



Explore the Bible.®

Fall 2017 > *Steve Gaines, General Editor*



*Exodus;
Leviticus*

LifeWay | Adults

LIFE BY DESIGN

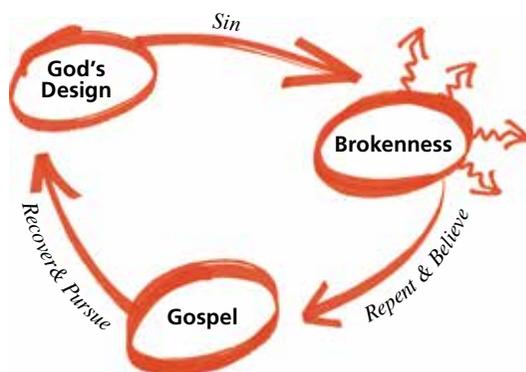
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16, Colossians 2:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel.

CONTENTS

» SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

	Title	Page
<i>Sept. 3</i>	Session 1: Reluctance (Ex. 3:4-14; 4:13-16)	10
<i>Sept. 10</i>	Session 2: Confrontation (Ex. 7:1-13)	20
<i>Sept. 17</i>	Session 3: Liberation (Ex. 12:1-13)	30
<i>Sept. 24</i>	Session 4: Victory (Ex. 14:13-28)	40
<i>Oct. 1</i>	Session 5: Sufficient (Ex. 16:1-5,11-20)	50
<i>Oct. 8</i>	Session 6: Commanded (Ex. 20:1-17)	60
<i>Oct. 15</i>	Session 7: Equipped (Ex. 25:1-9; 31:1-6)	70
<i>Oct. 22</i>	Session 8: Rebellion (Ex. 32:1-6,11-14)	80
<i>Oct. 29</i>	Session 9: His Presence (Ex. 39:42-43; 40:1-4,34-38)	90
<i>Nov. 5</i>	Session 10: Set Before (Lev. 1:3-9; 2:1-3; 3:1-5)	100
<i>Nov. 12</i>	Session 11: Set Apart (Lev. 9:15-24; 10:1-3)	110
<i>Nov. 19</i>	Session 12: Set Free* (Lev. 16:3-10,29-30)	120
<i>Nov. 26</i>	Session 13: Set Futures (Lev. 26:3-16,40-45)	130

*Evangelistic Emphasis

» MEET THE WRITER

Janice K. Meier wrote the study materials for this issue of *Explore the Bible Commentary*. A gifted Hebrew scholar, Janice is particularly qualified to write Bible study materials, having served at LifeWay as a content editor for more than eighteen years, including several years as editor of this commentary.

Dr. Meier participated on the translation team of the Holman Christian Standard Bible® and has contributed in-depth background articles to various publications, including *Biblical Illustrator*, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, *The Woman's Study Bible*, and *Women's Evangelical Commentary*.

Janice is a member of Hickory Hollow Baptist Church in Antioch, Tennessee, where she leads an adult Bible study group.

Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary (ISSN 1092-7174; Item 005075123) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2017, LifeWay Christian Resources.

For ordering or making inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or write to LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk shipments to be mailed quarterly to one address, email orderentry@lifeway.com, fax (615) 251-5933, or write to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations indicated by KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. Scripture quotations marked ESV® are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NIV® are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

The suggestions in this resource for pronouncing Bible names are from *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* by W. Murray Severance, © 1997 by Broadman & Holman Publishers. Used by permission.



ADULT COMMENTARY

FALL 2017

VOLUME 4 • NUMBER 1

ERIC GEIGER

VICE PRESIDENT,
LIFEWAY RESOURCES

STEVE GAINES

GENERAL EDITOR

DAVID BRISCOE

CONTENT EDITOR

DWAYNE MCCRARY

TEAM LEADER

KEN BRADY

MANAGER, ADULT ONGOING
BIBLE STUDIES

MICHAEL KELLEY

DIRECTOR, GROUPS MINISTRY

SEND QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO

TEAM LEADER BY EMAIL:

DWAYNE.MCCRARY@LIFEWAY.COM;

OR BY MAIL:

TEAM LEADER, EXPLORE THE BIBLE

ADULT COMMENTARY

ONE LIFEWAY PLAZA

NASHVILLE, TN 37234-0175;

OR MAKE COMMENTS ON THE WEB

AT LIFEWAY.COM.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

COVER PHOTO:

©Gettyimages.com

A WORD FROM **THE GENERAL EDITOR**



Life is God’s gift. He fashioned every person in his or her mother’s womb. Each of us is “remarkably and wondrously made” (Ps. 139:14). At conception, we begin to live. As we grow, we learn how to live.

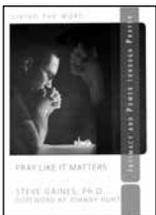
This quarter we will study the Books of Exodus and Leviticus. These biblical books are about life. Exodus describes the new life the Israelites received when the Lord rescued them from Egypt. Leviticus explains how God further taught them to live holy lives for His glory.

In Exodus, God set the Israelites free from bondage. He said, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians and rescue you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (Ex. 6:6-7).

In Leviticus, through His laws, God told His people how to live holy lives. He said, “You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine” (Lev. 20:26).

Together, Exodus and Leviticus make for a powerful study. As you work through these fascinating books, may you leave behind the old life of sin and bondage and begin a new life for God’s glory through Jesus Christ!

Steve Gaines, Ph.D.



Steve Gaines is Senior Pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. He also currently serves as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Gaines is the author of Pray Like It Matters, Share Jesus Like It Matters, and the devotion book, Morning Manna.

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS; LEVITICUS

What is a nation? The English word *nation* originated from a Latin word literally meaning “birth.” That definition suggests a formative revolutionary event that brings a group of people into existence as a national political entity. Being a nation also involves a group’s possessing an organizing structure that includes leadership and laws.

For the nation of Israel, the formative revolutionary event occurred when the Lord, using Moses as a deliverer, brought the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. The Israelites then came to Mount Sinai, where the Lord established His covenant with them. Various laws accompanied that covenant. The Lord summed up the heart of those covenantal regulations in the Ten Commandments. He promised that if the Israelites kept their covenant with Him, they would be His “holy nation” (Ex. 19:6).

Thus, the Books of Exodus and Leviticus deal with the beginnings of the nation of Israel. However, the Israelites’ history reaches back to the Book of Genesis and the Lord’s call of Abram, along with His promise to make Abram into a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3). Genesis ends with the multiplied descendants of the patriarchs in Egypt, where Jacob (also known as Israel) and his family had migrated to survive a lengthy famine. The Lord had brought Jacob’s son Joseph to power in Egypt to preserve Israel.

After the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and journeys in the wilderness, their history continued throughout the Old Testament period. Under Joshua, who succeeded Moses as leader, the Lord fulfilled His promise to give His people the land of Canaan. This people’s history reached a climax in the coming of Jesus the Messiah, whose birth, life, death, and resurrection effected the greatest deliverance of all—deliverance from sin (Matt. 1:21).

»» AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The Books of Exodus and Leviticus do not identify their divinely inspired writer. However, they have long been considered as primarily the work of Moses, along with the remainder of the books of the Pentateuch. These five books, also called Books of the Law, consist of Genesis through Deuteronomy. Not only did other Old Testament writers and books identify Moses as the writer of the Pentateuch (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 6:18; Mal. 4:4), the New Testament, including Jesus Himself, also attributed the books to Moses (Mark 12:26; Luke 2:22; 16:29; 24:27; John 5:46-47; 7:19; Acts 3:22-23; Rom. 10:5). Moses most likely wrote this Scripture sometime during a forty-year time span—after the Israelites completed the tabernacle

at Mount Sinai, at the beginning of their second year after their exodus from Egypt (1445 BC), and before his death around 1406 BC.

» EXODUS: TITLE AND THEMES

The title Exodus derives from a compound Greek word meaning “departure.” This title focuses on the key event of the book—the departure of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The Hebrew title of the book translates literally as “and these are the names.” This designation follows a general Hebrew practice of identifying biblical books by the first few words in the text.

The Book of Exodus reveals truths the Israelites learned about what it meant to be identified as the people of God. Seven themes can be identified.

Bondage—The Israelites experienced cruel hardships under Pharaoh before they were ready to act on the promise of the Lord’s deliverance under Moses’ leadership.

Deliverance—The Lord’s display of His awesome power through a series of ten plagues not only convinced Pharaoh to let the people go but also assured the Israelites that the Lord was able to deliver them.

Sacrifice—The Book of Exodus lays a foundation for sacrifice that the Book of Leviticus discloses in detail. Central to the Book of Exodus is the Passover sacrifice. It serves as a preview of Christ, the perfect Passover Lamb whose substitutionary death made provision for our redemption (see John 1:29).

Redemption—Closely associated with the themes of deliverance and sacrifice is that of redemption. The Lord responded to the Israelites’ prayers for redemption in such a miraculous way that their salvation was clearly God’s work. The annual observance of Passover was designed to remind the Israelites that their exodus from Egypt was only by God’s power.

God’s Nature—God revealed Himself in various ways throughout the Book of Exodus. At the burning bush, He unveiled to Moses the significance of the name Yahweh, which can be translated “I am who I am” and is typically written as “the LORD” in English Bibles (Ex. 3:14-15). This name conveyed God’s continuous presence with the Israelites and the consistency of His nature. The Lord further disclosed His nature and identity through the tabernacle’s features and the law’s requirements. While He holds people accountable for their wrongdoing, they can experience forgiveness when they turn to Him.

The Law—The law is central to the Book of Exodus, as it reveals God’s character and His commands. The heart of that law is the Ten Commandments, which summarize the Lord’s requirements for spiritual and moral living. The law consists of two parts—civil laws that govern life in the Israelite community and ceremonial laws that provide instructions for administering the tabernacle and worship.

Continuation and Expectation—The Book of Exodus continues the history of God’s people that began in the Book of Genesis with Abraham. However, Exodus also looks forward with expectation to the future. The Lord who partially revealed His nature to Moses would most fully reveal Himself in Jesus Christ as One who is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). All believers’ hopes and expectations are fulfilled in Christ, who is not only our perfect Sacrifice but also our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16).

➤ LEVITICUS: TITLE AND THEMES

The title Leviticus comes from a Greek word meaning “of the Levites.” The book’s Hebrew title derives from its first word, literally rendered as “and He called.” Leviticus deals with matters that concerned Israelite priests, including instructions for worship and regulations regarding ceremonial purity, holy days, and moral laws. Leviticus 16 deals with the Day of Atonement, an observance that stunningly foreshadows Christ’s atoning death on the cross for our sins. Four themes echo throughout the Book of Leviticus.

Holiness—Because the Lord is holy, He expects His people to be holy as well (Lev. 19:2). To be holy is to be set apart from that which is common or profane. Holiness for the Israelites involved careful observance of the sacrificial, community, and individual commands the Lord gave His people.

Sacrifice—Chapters 1–7 provide instructions for five basic types of sacrifices: the burnt offering; the grain (meal) or tribute (meat) offering; the fellowship or peace offering; the sin offering; and the restitution or guilt (trespass) offering. The first three sacrifices in the list were voluntary; the latter two sacrifices were required.

Ceremonial Purity—The ritual terms “clean” and “unclean” in the Book of Leviticus pertain to physical substances. An item or condition that departed from its normal state was labeled unclean. The designation unclean applied to certain foods, bodily emissions, skin diseases, and kinds of contamination. Purification ceremonies functioned as a daily reminder that individuals could not maintain a right relationship with God apart from His gracious provision of cleansing.

Worship—The English term “worship” derives from an Old English word that carries the idea of attributing worthiness or respect, hence showing “worthship.” To worship the Lord is to attribute honor and reverence to Him. In the Book of Leviticus, the Lord revealed how the Israelites were to show their reverence for Him.

Both Exodus and Leviticus play important roles in the unfolding of God’s salvation history that culminates in Jesus Christ. The laws and the sacrifices in these books find their fulfillment in Christ, who perfectly kept the law and provided the ultimate atoning sacrifice.

OUTLINES OF **EXODUS; LEVITICUS**

EXODUS

I. Preparation for Deliverance (1:1–4:31)

- A. Hebrew Slavery (1:1-22)
- B. A Deliverer in Exile (2:1-25)
- C. A Reluctant Deliverer Called (3:1–4:31)

II. Moses Confronts Pharaoh (5:1–13:16)

- A. Initial Talks (5:1–7:13)
- B. Plagues One through Nine (7:14–10:29)
- C. The Tenth Plague (11:1–13:16)

III. Freedom Gained (13:17–15:21)

- A. The Departure (13:17–14:4)
- B. The Pursuit (14:5-14)
- C. The Red Sea (14:15–15:21)

IV. Into the Wilderness (15:22–18:27)

V. At the Foot of Mount Sinai (19:1–34:35)

- A. Setting up Camp (19:1-25)
- B. God Reveals His Standards (20:1–31:18)
- C. Rebellion and Restoration (32:1–34:35)

VI. Building the Tabernacle (35:1–40:38)

LEVITICUS

I. Laws for Sacrifices and Offerings (1:1–7:38)

II. Ordination and Ministry of Priests (8:1–10:20)

III. Purity Laws (11:1–16:34)

IV. God's Requirements for Holiness (17:1–27:34)

RELUCTANCE

God calls and empowers people to serve Him and His purposes.

A few years ago, I needed to enlist an assistant for the Bible study group that I led. My pastor suggested that I seek to enlist one of our newer church members. When I did so, however, the individual expressed reluctance to accept the role, especially since it included speaking in front of the group. She preferred serving in behind-the-scenes roles.

Eventually, my reluctant enlistee accepted the challenge, and I watched her grow into a wonderful class leader. She voiced earnest prayers; raised honest, challenging questions; and demonstrated genuine compassion not only for class members but also for others within the church and the community. Her experience has provided living proof that God will always empower the people He calls to serve Him.

Many Christians today are reluctant to accept leadership roles in their churches. Reasons or excuses they give cover the gamut from genuinely feeling inadequate to not wanting to be tied down with the responsibility. The difficulty of finding faithful leaders is not new.

In this session, we will consider an Old Testament individual who reluctantly accepted God's call. That individual not only became a highly effective leader of God's people but also was remembered throughout both the Old and New Testaments as an example par excellence of faithful service. That reluctant leader was Moses.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 1:1–4:31

Chapters 1–4 of Exodus set the stage for the Lord's bringing the Israelites out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Chapter 5 begins the record of these two leaders' confrontation with Pharaoh and the series of plagues that led to the Israelites' release from bondage. Exodus 1 connects the events of this book with those at the end of Genesis.

The Israelites had multiplied greatly in Egypt when a new royal dynasty came to power. The new king, or pharaoh [FEHR oh], refused to recognize the good that Joseph had done for Egypt during his time of leadership. Instead this new king feared that the Israelites might side with Egypt's enemies if war broke out. Thus, the pharaoh instituted several measures in his attempts to control the Israelite population. First, he oppressed the Israelites with forced labor. Next, he instructed the Hebrew (Israelite) midwives to kill any sons born to Hebrew women. When neither of these measures succeeded, the Egyptian king commanded his people to drown every son born to the Israelites by throwing the babies into the Nile River (Ex. 1:1-22).

During this chaotic time for God's people in Egypt, an Israelite woman from the tribe of Levi gave birth to a beautiful, healthy son. The woman's name was Jochebed [JAHK uh bed], and her husband was Amram. When Jochebed could no longer hide their son, she placed the baby in a papyrus basket and hid it among the reeds on the bank of the Nile. The boy's sister Miriam guarded the baby until Pharaoh's daughter discovered him in the basket. The princess adopted the boy and named him Moses. She engaged Jochebed to nurse the child for her. Through these events we see the sovereign Lord at work preserving Moses' life and preparing for the future deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage.

The next scene occurs after Moses had grown to adulthood. He visited his people and saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Moses killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand. Thinking no one had witnessed his actions, Moses returned the next day to find two of his people fighting. When Moses intervened, he learned that his previous action had been observed. As a result, Moses fled in fear to the land of Midian. There he married Zipporah, one of the daughters of Jethro, also known as Reuel. Meanwhile the Israelites cried out to God because of their difficult servitude (2:1-25).

In this session we examine the next scene in Moses' life and in the ongoing saga of the Israelites. While shepherding the flock of his father-in-law, Moses reached Horeb, or Sinai, the mountain of God, on the far side of the desert. There the Lord called him from the burning bush to lead His people out of Egypt. Moses initially responded with reluctance. He protested that he was not the man for the job. The Lord replied to Moses' excuses by offering the promise of His presence and power. He also sent Aaron to accompany Moses and serve as his spokesman. So Moses returned to Egypt with the staff of God in his hands to confront Pharaoh. Aaron went with him. Upon their return, Moses and Aaron assembled the elders of the Israelites. When these Israelites who had been bowed down by their affliction saw the signs the Lord had given Aaron and Moses, and when they heard the Lord was ready to act on their behalf, they believed and bowed down in worship (3:1-4:31).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE APPROACH (Ex. 3:4-6)

While shepherding sheep in the wilderness near Horeb, the mountain of God, Moses encountered a burning bush that was not being consumed by the fire. When he stopped to observe this remarkable sight, Moses experienced the presence and call of the Lord from the bush.

VERSE 4

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!” “Here I am,” he answered.

Moses’ life had not advanced in the direction expected of a prince, a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Instead, after being forced to leave Egypt as a fugitive, he was shepherding sheep, an occupation Egyptians viewed as loathsome. This aging exile did not even possess a flock of his own. Moses likely expected to spend the remainder of his days tending sheep in the desert. Imagine his astonishment when he experienced a theophany [thee AHF uh nee], an encounter with the Angel of the Lord. His response of fear appears similar to that of some New Testament shepherds when an angel of the Lord appeared to them (see Ex. 3:6; Luke 2:9).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Theophany” on pages 1560–1561 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Describe the difference between a theophany and Christ’s incarnation. Why is it important to distinguish between a theophany and Christ’s incarnation?

The Lord addressed Moses from the burning bush only after Moses **had gone over** (“turned aside,” KJV) to observe the bush closely. These words remind us not only that the Lord takes the initiative to seek and to call us but also that He remains patient and waits for our response before proceeding further. While the verb rendered *had gone over* in some contexts refers to spiritual unfaithfulness, here it is clearly used in the positive sense of being attracted to an unusual phenomenon. Moses’ response, **Here I am**, was a standard Hebrew way of replying “yes” when addressed. It can be understood as meaning that the addressed individual was ready to listen and even to obey.

VERSE 5

“Do not come closer,” he said. “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

The Lord warned Moses not to come nearer to the bush. In fact, Moses needed to **remove** his **sandals**, because the Lord’s presence there meant the place was **holy ground**. Eventually, Moses would teach the people of Israel about God’s holy nature (see Lev. 19). The Hebrew term translated *holy* conveys the basic idea of being set apart or separated from other things. In this context, the word describes what belongs to the sphere of the sacred as distinct from what is common or profane. While we often focus on the negative aspect of the term (what we are to be separated from), we shouldn’t fail to emphasize also the positive aspect of the word (what we are separated to). We are to be devoted to the Lord and to His will for our lives.

To experience God’s presence is to stand on *holy ground*. When I read this verse, I always think of one of God’s choice saintly servants who once preached at my home church. Deceased and with the Lord now, he served as a missionary during his lifetime. He had the practice of removing his shoes whenever approaching the pulpit to preach. Taking off his shoes was a way he showed his reverence for God. The act also served as a reminder to other worshipers that God is holy and worthy of reverential awe.

VERSE 6

Then he continued, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord identified Himself to Moses as the God of Moses’ earthly **father** as well as the God of the patriarchs **Abraham, ... Isaac, and ... Jacob**. Moses was not encountering some strange new deity. Rather, he now had the opportunity to know the one true God whom previous generations of God’s people had worshiped. Furthermore, God’s covenant promises to Abraham (see Gen. 12:1-3) were in the process of being fulfilled. Exodus 3:6 provides a strong link to the themes of promise found in Genesis.

The final part of verse 6 stresses Moses’ fear of gazing directly at the appearance of the Lord in the burning bush. He apparently understood something of the potential power of God’s holy nature. Later, Moses would be granted the rare privilege of a partial view of God (Ex. 33:18-23). How awesome, then, for us today to realize that in the coming of Christ, God made Himself visible in human form (John 14:9)! What an awesome privilege we have of knowing God in Christ!

THE ASSIGNMENT (Ex. 3:7-10)

In Exodus 3:7-10 the Lord revealed that He had heard the prayers of His suffering people. He was ready to act on their behalf. The Lord also declared that Moses would be His agent in delivering the Israelites out of slavery.

VERSE 7

Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings,

The Lord had **observed** (literally “seen”) His people’s **misery** (“affliction,” KJV, ESV). In the Hebrew text, the form of the verb translated *observed* stresses the Lord’s attentiveness to His people’s suffering. God had not been distracted by other matters and now suddenly had been reminded about His people’s plight **in Egypt**. Instead, the Lord had **heard** every cry and groan as the Israelites’ suffering grew worse. Furthermore, the verb rendered **know** emphasizes God’s personal, intimate relationship with His people. The same is true of the Lord today whenever believers face the challenge of trusting Him in the midst of suffering.

VERSE 8

and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

The Lord expressed not only His knowledge and concern regarding His people but also His timely plan to **rescue them**. While the afflicted people may have felt the Lord’s visit was long overdue, His timing is always perfect because of His infinite knowledge. The Hebrew word translated *rescue*, while conveying personal physical deliverance, often carries spiritual overtones or application as well. The word rendered **power** literally means “hand.” In Hebrew thought, the hand represented strength or power.

The Lord’s plan of action involved more than delivering His people from enslavement in Egypt. He also would give them a future characterized by freedom in the promised land. The phrase **a land flowing with milk and honey** aptly described the fertile land of Canaan. The phrase symbolized abundance and blessing. The notation of six pagan groups occupying Canaan at that time hinted that God’s miraculous activity would be as needed for entry into the promised land as in the Israelites’ rescue from Egypt.

Today the Lord still delivers people who follow Him. Because of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, we can experience freedom not only from the eternal penalty of sin but also from its power as we walk daily in fellowship with Christ (Rom. 8:1-17). By depending on Him, we can be set free from destructive thoughts and habits. We can increasingly enjoy more and more of the abundant life He came to give (John 10:10).

EXPLORE FURTHER

If you are a Christian, reflect on the freedom you have experienced in Christ. From what sinful thoughts and behaviors has He delivered you? List specific ways you are enjoying abundant life in Him.

VERSES 9-10

So because the Israelites' cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

The Lord reiterated that He had both observed the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites and had heard their cries for help (see Ex. 3:7). The term rendered **oppressing** basically means "squeezing." The word's literal meaning is graphically portrayed in Numbers 22:25, where it is used of Balaam's donkey squeezing its rider's foot against a wall.

If verse 9 reveals the Israelites' need, then verse 10 declares God's solution. The Lord was **sending** Moses to lead His people out of Egyptian bondage. It would be a tough assignment. The pharaoh of Egypt was generally recognized as the most powerful ruler on earth at that time. However, a Ruler far more powerful than any earthly king was commissioning Moses to **lead** His **people, the Israelites, out of Egypt**. The commission came in the form of an emphatic command: **go**.

The main part of the Hebrew term rendered **therefore** is an adverb of time; it basically means "now." Some forty years earlier, Moses had been eager to deliver the Israelites from slavery. He had acted on his own initiative to kill an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an Israelite slave. That action backfired, however, and Moses was forced to flee for his life to the land of Midian (Ex. 2:11-15). Now, in God's perfect timing, Moses was to return to Egypt and deliver God's people. He would go not on his own initiative or in his own strength but rather at the Lord's initiative and with the Lord's power.

God still selects specific individuals to serve His purposes and to lead His people. In fact, God has assignments for all believers. In the church where I am a member, God has called people to a car-care ministry. That ministry helps single women and others in the community who cannot afford basic vehicle maintenance. No ministry is too large or too small when we are where God wants us to be—doing what He wants us to do.

THE AUTHORITY (Ex. 3:11-14)

The Lord responded to Moses' reluctance to obey His call by revealing His covenant name. He also promised to be with Moses.

VERSE 11

But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Immediately after hearing the Lord's commission, Moses began to express his reluctance to carry out the assignment. His question to God here could be understood either as a protest against the Lord's commission or as a typical Near Eastern form of polite acceptance (see 2 Sam. 7:18). While opinions differ, the question in any case emphasizes an absence of the self-assertiveness Moses had previously demonstrated.

VERSE 12

He answered, “I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain.”

The Lord responded to Moses' question by assuring Moses of His constant presence. For the Lord to **be with** someone means He is actively present, giving that person direct guidance and help. It also can mean that others will likely recognize that individual's God-given authority.

The Lord further gave Moses a **sign**. This sign was of a different nature than the sign God's messenger had given to Gideon (see Judg. 6:17-23). First, Gideon specifically asked for a sign; Moses did not. Second, Gideon's sign was fulfilled right away; the sign the Lord gave Moses at this point would be fulfilled in the future. The Lord guaranteed that one day Moses and all the Israelites would gather at Mount Sinai to worship Him as their Deliverer.

This verse has long had special significance for me personally, because it teaches that the Lord expects us to follow Him by faith, not by sight (see 2 Cor. 5:7). To follow the Lord often requires a willingness to step out into the unknown by faith as we sense His leadership. He does not leave us in the

dark, however, as we earnestly follow Him. He ultimately provides proof, and we are able to look back with utter wonderment at God's faithfulness!

VERSE 13

Then Moses asked God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I tell them?”

Moses lived in a world in which people believed that many gods existed. Thus, the expression **the God of your fathers** might have different meanings even to different Israelites. Furthermore, the patriarchs had known the one true God by various names and titles. Some Bible scholars interpret Moses' question in this verse not as a request for the name *Yahweh*—God was known by that name as early as the time of Adam's son, Seth (see Gen. 4:26)—but rather as a plea to understand the significance or authority of the name.

VERSE 14

God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”

This verse records one of those pinnacles of Old Testament revelation. God revealed the meaning of His covenant name, identifying Himself by the expression **I AM WHO I AM**. This name is based on the first-person form of the Hebrew verb that means “to be.” The designation *Yahweh*, typically rendered in English Bible translations as “the LORD,” is derived from this verb (Ex. 3:15). The name denotes that God is the self-existent, covenant-making God who acts independently of outside influences.

Various translations or interpretations of the Hebrew phrase include “I will be who I will be,” “I cause to be what is,” and my favorite: “I continually shall be what I repeatedly have been.” This last rendering stresses that the same God who faithfully led the patriarchs could be counted on to lead His people through the exodus and beyond. This understanding also means that the God who called and empowered Moses is the same God who calls and empowers Christ's followers today. As the writer of the Book of Hebrews stated, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “I Am” on page 786 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the significance of God's self-revelation as “I AM” and Jesus' use of this expression to refer to Himself?

THE ASSURANCE (Ex. 4:13-16)

In Exodus 3:16–4:12, the Lord instructed Moses to assemble Israel’s elders, inform them of his experience at the burning bush, and tell them the Lord was ready to deliver His people. He also warned Moses that Pharaoh would not free the Israelites until after a devastating series of plagues. The Lord gave Moses several signs to perform to demonstrate that God was working through him. Still, Moses presented another excuse and asked the Lord to send someone else. The Lord responded by assuring Moses of His assistance and by allowing Aaron to accompany Moses and function as his spokesman.

VERSE 13

Moses said, “Please, Lord, send someone else.”

The Lord had met every excuse or reason the reluctant emissary had raised. In his final protest, Moses revealed that he simply did not want to undertake the task. Among the various accounts in Scripture in which God called an individual to serve Him, in only one other instance did a prophet try to refuse to accept God’s call—the case of Jonah (see Jonah 1:1-3).

Moses’ response has sometimes been contrasted with Isaiah’s answer when the Lord called him. In Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah responded, “Here I am. Send me.” Moses in effect said, “Here I am; **send someone else.**”

VERSE 14

Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses, and he said, “Isn’t Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, he is on his way now to meet you. He will rejoice when he sees you.

At this point the Lord became angry with Moses because of his reluctance to go at His command. Yet the Lord’s anger was tempered by His patient mercy. He graciously allowed **Aaron the Levite**, Moses’ brother, to accompany Moses. Aaron’s ability to **speak well** would be an encouragement to Moses. Ironically, Moses would eventually do most of the public speaking, but having Aaron at his side gave him added confidence. Did Moses ever regret sharing the leadership role with Aaron? Perhaps. While the Lord may make concessions in overcoming our reluctance to serve Him in some capacity, we often miss out on blessings we could have experienced by an immediate response of obedient faith.

Verse 14 also reveals another aspect of the Lord’s nature. In addition to being gracious, He is omniscient—that is, all-knowing. The Lord informed Moses that Aaron was at that moment coming to meet his brother, and

Aaron was doing this in obedience to the Lord's command (Ex. 4:27). We thus witness in this event a blending of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

VERSES 15-16

You will speak with him and tell him what to say. I will help both you and him to speak and will teach you both what to do. He will speak to the people for you. He will serve as a mouth for you, and you will serve as God to him.”

These significant verses describe the relationship between Moses and Aaron as regards their speaking to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. Aaron would become Moses' mouthpiece (or "prophet"; see 7:1), and Moses would be like God to his brother. This statement accurately defines the close relationship that always existed between the Lord and His true prophets.

Verse 15 indicates that both Moses and Aaron would function as God's spokesmen. In the early chapters of Exodus, Aaron either spoke for Moses or in conjunction with him (see 4:30; 5:1). Later in Scripture, however, Moses is identified as an exceptional "prophet" (Deut. 34:10). Verses 15-16 of Exodus 4 also suggest that from the beginning Moses was the true prophet in the sense that God placed in his heart the words that were to be passed on to others (see Amos 3:7). Aaron, who was not a direct recipient of God's message, functioned as Moses' spokesman.

In addition to sending Aaron to accompany Moses in fulfilling his momentous assignment, the Lord provided Moses with additional resources as well. Verses 2-9 of chapter 4 delineate three signs the Lord gave his reluctant prophet to assist him in his difficult ministry—his hand becoming diseased or leprous (Ex. 4:6, KJV), his hand being healed, and water from the Nile becoming blood on the ground. God's mission would not fail because the Lord would make His obedient servants adequate for the assignment. Today, we too can be assured as believers that God provides the resources for us to be successful in our God-given responsibilities.

EXPLORE FURTHER

The Lord's call does not only apply to preachers or missionaries. He has responsibilities for every Christian. Is the Lord calling you to assume a new responsibility of service within your church or community? You might begin to answer that question by looking at the spiritual gifts or resources He has given you. They function as road signs pointing to ways the Lord wants you to serve Him.

CONFRONTATION

God displays His power, reminding all that He alone is worthy of worship.

In my younger, more adventurous days, I often canoed on the Ozark riverways in Missouri. One spring, a friend and I decided to take a canoe trip down a small waterway that was swollen with floodwaters. We were racing through rapids as we rounded a bend in the river. Suddenly a huge fallen log obstructed our path. In an instant, our canoe became pinned sideways under the log and started taking on water. I still remember the frightening power of that raging current as we struggled to upright our boat. Thankfully, we were able to do so and to continue our adventure without injury. That experience nevertheless gave me a deeper respect for the power of rushing waters.

Contrast my experience with small river rapids to the awesome force of Niagara Falls, the collective name given to three waterfalls that straddle the border between the United States and Canada. Taken together, these three falls have the highest flow rate of any waterfall in the world. More than six million cubic feet of water per minute tumbles over the crest of these falls at peak flow. No wonder they serve as a valuable source of hydroelectric power!

Another obvious display of God's power is the sun, with a diameter of over one hundred times that of the earth. Although the sun is approximately ninety-three million miles from the earth, it is unquestionably the most important source of energy for life on earth, providing both light and warmth.

Sunlight and water are two of the innumerable ways God has revealed His awesome power in creation. Sadly, many people throughout history have chosen to worship these created objects rather than to worship their Creator. In Moses' time, the Egyptians worshiped both the Nile River and the sun, along with numerous other false deities.

In this session focusing on Exodus 7:1-13, we will carefully examine the Lord's revelation of His power to the Israelite leaders Moses and Aaron. In revealing His power, the Lord prepared His servants to confront Pharaoh with His command to let the Israelites go from the land of Egypt. Ultimately, Pharaoh would be forced to acknowledge God's power and to release God's people from slavery.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 5:1–10:29

The events reported in Exodus 1–4 set the stage for the Lord’s bringing the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. Following the reunion of Moses and Aaron, these two leaders assembled the Israelite elders. The people worshiped when they learned that the Lord had responded to their cries (Ex. 4:27-31). Chapters 5–10 then chronicle Moses and Aaron’s confrontations with Pharaoh and the series of plagues that ultimately led to the Israelites’ release from slavery.

Three key themes dominate Exodus 5–10: (1) the Lord’s demand that His people be allowed to leave Egypt to worship Him; (2) Pharaoh’s resistance to that demand, demonstrating his lack of reverence for the Lord; and (3) Pharaoh’s stubborn behavior, leading him either to do nothing or to do the opposite of what the Lord instructed. Following Moses and Aaron’s initial meeting with Pharaoh, the Egyptian king inflicted even harsher conditions on his subjects. Pharaoh required the Israelite slaves not only to gather their own straw but also to meet the same quota of bricks as before (5:1-18). Under these conditions, the slaves found the quotas impossible to meet. As a result of this turn of events, the Israelite foremen angrily confronted Moses and Aaron. Apparently discouraged, Moses complained to the Lord (5:19-23).

The Lord responded that as of yet Moses and the people had witnessed little of His tremendous power. After repeatedly experiencing the effects of the Lord’s mighty power, the pharaoh would be ready to drive the Israelites out of Egypt (6:1). The Lord then gave Moses a fresh revelation of His character and nature and commanded Moses to approach Pharaoh again about letting the Israelites go. In response, Moses once more appealed to his deficiency in speech (6:2-13). Verses 14-27 of chapter 6 constitute a genealogy of Moses and Aaron. It functions to remind readers of just who this Moses and Aaron were to whom the Lord spoke.

Moses reiterated his lack of speaking skills (6:28-30). The Lord reminded His servant that with Aaron’s assistance Moses would successfully confront Pharaoh (7:1-2; see 4:14-16). God also repeated His intention to harden Pharaoh’s heart (7:3; see 4:21). Previously the Lord had employed signs and wonders to convince the Israelites He was working through Moses to deliver them from bondage (4:1-9). In chapter 7, signs and wonders would demonstrate the Lord’s sovereign power to the Egyptians (7:3-5).

Moses and Aaron obediently confronted Pharaoh. Aaron threw down his staff, or rod, and it became a serpent. Although Egypt’s magicians were able to do the same thing by their occult practices, Aaron’s staff swallowed their staffs. Nevertheless, Pharaoh’s heart became more hardened (7:6-13).

The remainder of the context passage for this session (7:14–10:29) narrates the occurrence of the first nine plagues. The plagues occurred in the following sequence: (1) water turned to blood, (2) frogs, (3) gnats (“lice,” KJV), (4) flies, (5) death of livestock, (6) boils, (7) hail, (8) locusts, and (9) oppressive darkness. Observe several facts related to the first nine plagues. First, while Pharaoh’s magicians were able to replicate the first two plagues by their occult practices, they could not produce the third and succeeding calamities. Second, although some of the plagues appear connected in their effects (frogs came out of the water after the Nile turned to blood; the frogs died, and then gnats and flies swarmed), God’s timing is clearly evident in the series of disasters. Third, the plagues struck directly at objects of Egyptian worship such as the Nile River, the sun, and even the pharaoh himself, who was regarded by the Egyptians as a god. Fourth, the Scriptures repeatedly state that in sending these plagues, the Lord made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites (see 8:22; 9:4,26; 10:23). Fifth, the text refers repeatedly to Pharaoh’s hardened heart. Pharaoh became more stubborn with each plague. The king’s hardened heart motivated him to issue a death threat against Moses during a final confrontation with him (10:28).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

STRATEGY EXPLAINED (Ex. 7:1-5)

Having reminded Moses of His great name and redeeming purpose (6:2-8), the Lord directed His servant to go back and tell Pharaoh what the Lord demanded. The Lord knew Pharaoh would not release the Israelite slaves without being compelled to do so (see 3:19). Pharaoh’s resistance would result in the Lord’s demonstration of greater signs and wonders.

VERSES 1-2

The LORD answered Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You must say whatever I command you; then Aaron your brother must declare it to Pharaoh so that he will let the Israelites go from his land.

These verses recall the Lord’s response to Moses at the burning bush when he complained about not being an eloquent speaker and begged the Lord to send someone else to address Pharaoh. The similarities between Exodus 7:1-2 and 4:14-16 emphasize that the Lord continued to strengthen Moses by

reiterating His relationship to His servant in the task He had assigned him. However, several significant differences also exist between the two passages. One difference between the two passages is that while previously Moses was said to function like God to Aaron, in 7:1 the Lord told Moses that he would be **like God to Pharaoh**. This expression conveys that Moses would speak and act with power and authority from the Lord. Interestingly, Aaron and Pharaoh would see contrasting aspects of God's nature through Moses' actions. Aaron would observe the Lord's compassion on His people, whereas Pharaoh would ultimately experience the wrath of God's judgment.

A second distinction between 4:14-16 and 7:1-2 is that while Aaron previously was identified as Moses' "mouth" (4:16), in 7:1 Aaron is specifically called Moses' **prophet**. The Hebrew word rendered *prophet* in 7:1 is the most important of several terms used for prophets in the Old Testament. It is used of such men as Samuel (1 Sam. 3:20), Elijah (1 Kings 18:22), Isaiah (2 Kings 20:11), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5), and Habakkuk (Hab. 1:1).

A third significant difference between Exodus 7:1-2 and 4:14-16 is the audience Moses and Aaron were to address. In 7:2 the designated audience was **Pharaoh**; in 4:16 the specified audience was the Israelites. Many conservative Bible scholars have identified the pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites as Thutmose III, who reigned in Egypt from 1479 to 1425 BC.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Prophecy, Prophets" on pages 1303–1305 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What scriptural tests help us distinguish between true prophets and false prophets today?

VERSE 3

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.

Previously at the burning bush, God had stated that He knew Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go unless forced by God's power to do so (3:19). In this verse, the Lord repeated His intention to **harden Pharaoh's heart** (see 4:21). In Hebrew thought, the *heart* represented the human mind or will, the place of decision making and the seat of moral responsibility. A number of verses in Exodus 4:1–14:31 refer to God's hardening Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17). Other passages in that section of Scripture state that Pharaoh hardened his own heart or stubbornly refused to let the Israelites

go (8:15,32; 9:34; 13:15). Finally, some verses indicate that Pharaoh's heart was hard without specifying who hardened it (7:13,14,22; 8:19; 9:7,35).

How are we to resolve these varying expressions of Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to release the Israelites from bondage? Bible scholars have long wrestled with this question. It involves understanding the relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will. There is no easy answer to the question, but the following scriptural truths need to be kept in mind in dealing with the issue: (1) God is sovereign. Part of that sovereignty involves His foreknowledge of people's attitudes and responses to Him. (2) Part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that He gave us as human beings free will, or the capacity to make choices. He also holds us accountable for our choices. (3) God's sovereignty is consistent with the free will He has granted human beings.

Some Bible students propose that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart and only afterward did God harden the Egyptian king's heart. Others hold to a view of progressive revelation or progressive understanding. Such individuals believe that at this point in their history, the Israelites viewed everything as coming from the Lord. Perhaps the best view is to accept the fact that some concepts in Scripture remain in the realm of mystery. Such difficult teachings remind us that God is God, and we are not. In the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul compared God's sovereign right to harden Pharaoh's heart with a potter's freedom to shape a piece of clay according to his own purposes (Rom. 9:17-21).

In Exodus 7:3, the Lord also stated that after hardening Pharaoh's heart, He would **multiply** His miraculous acts in Egypt. Literally, God would cause His **signs and wonders** to become numerous. These prophetic words were fulfilled in the Lord's display of His power through the plagues, with Pharaoh becoming more and more stubborn as the cycle of *signs and wonders* progressed. (See the Understand the Context section of this session for a listing and brief discussion of the plagues.)

VERSE 4

Pharaoh will not listen to you, but I will put my hand into Egypt and bring the military divisions of my people the Israelites out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment.

The Lord prepared Moses and Aaron to expect Pharaoh's hostility. The Hebrew verb rendered **listen** often refers to more than the physical act of hearing. It means to act in accordance with what the ears perceive—in other words, to obey. The Lord knew that Pharaoh would not let the Israelites depart until He demonstrated **great acts of judgment**. The plagues would function

as God's judgment against Egypt. The term translated **military divisions** ("armies," KJV; "hosts," ESV) can designate human armies, heavenly beings, or celestial bodies, including the sun and moon. The title "LORD of Armies," used elsewhere in Scripture (see Isa. 13:4,13), stresses God's sovereignty over all these beings and objects.

VERSE 5

The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the Israelites from among them."

The Lord's bringing the Israelites out of Egypt by His powerful acts of judgment would result in the Egyptians' knowing that He is Yahweh—that is, **the LORD**. Previously God had stated that the Israelites would know that He is Yahweh when He delivered them from bondage (Ex. 6:7). The Egyptians, however, would not know the Lord in the same way as the Israelites. While the Israelites would experience His mercy and grace, the Egyptians, especially Pharaoh (see 9:16), would be compelled to acknowledge the Lord's supremacy because of His mighty acts of judgment. One enduring purpose of the demonstration of God's sovereign power to Pharaoh and the Egyptians is to remind us too that He alone is worthy of worship (Rom. 9:17).

Exodus 7:1-5 teaches us that God is working in this world so all will recognize His power and sovereign rule. The apostle Paul similarly urged the Philippian believers to remember that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). That confession will be "to the glory of God the Father" (2:11). We will all one day know or experience the Lord's sovereign power either in judgment or in salvation, depending on how we have responded to Him.

SIMPLE OBEDIENCE (Ex. 7:6-7)

Moses and Aaron fully obeyed God's directions. These two aged leaders did exactly what the Lord told them to do.

VERSE 6

So Moses and Aaron did this; they did just as the LORD commanded them.

Take note of the repeated concept in this verse. A literal rendering of the Hebrew text is: "And Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them; thus they did." The Hebrews often used repetition when they wanted

to emphasize a point. Here the stress falls on Moses' and Aaron's simple and complete obedience to the Lord.

Gladys Aylward (1902–1970) is a modern-day example of the same simple obedience Moses and Aaron demonstrated. She served the Lord courageously and faithfully as a missionary to China. Getting there, however, was anything but simple for Gladys. She experienced one disappointment after another as she prepared herself for mission service. She was dismissed from missionary training school when she failed a Bible class. Additionally, she was twenty-seven years old, an advanced age by missionary training school standards. Furthermore, Gladys was perceived as having no useful qualifications for missionary service. She wasn't a nurse or a teacher. Miss Aylward was simply a housemaid from England, who had left school at age fourteen to go to work.

Nevertheless, Gladys was so certain that God had called her to serve Him in China that she worked tirelessly as a housemaid to raise her own finances for the trip to that country. Her faith and determination led her to trust the Lord in the face of dire and seemingly impossible circumstances as she followed Him in simple obedience. As a result, the account of her life has become one of the great missionary stories of modern times.

VERSE 7

Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Because of their advanced ages, Moses and Aaron might not have been given a second look for missionary service by modern standards. Moses was eighty years old; his older brother was eighty-three. The Lord had spent eighty years preparing Moses for the task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert to the promised land. During the first forty years, this adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter received the best education, training, and preparation Egypt could offer (see Acts 7:22). Moses was probably tutored by military and political leaders. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, Moses at one time served as a general in the Egyptian army. During his first forty years, Moses by all appearances was being groomed for leadership and fame in Egypt.

The next forty years of Moses' life contrasted sharply with the first forty. The fortunes of this promising prince reversed dramatically when it became known that he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster. Having become a wanted man in Egypt (Ex. 2:15), Moses fled to Midian, where he took a job tending sheep. Moving from the forefront of Egypt to the backside of the desert must have led Moses to seriously ponder the direction his life had taken. During those long, silent years in the desert, however, the Lord remained at work in

Moses' life. During this stage of Moses' education, God was preparing him to lead the Israelites through this same wilderness region after their deliverance from Egypt. Furthermore, as a good shepherd, Moses' concern for and commitment to the sheep in his care would be qualities that translated well into good leadership of God's people (see Ps. 23:1-6; John 10:1-18).

Although advanced in years, Moses and Aaron obeyed the Lord and served Him. No believer is ever too old to faithfully serve the Lord. Even if physical limitations prevent us from more active service, we can serve the Lord by praying for others. Faithful prayer is one way of demonstrating simple obedience.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Obedience" on pages 1176–1177 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What impact does obedience to God or the absence thereof have on a person's spiritual life? What motivates you to obey God?

SIGNS AND WONDERS (Ex. 7:8-13)

In obedience to the Lord, Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and displayed the miracle the Lord had given them. Nevertheless, Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses; his heart hardened, just as the Lord had foretold.

VERSES 8-9

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh tells you, 'Perform a miracle,' tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh. It will become a serpent.'"

Verse 8 calls to mind the important truth that Moses and Aaron did not act of their own accord or in their own power. They confronted Pharaoh and performed miraculous signs only in the Lord's power and in obedience to His commands.

Verse 9 designates the first **miracle** as the turning of Aaron's staff into a serpent when he threw it down. The Hebrew word translated *miracle* also means "wonder" or "sign." The term first occurs in the Old Testament in Exodus 4:21, where it is rendered "wonders" ("miracles," ESV). The word appears repeatedly in Deuteronomy to designate both the Lord's provision for His people as well as His divine judgments on them (see Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 28:46).

VERSE 10

So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD had commanded. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a serpent.

When Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh, they **did just as the LORD had commanded**. When Aaron cast down his staff, it turned into a snake. This verse again calls attention to Moses' and Aaron's obedience to the Lord's directions (see Ex. 7:6).

The Hebrew word translated **staff** also means "rod," "stick," "branch," or "tribe." The term may have referred specifically to a tribal leader's scepter, or wooden staff. This stick signified the leader's authority (see Num. 17:1-11). Moses' and Aaron's staffs became associated with supernatural wonders, because the Lord sometimes demonstrated His power through their staffs. One of the signs the Lord initially gave Moses to convince the Israelites to believe him was that his staff became a serpent when Moses cast it down (Ex. 4:1-5). Aaron's staff was eventually placed in the ark of the covenant as a memorial to the fact that God chooses the leaders of His people (Heb. 9:4).

VERSE 11

But then Pharaoh called the wise men and sorcerers—the magicians of Egypt, and they also did the same thing by their occult practices.

Pharaoh's **magicians** were also able to turn their staffs into serpents by means of their **occult practices** ("enchantments," KJV; "secret arts," ESV, NIV). (In 2 Tim. 3:8, the apostle Paul revealed the names, according to Jewish tradition, of two of these magicians: Jannes and Jambres.) How were the Egyptian *magicians* able to imitate this miraculous act? Were these men actually snake charmers who could pacify snakes into a state of rigor mortis and then bring them back again? Or did these sorcerers accomplish this feat by demonic power or evil spirits? The text does not reveal the answer to these questions. However, the text does clearly affirm the Lord's power was greater than whatever power the magicians may have possessed (see Ex. 7:12).

VERSE 12

Each one threw down his staff, and it became a serpent. But Aaron's staff swallowed their staffs.

This verse rivets our attention on the superiority of the Lord's power. Aaron's staff, or rod, **swallowed** the magicians' staffs. The Hebrew word translated

swallowed is the same term used to depict the destruction of Pharaoh's forces at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12). The word occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament as a symbol of the destruction and ruin associated with God's judgment (see Num. 16:30,32,34; Isa. 49:19; Lam. 2:2).

VERSE 13

However, Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

The Lord, who knows the hearts of all people, had warned Moses to expect the king's stubborn rebellion (Ex. 3:19). The statements **Pharaoh's heart was hard** and **he did not listen to them** reflect a single reality. The essence of the matter was that Pharaoh had no intention of submitting to the Lord. He stubbornly refused to let the Israelites depart (see 5:2).

The description of the series of plagues follows immediately after this summary statement in verse 13. Pharaoh became more stubborn as each plague occurred. Not until after the tenth plague, the death of every firstborn male of Egyptian families and livestock, did Pharaoh summon Moses and Aaron and command the Israelites to leave Egypt (12:29-32). The result of Pharaoh's hardened heart was a repeated display of God's miraculous power. The Lord received glory and honor through these miraculous events.

The reality that Pharaoh became more stubborn as the plagues progressed reminds us that refusing to recognize God's truth leads to greater spiritual darkness or blindness. The Lord holds people accountable for the revelation that He gives them. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reminded believers in Rome and us as well that God has clearly revealed His divine nature since the beginning of the world. "As a result, people are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20b). When people persist in their stubborn refusal to recognize the Lord as God, He eventually says to them, "Have it your way." Refusal to submit to the Lord in response to God's demonstration of His signs and wonders ultimately leads to devastating consequences.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Worship" on pages 1670–1672 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. According to this article, worship includes a response of adoration, humility, submission, and obedience to the Lord on the part of the worshiper. Which of these elements is most lacking in your worship? What can you do to strengthen that element?

LIBERATION

God provides deliverance for those willing to trust Him.

Captivity can take various forms. One form is physical confinement imposed on us by others. In 2009, a British couple was sailing in their small yacht in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Tanzania. Somali pirates overtook the boat and kidnapped the man and his wife, holding them as captives for more than a year while the pirates attempted to extort millions of dollars from the couple's middle-class family. During their ordeal, the two individuals withstood intimidating threats, whippings, and solitary confinement. Eventually, they experienced deliverance through the generosity of benefactors who paid a ransom for their release.

Another form of captivity is the kind we impose on ourselves by our poor choices. Josh Hamilton was already a highly talented, highly touted baseball player by the time he graduated from high school. Consequently, he was the first player chosen in the 1999 Major League Baseball draft. By 2002, however, Hamilton's life and baseball career were in a downward spiral. His bad choices resulted in a four-year nightmare of drug abuse, despair, and repeated suspensions from baseball. The decisive turning point for Hamilton came when he concluded that his problems were too big for him to handle. He chose to surrender to God. Taking James 4:7 as a key verse, he continually humbled himself before the Lord and depended on God's power to resist the vicious cravings for drugs. Hamilton found the freedom he yearned for and eventually worked his way back to the world he loved—the world of baseball. In the process, he also discovered that he could help others who were battling demons similar to ones he faced. He learned that life was about so much more than baseball.

In this session, we will focus on a group of captives in Egypt who would experience deliverance as they demonstrated their willingness to trust and obey the Lord. We will examine the tenth and final plague on Egypt—the death of the firstborn—and the Lord's instructions for observance of the Passover. After 430 years in Egypt (Ex. 12:40-41), the Israelites would finally leave the land of their captivity. The Lord would give them a new start and lead them toward a new life in the promised land as His holy people.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 11:1–13:16

The first nine plagues that God sent on Egypt as signs and wonders, signifying His judgment, are detailed in Exodus 7:14–10:29. With each of these plagues, Pharaoh's resistance to the Lord and to His servant Moses hardened all the more. Exodus 11 details the Lord's announcement of the tenth and decisive plague—the death of all firstborn males of both human beings and livestock among the Egyptians. By means of this plague the Lord would emphasize the distinction between the Egyptians and His people, the Israelites.

Exodus 12:1-13, the passage for primary focus in this session, records the Lord's instructions to Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover observance. The Festival of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover and lasted seven days. The fact that these observances signaled the beginning of a new year for the Israelites underlined their great significance (Ex. 12:2). The Lord instituted the observance of these events as a permanent statute among His people (12:14-20).

Moses next instructed the Israelite elders to select and slaughter the Passover animals, to dip clusters of hyssop in the animals' blood, and then to smear the lintels and the doorposts of their houses with the blood. When the Lord passed through to strike the Egyptians, He would pass over the houses with the smeared blood and not allow the destroyer to strike these families. The Israelites responded by worshiping the Lord and obeying Moses' instructions (12:21-28).

At midnight the Lord struck the firstborn among the Egyptians—both humans and livestock. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and released the slaves, ordering the Israelites to leave Egypt. Acting on Moses' instructions, the Israelites asked for and received silver and gold jewelry and clothing from the Egyptians. Four hundred and thirty years had passed since their ancestors had begun their sojourn in Egypt (12:29-42).

The remainder of Exodus 12 lists further specific instructions for future observances of the Passover. Foreigners who placed their faith in the Lord and chose to become members of the covenant community by being circumcised could participate in the Passover meal (Ex. 12:43-51).

The first sixteen verses of Exodus 13 deal with the consecration of the firstborn males—of both humans and domestic animals (13:1-2,11-16). The passage also reiterates the importance of continuing to observe the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread after the Lord brought the Israelites into Canaan (13:3-10). All of these traditions would continually remind the people of Israel that the Lord had delivered them from Egypt by His mighty power.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PREPARED (Ex. 12:1-5)

The Lord instructed Moses and Aaron regarding preparations for the Passover. That preparation included the establishment of a new year and specific requirements related to the sacrificial animal to be used in the observance.

VERSES 1-2

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: “This month is to be the beginning of months for you; it is the first month of your year.

Verse 1 reminds us that the Lord orchestrated the events surrounding the Passover and the exodus while the Israelites were still in Egypt. These events demonstrated God’s faithfulness to His promises (see Gen. 15:13-14; 50:22-25). The Lord gave His instructions **to Moses and Aaron**. Why these two men? First, because they were the leaders He had chosen. In addition, Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi, whom the Lord would soon designate as the priestly tribe. Thus, these two men were the appropriate recipients of whatever legal instruction the Lord dictated. They bore the responsibility not only of keeping the law but also of teaching and enforcing it.

The Lord directed Moses and Aaron to establish Abib [AY bib] (see Ex. 13:4), meaning “ears of grain” (an apparent reference to the beginning of the barley harvest), as the first month (**the beginning of months**) of the Israelites’ new year. This fact emphasizes that the Passover and the exodus from Egypt marked a significant new beginning for the Israelites. Their history was defined by God and His actions on behalf of His people. The Israelites were preparing to embark on a journey characterized by liberation from their years of slavery in Egypt.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Calendar” on pages 251–253 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Identify and define the type of calendar the Israelites followed. Do you maintain a spiritual calendar, either mentally or in written form? What events in your personal history have marked new spiritual beginnings for you?

This **first month** of Abib later acquired the Babylonian name Nisan [NIGH san]. It was equivalent to portions of March and April on our modern calendar—the early spring season north of the equator. Possibly many of the various Canaanite peoples observed a fall new year. Therefore, one reason the Lord may have designated a new year beginning in the spring for Israel was to clearly distinguish His people from the Canaanites and their false worship.

VERSE 3

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they must each select an animal of the flock according to their fathers' families, one animal per family.

The Lord's instructions regarding the Passover feast applied to **the whole community** ("all the congregation," KJV) of Israel. All His people were to participate in this turning-point experience in the community's life. The Lord stipulated that each household was to obtain an appropriate **animal** for sacrifice **on the tenth day** of Abib, four days before the feast. In other words, God required careful preparation for the Passover observance. The four-day time period between selecting the animal and slaughtering it allowed time to verify that the animal was unblemished. God further commanded the Israelites to eat this meal as households, not as individuals, thereby stressing unity. Although they would be consuming the Passover meal in different houses, all the Israelites would be partaking of the meal at the same time, creating a sense of solidarity among the people.

VERSE 4

If the household is too small for a whole animal, that person and the neighbor nearest his house are to select one based on the combined number of people; you should apportion the animal according to what each will eat.

This verse specified guidelines for a small household. If a family group was **too small** to consume an entire animal, the head of the family and his nearest neighbor were to select an animal **based on the combined number of people** in both households. Two guiding principles appear to be involved here. First, each person should eat a reasonable proportion of the meat. Second, no meat should be left over (see Ex. 34:25). Everyone had to partake of the slain animal, and all the meat was to be consumed. Neither gluttony nor leftovers were permitted. These instructions emphasized the importance of sharing the Passover meal in order to create and strengthen a sense of unity among the Israelites. In addition, these stipulations increased the

likelihood that all participants would understand the reason for the meal as the feast's purpose was shared in a group setting. Later in Israel's history, Jewish authorities stipulated ten as the minimum number of persons who could celebrate the Passover together.

Events in the New Testament reveal that the Passover celebration ultimately points to Christ as the Lamb of God and to the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper. John the Baptist drew a clear link between Jesus and the Passover lamb (John 1:29-30). Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples in connection with the Jewish Passover observance (Luke 22:7-20). The sacrificial Passover lamb (or goat) reminded the people of the deliverance that God provided for His people. Likewise, the broken bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper represent Jesus' body broken for us and His blood poured out for our salvation. Furthermore, as did the Passover celebration for the Jews, the Lord's Supper for Christians also focuses on the unity of believers, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29).

VERSE 5

You must have an unblemished animal, a year-old male; you may take it from either the sheep or the goats.

This verse stated the requirements for the sacrificial animal. First, it must be **an unblemished animal**. The Hebrew word translated *unblemished* basically means "complete." According to its context, the term has been variously rendered "whole," "full," "upright," or "perfect." Leviticus 22:21-25 sheds light on what constituted a blemished animal. Blemished animals included ones that were blind, injured, maimed, or diseased.

Why did the Lord require the animal to be of perfect quality? Various conditions that characterized an animal as blemished did not affect the quality of the meat. It could still be safely eaten. Thus, the reason for requiring perfection evidently rested with the symbolic significance of the animal. The animal reminded the people of the perfect deliverance that the perfect God provided for imperfect people.

Second, the requirements stipulated **a year-old male**. Such an animal would virtually be full-grown. This male animal would substitute for the firstborn Israelite males (see Ex. 12:12-13). Finally, the sacrificial animal could come **from either the sheep or the goats**.

How could this unblemished animal selected according to the Lord's criteria provide liberation and make those who consumed it acceptable to God? It could not, except in the sense that obeying the Lord's regulations for the Passover constituted an act of faith and obedience. Eating the Passover meal involved faith in God's gracious provision of liberation for His people.

That sacrificial meal symbolized and anticipated the reality of deliverance from sin that comes only through Jesus Christ, the sinless Lamb of God.

SACRIFICED (Ex. 12:6-7)

The Lord told Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites to sacrifice the Passover lambs at twilight on the fourteenth day of Abib (Nisan). The Israelites also were to apply some of the blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses.

VERSE 6

You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter the animals at twilight.

The unblemished, year-old lamb or kid, selected on the tenth day of the first month, was to be slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the month. The entire community of the Israelites was directed to kill the sacrificial animals at the same time—**at twilight** (“in the evening,” KJV)—again creating a sense of unity among the people. The Hebrew words translated **you are to keep it** convey the concept of preserving the animal in its unblemished condition until the time of sacrifice.

The command for the slaughter to occur *at twilight* ensured that enough light would be available for dressing the slain animal and preparing the roasting pit. The Hebrew expression rendered *at twilight* literally means “between the two evenings,” which has been taken to mean either between sunset and dark or between the decline of the sun (3:00–5:00 p.m.) and sunset. Deuteronomy 16:6 identifies the time for the slaughter as “in the evening as the sun sets.” Eating the sacrificial animal thus took place after nightfall (Ex. 12:8).

VERSE 7

They must take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat them.

After killing the sacrificial animal, the Israelites were to smear **some of the blood** on the lintels and doorposts of the houses where they were consuming the Passover meal. The blood placed on the exterior of the dwellings’ doorways would be visible to anyone outside, thereby revealing the faith of those within. While the all-knowing God did not need a sign to be able to identify those persons faithful to Him, such obedience gave evidence of the Israelites’ faith in the Lord’s power to deliver them. In the New Testament, James 2:14-26 likewise reminds us as believers that faith not authenticated by works of obedience is dead.

The shedding of blood constituted such a significant part of the Old Testament sacrificial system that the writer of the Book of Hebrews asserted, “According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). Thus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, by shedding His blood on the cross, made provision for our redemption from sin. He paid the penalty for our sin by His substitutionary death (see Rom. 5:8-10; 2 Cor. 5:21). As believers, we can be thankful that God provided the perfect sacrifice in His Son.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Blood” on pages 226–228 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Focus on the section titled “Blood of Christ—Meaning and Effects.” What does Christ’s death mean to you?

HURRIED (Ex. 12:8-11)

The Lord instructed the Israelites to eat the Passover meal in an urgent fashion. They would need to be ready to travel after eating the meal.

VERSES 8-9

They are to eat the meat that night; they should eat it, roasted over the fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or cooked in boiling water, but only roasted over fire—its head as well as its legs and inner organs.

The Lord required the Israelites to consume the roasted lamb or kid the same evening that it was slaughtered, **along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs**. The meat could be prepared more quickly by roasting it over a fire in contrast to boiling it, which required drawing water and then waiting for the water to boil. Another element stressing hasty preparation was the command to roast the entire animal—**its head as well as its legs and inner organs**. The Israelites were not to take the time to fully butcher the animal and thoroughly separate its various parts. Bread without leaven, or yeast, could be made more hastily since the process eliminated the time spent waiting for the dough to rise. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, yeast was used figuratively to depict the corrupting influences of evil (see 1 Cor. 5:6-8).

Why such haste in both preparing and consuming the Passover meal? The Israelites needed to be ready to leave Egypt immediately when Pharaoh ordered them to depart. The Lord knew that Pharaoh would quickly change

his mind after allowing the slaves to leave Egypt. Therefore the Israelites needed to get an advanced start on the Egyptian pursuit. Furthermore, the Israelites' willingness to leave at a moment's notice revealed their faith. The exodus generation would be leaving behind the only kind of life they had ever known and stepping out into an unknown future. As their ancestor Abraham had done (see Gen. 12:1-3), they were abandoning the security of their surroundings for a faith adventure.

The *bitter herbs* symbolized the Israelites' bitter experiences as slaves in Egypt (see Ex. 1:13-14). Probably these herbs originally were wild desert plants the Israelites gathered to season their food. A much later collection of Jewish oral laws listed the following herbs as meeting the Passover requirement: chicory, snakeroot, dandelion, lettuce, and pepperwort.

VERSE 10

You must not leave any of it until morning; any part of it left until morning you must burn.

The Lord commanded His people to **burn** any leftovers of the lamb or kid. Destroying any leftovers stressed that God's people were embarking on a faith journey. Their obedience to His command exhibited their faith that the Lord's liberation of His people would occur immediately (see Ex. 12:50-51). They needed to trust Him not only to provide food for the next day but also for all of their time in the wilderness. Over the next approximately forty years, the Lord proved His faithfulness even when His people repeatedly flaunted their unfaithfulness. He sustained the Israelites with manna in the wilderness until they entered the promised land (Josh. 5:10-12).

VERSE 11

Here is how you must eat it: You must be dressed for travel, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You are to eat it in a hurry; it is the LORD's Passover.

This verse underlines the haste connected with eating the Passover meal. Before eating the Passover, the Israelites were to **be dressed for travel** ("with your loins girded," KJV; "with your belt fastened," ESV; "with your cloak tucked into your belt," NIV) to the extent of wearing their sandals and carrying their staffs. People normally removed their **sandals** or shoes in the house. The **staff** was a tool for protecting oneself and for use in herding animals. Having it **in ... hand** in the house likewise was not typical. Thus, the entire Passover meal and the posture with which it was consumed signaled readiness for obeying the Lord at a moment's notice. Indeed, it was **the LORD's Passover**.

EXPLORE FURTHER

In the article titled “Festivals” in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*, read the section on page 565 titled “Passover.” What significance do you think the Passover held for Jewish Christians following Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection? Can you recall your participation in a Lord’s Supper observance that held special significance for you? What made that occasion especially meaningful?

DELIVERED (Ex. 12:12-13)

The Lord explained that His decisive plague would include every firstborn male’s death. This plague would fall on both humans and animals. The death of the firstborn males would be the decisive demonstration of the Lord’s superiority over Egypt’s false gods. Every firstborn male within the houses marked by the blood would escape this judgment.

VERSE 12

I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both people and animals. I am the LORD; I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt.

The Lord announced that He would **pass through** the land on Passover night and execute judgment on **every firstborn male in the land of Egypt**. When the Lord passed through Egypt, He would “pass over” (Ex. 12:13) the houses marked with the blood of the sacrificial animal. Verse 12 clearly states that a key purpose of all the plagues against Egypt was to **execute** [the Lord’s] **judgments against all the gods of Egypt**.

The Egyptians were both pantheists and polytheists. According to pantheism, everything that exists is viewed as a manifestation or extension of a god. Therefore, if any part of nature is judged, that judgment is viewed as coming on at least one god or goddess. The ten plagues thus represented the Lord’s judgment against Egyptian religion as a whole.

The Egyptians also were polytheists. They worshiped many gods and goddesses. A single plague might have led the Egyptians to conclude that the God whom Moses and Aaron worshiped was more powerful than one of their gods. However, ten different plagues striking at various Egyptian false gods displayed the reality that none of their gods and goddesses had any power

against the Lord. Verse 12 includes the words: **I am the LORD**. By bringing judgment on the Egyptians and delivering His people, the Lord was clearly showing the Israelites that they were to worship no other gods.

VERSE 13

The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

What was the **distinguishing mark** (“token,” KJV; “sign,” NIV) that signified deliverance or liberation from the destroyer? The Hebrew term translated *distinguishing mark* also can mean “ensign,” “standard,” “warning,” or “miraculous sign.” The word first appears in the Old Testament in Genesis 1:14, where it identifies the sun and the moon as “signs” to distinguish the seasons. It also is applied to the rainbow as the sign of the Lord’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12-13,17) and is used to denote circumcision as the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (17:11). Many of the occurrences of the term in the Old Testament refer to miraculous signs (see Ex. 7:3; Deut. 6:22; 7:19; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 135:9; Jer. 32:20).

When the Lord passed through Egypt on the night of the tenth plague, He would **pass over** the houses with the *distinguishing mark*—the lamb’s **blood**. He would spare those who demonstrated they had placed their faith in Him. The Hebrew noun translated “Passover” is derived from the verb rendered *pass over* in Exodus 12:13. The Lord would protect the Israelite houses and would not allow the destroyer to enter (Ex. 12:23; see Heb. 11:28).

When I study Exodus 12:1-13, I cannot help but be grateful for Christ, the Lamb of God slain for my sins. Because of Christ’s shed blood, God passes over or forgives my sins so that I will not experience the judgment of eternal separation from Him. How significant that God designed the perfect sacrifice of His Son to be offered during the Jewish Passover season!

EXPLORE FURTHER

The distinguishing mark of the blood placed on Israelite houses points to the apostle John’s vision of believers in heaven being distinguished by robes made white by the Lamb’s blood (Rev. 7:14). Only through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross can a person avoid hell—God’s eternal judgment against sin. Have you placed your faith in Him as the only One who can deliver you from your bondage in sin? If not, what hinders you from doing so now?

VICTORY

God will ultimately be victorious over His enemies and the enemies of His people.

I am a history buff. One reason I enjoy reading historical works is that I believe God is at work in human history. After all, much of the Old Testament recounts the Lord at work throughout the record of Israel's past. Does God still work in and through historical events of the modern era? I believe He does. So too believed some of the Allied troops engaged in defending the Belgian town of Bastogne [ba STOHN] during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

It was December 1944, and Hitler was determined to recapture the port city of Antwerp [ANT wuhrp], which had been freed from Nazi occupation just three months earlier. To reach Antwerp, Nazi forces desperately needed to seize and control the main roads that converged in the densely wooded highlands at the small town of Bastogne. The area was defended at the time primarily by battle-weary U.S. troops of the 28th Infantry Division.

Hitler's forces attacked swiftly and experienced initial success, cutting all the highways leading to Bastogne. Allied soldiers, in addition to being greatly outnumbered by enemy troops, experienced horrific conditions and faced a number of seemingly insurmountable problems. They lacked adequate protection from the brutally cold weather. They faced critical shortages of food, medical supplies, and ammunition. Furthermore, they lacked senior leadership. Because of the winter weather, the surrounded American forces could not receive assistance by air. Nazi commanders demanded surrender, but the American troops refused. This comparatively small group of soldiers facing harsh conditions held out long enough for Allied reinforcements to arrive and turn the tide in the Battle of the Bulge.

Some of the soldiers who fought at Bastogne believed that God had miraculously intervened on their behalf against a powerful enemy. Thousands of years before this history-making battle, the Lord God similarly intervened against a powerful Egyptian army surrounding the Israelites at the Red Sea. This session focuses on the Lord's protection and deliverance of His people even as the Egyptian pharaoh was determined to recapture the Israelites as slaves. The story of God's people—"His-story"—stood in the balance.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 13:17–15:21

The Israelites in Egypt had experienced mounting tension as Moses and Aaron haggled with Pharaoh over the slaves' release. At times the Israelites expressed their deep resentment of the two leaders' efforts (Ex. 5:19-21). Then came the series of plagues that generated hope anew. However, each time the Lord lifted a plague, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the Israelites go. Finally, the Lord gave instructions for the Passover meal that His people were to observe the night of the decisive tenth plague. Those instructions surely raised the people's hopes that liberation was near (12:11).

The Israelites experienced victory as the Lord brought them out of the land of bondage (12:51). Knowing their weakness, however, the Lord did not lead them through Philistine territory, although that was the shortest route to Canaan. He knew they would give up and return to Egypt if they faced war with the Philistines. As they set out on their journey, the Lord led His people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:17-22).

The Lord instructed Moses and the Israelites to camp by the Red Sea. He also warned Moses about the inevitable Egyptian pursuit. Through the events to come, the Lord would receive glory not only from His own people, but also from Pharaoh and the Egyptians (14:1-4).

As predicted, Pharaoh and his troops pursued the Israelites and caught up with them as they camped by the Red Sea. When the Israelites saw the approaching army, they demonstrated the lack of faith that would repeatedly characterize their response in the face of difficulties: "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness" (14:12).

Verses 13-28 constitute the primary focal verses for this session. In reaction to the people's despair, Moses attempted to buttress their faith in the Lord. He commanded them to trust God rather than to fear. Obediently, Moses stretched out his staff toward the sea, and the waters parted. The Israelites marched through the sea on dry ground, while the pursuing Egyptians were drowned. This miraculous event instilled reverent awe for the Lord in the Israelites' hearts. They "believed in him and in his servant Moses" (14:31)—at least for the moment!

Exodus 15:1-21 records the victory song that Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord after He brought them safely through the sea. This hymn focuses on the Lord's highly exalted and unique nature (15:1,11). It celebrates His strength and power (15:2-10) as well as His salvation (15:2). The song also affirms that His people can depend on His unfailing, redemptive love (15:13). Ultimately, they can experience victory as they follow Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE SETTING (Ex. 14:13-18)

The Lord reprimanded the Israelites for complaining against Him. He then told Moses that He would part the sea so the people could pass through it on dry ground. God would defeat the Egyptian army and thereby receive glory.

VERSES 13-14

But Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm and see the LORD’s salvation that he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you must be quiet.”

The Israelites had just experienced the great emotional release from their taskmasters only to find themselves hemmed in between Pharaoh’s troops and the Red Sea. They panicked in terror (Ex. 14:10). As an effective leader, however, Moses refused to be swayed by the multitude’s behavior. Instead he remembered and believed the Lord’s promise of victory (14:1-4).

Moses calmly commanded, **“Don’t be afraid”** (“Fear ye not,” KJV). The Hebrew verb meaning “to fear” occurs in at least two key contexts in the Old Testament. One of those contexts is the negative emotional reaction to danger and difficulty—the context of verse 13. Another significant context is that of the reverence and awe associated with worship of the Lord. If we learn proper fear or reverence of the Lord, we can overcome being terrified by devastating circumstances or by human beings’ evil actions.

Moses further ordered the Israelites to **stand firm and see the LORD’s salvation**. In some contexts the Hebrew verb rendered *stand firm* means to actively oppose evil. In Exodus 14:13, however, it signifies firmly and quietly awaiting the Lord’s mighty rescue. The term rendered *salvation* also means “deliverance.” It is associated with a word that means “to make wide” or “to make spacious.” Moving from a narrow or restricted area to one that is wide or spacious connotes freedom from distress. In this particular case, the Lord literally would open a wide path through the sea for the Israelites.

The Old Testament reveals that God delivered His people from various kinds of distress, including enemies, famine, and sickness. Yet, the word rendered *salvation* also has strong religious or theological meaning, because it is the Lord who accomplishes the deliverance of His people. God would do the fighting for the Israelites. He would give them total victory at the Red Sea. Moses assured the people: **“The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again.”**

Verse 14 reiterates the people's need to **be quiet** and let the Lord fight for them. So often our human nature dictates that we do something now. The Lord wants us to learn to wait on Him. Waiting on the Lord implies trust in Him. The Israelites' future seemed bleak; their faith was weak. In this setting, however, the Lord chose to perform a mighty act of deliverance. Clearly the people's faith did not produce the miracle of deliverance. Rather, the Lord's mighty act of deliverance led them to revere and trust Him (Ex. 14:31).

VERSE 15

The LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to break camp.

The Lord questioned Moses: “**Why are you crying out to me?**” Although in the Hebrew the pronoun *you* is singular, the Lord's words were meant for the Israelites as a whole. Verse 10 makes clear that the whole assembly was crying out to the Lord. Moses functioned as an intermediary between the Lord and the Israelites. Furthermore, as the people's leader, Moses had to accept criticism leveled at them even when he was not responsible for their lack of faith. Thus, the Lord's question likely was a rebuke to the Israelites and not a reference to any lack of faith on Moses' part.

The Lord next instructed Moses to **tell the Israelites to break camp**. The imagery behind the verb *break camp* is that of pulling up the tent pegs in order to move forward. There is a time to stand still and there is a time to go forward. How do we know which time is which? We can gain some clues from Scripture and from our circumstances. However, certain knowledge comes only by keeping the lines of communication open with the Lord so that we can discern His guidance. For believers today, maintaining vital fellowship with Him includes faithfulness in prayer and Bible study. Certainly Moses enjoyed rich fellowship with the Lord. Their relationship is described elsewhere in Exodus as follows: “The LORD would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend” (33:11). Because of Jesus, every believer can have a close, intimate relationship with God. He has called us friends (John 15:15).

VERSE 16

As for you, lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

The Lord commanded Moses to **lift up** his **staff** and **stretch out** his **hand over the sea**. This action would **divide** the waters so that the Israelites could

cross **on dry ground**. The waters the Israelites had viewed as a great barrier to freedom became their escape route. God opened a way through the Red Sea.

Moses' *staff* played an important role in this miracle. His simple shepherd's instrument had become the rod of God when Moses had surrendered it at the burning bush (Ex. 4:1-5). Moses had previously used that staff to strike the waters of the Nile at the Lord's command. Those waters had turned to blood, initiating the first of the series of plagues on Egypt (7:14-18). Here the rod would impact another body of water—the Red Sea. The staff was effective only because it symbolized the Lord's presence and power. God, not Moses, performed the miraculous acts.

VERSE 17

As for me, I am going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them, and I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh, all his army, and his chariots and horsemen.

Why did the Egyptian army follow the Israelites into the seabed? Perhaps they thought that if the Israelites could do it, they could too. The text, however, makes clear that the Lord was at work, hardening the Egyptians' hearts. (For a discussion of hardening the heart, see the commentary on Ex. 7:3 in Session 2.) The purpose for the hardening of Pharaoh's and the Egyptians' hearts is stated in verse 17. By this means the Lord would **receive glory** ("get ... honour," KJV) as the Egyptian troops pursued the Israelites and were drowned. The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb rendered *receive glory* is "to be heavy" or "to be weighty." Thus, *glory* designates the weighty importance and shining majesty that are associated with the Lord's presence. Although the Egyptians initially appeared to possess the upper hand at the Red Sea, the Lord's acts would reveal Him as sovereign.

VERSE 18

The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I receive glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

This verse repeats much of the thought of verse 17. However, verse 18 adds the significant point that the Lord's mighty deliverance of the Israelites and destruction of the Egyptian army would cause the idol-worshiping Egyptians to recognize that Israel's God, **the LORD**, is indeed sovereign. The goal of Egypt's humiliation in this instance was the Lord's revelation of Himself in His greatness and sovereignty as the only real God. Verse 18 also teaches all of us that if we refuse to know the Lord in His grace, we will ultimately know Him in His judgment.

EXPLORE FURTHER

How would you answer someone who asked, “Why would a loving God drown Pharaoh’s forces in the Red Sea?” Exodus 14:13-18 introduces the concept of holy war in the Old Testament, a theme that becomes more prominent in the Book of Joshua. Read the article titled “Holy War” on page 761 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does the article help you better answer the question asked at the start of this paragraph?

ACT 1: THE SEPARATION (Ex. 14:19-20)

God’s angel stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians to keep the two groups separated from one another. Likewise, the pillar of cloud came between the Israelite and Egyptian forces. The Lord had led the Israelites by means of the cloud. He also used it to protect them from their enemies.

VERSE 19

Then the angel of God, who was going in front of the Israelite forces, moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them.

This verse depicts the visible manifestation of the Lord’s presence with His people through **the angel of God** and **the pillar of cloud**. The reality of God’s presence with the Israelites is affirmed whether that presence is identified as the angel of God, the pillar of cloud, or as the Lord Himself (see 13:21). Through the pillar, the Lord did more than guide His people; He also protected them.

Some Bible scholars identify *the angel of God* as the Second Person of the Trinity, later to be incarnated as Jesus Christ. Others differ from this view on the basis that the incarnation was a unique event in history. One thing is clear: the *angel of God* is no ordinary angel or messenger. He is identified intimately with God’s presence and power.

VERSE 20

It came between the Egyptian and Israelite forces. There was cloud and darkness, it lit up the night, and neither group came near the other all night long.

A literal translation of this verse leaves the meaning somewhat obscure. I prefer the interpretation that the cloud separating the two groups brought darkness to the Egyptians and light to the Israelites. In any case, the cloud kept the Egyptians away from the Israelites and gave the Israelites the time they needed to pass through the Red Sea.

The verse reminds me of Jesus' words in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." To follow the Lord is to experience the light of abundant life. To reject the Lord is to live in spiritual darkness.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Revelation of God" on pages 1351–1353 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How is God's revelation of Himself to people today like and unlike how He revealed Himself in Moses' time?

ACT 2: THE CROSSING (Ex. 14:21-22)

When Moses obediently extended his staff over the Red Sea, the Lord parted the waters. The Israelites were able to escape on dry land from the Egyptians.

VERSE 21

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back with a powerful east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry land. So the waters were divided,

Using the **powerful east wind** He had created, the Lord pushed back the waters and turned the seabed into dry ground. He performed a miracle to redeem His people. In the Scriptures, an *east wind* often is associated with destruction or punishment (see Ex. 10:13; Jonah 4:8; Hos. 13:15), partly because the east winds in Egypt, the Sinai, and Canaan were so scorchingly hot. In Exodus 14:21, the Lord's east wind was in effect a two-edged sword. It resulted in deliverance for the Israelites and destruction for the Egyptians.

The Hebrew verb translated **were divided** can also be rendered "were split." Various contexts in which this verb appears express forceful action—for example, the hatching of eggs (Isa. 34:15) and the splitting of wood (Gen. 22:3). The word also appears in contexts associated with the splitting of the earth (Num. 16:31). Additionally, this verb is associated with warfare and violence (2 Kings 25:4, "broken into"). Finally, the term depicts the Creator's

mastery over the waters, as in Exodus 14:21. The One who possesses such power is more than able to redeem His people (see Isa. 51:9-11).

VERSE 22

and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left.

After the Lord split the waters, the Israelites passed through **on dry ground**. Verse 22 depicts the divided waters as being **like a wall to them on their right and their left**. The Hebrew word translated *wall* connotes a massive, high wall such as that surrounding a city in ancient times. Thus, God's intervention to deliver His people was clearly miraculous in nature. The same God who opened the sea for the Israelites continues to make a way for His people today. He often leads them through—not around—all kinds of obstacles and troubles (see Isa. 43:1-2).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Do you think that stepping between the walls of water demonstrated faith on the part of the Israelites? Why or why not? What are some ways believers demonstrate faith in the Lord today?

ACT 3: THE VICTORY (Ex. 14:23-28)

The Egyptians pursued the Israelites into the dry seabed. At God's direction, Moses extended his staff and the sea completely engulfed the Egyptian army.

VERSES 23-24

The Egyptians set out in pursuit—all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen—and went into the sea after them. During the morning watch, the LORD looked down at the Egyptian forces from the pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian forces into confusion.

Pharaoh's army pursued the Lord's people into the sea. Verses 23-24 lead us to assume the Israelites either had completely finished crossing or at least had almost finished crossing the dry seabed by the time the **pillar of fire and cloud** had ceased being a barrier to Pharaoh's army. Once conditions appeared to change with the arrival of morning, the Egyptians drove their chariots into the seabed.

Recall that while the Israelites had experienced deliverance by stepping into the sea (Ex. 14:21-22), the Egyptians were defeated and drowned. One group tasted victory by the same act that brought devastation to the other. What made the difference? The Israelites were obeying the Lord, while the Egyptians were following human orders from a pagan king. Those whom people choose to follow makes a big difference in the outcome of their lives.

The Lord **looked down** on Pharaoh's forces and **threw** them **into confusion**. When used in reference to the Lord, the Hebrew verb translated *looked down* appears in contexts of both grace and judgment. For example, in Psalm 102:19-20, the Lord's look is a redeeming look; in Exodus 14:24, His look is associated with judgment. The verb rendered *threw . . . into confusion* typically appears in the Old Testament with God as its subject. The verb describes the panic and chaos of military forces in the face of a superior challenger, particularly when the Lord is present in the battle.

VERSE 25

He caused their chariot wheels to swerve and made them drive with difficulty. "Let's get away from Israel," the Egyptians said, "because the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!"

A literal rendering of the first part of verse 25 is "And He caused to turn aside the wheels of their chariots." This description may refer to the Lord's causing the chariots to bog down in the soft, sandy sea floor. Others take the expression to mean the wheels came off (KJV). In any case, the Egyptians recognized that **the LORD** was **fighting for** the Israelites. The Lord accomplished one of His purposes: forcing the Egyptians to recognize His sovereignty.

Pharaoh's forces were only able to steer their vehicles **with difficulty**. The term translated *with difficulty* literally means "with heaviness." A related term in Exodus 5:9 describes the increased workload Pharaoh had imposed on the Israelites. The Egyptians thus were reaping what they had sown.

VERSES 26-27

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water may come back on the Egyptians, on their chariots and horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal depth. While the Egyptians were trying to escape from it, the LORD threw them into the sea.

These two verses record the Lord's further instruction to Moses and Moses' obedience to that mandate. The same hand motion that Moses previously had

used in dividing the waters (Ex. 14:16,21-22) now was employed in returning the sea to **its normal depth** (“his strength,” KJV; “its normal course,” ESV; “its place,” NIV). Presumably, Moses’ gesture also involved lifting his staff. As a result, the waters returned so quickly that none of the Egyptians had time to get back to shore.

In this clash with the enemy, the Israelites only needed to be still and watch the Lord win the victory on their behalf. The Lord’s timing of returning the sea to its typical depth **at daybreak** meant the Israelites had enough light to witness the destruction of Pharaoh’s army.

VERSE 28

The water came back and covered the chariots and horsemen, plus the entire army of Pharaoh that had gone after them into the sea. Not even one of them survived.

The enemy’s defeat was comprehensive: the returning waters **covered the chariots and horsemen, plus the entire army of Pharaoh, and not even one of them survived.** Through this catastrophic act, the Lord executed justice on the Egyptians who rejected Him. This verse reminds us that God’s judgment is real. As the writer of the Book of Hebrews aptly declared, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

Scripture teaches us that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23). Sin separates us from God. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, we face God’s judgment of eternal separation from Him in hell (Rom. 6:23). However, God has shown His great love by sending Christ to die for us (Rom. 5:8). By God’s grace through faith in Christ, we can escape eternal judgment and spend eternity with Him in heaven (Eph. 2:8-9).

As a result of their experience of deliverance, the Israelites believed in the Lord and reverently worshiped Him (14:31). They recognized that the Lord is worthy of worship and praise as the victorious God. Thus His people joyfully celebrated His mighty victory with the song of praise recorded in Exodus 15.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Contrast the Israelites’ attitudes and behavior on one side of the Red Sea with their attitudes and behavior after the Lord miraculously brought them through to the other side. Which side most accurately reflects your current walk with the Lord? Explain. What changes might need to happen in you so that you can experience greater victory as a Christian?

SUFFICIENT

God provides for the needs of His people.

John G. Paton was a Scottish missionary in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Despite extreme danger and difficulty, he took the gospel to Vanuatu [van WAH too] (known then as the New Hebrides Islands) in the South Pacific. Paton evangelized among an island people group who practiced cannibalism. The islanders repeatedly made attempts on Paton's life, stole his chickens and household items, and set fire to mission property. Yet Paton courageously persevered in his ministry, crying out in prayer to God for protection, and relying on the Lord as he faced difficulty after difficulty.

Paton had demonstrated great faith in God long before he went to the mission field. He grew up in Scotland in a family of eleven, and John's parents often struggled to meet the family's basic needs. In one especially difficult year, John's father had to temporarily leave home to find work. At one point before the father returned, there was no food or money in the house.

John's mother refused to ask her neighbors for help. When she put her children to bed, she calmed their fears. She told them she had prayed to the Lord about their needs and trusted Him to take care of them. John recalled that a large package arrived at their home the next day. It contained a bag of potatoes, a bag of flour, and some cheese. The package had come from their grandfather. While their grandfather was unaware of the family's desperate situation at that time, he had felt moved to send them a gift.

John's mother saw her children's excited surprise over the answer to her prayer. She gently encouraged the children to love their heavenly Father, to tell Him their needs in faith, and to have confidence that He would meet their needs in accordance with their good and His glory. Paton never forgot this incident or his mother's counsel.

This session focuses on the Lord's provision for the Israelites as they journeyed in the wilderness. After traveling in the region for over a month, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron, because they lacked the meat and bread they had enjoyed in Egypt. Although the Israelites faced genuine concerns and hardships, they failed to trust God to meet their basic needs. Nevertheless, the Lord graciously provided manna and quail for His people.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 15:22–18:27

The Lord had rescued the Israelites from the clutches of the Egyptians. He had opened a way through the sea for His people, while the pursuing Egyptians were drowned. That miraculous event had instilled reverent awe for the Lord in the Israelites' hearts. They "believed in him and in his servant Moses" (14:31). The people also responded by singing the victory song of praise recorded in Exodus 15:1-21.

Exodus 15:22–18:27 details various ways God continued to prove His sufficiency to meet the Israelites' needs as they began their trek through the wilderness toward the promised land. First, the people experienced thirst. The Israelites journeyed three days into the desert without finding fresh water. When they came to Marah [MAH ruh], a name meaning "bitter," they found water that was too acrid to drink. The people demonstrated a lack of faith by grumbling to Moses. Moses responded by turning to the Lord in prayer. God answered the leader's prayer by showing him a certain tree. When Moses cast the wood into the water, the water became suitable for drinking.

The Lord tested His people at Marah. He promised that if they obeyed His commands, He would not inflict on them the illnesses that He had inflicted on the Egyptians. At the next stage of their journey, the Israelites arrived at Elim [EE lim], a name meaning "large trees." There the Lord graciously provided twelve springs and seventy date palms to sustain His people (15:22-27).

After departing Elim, the Israelites again began griping to Moses and Aaron about their lack of food. The Lord again responded graciously by providing quail to eat. Further, God sent His people bread from heaven. This bread became known as manna, a name probably derived from the question the Israelites asked when they first saw the fine flakes: "What is it?" In accordance with the Lord's instructions, two quarts of manna were preserved and later placed in the ark of the covenant. The Lord sustained the Israelites forty years with manna in the wilderness (16:1-36).

At Rephidim [REF ih dim], the people again complained about a lack of fresh water to drink. This time God directed Moses to take his shepherd's staff and strike a certain rock and thereby obtain water. Also at Rephidim, the Israelites encountered an attack by hostile Amalekites [uh MAL uh kights]. Joshua led the Israelites in prevailing over their attackers. After the victory, Moses erected an altar and called it "The LORD Is My Banner" (17:1-16).

Finally, this context passage reveals the Lord's provision of sufficient human leadership for His people. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, visited Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. When Jethro observed Moses settling

disputes among the people from morning until evening, his father-in-law offered helpful advice. Jethro counseled Moses to select qualified men and place them over the people as commanders or judges of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moses wisely accepted his father-in-law's advice. By this means, God again met His people's needs (18:1-27).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

QUESTIONING THE FUTURE (Ex. 16:1-3)

The Israelites arrived in the Wilderness of Sin on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt. There the people again grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Previously they had complained because they lacked water (15:22-27). On the occasion described in Exodus 16:1-3, the people griped about having no food. Although their concerns were genuine, the Israelites failed to trust the Lord to meet their needs.

VERSE 1

The entire Israelite community departed from Elim and came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt.

One month had passed since the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. By this time, the people had probably consumed most if not all of the provisions they had brought with them out of that land. Buying or finding food in the wilderness for so many would have been quite challenging. The **Wilderness of Sin** was a barren area located west of the Sinai plateau on the Sinai Peninsula. The term *Sin* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word. It is not to be confused with the Hebrew word meaning "sin," although the Israelites certainly demonstrated a lack of faith in this location by grumbling against Moses and Aaron.

VERSE 2

The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

At this point the Israelite congregation again **grumbled** ("murmured," KJV) against their leadership. The Hebrew verb translated *grumbled* appears primarily in Exodus 15–17 and Numbers 14; 16; and 17. Although the people often made Moses and/or Aaron the target of their grumbling, ultimately

their murmuring was against the Lord. And though the Israelites' complaints seemed reasonable from a human perspective (water and food shortages), nevertheless the people demonstrated a lack of faith in God. They failed to trust Him to provide for their needs in the wilderness. Thus, this verb also can be translated "rebelled." By their grumbling, the people rebelled against the Lord and the leaders He had established over them.

VERSE 3

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!"

This verse records an example of the congregation's grumbling. The people contrasted the past days in Egypt with their current situation. This occasion was the first time the Israelites voiced their wish-we-had-died-in-Egypt complaint, but it would not be the last time they uttered such words (see Num. 11:4-5,18; 14:2; 20:3-5). In their present situation, the Israelites viewed their time in Egypt as the good old days! Certainly they had expressed a different perspective while they were in bondage (Ex. 2:23-24). At that time the Israelites had "groaned because of their difficult labor; and they cried out" (2:23). After a relatively short period of release from bondage, however, their former groaning became grumbling because of the new and difficult circumstances they faced.

The Israelites' tendency to recall only the positives of their past experiences (and thus to grumble about their current circumstances) reminds me of my inclination to behave in a similar fashion. For example, I enjoy eating blackberries, but I grumble every time I have to pay several dollars in a grocery store for a handful of berries. I remember many past summers spent on my grandparents' farm picking gallons of blackberries and freely eating all I wanted. I tend to forget, however, the oppressive heat in the berry patch, the many briar scratches I received, and the tick and chigger bites that kept me awake long after I went to bed. Remembering the negatives as well as the positives of past experiences can help us keep things in proper perspective.

While in some cases remembering only the positive aspects of previous experiences constitutes a healthy outlook, in the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, it did not. They failed to believe the Lord would address their present needs. They focused on only one aspect of the past instead of trusting the Lord to act in the present. Their faulty perspective led them to grumble against the Lord. As believers, we too must guard against the temptation to distrust God's goodness and faithfulness.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Recall a personal experience that tempted you to doubt God's goodness and faithfulness. How did you handle that difficulty? What, if anything, would you do differently if you faced a similar challenge again?

QUESTIONING THEIR OBEDIENCE (Ex. 16:4-5, 11-12)

The Lord declared to Moses that He would provide food. The provision would include a test of the people's obedience to Him. The Lord spoke to Moses in the Israelites' presence when He announced His specific provision of meat in the evening followed by bread in the morning.

VERSE 4

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions."

God promised to **rain bread from heaven** to feed the Israelite community. He sent this bread not only to satisfy the Israelites' hunger but also to teach them to rely on His provision. The Lord instructed the people to collect only enough for each day. By this restriction, God tested His people's willingness to obey and depend on Him. The Lord's stipulation regarding the gathering of manna would reveal whether or not the Israelites were prone to keep His law (which He would soon codify for them at Mount Sinai).

The instruction to gather only enough manna for **each day** calls to mind that portion of the Model Prayer in which Jesus taught His followers to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). These words remind us that all our sustenance comes from God. Thus, they teach us to live one day at a time in dependence on the Lord and not to be anxious about the future.

In many contexts, the Hebrew word translated **test** ("prove," KJV) conveys the idea of proving the quality of someone or something, often by means of adversity. God does not test His people in an attempt to cause them to fail but rather as a means of refining their character. In Deuteronomy 8:3, the Lord stated a further purpose in giving His people bread from heaven. The Lord gave them manna so that they "might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

God's provision of manna was a miraculous act that compelled the Israelites to recognize it was the Lord who sustained them in the wilderness. Such a Lord was more than worthy of their devotion. They had to listen to Him and obey His commands in order to experience true freedom.

VERSE 5

On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.”

The Lord instructed the Israelites to gather **twice as much** manna on the sixth day (see Ex. 16:22). This stipulation anticipated the Lord's future revelation of the fourth commandment establishing the Sabbath Day as holy. Half of the double portion of manna gathered on the sixth day was to be prepared that day for consumption on the Sabbath (see Num. 11:7-8).

VERSES 11-12

The LORD spoke to Moses, “I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them: At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will eat bread until you are full. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”

The words **the LORD spoke to Moses** occur repeatedly in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. In what way did the Lord speak to Moses? Did Moses hear His voice audibly? We do not know. What we do know is that Moses heard the Lord's message accurately, for it has been preserved as part of God's inspired Word. Elsewhere in Exodus we learn that the Lord spoke with Moses “face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex. 33:11). In other words, Moses enjoyed a close, personal relationship with the Lord.

The Lord still speaks to His people today. He guides us in various ways. Sometimes He speaks to us through circumstances. We also can hear His message through His messengers—preachers and evangelists. Ultimately He has spoken to us in His Word. What He says to us in other ways will never contradict what He has revealed in the Scriptures. However, we must take time, as Moses did, to develop a close, personal relationship with the Lord. Prayer involves listening as well as speaking to Him.

The Lord again addressed Moses in response to the Israelites' **complaints**. The Hebrew noun translated *complaints* (“murmurings,” KJV; “grumbling,” ESV, NIV) is related to the verb rendered “grumbled” in Exodus 16:2. The Hebrew noun always appears in contexts of the Israelites' grumbling against the Lord. Such complaints constituted acts of unbelief, disobedience, and rebellion against His authority.

In the evening the Lord sent meat to His people in the form of quail. The manna then appeared on the ground the next morning. In displaying His power over nature, the Lord again affirmed His identity as Yahweh their God. Through these provisions His people could acquire a deeper knowledge of Him. In this context, the Hebrew verb rendered **know** describes intimate knowledge gained by experience through personal relationship.

The Lord provided bread and meat for the Israelites. His provision, however, included a test of the people's obedience to Him. God still designs tests that require His followers to depend on Him in greater ways. Successfully passing such tests strengthens our faith in Him.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Faith, Faithfulness" on pages 547–550 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Pay special attention to the section titled "Role of Faith in Sanctification." Why does God allow a believer's faith to be tested?

QUESTIONING THE PROVISION (Ex. 16:13-18)

The Lord provided meat in the evening and manna in the morning. The Lord permitted the Israelites to gather two quarts of manna for each individual in a household. The people gathered varying amounts, but the end result was that each had just enough to meet his or her needs.

VERSE 13

So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp.

Meat arrived in the evening in the form of **quail**. The Hebrew term rendered *quail* appears in the Old Testament only in the contexts of God's wilderness provisions (see also Num. 11:31-32; Ps. 105:40). The quail depicted in Scripture were migratory birds with short wings and weak powers of flight. They were mottled brown in color and smaller than modern bobwhite quail.

Whereas the manna appeared daily, the quail provided a one-time supply of meat. The birds arrived in such numbers that they **covered the camp**. These birds usually migrated in vast numbers to the northern regions in the spring. Because of their extended flight over the Red Sea, they arrived exhausted on the shore of the Sinai Peninsula. However, the fact that the quail annually migrated north in the spring does not negate their being a

special sign of God's provision for His people. God's timing was clearly evident in the miraculous supply of quail to meet His people's needs. The reference to the layer of dew **around the camp** ("host," KJV) the next morning prepares the reader for the Lord's provision of manna described in verses 14-16.

VERSES 14-15

When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" because they didn't know what it was. Moses told them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

When the morning dew evaporated, **fine flakes** ("a small round thing," KJV; "thin flakes," NIV) appeared on the ground. The flakes were as fine as **frost** ("hoar frost," KJV). Based on the description of this provision in the original language, some biblical scholars have suggested the bread was flaky in the sense that pie crust is flaky. In other words, it may not have appeared in the form of individual flakes but rather in sheets.

When the Israelites saw the Lord's provision, they exclaimed, "**What is it?**" The substance received the name *manna* from the sound of their question in the original language. The question can be transliterated (substituting corresponding English letters for Hebrew letters) as follows: *man hu*. From this expression the designation *manna* was derived by similarity of sound.

Exodus 16 supplies additional characteristics of manna. In verse 31, Moses recorded that "it resembled coriander seed, was white, and tasted like wafers made with honey." The Israelites gathered manna early in the morning, because "when the sun grew hot, it melted" (Ex. 16:21). If kept overnight—except when prepared for the Sabbath—"it bred worms and stank" (16:20).

While biblical scholars have speculated about manna, all attempts to identify it with a modern substance in the area have failed in one way or another to satisfy the biblical description. We simply conclude that the Lord miraculously provided this bread for His people for forty years (16:35). When they reached Gilgal in the promised land, the manna ceased (Josh. 5:12). The Lord commanded Moses to preserve a quantity of manna for future generations to be reminded of God's provision (Ex. 16:32; see also Heb. 9:1-4).

VERSE 16

This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.'"

The Lord placed a restriction on the gathering of manna. Each individual was allowed approximately **two quarts** (“omer,” KJV, ESV, NIV). The law of averages was in effect here. Some adult household members no doubt needed more than two quarts to satisfy their hunger, while others such as children needed less. One’s family consisted of all who occupied the father’s **tent**.

VERSES 17-18

So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. When they measured it by quarts, the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat.

The Israelites initially followed the Lord’s command on the gathering of manna. **Some gathered a lot, some a little**, according to the number of people in their respective households. Although the Israelites gathered varying amounts, the end result proved to be just enough—**no surplus ... no shortage**—to meet each one’s needs. Apparently the amount averaged out to be approximately two quarts for each individual.

The apostle Paul referred to Exodus 16:18 to illustrate the need for Christians to share their resources with one another just as the Israelites apparently pooled the collected manna (2 Cor. 8:14-15). In this passage Paul stated the principle that each individual should give according to his or her ability, and each should receive according to his or her need.

The Lord’s provisions of meat and manna for His people in the wilderness demonstrated His authority over His creation. Jesus later multiplied a boy’s five barley loaves and two fish to feed a multitude that included about five thousand men (John 6:1-13). After doing so, He referred to the manna that God had supplied for the Israelites and then identified Himself as “the bread of life” (6:35). He alone gives eternal life, satisfying our deepest spiritual hunger.

QUESTIONING THE NEXT MEAL (Ex. 16:19-20)

Although Moses warned the people against doing so, some of them left part of the manna uneaten overnight. This remaining manna bred worms and spoiled. Such behavior demonstrated the disobedient Israelites’ lack of faith.

VERSE 19

Moses said to them, “No one is to let any of it remain until morning.”

Moses instructed the people not to keep any manna overnight. They were to trust God for daily provision to meet their needs. Recall that the Lord had

told Moses His command for the people to gather only enough for each day (except on the day preceding the Sabbath). This command was to be a means of testing His people's obedience to Him (Ex. 16:4). The test reminded the people that real living was not defined by how much of this world's goods they consumed but rather by how faithfully they obeyed the Lord (see Deut. 8:3).

VERSE 20

But they didn't listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. Therefore Moses was angry with them.

Every large group usually includes some who refuse to follow instructions, even when those orders have their best interests at heart. Those Israelites who kept part of the manna until morning discovered that **it bred worms and stank** ("it was full of maggots and began to smell," NIV). Interestingly, the Hebrew verb translated *stank* is the same verb that appears in Exodus 5:21. There the Israelite foremen accused Moses and Aaron of making them "reek" in the eyes of Pharaoh and his officers. In Exodus 16:20, the Israelites' own actions led to stinking manna, a consequence of their disobedience to the Lord's instructions given through Moses.

Moses **was angry** at the disobedient Israelites. Of the six main Hebrew terms translated "anger" in the Old Testament, the verb used here is related to one of the stronger words. As God's representative among the people and as the leader whom He had appointed over them, Moses rightly expressed indignation at their disobedience. Obeying the command not to allow any manna to remain overnight would have expressed trust in the Lord for the next day's provisions. The Israelites needed to recognize that their daily bread was a gift of God and that they were to live in constant dependence on Him.

God provides for the needs of His people. I cannot write those words without thinking of a church from my past. That small church repeatedly faced struggles to survive. Yet I recall our pastor repeatedly voicing the words "and the Lord provided." God does provide. He is sufficient to meet our deepest needs. Every day.

EXPLORE FURTHER

What, if any, relationship exists between obeying God and being able to count on Him to meet your needs? How have you found God more than sufficient to meet life's necessities? How can you show appreciation to those God has worked through to meet your needs?

COMMANDED

God gives a clear standard for holy living.

On June 28, 2014, an eleven-story apartment building under construction in southeast India collapsed without warning. More than sixty construction workers perished in the disaster. Ironically, the building had been named Trust Heights. Its two towers had been dubbed, respectively, Faith and Belief. One contractor who worked on the Trust Heights project later stated that the likely cause for the building's collapse was a weak foundation. Even a well-designed and constructed building will not endure if raised on a poor foundation.

Firm foundations are even more vital for people. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus the Master Teacher contrasted two construction workers who chose to build on quite different foundations—sand and rock. The building (or life) constructed on shifting sand collapsed in the midst of a storm. Only lives built on the rock of God's Word endure (Matt. 7:24-27).

Firm foundations are equally necessary for nations to endure. Ironically, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah from Old Testament times are numbered among the fallen nations in history. The Scriptures give a clear picture as to why these divided kingdoms experienced downfall. They collapsed from within. The people and most of their rulers ignored the foundational principles God had established for them.

This session focuses on the ten foundational principles, or commandments, that God laid down for His people—then and now—to live in right relationship with Him and with other people. The Ten Commandments provide a clear standard for holy living. Adherence to these commands is essential not only for wise living as individuals but also for the survival of nations.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 19:1–24:18

The Lord had continued to lead the people of Israel toward Mount Sinai, where He would establish a covenant with them. Throughout barren wilderness

terrain, God had sustained the vast congregation by providing manna, quail, and water. He had given them victory over an attacking enemy and provided wise leadership advice for Moses through Jethro, Moses' father-in-law.

The Israelites reached Mount Sinai (Horeb), the mountain of God, three lunar months after leaving Egypt. This was the place where the Lord had first appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-2). Also at this site, traditionally identified with Jebel Musa (meaning "mount of Moses"), the Lord entered into a covenant with the Israelites. Through obedience to the covenant, the Israelites would fulfill God's purpose for them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (19:1-6). The Lord gave them specific instructions for coming before Him in worship (19:7-25).

The Lord established His covenant with the people of Israel in the form of a sovereign-vassal treaty. It included a preamble introducing the Lord as the covenant initiator (20:1-2a), a historical prologue declaring what the Lord had done for His people (20:2b), and finally the general stipulations of the covenant, known as the Decalogue or Ten Commandments (20:3-17). These stipulations form the heart of the covenant.

Following a brief narrative recording the people's response to the manifestations of the Lord's presence (20:18-21), the Book of the Covenant was presented (20:22-23:33). This set of laws and explicit rules helped the Israelites know how to apply the Ten Commandments in everyday life.

This session's context passage concludes with the covenant ceremony recorded in Exodus 24:1-18. At the base of Mount Sinai, Moses set up an altar and twelve pillars representing the tribes of Israel. There the Israelites presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. After reading the covenant stipulations and receiving the people's affirmative response to keeping the covenant, Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the people. By this means the covenant was ratified and sealed. (Jesus later connected His blood with the establishing of the new covenant when He instituted the Lord's Supper. See Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20.) Moses then returned to the Lord on the mountain where he received the stone tablets, remaining on the mountain forty days and nights. He would not return to the people until he came down to deal with the Israelites' apostasy (see Ex. 32).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GOD OF THE COMMANDMENTS (Ex. 20:1-2)

Our study of Exodus to this point has focused primarily on narrative parts of the book. With chapter 20 we move into the more legal portions of Exodus.

The Hebrew word most often rendered “law” is transliterated (supplying English letters for corresponding Hebrew letters) as *torah*. This term comes from a root word meaning “to throw” or “to shoot.” In one of its forms, the verb means “to direct,” “to teach,” or “to instruct.” Thus the meaning of *torah* includes the broader concepts of teaching, instruction, and revelation.

The law was a vital part of God’s covenant relationship with the Israelites, because it taught them how to live as His holy people. Obeying God’s law was not the means of their deliverance. The Lord had graciously delivered them from Egyptian bondage before He gave them the law. The Israelites were to live out the moral principles laid down in the Ten Commandments not to earn salvation but to experience meaningful lives and to demonstrate they belonged exclusively to the Lord. In these verses God identified Himself, thereby establishing His authority to give the Ten Commandments.

VERSE 1

Then God spoke all these words:

In the original language this verse literally reads: “And God spoke all these words, saying.” Thus, the verse emphasizes that the Ten Commandments came directly from God. Here the Hebrew term translated **God** is *elohim*, a general term for deity. The fact that the Hebrew noun is plural may emphasize God’s majesty, power, and trinitarian (three Persons) nature. The reference to **words** may remind the careful student of Scripture that the Old Testament literally refers to the Ten Commandments as the “Ten Words” (see Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4, where the term rendered “commandments” is literally “words” in the original language).

VERSE 2

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

God began by identifying Himself as **the LORD**, the personal designation for Himself. He had revealed the significance of this name to Moses at the burning bush (see comments on Ex. 3:14 in Session 1). The name denotes God as the self-existent, covenant God who acts independently of outside influences. As *the LORD*, God has the authority to define how His people should live to exhibit His character in the world.

The Lord further introduced Himself as the Redeemer, the One who had brought the Israelite people **out of ... slavery**. Remembering what the Lord had done for them should motivate the people to demonstrate love for Him by obeying His commands. Jesus reiterated this truth for believers when He told His disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15).

RELATING TO GOD (Ex. 20:3-11)

The Ten Commandments can be divided into two main sections. The first section focuses on our relationship with God. The second section concerns our relationships with other people. In verses 3-11, God delivered four commandments that define how His people are to relate to Him.

VERSE 3

Do not have other gods besides me.

In Hebrew, this verse begins with a strong term that can be translated “no” or “not.” In other words, it sets up the command to be expressed negatively. We might express the strength of the first commandment by using the word “never.” That is, people are to never **have** any **other gods** other than the Lord. To phrase it the way my mother sometimes did when giving a negative command, “Don’t even start!”

The word rendered **besides** (“before,” KJV, ESV, NIV) is significant. The Lord was not saying that Israel could recognize other gods as long as they acknowledged Him as number one among many. The concept was not that of hierarchy but rather of exclusivity. The first commandment required a monotheistic faith, the recognition and revering of only one true God.

The first commandment deals with determining our priorities. No person can have two supreme loyalties. Recall Jesus’ words: “No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24a). God demands exclusive worship.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Gods, Pagan” on pages 654–659 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Do you think worship of false gods takes more subtle forms today than it did in the ancient world? How might people today violate the first commandment?

VERSE 4

Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth.

The thought of the second commandment closely follows that of the first commandment. While the first commandment focuses on the who of worship, the second commandment deals primarily with the how of worship.

The second commandment prohibits not only idolatry but also the making of images or likenesses of the one true God. The first part of verse 4 can be literally translated “you shall not make for yourself an image or any likeness.” The Hebrew term translated **idol** comes from a verb meaning “to hew out.” Thus, it designates a carved or sculptured object. The Hebrew term represented by the phrase **in the shape of** can also mean “form” and applies to pictorial representations, either real or imagined. They are not to be made with the intent of worshiping them.

This commandment emphasizes God’s separateness and otherness from all His creation. Because He is the eternal, infinite Creator, no created object can accurately represent Him. The commandment does not prohibit any and all visual imagery that might be connected to worship of the Lord. This is evident from God’s instructions regarding the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings with their ornate designs and symbolic meanings. However, these designs and symbols were not to be made with the intent to worship them. The Lord established this commandment to avoid false substitutes for the worship of the one true God.

VERSES 5-6

Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers’ iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

Verse 5 continues the thought of the second commandment, forbidding the worship of idols. The form in which the verb rendered **bow in worship** occurs in the original language signifies prostrating oneself. The verb rendered **serve** reminds us that genuine worship involves service. To truly worship the Lord is to say to Him, “At your service.”

The reasoning attached to this commandment is that the Lord is **a jealous God**. The Hebrew term rendered *jealous* might better be rendered “zealous” in this context. The term should not be understood to mean that God is suspicious or distrustful of others’ success. When used of the Lord, the term denotes an attribute that demands exclusive devotion to Him. Because He created us, He alone fully knows what we need to enjoy meaningful living.

The rest of verses 5-6 reminds us that God is sovereign, and we can expect consequences that correspond to our acceptance or rejection of Him. The terms rendered **hate** and **love** refer to unfaithfulness and loyalty respectively, rather than being emotional or sentimental terms. The idea of **punishing the children for the fathers’ iniquity** should not be taken to

mean God is unjust. Instead, it warns that each generation will be punished if they keep committing the sins of previous generations (see Deut. 24:16). The Lord's judgment on sinful generations is contrasted with His real desire to show **faithful love to a thousand generations** ("thousands," KJV, ESV) of those who love Him and keep His commands.

VERSE 7

Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.

The first part of this verse literally reads "you shall not lift up the name of the LORD your God to emptiness." In Hebrew thought, one's **name** stood for the individual's essence, character, or reputation. In application, this commandment prohibits using God's name frivolously, as in swearing over trivial matters. It also prohibits perjury, deliberately lying or misleading in a legal proceeding. Moreover, this commandment forbids hypocrisy, pretending to be something we are not. I recall that one of my seminary professors once applied the third commandment in this way: "To take the Lord's name in vain means to have something in the showcase but nothing in the warehouse."

VERSE 8

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:

Verse 8 introduces the fourth commandment, the command to keep **the Sabbath**. The form of the Hebrew term translated **remember** is not an imperative. Thus, the primary directive in the fourth commandment is not so much on remembering as it is on sanctifying the Sabbath—that is, keeping it holy. We might paraphrase the commandment as follows: "Remembering the seventh day, you are to use it for holy purposes." The Hebrew term rendered *Sabbath* derives from a root word meaning "to cease" or "to rest." To **keep it holy** means "to set it apart from the ordinary." The seventh day was to be a time when the Israelites set aside the concerns of everyday living to focus attention on God and His purposes.

VERSES 9-10

You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates.

What did the prohibition against **any work** on the Sabbath mean? Most likely the fourth commandment was meant to prohibit any of the usual work of the other six days that could be stopped without causing harm to people or animals. Many centuries later, the religious leaders of Jesus' day burdened the Sabbath observance with thousands of petty rules and regulations (see Mark 2:23-28). Jesus responded to their legalistic strictures by emphasizing that "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). God established the Sabbath because He knew that constant toil negatively affects not only the human body but also the human spirit.

Notice that the Sabbath restrictions applied not only to the Israelites but also to their servants and to the foreigners living among them. The Israelites were not to keep the Sabbath by shifting labor from themselves to others. Rather, as far as possible, everyone was to be allotted a day of rest.

VERSE 11

For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

The Lord **blessed the Sabbath day** because it corresponded to **the seventh day** of creation, when He **rested**. The word translated *blessed* is the same word used in the creation account (see Gen. 2:3). The Old Testament concept of the term is to impart the capacity to accomplish one's purpose. God designed the Sabbath to revitalize human beings both physically and spiritually.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, the Scripture provides an additional reason the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath: it reminded them the Lord had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Thus, keeping this commandment helps us focus on God not only as Creator but also as Deliverer. First-century Christians thus came to connect the Sabbath with the day of Christ's resurrection. Through His atoning death and victorious resurrection, Christ brought true deliverance, making the believer into a new creation. Thus, we as Christ's followers worship on the first day of the week rather than on the seventh day.

How should we observe Sunday as the Lord's Day? In responding to that question, we need to keep two principles in mind. First, we all need a day of rest. Second, the Lord's Day is to be focused on the Lord and His business. It is a day to celebrate God's new creation in His people (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

RELATING TO SOCIETY (Ex. 20:12-17)

The six commandments in the second section concern our relationships with family members and the rest of society. These commandments identify how people should relate to one another.

VERSE 12

Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

The fifth commandment has sometimes been described as the bridge commandment, because it moves from relating to God to relating to people. By learning respect for one's parents in the home, a child learns respect for authority in society as a whole. The Hebrew verb translated **honor** basically means "to be heavy" or "to be weighty." Thus, to ascribe weightiness to someone is to honor that person. Honoring one's parents means more than obeying them. It means treating them as significant individuals, treating them with respect.

In Ephesians 6:2, Paul reminded his readers that the fifth commandment is "the first commandment with a promise." The promise to the Israelites was **long life** in the promised land. This pledge did not necessarily refer to individually long life spans. Rather it referred to the Lord's preservation of His covenant people as a nation if they kept His covenant. This commandment also applies generally to society today in the sense that when the home begins to break down, a nation begins to crumble.

VERSE 13

Do not murder.

The sixth commandment consists of two words in the original language: "Never murder" ("kill," KJV). Behind this teaching lies the biblical truth that every human being has been created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). Thus the Scripture emphasizes respect for human life. At the heart of the verb rendered **murder** lie the concepts of premeditation and deliberate action for selfish reasons. The Old Testament clarifies that the prohibition against murder did not apply to defending one's home against burglars (Ex. 22:2), to the state's execution of murderers (Gen. 9:6), to accidental killings (Deut. 19:5), and to a nation's involvement in certain types of war (as illustrated by Israel's history). When questions arise about the meaning of this commandment in today's world, the following counsel is worth remembering: we need to develop and nurture an uneasy conscience about the taking of human life under any circumstances.

VERSE 14

Do not commit adultery.

The seventh commandment forbids **adultery**. This commandment upholds the sanctity of marriage. It requires sexual purity and fidelity. From the

beginning God established monogamy, the lifelong union of one man and one woman, as the standard for marriage (see Gen. 2:24; Mark 10:2-9). Such a relationship is intended to be so intimate and exclusive that God used marriage as an analogy of His relationship with His people in both the Old Testament (Israel) and the New Testament (the church).

In principle, the seventh commandment prohibits any and all sexual relations outside of marriage. The capacity for sexual relations is a God-given blessing designed solely for the marital bond between husband and wife. It is too sacred to be abused or debased. God has established the family as the foundational institution of human society. When the institution of marriage and family breaks down in a society, that society becomes unstable and is ultimately headed for disaster.

VERSE 15

Do not steal.

Like the sixth and seventh commandments, the eighth commandment literally consists of two words: “Never steal.” This commandment emphasizes respect for another’s property. It condemns stealing in all of its various forms, including burglary (Ex. 22:2) and kidnapping (Ex. 21:16). The absolute nature of this commandment makes irrelevant whether the thief acquires another’s property by force, oppression, or deceit.

How does this commandment apply today? While the eighth commandment continues to be constantly broken through theft of money and material possessions, it can also be violated in more subtle ways. For example, we can break this commandment by stealing time from our employers, by stealing someone’s good reputation through gossip, and by selfishly using possessions without any consideration for needy individuals. In New Testament times, the apostle Paul, in writing against theft of any kind, instructed his readers to do honest work in order to have something to share with persons in need (Eph. 4:28).

VERSE 16

Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

The ninth commandment prohibits giving **false testimony** (bearing “false witness,” KJV, ESV). In the original language, the verse literally reads “you shall not answer against your neighbor a witness of falsehood.” The word **neighbor** should be understood here in the broader sense of human beings with whom you come in contact or have dealings with, not in the narrower sense of someone who happens to live close to you. This commandment deals with an individual’s right to a good and honest reputation.

Although the vocabulary of the ninth commandment primarily reflects the Israelites' legal process, in its broader application this mandate calls for truth in all areas of life—then and now. In principle, this commandment prohibits all forms of dishonesty. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus punctuated the importance of speaking the truth (Matt. 5:33-37). The Christian must not engage in any form of self-preservation or advancement that is based on twisting, suppressing, or falsifying the truth.

VERSE 17

Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

More overtly than any other, this final commandment addresses the internal attitude or motive behind the breach of all the Ten Commandments. While in some contexts the Hebrew term rendered **covet** can express a sense of positive desire, its usage in the tenth commandment is clearly negative. This commandment forbids an undisciplined, selfish desire to have what belongs to another. The sinful, covetous thought often leads to the evil act, whether it be the desire for another's spouse, property, or reputation.

At the root of covetousness is the false idea that acquiring something we do not possess will bring happiness. What is the cure for covetousness? Paul expressed it well when he wrote, "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Such contentment springs from gratitude—the recognition that all we are and have are gifts from God.

This session has dealt with the Ten Commandments, the heart of the covenant the Lord established with Israel at Mount Sinai. Centuries later as Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He announced that He had not come to destroy the law but rather to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). When He was questioned about the most important command in the law, Jesus responded by summarizing the Ten Commandments as love for God and love for others (Matt. 22:35-40). The bottom line for fulfilling the entire law is to love God wholeheartedly and to love others as oneself. Such self-giving love is the heart of the new covenant. This kind of sacrificial love will compel us to act in others' best interests in ways the law never could.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Love" on pages 1031–1032 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. After studying this session, how would you define holy living?

EQUIPPED

God enables and equips His people to do the work He directs them to do.

Example one: she taught a young adult Bible study group for many years. Although she never had the opportunity to pursue a seminary education, she possessed both a rich knowledge of the Scriptures and a keen sense of practical application. She took a personal interest in her students, investing not only her knowledge but also her time, prayers, and material resources in them as individuals. I know these things because this person played a formative role in helping me discover and develop my God-given gifts as a writer and editor.

Example two: he attended the same Bible study group that I did some years ago. Health issues limited his physical activities, but he could work with wood, carving intricate designs. He fashioned various objects as gifts for friends, even creating articles that could be used as witnessing tools. He served the Lord by using his artistic gifts to bless others.

Example three: he has multiple gifts and talents. He preaches sound, engaging sermons; leads music with a passion; captivates an audience with his theatrical and martial arts skills; and gives wise leadership to the church he serves. No doubt he could lead a large congregation. Yet he uses his gifts and abilities to serve a small, struggling group of believers. He is my pastor.

God still enables and equips His people to do the work He directs them to do. This session focuses on the Lord's instructions for building the tabernacle. God directed the Israelites to willingly offer the supplies essential for building this place of worship. He also gifted particular individuals to lead the construction of this sacred tent and its furnishings.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 25:1–31:18

The Lord had established His covenant with His people at Mount Sinai in the form of a sovereign-vassal treaty. The Ten Commandments constituted the

heart of the covenant stipulations. Following the people's solemn agreement to the covenant's terms, it was ratified and sealed by the sprinkling of blood.

Exodus 25:1–31:18 consists of the Lord's instructions to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings. Later Moses communicated those instructions to the Israelite community and specifically to the skilled craftsmen who constructed the sacred dwelling (Ex. 35:1–39:43). This portable sanctuary would occupy the central position in the Israelite camp.

God instructed the Israelites to bring freewill offerings to build the tabernacle. Such offerings included precious metals, fine linen, animal skins, acacia wood, oil, spices, and precious stones. The tabernacle and its contents were to be built according to His pattern or design, not according to the people's ideas (Ex. 25:1-9).

The ark of the covenant was arguably the most significant item in the tabernacle. It alone occupied the holy of holies or most holy place, the innermost area of the sacred tent. Constructed of durable acacia wood, the ark was then overlaid with gold. It would house three objects—the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments (Ex. 25:16), Aaron's staff that later budded to demonstrate his genuine priesthood (Num. 17), and a container of manna (Ex. 16:33-34). The mercy seat rested on top of the ark between two cherubim. There the Lord communicated with His people (25:10-22).

Moving outward from the innermost holy of holies, the next curtained area of the tabernacle was the holy place. It contained three items of furniture: the table containing the bread of the Presence (or showbread), the seven-branched lampstand (25:23-40), and the incense altar (30:1-10). A veil, or curtain, separated the holy place from the holy of holies. Another curtain separated the holy place from the tabernacle courtyard (26:31-37). Curtains joined by posts delineated the tabernacle's courtyard (27:9-19). The altar of burnt offering (27:1-8) and a bronze basin for ceremonial cleansing (30:17-21) occupied the courtyard. The Lord repeatedly stressed that the tabernacle and its furnishings should be constructed according to the pattern that He showed Moses on the mountain (see 25:9,40; 26:30; 27:8).

Exodus 28 records the Lord's specific instructions regarding priestly garments worn by Aaron and his sons. The ephod that Aaron wore as high priest was an apron-like garment placed over his robe and under his breastpiece. The breastpiece was an approximately nine-inch square of elaborate embroidery with gemstones worn on the chest. The Urim and Thummim, stones used in the decision-making process, were placed inside this purse-like item.

In Exodus 29, Moses recorded the Lord's direction for consecrating the priests. The ordination ceremonies lasted seven days (29:35) and featured a sin offering (29:10-14). Two rams were offered as sacrifices. The blood of one of the rams was applied to the right earlobes, right thumbs, and right

big toes of Aaron and his sons (29:15-21). In Hebrew thought the right arm represented strength. Aaron and his sons were to serve the Lord with vigor, not in their own strength but in the Lord's power.

In addition to describing two furnishings previously mentioned (the incense altar and the bronze basin), Exodus 30 details instructions regarding atonement money (30:11-16), anointing oil (30:22-33), and sacred incense (30:34-38). The atonement money reminded the Israelites of the cost of atonement and was used for the tabernacle's upkeep.

Exodus 31 records the Lord's appointment and gifting of two chief craftsmen to lead the tabernacle's construction. The chapter concludes with the Lord's emphasis on keeping the Sabbath. The final verse stresses the divine origin of the law, the heart of which is the Ten Commandments. The two stone tablets were inscribed by the finger of God (31:18).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE OFFERING (Ex. 25:1-7)

The Lord directed Moses to call on the Israelites to contribute the supplies necessary to build the tabernacle, the Israelites' house of worship. The people were to willingly offer the essential building materials. Even as they journeyed through the wilderness, the Israelites needed to place a special priority on worship. The reason behind the Israelites' plundering the Egyptians as they left Egypt (see Ex. 12:35-36) was not to promote personal enrichment but rather to honor God by constructing a place to worship Him.

VERSE 1

The LORD spoke to Moses:

This statement occurs repeatedly in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. As mentioned in a previous session, while we don't know whether or not Moses heard the Lord's voice audibly, we do know that he heard (and recorded) the Lord's message accurately. Moses enjoyed a close, personal relationship with the Lord (see Ex. 33:11).

VERSE 2

“Tell the Israelites to take an offering for me. You are to take my offering from everyone who is willing to give.

The Lord commanded Moses to direct the Israelites to **take an offering**. I think it is significant that God did not say for the people to collect an offering

for the tabernacle but rather for the Lord (**for me**). Let me personalize the matter: how do you view the tithes and offerings that you bring to the Lord's house? Do you view giving as only a necessary duty to pay the ministers and to keep the church running? While that aspect is important, I think we also need to realize that ultimately we are bringing our gifts to the Lord. We can and should expect the church's decision makers to exercise wise stewardship in the use of tithes and offerings, but we cannot rightly withhold our contributions just because every decision is not made according to our personal preferences. When we feel tempted to give grudgingly or not to give at all, we need to remember that our gifts are ultimately for the Lord who laid down His life for us.

Notice that the Lord identified the contributors as **everyone who is willing to give**. In other words, God stipulated that a voluntary or freewill offering was to be collected. The Hebrew word translated **offering** comes from a verb meaning "to be high." The concept here may be that of a gift lifted up for a sacred purpose or consecrated to the Lord. In any case, the Lord sought such gifts from people who willingly made them available for the construction of His dwelling place. Centuries later, Paul reminded believers in Corinth—and us as well—that we should not give "reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Gift, Giving" on page 643 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Believers honor God by participating in giving offerings for His purposes. What factors motivate you most to give tithes and offerings to the Lord through your church?

VERSE 3

This is the offering you are to receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze;

The Israelites were to present offerings of **gold, silver, and bronze** ("brass," KJV) for the building of the tabernacle. Metals appear first in the list of needed items for the tabernacle's construction. Gold was highly valued because of its scarcity, beauty, and workability. It could be melted without being damaged and could be beaten into various shapes. Thus, it could be used for cast objects, overlays, and inlays. A number of objects associated with the tabernacle consisted of solid gold or were made of wood covered with gold (see Ex. 37). These objects included the ark of the covenant with its

mercy seat, the table, the lampstand, and the altar of incense. The Scriptures contain more references to gold than to any other metal.

The Lord also instructed that silver be used in the construction of objects associated with worship in the tabernacle. For example, silver formed the bases under the sanctuary's wooden supports (Ex. 26:19; 36:24). At one time, silver was valued more highly than gold in the ancient world. By Solomon's time, however, silver was common in Israel and constituted the basic monetary unit.

The Hebrew term rendered *bronze* is the common word for copper and its alloy, tin. Brass is composed of copper alloyed with zinc. Archaeological evidence indicates brass was not used extensively until the period between the Old and New Testaments. The following elements of the tabernacle were made of bronze: bases to hold posts (Ex. 26:37), various utensils (27:3), the altar's grate and rings (27:4), and other pieces of hardware and decoration, including the overlay on the altar of burnt offering (27:2).

VERSE 4

blue, purple, and scarlet yarn; fine linen and goat hair;

This verse lists yarns and fabrics collected for use in constructing the tabernacle. The word **yarn** does not actually appear in the Hebrew text. It is clearly implied, however, because the colors mentioned are those of yarns used to make such items as the tabernacle's curtains (26:1), the screen that covered the tent's entrance (26:36), and the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place (26:31-33).

The color **blue**, derived from the dye of a shellfish, may have been sky blue, dark blue, or blue with a purple tint. The dyes used in ancient times were impure; therefore, colors could not be reproduced with certainty. The Hebrew term rendered *blue* could describe colors that ranged from bright red through deep purple. The Hebrew word rendered **purple** likely refers to shades of this color ranging from dark reddish-black to violet. In the Old Testament, this color generally was reserved for items connected with worship. People in the ancient world obtained this purple dye from mollusks along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The translation **scarlet** is actually a rendering of two Hebrew words. The two terms refer to a brilliant red dye obtained from the female kermes insect, which lives on the kermes oak tree. People in ancient times highly prized this coloring agent.

The people also contributed **fine linen** and **goat hair** for building the tabernacle. The Hebrew term translated *fine linen* was adopted from the Egyptian language. Some linen pieces found in Egyptian tombs proved to have a high thread count, which revealed the fabric's finely woven nature. This linen was usually white. Its use in the tabernacle may represent purity

and righteousness. The *goat hair*, a coarse material often used in the making of tents, likely was black in color. This material was used to make the tent covering the tabernacle (26:7).

VERSE 5

ram skins dyed red and fine leather; acacia wood;

Verse 5 lists three additional items the people contributed for the tabernacle's construction: **ram skins, fine leather** ("badgers' skins," KJV; "goatskins," ESV; "another type of durable leather," NIV), and **acacia wood** ("shittim wood," KJV). *Ram skins* were similar to morocco leather. The hair was removed from the skins, and then the skins were **dyed red**. As is evident from the various translations, the meaning of the Hebrew word rendered *fine leather* is unclear. Other suggested meanings include "dolphin" and "porpoise." The Hebrew term is not the typical word for either badger or goat. Since these skins formed the outermost covering of the tabernacle (26:14), a marine animal's leathery skin would have been especially suitable because of its toughness and waterproof nature.

Acacia wood is a species of the mimosa. Common in the Sinai Peninsula, acacia is a hard wood with a beautiful fine grain. Its density makes it unattractive to wood-destroying insects. Tabernacle items constructed of acacia wood include the ark of the covenant and its poles, the table of showbread and its poles, the altar of burnt offering and its poles, the altar of incense and its poles, and all the poles for the curtains and the supports.

VERSE 6

oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense;

This verse lists two more key items related to the tabernacle's function: **oil** and **spices**. The Hebrew word translated *oil* generally referred to olive oil. Oil functioned in various ways in connection with sacrifices and worship. In addition to its usage in lamps, it could be presented as an offering (Lev. 2:15-16). Moses also used it to anoint the completed tabernacle and its contents (Lev. 8:10). Spices signified luxury and wealth in the Old Testament period. The four best spices for the production of anointing oil are identified in Exodus 30:22-25, and the best ones for incense are listed in 30:34-38.

VERSE 7

and onyx along with other gemstones for mounting on the ephod and breastpiece.

Concluding the list of items collected for building the tabernacle are gems. Onyx and other stones would be mounted on the high priest's ephod and breastpiece. (See the Understand the Context section for a description of the ephod and breastpiece.) The ephod was fastened at the shoulders by onyx clasps. These onyx stones cannot be identified with certainty. In any case, the gems probably were some shade of green or red. Exodus 28:6-28 lists gems mounted in the ephod and breastpiece.

THE PURPOSE (Ex. 25:8-9)

The Lord declared the tabernacle would be the place where He would dwell with His people. He also reminded Moses of the importance of following the patterns He would give him.

VERSE 8

They are to make a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them.

God commanded the Israelites to construct **a sanctuary**. The Hebrew word translated *sanctuary* comes from a root word meaning “to be holy.” Thus the term identifies a place set apart for the worship of God. In the Old Testament, it can denote either the tabernacle or the temple. Additionally, the word designates articles of the tabernacle and portions of the sacrifices that were especially holy. The writer of the Book of Hebrews referred to the tabernacle as “an earthly sanctuary” (Heb. 9:1-2).

The Lord stated the purpose of the sanctuary: **so that I may dwell among them**. This verse has been described as the simplest and perhaps strongest statement in Exodus of the Lord's demand to be the central focus of His people, to have them organize their lives around Him. The Hebrew word for “tabernacle” is derived from a verb meaning “to dwell.” God is far greater than any structure. He does not need a building in which to dwell. Indeed, He cannot be contained in one, no matter how large and ornate it is (see 2 Chron. 2:6). Nevertheless, the Lord desired the Israelites to make a home for Him according to His design. By doing so, the people signified their willingness to adhere to the covenant stipulations and to honor Him as their Lord.

VERSE 9

You must make it according to all that I show you—the pattern of the tabernacle as well as the pattern of all its furnishings.”

The Lord emphasized that the tabernacle and its furnishings had to be built according to the design He revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The Hebrew term translated **pattern** comes from a verb meaning “to build.” The specifications for this sacred building included materials, dimensions, designs, and even colors.

The word *pattern* also suggests the presence of typology. The writer of Hebrews referred to the tabernacle and its furnishings as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5). Thus, the Mosaic tabernacle was a representation of the realities of heaven. It was designed to point to the greater eternal reality of believers’ dwelling with God not only on earth but also ultimately in heaven.

Elements of symbolism apparent in the tabernacle’s **furnishings**—moving from the outer court to the innermost one—are as follows: (1) The altar of burnt offering or brazen altar symbolized the need for something to be done about our human sin problem. (2) The bronze basin or laver for washing represented our need to be clean before God. (3) The table with the bread of the Presence (showbread) symbolized that God is always present with His people. (4) The lampstand signified that the way to God is always lighted. (5) The altar of incense represented prayer. (6) The ark of the covenant with its mercy seat symbolized God’s gracious presence.

As believers today, we are blessed to live after Christ’s coming to earth and dying on the cross for us. The apostle John reminded believers that “the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally ‘tabernacled’] among us” (John 1:14). Living also after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, we as Christ’s followers are blessed to enjoy the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit both as individual believers (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and as the church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:16-17). We are referred to as temples or sanctuaries because Christ’s Spirit lives in us. We can enjoy God’s presence not only as individuals but also as the body of Christ when we gather for worship.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Holy Spirit” on pages 759–761 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What differences exist between the Spirit’s presence and work in the Old Testament era and His presence and work in the New Testament era and beyond?

THE LEADERS (Ex. 31:1-6)

The Lord gifted two Israelites with the ability to lead the tabernacle’s construction. They also received the wisdom, understanding, and ability to follow the Lord’s pattern in making the tabernacle’s furnishings.

VERSES 1-2

The LORD also spoke to Moses: “Look, I have appointed by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

Moses received directly from the Lord complete instructions related to building the tabernacle. Those instructions included the appointment of two individuals who would serve as the hands-on leaders of the construction project. The Lord appointed the craftsman **Bezalel** [BEHZ uh lehl] ... **of the tribe of Judah** along with the gifted artisan Oholiab [oh HOH lih ab] of the Dan tribe (see Ex. 31:6) to lead the construction of the tabernacle.

The basic meaning of the Hebrew word translated **appointed** is “called” (“called,” KJV, ESV; “chosen,” NIV). Notice that the call was personal. The Lord called Bezalel by name. The name *Bezalel* means “in the shadow of God.” He is elsewhere identified as a descendant of Caleb (1 Chron. 2:19-20). Once the tabernacle was completed, only men from the tribe of Levi were allowed to serve in this sanctuary. Its construction, however, was another matter. The Lord chose men whom He had spiritually gifted for this particular work.

VERSE 3

I have filled him with God’s Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and ability in every craft

Bezalel was well qualified for the assigned task because the Lord had equipped him. Verse 3 describes that essential equipping. A literal translation of the Hebrew text reads: “And I have filled him (with) God’s Spirit, in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in every work.” I believe that the best interpretation of this verse is that God gave Bezalel one primary piece of equipment: the filling of **God’s Spirit**. That filling of the Spirit then enabled Bezalel to be wiser, more understanding, more knowledgeable, and more capable of doing the work God assigned him.

The essential idea behind the Hebrew term rendered **wisdom** is a way of thinking and an attitude toward life’s varied experiences, including matters of morality. Biblical wisdom does not focus on theory and speculation but rather on practical application. It is based on the principles of right and wrong that God revealed.

The Hebrew word translated **understanding** could also be rendered “insight” or “discernment.” It includes more than the ability to gather information; individuals must be able to use the information they possess. The Hebrew term also can mean “understanding in the sense of ability.”

The term rendered **ability** (literally “knowledge”) is a general term. The emphasis falls on knowledge that is personal and experiential. The word also was used of technical knowledge or ability, such as in Exodus 31:3.

VERSES 4-5

to design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut gemstones for mounting, and to carve wood for work in every craft.

These two verses further delineate the specific craftsmanship for which the Lord equipped Bezalel. That equipment consisted of artistic ability in three areas: (1) to **design . . . works in gold, silver, and bronze** (“brass,” KJV), (2) to **cut gemstones**, and (3) to **carve wood**. Although the ability to work with fabrics is not specifically mentioned in these verses, in Exodus 35:35 the Lord stated that He had filled both Bezalel and Oholiab with the skills of embroidery and weaving. Furthermore, Exodus 35:34 reports that God gave both men “the ability to teach others.”

At the end of verse 3 and again at the end of verse 5, Moses recorded that the Lord gave Bezalel ability **in every craft**. In other words, Bezalel would know how to assess the quality of someone else’s work. The Lord thus equipped Bezalel to be an overseer, or administrator.

VERSE 6

I have also selected Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be with him. I have put wisdom in the heart of every skilled artisan in order to make all that I have commanded you.”

The Lord also chose **Oholiab** to assist Bezalel in constructing the tabernacle. Oholiab’s name means “father’s tent.” The first part of verse 6 literally reads: “And I, behold, I have given.” Thus, we might view Bezalel and Oholiab not only as equipped, or gifted, by the Lord to build the tabernacle but also as God’s gifts to the worshiping congregation. God also gifted a number of other unnamed skilled craftsmen to assist in making everything He had commanded. The Lord had **put wisdom in the heart of every skilled artisan**.

God still equips His people to do the work He calls them to do. Just as God gave Bezalel and Oholiab the abilities and skills to oversee and complete the construction of the tabernacle, He also endows every believer with at least one spiritual gift to be used in the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:12).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Spiritual Gifts” on pages 1499–1501 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How do you distinguish between spiritual gifts, talents, and skills? What is your spiritual gift or gifts? How are you using your talents and spiritual gifts to serve the Lord?

REBELLION

Worshiping anyone or anything other than the one true God is rebellion against Him.

What is an idol? We use the term in various contexts in our culture. It may describe a person whom we deeply admire and long to emulate—persons such as a movie star, a parent, or even an older sibling.

The television show *American Idol* debuted in the summer of 2002 and ran for fifteen seasons. By 2004 it was America’s most popular TV program, a position it held for seven consecutive seasons. The concept of the show involved discovering recording stars from unsigned singing talents. Viewers voted by means of telephone, Internet, and text messaging to choose the winners. Some have deemed the program’s success as unparalleled in television history. The show’s popularity reveals that millions of viewers deeply admired these talented young singers.

At what point, though, does admiration become idolatry? It does so when the person or object we admire begins to take the number one or all-consuming place in our lives that belongs only to God. It does so when we begin to copy attitudes and behaviors of the admired personality that are harmful to us and contrary to God’s Word.

Idol worship has taken many forms throughout history. People have worshiped trees, rivers, hills, celestial bodies, and images of wood, stone, or precious metals. Idolatry can even creep into our lives as believers. The apostle Paul admonished Christians in Colossae—and us as well—to “put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Observe that Paul equated greed with idolatry. Greed may be defined as that sinful desire to satiate ourselves with more and more. What makes greed a form of idolatry? To live as if everything exists for our benefit is to attempt to put ourselves in the place of Christ, the Son of God, for whom all things exist (Col. 1:16).

Throughout the Scriptures, God repeatedly warns against allowing things and people to take the place that only He deserves. This session reminds us that worshiping anyone or anything other than the one true God is sin—rebellion against Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 32:1–34:35

The Lord established His covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Following the people's solemn agreement to its terms, the covenant was ratified by a blood sacrifice. Exodus 25:1–31:18 consists of the Lord's specific instructions to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings. The final verse of Exodus 31 stresses the divine origin of the law. The two stone tablets were inscribed by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18).

Before Moses could descend the mountain with the stone tablets containing the commandments, the people violated the covenant. The Israelites demanded a visible god, and Aaron, as the designated leader in Moses' absence, complied with their request. Aaron not only fashioned the calf idol but also proclaimed a celebration in connection with it (32:1-6).

Verses 7-14 consist of a dialogue between Moses and the Lord regarding the Israelites' idolatry. Apparently neither the Lord nor Moses wanted to claim this unfaithful group—each referred to the people as belonging to the other. In response to Moses' intercession, however, the Lord relented and promised not to totally wipe out the rebellious nation.

When Moses descended Mount Sinai and witnessed the golden calf and the people out of control, he smashed the stone tablets, burned the idol, ground it to powder, and scattered the powder in the water supply. When he called the Israelites to take a stand for the Lord, the Levites gathered around him. Those Israelites who rebelliously refused to repent and abandon their idolatry experienced destruction at the hands of the Levites (32:15-29).

Moses again interceded for the people. In response the Lord promised to send His angel with Moses to lead the people into the promised land. Nevertheless, God also inflicted judgment on the disobedient Israelites in the form of a plague (32:30-35). Moreover, He refused to accompany them in person lest He destroy the stubborn, rebellious nation (33:1-6). Two passages that emphasize the Lord's intimate relationship with Moses appear in chapter 33: verses 7-11 and verses 18-23. These passages highlight the contrast between God's holiness and the Israelites' sinfulness.

In Exodus 33:15-17 and 34:9 Moses again interceded with the Lord on behalf of the rebellious Israelites, basing his appeal on the Lord's reputation. God responded favorably to Moses' request. Twice the Lord revealed His nature to Moses as a God of mercy and compassion (33:19; 34:6-7). God's grace and forgiveness formed the basis of the covenant renewal recorded in Exodus 34:1-28. The final verses of this chapter call attention to Moses' radiant face that resulted from his intimate relationship with the Lord (34:29-35).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REBELLION (Ex. 32:1-4)

When Moses remained on the mountain for forty days, the restless people demanded that Aaron make them an idol to worship. Aaron acquiesced, collected gold rings, and fashioned the rings into an image of a calf. In doing this, the Israelites violated the first and second commandments (20:3-5).

VERSE 1

When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make gods for us who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!”

Before the exodus, the people of Israel had been immersed in Egypt’s idolatrous culture for hundreds of years. Idolatry attracted followers in the ancient world because it was self-centered and materialistic. Ancient belief held that if a person fed a deity adequately and consistently, that god would bless the individual with abundant harvests, livestock, and children. Also, the system of idol worship placed little, if any, emphasis on moral and ethical behavior. Idol worship was sensual, indulgent, and erotic. It sometimes included gluttony, drunkenness, and prostitution.

Because of Moses’ lengthy stay on Mount Sinai and the frailty of the people’s commitment to the newly established covenant with the Lord, the Israelites began to doubt the reality of their recent experiences. They questioned whether Moses would ever return. In their restlessness and fear, the people **gathered around Aaron**, whom Moses had designated as a leader in his absence (24:14). This phrase can also be translated “assembled themselves against Aaron.” In three other instances where Moses used this Hebrew expression (Num. 16:3,42; 20:2), the contexts make clear that the confrontations had an air of hostility. Thus, it is possible that here too the people had every intention of pressuring Aaron to make idols for them to worship. Although this view doesn’t excuse Aaron’s actions, it may help us understand why he caved in so quickly to the people’s demands.

The people refused to wait patiently for Moses to return from his encounter with the Lord on the mountain. Instead they requested **gods** who would **go before** them. They wanted a god in visible form. Believing in the Lord whom they could not see required faith.

The Scriptures remind us of the necessity of walking (living) “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). As did the Israelites, we often fail to realize that the spiritual world, invisible to the human eye, is nevertheless real and eternal.

EXPLORE FURTHER

The Israelites failed to demonstrate trust in God by waiting for Moses to return from his encounter with God on Mount Sinai. When did you last experience a time of waiting for God to act? Describe your experience. Did you demonstrate faith during that waiting period? If so, how? What did you learn from your experience?

VERSE 2

Aaron replied to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.”

In response to the people’s demand for an idol, Aaron instructed the men to **take off** the golden earrings from their family members and bring them to him. The Hebrew verb rendered *take off* (“break off,” KJV) literally means “tear off,” or more colloquially, “yank off.” Based on the meaning of this verb and its usage in other passages (see Gen. 27:40, “break”; Ps. 7:2, “ripping”), the action of taking off jewelry may have caused pain and even injury to those wearing it. Perhaps the action also created tension in family relationships as fathers confiscated jewelry from family members. In any case, Aaron’s directive reminds us that idolatry, while perhaps satisfying an immediate desire for a visible and tangible god, like any sin has awful consequences (Rom. 6:23).

Why did Aaron exclude the men in his request for earrings? Did he estimate that he would have enough gold without taking the men’s earrings? Or were the earrings a visible indicator that only a man’s dependents wore? We don’t know for certain. In any case, these gold earrings probably constituted part of the gifts the Israelites had obtained from the Egyptians (see Ex. 11:2-3; 12:35-36). Furthermore, the Lord had desired for the jewelry to be given as a freewill offering for use in constructing the tabernacle for worshiping Him (25:1-3; 35:4-5) rather than to be wasted in the making of an idol (32:20).

VERSE 3

So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron.

The Israelites obeyed Aaron's command. They brought their gold earrings to their substitute leader. The reference to **all the people** does not imply that every single Israelite agreed to participate in the idolatry. The Hebrew phrase can mean "all kinds of people" as well as "every single person." We later learn that the Levites did not participate in the idolatrous worship (see 32:26). The verb rendered **took off** is the same Hebrew term translated "take off" in verse 2. Its basic meaning is "tear off."

VERSE 4

He took the gold from them, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf. Then they said, "Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

Aaron took the Israelites' gold and **fashioned** it into a golden calf. The Hebrew verb rendered *fashioned* refers to molding a metal to a certain form. It is used elsewhere of Hiram's casting two bronze pillars for King Solomon (1 Kings 7:15). Thus the verb indicates deliberate activity. Regardless of how much pressure Aaron faced to cave in to the Israelites' demands, as a leader he bore responsibility for assisting the people in their sinful desire for an idol. Later, when Moses confronted him, Aaron tried to avoid responsibility for his actions by saying, "When I threw it [the gold] into the fire, out came this calf!" (Ex. 32:24b). He conveniently omitted any reference to his fashioning the object **with an engraving tool**.

Aaron made the idol into the shape of a **calf**. It may have been made of solid gold or of a wooden form covered with gold. The Hebrew word translated *calf* is masculine. Thus, the golden idol looked like a young bull, a male calf. In the ancient Near Eastern world, the bull symbolized virile power. The bull image held a significant place in the false religions of Egypt.

The Israelites responded to the idol by proclaiming it to be the god who had brought them out of Egypt. The Hebrew term **your gods** can be understood as singular or plural depending on whether the reference is to the Lord or to idols. The Israelites' sin was primarily a violation of the second commandment. The people were trying to represent God with an idol!

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Golden Calf" on pages 659–660 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Then read 1 Kings 12:25–33. How would you describe the similarities and theological significance of the events in Exodus 32:1–6 and 1 Kings 12:25–33?

SIN COMMITTED (Ex. 32:5-6)

Aaron built an altar and announced a day of celebration. The next day, the Israelites offered sacrifices to the idol and engaged in a festival of revelry.

VERSE 5

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it and made an announcement: “There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow.”

When Aaron witnessed the Israelites eagerly engaged in worshiping the gold calf idol, he erected **an altar in front of it**. Most likely the makeshift altar was comprised of field stones and earth (see Ex. 20:24-25). The concept of building an altar in front of an idol was based on the false belief that doing so guaranteed that the god would see and accept the sacrifices and offerings. Contrast this concept with the fact that God instructed that the altar in both the tabernacle and the temple should be located in the courtyard. The ark of the covenant, representing His presence, remained hidden behind a veil. This positioning required the Israelites to have faith that God witnessed what they did for Him without a direct line of visibility from the item representing His presence to the altar.

VERSE 6

Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.

In response to Aaron’s proclamation of a festival, the people arose **early the next morning** to present sacrifices and offerings. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord’s people often rose early to accomplish what they viewed as significant tasks (see Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3; Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4; Num. 14:40; Josh. 6:12; Judg. 7:1; Ruth 2:7; 1 Sam. 1:19; 17:20; 2 Chron. 29:20). On the occasion recorded in Exodus 32:6, the task of offering sacrifices during “a festival to the LORD” (Ex. 32:5) would have been a worthy endeavor. The problem was the people were worshiping an idol! They presented to a false god the types of offerings designed for the one true God.

The worship experience quickly degenerated further. After sitting down **to eat and drink**, the people rose up **to party** (“to indulge in revelry,” NIV). The Hebrew verb translated *to party* basically means “to laugh.” Additional meanings include “to make sport of” or “to toy with.” In the form in which the verb occurs in verse 6, it can connote mockery and derision. Bible scholars hold differing opinions regarding the connotations of the verb in this context. Some believe it signifies such activities as drunken, immoral orgies.

Others hold that the revelry involved singing and dancing with abandon but not the sexual debauchery the Israelites later demonstrated when they worshiped the false god Baal [BAY uhl] (see Num. 25:1-5).

When I reflect on the people's behavior in worshiping the golden calf, I recall the various kinds of conduct I witnessed when I lived in New Orleans. During Mardi Gras time each year, many partygoers engaged in a variety of raucous, alcohol-fueled behaviors. Regardless of the specific nature of the Israelites' behavior, it constituted sin because they were breaking the second commandment. Any attempt to worship any person or object other than the one true God will lead to foolish, sinful actions.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Sin" on pages 1477–1479 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is sin's place of origin? How would you describe the consequences of sin? What is its remedy?

APPEAL FOR GRACE (Ex. 32:11-14)

Following the Israelites' rebellious behavior in constructing and worshiping the golden calf, Moses interceded on the people's behalf. He appealed to the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

VERSE 11

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God: "LORD, why does your anger burn against your people you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?"

In verses 7-10, Moses recorded the Lord's words to him regarding the Israelites' unfaithfulness while he was on the mountain. The Lord not only described the nature of the Israelites' apostasy but also referred to them as Moses' people. The Lord identified the Israelites as a stiff-necked or stubborn people, indicated His intention to destroy them, and promised to make Moses' descendants into a great nation.

Some individuals would have been flattered at the Lord's proposal to make them into a great nation, but not Moses. Instead he chose to intercede for the sinful nation. The phrase **but Moses sought the favor of the LORD** literally can be rendered "but Moses entreated the LORD's face." The verb translated *sought the favor of* ("besought," KJV; "implored," ESV) appears sixteen times in the Old Testament and always includes a reference to the face of someone.

Thirteen of the sixteen usages refer to seeking the Lord's favor. Usually the intercession involves a prayer for help or mercy amid threatened danger. The threat may be that of the Lord's judgment (as is the case in Ex. 32:11), or it may be the threat of enemies (2 Kings 13:4).

Devoted people of God throughout the centuries have interceded for those who are lost without Christ. Paul prayed for fellow Jews to become believers (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1). John Knox, the great sixteenth-century Scottish reformer, pleaded before the Lord, "Give me Scotland, or I die." George Whitefield, an outstanding eighteenth-century English preacher, is reported to have similarly prayed, "Give me souls, or I die."

EXPLORE FURTHER

People who have not received Christ as their personal Savior stand under God's judgment (John 3:18). For what lost friends and family members are you interceding? How have you seen God work in response to your intercession for others?

Moses petitioned the Lord by using three arguments, all of which appealed to God's nature as consistent and faithful. In each of these pleas, Moses focused on protecting God's honor. The first argument appears in verse 11. Moses asked why the Lord would negate the result of His mighty demonstration of power in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. In voicing this appeal, Moses reminded the Lord of His covenant relationship with His people, exhibited in His deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.

VERSE 12

Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and eliminate them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for your people.

Moses based his second appeal on the Lord's reputation. Destroying the Israelites would cast aspersions on God's trustworthy character. Why should the Egyptians be allowed to experience the delight of seeing the Israelites destroyed by the same God who previously had delivered them? The reference to **the mountains** reflects an Egyptian concept. The Egyptians designated foreign lands outside of Egypt as *the mountains*. A similar kind of appeal appears again in Numbers 14:13-19. In that passage Moses again

interceded for the Israelites after they rebelled against the Lord by refusing to enter Canaan.

Moses ended his second petition by requesting the Lord to **turn from His fierce anger and relent concerning this disaster**. He intended to bring on the Israelites. The two Hebrew words translated *fierce anger* are repetitive; literally they mean “anger of anger.” The phrase also could be rendered “burning anger,” conveying the intensity of the Lord’s ire.

The verb rendered *relent* has sometimes been translated “repent” (KJV). Because God is perfect in every way, He never needs to repent in the sense that human beings need to repent or turn from their sins. Sometimes, however, He chooses to relent, or change His course of action, in response to people’s changing their attitudes and behaviors. Interestingly, this Hebrew verb also has emotional overtones. The word’s root idea appears to reflect the concept of breathing deeply in a physical display of one’s emotions. Out of either joy or sorrow, God may change His course of action in response to people’s behavior.

When used of either human beings or God, the word *relent* has retained some degree of its original connection with breathing heavily or sighing. Thus, using language that refers to God in humanlike terms, the verb may communicate that the Lord either sighed within Himself as an expression of sorrow (see Gen. 6:6) or heaved a sigh of relief as an expression of joy (see Ex. 32:14). God delights in pardon as opposed to punishment or judgment. The Scriptures reveal three elements involved in the Lord’s relenting, or changing His course of action: (1) intercession (see Amos 7:1-6); (2) people’s repentance (Jer. 18:1-11; Jonah 3:9-10); (3) God’s mercy or compassion (Deut. 32:36; 2 Sam. 24:14-16).

The term translated *disaster* basically means “evil” (KJV). Of course, God never does evil. Such behavior is contrary to His nature. In the context of Exodus 32:12, the term identifies the Lord’s proposed judgment of destroying the Israelites and making a great nation of Moses’ descendants. The Hebrew word also means “calamity.” In this case, the proposed calamity would be the Lord’s judgment on the Israelites’ sin.

VERSE 13

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—you swore to them by yourself and declared, ‘I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.’”

Moses grounded his third plea for the Lord’s forgiveness in His promises to and covenant with the patriarchs—**Abraham, Isaac, and Israel** (Jacob).

Of course, the all-knowing God never forgets His commitments. In asking the Lord to **remember**, Moses was calling Him to act on the basis of those promises—specifically, God’s promises of the land and numerous descendants. The Israelites’ leader called attention to the fact that the Lord **swore** by His own name in making these promises. When people take an oath, they swear by something greater than themselves. The Lord swore by Himself because there is nothing and no one in existence greater than He is.

VERSE 14

So the LORD relented concerning the disaster he had said he would bring on his people.

In response to Moses’ earnest prayer, the Lord **relented** and chose not to destroy the Israelites. God takes no delight in the death of sinners (Ezek. 18:23,32). Although the Lord had not desired to destroy His people in the first place, the threat of His judgment was real, not theoretical.

This passage emphasizes that the Lord responds to the prayers of a person in right relationship with Him. Moses did not pray selfishly but rather out of a love for the people of Israel. He also prayed out of a desire to see God’s reputation upheld and His will accomplished (see Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:12).

The Lord gave the people an opportunity to repent of their idolatry, and the Levites responded appropriately (Ex. 32:26). While the Lord graciously relented **concerning the disaster** of wiping the Israelites off the face of the earth, He did not totally spare them from judgment. Those who adamantly refused to repent and abandon their idolatry experienced destruction at the hands of the Levites. The Lord also inflicted a plague on the people (32:35). Some Bible scholars identify this plague with the Levites’ slaughter of approximately three thousand men (32:28).

In any case, repentant Israelites experienced God’s grace. Grace forms the basis of God’s relationship with human beings and His actions on their behalf. God’s grace is an expression of His love. He demonstrated that love in an ultimate way by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins (Rom. 5:8). By His grace we are saved through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Intercession” on pages 810–811 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is intercession? What does it mean to you that the Holy Spirit intercedes for believers who struggle in knowing how to pray as they should (see Rom. 8:26-27)?

HIS PRESENCE

God enjoys dwelling with His obedient people.

Can you recall a time when you felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence? His Spirit, of course, resides permanently within believers. In my experience, though, there have been times when His presence has seemed closer and more real than at other times.

One of those times I sensed God's presence in a special, personal way occurred when I left the Missouri Ozarks, the only home I had ever known, to attend seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana. I grew up in the Ozarks and graduated from college in Bolivar, Missouri. After earning a degree in education, I taught high school Spanish and social studies in my hometown area. After teaching a couple of years, I became convinced of my need to study God's Word more deeply. For me, that conviction involved expanding my education to encompass not only more in-depth Bible study but also the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.

After much prayer, I believed the Lord was leading me to attend seminary in New Orleans. Venturing out in obedient faith, I left the shelter of my small-town community to go to a big city. Upon arrival at the seminary in New Orleans, I knew this school was the place where God was leading me to complete my education. As I sat under the teaching of godly scholars in that institution, I enjoyed God's presence in a wonderful, refreshing way. I experienced the deep spiritual satisfaction of knowing that I was where the Lord wanted me to be, doing what He wanted me to do.

I reveled not only in the spiritual insights gained through those years of study but also in the pleasure of the friendships I developed with other Christians during that time. As I look back on those years of intense biblical study in community with other committed believers, I view those experiences as a foretaste of heaven's joys.

God enjoys dwelling with His obedient people. Moreover, nothing in this world can compare with the delights of our being in right relationship with the Lord and with His people as we obediently follow His will. This session focuses on the glory of God's presence with His people following their obedient completion of the tabernacle.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 35:1–40:38

In Exodus 25:1–31:18, Moses recorded the Lord’s specific instructions regarding building the tabernacle and its furnishings. Much of Exodus 35:1–40:38 details the actual building of the tabernacle according to the Lord’s instructions. Moses conveyed these directions to Bezalel and Oholiab, the two lead craftsmen.

Following the breach and renewal of the covenant reported in Exodus 32–34, Moses assembled the Israelite community and emphasized the fourth commandment, regulations regarding Sabbath observance (Ex. 35:1-3). This reminder about prohibition of work on the seventh day appropriately occurred prior to beginning construction of the tabernacle.

Verses 4-9 of Exodus 35 reiterate the Lord’s command to collect an offering of materials for the tabernacle (see 25:1-7). Those whose hearts were so moved brought a freewill offering to the Lord (35:20-29). In 35:10-19, Moses reviewed specific items needed for this sanctuary and its ministry. In verses 30-35, he called attention to the Lord’s appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab, whom He had specifically gifted for this task.

As work on this holy place began, Moses encountered a problem that many church leaders would welcome today. The Israelites gave so generously that Moses finally issued an order for the people to cease bringing gifts. The Israelites had contributed more than enough materials to complete the building (36:1-7).

In Exodus 36:8–38:20, Moses detailed the erecting of the tabernacle structure and its key furnishings. The furniture included the ark of the covenant, the table for the bread of the Presence (showbread), the seven-pronged lampstand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, and the bronze wash basin (laver). The final verses of Exodus 38 provide an inventory of materials used in constructing the Lord’s sanctuary.

Exodus 39:1-31 describes the making of the priestly garments just as the Lord had commanded Moses (see 28:1-43). Bezalel led the skilled craftsmen in making the ephod and breastpiece. As the name suggests, this latter article adorned the high priest’s chest. The Urim and Thummim, stones used in the decision-making process, were placed inside a purse-like pocket. Other priestly garments included tunics and special headgear.

Following the completion of the tabernacle’s construction, Moses inspected the craftsmen’s work. He determined that everything had been accomplished in accordance with the Lord’s commands, and he blessed the workers (39:32-43).

The first fifteen verses of Exodus 40 record the Lord's directions to Moses about setting up the tabernacle. Verses 16-33 then describe Moses' assembly of the tabernacle and its furnishings. Repeated emphasis falls on the fact that Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded. Chapter 40 concludes with a revelation of the Lord's glory filling the completed tabernacle, thereby emphasizing that the Lord enjoys dwelling with His obedient people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FINISHED! (Ex. 39:42-43)

The Israelites finished the tabernacle and its furnishings just as the Lord had specified. When all had been completed, Moses reviewed the work and blessed the people for their faithfulness in completing the task. Some Bible scholars estimate that the Israelites spent six months building the tabernacle. They arrived at Mount Sinai in the third month after they departed Egypt (19:1-2). Moses then spent approximately three months in dialogue with the Lord. The workers had completed the tabernacle by the end of that first year (40:17).

VERSE 42

The Israelites had done all the work according to everything the LORD had commanded Moses.

The expression "just as the LORD had commanded Moses" functions as a refrain throughout Exodus 39 (see 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32). A variation of the phrase occurs in verse 42: **according to everything the LORD had commanded Moses**. The repetition clearly emphasizes the people's obedience. The Israelites began their assigned task well; they also finished well!

Finishing well is important, not only in assigned responsibilities but also in life as a whole. Although Moses, the servant of the Lord, failed along the way, he finished well. The Lord inspired the following words to describe His servant's ministry: "No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unparalleled for all the signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do against the land of Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to all his land, and for all the mighty acts of power and terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12).

The apostle Paul, who had persecuted Christians prior to his conversion, nevertheless finished well as a servant of the Lord. As Paul anticipated the end of his life on earth, he wrote Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Finishing well as a believer at the end of life requires consistently serving the Lord throughout life.

VERSE 43

Moses inspected all the work they had accomplished. They had done just as the LORD commanded. Then Moses blessed them.

After the craftsmen had completed the tabernacle, Moses **inspected** their work. The Hebrew verb rendered *inspected* is a common verb meaning “to see.” The term appears in Genesis 1:31, where it depicts the Lord viewing (inspecting) His work of creation and pronouncing it to be very good.

On the occasion described in Exodus 39:43, Moses saw, or inspected, the completed tabernacle. He acknowledged the workers had done **just as the LORD commanded**. Not only had the craftsmen completed the tabernacle, they had finished it according to the Lord’s precise specifications.

After making his inspection, Moses **blessed** the workers. The Hebrew word translated *blessed* also appears in the Genesis creation account in connection with God’s creation of fish, fowl, human beings, and the Sabbath (Gen. 1:22,28; 2:3). The Lord, as Creator, blessed His work. Moses blessed those who constructed the tabernacle. The Hebrew term rendered *blessed* means “to empower someone or something for success.” One of my seminary professors defined the verb as “to impart the capacity to accomplish a designated purpose.” According to the Old Testament concept, ultimately God is the only Source of blessing. He confers blessing by His presence and His word. Others can bestow blessing only in His name or power (see Deut. 10:8).

Moses thoroughly inspected the completed tabernacle. Because the Israelites had finished the task in full accord with the Lord’s instructions, Moses blessed them. Their successful completion of the structure resulted in the deep satisfaction of receiving God’s approval because He had empowered them to accomplish His purpose (see Ex. 31:1-11).

EXPLORE FURTHER

What task or responsibility has the Lord assigned you? What steps are you taking to obediently see your assigned mission through to completion and enjoy God’s blessing as a result?

ASSEMBLY REQUIRED (Ex. 40:1-4)

After the craftsmen constructed the various parts of the tabernacle, God directed Moses to assemble the structure. In doing so, the Lord specified the order for assembly.

VERSE 1

The LORD spoke to Moses:

Verse 1 is by now a familiar refrain. As mentioned in previous sessions, the statement occurs repeatedly in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Whether or not Moses heard the Lord's voice audibly is not clear. What is clear, however, is that Moses heard the Lord's message accurately and recorded it as part of Holy Scripture. The statement underscores that Moses enjoyed a close, personal relationship with the Lord.

VERSE 2

“You are to set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, on the first day of the first month.

The Lord instructed Moses to erect the tabernacle **on the first day of the first month**. In other words, a year had passed since the Israelites had left Egypt (Ex. 12:1-2). The *first month* corresponds to the period of mid-March to mid-April on our modern calendar. The Scriptures refer to this month as Abib (Ex. 23:15) or Nisan (Neh. 2:1).

Verse 2 of Exodus 40 uses both the terms **tabernacle** and **tent of meeting** to identify the worship sanctuary the Israelites constructed in accordance with God's directions. The Book of Exodus mentions two different structures that were designated as the *tent of meeting*. The first structure was a provisional edifice that functioned as a meeting place for God and His people prior to the construction of the larger tabernacle. Apparently only Moses entered this structure (Ex. 33:7-11). The tabernacle with its rich decorations and symbolism became the focus during the Israelites' journeys through the wilderness. While the first tent of meeting was located outside the Israelites' camp (33:7), the later tent of meeting or tabernacle was set up at the center of the camp.

The Hebrew term translated *tabernacle* comes from a verb meaning “to dwell.” The tabernacle represented God's dwelling place in the midst of His people. One way the tabernacle's significance might be gauged is by the number of chapters devoted to it—thirteen (Ex. 25–31; 35–40)—in contrast to the three chapters devoted to God's creation of the world and humanity's fall into sin (Gen. 1–3). The tabernacle was the place of worship where God met with sinful humanity. This relationship with God could only be experienced because of God's grace and initiative. Therefore, in order for the Israelites to encounter God in the tabernacle, it had to be designed and constructed according to God's command.

Observe that the section of Exodus dealing with the tabernacle follows the Lord's giving of the law and establishing the covenant at Mount Sinai.

When Moses received the law on Mount Sinai, a cloud of smoke enveloped the mountain “because the LORD came down on it in fire” (Ex. 19:18). Moses also received instructions for building the tabernacle on that mountain. After the Israelites completed the tabernacle, the Lord’s glory (His weighty presence), once visible on Mount Sinai, filled this portable sanctuary (40:34). This visible manifestation emphasized the continuity between God’s revelation of His will on the mountain and His continued revelation of Himself through worship in the tabernacle.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Tabernacle, Tent of Meeting” on pages 1524–1527 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the significance of the Lord’s instruction to place the tabernacle or tent of meeting in the center of the Israelites’ camp (see Num. 2)? How can believers best show that Christ is at the center of their worship?

VERSE 3

Put the ark of the testimony there and screen off the ark with the curtain.

The Lord commanded Moses to set up the tabernacle beginning with the innermost room—the holy of holies or most holy place. The **ark of the testimony** constituted the only furnishing in this most sacred area. The term here translated *ark* differs from the Hebrew word designating Noah’s ark. The word in this verse basically means “chest.” In other contexts, the term designated a box or chest used for offerings (2 Kings 12:9-10) and the coffin in which Joseph’s remains were placed (Gen. 50:26).

The skilled craftsmen made the *ark of the testimony* (also known as “the ark of the covenant”) of acacia wood and overlaid it with gold according to the Lord’s design. The contents of the ark eventually consisted of the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments (Ex. 40:20), a container of manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded to confirm he was the Lord’s true priest (Heb. 9:4).

The ark represented the Lord’s intimate presence. God commanded that the ark be screened off with a veil. No Israelite was to enter this sacred area except the high priest—and he could enter the most holy place only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that holy day, the high priest entered to offer sacrifices for the people’s sins (Lev. 16:2-3).

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was split from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50-51). The fact that the split occurred

from top to bottom reveals that it was an act of God. Many Bible scholars believe the curtain that was torn was the one protecting the most holy place. If this view is correct, then the torn veil probably symbolizes the new access to God made possible by Christ's death (see Heb. 4:16).

VERSE 4

Then bring in the table and lay out its arrangement; also bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps.”

The two tabernacle furnishings listed in this verse occupied the room designated as the holy place. The **table** contained the bread of the Presence, or showbread. While the Hebrew term rendered *table* describes the physical table itself, it is also used in the Old Testament with an emphasis on the meal or sustenance provided at a table. Thus, the word portrays God's provision for humanity's needs. In the instance of the table of showbread, that provision was the close presence of God and the nourishing fellowship that worshipers could enjoy with the Lord. The sacred bread on this table was set before the Lord as a continual sacrifice (Ex. 25:30). Only the priests were to consume this bread (Lev. 24:5-9).

Bread also plays an important role for believers today. It is one of the two key elements of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, offered thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). By the symbolic act of eating this bread, believers remember Christ's death on their behalf and anticipate His second coming. In contrast to the bread of the Presence consumed only by the priests, all believers partake of the Lord's Supper. All believers can enjoy the close fellowship with God that was the prerogative of spiritual leaders in the Old Testament.

The second tabernacle furnishing mentioned in Exodus 40:4 is the **lampstand**. By transliterating the Hebrew term (substituting equivalent English letters for the Hebrew ones), we get the word *menorah*. This seven-pronged, pure gold lampstand consisted of three branches extending from each side of a central tier. Each branch may also have possessed a seven-sprouted lamp (see Zech. 4:2). In the Scriptures, light depicts both God's presence and abundant life. Jesus identified Himself as the Light of the world (John 8:12). He also instructed His followers to function as lights in a world of spiritual darkness (Matt. 5:14-16).

The Lord commanded that the lamps in the lampstand be kept burning continuously (Lev. 24:1-4), perhaps signifying that the way to God is always lit. God continues to offer the light of His Word to His people (Ps. 119:105).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Light, Light of the World” on pages 1017–1018 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. According to the article, what elements are linked with light in the Scriptures? On a scale of one to ten (ten being highest), to what degree are you serving as a “light of the world” in the spiritual darkness around you? Explain.

GLORY SHOWN (Ex. 40:34-35)

The Lord appeared in the completed tabernacle. Because His glory filled the tent, not even Moses could enter the tabernacle at this time.

VERSE 34

The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

After the workers finished the tent of meeting, or tabernacle, **the cloud** enveloped the structure. The Hebrew term rendered **covered** also means “to conceal” or “to hide.” This cloud had first appeared as the Israelites departed Egypt and set out on their journey toward the promised land (see Ex. 13:21-22). God chose to manifest His presence to the Israelites by this means. This cloud guided and protected God’s people in the wilderness (see 14:19-20,24; 16:10). The Israelites had witnessed the presence of this cloud atop Mount Sinai (19:9,16; 24:15-18). Although this cloud provided cool shade in the hot, arid wilderness, it was much more than comforting shelter. This cloud displayed **the glory of the LORD**, which could be awesome and frightening.

As the cloud covered the tabernacle, the Lord’s glory filled the tent. The Hebrew word translated *glory* comes from a verb meaning “to be heavy.” Thus, the Lord’s glory refers to the weighty importance or shining majesty that accompanies His presence. The Lord’s filling the completed tabernacle with His presence demonstrated His gracious forgiveness of His sinful people. He came to dwell among them just as He had promised (33:14-17).

In the New Testament, the apostle John referred to the Word (Christ) becoming flesh by using a Greek verb that literally means “tabernacled” or “dwelt with.” God’s dwelling among His people in the Old Testament was connected with the tabernacle and later with the temple. In the New Testament, however, God took up residence—“tabernacled”—among us in the Person of His Son (John 1:14).

VERSE 35

Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Verse 35 essentially repeats the thought of verse 34. The new element introduced in verse 35 is that Moses could not enter the tabernacle, because the Lord's glory **filled** it. The Hebrew verb rendered *filled* occurs in the Old Testament to designate both spatial and theological concepts. In a literal, spatial sense, the term denoted locusts filling houses during the plagues on Egypt (Ex. 10:6). Theologically, the word was used to represent God's omnipresence (Jer. 23:24). Exodus 40:35 demonstrates that the Lord's glorious presence was visible in the form of a cloud that filled the tabernacle.

The fact that the filling of the sanctuary by the Lord's presence prohibited Moses from entering stresses at least two important concepts. First, by His presence filling the sacred tent, the Lord demonstrated His approval of the builders' work. They had built it according to His design and specifications. Second, through this action the Lord emphasized that this holy structure was His and His alone. Human beings could not experience a right relationship with God by their own efforts and initiative. Only the Lord could make possible a way for people to experience a right relationship with Him.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Glory" on pages 647–648 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some ways that God reveals His glory? How has God most fully revealed that glory?

GOD LED (Ex. 40:36-38)

God led the Israelites on their journey by means of the cloud that settled on the tabernacle. When the cloud moved, the Israelites followed.

VERSE 36

The Israelites set out whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle throughout all the stages of their journey.

The **cloud**—the visible sign of the Lord's presence—that had covered the completed tabernacle also guided the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness. This visible manifestation of God's presence had accompanied the Israelites from the time they left Egypt. This directing pillar appeared

as a cloud during the daytime and as fire by night (Ex. 13:20-22). The Lord descended to speak to the Israelites in the cloud during crises (Num. 11:25; 12:5-8). Paul referred to the cloud that led the Israelites when he warned believers that God's presence demands holy living (1 Cor. 10:1-14).

VERSE 37

If the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out until the day it was taken up.

This verse reiterates the reality that God explicitly guided the Israelites throughout their journeys by means of the visible cloud. They were not to break camp and move forward until the cloud lifted. In His perfect timing, the Lord knew when His people needed to move forward and when they needed to remain where they were camped. As believers, we may not understand the reason for His specific direction, but He calls us to follow Him in faith.

VERSE 38

For the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and there was a fire inside the cloud by night, visible to the entire house of Israel throughout all the stages of their journey.

The final verse of the Book of Exodus reminds us that the Lord graciously accompanied and guided His people by means of a pillar of **cloud** by day and a pillar of **fire** by night. The total nature of that revelation is emphasized—the cloud was **visible to the entire house of Israel throughout all the stages of their journey**. Not just Moses and other key leaders but every Israelite had access to God's guiding presence.

God still provides leadership to His people today. Sometimes He leads through circumstances or through the counsel of godly friends, teachers, and preachers. God offers direction through the confirmation of His Word and through the conviction of His indwelling Holy Spirit. His guidance through other means will never contradict the message He has given in His Word.

EXPLORE FURTHER

List two or three specific ways or specific instances in which God has guided you. Have you consistently been obedient to His leadership? Did you discover a direct connection between obeying His leadership and enjoying His presence? Give an example from your personal experiences.

SET BEFORE

God is pleased when His people show Him gratitude and devotion.

Heather Mercer grew up with great opportunities in upper-middle-class America. By age twelve, she had lived in three foreign countries and visited eleven others. In so doing, Heather discovered that the world extended beyond her own concerns and desires. She learned to value people who differed from her. She also realized that many people lived without the luxuries she enjoyed.

Observing her Christian friends in high school, Heather became curious about the Christian faith. When one of her friends invited her to church, Heather went. There a young speaker made the message of Christ relevant to her. Heather responded to the invitation to accept Christ.

When the time came to apply for college, Heather chose a Christian-based university in Waco, Texas. Through her church in Waco, Heather learned even more about people from other cultures and nations. Poverty, famine, and disease often plagued these poorer countries. As Heather studied her Bible, she recognized that many Scriptures focused on serving people in poverty (see Jer. 22:16). She became convinced that she needed to express her love for God through service to people who had not been as richly blessed as she was.

That conviction led Heather Mercer to Afghanistan in March 2001. She had counted the cost of serving in Afghanistan. Within months of her arrival, the ruling Taliban authorities arrested Heather for teaching about Christianity. She endured the rigors of trial and imprisonment by the Taliban until her rescue by U.S. Special Forces. Her gratitude for what God had done for her led Heather to set herself before the Lord as a willing sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LEVITICUS 1:1–7:38

The Book of Leviticus deals with instructions for priests and worship. It thus relates closely to the Book of Exodus, especially the second half of Exodus

that focuses on the construction of the tabernacle with its various altars and furnishings as well as with the priests and their ministry. In Leviticus 1:1–7:38, Moses delineated five basic types of offerings the Lord established as part of His people’s worship of Him. When offered from sincere hearts, these sacrifices expressed outwardly the people’s inward devotion to the Lord.

The Lord identified the first offering as the burnt offering, or sacrifice (Lev. 1:1-17; 6:8-13). A bull, ram, male goat, male dove, or young pigeon could be offered, but the sacrifice had to be an unblemished male. The animal’s species could vary depending on the worshiper’s economic status. The emphasis of this sacrifice was on atonement. That the entire animal was burned signified complete surrender and consecration.

Moses next described the grain offering, also known as the meal or tribute offering (meat offering, KJV) (2:1-16; 6:14-23). This sacrifice was made of grains produced by tilling the soil. It might consist of flour or unleavened bread mixed with olive oil and salt. Frankincense, or incense, also constituted part of the grain offering. This sacrifice represented the necessities of life and perhaps even life itself. It symbolized a thankful recognition of God’s blessings and the consecration of the worshiper’s life and substance to God.

The third offering designated in Leviticus was the fellowship offering (peace offering, KJV, ESV) (3:1-17), including related offerings such as the thank offering (7:11-15), the vow, or freewill offering (7:16-18), as well as wave and heave offerings (7:28-36). The fellowship offering was a voluntary gift that signified peace or fellowship with God. Part of the sacrifice was burned on the altar. The worshipers and priests then consumed the remainder in a joyful fellowship meal. Any unblemished animal could be offered. The animal species (or grain) could vary depending on the worshiper’s economic status.

Moses then depicted the sin offering (4:1–5:13; 6:24-30). This sacrifice of atonement was made to restore the covenant relationship between an individual and God or between the congregation and God. The offering related mainly to sins committed unintentionally. The nature of this sacrifice varied according to the person who had committed the sin. If the priest or the congregation sinned, a bull was required. If a leader of the people sinned, he had to offer a male goat. Poor individuals could bring two turtledoves, two young pigeons, or two quarts of fine flour (5:11).

Finally, this passage identifies the restitution offering, also called the trespass offering (KJV) or guilt offering (ESV, NIV) (5:14–6:7; 7:1-10). It apparently overlapped somewhat with the sin offering. This special kind of sin offering pertained to sins against God or other individuals committed in a state of weakness. It did not atone for rebellious sins committed intentionally and willfully. The guilt toward God was atoned by the sacrificial blood, and the guilt toward others was atoned by a restitution payment and a fine.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE BURNT OFFERING (Lev. 1:3-9)

In these verses the Lord revealed to Moses the requirements and procedures for presenting a burnt offering. God designed this sacrifice to atone for the worshiper's sins and thus to restore the individual's fellowship with Him.

VERSE 3

“If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to bring an unblemished male. He will bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting so that he may be accepted by the LORD.

To make atonement, the worshiper could bring an offering either from the herd or the flock (Lev. 1:2). If an individual lacked the economic means to sacrifice such an animal, that person could bring turtledoves or young pigeons (1:14). This fact reveals the Lord's concern that no one be denied the opportunity of being in right relationship with Him.

The Hebrew term translated **burnt offering** comes from a verb meaning “to go up” or “to ascend.” What is the connection between the verb and the derived noun? Some Bible scholars believe the connection lies in the fact that smoke from the offering ascended to the Lord—that is, heavenward. While that is true, other offerings also were burned on the altar. The greater distinction of the burnt offering resides in the fact that only this sacrifice was completely burned. Fire consumed the whole animal, except its hide, on the altar. In the case of a bird, its crop and tail feathers were not burned (1:16). Neither the priest nor the worshiper consumed any portion of the offering. Thus, this sacrifice is sometimes designated by the phrase “whole burnt offering.” The fact that the offering was burned was secondary to the significance of giving the entire sacrifice to the Lord.

While on occasion this offering might demonstrate thankfulness (Gen. 8:20) or a plea for help in crisis (Judg. 20:26), it primarily functioned to atone for sin (Lev. 9:7; 14:20; 16:24). The inspired writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted the Old Testament to show that burnt offerings, as well as other offerings, are inferior to Christ's sacrifice of Himself for sin once for all (Heb. 10:1-10). The Hebrews passage suggests that the sacrificial system and especially the burnt offering foreshadowed Christ's death for sins.

Verses 3-9 of Leviticus 1 provide instructions for the burnt offering **from the herd**. Animals from the herd were considered the most valuable sacrificial animals. The worshiper had to present **an unblemished male** (“a male without defect,” NIV) as an offering. The Hebrew word rendered

unblemished conveys the ideas of completeness, wholeness, soundness, or perfection. A related term sometimes translated “blameless” appears in Job 1:1 (NIV) to describe this patriarch’s integrity. Again, this requirement foreshadowed Christ’s atoning death. As the sinless Lamb of God, Christ offered Himself (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The law required the worshiper to bring the whole burnt offering to the tent of meeting’s entrance. In this context, the term **tent of meeting** (“tabernacle of the congregation,” KJV) designates the tabernacle. Moses stated the sacrifice’s purpose as follows: **he** (the worshiper) **will bring it ... so that he may be accepted by the LORD.** The Hebrew phrase can literally be translated “he will bring it at his pleasure (“of his own voluntary will,” KJV) before the LORD.” The term translated *accepted* is actually a noun that literally means “pleasure,” “delight,” “favor,” or “acceptance.” While the noun can denote the pleasure that people derive from doing what they desire or decide to do, in the context of Leviticus 1:3 the word depicts the Lord’s acceptance of the offering and the worshiper.

VERSE 4

He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering so it can be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

Verse 4 specifies the purpose of the burnt offering as **to make atonement.** The single Hebrew word rendered by this phrase basically means “to cover over.” One of the nouns derived from this verb is often translated “mercy seat.” As such, it designated the golden lid or cover of the ark of the covenant. On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the lid of the ark to make atonement for the people’s sins.

In the case of the whole burnt offering, the worshiper laid his hands on the sacrificial animal’s head before the animal was slaughtered. This action symbolized the worshiper’s identification with the offering. The sacrificial animal functioned as a substitute for the sinner. Usage of the Hebrew verb rendered **lay** in other Scriptures suggests that the action may have involved exerting pressure on the animal’s head. Thus, some Bible scholars believe the verb in this context might better be translated “leaned upon.” In any case, the action symbolized the transfer of the worshiper’s sins to the animal. The animal gave its life in the sinner’s place.

VERSE 5

He is to slaughter the bull before the LORD; Aaron’s sons the priests are to present the blood and splatter it on all sides of the altar that is at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Moses instructed the worshiper to slay the sacrificial animal **before the LORD**. This expression evidently refers to the tabernacle's precincts. The worshiper slaughtered his own animal, apparently by cutting its throat. (Individual Israelites continued this practice until the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.) After the worshiper killed the sacrificial animal, the priests sprinkled its blood around the altar located at the tabernacle's (**tent of meeting**) entrance. The Hebrew term translated **bull** literally means "son of cattle." It was used to denote a single animal.

Although worshipers slaughtered their own sacrifices, they did not sprinkle the animals' blood around the altar. Only the priests could handle the blood, the most holy element of the offering. The sprinkling of the slaughtered animals' blood also reminded the worshipers that because of their sins, they deserved death yet received mercy.

The Greek equivalent to the Hebrew verb rendered **slaughter** occurs in the Book of Revelation to refer to Christ as the "slaughtered" Lamb (Rev. 5:6,9,12; 13:8). Just as the slaughtered animal took the worshiper's place, Christ took our place on the cross. By His substitutionary death, He made provision for our redemption from sin.

VERSE 6

Then he is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces.

According to the Lord's instructions for the whole burnt offering, the worshiper had to **skin** ("flay," KJV, ESV) the animal and divide it into pieces. The Hebrew verb translated *skin* literally means "to strip" or "to invade." It is also used in the Old Testament for stripping off clothing or armor. For example, Joseph's brothers stripped him of his special robe (Gen. 37:23). Similarly, Aaron was to be stripped of his priestly garments before he died (Num. 20:23-26,28).

Skinning the animal was a unique action connected with presenting a whole burnt offering. However, cutting the slain animal in pieces was a procedure associated with most sacrifices. A notable exception was the handling of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:9).

VERSE 7

The sons of Aaron the priest will prepare a fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

As priests, Aaron's sons arranged the wood and prepared the **fire on the altar**. This verse calls to mind events surrounding Abraham's obedient response to the Lord's command for the patriarch to offer up Isaac, the son of promise. That sacrifice was also identified as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:7-9). The Lord, however, provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac.

That event from Abraham's life, as well as the regular offering of lambs and other animals during the Old Testament period, anticipated the coming of Christ, the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins (John 1:29).

VERSE 8

Aaron's sons the priests are to arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat on top of the burning wood on the altar.

As priests, Aaron's sons arranged the pieces of the burnt offering, including the **head** and the **fat**, on the burning wood. The derivation of the Hebrew term rendered *fat* is uncertain. It appears in the Old Testament only in connection with the burnt offering (Lev. 1:8,12; 8:18-20). The word evidently refers to the hard fat that collects around the kidneys and loins of sheep and cattle. By calling attention to these two specific parts, the Lord made clear that the entire animal (except the hide) was to be consumed on the altar.

VERSE 9

The offerer is to wash its entrails and legs with water. Then the priest will burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD."

The Lord directed the worshiper to clean the sacrificial animal's **entrails** ("inwards," KJV; "internal organs," NIV) and **legs** with water. The consumption of the burnt offering on the altar created **a pleasing aroma to the LORD**. This phrase expressed the Lord's satisfaction with the offering. The sacrifice brought tranquility, or peace, between the Lord and the worshiper. A Greek phrase with a similar meaning appears in the New Testament to describe Christ's sacrifice (Eph. 5:2).

Priests offered a burnt offering for all the Israelites every morning and evening. These burnt offerings were doubled on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10). The necessity of daily burnt offerings reminds us of the need to confess our sins regularly. These offerings also emphasize that sin is serious. Atonement for sin required an acceptable sacrifice.

Because Christ has given Himself as the sacrifice for our sins once and for all, we no longer present animal offerings to the Lord as the Israelites did in biblical times. As believers, our salvation is eternally secure because of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and His victorious resurrection.

God often calls believers today to make sacrifices of a different kind—not to atone for sin but to demonstrate our devotion to Him. Those sacrifices may include offerings of our time and money. In some cases, we as believers might face the prospect of making the ultimate sacrifice of our lives for Christ.

Lottie Moon spent nearly forty years (1873–1912) as a missionary to China. Throughout her years of service, she faced plague, famine, revolution, and war. She felt deeply for the suffering Chinese people. Her compassion and commitment to the Lord motivated her to share her personal finances and food with those in need around her. Because of her sacrificial generosity, she severely damaged her own health. By 1912, Moon weighed only fifty pounds. Although fellow missionaries arranged for her to return home, she died en route to the United States on December 24, 1912. An annual international missions offering is named in her honor. Lottie Moon’s love for the Lord and for the Chinese people motivated her to keep giving at the cost of her life.

The Lord calls each of us as believers to demonstrate our love for Him in some sacrificial way. Sacrifice to the Lord may take various forms. Paul pleaded with believers to give themselves as living sacrifices to the Lord, accompanying his plea with a rationale that in so many words stated sacrificial living was not too much to ask of Christ’s followers (see Rom. 12:1). In what specific way(s) might the Lord be challenging you to sacrificial living?

EXPLORE FURTHER

Old Testament worship called for daily burnt offerings. This fact reminds us that sin is serious and we need to confess it regularly. In the article titled “Confession” in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*, read the section about “Confession of Sin” on page 328. How regularly do you confess your sins to the Lord? What New Testament passages encourage Christians to confess their sins?

THE GRAIN OFFERING (Lev. 2:1-3)

While the burnt offering described in Leviticus 1:3-9 atoned for sin, the grain offering expressed gratitude to God for His provisions. In Leviticus 2:1-3, the Lord outlined the requirements and procedure for presenting a grain offering.

VERSE 1

“When anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, it is to consist of fine flour. He is to pour olive oil on it, put frankincense on it,

The root meaning of the Hebrew term translated **grain offering** (“meat offering,” KJV, the term “meat” being used in the sense of food) is uncertain.

Some believe the word comes from a root meaning “to lead.” Most Bible scholars, however, associate the term with a verb meaning “to give.” The word rendered *grain offering* is used in some contexts to identify gifts to superior individuals, particularly kings. For example, this Hebrew term appears in 1 Kings 4:21 to designate the “tribute” Solomon received from foreign kings that he had conquered. In sacrificial contexts, the term most commonly came to mean a gift of grain. Leviticus 2 delineates four types of grain offerings: (1) uncooked flour (Lev. 2:1), (2) oven-baked bread (2:4), (3) bread cooked on a griddle (2:5), and (4) bread prepared in a pan (2:7).

Fine flour constituted a primary ingredient of the grain offering. Such flour was ground exclusively from the inner kernels of wheat. This sacrificial element figured prominently in levitical offerings. It also was used at the consecration ceremony for priests (Ex. 29:1-2) and the ordination of Levites (Num. 8:6-14). The fine flour reminded priests and Levites of their high calling that required quality service and dedication to the Lord.

The worshiper who brought a grain offering of flour was to put **olive oil** and **frankincense** on it. The oil helped the sacrifice catch fire. Frankincense is a resin that comes from the bark of certain trees in the balsam family. This substance played such a key role in the sacrificial system that it sometimes represented the entire system (Jer. 6:20). The wise men brought frankincense as one of their gifts when they came to worship Jesus (Matt. 2:11).

VERSE 2

and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest will take a handful of fine flour and oil from it, along with all its frankincense, and will burn this memorial portion of it on the altar, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

The priest burned a **memorial portion** of the grain offering on the altar. The term rendered *memorial portion* is related to a verb meaning “to remember.” Thus, the implication may be that the worshipers remembered the Lord as the One who graciously provided them with food. Like the burnt offering, the grain offering offered the Lord **a pleasing aroma** (Lev. 1:17).

VERSE 3

But the rest of the grain offering will belong to Aaron and his sons; it is the holiest part of the fire offerings to the LORD.”

After burning the memorial portion, the priests received the remainder of the grain offering (Lev. 6:14-16). This portion was identified as **the holiest part** (“a thing most holy,” KJV; “a most holy part,” ESV, NIV). Only the priests

could eat this part. The grain offering apparently functioned as the priests' main source of income. Just as worshipers in Old Testament times provided sustenance for the priests, believers today have a responsibility to provide for those who minister to them (1 Cor. 9:13-14). The grain offering expressed gratitude to the Lord for His provisions. We also need to honor the Lord by thanking Him for all He provides for us.

THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERING (Lev. 3:1-5)

In Leviticus 3:1-5, the Lord identified the requirements and procedure for presenting a fellowship offering. This sacrifice symbolized both the worshiper and God enjoying a fellowship meal. Because it signified peace between the Lord and worshipers, this offering also has been designated the peace offering.

VERSE 1

“If his offering is a fellowship sacrifice, and he is presenting an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present one without blemish before the LORD.

The thrust of the **fellowship** or peace offering (KJV, ESV) was the joy of a right relationship with God. Part of the sacrifice was burned on the altar. The worshipers and priests consumed the rest of the sacrifice in a joyful fellowship meal. Any unblemished animal could be offered. Leviticus 3:1-5 provides stipulations for offering an animal **from the herd**. The animal could be either male or female. In verse 1, the emphasis is on the fact that the sacrificial animal had to be **without blemish** (“without defect,” NIV). As in the description of the burnt offering in Leviticus 1:3 (“unblemished”), the Hebrew term conveys the ideas of completeness, wholeness, soundness, or perfection. Again, this requirement foreshadows Christ’s atoning death as the sinless Lamb of God (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

VERSE 2

He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests will splatter the blood on all sides of the altar.

The procedure described in this verse is essentially the same as that prescribed for the burnt offering in Leviticus 1:3-5. The law required the worshiper to slaughter the animal at the tent of meeting’s entrance. Here also the designation **tent of meeting** refers to the tabernacle. The worshiper placed his hands on the sacrificial animal’s head, an act symbolizing the worshiper’s identification with the offering. After the worshiper killed the

sacrificial animal, the priests sprinkled its blood around the altar located at the tabernacle's entrance. Because the blood constituted the most holy element of the offering, only the priests could sprinkle it.

VERSES 3-4

He will present part of the fellowship sacrifice as a fire offering to the LORD: the fat surrounding the entrails, all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat on them at the loins; he will also remove the fatty lobe of the liver with the kidneys.

These verses introduce a distinctive element of the fellowship offering—the removal of **the fat**. It was not to be eaten but rather burned. As the choicest part of the sacrifice, the fat belonged solely to the Lord. The Hebrew term rendered *fat* typically was used to refer to the fat of sacrificial animals. Like the blood, the fat could not be eaten. One suggestion for this prohibition is that the fat was viewed as the seat or basis of life. In any case, the offering of the fat represented the worshiper's desire to offer God the best (Gen. 4:4).

VERSE 5

Aaron's sons will burn it on the altar along with the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD."

The priests burned the fat **on the altar** as part of the burnt offering. The connection of the fellowship offering with the burnt offering clearly reveals that the atonement represented by the burnt offering was essential before worshippers could enjoy peace, or fellowship, with God. Only through faith in Christ can believers today be assured of peace with God and enjoy fellowship with Him (Rom. 5:1). Like the burnt offering, the fellowship offering also is identified as **a pleasing aroma to the LORD**, an expression of the Lord's satisfaction with the sacrifice (see Lev. 1:9).

EXPLORE FURTHER

The three offerings highlighted in this session emphasize making atonement for sin, expressing gratitude to God, and enjoying peace and fellowship with Him. While these three areas are interrelated, which is most critically lacking in your relationship with God right now? What action will you take this week to demonstrate gratitude and devotion to the Lord?

SET APART

God's people are to live as a set-apart priesthood.

The gathering was unofficial. It consisted of some seminary students who resided in campus housing. We met to recognize and encourage those among us whom the Lord had set apart to serve as missionaries in various parts of the world. Over thirty years have passed now since that time of group fellowship. Although I have forgotten some of the names of those present, I still vividly recall the sweet spirit that permeated the room that evening. We keenly felt the Lord's presence as we fellowshiped and prayed for those leaving our midst to serve on the mission field.

The Lord had called these missionaries as His messengers to share the good news of salvation with people at home and around the world. Although He had not called them to serve as priests in the sense that Aaron and his sons served, they functioned in the way that the Lord had previously called all the Israelites to service. He had announced at Mount Sinai that His covenant people were to be His "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6).

Part of the Israelites' responsibility as a set-apart people included sharing their knowledge of Him with other people groups. That responsibility belonged to all the Israelites, not just to a select few. Throughout the Old Testament period the Lord made clear that He wants all people to know Him. He called Abraham to be a blessing to "all the peoples on earth" (Gen. 12:1-3). God sent His prophet Jonah to preach to Israel's enemies, the wicked Ninevites (Jonah 3:1-2; 4:10-11). He announced to Isaiah that His house was to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7). God cares for all the people of the world. This emphasis is the missionary message of the Old Testament.

God did not just designate His people as a priestly kingdom in Old Testament times. The apostle John declared that Christ has made believers in New Testament times and beyond "a kingdom, priests" (Rev. 1:6). As a set-apart priesthood, we have received the privilege not only of access to God through Christ but also of sharing the good news of salvation with those who do not know Him. As set-apart people, each of us has received both a call to holy living and a commission to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:9).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LEVITICUS 8:1–10:20

As we have observed, the Book of Leviticus deals with instructions for priests and worship. The first major section of the book, chapters 1–7, focuses on the nature, purpose, and procedure for presenting sacrifices. In these chapters the Lord instructed the Israelites regarding how to worship Him. The summary in Leviticus 7:37–38 sets the sacrificial system in the context of the Lord’s covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai.

Moses’ role as mediator on behalf of the rebellious Israelites at Mount Sinai (Ex. 32–34) pointed to the need for priestly mediators to continue this intercession ministry throughout the nation’s history. The second major section of Leviticus, chapters 8–10, deals with God’s establishment of the priesthood to meet this need. Chapter 8 records the formal consecration of the priests. Chapter 9 directs attention to priestly functions, while chapter 10 warns against priestly failure.

The first five verses of Leviticus 8 emphasize that Moses followed the Lord’s directions in assembling the Israelites and ordaining Aaron and his sons. The ordination occurred at the entrance to the tabernacle. It lasted seven days. The ritual washing of Aaron and his sons represented their need to be clean before God before they could effectively mediate for others.

After the ritual cleansing, Moses adorned Aaron with the special garments of the high priest. Moses next anointed the tabernacle and its furnishings, including the altar. As part of the ordination ceremony, Moses presented the bull for the sin offering, followed by the ram for the burnt offering, and concluding with the second ram of ordination. The application of the second ram’s blood to the priests’ right ear lobes, right thumbs, and big toes of their right feet signified that the priests were to listen carefully to God’s Word and carry out their duties in accord with His instructions.

In Leviticus 9, the Lord set apart members of the tribe of Levi to minister. Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices on behalf of themselves and the people. After presenting the offerings, Aaron blessed the people. Thus, chapter 9 indicates two appropriate functions of the priests. They served as mediators to help the people experience the Lord’s cleansing from sin. They also communicated the Lord’s blessing on the worshiping congregation.

Leviticus 10 warns against priestly failure. Two of Aaron’s sons offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. The consequence of their disobedience was death. Moses also became angry with Aaron’s surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, for their failure to consume the sin offering in the sanctuary area. The chapter emphasizes the Lord’s holiness.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CLEANSED (Lev. 9:15-21)

Aaron presented offerings on the Israelites' behalf. These gifts included the people's sin offering, burnt offering, grain (meat, KJV) offering, fellowship (peace, KJV, ESV) offering, and presentation (wave, KJV, ESV, NIV) offering.

VERSE 15

Aaron presented the people's offering. He took the male goat for the people's sin offering, slaughtered it, and made a sin offering with it as he did before.

This verse focuses on Aaron's presentation of a sin offering on the people's behalf. In Leviticus 4:1–5:13 and 6:24-30, the Lord gave Moses instructions regarding the sin offering. This sacrifice of atonement was made to restore the covenant relationship between an individual and God or between the congregation and God.

As recorded in Leviticus 9:15, Aaron offered a **male goat** as a **sin offering** for the people. According to Leviticus 4:22-23, a male goat was the stipulated sin offering when a leader sinned. A bull was required when the congregation sinned (4:13-14). However, in the situation described in Leviticus 9:15, the male goat probably first represented the elders or leaders of the Israelites and then by proxy the entire congregation (see 2 Chron. 29:20-21,23-24).

VERSE 16

He presented the burnt offering and sacrificed it according to the regulation.

Aaron next sacrificed the **burnt offering** on the people's behalf. The Hebrew term translated *burnt offering* comes from a verb meaning "to go up" or "to ascend." The primary distinction of the burnt offering, however, lay in the fact that only this sacrifice was completely burned. Fire consumed the whole animal, except its hide, on the altar. Neither the priest nor the worshiper consumed any part of the offering. The fact that the offering was burned is secondary to the significance of giving the entire animal to the Lord.

This offering primarily functioned to atone for sin (Lev. 9:7; 14:20; 16:24). In the case of the whole burnt offering, the worshiper demonstrated his identification with the offering by laying his hands on the animal's head before the animal was slaughtered. The action may have involved exerting pressure on the animal's head. In any case, the act symbolized the transfer

of the worshiper's sins to the animal. In effect, the sacrificial animal gave its life in the sinner's place.

The Hebrew term translated **according to the regulation** (“according to the manner,” KJV; “in the prescribed way,” NIV) basically means “according to the judgment” or “according to the justice,” thus according to the regulation or ordinance. The source of this ordinance, or judgment, is the Lord. He stipulated the regulations for the whole burnt offering to atone for sin. He provided a way for repentant sinners to enjoy a right relationship with Him. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed ahead to Christ, the perfect Sacrifice, who died for us (Rom. 5:8-9).

VERSE 17

Next he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning burnt offering.

Aaron next presented the **grain offering** (“meat offering,” KJV) on the people's behalf. The grain offering expressed gratitude to God for His provisions. In the second chapter of Leviticus, Moses delineated four types of grain offerings: (1) uncooked flour (Lev. 2:1), (2) oven-baked bread (2:4), (3) bread cooked on a griddle (2:5), and (4) bread prepared in a pan (2:7). Fine flour, ground from the inner wheat kernels, constituted a primary ingredient of the grain offering. The grain offering of flour also included olive oil and frankincense. The oil helped the grain sacrifice burn. The priest burned a **handful**, or memorial portion, of the grain offering on the altar. Like the burnt offering, the grain offering was a fire sacrifice that offered the Lord a pleasing aroma (Lev. 1:17).

VERSE 18

Finally, he slaughtered the ox and the ram as the people's fellowship sacrifice. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, and he splattered it on all sides of the altar.

Finally, Aaron presented the congregation's **fellowship sacrifice** (“peace offerings,” KJV, ESV), consisting of a slaughtered ox and ram. This voluntary gift signified peace, or fellowship, with God. Part of the sacrifice was burned on the altar. The worshipers and priests consumed the remainder in a joyful fellowship meal. Any unblemished animal could be offered. Grain could also be presented.

After his sons brought it to him, Aaron sprinkled **the blood** of the fellowship offering on the altar's sides. Only the priests could handle the blood, the most holy element of the offering. The sprinkling of the

slaughtered animals' blood reminded the worshipers that because of their sins, they deserved death. It also reminded worshipers of God's mercy in providing a way of forgiveness and renewed fellowship.

VERSES 19-20

They also brought the fat portions from the ox and the ram—the fat tail, the fat surrounding the entrails, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe of the liver—and placed these on the breasts. Aaron burned the fat portions on the altar,

These verses identify the **fat portions** of the fellowship offering. Those portions included the fat on the tail, the fat surrounding the kidneys and intestines, and the fatty part of the liver. In some cases the fatty tissue of a sheep's tail could weigh up to ten pounds.

Aaron burned the fat portions on the altar. They were not to be eaten. As the choicest part of the sacrifice, the fat belonged solely to the Lord. One suggestion for the prohibition against eating the fat of sacrificial animals is that it was viewed as the seat or basis of life. In any case, the offering of the fat represented the worshiper's desire to offer God the best, because the fat represented the tastiest part of the offering. In bringing an offering that pleased God, Abel sacrificed "the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions" (Gen. 4:4). However, the Old Testament also makes clear that even presenting the choicest part of an animal in sacrifice to the Lord was no substitute for obedience to Him (1 Sam. 15:22).

VERSE 21

but he presented the breasts and the right thigh as a presentation offering before the LORD, as Moses had commanded.

The **presentation offering**, also called a wave (KJV, ESV, NIV) or elevation offering, was associated with the fellowship offering. Presentation offerings received their name from the fact that they were presented to the Lord by waving them or lifting them up before Him. The appellation is used here as a specific term for those parts of the offering that were designated for the officiating priest. Although such is not the case in every instance of its usage, in Leviticus 9:21 the presentation or wave offering included **the breasts and the right thigh**. The wave offering always was to be presented in the sanctuary.

Aaron carried out his responsibilities in association with this offering **as Moses had commanded**. Moses had initially received these commands from the Lord, as the Books of Exodus and Leviticus repeatedly emphasize.

Again and again the narrative records that the Lord spoke to Moses, and Moses did just as the Lord commanded him.

After experiencing the Lord's cleansing for their own sins (see Lev. 4:3), the priests called the people to experience cleansing from their sins. Thus, the priests served as mediators between God and the Israelites. In the gospel of the new covenant, earthly mediators that were provided in the law have been surpassed. Jesus Christ came to the world not only as the perfect, sinless Sacrifice but also as the believer's great High Priest, the perfect Mediator (Heb. 7:26-27; 8:6). In another sense, however, we as believers have been called to a priestly function (see Rev. 1:6). We have received a commission from Christ to call people to repentance (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Mediator" on pages 1072–1073 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In addition to offering sacrifices, in what other ways did Old Testament priests function as mediators between God and the people? What uniquely qualifies Christ to be the perfect Mediator (see Heb. 4:15-16)?

BLESSING (Lev. 9:22-24)

In addition to calling the Israelites to experience cleansing from their sins by offering sacrifices on their behalf, priests also acted on the Lord's authority by communicating a blessing to the people. Aaron's announcement of blessing on the people constituted part of his priestly role as a mediator for the nation of Israel. After Aaron blessed the people, he and Moses entered the tent of meeting. When they emerged and offered another blessing, the glory of the Lord appeared. The Lord sent fire to consume the burnt offering and the fat portions, and the people responded with praise and worship.

VERSE 22

Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. He came down after sacrificing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering.

Aaron **lifted up his hands** to bless the people. By lifting his hands, the priest signified that he was invoking or petitioning the Lord for help (see 1 Kings 8:22-23; Ps. 28:2). In Numbers 6:23-27, Moses recorded a traditional priestly blessing or benediction. Such a blessing focused on receiving God's protection

and favor. Some Bible scholars view the blessing mentioned in Leviticus 9:22-23 as the prescribed priestly blessing recorded in Numbers 6:23-27.

The Hebrew term rendered **blessed** is the same word that appears in Genesis 1:22 and 1:28, where God blessed the fish and the fowl He created (Gen. 1:22) as well as the man and woman He made in His image (1:28). In each case the blessing was connected with the command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. With human beings, the blessing included an additional command to subdue the earth. Thus, to bless in the Old Testament meant to endow someone or something with power. Such blessing could include power for success, longevity, or fertility. The Old Testament makes clear that ultimately God is the only Source of blessing. Others could bestow blessings only in His name or with His authority (Deut. 10:8).

Aaron's stepping down after presenting the various offerings refers to his descent from an embankment, or incline, surrounding the altar. He had stood on this embankment while offering the sacrifices. Exodus 27:5 mentions a ledge in connection with the altar of burnt offering, possibly a ledge surrounding the altar on which priests could stand.

VERSE 23

Moses and Aaron then entered the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.

Following Aaron's descent from the altar, he and Moses went into **the tent of meeting**. Here again, as in Leviticus 3:2, the designation *tent of meeting* ("tabernacle of the congregation," KJV) refers to the tabernacle. Aaron's entrance into the tabernacle alongside Moses signified his new role as a servant of the Lord's tabernacle and as a mediator for the people.

After Moses and Aaron emerged from the tabernacle, they **blessed** the congregation. Following this blessing, the Lord revealed His **glory** to the people. The Hebrew term translated *glory* derives from a root that means "to be heavy." Thus, the Lord's glory refers to the weighty importance or shining majesty that accompanies His presence.

The appearance of God's glory in connection with the priesthood's inauguration demonstrated that the Lord had established and placed his stamp of approval on both the levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system. Moses had previously announced that the revelation of the Lord's glory was the desired culmination of the inauguration ceremony (Lev. 9:4,6).

VERSE 24

Fire came from the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and

the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell facedown.

In conjunction with the Lord's revelation of His glorious presence, He sent **fire** to consume the offering. This miraculous fire demonstrated the Lord's acceptance of the people's sacrifice. Fire appears elsewhere in the Old Testament to symbolize the Lord's presence and work (Ex. 3:2; 19:18; Deut. 4:24; Ezek. 1:4; Mal. 3:2). While the Lord's manifestation of His presence in fire sometimes indicated His blessing or approval, it could also demonstrate His judgment (Mal. 3:2; Matt. 3:11-12).

How did the Israelites respond to God's revelation of His glory in fire? They **shouted** ("shouted for joy," NIV) **and fell facedown** on the ground. The Hebrew verb translated *shouted* basically means "to give a ringing cry" or "to shout for joy." This reference is the first use of the verb in the Old Testament. Appropriately, this first usage depicts the Israelites' joy related to the Lord's acceptance of their burnt offering. This offering primarily functioned to atone for sin (see comments on Lev. 9:16). The overwhelming majority of usages of this verb in the Old Testament are in contexts of praising the Lord and rejoicing in Him.

To fall *facedown* literally means "to prostrate oneself on the ground." This posture signified reverential fear and devotion; it demonstrated worship. We can and should rejoice in the fact that by His grace we as believers have experienced the Lord's forgiveness. That marvelous blessing, however, needs to motivate us not to take the cost of that forgiveness lightly. Just as the burnt offering was wholly consumed on the altar, we need to respond in the kind of reverential awe that shows we are giving ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord. Such commitment needs to be demonstrated not only in our words but also in our behavior (Rom. 12:1-2).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Blessing and Cursing" on pages 225–226 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are ways God blesses His people today? What connection, if any, exists between prosperity and God's blessing? Between success and God's blessing?

HOLY (Lev. 10:1-3)

Two of Aaron's sons presented an unauthorized offering to the Lord. They died as a result of their disobedience. The passage reminds us that the Lord is holy and must be revered as a holy God.

VERSE 1

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his own firepan, put fire in it, placed incense on it, and presented unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them to do.

The final verses of Leviticus 9 portray a worship experience pleasing to God. After Aaron offered the prescribed sacrifices, the Lord revealed His approval of the people's worship by sending fire to consume the offerings. The Israelites responded with joyous praise and devotion.

Leviticus 10:1-3 reminds us that times of testing and temptation often follow spiritually exhilarating experiences. In the Israelites' situation, **Nadab** [NAY dab] **and Abihu** [uh BIGH hyoo], Aaron's two eldest sons, succumbed to a costly temptation. They presented an **unauthorized** ("strange fire," KJV) offering **before the LORD**. The word rendered **firepan** refers to a handheld container utilized in moving burning coals from one location to another. The **incense** could have come from the incense altar or from another unidentified source. The phrase *before the LORD* may indicate either the altar in the tabernacle courtyard or the one inside the holy place.

Both Christian and Jewish commentators have debated the nature of this offense for centuries. The most commonly accepted views today include the following: (1) the two men entered an area of the sanctuary they were not supposed to enter, possibly the holy of holies; (2) they presented unauthorized coals from outside the sanctuary area; (3) they offered incense that did not consist of the proper ingredients; and (4) they presented incense at the wrong time of day. Whatever their specific offense, Nadab and Abihu clearly did something the Lord **had not commanded them to do**. They acted rebelliously, disregarding the Lord's commands.

VERSE 2

Then fire came from the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

Aaron's two sons reaped deadly consequences for their disobedience. While the nature of the strange fire Nadab and Abihu offered is obscure, the nature of the **fire ... from the LORD** is clear. It was the fire of His judgment.

A key theme throughout this session's Scripture passage has been references to burning and fire. Sacrifices were burned on the altar. Fire from the Lord had consumed the priestly offering in Leviticus 9:24, thereby demonstrating His approval. However, Nadab and Abihu disobediently offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. In response, the Lord sent the fire of His judgment that resulted in their deaths.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord sent fire—sometimes to bestow His blessing and at other times to reveal His judgment. The writer of the Book of Hebrews reminds us of the importance of serving God with reverence and awe. We need to avoid His judgment because He is “a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). While God’s judgment on Aaron’s sons may appear harsh, it was equally so for Ananias and Sapphira in the early days of the New Testament church (Acts 5:1-11). Both the congregation of Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament needed an explicit reminder that God is holy and His commands demand obedience.

This passage also reminds us that our worship of God should never be characterized by carelessness. Furthermore, those who have spiritual leadership roles have both a greater privilege and a greater responsibility. God expects all believers, and especially leaders, to act appropriately.

VERSE 3

Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has spoken: I will demonstrate my holiness to those who are near me, and I will reveal my glory before all the people.” And Aaron remained silent.

This verse depicts the close connection between the Lord’s holiness and His judgment. The Hebrew word rendered **holiness** (“sanctified,” KJV, ESV) means “set apart” or “separate.” The term also conveys ethical connotations of cleanliness and purity. A form of the term appears three times in Isaiah 6:3 to describe the Lord’s nature as perfect moral purity. Because the Lord is holy, He expects His people also to be holy. That demand constitutes a key theme of Leviticus (see Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26).

Leviticus 10:3 brings us full circle back to the statement at the beginning of this session: “God’s people are to live as a set-apart priesthood.” What does this requirement mean for believers today? It does not mean that we are to assume “better-than-thou” attitudes. Rather, we are to live Christlike lives, reflecting Christ’s holy character. We are to reflect the standards of the kingdom of God, standards that Jesus set forth in Matthew 5:1-12, for example. When we live Christlike lives, we reveal His **glory**; we honor Him.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Before studying this Scripture text, what perceptions did you have of the biblical truth that believers are to be set apart or holy? Did your concept of what it means to be holy change as a result of this study? If so, in what ways did your view change, and how can you live out this changed view?

SET FREE

God promised a way for His people to be free from the guilt of sin.

“There Is a Fountain.” The first verse of this great song reminds us that the fountain is filled with blood—the blood of Christ. Sinners who apply this blood to their hearts and lives by faith are set free from sin’s guilty stains.

William Cowper [COO puh-er] wrote the lyrics to this song about Christ’s atonement. Cowper was born on November 15, 1731, the fourth child of a British clergyman and his wife. Following the deaths of William’s three elder siblings, William’s mother died when he was only six. He never fully recovered from that tragedy. Emotionally vulnerable, William was sent to a boarding school where a bully repeatedly terrorized him. He had a better experience at his next school. There William developed a love for poetry and literature. While preparing for the bar exam in an effort to become an attorney, however, he became so anxious and distraught that he attempted suicide.

Friends recommended an asylum run by a devout Christian, Dr. Nathaniel Cotton. There Cowper slowly recovered. In that refuge at the age of thirty-three, William became a Christian while reading Romans 3:25: “God presented him [Christ] as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith.”

Although Cowper still experienced periods of depression, his conversion experience gave him a firm spiritual foundation. Subsequently, William enjoyed some happy years in the village of Olney, England, with his friend and pastor, John Newton. The two men worked together on one of the most well-known hymnals in British church history—*Olney Hymns*. Included in that hymnal was the song “There Is a Fountain,” originally published under the title “Praise for the Fountain Opened” and based on Zechariah 13:1.

William Cowper understood from personal experience what it meant to be set free from the guilt of sin. He identified with the dying thief on the cross who rejoiced in the forgiveness provided by Christ’s death. Such redeeming love became Cowper’s lifelong theme.

In establishing the annual Day of Atonement, God gave the Israelites a vivid picture of sin’s costliness as well as His gracious power. That power removes the guilt of sin for those who place their faith in Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LEVITICUS 11:1–16:34

The Book of Leviticus communicates the Lord's awesome holiness and reveals how the Israelites could have access to Him. Thus it deals with instructions for priests and worship. The first major section of the book, chapters 1–7, focuses on the nature, purpose, and procedure for offering sacrifices. The second major part, chapters 8–10, describes the Lord's establishment of the priesthood to meet the ongoing need for mediation between God and sinful humanity.

The third section of Leviticus, chapters 11–16, relates to the need for separation between what is clean and what is unclean, what is holy and what is profane. The laws recorded in these chapters reminded the Israelites that the Lord had called them to be distinct from the surrounding nations. The Israelites were not to yield to the temptation to conform to the standards of either the Egyptians or the Canaanites (see Lev. 18:3).

Leviticus 11 provides instructions related to clean and unclean animals. The regulations regarding consumption of animals covered the following categories: land animals, aquatic animals, birds, flying insects, and swarming creatures. Not all the animals in each of these categories were fit for human consumption. The Lord also gave His people specific directions for purification when they came in contact with dead animals. The primary focus seems to be that God's people were to be holy or separate because God is holy (Lev. 11:44). That distinction related in part to their eating habits.

Leviticus 12 deals with purification after childbirth. When we compare chapter 12 with similar legislation in Leviticus 15, the impurity pertained to bodily discharges associated with childbirth and not with the act or fact of birth itself. The Old Testament elsewhere reminds us that children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3).

Leviticus 13–14 gives guidance concerning the cleansing of skin diseases and contaminated objects, including fabrics. Of all the diseases in biblical times, none is regarded as more serious or repulsive than what is identified as leprosy. The various symptoms and remedies listed in chapter 13 indicate a variety of afflictions. To experience ritual cleansing after healing required offering appropriate sacrifices. Contaminated clothes had to be treated by washing or burning them. Houses polluted by mildew had to have the affected parts repaired. In some cases the entire house had to be torn down.

Leviticus 15 concerns unclean bodily discharges, both male and female. Not all of these discharges were inherently unclean. However, they symbolized impurity. Therefore, they needed to be cleansed by appropriate ritual and sacrifice. All these instructions emphasized the Lord's holiness (15:31).

The focal point of Leviticus 11:1–16:34 is the Day of Atonement in chapter 16. This annual observance focused on the purification of the entire Israelite community. After offering a sacrifice for himself, the high priest slaughtered a goat as a sin offering for the people. He then expelled from the camp another goat, the scapegoat, symbolizing the removal of sin from the community.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PREPARING TO SACRIFICE (Lev. 16:3-6)

Speaking to Moses, the Lord identified how Aaron the high priest was to prepare himself to offer a special sacrifice on the annual Day of Atonement. Aaron was to present this atoning offering in the holy of holies, or most holy place. The Lord further described this place in Leviticus 16:2 as “behind the curtain in front of the mercy seat on the ark.” The ark of the covenant was the only furnishing in the most holy place.

VERSE 3

“Aaron is to enter the most holy place in this way: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.”

The Lord instructed that Aaron, the high priest, was to **enter the most holy place** (“the holy place,” KJV) only on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Israelites’ sacred calendar (16:29). The seventh Hebrew month corresponded to parts of our months of September and October. It was initially identified by the name Ethanim [ETH uh nim] (1 Kings 8:2) and later by the name Tishri [TISH ree]. The Hebrew term translated *most holy place* is the same word rendered “holy place” in Leviticus 16:2. The context makes clear, however, that the Lord was referring to the innermost room of the tabernacle.

The Lord specified that Aaron must bring with him into the holy of holies **a young bull** (“young bullock,” KJV) and **a ram** as sacrifices. The Hebrew expression translated *young* literally means “son of cattle.” The bull functioned as **a sin offering** and the ram as **a burnt offering** for Aaron, not for the congregation of Israel. In Leviticus 4:1–5:13 and 6:24–30, the Lord gave Moses instructions regarding the sin offering. This sacrifice of atonement was made to restore the covenant relationship between an individual and God or between the congregation and God. Leviticus 4:3 stipulates a young bull as the sin offering for a priest.

The term rendered *burnt offering* derives from a verb meaning “to go up” or “to ascend.” The distinction of the burnt offering lies in the fact that only this

sacrifice was completely burned. Fire consumed the whole animal, except its hide, on the altar. Neither the priest nor the worshiper consumed any part of the offering. This sacrifice primarily functioned to atone for sin (Lev. 9:7; 14:20; 16:24).

The sacrificial system, especially the burnt offering, foreshadowed, or typified, Christ's death for sins (see Heb. 10:1-10). However, the inspired writer of the Book of Hebrews made clear that Christ had no need for this initial cleansing sacrifice (Heb. 7:26-28). He is the perfect High Priest who offered Himself, the perfect Sacrifice, once and for all.

VERSE 4

He is to wear a holy linen tunic, and linen undergarments are to be on his body. He is to tie a linen sash around him and wrap his head with a linen turban. These are holy garments; he must bathe his body with water before he wears them.

In verse 3, the Lord specified the offerings with which Aaron was to enter the holy of holies. In verse 4, He detailed Aaron's personal preparation for entry into this most holy place. The high priest must be cleansed and consecrated anew before fulfilling his priestly function for the people. Prior to donning special garments, Aaron was to bathe his body. This washing served as an outward symbol of the need for inner cleansing. In carrying out his responsibilities on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would bathe his body twice (see Lev. 16:24). At other points during the ceremonies he would wash only his hands and feet (see Ex. 30:19).

After bathing, Aaron put on **holy** ("sacred," NIV) **garments**. The Hebrew term translated *holy* refers to that which is separate, or set apart from the ordinary. It identifies that which belongs to the sphere of the sacred and thus is distinct from what is common or profane. Bible scholars differ regarding the significance of the garments the high priest wore on this special occasion. Some suggest that these clothes were not as elaborate as those the high priest wore when fulfilling his regular priestly duties. Thus, these simple garments represented the humility of the high priest in seeking forgiveness or atonement for himself. Some Bible scholars who hold this view regard these humble garments as foreshadowing Christ's enduring humiliation.

Others view the garments depicted as quite similar to those the high priest commonly wore in carrying out his ministry (see Ex. 28:39-43). However, the particular garments described in Leviticus 16 were reserved for use only on the Day of Atonement. Thus, they were especially sacred in that regard.

Observe the repeated references to **linen** in the description of the garments the high priest wore on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4). Linen was white

in color. That Aaron wore clothing made only of white linen on the Day of Atonement symbolized the sacredness of the occasion. The Lord emphasized that these were *holy garments*. Angelic messengers often wore linen (Dan. 10:5; Rev. 15:6). It portrays purity and holiness.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Linen” on page 1019 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Linen is sometimes used symbolically in the Scriptures. In Revelation 19:8, John stated that “fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints.” In what specific ways does your life give evidence that, spiritually speaking, you are dressed in fine linen?

VERSE 5

He is to take from the Israelite community two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering.

After presenting sacrifices to atone for his own sins and receiving the Lord’s cleansing, Aaron was personally prepared to minister on behalf of the Israelite people. Verse 5 identifies the animals Aaron presented to the Lord as sin and burnt offerings on behalf of **the Israelite community** (“the congregation of the children of Israel,” KJV). The Lord commanded the high priest to take **two male goats** (“two kids of the goats,” KJV) from the congregation. These animals functioned as **a sin offering** for the Israelites. The Hebrew term translated *male* can also be rendered “he-goat,” “hairy,” or “kid.” The nature of the sin offering has been detailed in the discussion of Leviticus 16:3.

According to Leviticus 4:22-23, a male goat was the stipulated sin offering when a leader sinned. A bull was required when the congregation sinned (Lev. 4:13-14). However, as in Leviticus 9:15, the male goat first represented the elders or leaders of the Israelites and then by proxy the entire congregation (see 2 Chron. 29:20-21,23-24).

The Lord also instructed Aaron to take **one ram for a burnt offering**. The nature of the burnt offering has been described in the commentary on Leviticus 16:3. This burnt offering served as a sacrifice for the congregation. A bull, ram, male goat, male dove, or young pigeon could be offered. The sacrifice must be an unblemished male. The animal’s species could vary depending on the worshiper’s economic status. The emphasis of this sacrifice was on the atonement for sin. That the entire animal was burned signified complete surrender and consecration before the Lord.

VERSE 6

Aaron will present the bull for his sin offering and make atonement for himself and his household.

This verse focuses on the need for Aaron to **make atonement for himself and his household**, or family. As a leader, Aaron was first to make sure that he and his family were in right relationship with God before ministering on behalf of the congregation. The Hebrew verb rendered *make atonement* may basically mean “to cover over.” One of the nouns derived from this verb designates the lid or cover of the ark of the covenant and is often translated “mercy seat.” On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the ark’s cover to make atonement for the people’s sins.

Aaron presented **the bull** as a sin offering for himself. The type of animal sacrificed as a sin offering varied according to who had committed the sin. Leviticus 4:3 stipulates a young bull as the sin offering for a priest.

The Lord thus made clear through the Old Testament sacrificial system that all people, even the highest religious leaders He appointed, were sinners in need of cleansing and forgiveness (compare Rom. 3:23). Furthermore, the sacrifices were repeated reminders that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

THE CHOSEN GOAT (Lev. 16:7-10)

The Lord instructed Aaron regarding the two male goats he had selected on behalf of the congregation (see Lev. 16:5). Aaron was to cast lots to determine which animal would be sacrificed and which would be sent into the wilderness as the scapegoat.

VERSE 7

Next he will take the two goats and place them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

The Lord instructed Aaron through Moses to place the two goats at the doorway of **the tent of meeting**, or “tabernacle of the congregation” (KJV). That location is further defined as being **before the LORD**. The tabernacle functioned as one visual reminder of God’s presence with His people. The expression *before the LORD* occurs repeatedly in the Book of Leviticus. This expression evidently refers to the tabernacle’s precincts. It points out that while the omnipresent God is everywhere, His house serves as a reminder of His close presence with His people. Since Christ’s coming, death, resurrection, and the manifestation of His Spirit at Pentecost, His Spirit indwells His church, the body of Christ. The New Testament also uses the imagery of a building or sanctuary for the people in whom God’s Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 3:16).

VERSE 8

After Aaron casts lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other for an uninhabitable place,

Next, Aaron was to **cast lots** for the goats. Through this process the high priest would determine which goat would be sacrificed and which would be sent into the wilderness as the scapegoat. The Hebrew term translated *lots* probably is related to an Arabic word meaning “pebble.” Small stones often were used in casting lots. Thus the word *lot* designates some small article like a stone that either was thrown or allowed to fall to determine a choice.

Casting lots constituted one method of discerning God’s will in biblical times. Joshua cast lots to determine the division of the promised land among the tribes (Josh. 18:8-10). David cast lots to decide the divisions of priests (1 Chron. 24:1-5). In Nehemiah’s time, lots were cast to determine when to bring certain contributions to the temple (Neh. 10:34). Although the Scriptures detail neither the appearance of the lot nor the method of casting it, they do affirm that the process was in the Lord’s control (Prov. 16:33).

Some Bible scholars have suggested that the lot (or lots) consisted of an affirmative stone and a negative stone placed in a container. The one that fell out when the container was shaken provided the answer to a proposed yes or no question. Other scholars suggest the lots were items that had a light and a dark side, respectively. If two light sides appeared when they were dumped from a container, the answer was yes. If the two dark sides were face up, the answer was no. If a light and a dark side turned up, then the process had to be repeated. Such a practice may have varied from one period to another and even from one place to another in the promised land.

In casting lots for the two goats on the Day of Atonement, one lot selected the goat to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord and the other lot was for “*azazel*” [uh ZAY zel], the English spelling of a Hebrew word that can be translated **an uninhabitable place** (“the scapegoat,” KJV, NIV). This term occurs in the Old Testament only in Leviticus 16. Bible scholars have proposed various interpretations of its meaning. One view is that the term identifies the goat’s function—to be a scapegoat. This traditional rendering originated in the Tyndale version of the Bible in AD 1530. In my view this understanding seems to best fit the context of Leviticus 16.

A second proposal, however, interprets “*azazel*” to mean “complete removal.” According to this view, the name specifically designates the goat’s departure into the wilderness never to be seen again. Thus, the procedure symbolized the complete removal of sin by God’s forgiveness. A third interpretation suggests that the term designates a “rough, difficult terrain”—that is, *an uninhabitable place*. As such, it referred to the goat’s destination. This third view also reasonably fits the context of Leviticus 16.

Regardless of the precise meaning of the term “azazel,” the basic meaning of the passage is clear. The releasing of the goat depicted the complete removal of the Israelites’ sins. Aaron placed his hands on the goat’s head and confessed the Israelites’ sins over it before the goat’s release (Lev. 16:21-22). The dismissed goat graphically portrayed the removal of Israel’s guilt.

VERSE 9

he is to present the goat chosen by lot for the LORD and sacrifice it as a sin offering.

Aaron sacrificed the goat selected **by lot** as belonging to the Lord for a **sin offering**. By way of review, Leviticus 4:1–5:13 and 6:24-30 provide instructions regarding the sin offering. This sacrifice of atonement was designed to restore the covenant relationship between an individual and God or between the congregation and God. The offering related primarily to sins that had been committed unintentionally. Nevertheless, the individual or congregation had realized their acts (or attitudes) displeased the Lord.

VERSE 10

But the goat chosen by lot for an uninhabitable place is to be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement with it by sending it into the wilderness for an uninhabitable place.”

This verse focuses on the second goat that was kept alive yet sent into the wilderness **for an uninhabitable place** (“for a scapegoat into the wilderness,” KJV; “into the wilderness to Azazel,” ESV; “into the wilderness as a scapegoat,” NIV). The preceding commentary on verse 8 has dealt at length with possible meanings of the Hebrew term “azazel”—rendered here as *an uninhabitable place*. Verse 10 supplies the additional information that the released goat, symbolically bearing the people’s sins (Lev. 16:21-22), was sent **into the wilderness**. The fact that the goat would be sent away to an area where it would never be seen again depicts the removal of sin and guilt.

Finally, the purpose of sending the goat away after presenting it alive **before the LORD** was to **make atonement**. (See the commentary on Lev. 16:6 for a discussion of atonement.) In addition to meaning “to make atonement,” the verb can also mean “to purge,” suggesting an act of purification. The writer of the Book of Hebrews described Christ’s atoning work in terms of “making purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3). As the apostle Paul also taught, it is through Christ alone that “we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

Believers can be confident that Jesus’ death on the cross removed the guilt of their sins. In Psalm 32, David gave thanks for the Lord’s forgiveness.

In 32:5, he expressed gratitude that the Lord had removed even the guilt of his sin. Guilt that grows out of a healthy conscience instructed by God's Word is a divine blessing. However, both false guilt and failure to deal with true guilt according to what God teaches us in His Word can harm us spiritually, emotionally, and physically. In Psalm 32:3-4, David expressed some of the effects of guilt that resulted as long as he refused to confess his sins.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Guilt" on pages 682–683 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Are guilty feelings always an indicator of genuine guilt? Explain your answer. What does the Bible teach us about how to deal with genuine guilt?

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (Lev. 16:29-30)

The Lord established the Day of Atonement as an annual observance for the Israelites. The purpose of this most holy day was to make atonement for the Israelites' sins.

VERSE 29

“This is to be a permanent statute for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month you are to practice self-denial and do no work, both the native and the alien who resides among you.

The Lord's words in this verse established the Day of Atonement as a **permanent** annual observance for the Israelites. The Lord determined the tenth day of the seventh month as the specific date for the holy day. In addition to the prescribed ceremonies associated with the two goats and other sacrificial animals, keeping the Day of Atonement involved humbling oneself and ceasing work. The Hebrew phrase rendered **practice self-denial** (“afflict your souls,” KJV; “afflict yourselves,” ESV; “deny yourselves,” NIV) conveys the basic concept of humbling oneself. The form in which the verb appears in verse 29 indicates intense self-denial or affliction. One concept connected with the term is inner pain expressing sorrow for sin. Fasting and prayer often accompanied this repentant attitude. God commanded this genuine expression of repentance for the Day of Atonement. Today the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, remains one of the most holy days in Judaism.

The Lord's second mandate in this verse required the cessation of work on the Day of Atonement. This command applied not only to the Israelites

but also to **the alien** (“stranger,” KJV, ESV) who lived among them. These non-Israelites were required to obey certain Israelite laws, including keeping the Sabbath. These laws regarding strangers or foreigners foreshadow the conversion of the Gentiles (see Rom. 11).

VERSE 30

Atonement will be made for you on this day to cleanse you, and you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD.”

This verse reiterates the Day of Atonement’s purpose to make **atonement** for the Israelites’ sins. The verb expressing *atonement* in this verse is the same one with which we have become familiar in this chapter. (See the discussion on Lev. 16:6.) We also have observed that some Bible translations render this same verb “to make purification” in Leviticus 16:10. In 16:30, the concept of atonement is joined with that of purification by the use of a different verb translated **cleanse** and **clean**. This verb almost exclusively refers to ritual and moral purity in the Old Testament. Ritual purification from the priest was not what ultimately mattered, however, but rather the Lord’s forgiveness that made people clean before Him (see 2 Chron. 30:18-20). People cannot achieve genuine purity by their own efforts (Job 4:17; Prov. 30:12). Only the Lord can cleanse us from our sins.

Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross provided atonement once and for all for humanity’s sins. The sin offerings on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross on a number of levels. First, only the high priest could enter behind the veil on this most holy day. Christ, however, entered the heavenly sanctuary once for all (Heb. 9:23-28). Jesus entered the holy of holies to atone for sin not with the blood of bulls or goats but with His own blood (Heb. 9:12). When Christ died on the cross, the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), symbolizing that Christ had opened the way so all could have access to God’s very presence. As the sinless High Priest, He did not need to first offer a sacrifice for Himself (Heb. 10:10). Finally, the sending of the scapegoat outside the camp bearing the people’s sins portrays Christ’s atoning death outside the gate of Jerusalem to make provision for people’s redemption (Heb. 13:12).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Expiation, Propitiation” on pages 532–534 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What does it mean to you that Jesus paid the price for your sins?

SET FUTURES

God promises to bless those who are faithful to Him and discipline those who are not.

More times than not, a nation's downfall starts from within, not from the outside. This idea constituted part of an address given by a young American citizen in Springfield, Illinois, on January 27, 1838. The speaker was Abraham Lincoln, who went on to become the sixteenth president of the United States. Today we remember this great leader especially for his role in preserving the union and freeing the slaves during the American Civil War.

What should a nation do when it awakens to the reality that it is on a slide toward destruction? Lincoln knew the answer to that question as well. At one point during the Civil War, this wise leader made a proclamation setting aside April 30, 1863, as a day of fasting and prayer. In that announcement, Lincoln acknowledged that the terrible calamity of the war might be a divine punishment inflicted on the United States for its sins. In that case the purpose of the calamity would be to elicit national repentance. The president continued his declaration by calling attention to the bounty, peace, and prosperity the United States had enjoyed for many years. Tragically, however, its people as a whole had forgotten that its wealth and power were blessings from God. Thus, Lincoln called for a national day of prayer and humility before Almighty God—a day of confessing national sins and seeking forgiveness.

More than three thousand years prior to Lincoln's time, the Lord God announced through Moses this same truth regarding a nation's rise or fall. This teaching initially was delivered to the Israelites. Moses recorded it in Leviticus 26. The essence of that message was the Lord's promise to bless the people as a whole when they demonstrated faithfulness to Him and to discipline them when they sinned or went astray. Such discipline ultimately included defeat at the hands of their enemies. When the nation of Israel failed to follow godly principles, its people would experience captivity instead of enjoying the blessings of liberty. However, even in the direst circumstances resulting from His people's rebellion, the Lord included a message of hope. If the nation repented, the Israelites could experience God's forgiveness and again enjoy meaningful fellowship with Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LEVITICUS 17:1–27:34

The Book of Leviticus reveals how the sinful Israelites could have a relationship with the awesome, holy God. The first major part of the book focused on the need for sacrifices in Israel's worship (Lev. 1–7). The second main section emphasized the continuing need for priestly mediators between God and sinful humanity (Lev. 8–10). The third major division of Leviticus concerned the need to distinguish between what is clean and what is unclean. The laws recorded in these chapters reminded the Israelites that the Lord had called them to be distinct from the surrounding nations (Lev. 11–16). As the focal point of the entire book, chapter 16 in particular dealt with the need for the Day of Atonement. The ceremonies the nation observed on that day pointed to the atoning work Christ would accomplish by His death and resurrection.

The final segment of Leviticus (17:1–27:34) deals with the need for holy living. This is the longest section of the book and deals with how the Israelites were to live holy lives, thus demonstrating separation or dedication to the Lord. Chapters 17–25 have been titled the “Holiness Code” because they consist of a list of regulations related to acquiring and maintaining holiness among the Israelites. Leviticus 17–27 can be categorized under ten headings.

- *Laws dealing with sacrifice and blood* (17:1-16)—Blood represented life and was the God-established means of atonement; it was not to be consumed.

- *Standards for sexual relationships* (18:1-30)—Contrary to practices of the surrounding nations, God's people must not engage in incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality.

- *Guidelines for interpersonal relationships* (19:1-37)—Echoes of the Ten Commandments occur frequently in this chapter. It reminds us that right relationships with others are part and parcel of a right relationship with God.

- *Laws concerning capital offenses* (20:1-27)—Capital offenses included worshipping false gods, cursing one's parents, and sexual perversions.

- *Instructions regarding worship and holiness* (21:1-22:33)—These chapters contain regulations for religious leaders. They must be models of holiness.

- *Requirements for holy days* (23:1-44)—Israel's weekly Sabbath and annual religious festivals and feasts must be properly observed.

- *Mandates related to consecration and desecration* (24:1-23)—The Lord imposed the death penalty for blasphemy.

- *Regulations for Sabbath and Jubilee years* (25:1-55)—The people as well as the land needed special times for rest and rejuvenation.

- *Lists of blessings and curses* (26:1-46)—Depending on whether they obeyed or disobeyed the Lord, the Israelites would experience blessings or

curses associated with the covenant. When they disobeyed, repentance and restoration were possible.

• *Laws regarding dedication offerings* (27:1-34)—These regulations provide a fitting conclusion to the Book of Leviticus, because dedicating oneself and one’s possessions to the Lord is the heart of holiness.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PROMISE (Lev. 26:3-13)

The Lord began the segment on blessings and curses positively by focusing on the blessings His people could enjoy if they remained faithful to Him. He promised to sustain life and give peace to those who faithfully followed His commands. By far, however, the Lord’s greatest promise was the blessing of His presence with His people.

VERSE 3

“If you follow my statutes and faithfully observe my commands,

The declaration “I am the LORD” (Lev. 26:2) immediately precedes verse 3. Thus, God’s authority stands directly behind the message in the remainder of the chapter. The word **if** at the beginning of verse 3 alerts the reader that conditions exist if God’s people are to enjoy the blessings delineated in verses 4-13. The Hebrew term translated **follow** literally means “walk” (KJV, ESV). In the context of Leviticus 26:3, it refers to a lifestyle.

As God’s covenant people, the Israelites were to be characterized as people who consistently obeyed His **statutes** (“decrees,” NIV) and **commands** (“commandments,” KJV, ESV). The Hebrew term rendered *statutes* derives from a verb meaning “to engrave.” In ancient times, people commonly engraved laws on slabs of stone or pieces of metal. The word rendered *commands* appears elsewhere in the Old Testament to identify a father’s or teacher’s instruction (Prov. 3:1) and the terms of a contract (Jer. 32:11).

Because of Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, we as Christians are blessed to have entered the new covenant relationship with the Lord. How can we who are under grace do less than that required under the law? Surely gratitude for our salvation will motivate us to obey the Lord.

VERSES 4-5

I will give you rain at the right time, and the land will yield its produce, and the trees of the field will bear their fruit.

Your threshing will continue until grape harvest, and the grape harvest will continue until sowing time; you will have plenty of food to eat and live securely in your land.

Verse 4 begins the list of blessings for faithful obedience to the Lord's commands. The first blessing—**rain**—reflects a basic necessity of an agricultural society. The Lord promised to send rain **at the right time** or “in its season” (NIV). The Hebrew term translated *rain* is literally the plural form “rains” (ESV). The word thus designates the two crucial rainy periods that occurred in the land of Canaan in autumn and spring.

Verse 5 continues the thought of verse 4. The Lord's obedient people could depend on Him to supply their basic needs—in this instance **plenty of food to eat** (“bread to the full,” KJV, ESV; “all the food you want,” NIV). When taking into account the methods of harvesting and threshing in Old Testament times, in a really good year the harvesting of one kind of produce could continue until the harvesting of the next kind.

We need to exercise at least two cautions, however, in interpreting these verses. First, while the Lord promised to satisfy His faithful people's hunger, He stated His promise in terms of the staples of life—the basic necessities—not in terms of luxury items. Second, this promise did not negate intense work on the Israelites' part. To have plenty to eat, they had to expend the effort of sowing seed, tilling the soil, and harvesting their crops. Work has been a part of God's plan for human beings from the beginning (Gen. 2:15).

VERSES 6-8

I will give peace to the land, and you will lie down with nothing to frighten you. I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall before you by the sword. Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand; your enemies will fall before you by the sword.

These verses enlarge the idea introduced at the conclusion of verse 5 of God's people living securely in the land. The term rendered **peace** is the Hebrew word *shalom* [shah LOHM]. The biblical concept of peace is much richer than simply the absence of conflict. The word expresses the ideas of wholeness, completeness, and harmony. It embraces images of healthy or unbroken relationships and fulfillment in one's efforts.

The peace envisioned in these verses involved protection from both **dangerous animals** and predatory nations (**enemies**). In ancient times, lions and bears roamed the land of the Bible. They apparently were so

common that the Lord promised to drive out the Canaanites gradually so that dangerous beasts would not multiply against His people (Ex. 23:29-30).

In regard to security from predatory nations, the expression that **five** Israelites would **pursue a hundred** of the enemy reminds us that God often accomplishes His purposes through faithful people who appear outnumbered or weak. The apostle Paul reminded that God often chooses such methods of triumph to underscore the reality that He is the true Victor (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

VERSE 9

I will turn to you, make you fruitful and multiply you, and confirm my covenant with you.

In response to His people's obedience, the Lord would **turn** ("have respect," KJV; "look ... with favor," NIV) to them. The Hebrew word for "face" derives from the verb rendered *turn*. The Lord's turning His face toward His people in this context indicated His favor and acceptance. The promise to make His loyal people **fruitful** and to **multiply** ("increase ... numbers," NIV) them calls to mind the Lord's covenant pledges to His people beginning with Abraham (Gen. 12:2; 15:4-5; 17:5-6). The phrase **confirm my covenant** most likely refers to the covenant the Lord made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, the heart of which is the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 19–20).

VERSE 10

You will eat the old grain of the previous year and will clear out the old to make room for the new.

This verse continues the thought of bountiful harvests previously mentioned in verses 4-5. Coming on the heels of verse 9 with its promise of multiplied descendants, the Lord reassured the obedient people that they would suffer no food shortage in spite of the population increase. Indeed, the Israelites would need to clear out the **old grain** left over from the previous year's harvest to provide **room for the new** grain.

VERSE 11

I will place my residence among you, and I will not reject you.

The blessings of the covenant reach their climax in the promise of the Lord's loving fellowship with His obedient people. His presence implies acceptance, not rejection. The Hebrew of the first part of verse 11 can literally be translated "I will put my tabernacle in their midst." The Lord designed the tabernacle as the place where He dwelt with His people (Ex. 25:8). Like the later temple, however, it could become a meaningless shrine if the people

broke their covenant with God through disobedience (see Ezek. 10–11). Centuries later, the apostle John picked up on this imagery when he wrote of Jesus: “The Word became flesh and dwelt [literally ‘tabernacled’] among us” (John 1:14). As Christians we are privileged to enjoy His continually abiding presence through the Holy Spirit.

VERSE 12

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.

Next, the Lord promised to **walk** with His people. This verb may call to mind the uninterrupted, intimate fellowship Adam and Eve enjoyed with God in the garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 3:8). The form of the Hebrew verb translated *walk* can express both duration and continuous action. The Lord promised to continually fellowship with His people if they obeyed Him. The remainder of verse 12 expresses the intimate covenant language of a holy relationship between God and His people (see Jer. 24:7; 32:38).

VERSE 13

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, so that you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to live in freedom.

This segment of Leviticus 26 ends with a reminder of the authority behind the message the Israelites had received in the preceding verses. It came from **the LORD**, the personal God who had revealed Himself and the significance of that name (Yahweh) to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14-15). The God who had delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt could be depended on to keep His promises to bless an obedient people.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Peace” on pages 1233–1234 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What does it mean to you that God’s peace guards believers’ hearts and minds (Phil. 4:7)?

WARNING (Lev. 26:14-16)

The Lord warned the Israelites that if they disobeyed His commands, they would face His discipline. Such discipline would include suffering defeat at their enemies’ hands.

VERSES 14-15

But if you do not obey me and observe all these commands—if you reject my statutes and despise my ordinances, and do not observe all my commands—and break my covenant,

This verse introduces a contrast with the preceding verses' content. The Israelites could enjoy the covenant's blessings if they obeyed the Lord, but if they chose to disobey, they could expect negative consequences. The form of the verb in the expression **do not obey** ("will not hearken," KJV) suggests repeated or habitual action. In other words, the Lord's warnings were directed toward repeated, deliberate disobedience. His discipline would increase in degree according to the levels of the Israelites' persistence in sinful rebellion.

Verse 15 continues with descriptive expressions of repeated disobedient actions. These are rejecting the Lord's **statutes** ("decrees," NIV), despising His **ordinances** ("judgments," KJV; "rules," ESV; "laws," NIV), and refusing to obey His **commands** ("commandments," KJV, ESV). The variety of terms are piled one upon another for emphasis. Each of these behaviors constitutes a breach of the Lord's **covenant** with His people.

VERSE 16

then I will do this to you: I will bring terror on you—wasting disease and fever that will cause your eyes to fail and your life to ebb away. You will sow your seed in vain because your enemies will eat it."

Verse 16 lists some of the means by which the Lord would discipline the Israelites under the old covenant. The Hebrew term rendered **terror** expresses the emotion of someone unexpectedly confronted with a threatening or disastrous situation. The terrors include **wasting disease** ("consumption," KJV), **fever**, and defeat by **enemies**. This initial discipline would intensify if the Israelites chose to persist in stubborn rebellion.

RETURN (Lev. 26:40-45)

God's discipline, then and now, has a positive purpose—to motivate His people to repent and return to Him.

VERSE 40

"But when they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers—their unfaithfulness that they practiced against me, and how they acted with hostility toward me,

Failure to keep the covenant did not have to mean the end for the Israelites. The gracious Lord of the covenant offered a new beginning to His rebellious people. To enjoy that restored fellowship the people had to **confess their iniquity**. Confession of sin is essential to being in right relationship or fellowship with God (1 John 1:8-9).

The term rendered *iniquity* is one of three key Hebrew words for wrongdoing used in the Old Testament. The specific term appearing in Leviticus 26:40 derives from a verb meaning “to bend,” “to twist,” or “to distort.” Thus, the specific focus of the word is on sin as crooked behavior or perversion.

Why did the Lord instruct the Israelites to confess their fathers’ or ancestors’ sins as well as their own? Perhaps this element of the confession was a means of acknowledging that, as a nation, the Israelites had been guilty of sinning against God for many years. Furthermore, the statement involved the recognition that the Lord had long been patient with His people. Thus, His discipline or judgment was rightly deserved.

VERSE 41

and I acted with hostility toward them and brought them into the land of their enemies—and when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they make amends for their iniquity,

The Lord demonstrated **hostility** (“contrary,” KJV, ESV) toward His people in response to their hostility toward Him (see Lev. 26:40). The reference to being defeated by **enemies** constitutes one of the curses for covenant disobedience (see 26:17). The Lord further referred to disobedient people as having **uncircumcised hearts**, a phrase that describes a mind-set in rebellion against Him. Circumcision represented the outward sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:9-14). The Israelites viewed the heart as the seat of the mind and will. The remainder of 26:41 points out that returning to the Lord also includes humility and a willingness to accept the consequences of one’s sin. The Hebrew verb translated **humbled** conveys the image of being brought to one’s knees.

VERSES 42-43

then I will remember my covenant with Jacob. I will also remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land abandoned by them will make up for its Sabbaths by lying desolate without the people, while they make amends for their iniquity, because they rejected my ordinances and abhorred my statutes.

When the people returned to the Lord in repentance, He promised to **remember** His covenant with the patriarchs. For God to *remember* His covenant means that He is ready to take appropriate action in accord with it. While His specific actions are not spelled out in this passage, Deuteronomy 30 provides a list of blessings His repentant people could anticipate. The Lord had promised the land as well as numerous descendants to the patriarchs. He would honor His promises to the patriarchs even though the Israelites had failed to keep the law. Nevertheless, the Israelites would reap consequences for their rebellion against the Lord. They would be taken into captivity away from the promised land. The abandoned land would lie desolate to compensate for the Sabbath years it had missed.

VERSES 44-45

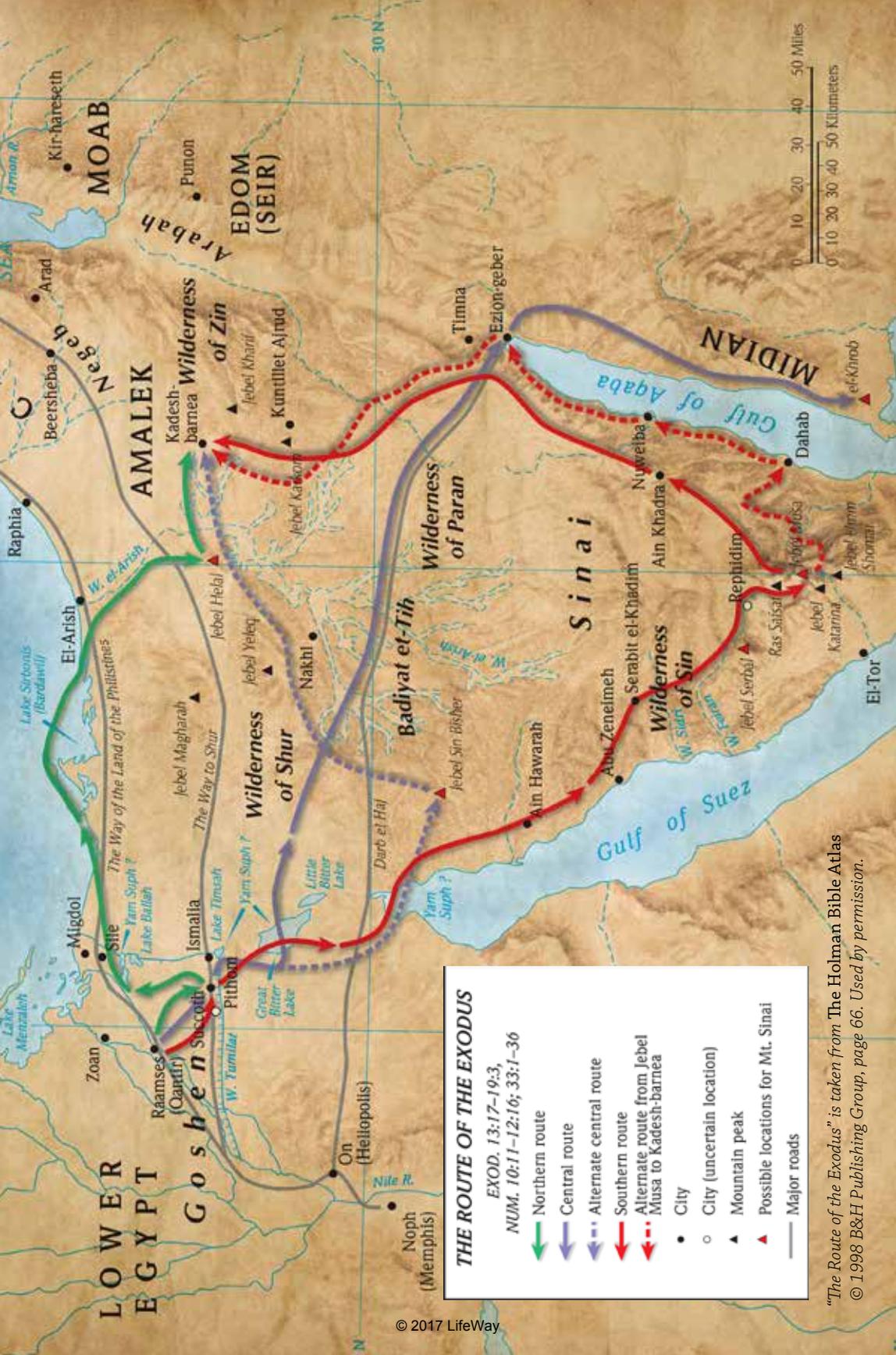
Yet in spite of this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject or abhor them so as to destroy them and break my covenant with them, since I am the LORD their God. For their sake I will remember the covenant with their fathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God; I am the LORD.”

Even though the Israelites broke the Lord’s laws and suffered the consequences of their sin in exile (Lev. 26:43), God would not totally destroy them or break His covenant with them. The Lord is a gracious God. He promised to act on the basis of His character as **the LORD their God** rather than on the basis of what the Israelites deserved.

Leviticus 26:45 reiterates the Lord’s nature as a covenant-keeping God. This passage (Lev. 26:40-45)—along with many New Testament passages—testifies to the Lord’s willingness to forgive His wayward people if they repent and return to Him. Genuine love for the Lord will demonstrate itself in obedience to Him.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Repentance” on pages 1344–1345 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How would you depict the biblical idea of repentance? From what sins do you need to turn today by embracing the Lord’s forgiveness and restoration?



THE ROUTE OF THE EXODUS
 EXOD. 13:17-19:3
 NUM. 10:11-12:10; 33:1-36

- Northern route
- Central route
- Alternate central route
- Southern route
- Alternate route from Jebel Musa to Kadesh-barnea
- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ▲ Possible locations for Mt. Sinai
- Major roads

"The Route of the Exodus" is taken from The Holman Bible Atlas © 1998 B&H Publishing Group, page 66. Used by permission.

POINT YOUR HEART TO

TrueNorth



How do you make a deeper, clearer connection to God's Word?

The Christian Standard Bible is proven to be the optimal blend of accuracy and readability. So it's as literal to the original as possible without losing its ability to stir your heart. You'll find it to be highly trustworthy — and deeply satisfying. The CSB: Truth so clear, you'll want to read it, share it, and live it. **Learn more at CSBible.com.**

SAVE 30% on all CSB text Bibles in LifeWay Stores and at LifeWay.com

Code: C15266 Valid until 04/30/18



**CHRISTIAN
STANDARD
BIBLE**