

Journey to Freedom

Studies from Exodus through Joshua

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PART I

FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible uses the opening words, *we'lleh shemoth*, "Now these are the names..." as the title for the book that we call *Exodus*. These words echo the listing of the sons of Israel who went down to Egypt in Genesis 46:8 and connect Exodus to the previous book of Genesis.

Genesis concerned itself with the beginnings of the world, of human beings and their institutions, and of the people of Israel as a tribal family. The focal point of Genesis was the covenant that God made with Abraham¹ in which God promised two things: to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation through whom the whole earth would be blessed, and to give Abraham's descendants the land extending from the river of Egypt to the great Euphrates River.

On the day that God sealed His covenant with Abraham, He also foretold that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land where they would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. "But I will also judge the nation that they will serve," God promised, "and after-ward they will come out with many possessions" (Genesis 15:13-14).

In the years to come, the promises and predictions of God began to unfold in amazing ways. The end of Genesis records that Abraham's grandson, Jacob (later renamed "Israel" by God), had twelve sons. Because ten of Jacob's sons were greatly jealous of their brother, Joseph, they sold him as a slave to a passing caravan traveling to Egypt. But God was with Joseph, and he gained tremendous favor with the king of Egypt, Pharaoh,² who eventually made Joseph his prime minister in charge of the whole land.

Later, when famine threatened to wipe out Jacob's entire family in Canaan, God had placed Joseph in a position to rescue them from extinction. He brought his father Jacob and family, seventy persons in all, out of Canaan and to the land of Goshen where he provided for them from the storehouses of Egypt. The book of Genesis closes with Abraham's offspring firmly planted in the land of Egypt as God had foretold and orchestrated.

The book of Exodus picks up on the dramatic story of Abraham's offspring some 400 years later. The Israelites, or Hebrews as they were called, had increased in numbers to about two million. God had indeed made of Abraham's offspring a great nation as He had promised. But, as foretold, they were now slaves in a foreign land with a new Pharaoh who was threatened by their numbers and who oppressed them with hard labor and cruelty.

The title *Exodus* comes from the Greek word, *Exodos*. The name means "going out" or "departure" and was given to this book by the translators of the Septuagint³ in the third century B.C. because it reflected the theme of the book.

The first "going out" for the Israelites was their departure from Egypt,⁴ being freed from slavery and oppression to become the people of God. On this journey Moses, God's chosen leader, and the people began to receive God's revelation of Himself through His mighty acts of deliverance.

A second "going out" took place through Israel's forty years of wilderness wanderings. There the fledgling nation learned to put aside her old life and live a new life of trust and obedience to God.

The final "going out" for God's people occurred as the nation left the wilderness and entered the Promised Land. The book of Joshua recounts the incredible story of how God led Israel in the supernatural conquest of the very land He had promised Abraham centuries before. There, the people of God found peace and freedom as they worshipped the one true God and made Him known to the world.

Israel's journey to freedom holds many applications to the development of our own faith in God. Studying God's direct involvement in the history of His people will help us see and trust His involvement in our complex lives today. As we watch God sanctifying His people through many experiences over a long period of time, we will better appreciate how God uses everyday circumstances to produce holiness in us. As we observe God's workings with Israel in the midst of a hostile world, we will learn to expect opposition to our faith, and learn to face the challenges of life with courage and certainty of God's ultimate victory.

As we embark on this fascinating study of ancient history, we will above all become more aware of His faithful hand on our lives and find new freedom in trusting Him more.

THE BIRTH OF A DELIVERER

Exodus 1-2

Joseph had died and a new king, who did not know Joseph and therefore had no sympathy toward his people, ruled the nation of Egypt. This king enslaved the Israelites and forced them to do hard labor to further build his kingdom. Yet God was blessing Abraham's descendants, as He had promised, even while they were slaves in a foreign land. The Israelites became so numerous that the new Pharaoh was threatened by their potential power and set out to weaken them by increasing their forced labor.

But the more oppressed they were, the more the Hebrew people multiplied and spread until they were all over the land! One translation of Exodus 1:6 reads, "Yet the Children of Israel bore fruit, they swarmed, they became many, they grew mighty in number--exceedingly, yes, exceedingly; the land filled up with them."

Because hard labor and ruthless treatment failed to curb the Israelites' growth in numbers, the king resorted to violence. He instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies at birth. However, the Hebrews midwives proved more shrewd than Pharaoh. Out of fear and respect for God, they disobeyed the king. When he required an explanation, they told him that the Hebrew women were so vigorous that they gave birth before a midwife could get there. Clearly obsessed with a perceived power struggle between him and the Hebrew slaves, Pharaoh responded with the order that all male babies be thrown in the Nile.

It was against this backdrop that Israel's future deliverer, Moses, was born. When he was born, Moses' parents sensed that he was special and hid him for three months (Hebrews 11:23). When he could no longer be hidden, his mother, Jochebed, made a waterproof basket in which she placed her son wrapped in a blanket. As Jochebed set the basket afloat on the Nile, Moses' sister, Miriam, ran along the bank to watch. It so happened that Pharaoh's daughter, who was out bathing in the Nile, discovered the basket and decided to adopt the beautiful Hebrew infant. Miriam stepped forward to offer to find a nursemaid among the Hebrews. Pharaoh's daughter agreed and ended up paying Jochebed to nurse Moses through infancy (probably about three to four years).

Both Pharaoh and the Nile River were worshipped as gods in Egypt but were unable to prevail against the God who was with the Hebrew slaves. Indeed, Pharaoh had no idea of the power that stood against him on behalf of these people. In His providence, God used the natural love of a mother for her child and the tender heart of Pharaoh's own daughter towards a baby's cry to thwart the evils of Pharaoh. God would deliver His people, and the deliverer would be raised in Pharaoh's palace by his own daughter!

After he had grown up, Moses went out to where his own people labored and saw an Egyptian beating a slave. Moses came to the defense of this fellow Hebrew by killing the Egyptian and hiding the body in the sand! The next day when Moses went out to his people, he came upon two Hebrews

fighting. When he stepped in to try to settle the differences, the man in the wrong rejected Moses' authority, saying, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" This taunting statement told Moses that the murder was public knowledge, and he fled Egypt in fear. Sure enough, Pharaoh determined to kill Moses when he discovered what had happened. Moses traveled through the Sinai Desert on foot, finally stopping in Midian,⁵ some two hundred miles from Egypt. As he sat down to rest by a water well, Moses encountered yet another incident of injustice, this time among foreigners. When the daughters of Reuel, a priest of Midian,⁶ came to water their father's flocks at the well, some shepherds came and pushed them aside. But Moses stepped in, forced the shepherds back and watered Reuel's flocks himself. Consequently, the girls' father asked Moses to stay at his home. Later, Moses married Reuel's daughter, Zipporah, and had a son whom he named Gershom. Moses would have another son and reside in Midian for some forty years (cf. Acts 7:29-30).

During this time, the king of Egypt died, and the new Pharaoh intensified the oppression of the Israelite slaves. In desperation, they cried out for help. Chapter 2 closes with the spotlight turned toward God and what He would do. The author of Exodus⁷ used four short phrases to describe God's response: God *heard* their groaning; God *remembered* His covenant with Abraham; God *saw* the Children of Israel; and God *knew*. God was intimately aware of their sufferings and was working behind the scenes to bring about their promised deliverance.

Read Exodus 1:1-2:10.

1. God had promised Abraham innumerable descendants who would form a nation. Even though enslaved and oppressed in Egypt, what indicated that God was working out His promise to Abraham in spite of the circumstances (1:7, 12)?

Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

2. a. Why did Pharaoh fear the increase of the Hebrew slaves (1:9-10).

b. What first attempts did Pharaoh make to try to curb the Hebrew population growth (1:14, 16)?

3. a. How did the midwives respond wisely to the Pharaoh's command (1:17-19)?

Note: Biblically, *fear of the Lord* (vs. 17) denotes "reverent trust" in the Lord.

b. How did God reward the courage and godly choices of the midwives (1:20-21)?

4. What final attempt did Pharaoh make at thwarting the Hebrew population growth (1:22)?

5. Women were regarded as the most weak and powerless in ancient society. Even so, what women did God use to confound the powerful Pharaoh's plans (1:17-21; 2:1-10)?

Read Exodus 2:11-25.

6. a. Moses would become God's chosen leader and judge for Israel as they became a nation. What attitudes and character traits were evident in his life which would equip him for these tasks (2:11-13, cf. Acts 7:23-28, esp. v. 25)?

b. Why did Moses flee Egypt, and where did he go (2:14-15)?

Reference: Note 5, *Midian*, and Note 6, *priest of Midian*, p. 13.

7. a. What did Moses' response to the situation at the Midian well reiterate about his character (2:16-17)?

b. What resulted from Moses' actions at the well (2:18-22)?

8. a. The situation in Egypt intensified while Moses was in Midian. What did the Israelites do (2:23)?

b. What was God's response (2:24-25)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

When God Seems Distant

During their terrible bondage, the Israelites had only the promise of God to their forefather, Abraham, to hold onto for hope. But as the years passed,

their prayers remained unanswered, and the situation became unbearable. There seemed no end in sight, and God seemed distant, if there at all.

We all go through times when things seem to only get worse, and we are tempted to believe God has distanced Himself from our great need. Prayers of faith and hope may become groans of pain accompanied by a growing lack of faith in God's ability to help or that He is even aware or concerned about our distress.

These are times to remember the story of Israel's deliverance. During Israel's suffering, God was not distant nor detached, but silently working to bring about the promised freedom from bondage. Despite Pharaoh's cruelty, God continued to build the Hebrew nation and raise up their deliverer, Moses, in Pharaoh's own palace! Although God may have seemed non-existent or uninvolved, He was in fact preparing to move in a phenomenal way to fulfill His promises to Abraham and his descendants.

Perhaps the most important truth to be learned here is that it is always too soon to stop trusting God. When we are in distress and the answers to our prayers seem delayed, He is not distant, but near. He is working silently toward deliverance and the fulfillment of His promises to those who love Him.

As we begin our study of *Journey to Freedom*, let's make some observations about the wonderful implications of these truths and examine other Scriptures that have to do with times when God seems distant.

1. a. What are some long-term "bondages" or recurring distresses that are common to our human experience?

b. What negative thoughts about God might result from enduring the pain of these issues?

2. What do these Scriptures encourage us to believe even when we cannot see what God is doing?

Psalm 34:18

Psalm 121:2-3

Isaiah 33:6

3. Psalm 68:19 promises that the Lord daily bears our burdens. What does Hebrews 7:24-25 promise those who come to God through His Son, Jesus Christ?

4. As Jesus prays for us, what are we to do?

Philippians 4:6-7

I Peter 5:7

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalm 27:14

Psalm 55:22

5. What is the promise God will surely fulfill as we trust in Him?

Jeremiah 29:11

Summary

6. In what ways was God at work on behalf of His people even though they may have felt He had abandoned them?

7. a. What areas of trust are you confronted with in your life today?

b. What does this story say to you about your own situation?

8. Psalm 86 is a beautiful guide for prayer in times of difficulty. List the attributes of God that are proclaimed in this Psalm. Then list the attitudes and choices we can make to experience the freedom of faith to be discovered in times of adversity.

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *The Abrahamic Covenant* (Genesis 12:1-4). God's promise to Abram was first given to him when God called him to leave his father's household and his own country to follow Him into a new land. The promise involved two things: 1) Abraham would have numerous descendants and become a great nation which would be blessed by God; 2) Through his descendants, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Later, the promise was confirmed with an everlasting covenant, and a third promise was added: 3) God would give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan, where he then lived as an alien, as an everlasting possession (17:1-8).

God's original blessing on all mankind (Genesis 1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring. In various ways and degrees, these promises were reaffirmed to Abram (15:5-21; 17:4-8; 18:18-19; 22:17-18), to Abram's son Isaac (26:2-4), to Isaac's son Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15; 35:11-12; 46:3) and to Moses (Exodus 3:6-8; 6:2-8). The promise to bless the world through Abraham's descendants is quoted in Acts 3:25 with reference to Peter's Jewish listeners (see Acts 3:12)--Abram's physical descendants--and in Galatians 3:8 with reference to Paul's Gentile listeners--Abram's spiritual descendants.

2 Pharaoh. This meant "great house" in Egyptian. It was a royal title, not the king's personal name. (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 88). Pharaoh was considered a god in Egypt, along with many other gods such as the Nile.

3 Septuagint. The first and most important of a number of ancient translations of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek between 280 and 180 B.C.

4 The date of the exodus, or departure from Egypt, "seems to be fixed with a fair degree of accuracy by 1 Kings. We are told that 'the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel' was the same as 'the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt' (1 Kings 6:1). Since the former was c. 966 B. C., the latter--and thus the date of the exodus--was c. 1446 (assuming that the 480 in 1 Kings 6:1 is to be taken literally). The 40-year period of Israel's wanderings in the desert, which lasted from c. 1446 to c. 1406, would have been the most likely time for Moses to write the bulk of what is today known as the Pentateuch" (see Note 7 below). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 2. Also see note on Exodus 1:11, p. 105, *The NIV Life Application Bible*.

5 Midian. The Midianites probably descended from one of Abraham's younger sons (Genesis 25:2). They lived in southeastern Sinai and west central Arabia on either side of the Gulf of Aqaba (an arm the Red Sea).

6 Priest of Midian. His personal name was Reuel, which means, "friend of God." This name is used interchangeably with Jethro, which may have been a title meaning, "his excellency." (2:18; 3:1). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 90.

7 The author/compiler of Exodus and the other four books of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) is historically believed to be Moses by Jews and Christians alike. Several statements in Exodus indicate that Moses wrote certain sections of the book (see 17:14; 24:4; 34:27). Joshua 8:31 refers to the command of Exodus 20:25 as having been "written in the Book of the Law of Moses." New Testament passages, such as Mark 7:10; 12:26 and Luke 2:22-23, point to Moses as the author of

Exodus. Taken together, these references strongly suggest that Moses was largely responsible for writing the book--a traditional view not convincingly challenged by the commonly held notion that the Pentateuch as a whole contains four underlying sources. *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 2 and 84.

LESSON 2

DIVINE CALL AND HUMAN RESPONSE

Exodus 3:1-4:17

In our previous lesson we left Moses in Midian with a wife and child, working for His father-in-law, Jethro. According to Acts 7:30, about forty years had passed since he had fled Egypt, where his fellow Hebrews continued to suffer cruel slavery. Perhaps Moses had tried to forget his intense desire to help his people. But things changed one day as he was tending Jethro's flock near Mt. Horeb. There, from a burning bush miraculously unconsumed by the flames, God revealed Himself to Moses and commissioned him to return to Egypt to lead his people out of bondage and into the promised land!¹ For Moses, his old life of shepherding was over, and a new life as deliverer was about to begin.

But Moses did not follow without resistance. He knew the power of Egypt and that the task before him was humanly impossible. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" was Moses' earnest response. What followed was a dialogue during which God patiently dealt with Moses' objections one at a time.

One of Moses' major concerns was going to the leaders of Israel with such limited personal knowledge of God. The people might ask him, "What is His name?" Perhaps Moses feared that he would be exposed for his spiritual immaturity in the face of men intimately acquainted with the God of their fathers. Moses did not know himself who God was. How could he represent Him? To Moses' question, God answered "*I AM WHO I AM*," or, "*I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE*."² This name by which God identified Himself to Moses signified His presence with His people in both the present and

future. They would not need to be concerned about divine arbitrariness or capriciousness; God could be depended upon to be unchanging and faithful. God told Moses that the sign of this truth would be that after being supernaturally delivered from bondage in Egypt, they would return to worship on the very mountain on which Moses now stood. Moses could only really grow to know the character and saving power of the ever-present God as he walked with God through the acts of deliverance He was about to perform for Israel.

God instructed Moses to take the divine message he had received to the elders³ of Israel, who would listen to him. He was to go to Pharaoh to tell him that the LORD had met with him and instructed the Israelites to take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to Him. When Pharaoh refused, God would "stretch out His hand" and perform such wonders among the Egyptians that they would be eager for the Israelites to leave, gladly giving them their Egyptian wealth to take with them.

Then God gave Moses three miraculous signs to perform which would prove God had met with him and was with him. When thrown to the ground, Moses' shepherd staff turned into a snake, then back to a staff as Moses retrieved it. Then as Moses reached inside his cloak, his hand would turn leprous, then would be healed again. Finally, God promised Moses that if further proof were needed, he should take water from the Nile, and it would turn to blood when he poured it on the ground.

But even in the face of these miracles, Moses expressed another great concern: his lack of eloquence. Although God promised to help him to speak and teach him what to say, Moses pleaded, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Moses felt so inadequate as a spokesman for God that even God's promise of help did not encourage him. So God permitted Moses' brother, Aaron, to speak for Moses; Moses would tell Aaron what to say as God revealed it to him (4:16).

God had chosen and prepared Moses to be His instrument of deliverance for Israel; the message of God and responsibility would be entrusted to Moses alone. So, with staff in hand, Moses set out to Egypt with God's name as a pledge that the LORD would be with him.

Read Exodus 3:1-10.

1. What were God's first words to Moses, and how did Moses respond (3:4-6)?

Reference: Note 4, *angel of the LORD* (VS. 2), p. 23.

2. What did God tell Moses that He wanted to do for His people and why (3:7-8)?

3. What did God commission Moses to do (3:10)?

Read Exodus 3:11-4:17.

4. What objections did Moses make regarding God's direction for his life?

a. 3:11

b. 3:13

c. 4:1

d. 4:10

e. 4:13

5. What assurance did God give Moses in response to his first objection (3:12)?

6. How did God answer Moses' second concern (3:14-15)?

Reference: Note 1, *I AM*, p. 22.

7. Summarize the directions and promises of future events God gave Moses.

3:16-18a

3:18b-20

3:21-22

8. Describe the signs God gave Moses to prove He was from God (4:2-9).

9. a. How did God finally resolve Moses' fourth objection about his lack of eloquence (4:14-16)?

b. What were the LORD's final instructions to Moses (4:17)?

10. What do you observe about the character of God in this dialogue with Moses?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

When We Feel Inadequate

Moses was ready to be used by God to free his people at age forty when he was a prince in Egypt. But his response to God's call at age eighty, after having been a humble shepherd for forty years, was a very different: "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Why did God call Moses in the second state rather than the first? Why as a humbled shepherd but not a confident prince of Egypt?

Throughout Scripture, we see God calling the most unlikely people to do His tasks...choosing "the weak things of the world to shame the strong...so that no one may boast before Him" (I Corinthians 1:27,29).

In His own way, God had prepared Moses. Within the courts of Pharaoh, Moses had learned about leadership of a nation from the world's most powerful leaders of the day. He had attended the most elite schools of Egypt to prepare him to pen most of the first five books of the Bible.

Moses had also been prepared by God on the back side of the desert while tending Jethro's flocks. There he learned to exist in the wilderness where he would later carry the responsibility of leading the nation of Israel in their long pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Most importantly, the wilderness experience would build the humility Moses needed to be greatly used of God. His sense of inadequacy enabled Moses to trust in God's strength and wisdom, rather than his own.

Like Moses, God will use all aspects of our past and present circumstances to equip us for the tasks He calls us to. He wastes nothing if we turn our lives over to Him moment by moment. God only asks for us to be available, and when we recognize our own inadequacy, we are more sensitive to his

leadership in our lives. It is from this position of humility and faith that God can best use us to achieve His purposes for our lives.

God's desire was to use Moses as His instrument to rescue the needy Israelites. Moses would only grow to know and trust God as he chose to submit to His training program and take steps of faith in following Him. Like Moses, on our journey toward freedom there are steps of faith and consequent fears we will experience. But God understands these fears, and deals with us graciously, as He did with Moses, always promising "to be there with us."

In this lesson, we will look at some principles that encourage faith in the face of our inadequacies.

1. How does Numbers 12:3 describe Moses?

2. a. What do the Scriptures promise the one who is humble in spirit?

Psalm 18:27

Psalm 25:9

Proverbs 3:34

Proverbs 11:2

b. Exodus 33:11a states that God could speak to Moses face to face, as to a friend. Why do you think humility is necessary for intimacy with God and for receiving His strength for service?

3. Humility in the biblical sense is not a place of weakness. It is a disposition of yieldedness to God's guidance and authority which allows God to give us His strength (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:9). This was the strength

He would provide for Moses to face the powerful Pharaoh of Egypt. The same strength is modeled perfectly in the life of Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 11:29; John 6:38; Philippians 2:5-8). Moses reached a place of humility, and therefore strength, through the experiences of his life.

a. What are some ways Moses was humbled throughout his life?

b. What types of experiences can teach us invaluable lessons about our need for God's strength?

4. Humility, or submission to God's leadership, is developed in our lives through various means, and leads to freedom from dependence on ourselves. What does God promise when we realize our need for His grace?

Proverbs 3:5-6

2 Corinthians 9:8

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Ephesians 2:8-10

5. a. John 15 records how Jesus Christ described a life of submission to God. What does He promise?

John 15:5, 7-8, 9-10

John 14:15-17

Reference: Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.

b. According to the following, what freedom will we experience as we learn to abide in Christ?

John 15:11

Galatians 5:6b

Galatians 5:22-23a

Summary

6. a. Over the years of your life, what experiences have caused you to see your own helplessness?

b. How can the failures and struggles of your life actually better equip you to be used of God to help others?

7. a. What strengths has God built into your life over time?

b. How can these strengths be used for His redemptive purposes in others' lives?

8. a. Whether you have known the Lord for a long time or are just beginning to study His Word, what is key to finding His purposes for your life?

b. What favorite Scripture verse from this lesson best relates this principle to you?

LESSON 2 NOTES:

1 Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

2 *I AM WHO I AM* or *I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE* is the name by which God wished to be known and worshipped in Israel--the name that expressed his character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of his people (see v. 12, where "I will be" is completed by "with you"; see also 34:5-7).

In 3:15 God told Moses to say to the sons of Israel that "YHWH, the God of your fathers... sent you." YHWH is the third person form of the same verb, *to be*, and means *He is* or *He will be* which is the form of the verb used when *we* speak of God. (i.e. God says, "I AM," and we say, "He is." While correct pronunciation of the Hebrew word YHWH has been lost, "Jehovah" is an incorrect spelling that developed from combining the consonants of the name with the vowels of a word for "Lord" (Adonai). "Yahweh" is probably the original pronunciation. The name eventually ceased to be pronounced because later Jews thought it too holy to be uttered and feared violating Exodus 20:7 and Leviticus 24:16. It is translated LORD in the NIV translation. *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 91, 279.

3 *elders* (3:16). "The Hebrew for this word means literally "bearded ones," perhaps reflecting the age, wisdom, experience and influence necessary for a man expected to function as an elder. As heads of local families and tribes, "elders" had a recognized position also among the Babylonians, Hittites, Egyptians, Moabites and Midianites. Their duties included judicial arbitration and sentencing as well as military leadership and counsel." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 91.

4 *angel of the LORD* (3:2) is used synonymously with "the LORD" and "God" in Exodus 3:4. Because of this, traditional Christian interpretation

has held that this and other similar narratives in the Old Testament of this "angel" were theophanies, or a preincarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Messenger-Servant. But whether this "angel" was the second person of the Trinity or the Lord's personal messenger who spoke on His behalf (and so was identified with the One who sent him) remains uncertain. *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 29, 90.

5 Holy Spirit. God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity; three divine persons with the same essence as God. The Holy Spirit, known as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Jesus Christ (John 1:12, 14:16-17). The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit not as an "it," but rather a "He," a distinct personality. He might also be referred to as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6). In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit brings about regeneration or spiritual birth in the believer. While the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, we can see the evidence of His work (3:8). The Scriptures further tell us that when we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in you," as in Colossians 1:27b.

LESSON 3

IT'S ALL IN A NAME

Exodus 4:29-7:7

Having accepted God's commission, Moses returned to his people in Egypt, and, with Aaron as his spokesman, called together the elders of the Israelites. As God had promised, the people believed that God had spoken to Moses and the signs God had given Moses to confirm his leadership. With hope and unity, they spontaneously bowed down and worshipped the LORD, for He had seen their suffering and had promised to become active on their behalf.

In this strength of spirit, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and confronted him with God's message: "This is what the LORD (YAHWEH), the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go.'" Pharaoh's response was to belittle the God of the Hebrew slaves. He established his position clearly: "I do not know YAHWEH, and I will not let Israel go." Furthermore, he accused Moses and Aaron of distracting the people from their work and increased their workload to an unbearable level.

With this turn of events, the high point of faith and worship quickly faded into division and discouragement. Moses was renounced again by the people, who were ready to trade any thought of deliverance for a return to the previous state of affairs, which now seemed tolerable! Moses complained to God, questioning his whole mission and accusing God of bringing trouble upon the people instead of the promised deliverance.

God offered no defense or comment in response to Moses' accusation, but simply restated His plan: "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh..." (6:1), and He again promised to force Pharaoh to drive the people out of Egypt. But more importantly, the LORD promised Moses that their deliverance would give the Israelites a great revelation of God, greater than

their forefathers had known. Those gone before knew Him as God Almighty, *El Shaddai*, but not as YAHWEH¹ the ever-present and faithful God who would be with His people. Exodus 6:6-8 reflects the actions with which God promised to reveal His character as YAHWEH to Israel: "*I will bring you out... I will deliver you... I will redeem you... I will take you as my people... I will be your God... I will bring you to the land... I will give it to you... then you will know that I AM YAHWEH, your God.*"

Sadly, when Moses reported God's message of promise to the Israelites, they could not hear it because of their overwhelming discouragement and cruel bondage. Even so, Moses continued to listen to God for his people.

In contrast, Pharaoh's heart was already hardened. God told Moses that even though he would do incredible signs and wonders in Egypt, Pharaoh would refuse to listen. But God's plan for Israel would not be thwarted. Through His mighty deliverance, all of Egypt and Israel would know the name of the LORD -- all would know YAHWEH, the great I AM of Israel.

Read Exodus 4:29-5:21.

1. How did the Israelites respond when Moses and Aaron first told them of God's concern for their affliction and His plan for deliverance (4:31)?

2. a. How did Pharaoh receive Moses' statement from God (5:2)?

b. How did Pharaoh respond to their request to go to the wilderness to worship God (5:3-14).

3. a. How did Pharaoh receive the reasonable appeal of the Israelite foremen (5:15-18)?

b. As a result, what was the attitude of the Israelite foremen toward Moses and Aaron? (5:19-21).

Read Exodus 5:22-6:12.

4. a. What complaint did Moses bring to God (5:22-23)?

b. In response, what did the LORD declare to Moses (6:1)?

5. a. Exodus 6:2-8 could be titled, "The Gospel of Exodus." How did the LORD begin and end this dialogue with Moses (6:2, 8c)?

Reference: Note 2, *I AM...*, p. 22.

b. What aspects of God's name did the founding fathers of Israel-- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--understand (6:3)?

c. What ancient promises was God being faithful to in the promised deliverance of Israel (6:3a, 4, 5c, 7a, 8; Genesis 17:1-8; 15:13-14)?

Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

6. In Exodus 6:6, God gave Israel further revelation about His name. What do the first three verbs reveal about what God would do for Israel?

7. How did the people respond to this great revelation of God to Moses (6:9)?

Read Exodus 6:28-7:7.

8. a. Describe the relationship between Moses and Pharaoh from God's perspective (7:1).

b. Describe the relationship between Moses and Aaron in Exodus 7:1.

Note: A prophet's responsibility was to receive and then communicate the message of God to the people. Moses was God's chosen prophet, but because of Moses' deep sense of inadequacy in public speaking (4:10-16), God would give Moses His message, and Moses would then tell Aaron what to say (making Moses "as God" to Aaron).

9. Pharaoh made the claim that he did not know Israel's God (5:2). How would he and Egypt come to know the name of the LORD (7:5)?

10. What characteristics of Moses and Aaron does this passage highlight (7:6-7)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Grace We Need in Desperate Times

The people of Israel hoped for an instant deliverance. . . obviously, so did Moses. They expected God to quickly deliver them from their painful circumstances as a result of their obedience. But instead, He allowed the situation to become far worse. To the people, Moses and Aaron seemed to

have deluded them. To Moses, God looked cruel. Faith vanished in the face of their terrible disappointment and increased suffering.

But God understood their confusion and graciously honored their steps of faith. He knew what they did not: their situation would have to get worse before it got better to provide them a more complete deliverance. Pharaoh's hard-hearted choices were necessary to bring about the mighty acts of God's judgment that would cause the king to free the Israelites. Also, these acts would make Israel's deliverance so spectacular that fear of Israel's God would paralyze the surrounding kings, protecting Israel during their wilderness travels and supporting their conquest of the Promised Land.

But more than this, God's way would help Israel come to experience His magnificent grace toward them. Their bondage, not caused by God, but rather by proud, ruthless and powerful Egyptian leaders, could in no way be ended by their own efforts. The more intensely the people felt their need, the more they would be able to comprehend God's faithfulness and grace as He intervened in history to bring about their deliverance. They would come to know Him not just as God Almighty, but as their personal Savior.

The parallels are many with our spiritual pilgrimage. First, we must be careful not to blame God for situations in our lives which human wrong choices have caused. And when we realize our desperate need, we are most able to recognize and receive the wonderful grace of God to deliver us. He will ultimately free the faithful from every bondage of this life, but the discovery here and now of His unchanging presence and infinite love can bring a lasting joy to the soul which cannot be touched by life's ups and downs.

The Israelites could not see the overall picture, but their obedience *had* begun the process of deliverance that would lead them to freedom. What a story for us to keep in mind when we take steps of faith and obedience only to meet obstacles greater than those from which we sought relief. This is not, as we can see from the story, a time to give up, but rather to know that God is using the worsened circumstances to bring about a more complete deliverance. As we continue our study, let's make some observations from the Scriptures related to God's grace found in desperate times.

1. a. What situations in life can cause us to see our need for God's grace?

b. How might our response be similar to Israel's in Exodus 6:9?

2. a. How was Moses' response a better one? What did he do in Exodus 5:22-23?

b. What do the Scriptures instruct us to do in times of despair?

Psalm 62:8

c. In his book, *Why Us?*, Warren Wiersbe states that what we need most in times of suffering is not an explanation of why, but rather a fresh revelation of God's goodness and faithfulness to us. What does God promise those who approach Him honestly, as Moses did?

Psalm 34:18

Jeremiah 33:3

Isaiah 42:16

3. What was the Psalmist's discovery as he drew close to God in desperate times?

Psalm 16:8, 11

Psalm 73:23-24

Psalm 73:25-26

4. What do these Scriptures instruct us to do in desperate times?

Psalm 27:13-14

Psalm 37:3a, 4

Psalm 37:5-7

Psalm 37:8-9

1 Peter 5:6-7

5. Of what do the following verses assure those who trust God through hard times?

Exodus 14:14

Romans 8:28

1 Peter 5:10

Summary

6. What have you learned from Moses about honesty with God regarding your needs?

7. Why is it important to wait on God when we are discouraged by the results of a step of faith?

8. a. How is the grace of God extended to you today? What promises does He ask you to put faith in in desperate times?

b. What are the greatest results of drawing near to God and trusting Him in desperate times?

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 2, *I AM...*, p. 22.

2 Redemption. "The concept of redemption can only be fully understood by glimpsing the Biblical context of human beings held captive by the power of forces they cannot defeat. Only through intervention can that slavery be broken and freedom accomplished, often by paying a ransom. In the Old Testament, God intervened on behalf of Israel, taking the initiative in the great redemptive event from Egypt, the exodus (see Genesis 15:13-14; Exodus 1:11-14; 12:31-42; Psalm 105:23-39), where the goal was the enjoyment of life in the promised land. References in the Old Testament to redemption from sin point forward to the redemption from sin accomplished in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:13-14). Though in the human arena freedom can be purchased through money, no human being can break the bondage of another human being to sin. No person can redeem another human being. We are all slaves to sin: Christ, however, paid the ransom with His blood, His death (Exodus 12:12-13; Leviticus 11,14; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 1:7; I Timothy 2:6). The goal of our redemption is to enjoy freedom from the guilt and power of sin and to live a life of service that reflects our new standing (Romans 3:24; 6:7,22; Galatians 5:1,13; I Peter 2:16). The goal will be fully achieved only at the resurrection on the last day (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:14)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, pp. 137-138, 1391.

LESSON 4

GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH JUDGMENT THE PLAGUES: PART I

Exodus 7:8-9:7

In the previous lesson, the Israelites were in such a state of bondage and discouragement that they were unable to hear the good news of God's name, *I will free* you and *I will redeem* you, which He had revealed to Moses. Pharaoh had flaunted his power over them by increasing their labor to an intolerable state and by taking a stand against their God, saying, "Who is the LORD that I should obey him?"

Now, as the LORD had instructed, Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh a second time, who asked for a sign of their God. In response to Pharaoh's request, Aaron threw down his staff, which became a snake. When Pharaoh's sorcerers duplicated the miracle, Aaron's snake swallowed all of theirs. The miracle served to demonstrate the genuine conflict of powers between Moses' God and Pharaoh, as well as to foreshadow the outcome of the battle. Moses and Aaron were obvious victors in the contest, but Pharaoh chose to harden his heart,¹ just as the LORD had predicted (7:8-13). God knew from the beginning that Pharaoh would continue to resist and that all the powerful signs would not evoke belief. By the hard route, Pharaoh would come to know God's name, and that there was no one like Him in all the earth (9:14).

So the stage was set; the battle lines were drawn, and soon ten incredible plagues would reveal the existence and awesome power of Israel's God.

In the first plague, the touch of Moses' staff turned the water of the Nile

into *blood*. Because the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate this plague, Pharaoh was unmoved. The people were forced to dig beside the Nile for their drinking water. Seven days later, Moses stretched out his staff, and *frogs* covered the land. The magicians used sorcery to duplicate this miracle, so once again Pharaoh was unyielding. Continuing to follow the explicit directions given him by the LORD, Moses' staff caused the dust of Egypt to become *gnats*, a miracle which the magicians could not reproduce. They acknowledged the victor in the contest, confessing to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (8:19). Even so, Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

In the fourth plague, *flies* covered the land of Egypt. But, as the LORD had promised, this plague would not touch the land of Goshen where the Hebrews lived. The same distinction occurred with the fifth plague, in which all the Egyptian *livestock* died. But, as the LORD had promised Pharaoh, not one Hebrew animal died. These plagues highlighted God's intent to help and protect His people while judging Egypt. In the revelation of His name to Moses (6:6-8), God had said that through mighty acts of judgment, He would become their God, and they would become His people. Israel also was coming to know the name of YAHWEH and His special relationship to them.

After the land was ruined by flies, Pharaoh offered his first compromise to Moses: they could sacrifice to their God right there in the land of Egypt. Moses responded that the Egyptians would be repulsed by this and predicted they would stone his people. Then Pharaoh agreed to let the people go a short distance into the desert to worship. However, after God removed the flies, Pharaoh retracted his promise. The livestock plague brought no change in Pharaoh's stance, either. His heart remained "unyielding, and he would not let the people go" (9:7).

Read Exodus 7:8-14.

1. a. What happened when Aaron threw down his staff as the LORD had commanded (7:10-12)?

b. What did this foreshadow about the results of the battle to come between Pharaoh and God?

2. Describe the attitude of Pharaoh's heart before God sent the first plague (7:13-14).

Reference: Note 1, *Pharaoh's hardened heart*, p. 41.

Read Exodus 7:15-24.

3. a. How did the LORD describe the first plague to Moses so that the prophet could warn Pharaoh of its coming (7:17b-18)?

b. What did God intend Pharaoh to learn from this plague (7:17a)?

4. a. By what power did the Egyptian magicians duplicate the plague (7:22)?

Reference: Note 2, *secret arts*, p. 41.

b. What was Pharaoh's response (7:22-23)?

Read Exodus 7:25-8:15.

5. a. How did the LORD describe the second plague exactly as it would happen (8:2-4)?

b. What did Pharaoh request (8:8)?

6. a. What was Moses' intention in allowing Pharaoh to set the time that he would pray to God for the frogs to be taken away (8:9-10)?

b. What was Pharaoh's amazing response to God's answer to prayer (8:12-15)?

Read Exodus 8:16-19.

7. a. What did the magicians concede when they were unable to reproduce the plague of gnats (8:19)?

b. Did this have any effect on Pharaoh's heart (8:19b)?

Read Exodus 8:20-32.

8. a. What did God intend Pharaoh to learn from the distinction He made between peoples in the plague of flies (8:22-23)?

b. What would Israel also learn through this distinction as God spared them from not only this plague, but also the fifth (9:4,6), the seventh (9:26), the ninth (10:23) the tenth (11:7), and probably also the sixth and eighth plagues (9:11; 10:6)?

9. a. How did Pharaoh attempt to make Moses and the people compromise what God had told them to do (8:25, cf. 8:27)?

b. What did Moses think would have resulted (8:26)?

10. What did Pharaoh promise so that God would remove the flies (8:28), then what did he do (8:30-31)?

Read Exodus 9:1-7.

11. What did the LORD promise Pharaoh that came to pass in the plague of the livestock (9:7)

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Freedom from Stubbornness

As we observe Moses and Pharaoh, we see two men in contrast standing firm. But for Moses, his stand was one of persevering, or persisting, in the way of faith. Pharaoh's stand, on the other hand, was one of stubbornness, a headstrong resistance toward God and His way. After giving Pharaoh many opportunities to change his mind, the LORD allowed Pharaoh to have his way, confirming Pharaoh's decision to resist Him and responding accordingly.

God knew Pharaoh's stubbornness would not change and therefore incorporated Pharaoh's decision into His eternal plan of redemption. But Pharaoh was destroyed by his resistance toward God, and an entire nation suffered as a result.

While it is easy to stand in awe of Pharaoh's obstinacy, we can learn from him about the need for freedom from this common human trait. Let's look at the price to be paid for a stubborn spirit, and God's desire that we would not be held under its bondage.

1. How would you define stubbornness?

2. a. What do you think were the main causes of stubbornness in Pharaoh?

b. The following Scriptures describe Pharaoh and his eventual downfall. What do these also suggest may cause stubbornness?

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 15:27a

Jeremiah 17:11

2 Peter 2:10

3. a. Later, we will see how Israel, as God's people, also exhibited stubbornness toward God. What characterized their stubbornness?

Psalm 78:8

Jeremiah 32:33 (Isaiah 48:4)

b. What warnings did the LORD give Israel?

Psalm 32:9

Malachi 2:2

4. a. What causes people to be resistant or stubborn toward God's leadership in their lives?

b. What are some subtle ways we ignore God and His leading for our lives?

c. What general results of ignoring God and His principles for life are exemplified in Pharaoh's story?

5. What effect does stubbornness have on our relationships with other people?

6. a. The Bible states that we each have a "fleshly" or "sinful" nature that insists on its own way and is always at war against our desire to do right. How is this battle described in Romans 7:15, 18-23?

Galatians 5:17

b. How is the battle against this stubborn nature won? What choices give power to overcome stubbornness according to the following?

Galatians 5:16

Romans 8:5-7

Reference: Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.

7. a. What kind of wisdom does the Spirit of Christ produce in us when we ask Him to control our lives?

James 3:17

b. The Holy Spirit also constrains us to make a firm stand for right, as Moses did. How is this encouraged in 1 Corinthians 15:58?

Summary

8. a. How did stubbornness keep Pharaoh in bondage, even though he was the king of a great and wealthy nation?

b. How can stubbornness put a person in bondage? Why is it important to combat stubbornness with God and others?

9. a. While stubbornness in relationship with God or others may give a sense of maintaining power and control, how might the opposite really be true?

b. What is the difference between being stubborn and setting healthy boundaries with other people?

10. a. If there are situations in your life where you are wrestling with a stubborn spirit toward God or other people, what choices can you make to overcome it?

b. How will these choices affect your relationship with God and other people?

11. Is there a favorite verse from this lesson you want to remember?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 *Pharaoh's hardened heart.* In the first five of the plagues God brought on Egypt, Pharaoh willfully chose to *harden his heart* toward God (see 7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35). With the sixth plague, God confirmed the Pharaoh's choice to disregard Him. At that point, God began to fulfill the prophecy He had given Moses in 3:20 and 4:21: "I will harden his heart" (cf. 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 92.

The problem of human opposition to God remains a mystery which the Bible does not attempt to resolve logically. Common to Hebrew thought is the idea of two seemingly contradictory ideas held together in tension. It is a *both/and* way of thinking as opposed to the Greek's more logical *either/or* way of thinking. *Both* God's power is supreme and overcomes the forces of evil, *and* each individual retains the power to make real decisions for or against God. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility mysteriously co-exist in this question of Pharaoh's hardened heart. Certainly in the beginning, the expression, "Pharaoh hardened his heart," referred simply to the resistance he had toward the miraculous signs that God demonstrated to achieve the freedom of His people. Each time that a plague was removed, Pharaoh would again feel in control of the situation and resist God's purpose in the sign. Clearly in Exodus 9:2, there is still an *if-then* situation; *if* Pharaoh refuses to let the people go, *then* the LORD will bring a terrible plague. He had a choice. Eventually, after repeated opportunities to let the people go and the resulting signs that demonstrated God's strong hand were resisted, Pharaoh's hardened heart became part of the judgment on Egypt. *Both* Pharaoh resists God according to his own free choice *and* God's judgment on Egypt is such that Pharaoh will not listen. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* p. 153. See also Note 1, *The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart*, p. 49.

2 *secret arts.* (7:11,22). The Egyptian sorcerers and magicians were able to duplicate Moses' miracles by trickery or illusion, or some may have used satanic power since worshipping gods of the underworld was part of their religion. Ironically, whenever the sorcerers duplicated one of Moses' plagues, it only made matters worse. If the magicians had been as powerful as God, they would have reversed the plagues, not added to them." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 114.

LESSON 5

GOD'S REVELATION THROUGH JUDGMENT THE PLAGUES: PART II

Exodus 9:8-11:10

In the sixth plague, *boils* broke out on Egyptian men and animals, causing the magicians to crumble before Moses. Still Pharaoh was unyielding, and now God hardened Pharaoh's heart.¹ After many opportunities to heed Moses' warnings, God allowed Pharaoh's proud and resistant heart to become permanently set.

As the battle intensified, the LORD warned Pharaoh that now He was going to send the full force of His plagues against Egypt. "For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth," He declared. "But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (9:14-16). Pharaoh's belligerence, far from being a threat to God, had been foreordained to bring about the revelation of God in all the earth!

After this proclamation, Moses announced the seventh plague: a fierce *hailstorm*. In this plague, not only would God make a distinction by sparing His people's land of Goshen from the hail, but another distinction was made. This time, Pharaoh's officials were given a choice to obey or disobey God. They were told to bring their livestock and possessions to a place of shelter because everything in the fields would die from the hail. Those who feared the word of the LORD obeyed, and their livestock and servants were spared. But the officials who ignored the LORD's warning were destroyed. It appeared that even some Egyptians were blessed with a knowledge of

and belief in God through the plagues, fulfilling God's promise to bless all peoples of the earth through Abraham's descendants.²

Desperate to stop the hail, Pharaoh experienced a brief moment of repentance. However, when the LORD ended the storm, Pharaoh broke his promise to let the Israelites go. This time, the Scriptures record that Pharaoh *and* his officials hardened their hearts (9:34). Those officials who ignored the word of the LORD also shared the responsibility of Egypt's destruction with Pharaoh.

Before going to Pharaoh to warn him of the next plague, the LORD expressed His purposes for Israel regarding the plagues: ". . . so that you may tell your children and grandchildren . . . how I performed my signs among them [Egyptians] . . . and that you may know that I AM the LORD (YAHWEH)" (10:2). Israel was also coming to know their God through the plagues, and His inclusion of their children and grandchildren was a wonderful promise to be with His people through every new generation.

After this, Moses warned Pharaoh of the eighth plague during which swarming *locusts* would devour every green thing left in Egypt after the hail. On hearing this, Pharaoh's officials pressed him to give in. "Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?" they pleaded. So Pharaoh weakly offered a second compromise to Moses. He would allow the Hebrew men only to go and worship God. But this was unacceptable to Moses, and Pharaoh became angry, driving Moses and Aaron out of his presence. But the locusts brought another quick repentance and promise to allow the people to go worship God at their festival, a promise he once again broke.

The ninth plague was a *thick darkness* in Egypt, lasting three days and preventing anyone from seeing or going anywhere. But in Goshen, where the Israelites lived, there was light. This time, Pharaoh agreed to let the people go if they left their livestock behind.³ But Moses told him they needed all the livestock to be prepared for sacrificial worship. Pharaoh became so furious with Moses that he retorted, "Get out of my sight! Do not appear before me again! . . . The day you see my face you will die" (10:28).

Moses agreed never to come to Pharaoh again and was also "hot with anger" (11:8) as he announced the tenth and final plague. In this plague, every *firstborn son* of man and beast in Egypt would die, including

Pharaoh's son. This, Moses declared, would cause Pharaoh to demand the Hebrew people leave his land.

Read Exodus 9:8-35.

1. Why didn't God destroy the Egyptians through the first five plagues (9:14-16)?

2. a. In the plague of hail, God protected His own people in the land of Goshen. Who else did He protect from the hail? What was special about these people (9:20)?

b. What had God promised Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, that was fulfilled in Egypt? (See Genesis 12:3b.)

3. a. Did Pharaoh truly repent when he asked Moses to pray for the LORD to stop the hail (9:27-28)? What did Moses know (9:30)?

b. What happened as soon as the hail stopped (9:34-35)?

Read Exodus 10:1-29.

4. God used Pharaoh's stubborn arrogance for His purposes (9:16b; 10:1). What did God want Israel to know and do as a result of the miraculous signs done among the Egyptians (10:2)?

Reference: Note 1, *The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart*, p. 49, and Note 2, *I AM*, p. 22.

5. a. How intense was the plague of locusts (10:14-15)?

b. How immense was the plague of darkness (10:21-23a)?

c. The contrast between Goshen and Egypt during the plague of total darkness might have symbolized the struggle of powers that continued throughout the plagues. What was the condition of Israel in the midst of the struggle with Pharaoh (10:23b)?

Reference: Note 4, *I will deal differently*, p. 49.

6. a. What three compromises did Pharaoh offer Moses to allow the people to go and worship their God (8:25-28; 10:8-11, 24-27)?

Reference: Note 3, *leave livestock behind*, p. 49.

b. What was Moses general response to Pharaoh's offers?

Read Exodus 11:1-10.

7. In battle, the victors usually plundered the valuable belongings of the losers. What aspects of a total victory in battle would be evidenced as Israel left Egypt (11:2-3)?

8. How did God describe the difference between the condition of the Egyptians and the Israelites as He gave warning of the last plague (11:6-7)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Freedom from Greed

For years, the Hebrew people had spent their lives building the material grandeur of Egypt and Pharaoh. Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to release the Hebrew slaves was greatly motivated by his greed for power and the riches the slaves afforded him and his kingdom. Greed had not only enslaved the poor Hebrews, but also the rich Egyptians. Finally, as the Israelites left the city, the Egyptian people would be so favorably disposed toward the slaves that they would freely give them their cherished possessions to take with them.

Materialism through the centuries has blinded people to their inhumane treatment of others and from coming to know God. In His teachings, Jesus addressed the issue of money and material possessions more than almost any other topic. As He taught rich and poor alike, He showed that money is not morally neutral, but a power that seeks to dominate people of all economic levels.

But God's desire is to set us free from being controlled by possessions. In this lesson, we will review biblical principles that can help us experience freedom from the domination of material possessions.

1. a. God has gifted some people at investment and money making. What is the focus necessary to be right with God regarding giving and our possessions?

b. What part does heart attitude play in the giving that pleases God and blesses us?

2 a. Why is the topic of greed such a difficult one for us to discuss?

b. How would you define greed?

3. a. Why did greed have a major part in Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrew slaves go?

b. How do the following biblical principles related to greed reflect Pharaoh's experience?

Proverbs 11:28

Proverbs 14:31

Proverbs 18:11

Proverbs 28:27

4. a. What attitudes can save us from Pharaoh's plight?

Proverbs 11:24-25

Proverbs 15:16

Proverbs 19:17

Proverbs 23:4

Jeremiah 9:23-24

b. What other principles about material possessions are given in the following passages?

1 Timothy 6:6-7

1 Timothy 6:9-10

Hebrews 13:5

4. Summarize the principles from these teachings of Jesus that set us free from the domination of things.

Luke 12:15-21

Matthew 6:19-21

Matthew 6:31-33

5. What freeing perspectives on possessions, which apply to rich and poor alike, are found in 1 Timothy 6:17-19?

Summary

6. Pharaoh was enslaved by greed, even though a king. What do you learn from Pharaoh with regard to material possessions?

7. What do you desire to maintain in your life in order to stay free of the domination of material things?

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 *The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart* (9:12; 10:20; 11:10). "Did God really harden Pharaoh's heart and force him to do wrong? Before the ten plagues began, Moses and Aaron announced what God would do if Pharaoh didn't let the people go. But their message only made Pharaoh stubborn--he was hardening his own heart. In so doing, he defied both God and his messengers. Through the first six plagues, Pharaoh's heart grew even more stubborn. After the sixth plague, God passed judgment. Sooner or later, evil people will be punished for their sins. When it became evident that Pharaoh wouldn't change, God confirmed Pharaoh's prideful decision and set the painful consequences of his actions in motion. God didn't force Pharaoh to reject him, rather, he gave him every opportunity to change his mind. In Ezekiel 33:11, God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 121. See also Note 1, *Pharaoh's hardened heart*, p. 41.

2 Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

3 *leave livestock behind* (10:24). Pharaoh wanted to be sure if the Hebrews slaves left, they would come back, thus the insistence that only the men go (10:11), or that they leave livestock behind. Pharaoh's reluctance to let the Hebrew people go was because they were free labor, the builders of Egypt's great cities. It was hard for the ruler of Egypt to let such a great resource go. *The Life Application Bible*, p. 120.

4 *I will deal differently, the LORD makes a distinction* (8:22; 11:7). See also Exodus 33:16. God made a 'distinction' (8:23; 11:7), between Moses' people and Pharaoh's people in the fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, and probably also the sixth and eighth plagues, demonstrating that the LORD could preserve his own people while judging Egypt. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 97.

LESSON 6

PASSOVER: PAST AND PRESENT

Exodus 12:1-13:16

When Pharaoh angrily ordered Moses to leave his presence and never come back, Moses announced the tenth plague that would come on Egypt. In this final judgment, which would cause Pharaoh to at last submit to God, all firstborn sons of both men and animals in Egypt would die.

Then the LORD gave Israel instructions for their protection during the plague, a protection which would forever be called the Passover. The ritual they would perform would allow God to pass over the households of the faithful in Israel as death visited every other family in Egypt.

The narrative on the Passover in Exodus 12 can be confusing unless you understand that it included (1) instructions for that night, and (2) instructions for the yearly celebration which would forever commemorate God's deliverance (see note 7, p. 60 for the breakdown of these two within the passage).

The celebration of the Passover would have such importance in the religious life of the Hebrew community that the LORD instructed Moses to make this the first month of the year for Israel.¹ This would serve as a reminder to Israel that the beginning of her life as the people of God was marked by God's redemptive act in delivering them from the domination of the Egyptians.

In the previous plagues, God had protected His people. But this time there was no automatic exemption for Israel. Instead, God gave Moses and Aaron very specific instructions for the appropriation of His protection. Each family was told to quickly slaughter an unblemished lamb. They were

then instructed to take a bunch of hyssop,² dip it into the basin of blood, and place the blood on the top and both sides of the door frame of their houses. Moses told them that when the LORD went through the land to strike down the Egyptians, He would "pass over" and not destroy the occupants of the houses that were under the sign of the blood.

The distinction made in this plague was not based on the fact that these people were descendants of Abraham, nor on their individual righteousness, but completely on their obedience to God's plan as given through Moses. No one questioned the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the ritual. Instead, the Israelites responded by bowing down in worship and "they did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron" (12:28).

At midnight, death struck all the firstborn in Egypt, including Pharaoh's son. So Pharaoh summoned Moses, commanding him, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go." (12:31--32).

Fearful for their lives, the Egyptians were eager for the Israelites to leave, and freely gave them their silver, gold, and clothing, which Moses had instructed his people to request. The writer of Exodus describes their departure as if they were conquerors, having "plundered the Egyptians" (12:36).

For Israel, the Passover was a memorial to the deliverance from Egypt which had displayed God's redemptive nature toward His people. But the New Testament also explains this great event as a foreshadowing of God's true redemption in Christ. The Israelites' struggle for liberation from an Egyptian tyrant was like Christ's struggle and victory over sin and death, allowing those who believe to experience freedom from these evil destructive forces. The imagery of the perfect lamb which was slaughtered became the symbol for the sinless Son of God, slain on the cross to demonstrate the tremendous price God had to pay for our redemption. Looking back to the events of Passover and Exodus from what Christ accomplished in the New Testament magnifies the intensity of the struggle and the immensity of the victory that was won on the cross.

Read Exodus 12:1-13.

1. a. Describe the lambs to be used for the Passover (12:5).

- b. What sign did God give Israel to ensure them of His protection and deliverance (12:7,13)?

Read Exodus 12:21-23; 27b-28.

2. a. What were the people also instructed to do in order to receive God's protection (12:22c)?

- b. What was their response to Moses' instructions (12:27c-28)?

Read Exodus 12:14-20; 12:24-27; 13:1-16.

3. a. The LORD wanted *every succeeding generation* of Israelites to personalize their redemption through the exodus. What phrases in the following commands emphasize this (12:14, 17, 24-25; 13:3, 4-5, 10)?

- b. Besides the Passover lamb, what were some of the other rituals that would make their salvation real to future descendants of Abraham?
12:14-20 (13:3-10)

Note: *no yeast* (12:19). Yeast later became symbolic of sin, like hypocrisy in Luke 12:1 and malice and wickedness in 1 Corinthians 5:8. The unleavened bread would also remind them of their hasty exodus (cf. 12:39).

Reference: Note 4, *The Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread*, p. 59.

13:1-2, 12-15

Reference: Note 3, *firstborn redemption*, p. 59.

4. a. What part would parents play in the ongoing understanding of God's redemptive love (12:26-27a, 13:14)?

b. How would the Hebrew people be set apart by practicing these rituals (13:9,16)?

Read Exodus 12:43-49.

5. How could a non-Israelite celebrate the LORD's Passover (12:48-49)?

Reference: Note 5, *Circumcision*, p. 59.

Read Exodus 12:29-42.

6. The tenth and final plague caused all of Egypt to acknowledge the name of Israel's God: "I am YAHWEH." What was the ultimate power demonstrated in this plague (12:12, 29-30)?

Reference: Note 6, *judgment on all the gods*, p. 60.

7. a. Why were the Egyptians anxious for the people of Israel to leave quickly (12:33)?

b. How was Israel's exodus like the victory of a conquering people (12:35-36)?

8. Describe the procession out of Egypt (12:37-38).

Note: "The total number of people leaving Egypt is estimated to have been about two million. The 'many other people' may have been Egyptians and others who were drawn to the Hebrews by God's mighty works and who decided to leave Egypt with them." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 123.

9. What promises did God make to Abraham hundreds of years earlier which had now been completely fulfilled (Genesis 15:13-14)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Beginnings of Freedom: Making the Passover Personal

God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt was the salvation event of the Old Testament. This event, rooted in the faithfulness and love of God, would be celebrated annually in the Passover. Additionally, psalmists would write songs about it, and prophets would often point to God's grace, which had been so clearly revealed through the exodus.

The Scriptures reveal that the saving act of the New Testament was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, beautifully foreshadowed in the Passover and Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Jesus, the perfect Passover Lamb, gave His life so that those who believe would be passed over, forgiven of their sins, in the day of judgment. The exodus looked forward to the freedom from sin's bondage which would be provided through faith in Christ.

The elements of the Passover meal--the sacrificial lamb, the unleavened bread and bitter herbs (representing bitter slavery in Egypt)--served to help every new generation of Israelites believe in God's redemptive grace. They also foreshadowed God's ultimate salvation through His Son. The sinless Christ (symbolized by the sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread) gave His life that we might be delivered from "bitter slavery" to sin and death (foreshadowed by the bitter herbs) and set free to live a new life.

As the annual Passover served to remind the Jewish people of God's redemption and deliverance, the LORD's Supper, instituted by Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion, was given to help us and our children understand and put faith in God's great gift of redemption and deliverance in Jesus.

As we contemplate the Passover and exodus of the Israelites, let's look more closely at the parallels in the New Testament which help us to personalize the Passover in our lives today.

1. a. The Scriptures teach that the great bondage common to man is a sinful nature, or inclination to do wrong, which separates us from a holy God and leads to death (Romans 7:21-23; 3:23; 6:23). How did John the Baptist refer to Jesus in John 1:29?

b. What redemption did Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, bring about through His death and resurrection?

1 Peter 1:18-19 (2:22)

Isaiah 53:5-6

Reference: Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32, and Note 3, *firstborn redemption*, p. 59.

2. How did Jesus explain the new promise of God as He ate the Passover meal with His disciples the night before His crucifixion?

Matthew 26:26-28

1 Corinthians 11:24-25

3. a. The celebrations commemorating God's salvation through the Passover and exodus were designed to make the faithfulness and love of God real and personal to individuals in each new generation. How is the celebration of the LORD's Supper similar?

b. The Israelite parents were responsible to explain the rituals to their children to prevent the Passover rituals from losing their meaning in succeeding generations. What is our responsibility as parents today?

4. a. What did the people of Israel have to do in order to receive God's salvation (Exodus 12:27c-28)?

b. What must we do to receive God's salvation through Christ?

Romans 10:9

Romans 3:22-24

5. a. What did the exodus teach the Israelites about God's character which the Passover celebrations reflected to their offspring?

b. What does God's salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, teach about the character of God which we are to pass on to our children?

6. When we declare Jesus Christ to be our personal Lord and Savior, how do these verses describe the new freedom that begins?

2 Corinthians 5:17 (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Summary

7. How was Israel's terrible bondage in Egypt similar to our human struggle with sin and death?

8. How is freedom in Christ different from any other freedom we can experience?

9. If this lesson has made clear for the first time what God has done for you in Christ, perhaps you would want to take a moment and receive the gift of salvation He offers. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for becoming the sacrificial Lamb of God that I might be forgiven of my sin and set free to live a new life in You. I now acknowledge you as my Savior and declare you the Lord of my life.

Amen.

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 *First month* (12:2). The initiation of the *religious* calendar in Israel started the new year on the 14th of Nisan (our April) and was a reminder to Israel that her life as the people of God was grounded in God's redemptive act in the exodus. During the time of the kings, the *civil* or agricultural calendar, which started in the fall, began to be used alongside the religious calendar. Judaism today uses only the calendar that begins in the fall.

2. *Hyssop*. It probably refers to an aromatic plant of the mint family with a straight stalk and white flowers. The hairy surface of the leaves and branches held liquids well and made it suitable for use as a sprinkling device. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 102.

3 *firstborn redemption* (12:29-30). The verb 'redeem' means 'obtain release by means of payment.' Because of the economic importance of pack animals, firstborn donkeys (13:13) were redeemable through sacrificing a lamb. Humans, that is firstborn sons, were to be consecrated to the Lord by their life, not by their death (see Gen. 22:12; Num. 3:39-51, Romans 12:1). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 105.

"Every firstborn child of the Egyptians died, but the Israelite children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been placed on their door frames. So begins the story of redemption, the central theme of the Bible.

Redemption means 'to buy back' or 'to save from captivity by paying a ransom.' One way to buy back a slave was to offer an equivalent or superior slave in exchange. That is the way God chose to buy us back—he offered his Son in exchange for us. In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner. When Jesus came, He substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and restored us to God. Our part is to trust him and accept his gift of eternal life. Our sins have been paid for, and the way has been cleared for us to begin a relationship with God (Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:13-15, 23-26)." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 123. See also Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.

4 *Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread*. These two celebrations really constituted a double festival. These most important of all annual Jewish celebrations commemorated the redemption of the firstborn in Israel (see note 3 above), the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, and the establishment of Israel as a nation redeemed by God. The Passover Feast took place in the evening. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread began on the day after the Passover and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:5-8).

5 *Circumcision* was the cutting off of the foreskin, a practice which originated in various western Semitic cultures as a religious act. The Hebrew rite was instituted by God as a sign of the covenant between Him and Abraham. God commanded Abraham and all his household to be circumcised. The rite was required of every male Jew (descendant of Abraham) and any foreigner joining themselves to the Hebrew nation. This act assured the recipient of admittance to the fellowship of the covenant people and of a share in the promises of God to Israel. Circumcision metaphorically symbolized cutting away pride and sinfulness of the heart" (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Acts 7:51). Because circumcision predated the Laws of Moses, the heart attitude behind this act was first and foremost true faith in God.

6 *judgment on all the gods* (12:12). Each plague revealed the powerlessness of another Egyptian god. The Nile god (Hapi) could not keep the waters from turning to blood. The cow-goddess (Hathor) could not save the Egyptian livestock. The sun-god (Amon-Re), chief Egyptian god, could not prevent the three-day darkness over the land. "The Egyptian gods were (1) impersonal, centering around images like the sun or the river, (2) numerous, (3) nonexclusive. By contrast, the God of the Hebrews was (1) a living personal Being, (2) the only true God, and (3) the only God who should be worshiped. God was proving to both the Hebrews and the Egyptians that he alone is the living and all-powerful God." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 120.

7 *The exodus narrative* of Exodus 12:1-13:16 mixes (1) account of the exodus events and (2) instruction for future rituals and yearly celebrations commemorating those events. Rough breakdown:

Passover Celebrations	Events of Passover Exodus
12:1-11	12:1-5,7-11
12:14-20	12:12-13
12:43-49	12:21-23
13:3-10	12:27-42
Consecration of Firstborn	12:50-51
13:1-2	
13:11-16	

LESSON 7

VICTORY AT THE RED SEA

Exodus 13:17-14:31

God had brought about a great deliverance for His people; yet as they left Egypt with silver and gold, token signs of the spoils of victory, Israel must have wondered what lay ahead. They had come to know experientially the character of their God, YAHWEH or *I will be who I will be*, as He brought them out of Egypt with mighty acts of judgment against Pharaoh and his people. They were only beginning to comprehend what it meant to be God's people, and they must have wondered if He would truly fulfill His ancient promise to Abraham to give his descendants the land of Canaan (cf. 6:6-8). Now, as two million men, women and children walked into the wilderness, would God be as dependable and his character as unchanging as His name, YAHWEH,¹ depicted?

Certainly, their questions would be answered in the events of this lesson. From the beginning of Israel's journey out of Egypt, God was clearly and gently leading them. He knew their depleted physical and emotional condition well and purposefully led them on a longer route toward the Red Sea² to avoid possible war on the Philistine road to Canaan. Yet in the next sentence, the narrator describes the Israelites as going up from Egypt "armed for battle" (13:18). It is hard to imagine a large band of men with their women and children, leaving Egypt in haste with their kneading troughs on their shoulders as a nation armed for battle! Perhaps the writer was referring to the fact that they were organized for march or had spears, bows and slings for protection.

But what quickly becomes very clear is that the LORD was armed for battle, and His Presence was sufficient as He went before them in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.³ Like the commanding general of an army, the LORD directed Moses to turn Israel back and have them camp by the sea. Pharaoh would think they were confused and wandering, and He and his officials would ask themselves why they had been so foolish to let the Israelite slaves go. They would come after their easy prey, whose backs were against the sea, only to discover the second part of God's strategy for Israel: He not only planned to free His people from slavery in Egypt but also to totally destroy their enemy so that His name might become known throughout the earth.

God revealed this plan to Moses beforehand, but as Pharaoh's army, as expected, approached the Israelites, the people panicked like a band of slaves who had no hope for freedom. They asked Moses why he had not left them alone in Egypt. In their fear, they cried out that it would have been better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! Moses' patient response to the people: "Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today . . . The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still." (14:13,14).

Then the LORD commanded Moses to lead the people on toward the sea and to raise his staff, stretching out his hand over the waters so that the Israelites could cross on dry ground. As Moses obeyed, the LORD brought an incredible east wind⁴ which parted the enormous waters and made a dry-ground passageway of such proportions as to allow two million people and their animals to pass through! The LORD also threw the Egyptian army into confusion and made the wheels of their chariots come off. Through the night, the Israelites passed through the sea by the light of the pillar of fire. The Egyptians followed, but were kept at distance by the dark side of the pillar of fire. The Egyptians finally concluded: "Let's get away! The LORD is fighting for them!" But when they tried to escape, Moses again stretched his hand over the sea, and it went back to its place, drowning the entire Egyptian army.

The victory at the sea was truly God's victory. Israel made no claim of being an active participant, but emerged from the sea as a people testifying that their deliverance was an act of God. Their response was a reasonable faith: "When the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant" (14:31).

Many years later, the Apostle Paul would interpret Israel's passing through the sea on dry land as a type of Christian baptism (I Corinthians 10:1-4). The Old Testament parallel helps us understand more clearly the radical change that is symbolized by baptism⁵ as a believer. On one side of the sea, Israel was pursued by her enemies, enemies who were completely destroyed by the LORD as He fought for her. On the other side of the sea, Israel became a free people who feared the LORD and trusted Him to guide the journey that lay ahead.

Read Exodus 13:17-14:31.

1. How did God initially protect His people (13:17-18)?

2. Hundreds of years earlier, God made promises to Abraham (Genesis 15:16) and later Jacob (Genesis 46:3-4). At his death, Jacob's son Joseph was firmly convinced of God's promises (Genesis 50:24-25). What stood as a reminder to Israel of God's faithfulness and this godly forefather's faith (13:19)?

3. a. What was God's battle plan as commanding general of Israel's army (14:2-4)?

- b. What would result from Pharaoh's total defeat (14:4, 17-18)?

Note: *glory* is the display of God's divine attributes and perfections, the revelation of His true nature.

Reference: Note 1, *The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart*, p. 49.

4. a. How does Exodus 14:10-12 display the vulnerability of God's people?

b. Whom did they blame for their troubles (14:11-12)?

c. What was Moses' response and declaration (14:13-14)?

5. a. Describe God's physical presence with His people (13:21-22; 14:19).

Reference: Note 3, *the pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

b. How did His presence protect them during the night (14:20)?

6. a. What did God do as He fought for Israel?

14:21-22

14:24-25a

Reference: *the Lord looked down* (14:24). See Note 6, *The Human God*, p. 79.

b. What was Egypt's response (14:23, 25b)?

c. God finally reckoned with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who had carried out many barbarous acts toward His people and proudly defied God Himself. How did the battle end (14:26-30)?

7. What was Israel's very logical response to this awesome revelation of God's faithfulness and power (14:31)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Freedom from Fear

When the Israelites saw Pharaoh and his vast army and chariots coming, they were afraid, and they had reason to be! From a human perspective, they were hopelessly trapped with the sea at their backs. Surely many men, women and children would die by the Egyptian sword before the rest were returned to cruel bondage in Egypt.

But what Israel was about to learn is still true for us today. No matter how desperate our circumstances may appear, God is ever faithful to His promises and mighty to save. The more we gain confidence in these truths, the more freedom from anguish we will experience in the fearful and seemingly hopeless situations of life.

In light of the spectacular story of the Red Sea crossing, let's look at keys to finding peace and freedom from fear in our lives today.

1. a. What typical human experiences can produce fear in our lives?

b. What were some negative ways that the Israelites dealt with their fear?

c. How can unhealthy responses to fear only magnify or create more problems?

2. The first response of the Israelites was to look outward at their circumstances rather than turning upward toward God for help. Pharaoh and the Israelites quickly forgot God's power and authority which had been demonstrated in Egypt through the plagues. As we contemplate their

reactions to the situation at the Red Sea and observe the following Scriptures, what healthy and unhealthy responses to fear do you see?

Healthy Response Unhealthy Response

Proverbs 28:26

Proverbs 3:5

3. a. Another result of looking outward rather than upward in fearful times is that we often waste energy trying to gain control of the situation ourselves. The instinct is to *do* something rather than to first wait on God to receive His direction.

Moses instructed the people not to be afraid, but to stand still and watch for the LORD's deliverance. "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (14:14). How is this principle reiterated in the following Scriptures?

Psalm 37:7-8

Psalm 46:10a

Isaiah 30:15a

1 Peter 5:6-7

b. What can we do as we determine to be still and wait for the LORD to lead us through the battle?

Psalm 5:3

Isaiah 40:31

James 1:5

4. a. The Twenty-Third Psalm, perhaps the most well-known passage in the Bible, depicts the LORD as a good Shepherd, who leads, guides and protects. What did the Psalmist declare as he focused on the LORD during fearful times?

Psalm 23:4

b. How do the promises of the following verses also encourage us to trust God to lead, guide and protect as we face fearful situations?

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalm 32:7-8

2 Chronicles 20:15b (Exodus 14:14)

5. a. The Red Sea miracle demonstrated the LORD's faithfulness to His people. What are His promises to us today as we face fearful situations?

Isaiah 43:2-3a

Zephaniah 3:17

b. In light of the story of the Red Sea crossing and the Scriptures we have studied in this lesson, what is the constructive response to situations in which we are afraid or feel despair?

Psalm 27:1-3

Hebrews 10:23

Summary

6. a. Are there fearful circumstances in your life right now?

b. What can be learned from the story of the Red Sea crossing that might also apply to your situation?

7. What principles in this lesson have helped you respond to fearful situations more constructively?

8. What Scripture promises from this lesson do you want to remember in seemingly hopeless situations? Perhaps you would want to commit one to memory.

LESSON 7 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 2, *I AM*, p. 22.

2 Red Sea. The Hebrew text of Exodus uses the term, *Yam Suph*, which means "Sea of Reeds" (papyrus reeds). The Greek translation of the Old Testament made in 200 B.C. rendered this "Red Sea." But since reeds do not grow in salt water, the Gulf of Suez (or Red Sea on Bible maps of the times) could not have been the body of water crossed. Any of the bodies of water north of the Gulf of Suez could have been called "Sea of Reeds." Some think it was Lake Balah or Lake Menzaleh, but since Egypt's geography may have changed in 3500 years, one cannot precisely pinpoint the exact location. Lifechange, *Exodus*, NavPress 1989, p. 76.

3 the pillar of cloud (by day) and fire (by night). This was the visible symbol of God's presence among His people during their wilderness journeys. The LORD often spoke to them from the pillar (see Num. 12:5-6; Deuteronomy 31:15-16; Ps. 99:6-7), and used it to light their path, protect them from their enemies, control their movements, reassure their faith, and inspire burning zeal for their God.

4 incredible east wind. God's victory at the Red Sea reflects His use of both natural and supernatural phenomena to accomplish His will. Israel could at once see the mighty hand of God in both supernatural and natural events in His great acts of deliverance. God commanded Moses to stretch out his hand, and the waters were miraculously divided. God used a mighty east wind to part the waters and turn the sea floor into dry land. He threw the Egyptian army into confusion, and He caused the wheels of their chariots to bog down and come off. The waters stood up like a wall, then, at Moses' command, began to flow normally again, sweeping Pharaoh and his army into the sea. Many of the greatest biblical events demonstrate this combination of the wonderful and the ordinary, so that the event can never be understood as only ordinary, nor does the supernatural ever completely absorb the natural!

5 baptism. Jesus inaugurated baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism, the sacrament of initiation, always quickly followed one's conversion in New Testament times (cf. Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:36-38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:1-7). The action symbolized identification of the new believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (see Romans 6:1-4); i.e., it depicted dying with Christ, being cleansed of sin, and being raised to newness of life in Him.

LESSON 8

SONG AT THE SEA

Exodus 15:1-21

"And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant" (14:31). The incredible drama at the Red Sea ended with Israel's response of faith. But faith certainly had not been the reason God saved them. Right up to the moment of their deliverance, they were terrified and would have chosen to go back to serving the Egyptians rather than face what they thought was certain death in the desert (14:10-12). However, Moses encouraged them, God fought for them, and the people at last responded in worship to God.

Their song of praise, usually called *The Song of Moses* (15:1-18), is thought to be one of the oldest hymns in Israel's liturgical life. Joyful praise was the response of this redeemed people, whose God had done such great things on their behalf! Only poetry could express the emotional exultation the people were feeling.

The poem focused on the LORD as the sole agent of Israel's salvation. The first twelve verses, which reflect on what He had done for them in the great victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea, used phrases that describe a military victory: "The LORD is a warrior" . . . "Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy" . . . "In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you." The first four stanzas of the song climax in verse 11, in which Israel asks the rhetorical question echoed again and again in the Psalms:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?

*Who is like you--
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?*

The second part of the poem dealt with Israel's future, and their faith in the LORD's guidance and care. Verse 13 provided the transition to this section:

*In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.*

The Hebrew word, *hesed*, translated as *unfailing* or *everlasting love*, was used to describe the motivation of God's heart toward His people. At this high moment in Israel's faith, they proclaimed their trust in God, believing that the same love and strength that redeemed them would also guide them on the journey that was ahead. They praised God for what He would do to their enemies as He brought them safely to His "holy dwelling," the Promised Land.¹ Its now terrified inhabitants were specifically named: the people of Edom, Moab, and Canaan. At the same time, this "holy dwelling" was a spiritual place: "the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O LORD, your hands established" (15:17).

The hymn ends with a refrain repeated many times in the Psalms:

*The LORD will reign
for ever and ever.*

This reflected how from their infancy and for many years as a nation, Israel was a theocracy, a people who confessed the kingship of God.

At the Red Sea, God had told Moses that He would gain glory⁵ for Himself through Pharaoh and his army (14:4,17,18). All Egypt would know the great I AM of Israel. Nations would hear and tremble as God's people passed through their land. But the revelation of God's love and majesty would become known throughout the world for generations to come through Israel's praise to God for what He had done for them. Their response to His marvelous salvation would bring God glory, and He would forever be "enthroned in the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3).

Read Exodus 15:1-21.

1. a. What words and phrases did Moses and the people use to express God's relationship to them (15:2)?

b. What was their response to Him (15:2)?

2. a. The name of God, YAHWEH (translated LORD), is mentioned ten times in this song of praise. What phrases paint a picture of the character of the LORD in the first half of the song, as it recounts the victory at the Red Sea (15:3-10)?

Reference: Note 2, *He has cast into the sea*, p. 78, and Note 6, *The Human God*, p. 79.

b. What was their final declaration (15:11)?

Reference: Note 5, *Glory*, p. 79.

3. What is the overall picture of the LORD you get from the first half of the song?

4. a. In the second half of the song, Israel reflected on her future. On what basis did the people exude confidence for their future?

15:13

15:14-17

15:18

b. What characteristics of God are highlighted in this section?

5. How did the knowledge of God's character and past faithfulness affect the people's perspective on the future?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Reason to Celebrate

Imagine the celebration and rejoicing that must have taken place as Israel sang the Song of Moses. At last they were truly free of the evil bondage they had experienced in Egypt, and after seeing the awesome display of God's power, they were fully assured that He would take them to the Promised Land where He would reign as their King.

As we review the story of Israel's deliverance thus far, we are reminded of several important truths. God, in His sovereignty, has given men the freedom of choice. Many heartaches result from the choices people make, as exemplified by the cruelty that the Israelites suffered at the hand of Egypt and the Pharaohs.

But Moses' song of praise emphasizes that when man's wrong choices cross God's eternal plan of redemption for mankind, God will act in force, and those who oppose God will find themselves to be no match. A major theme of this song is that God's plan will not be thwarted, and those who have the arrogance to oppose Him will be crushed.

The Bible from beginning to end resounds the plan of God, which is the redemption of mankind.⁴ In Genesis 3, we learn how man first chose to go His own independent way, breaking fellowship with his holy God. God's plan of redemption was to repair that broken relationship, by bringing man back into fellowship with Himself. The plan began to unfold as God promised Abraham that He would create a nation from his descendants, and give that nation a land, specifically Canaan, in which to thrive under His kingship. He also promised Abraham that the whole world would be blessed through this nation. We see now that God would do this by giving Israel the Old Testament Scriptures and revelation of Himself, and then by bringing His Son, the Messiah, into the world from their midst. Jesus Christ would pay the penalty for sin once and for all and provide a way for sinful man to be justly forgiven and restored to the heart and home of the Father.

When Pharaoh opposed God, he also opposed God's plan, and the anthem of Moses declares how God simply "blew" (15:10) on Pharaoh's mighty forces, and he was crushed. But God also used Pharaoh's resistance to reveal Himself to the world as He saved His people. This compares with Christ's death on the cross, where Satan (John 13:27) and evil men meant to do away with the Son of God once and for all. But God raised Him from the dead and used the evil act to overcome death (1 Corinthians 15:56-57) and bring salvation for the faithful of all time. What has been deemed the most evil event of history became, in God's hands, the means of mankind's redemption and ultimate freedom from sin and death.

The promise at the end of the song is that the LORD will surely bring His redeemed people to His Kingdom, and no foe will stand against Him in this. There He will reign forever and ever. The believer can be sure that the LORD's ultimate destination for us is with Him in His everlasting kingdom. Because of all He has done in the past, especially in the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure we will be in His very presence and thrive under His kingship forever as He has promised.

Thus, the Song of Moses echoes that the LORD has a plan of redemption that cannot be thwarted by any turn of history or man's wrong choices. Instead, God will use history and man's choices to bring His plan to pass. As God is in control of history, He is also in control of our individual lives if we have chosen to follow Him. This does not promise that we will not experience difficulties, but it does mean that nothing will thwart the specific plans He may have for our lives. And ultimately we can be sure we

will be with Him as He reigns in His everlasting Kingdom, so that we can sing with Israel:

*In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.*

As we continue our study of *Journey to Freedom*, let's look at the biblical support behind these reasons to celebrate.

1. a. Who did Pharaoh think was in control of history, and how did this perspective affect his life?

b. What are the dangers of man's sense of invincibility?

2. a. What can we be assured of as we read about the crises that face our world today?

b. What do the Scriptures reveal about the character of the One who guides history?

Psalm 33:5

Psalm 103:8

Lamentations 3:33 (Ezekiel 18:32)

Isaiah 33:6

c. What does Jesus Christ's death for our sins reveal about God's heart for mankind?

John 3:16 (2 Peter 3:9b)

3. What do the Scriptures promise evildoers, those who oppose God and His righteousness?

Exodus 15:6

Psalms 34:16

Psalms 92:7-9

4. a. The Bible also promises that God will redeem, or work for good, all evil that touches the lives of His people. How did He bless Israel through the evils of Pharaoh?

b. How did He bless the world through the crucifixion of His Son?

c. What does His word promise regarding all evils we face as we trust Him?

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:38-39

5. As we observe God's sovereignty over Israel's life as a nation, what promises of God can you trust for your own life?

Jeremiah 29:11

Job 42:2

6. Because of God's awesome act on their behalf at the Red Sea, Israel could be sure that God would do the impossible: plant them as a loved and redeemed people in the land of Canaan (Exodus 15:13).

a. Because of God's faithfulness and miraculous power displayed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-6a), of what can those who believe in Christ be certain?

1 John 5:11-13

b. In John 8:58-59, Jesus identified Himself as the LORD, I AM, of the Old Testament. What did He tell us we could be absolutely certain of?

John 10:27-28

John 14:2-3

Summary

7. How do Exodus 15:13 and 15:18 relate to us today? What reason for celebration does the Song of Moses give you personally?

8. a. What have you observed about God's control of history from this lesson?

b. What related promises has He made regarding your life?

c. Are there certain situations or areas of your life today in which these truths provide hope and comfort?

9. Why can we be certain of God's promise to take us to be with Him eternally?

Reference: Note 3, *The reliability of the Scriptures*, p. 78.

LESSON 8 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

2 *He has cast into the sea . . .* (15:3-4). "These are not expressions of vindictiveness, but of God's righteousness. The emphasis today seems to be "God is love" to the almost total exclusion of the fact that He is also a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). God is loving, merciful and patient. He loves the sinner, He hates sin. Because He is righteous and holy, He must punish sin. 'It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31 NASB). Israel saw the situation from God's viewpoint, and they recognized that God had judged those who had so persistently defied Him. 'In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble' (15:7). Moses song was entirely free of selfishness or bitterness and thus was acceptable to God." Jean W. Randall, *Joy of Living Bible Studies, Exodus*, Lesson 9, p. 1.

3 *The reliability of the Scriptures*, suggested reading: *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, F. F. Bruce; *Objections Answered*, R. C. Sproul; *Inerrancy Answered*, Norman Geisler; *God's Inerrant Word*, John Warwick Montgomery.

4 Reference: Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.

5 *The glory of God* is the grandeur and majesty of God. His glory "is rooted in his very nature--majestic, awesome, holy. His glorious character is displayed in His active presence among His people. God reveals His glory to humanity both directly and through His works, and it is in those works that we discover and respond in awe to His splendor. Jesus Christ is the glory of God in human flesh (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-3), surpassing any glory seen in the Old Testament. He revealed God's glory by what He did and especially through His death and resurrection. He is now exalted in glory and will someday return in glory (1 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 24:30; 25:31)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 672.

6 *The Human God*. The Song of Moses uses phrases such as "your right hand," "the blast of your nostrils," "your hands established." Although God is spirit, all-powerful, everywhere present, all-knowing and transcendent to man, the Bible often draws God in human colors, in order to help us understand his nature. With His face, He smiles at us in love and grace. His ears hear our prayers. His eyes see everything. His mouth and voice speak His word to us. His fingers have created all things, and most importantly, His hands guide, provide, protect and can administer chastisement or punishment. The Bible ~~compare~~compares God to a father or mother because He has created everyone and is compassionate, nurturing, loves deeply and is wise. Other human characteristics such as jealousy and anger, ones that we see negatively, are cast positively when they are applied to God. All of these human characteristics of God not only help us understand His character, but also help us better fathom the concept of being created in His image. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 518.

PART 2

WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

The Song of Moses would be sung throughout Israel's history, commemorating the beginning of Israel's life as the people of God. It marked the high point of their trust in God and naturally separated their experience in Egypt from the period of their wanderings in the wilderness. The Song also became the backdrop upon which Israel's wilderness complaining proved the fickleness of the people and stood in stark contrast to God's continuing mercy.

The wilderness wanderings must have surprised Israel, who probably expected to move on a straight path from the exhilaration of the sea crossing to the milk and honey of the Promised Land! Instead they found themselves in the desert, saved from one kind of death but in fear of another; far removed from all that was familiar and routine in Egypt, but not yet in their own land. For them, the wilderness seemed permanent and their needs overwhelming. They had no resources of their own to cope with this new situation and were about to learn in a very different setting about the name of YAHWEH. The refrain that had been repeated throughout their deliverance from Egypt would be heard again in the wilderness: "Then you will know that I am the LORD your God" (16:6,11,12).

In both victory and defeat, as well as in their praise and in their grumbling, Israel would come to know their God. The wilderness wanderings serve as both a warning and an encouragement to Christians today, delivered from the bondage of sin, but not yet in the promised kingdom.

LESSON 9

MURMURING AND MANNA

Exodus 15:22-17:7

The LORD was leading Israel to Mount Sinai, a three-month journey through the wilderness. Israel's first trial in the wilderness took place on the third day of their journey into the Desert of Shur, where they first grumbled¹ to Moses about a very legitimate need--water that was fit to drink. After traveling for three days without finding water, they finally came upon water at Marah, only to find it too bitter to drink.

The problem was serious, and Moses cried out to the LORD for help. God showed Moses a piece of wood which he threw in the water, and God made the water sweet. The LORD used the "healing" of the waters to show Israel yet another facet of His character and providence. He promised them that if they listened and obeyed Him carefully, He would spare them the diseases suffered in Egypt.

This was the choice that would always be before Israel to test² their faith in God. Though stated in different words at different times, the choice was always the same: "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes...then *I will be* ... the LORD who heals you" (15:26). God wanted only Israel's obedience in response to the gracious gifts He desired to give His people. They soon experienced the lavish abundance of God's provision when they arrived at Elim, where they found twelve springs, one for each tribe,³ and seventy palm trees.

One month into their journey to Sinai, Israel's complaining escalated again. This time they grumbled that the food was more plentiful back in Egypt, with a veiled accusation against God that He had delivered them from Egypt in order to starve them in the desert. This was flagrant unbelief in light of all He had done for them in Egypt and at the Red Sea. But God responded with the gracious offer to care for them with bread from heaven called manna.⁴

The gift of manna also came with instructions and a test intended to help Israel grow to know and trust the LORD, YAHWEH (16:12). First God provided the manna strictly on a daily basis. Each day, the heavens would rain down just enough food for that day. Any extra would not keep until the next day, leaving the people to wonder if God would forget or be faithful to

his promise to care for them the next day. God also used the manna to teach His people how to treat others within the community. In the gathering of the manna, they learned about justice, equality and covetousness. By God's gracious hand, no matter how much or how little the people gathered, each person always had the exact amount that was needed.

Along with this, God's gift of the Sabbath, a day of rest each week, was given to Israel even before the Sabbath rest became one of God's Ten Commandments (cf. 16:23-26; 20:8). In His graciousness, so that all would have a day of rest, God provided enough manna for two days on the day before the Sabbath. Miraculously, it did not spoil overnight on this particular day of the week. But the LORD was grieved because some of His people refused His gift and did not listen to His instructions. Instead they labored on the Sabbath looking for manna but finding nothing.

In spite of Israel's murmuring and disobedience, God continued to provide manna for them throughout the forty years they were in the wilderness as a sign of His mercy and His gracious care. Although this time in the wilderness revealed the disobedient and rebellious human nature of God's people, it was also a time when God, as a father to his son, "bent down to feed them" (Hosea 11:1-4). As He cared for their daily needs for food and water, He sought to transform them from slaves who could trust no one to sons and daughters who knew the name of YAHWEH and could trust His character. God instructed Moses to save about two quarts of manna and to place it alongside the tablets of the law in the tabernacle to be a perpetual reminder to future generations that His grace belonged next to His law. The full significance of the gift of manna would be understood much later as the sign of the true bread from heaven, Jesus (John 6:31f). God's grace and provision were perfectly manifested in Jesus who made this claim about Himself: "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever!" (6:58).

The seriousness of Israel's complaining became apparent in the third story. The people were ready to stone Moses because once again they had no water. But it is clear to the reader that it was the LORD, not Moses, who was leading them from place to place. He had purposefully led them to camp at a place where there was no water in order to test and build their faith. Would they trust in His Name--in who He *had been* for them in the past? Sadly, they did not remember (Ps. 106:7). Instead, Israel defiantly put God to the test, saying "Is the LORD among us or not?" Faith had eroded, and they demanded a visible sign to prove whether or not the LORD was

truly among them. God graciously responded by providing water from a rock at Horeb.⁵

Read Exodus 15:22-27.

1. What did the Israelites complain about at Marah (15:23-24)? What real fear lay behind their complaint (15:23-24)?

Reference: Note 1, *grumbled*, p. 90.

2. What choice did God introduce to His people through the miraculous healing of the waters (15:25-26)?

Reference: Note 2, *God tested them*, p. 90.

3. How did God demonstrate the abundance of His gifts and love for Israel when He led them to Elim (15:27)?

Read Exodus 16:1-36.

4. a. Where were the Israelites in their journey when these events took place (16:1)?

b. What was their complaint (16:2-3)?

c. What was God's gracious response to this complaint (16:4-5)?

5. a. What did Moses make clear about the people's grumbling against him and Aaron as their leaders (16:7-8)?

b. What did the whole community see as they came together before the LORD (16:9-10)?

Reference: Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69, also 24:15-17.

c. What was the LORD's gracious provision (16:11-15,31)?

Reference: Note 3, *Manna*, p. 90.

6. a. What responsibilities and instructions did the LORD give along with His gracious provisions?

16:16,19

16:22-26

b. Did all of the Israelites listen and obey God's instructions? What was the result? (16:20,27-30)

Note: *you* (16:28) is plural in the Hebrew.

7. a. What lessons about God's character could Israel learn from the manna?

b. How would this be commemorated for generations to come (16:32-34)?

c. How long did God provide Israel with manna (16:35)?

d. *Optional.* A parallel story concerning the manna and quail in the wilderness can be found in Numbers 11:4-15; 31-34. Note the similarities and differences.

Read Exodus 17:1-7.

8. What was the crisis the Israelites experienced at Rephidim, and how did they respond (17:2-4,7)?

9. How did God demonstrate His grace and faithfulness in spite of the people's arrogance and lack of faith (17:5-6)?

10. Even when things looked hopeless in the wilderness, God had a good plan for Israel, a plan which He had not kept to Himself. What had He promised Israel that each test of faith called for them to remember and believe in spite of their circumstances (see 3:7-8; 6:6-8)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Freedom from Complaining

In spite of the incredible miracles God had done--in raising up Moses, in the ten plagues of Egypt, in the spectacular crossing of the Red Sea--the people quickly lost perspective with the next crisis. Rather than looking back at God's faithfulness and trusting Him in the present situation, they fell into complaining which produced an angry, testy and demanding disposition toward the LORD who had graciously saved them. At Rephidim, they even accused Him of bringing them into the desert to starve them and began to wish they had never left Egypt! Complaining had indeed led them on a downward spiral to hopelessness and alienation from God.

It is not hard to relate to these people. How easy it is to forget God's past faithfulness when the crisis comes. Complaining can lead to negative thoughts about God's character and questioning about God's ways and rules. We can get lost in questions like, "Why did God do this?" or "Why doesn't God do this?" We might even begin thinking that life was better without the Lord.

The good news is that the Bible gives us wonderful alternatives to complaining amidst the crises of life. In such times, it is possible to have security, hope and peace. Not only this, but our attitudes in such times can bring hope, guidance and blessing to those around us. It is easy to be taken captive by complaining, but in this lesson we will look at choices that can free us from grumbling.

1. a. Why did complaining seem natural for Israel at Marah, in the Desert of Sin, at Rephidim?

b. Why did it seem unreasonable?

2. a. Why do we fall into complaining?

b. How does complaining affect our lives and the lives of those around us?

c. What is the challenging mandate of Philippians 2:14?

3. What could the Israelites have done rather than complain? What did Moses do during these times?

4. What did God want to teach the people as they faced one impossible situation after another?

5. a. The negative mindset produced by a complaining spirit can lead us to doubt God's awareness or involvement regarding our problem. What do the following Scriptures declare about God's awareness of the issues we encounter in our lives?

Psalm 139:1-4

Psalm 139:7-10

Isaiah 40:27-29

b. What does Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:31-33 add to this?

c. How does Matthew 6:34 relate to the lesson the LORD taught Israel through the daily distribution of the manna (cf. Exodus 16:4-5,21,35)? What did He want them to learn?

6. a. What can we be confident of in times of crisis?

Psalm 34:4-6

Psalm 37:25

Philippians 4:19

b. God promises to meet our needs, but it is easy for us to confuse needs with wants. How can we get into trouble demanding that God provide our wants?

7. a. What positive choices can we make rather than complaining during times of crisis?

Psalm 31:24

Psalm 62:8

Psalm 63:8

Psalm 130:5

b. What can we say to ourselves to combat a complaining spirit?

Psalm 42:5

Psalm 62:5-6

Psalm 116:7

c. What choices did David make in Psalm 131?

8. What can God produce in our lives as we make the right choices in times of crisis?

Romans 15:13

Summar

9. What have you learned from the Israelites about complaining? Why is a complaining spirit detrimental to your life?

10. a. What positive choices can you make instead of complaining in times of difficulty?

b. How will these choices benefit those around you?

11. What promises of God can you rest in during times of crisis?

LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *grumbled* (15:24). "During their desert wanderings, the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron whenever they faced a crisis (see 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 14:2; 16:11,41). In reality, however, they were grumbling 'against the LORD' (16:8). Paul warns us not to follow their example (see 1 Corinthians 10:10)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 109.

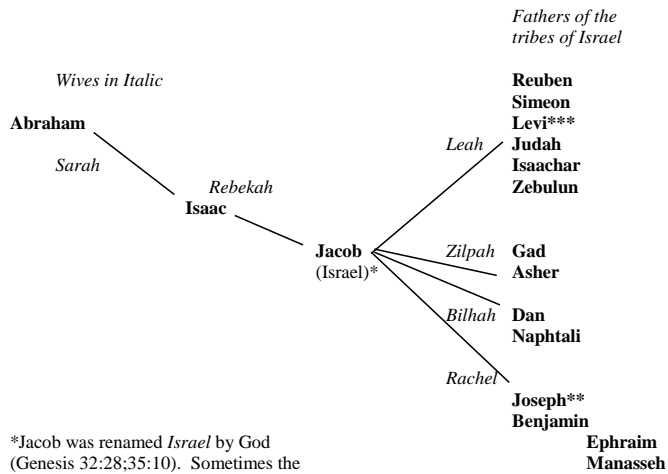
2 *God tested them* (15:25). "Not *tempted*, for God does not tempt (James 1:13). Satan tempts us (see 1 Corinthians 7:5b) in order to make us fall; God tests us in order to confirm our faith (Exodus 20:20) or prove our commitment (Deuteronomy 8:2)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 37.

3 *The twelve tribes of Israel*. See chart, p. 91. Each tribe was made up of all the persons descended from one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob (see Introduction, p. 3-4.). While the 12 tribes of Israel, or Jacob, were in Egypt, they were grouped according to their fathers' houses (*Exodus* 6:14). After they left Egypt, the whole company was conceived of as the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 24:4).

4 *Manna*. The Hebrew word literally means, "What is it?" Several natural explanations as to what it was have been proposed over the years and may offer some light on its possible substance but cannot explain away the supernatural provision of God. For example, some equate it with the sticky, often granular honeydew that is excreted in Sinai in early June by various scale insects which rapidly solidifies through evaporation. But no naturally occurring substance fits the entire description in the text. As was mentioned before, God often brings the natural and supernatural together in His activities; certainly the daily abundance for the entire nation over a period of forty years and the double amounts on the sixth day each week that did not spoil do not fit a natural phenomenon. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 206.

5 *Horeb* is another name for Mount Sinai, but Israel did not camp at Sinai until later (19:1). Horeb could also mean the Sinai region. Rephidim was close to Sinai so that the mountain slopes reached there. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, p. 135.

The Tribes of Israel



*Jacob was renamed *Israel* by God (Genesis 32:28;35:10). Sometimes the nation of Israel is referred to as Jacob by Old Testament writers.

**When Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph became the father of two tribes of Israel.

***The Levites became the priests of Israel, did not own property in Canaan, therefore were not among the traditional 12 landowning tribes of Israel. They were in 48 towns scattered throughout the promised land (Joshua 21).

LESSON 10

FREED TO FORM A COMMUNITY

Exodus 17:8-18:27

Israel was still struggling as a people, discontent with their leadership and doubtful regarding the LORD's presence among them. Yet another crisis was about to unite them. The Amalekites, who had no fear of Israel's God, attacked the fledgling nation when they were most weary and vulnerable (see Deuteronomy 25:17). God's people immediately became united as together they faced an outside enemy.

Unlike the victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, the participation of all Israel was critical in this battle. Moses appointed Joshua to choose men to fight, while he stood before the LORD, holding the staff of God up in prayer. When Moses became tired, Aaron and Hur held his arms up, while Joshua united the people to battle the enemy.

Israel took responsibility for her part in the battle, but the victory was clearly dependent on God's intervention. Every time Moses lowered his hands, the Amalekites began to win the battle. When he raised them up before God, Israel prevailed. When the battle ended, God told Moses and Joshua that He would eventually blot out the memory of Amalek and forever be against this people for their attack on Israel.

Chapter 18 continues to focus on the building of the community of Israel. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, would prove strategic in the process. He came to visit Moses in the wilderness, bringing Moses' wife

and two sons with him. Jethro joyfully received the news of all God had done to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians and preserve them in the wilderness. He praised the God of Israel and received Him as his own, declaring, "Now I know that the LORD, YAHWEH, is greater than all other gods, for He did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly" (18:11). As a foreigner and one of the first converts to be blessed through what God had done for Israel, Jethro immediately responded by worshipping God with Moses, Aaron and the elders.

After Jethro's profession of faith, God used Jethro's experience and gifts to help the new community develop the structure it needed to support their life of faith. Jethro observed Moses hard at work from morning until night judging the people's disputes as they were brought before him. In order to save Moses and the people from exhaustion, Jethro suggested that Moses only hear the most difficult cases and appoint trustworthy men to serve as judges over the simpler ones. Moses heeded Jethro's advice, taking a great step forward in structuring the community of God's people.

Israel's identity as a community was established on their confession of *faith* in the LORD, YAHWEH. The issues of law and good order within the community *followed* their faith and were designed to support Israel's identity as a redeemed people.

Read Exodus 17:8-16.

1. a. What new leader was raised up to help Moses (17:9-10)?

- b. How did Israel and the LORD work together in defeating the Amalekites (17:9-13,16a)?

- c. What do you think the LORD wanted Israel to learn from this victory? What was the point in Moses raising his hands and the staff of God?

Read Exodus 18:1-12.

2. We have seen Moses primarily in the roles of deliverer and prophet of God. In this passage, we see more of Moses' personal life. Describe his family and his reunion with them (18:2-7).

Reference: Note 1, *sent away his wife*, p. 100, and Note 6, *priest of Midian*, p. 13.

3. When Moses left Jethro and his family in Midian, they had a vague knowledge of the God of Abraham who had called Moses to go back to Pharaoh and Egypt. What new understanding about God did Moses give to Jethro at this point (18:8)?

4. a. What was Jethro's immediate response to his new understanding of what God had done for Israel (18:9-11)?

b. Jethro's response also symbolized his reception by the community. What did Jethro do (18:12)?

Read Exodus 18:13-27.

5. a. Up to this point, what system of justice had operated in the Israelite community (18:13-16)?

b. What was wrong with this current system (18:17-18)?

6. a. What was Jethro's advice to Moses?

18:19-20

18:21-22

b. Who was the final authority as to whether or not this advice should be accepted (18:23)?

c. How did God lead Moses to respond (18:24-26)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Keys to Leadership: A Submissive and Teachable Spirit

In contrast to the people of Israel who struggled to submit to God's leadership and plan, this lesson highlights the submissive natures of three godly leaders. The first was Joshua, who "fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered" (17:10). As we follow the life of this leader throughout the rest of our study, we will see a man who never hesitated to take God's orders and carry them out explicitly. Joshua never questioned God's promises, no matter how impossible the circumstances might have seemed.

Then there was Moses' father-in-law, Jethro. The open, teachable heart toward God of this non-Israelite inspired all of Israel as he freely embraced faith in YAHWEH and worshipped Him. Then he humbly instructed Moses in ordering his priorities and delegating responsibilities to others.

Finally, we saw the teachable spirit of Moses as he listened and carefully followed the wise counsel of Jethro. These three great leaders blessed all of Israel because of their ability to listen and submit to God and others. These important qualities of leadership--submission and a teachable spirit--require choosing against pride, fear of what others think, and deeply imbedded wrong thinking. For anyone who develops and maintains these wonderful qualities, the life of faith becomes a dynamic, abundant never-ending learning experience. As we yield to God and love learning from Him and others, we find no end to what an infinite God has to teach us. Each step of obedience and growth brings greater wholeness and freedom and equips us to be a greater blessing to the world around us.

While a submissive, open and teachable spirit are necessary keys to good leadership, we don't have to be powerful leaders for God to learn these secrets to fulfillment. The freedom and blessings of such a disposition toward God are for all who "hunger and thirst after righteousness." As we continue our study of *Journey to Freedom*, let's look at what the Bible has to say about the strength of a submissive and teachable spirit toward God and others.

1. a. What different aspects of a submissive and teachable spirit were exhibited by Joshua, Jethro and Moses?

b. How did this contrast to the people of Israel in their attitudes toward Moses and God?

c. What do you think contributed to the teachable and submissive spirits of these men?

2. Where does a submissive and teachable attitude toward God begin? What are some things we need to comprehend?

Psalm 8:3-4

Psalm 18:30,32

John 15:5

3. a. What can prevent us from having a submissive and teachable spirit toward God and other people?

b. What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 3:7a (Proverbs 11:2)

Matthew 14:29-32

Mark 12:24

4. a. What are the characteristics of a submissive and teachable spirit?

What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 12:1

Proverbs 18:15

b. How do Proverbs 10:8a and 16:20 describe Joshua's submissive heart?

c. How does Proverbs 9:9 describe the teachable hearts of Jethro and Moses?

5. a. Being teachable requires being a good listener. What does it take to be a good listener?

b. To listen to God and others, we have to discipline ourselves not to talk. Of what do these proverbs remind us?

Proverbs 17:27a

Proverbs 18:13

Proverbs 18:2

6. a. How does Proverbs 2:1-4 describe a submissive and teachable heart toward God?

b. List some of the benefits of a submissive and teachable heart toward God found in Proverbs 2:5-8.

Proverbs 2:9-11

c. According to James 1:5, what is God's open invitation to us in any situation?

7. Certainly it is important to have a submissive and teachable heart in order to influence people for Christ. But what are the greatest rewards of a submissive and teachable spirit toward God?

Ephesians 3:17b-19

Summary

8. a. What opposes submission and a teachable spirit toward God in our lives? What do you see in the people of Israel?

b. How did submission and a teachable spirit enable Joshua, Jethro and Moses to be effective leaders? What does such a spirit elicit from others?

9. a. What does listening have to do with a teachable spirit toward God and others?

b. How are you doing at listening to God and others, especially those close to you? Do you seek out and enjoy hearing other viewpoints? What is your desire in this area?

10. What is to be gained from developing a submissive and teachable heart toward God and other people?

LESSON 10 NOTES

1 *sent away his wife* (18:2). "Moses had apparently sent his wife, Zipporah, and two sons back to Jethro after they had started for Egypt. Though the reason for that action is not stated, Moses may have wanted to protect them from the horrors of the Egyptian bondage. So now, several months later, Moses was reunited with his family." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, p. 136.

LESSON 11

COVENANT AT SINAI

Exodus 19:1-25; 20:18-21

It was three months to the day after leaving Egypt that the Israelites reached Mount Sinai,¹ the place where Moses had first met God in the burning bush. At that time, God had promised to use Moses to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage and guide them back to this mountain to worship Him (3:12). There God would make a covenant² with Israel that would forever set them apart from all other nations of the earth.

To prepare the people to receive this covenant, God first reminded Israel of His care for them thus far, describing in a very personal language how He had carried them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself (19:4). The image was that of an eagle hovering over its young, spreading its wings to catch them and carry them on its pinions (cf. Deuteronomy 32:10-12). Then God made His proposal to Israel, saying, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests³ and a holy nation"⁴ (19:6).

The people responded enthusiastically to being God's people, raised from bondage to power. They promised to do everything He said, and the LORD began to prepare them for a new understanding of His character. Israel had already witnessed God's power against the Egyptians and Amalekites and His care for them in the desert. Now they would see His *majesty and holiness*.⁸ For this, they were instructed to consecrate themselves and prepare to meet and hear God on the third day.

The day came, and the LORD spoke to Moses from a thick cloud on Mt. Sinai in view of the people. It was an awesome day as thunder and

lightning filled the sky, and smoke and fire covered the mountain, which trembled violently as the LORD descended upon it. Limits had been placed around the mountain to set it apart as holy. The people were warned that whoever touched the mountain, man or beast, would die.

The people trembled with fear and begged Moses to speak to them, rather than God Himself. But God used Moses to comfort them and explain why He was presenting Himself in such an awesome way. "Do not be afraid,"⁵ Moses said. "God has come to test⁶ you, so that the fear⁷ of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (20:20). Seeing God's holy nature would cause the people to keep His covenant, share in His holiness, be His treasured possession, and, as a nation that was set apart, reflect the knowledge of the one true God to the world.

The people stood in awe as Moses once again entered the thick darkness to be with God.

Read Exodus 19:1-15.

1. Where did the people camp (19:1-2)?

Reference: *Mount Sinai*, note 1, p. 108.

2. a. What had the people experienced in their relationship with God thus far (19:4)?

b. What covenant did God now propose to Israel (19:5-6)?

References: Note 2, *Sinaitic Covenant*, Note 3, *kingdom of priests*, and Note 4, *holy nation*, p. 108.

c. How did the people respond (19:7-8)?

3. a. Why did God speak to Moses through the cloud as the people watched (19:9)?

b. Why did the people wash their clothes, put limits around the mountain and abstain from sex (19:10-15)?

Note: The people were to abstain from sex (19:15) not because it is sinful but in order to be ceremonially clean.

Read Exodus 19:16-25.

4. How did God manifest His holiness to the people (19:16-20)?

5. What did the LORD tell Moses he must reiterate to the people (19:21-25)?

Note: *break out against* (19:22,24). The LORD's holiness required total consecration to enter His presence (cf. 40:32; Leviticus 21:23). This might have referred to the Aaronic priestly office soon to be established. It also highlights the great significance of the holiness of Christ imputed to the believer which allows him/her to freely enter the presence of holy God (cf. Ephesians 4:24; 5:25-27; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 2:9).

Read Exodus 20:18-21.

6. How did the people react to what they had just seen and heard (20:18-20; see also Deuteronomy 5:23-27)?

Note: Moses, who had been Israel's liberator, had now become the mediator between the people and God.

7. What was God's intention in manifesting His holiness to Israel (20:20; see also Deuteronomy 5:24,29)?

References: Note 2, *God tested them*, p. 90, and Note 5, *Do not be afraid*, p. 109.

Note: *Fear of God* means "reverential trust" (see Note 7, *Fear of God*, p. 109).

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Rewards of Reverence

"Fear of the LORD" is a biblical phrase often misunderstood to mean an emotion toward God that keeps us at a distance from Him. But this is not the biblical meaning of the phrase. "Fear of the LORD" means reverential trust in God that leads to intimacy with Him and allows us to experience His richest blessings. As we stand before God as the Israelites did, in awe of His greatness and holiness,⁸ we are humbled and filled with a desire to serve Him and walk in obedience to His loving will for us.

Rather than distancing us from God, our obedience to the biblical mandate to "fear the LORD" causes us to become united with Him in a oneness that allows us to know His heart, experience His joy, and take part in His merciful work in the world. God revealed His greatness and holiness to Israel at Mount Sinai so that they and those who followed them might revere Him and experience the great benefits of "fearing the LORD."

As we continue our study of *Journey to Freedom*, let's explore the blessings of realizing God's greatness and worshipping Him in loving trust and obedience.

1. a. Why do you think it was important for Israel to realize God's holiness and majesty? Why did the people need to fear the LORD?

b. Do you think people truly revere God today? What are the results where there is a lack of reverence:

in an individual?

in a society?

c. What are the symptoms of a society that refuses to honor God?

Romans 1:21,25

d. What sobering warnings are given to a society that refuses to revere the LORD (which includes following His ways) in Romans 1:24,28-32?

2. a. The Scriptures record many rewards for revering the LORD, some of which are found in the following verses. What phrases describe the blessings we will experience in our relationship with God when we revere Him?

Psalm 103:11,13,17

Psalm 25:14

Psalm 147:11

Luke 1:50

b. What are other rewards we will experience as we live a life of reverent trust in the LORD?

Psalm 31:19

Psalm 34:9

Psalm 145:19

Proverbs 10:27; 14:27

Proverbs 19:23

Proverbs 22:4

3. Psalms 34 and 37 highlight the choices people make who reverence the LORD. What phrases in the following verses describe these choices?

Psalm 34:1-6 (9)

Psalm 34:11-14

Psalms 37:1,3-5, 7-8

4. a. What was God's desire as He showed His holiness and majesty to Israel at Mt. Sinai? Why did He want them to revere Him?

Deuteronomy 6:2

Deuteronomy 10:12

b. What was the psalmist's response to God's revelation of His majesty?

Psalms 95:6-7

Summary

5. How does reverence or "fear" of the Lord preserve a society? What happens without it?

6. Do you take time each day to meditate on the greatness of the LORD? If not, how might you build this into your life?

Note: The Psalms are a wonderful place to go to meditate on God's character.

7. a. What does the LORD want to give you as a result of your reverent trust in Him?

b. What can you give the LORD through your reverence toward Him?

LESSON 11 NOTES

1 *Mount Sinai* was also called Mount Horeb. It was located in the south-central Sinai peninsula. Moses met God there in a burning bush and later received God's covenant with Israel there as the people camped beside the mountain. The remainder of Exodus takes place at Mt. Sinai, as God gave His people the laws and guidelines for right living.

2 The *Sinaitic Covenant* was made with Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and as the people the LORD had redeemed from bondage to be an earthly power. It was a conditional divine pledge to be Israel's God (as her Protector and the Guarantor of her blessed destiny). The condition: Israel's total consecration to the LORD as his people (his kingdom) who live by his rule and serve his purposes in history. This covenant was an extension of the covenant He had made with Abraham 600 years prior in which receiving the divine blessings depended upon faith and obedience.

3 *kingdom of priests* (19:6). God's kingdom on earth would be made up of the people who acknowledged him as king and, like priests, were completely committed to His service.

4 *holy nation* (19:6). "Why did God choose Israel as his nation? God knew that no nation on earth was good enough to deserve to be called his people, his 'treasured possession.' He chose Israel, not because of anything they had done, but in his love and mercy he chose Israel in spite of the wrong the nation had done and would do. Why did he want to have a special nation on earth? To represent his way of life, to teach his Word, and to be an agent of salvation to the world. 'All nations on earth' would be blessed through

Abraham's descendants (Genesis 18:18). Gentiles and kings would come to the LORD through Israel, predicted Isaiah (Isaiah 60:3). Through the nation of Israel, the Messiah, God's chosen Son, would be born. God chose one nation and put it through a rigorous training program so that one day it could be a channel for his blessings to the whole world." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 135.

5 *Do not be afraid* (20:20). The same Hebrew word is used in Exodus 20:20 as for the reverential *fear* of God (see note 6). This is another example of the both/and way of Hebrew thought regarding God. The same God who demonstrates His holiness in order to develop the proper fear of His majesty is the God who comforts and speaks the word through Moses, "Do not be afraid."

6 Reference: Note 2, *God tested them*, p. 90.

7 *Fear of God* is a conventional phrase equivalent to "true religion." *Fear* in this phrase has the sense of reverential trust in God that includes commitment and obedience to His revealed will (word). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 36.

8 *majesty and holiness of God*. The word *majesty*, when applied to God, is always a declaration of His *greatness* as our Maker and our LORD, which bids us to worship. "The LORD is a great God, and a great King . . . O come, let us worship and bow down" (Psalm 95:3,6). When the Bible speaks of God as being "on high" and "in heaven," the thought is not that God is far distant from us in space, but that He is far above us in greatness and to be adored. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 73.

The holiness of God has to do with God being "set apart" in power and glory and majesty, separate from sin and perfect in righteousness. He alone deserves to be held in awe by created beings.

LESSON 12

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:1-17

At Mt. Sinai, all of the people committed together to do everything that God would instruct them to do through Moses. They said "yes" to His proposed covenant (19:5,8) whereby the LORD would be their King¹ and they would be His people. Now they would receive His edict, the ten "words"² or "stipulations" upon which all the laws of Israel would be based thereafter.³

God had revealed Himself in Egypt as their powerful deliverer and in the desert as their gracious provider. Now the people would come to know the LORD as their King. The covenant He would make with His people would include ten "words" or edicts and would always be based upon a personal relationship with Him. Only later would the stipulations of the covenant be called laws and decrees (Deuteronomy 5:1) or the Ten Commandments. But it is important to note that these stipulations were never intended to be a static legal code in isolation from a relationship of reverent trust in a gracious and faithful LORD.

The first three "words," or edicts, of the covenant had to do with this relationship between God and His people. If Israel was to be God's treasured possession (19:5), they must:

1. *Trust God only* (20:3-4). "You shall have no other gods before me."
2. *Worship God only* (20:5-6). "You shall not make an idol . . . or bow down to them or worship them."
3. *Use God's name in ways that honor Him* (20:7). "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God . . ."

Following these principles would set Israel apart from all other nations who worshipped idols and graven images. Israel would be a holy nation for the LORD which would honor His name, YAHWEH. Because His name represented all that God was to His people, it must never be misused or taken lightly.

The fourth stipulation of the covenant also had to do with their personal relationship with the LORD:

4. *Rest on the Sabbath and think about God* (20:8-11). "Remember the _____ Sabbath day by keeping it holy . . ." This day was to honor God as the Creator who rested from His labor on the seventh day (Genesis _____2:2-3). It was also intended as a gift of rest to Israel.

Commandments five through ten addressed principles regarding the people in relationship to each other:

5. *Respect and obey your parents* (20:12). "Honor your father and your _____mother . . ." This commandment promised long life in the land God _____would give them, a result of following God's intended order within _____the family.

The last five principles prescribed community ethics:

6. *Protect and respect human life* (20:13). "You shall not murder." This protected Israel's community.

7. *Be true to your husband or wife* (20:14). "You shall not commit adultery." This law protected marriage.

8. *Do not take what belongs to others* (20:15). "You shall not steal." In a broader sense, this forbid any misappropriation of a neighbor's possessions.

9. *Do not lie about others* (20:16). "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." This law extended to include deceit of all kinds (see Leviticus 19:11).

10. *Be satisfied with what you have*⁴ (20:17). "You shall not covet your neighbor's house . . ." strikes at the heart motivation behind the acts mentioned in other commandments. Deuteronomy 5:21 uses the phrase, "You shall not set your desire on . . ." to interpret the word *covet*, showing the heart attitude from which most violations against one's neighbor would occur.

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These Ten Commandments given at Mt. Sinai established Israel's covenant responsibilities, but also expressed the eternal will of God, written on every heart by the Creator (Romans 2:15). Jesus further stated that all these commandments can be summed up in the following two: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Read Exodus 20:1-17.

1. a. How did God identify Himself in the preamble of the Ten Commandments, and what gracious act called for the allegiance of His subjects (20:2)?

Reference: Note 1, *be their King*, p. 120.

b. In Exodus 19:5-6, what had God promised to do as Israel accepted His covenant stipulations?

Reference: Note 3, *kingdom of priests*, and Note 4, *holy nation*, p. 108.

2. a. God established an intimate relationship with His people, first by allowing them to relate to Him by His personal name, YAHWEH, and then by making the covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. The Old Testament sometimes pictures this intimate relationship between God and Israel as a marriage: "for I am your husband" (Jeremiah 3:14). By delivering Israel from bondage, the LORD had proven His love, and His desire was that Israel would follow His leadership out of a motivation of love for Him (Deuteronomy 11:1).

How was this intimate relationship between God and Israel to be preserved (Exodus 20:3-4)?

Reference: Note 6, *Jealousy*, p. 120.

b. In the second commandment, the consequences of hating God are seen to affect three or four generations. In contrast, what is God's bountiful promise to those who love and obey Him (Exodus 20:5-6)?

3. God had given Israel His personal name, YAHWEH, which stands for all He is and will be to His people. In the third commandment, *misuse* of His holy name literally means "to lift it up to or attach it to emptiness." An example would be swearing falsely by God's name, as on a witness stand in a courtroom. What does this commandment say about using God's name flippantly or to reinforce a lie or wrong action (Exodus 20:7)?

4. a. How does the fourth commandment also support Israel's relationship with God (Exodus 20:8,10; Leviticus 23:3)?

b. How was this day also a gift to God's people (Exodus 16:23, 29-30; Deuteronomy 5:13-14)?

Reference: Note 7, *Sabbath*, p. 121.

5. a. What was the promised blessing to those who honored their father and mother (20:12)?

b. If individuals obeyed this commandment, why would the nation also experience long life in the land God had given them?

6. How could each of the commandments that are stated in the negative be stated in the positive (20:13-16)?

7. a. Why did God speak so strongly against coveting (20:17)? What harm can result from unchecked coveting:

in one's own life?

in the family, community, or workplace?

b. What commandments could coveting ultimately lead a person to break?

c. How can obedience to the first two commandments help us fulfill the tenth commandment (see also Deuteronomy 6:5)?

8. a. Which commandments refer specifically to Israel's relationship with God? Which refer to relationships within the community?

b. Why would God's holy nation have to have both?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

God's Gift of the Ten Commandments: Part I

All the godly principles of the Bible have their roots in the commandments of God given at Mount Sinai. The laws simply stated there can be expanded to address every aspect of our lives.

It is important to emphasize, however, that these principles were given as a gift to help Israel become a holy nation which experienced life as God intended it to be lived. And these principles are still a gift to us today. Far from restrictive, they safeguard our freedom, make social life possible, and help us make healthy, constructive choices. Also, God's desire was for Israel to follow these guidelines for life out of love and devotion to Him, and this is His desire for us today.

In the rest of this lesson and the next, we will be looking more closely at the gift of God given to us in the Ten Commandments. As we briefly look at each of the "words" God gave at Mt. Sinai as He established a covenant of love with His people, we will see invaluable keys to living. In this lesson, we will take a brief look at the first five commandments, and our next lesson will cover the remaining five.

1. How did the Psalmist describe the gift of godly principles for life?

Psalm 19:7-11

Psalm 119:24, 105

Psalm 119:32,45

Psalm 119:165

2. It has been said that the Ten Commandments reveal the life-style the Creator intended for all human beings--a life characterized by God-centeredness, balance between work and leisure, faithful relationships, and respect for others.⁵ The first four commandments have to do with God-centeredness, or devotion to God.

a. Commandments one and two state: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (20:3). "You shall not make for yourself an idol . . ." (20:4-5). The people of Moses' day were polytheistic. They worshipped many gods. How can we have many "gods" in our lives today?

b. How does Romans 1:25 describe idolatry?

3. a. In the modern classic, *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer describes a shrine in every heart upon which God is to be enthroned and worshipped. Tozer writes that human beings replace Him on this throne with external things which He has given us to enjoy. What are some of the tragic results of this choice mentioned in Colossians 3:5?

b. How do the instructions in Matthew 22:37-39 provide the basic keys to avoiding the subtle pitfalls of idolatry?

4. Commandment three states: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God . . ." (20:7). The word "misuse," or "in vain" (KJV), refers to using God's name in a hollow or idle way, placing no value on it, especially when swearing an oath or backing an action. Here is a command against profanity, but also against using God's name in a manipulative way, such as to lie in court, back a wrong action or curse someone.

a. How does Leviticus 19:12 restate the justice called for in this commandment?

b. What did Jesus add to this in Matthew 5:33-37?

5. a. How can Christians misuse God's name and the privilege of knowing Him personally?

Mark 7:6

Titus 1:16a

b. If we claim to be followers of Christ, what is our high calling?

Ephesians 5:1-2 (1 John 2:6)

6. a. How do the following teach us to address God?

Psalms 8:1

Psalms 29:2

7. The fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (20:11), was given to help the Israelites regularly stop to focus on their relationship with God as well as to help them find balance between work and leisure. While Sabbath day worship is not mentioned as a requirement for believers in the New Testament, it was practiced throughout the early church (see note 7, *Sabbath*, p. 121).

a. What is the motivation for us to set apart one day to honor the LORD each week? What should be the purpose of this day?

b. What will be the rewards of making this a priority?

8. a. How is the fifth commandment, "Honor (or *respect*) your father and mother . . ." (Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:3a) restated in the New Testament?

Ephesians 6:1-2

b. What do Proverbs 23:22 and Proverbs 1:8 add to this?

c. Why does this biblical principle bring stability to a society?

d. How would you account for the disrespect for parents in today's society?

e. What are some ways we can respect and honor parents?

9. a. What guidelines are given for parent/child relationships in Ephesians 6:4?

b. How can parents best set the tone for a relationship of respect and obedience with their children?

10. When children learn to respect parents, they learn to respect others. What do the following Scriptures say about showing respect?

Leviticus 19:32

1 Timothy 5:1-2

1 Peter 2:17

1 Peter 3:15

Summary

11. What motivation does God want you to have as you seek to follow His principles for life?

12. What is the key to avoiding subtle pulls toward idolatry in our modern culture?

13. What does knowing God's name, the LORD, mean to you? How can you avoid taking His name and your relationship with Him for granted?

14. What have you observed in this lesson regarding keeping the Sabbath?

honoring parents?

LESSON 12 NOTES

1. *be their King. The Ten Commandments* (also known as *The Decalogue*, Greek terminology for "Ten Words") are worded like a covenant of Moses' day between a great king and a subject people. 1)The great king identifies himself in a preamble (20:2a); then 2) he sketches his previous gracious acts that should have earned the gratitude of the subjects (20:2b); then 3) he states the treaty stipulations that the subjects must obey (20:3-17). Use of this treaty pattern showed that in the Decalogue, the LORD was formally acknowledging Himself as Israel's King and that Israel had become His subject people. In gratitude for His mercies, reverence for His sovereignty, and trust in His continuing care, the people of Israel, as His subjects, were expected to render complete submission, allegiance and obedience to the LORD, their King. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 115.

2 *Words* (20:1). A technical term for "(covenant) stipulations" in the ancient Near East. The ten "words" in 20:2-17 are the basic stipulations of Israel's covenant with God. In this account it simply says, "And God spoke all these words . . ." In Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4 these same words of God are called, "the ten words." Later in Deuteronomy, the same passage is given the technical terms, "laws and decrees." The common title, The Ten Commandments, must come from the combination title given to the passage, "the ten words," and the reference to it as laws and decrees. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 115.

3 *These "ten words"* or Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mt. Sinai are the original kernel of the Torah (Old Testament laws or instructions of the LORD). . . around which the whole rest may be grouped as an expansion . . . The "ten words" are at once the beginning and the heart of the Mosaic revelation."

4 Paraphrasing for the Ten Commandments in this section are taken from *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*, p. 32.

5 David Field, *Christianity, The Life That Pleases God*, p. 34.

6 *Jealousy* is addressed in both a positive and negative way in the Bible. The two positive are (1) God's jealousy, or exclusive right to possess, Israel (Exodus 20:4) because of their covenant relationship (analogous to marriage), and (2) a husband's jealousy, or zeal to protect, his marriage (Proverbs 6:34; Song of Songs 8:6). Israel's unfaithfulness to God was compared to adultery in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 3:6-10,20; Ezekiel 16:32-35; Hosea 1:2). *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 83.

In His "jealousy," God (1) demands exclusive devotion to Himself, (2) delivers to judgment those who oppose Him, and (3) vindicates His people. "Zeal" and "jealousy" are the same Hebrew word, translated differently according to context. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 115.

7 Sabbath. On the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, God ceased His creative work (Genesis 2:2-3). He commanded His people to keep the day holy as a sign of the covenant, as well as to use it for their own benefit, especially for rest and worship (Deuteronomy 5:12-14; Leviticus 23:3; Exodus 24:12). It was designed to symbolize the rest that God desired for His people and to point forward to an eternal sabbath in God's land of rest (Hebrews 4:8-11). By New Testament times the Sabbath had become so filled with legalistic rules that Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, often did things to restore its proper spirit (Matthew 12:2,3,10; Mark 2:27). Many Christians, in view of both Christ's resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first day of the week, celebrate Sunday as the day of rest, the Lord's Day (John 20:1, 19; Acts 2:1). Some, however, believe that Saturday ought to remain the day of rest and worship." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 81.

~~**8 Reference:** Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.~~

~~**9 Reference:** Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.~~

**This lesson has only
Building on the Basics
continued from Lesson 12.**

LESSON 13

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:1-17

The Gift of the Ten Commandments: Part II

At Mt. Sinai, all of the people committed to do everything that God would instruct them to do through Moses. They said "yes" to His proposed covenant (19:5,8) whereby the LORD would be their King¹ and they would be His people. Now they would receive His edict, the ten "words"² or "stipulations" upon which all the laws of Israel would be based thereafter.

As we saw in our last lesson, these laws were established to allow Israel to thrive as a holy nation and treasured people, bound in a covenant of love to their gracious and personal LORD. Through the Ten Commandments, God also revealed in a broader sense the life-style He, as our Creator, intended for all mankind--a life characterized by God-centeredness, balance between work and leisure, faithful relationships, and respect for others. When practiced, they prevent the chaos produced by selfishness in a society and promote harmony in the family and community. Far from a list of "do's and don'ts," the Ten Commandments are a loving gift from God. for our protection and welfare.

As we explore the broader implications of the Ten Commandments, we will see that we all fall short in keeping them. But the Scriptures make it clear that endeavoring to keep these laws does not save us (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16), but rather points out our tremendous need for the salvation³ found in Christ. His Spirit⁴ then enables us to follow godly principles (Ezekiel 36:27) as we choose the wholehearted devotion

prescribed by the first two commandments. The law, then, serves to draw us to Christ's salvation, where we receive the grace to bow to God's wise authority.

In this lesson, we will survey the last five commandments, all related to healthy relationships with others, and also review the grace of God, which motivates and enables us to practice godly principles for life.

1. a. The sixth commandment states: "You shall not murder" (20:13). Record what 1 John 3:15 adds to the sixth commandment.

b. What does the Spirit of Christ lead us to do with grudges?

Colossians 3:8

Colossians 3:12-13

c. How does this affect our quality of life?

2. a. The seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (20:14), provides protection for the sanctity of the home. How is this commandment restated in Hebrews 13:4?

b. Why is the sanctity of marriage critical to the preservation of a society?

c. To what do you attribute the sexual moral state of our society?

d. What are some choices that we can make in order to be a stabilizing factor in our society?

1 Corinthians 6:18

1 Corinthians 7:2

Galatians 5:22-25

3. a. The eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," deals with respect for the property of others. Why is this necessary for a stable society?

b. How is this commandment closely related to the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17)?

4. a. How does Ephesians 4:28 add to the principle stated in this commandment and turn the focus to generosity?

b. The Bible describes us as caretakers (or stewards) rather than owners. Why is this true, according to Psalm 24:1?

c. Because of this, one author makes the statement, "We are as guilty of theft when we fail to distribute God's resources generously as we are when we seize them for ourselves unjustly."⁵ The eighth commandment is designed to protect personal property, and does not suggest we give away all we own. However, what do the following verses encourage us to do?

Proverbs 3:27-28

Proverbs 19:17

Luke 6:38

5. What additional practices related to respecting others' property are prohibited by the Bible?

Proverbs 22:22-23 (Nehemiah 5:10b)

Note: Usury is driving a hard bargain when the other person's need is great. It involves exploitation of the needy, such as a moneylender who turns his clients into victims and their misfortunes to his own profit. (Ex: Matthew 21:12-13.)

Psalms 37:21a

6. In light of all these principles, how would you summarize the healthy choices we can make regarding material things and respecting the property of others?

7. a. The ninth commandment, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" does not just apply to a court of law. What related principles are given in these verses?

Leviticus 19:11b,c

Proverbs 10:18b

Proverbs 11:12-13

b. What effect do our words have on our lives and our society? What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 13:3 (12:14)

Psalm 34:12-13

8. What guidelines can we follow to make our words a positive force in the world around us?

Ephesians 4:29

9. The tenth commandment, "You shall not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor" (20:17), is the only commandment to address a hidden mental state, a state which is the root of nearly every sin against other people. What objects of coveting are mentioned in the tenth commandment?

10. a. Sometimes coveting is synonymous with greed in the Bible (cf. Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5) and connected to idolatry. How can coveting lead us to put something else before God?

b. What mindsets can combat coveting in our lives?

Hebrews 13:5

1 Timothy 6:6-7

Luke 10:27a

11. While the Ten Commandments are guidelines for life as God intended it, the Scriptures make clear that we are not made right with God by keeping these laws. What do the following verses state?

Romans 3:20

Ephesians 2:8-9

Galatians 2:16

Reference: Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.

12. If we have received God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, what can we do when we realize we have failed to meet God's standard in a certain area?

1 John 1:9

13. a. Rather than a set of rules to be rigidly followed for salvation, the Ten Commandments are valuable keys to life which will never become outdated. What do the following all declare about God's laws?

Psalms 119:144a, 152, 160

b. What will always be true of the one who seeks to live in ways that please the Lord?

Psalms 119:45

Psalms 119:165

Psalms 1:1-3

Summary

14. a. What do the Ten Commandments show you about the character of God?

b. What do the Ten Commandments show you about the character of man?

15. Are there any principles which you have studied related to the last five commandments that have been especially helpful to you?

16. If there are any specific areas of your life where you realize you have failed during this study of the Ten Commandments, what is God's desire for you according to 1 John 1:9 and Isaiah 1:18?

17. Why are the Ten Commandments a gift to you as an individual and to our society?

LESSON 13 NOTES

- 1 **Reference:** Note 1, *be their King*, p. 120.
- 2 **Reference:** Note 2, *Words (20:1)*, p. 120.
- 3 **Reference:** Note 2, *salvation found in Christ, SeeRedemption*, p. 32.
- 4 **Reference:** Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.
- 5 David Field, *Christianity, The Life That Pleases God*, p. 217.

LESSON 14

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

Exodus 20:22-24:18

The people had listened as God gave Moses the Ten Commandments or Words, which established His kingship¹ over Israel. But they were so frightened by the thunder and lightning and the awesome nature of God on Mt. Sinai that they pleaded with Moses to speak to them rather than have God speak to them directly, lest they die (20:19). So Moses returned to the thick darkness on the mountain. There God spoke privately with him while the people waited.

First, the LORD reiterated how important it was that the people worship Him only and that they not make idols like those of the pagan nations around them. Then God gave Moses some laws which dealt with everyday issues in Israel and which illustrated the application of the Ten Commandments. Moses later wrote these laws down in what he called the Book of the Covenant (24:3)² which addressed such contemporary practices as slavery,³ illustrating the fact that God was starting with Israel where they were--having learned many undesirable practices from the world around them. These detailed laws were designed to progressively build godly perspectives on justice into the people as God continued to interact with them and systematically teach them His ways.

The LORD told Moses that if the people were faithful to listen to and obey Him, He would go before them to oppose their enemies and drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land. If they stayed clear of the gods of that land, He promised incredible blessings on them, such as freedom from illness and a full life span.

After receiving the laws, Moses descended the mountain and told the people all the LORD's words. They responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." The next morning, Moses led the people in a ceremony in which the people solemnly vowed to be God's covenant people. Then Moses led Aaron and his two oldest sons and the seventy elders of Israel up Mt. Sinai to actually view the awesome presence of God and have a fellowship meal before Him. Only incomprehensible words could describe what they saw: "Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself" (24:10).

After this, the LORD called Moses to meet with Him again on the top of the mountain where he would be given duplicate copies of the ten stipulations (Ten Commandments) of His covenant with Israel on two tablets of stone (24:12).⁴ As the people awaited Moses' return, they could always see the glory of God, which looked like a consuming fire, on the top of Mount Sinai.

Scan Exodus 20:21-21:35.

1. a. What rule did God add to Hebrew slavery that made the practice different in Israel than in other nations (21:2-3)?

- b. What special protection was offered to female slaves who would have no livelihood or protection if released (21:7-8)?

References: Note 2, *The Book of the Covenant*, and Note 43, *Slavery*, p. 139.

2. a. In its context, what weaker members of Israel's society did the "law of retribution" protect (21:22-27)?

Reference: Note 5, *The Law of Retribution*, p. 140.

b. In ancient cultures, women and slaves were seen as dispensable property. What status did God's laws give them?

Scan Exodus 22.

3. How did the laws of God dissuade a person from stealing (22:1-4)?

4. What created trust between the two parties in Exodus 22:11? Why would this establish trust?

5. a. What did God declare about His own character as He decided justice (22:27d)?

b. The judgments recorded in Exodus 22:16-27 demonstrate God's compassionate nature. Whom do these verses protect from the selfish nature of others?

22:16

22:21

22:22-23

22:25

Read Exodus 23:1-17.

6. God knew the potential for corruption in the courts. What rules of character did the LORD lay down for those involved in the courts which could also be guidelines for our everyday behavior (Exodus 23:1-3,6-8)?

7. What were the stated purposes of the seventh year rest (23:10-11) and the Sabbath rest (23:12)? Whom did God help through these laws?

8. In addition to the weekly Sabbath celebration, the people were required to have three other celebrations (23:14-16). What were the men required to do at these times (23:17)?

Reference: Note 6, *Feasts*, p. 140.

Note: The men were usually accompanied by their families (ex: 1 Samuel 1).

Read Exodus 23:20-33.

9. a. List God's promises to Israel if they obeyed Him?

23:20, 22-23

23:25-26

23:27-31

b. What did the people have to do in order to receive God's blessings?

23:21b

23:24, 32-33

Read Exodus 24:1-18.

10. How did the people respond to the words and laws God gave Moses (24:3,7)?

11. What was the sign of the covenant that the LORD had made with the people (24:5,8)?

Reference: Note 7, *blood sprinkled on the people*, p. 140.

12. Who participated in the meal sealing the covenant, and what was their privilege (24:9-11)?

13. a. What did Moses do after this (24:12-14)?

Reference: Note 4, *tablets of stone*, p. 139.

b. What was always in view of the Israelites during the forty days that Moses met with God on Mt. Sinai (24:16-17)?

Reference: Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Discovering Boundaries

After being enslaved in Egypt for several hundred years, the Israelites possessed little understanding of personal rights and ownership. They had labored without reward, and their families and property had been owned by

Pharaoh. Now, as God began the process of making them a holy nation, He began teaching His people about personal freedom and rights. They needed to learn to be responsible as individuals and to treat other individuals, whether slave or free, with equal dignity and respect.

The first examples illustrated that godly living involves understanding individual rights and responsibility and respecting the rights of others. This was the focus of the Book of the Covenant, where God applied the Ten Commandments to everyday life in Israel. Today's psychologists would call this "setting healthy boundaries." In their book called *Boundaries*, Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend define a "boundary" as "a personal property line that marks those things for which we are responsible. They define *what is me* and *what is not me*. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom."⁸

Knowing how to set healthy boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others affects all areas of our lives and is essential to personal integrity. We often are confused by the Christian focus on being loving and unselfish to the point of disregarding our limits and limitations. But we can see from the first laws God gave Israel that love and unselfishness is not negated, but rather supported in a society where individuals respect healthy boundaries of self and others.

Let's look at some of these principles demonstrated in the Scriptures.

1. a. As you think back over the laws given in the Book of the Covenant, how would you describe the boundaries (lines of responsibility) that were set for individuals?

the courts?

b. How would these boundaries promote respect and unselfishness?

c. What would an absence of such laws have allowed in Israel?

2. a. Honesty is necessary for individuals to maintain healthy boundaries within a society; i.e. people must be telling the truth. Why is honesty necessary, and what happens if it is discarded?

b. How was this demonstrated in God's laws for the courts (Exodus 23:1-3, 7-8) which existed to protect human rights?

c. How do the following verses also support absolute honesty?

Leviticus 19:11

Zechariah 8:16-17

3. The law of retribution given to judges in Exodus 21:23-25 instructed them to distribute punishment that fits the crime. (See also Note 5, *The law of retribution*, p. 140.) How do the following Scriptures also promote just measures?

Psalms 82:3

Proverbs 21:3

Romans 13:7

4. a. God's boundaries for Israel involved avoiding evil and evil people. This was the principle behind God forbidding His people to make

treaties with the corrupt nations of Canaan (Exodus 34:12; 23:31-33). Why is this a necessary part of setting and maintaining healthy boundaries in our lives?

b. How is this principle reiterated for us in the following verses?

Psalms 1:1

Proverbs 4:14-15

2 Corinthians 6:14

5. Honoring the personhood of others requires compassion and a refusal to exploit those in weaker positions in life. God clearly reflected this principle in the laws He gave Israel (cf. Exodus 21:2, 5-6, 22:22-24, 25-27; 23:6, 9). How do the following godly principles also promote respect and compassion toward others?

Deuteronomy 24:14

Proverbs 14:31

Colossians 3:12

6. a. The words we have to learn in order to set healthy boundaries in all areas of our lives are "yes" and "no." What does Jesus say about this in Matthew 5:37?

b. What has God given us to help us make solid decisions?

Psalm 19:7

Psalm 25:9 (Psalm 32:8)

7. To respect the boundaries of others, we have to give up the tendency to try to control others. We not only have to let others make their own choices, but also have to learn to allow God to control our lives. How can we do this?

Micah 6:8

Summary

8. a. What do the specific laws God gave Israel for their lives three thousand years ago show us regarding God's concern about specific details of our lives as His people today?

b. What have you observed about the character of God from this lesson? What are His desires concerning business transactions, punishment of the guilty, and protection of the innocent?

9. a. The Book of the Covenant shows that God is on the side of defining individual rights and responsibilities. Why was learning to set boundaries necessary in Israel's journey to holiness?

b. Why is it important for us to learn to set healthy boundaries in our own lives in order to grow in godliness?

11. It is clear from our lesson that God is compassionate and upholds the cause of the weak. How can we, as His holy people, practice compassion and at the same time set healthy boundaries? How are the two related?

LESSON 14 NOTES

1 References: Note 1, *be their King*, and Note 2, *Words*, p. 120.

2 *Book of the Covenant* (20:22-23:19). The Book of the Covenant recorded in Exodus 20:22-23:19 displays some of the earliest legal material used in the formation of Israel as a nation. It stands unique because it originated at Mt. Sinai rather than because of its content. While the Ten Commandments were comprehensive, broad-based and abstract which gave them a timeless quality for people of all generations, the Book of the Covenant was specific and time-bound, rooted in the ancient place and culture of Israel. While the Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets by the finger of God, the Book of the Covenant was Moses' record of his subsequent conversation with God where God made *judgments* which illustrated the application of the Commandments to real life situations. The Book of the Covenant was therefore not to be understood as a comprehensive and systematic legal code, but rather as a dialogue between God and Moses about the application of the Commandments.

3 *Slavery.* "The Hebrews, though freed from slavery, had slaves (or servants) themselves. A person could become a slave because of poverty, debt, or even crime. But Hebrew slaves were treated as humans, not property, and were allowed to work their way to freedom. The Bible acknowledges the existence of slavery but never encourages it." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 139.

4 *tablets of stone inscribed by God* (24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16). These tablets contained the ten *words* or edicts of God's covenant with Israel (see notes 1, 2, 3, p. 120). "In keeping with ancient Near Eastern practice, these were duplicates of the covenant document, not two sections of the Ten

Commandments. One copy belonged to each party of the covenant. Since Israel's copy was to be laid up in the presence of her God (according to custom), both covenant tablets (God's and Israel's) were placed in the ark (25:21)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 133.

5 *The Law of Retribution* (Exodus 21:24-25). "The 'eye for eye' rule was instituted as a guide for judges, not as a rule for personal relationships or to justify revenge. This rule made the punishment fit the crime, thereby preventing the cruel and barbaric punishments that characterized many ancient countries. Jesus used this principle to teach us not to retaliate (Matthew 5:38-40). Judges, parents, teachers, and others who work with people must make wise decisions in order for discipline to be effective. A punishment too harsh is unfair, and one too lenient is powerless to teach. Ask God for wisdom before you judge." *Life Application Bible*, p. 139.

6 *Feasts*. The Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the Exodus. (See Note 4, *Passover & Feast of Unleavened Bread*, p. 59.) The *Feast of Harvest*, also called the *Feast of Weeks*, was held seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was celebrated during the wheat harvest. Later in Judaism, this celebration came to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. In New Testament times, it was called the *day of Pentecost*, which means "50." The *Feast of Ingathering*, also called the *Feast of Tabernacles*, or *Booths* because the Israelites lived in temporary shelters when God brought them out of Egypt, was celebrated the 15th through 22nd days of the seventh month after the harvest of orchards and vines was finished. This feast would remind Israel of God's presence among them as they lived in tents in the wilderness. In Exodus 23:16, *end of the year* means this celebration occurred at the end of the agricultural year, which began and ended in the Fall.

7 *blood sprinkled on the people*. Shed blood symbolized cleansing of sin and forgiveness (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). See also Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32. The blood shed in the Old Testament sacrifices represented death as punishment for sin. These sacrifices pointed to the blood of Christ, which would be shed during his death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin (Isaiah 53:5-8). Through His blood, Christ obtained forgiveness, release from bondage to sin, atonement, justification, cleansing, holiness and victory for the believer. *The NIV Topical Bible*, p. 1374.

8 Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries*, p. 29.

LESSON 15

THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 25:1-31:18

Moses had entered into the cloud of the LORD's presence on Mt. Sinai and stayed for forty days and nights. During this time, God gave Moses specific instructions for the tabernacle, Israel's traveling "church in the wilderness" where the LORD would dwell among them. To construct the tabernacle, Moses first had to collect a free will offering from the people of materials necessary for the project. Then the people would build exactly according to instructions given by God to Moses for the building and its furnishings.

The tabernacle (*see illustration, p. 152*) would be a 45' X 15' rectangular structure framed with acacia wood. It was to be divided into two parts, the holy place and the Most Holy Place, which would be separated by a curtain. The tabernacle would stand within an outer court, 150 feet long by 75 feet wide, surrounded by curtains.

The Most Holy Place within the tabernacle contained the most holy furnishing, a chest, or ark, made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. The ark was to be fitted with rings and poles which made it portable. It would contain the two stone tablets of God's Covenant, or Testimony (Ten Commandments), inscribed by the finger of God on Mt. Sinai. Most importantly, the ark was to have a cover made out of hammered gold with two cherubim (mighty angels), one on each end and facing each other. God promised Moses, "There above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for Israel" (25:22).

God would begin the process of making His people holy by setting aside Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. The priests would wear sacred garments as they represented the people before God. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were to be engraved on Aaron's shoulder pieces and on the twelve precious stones on his "breastpiece for making decisions." Aaron would also wear a turban on his head with an engraved gold plate which read, "HOLY TO THE LORD." As the representative of the people, the priest would bear their guilt as he presented their offerings and sacrifices¹ to the LORD. These atoning sacrifices would make amends for their sin, and the LORD would declare the people holy as the priest came before Him on their behalf. Morning and evening, a sweet-smelling incense was burned on an altar inside the tabernacle, and once a year, an offering of atonement² for the sins of the people would be made on this altar (30:10).

The LORD concluded the instructions for the tabernacle and priesthood with commands regarding the Sabbath, a special day each week for rest and worship. This holy day would always be connected with God's holy dwelling and with the LORD's promise to make His people holy (31:13).

The purpose of the tabernacle and its court, as well as the whole story of Exodus, may be summed up in God's words to Moses: "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God" (29:45-46). The tabernacle, ark, priests and sacrifices were all means by which God made His people holy so that they could have fellowship with Him as He dwelt among them in all His holiness.

Scan Exodus 25:1-26:37.

1. a. Why did God tell Moses to have the Israelites make a tabernacle for him (25:8)?

b. How specific were His instructions (25:9, 40)?

Reference: Illustration of the Tabernacle, p. 152.

c. Whom did God invite to bring a contribution to Him to help with the building of the tabernacle (25:2)?

2. a. The most important furnishing in the tabernacle was the chest, or ark. What was to be kept in this holy place (25:16; 31:18)?

Reference: Illustration of the Ark, p. 152, and Notes 1-3 on the Ten Commandments, p. 120.

b. What did God tell Israel to make that would cover the ark (25:17-21a)?

Reference: Note 2, *atonement*, p. 151.

c. Where would God meet with Moses and for what purpose (25:22)?

d. Where was the ark to be placed in the tabernacle (26:34)?

Scan Exodus 28-30.

3. a. Whom did God select to serve as priests (28:1)?

b. What was the purpose of the special garments they were to wear (28:2,40)?

4. a. Why did the high priest wear onyx stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (28:9-12)?

Reference: Illustration of the Priestly Dress, p. 152.

b. Why was Aaron to wear twelve stones with the name of the tribes on the "breastplate for making decisions" (28:15-21,29-30)?

c. What did the engraved plate on Aaron's forehead read, and what did it symbolize (28:36-38)?

References: Note 1, *Sacrifices*, p. 150.

5. How were the priests first consecrated before they could enter the holy place (29:4,21; 30:30)?

References: Note 3, *Blood*, p. 151.

6. What did anointing the Tent of Meeting, or tabernacle, and all its furnishings with the sacred oil (30:25-28) signify to the people (30:29)?

7. a. Why was it necessary to consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the priests so that they would be made holy (29:44-45)?

b. What was God's ultimate purpose when He brought Israel out of Egypt (29:46)?

Read Exodus 31.

8. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the construction of the tabernacle (31:1-3)?

Reference: Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.

9. What was the Sabbath designed to do (31:13)?

10. After all these instructions, what was Moses given before he went back down the mountain to the people (31:18)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Journeying With God

As we study these Old Testament passages, it is important to put them in the context of the entire Bible and its revelation of God's character. The LORD who conceived the tabernacle in order to dwell among His people in the Old Testament is the same LORD of the New Testament, who actually became a man and "made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14) in Jesus Christ. His heart of compassion and sacrificial love, demonstrated as He moved among the poor and sick and spiritually blind in the New Testament, is the same heart of longsuffering and lovingkindness which He extended to the Israelites 1,300 years earlier. In both cases, His loving intent was to mend the breach between God and man and make a way for us to experience the deep fulfillment of journeying through life with Him.

The tabernacle was built for this purpose; so that the LORD could dwell among His people and travel with them on their journey. It was not for His own good, but to meet Israel's needs that He came to them. They needed His guidance to face difficulties and to take them in the right direction, His companionship to inspire and comfort and give them significance as a people and as individuals. They needed His provision for their daily needs and His protection and victory over the enemies they would face on their journey. The LORD wanted to travel with the people so that He could meet these needs.

Furthermore, He came to Israel so that all mankind would be blessed (Genesis 12:3b). He did not choose Israel to favor them to the exclusion of other nations, but rather to draw all nations to His grace and righteousness as they observed Israel's interaction with her great and good King.

What can the tabernacle, with all its intricacy, say to us today about our unchanging LORD? Certainly there is the message that He wants to dwell with us as His people, be actively involved in our daily lives and in meeting our deepest needs. He wants to be the ever-present Good Shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10) whose Spirit dwells in our hearts, guiding our lives and making us into a holy people.

Let's look at these encouraging truths as we continue our study of *Journey to Freedom*.

1. a. Why did Israel need the guiding hand and protection of God?

b. Why do we need His presence with us in our lives today?

2. a. Everything about the tabernacle pointed to the holiness of God and His absolute purity. Why are some people uncomfortable, as the Israelites were, with the holiness of God?

b. What are we to remember each time we go before the LORD, who is holy? How are we able to enter His presence?

Romans 3:23-25a

Reference: Note 2, *Atonement*, and Note 3, *Blood*, p. 151; also Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.

Optional: Hebrews 9:19-28

3. According to the following Scriptures, where does the LORD dwell in these days?

1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19

Ephesians 2:19-22

4. a. The Bible tells us that when we put our faith in Christ and His sacrifice for our sin, the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell within us (Romans 8:9-11; John 3:5-6; 14:15-17; Ezekiel 36:26-27). With Christ indwelling our hearts, what privilege do we have?

1 Peter 2:5,9 (cf. Ex. 19:6)

Hebrews 4:16

b. Who is our high priest, according to Hebrews 4:14-15?

5. Through their gracious deliverance from bondage and through the many times God forgave their sin in the wilderness, Israel learned about God's compassionate and patient heart. What must we realize in order to desire, rather than fear, the LORD's presence with us as we journey through life?

Psalms 86:15

Note: See also "God is Easy to Live With," by A. W. Tozer, p. 149.

Psalm 117:2

6. What does His closeness promise that meets our deepest needs?

Psalm 73:24 (48:14)

Psalm 121

Psalm 16:8,11

7. As we come to Him with our needs, what does His word promise?

Psalm 86:5-7

Psalm 91:15

Jeremiah 33:3

Isaiah 65:24

8. What did the people of Israel need to choose that we also must choose today in order to experience the benefits of God's presence?

Psalm 40:8

Psalm 86:11

Psalms 105:3-4

Summary

9. How would you compare traveling through life with God as opposed to traveling through life without Him? What does He desire to give you as you walk with Him?

10. What does it mean to you that God desires to dwell in your heart and walk with you through life?

Excerpt from "God is Easy to Live With" by A. W. Tozer

"It is most important to our spiritual welfare that we hold in our minds always a right conception of God. If we think of Him as cold and exacting we shall find it impossible to love Him, and our lives will be ridden with servile fear. If, again, we hold Him to be kind and understanding our whole inner life will mirror that idea.

The truth is that God is the most winsome of all beings and His service one of unspeakable pleasure. He is all love, and those who trust Him need never know anything but that love. He is just, indeed, and He will not condone sin; but through the blood of the everlasting covenant He is able to act toward us exactly as if we had never sinned. Toward the trusting sons of men His mercy will always triumph over justice.

The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed ones in an easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than galaxies of new created worlds.

How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust...

Some of us are religiously jumpy and self-conscious because we know that God sees our every thought and is acquainted with all our ways. We need not be. God is the sum of all patience and the essence of kindly good will. We please Him most, not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, but by throwing ourselves into His arms with all our imperfections, and believing that He understands everything and loves us still."

LESSON 15 NOTES

1 *Sacrifices.* "Early on, sacrifices became the heart of the worship of God in the Old Testament. There were two main purposes for sacrifices: (a) cleansing from sin by means of burnt offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings (Leviticus 1:3-17; 4:1-6:7); (b) expressing thanksgiving and devotion to God through grain and fellowship offerings (Leviticus 2:1-16; 3:1-16). But sacrifices by themselves were insufficient, for God wanted these accompanied by a softened, humble heart and by obedience and devotion to Him (Psalm 51:17; Psalm 40:6-8; 1 Samuel 15:22). "The New Testament stresses that the Old Testament sacrifices of blood did not actually take away sin; rather, they pointed to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 9:9-14, 23-26; 10:1-4, 11). God still wants our sacrifices today—not animals killed in an effort to honor or appease him, but the sacrifices of lives dedicated to Him, lives poured out in praise and confession of Him, lives rich with deeds of kindness done to our fellow humans, and lives committed to using our resources in God's work (Matthew 16:24-25; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, pp. 108, 146.

2 Atonement "describes the process whereby God draws sinful men and women back to be "at one" with Himself. In the Old Testament this was carried out in an elaborate ceremony, practiced on what was called the Day of Atonement. The main feature of the ceremony, the shedding of blood, taught that atonement symbolizes the substitution of life for life (Leviticus 16:14,18; 5:5-10). In this way, the Old Testament points forward to the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-7; John 1:29). Our LORD entered heaven to present His blood before God, thus making us clean and acceptable (Hebrews 9:11-14); through faith in the blood of the great reconciler, we can be welcomed back home into the arms of our loving Father (Colossians 1:20). Because of Jesus, the atoning Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we are accepted as righteous, and we are declared not guilty (Romans 3:24-25; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 13:12)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, pp. 16, 124. See also Note 2, *Redemption*, p. 32.

3 Blood. "Though blood occasionally refers to the literal fluid in human beings, the Bible uses it primarily as a symbol of life and death, so that the phrase "shedding of blood" means taking a life. The blood shed in the Old Testament sacrifices, therefore, represents death as punishment for sin; this establishes the principle that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). These sacrifices point to the blood of Christ, His death on the cross, as the penalty for sin. Through this blood, presented to God in heaven, He obtains for us forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), release from bondage (1 Peter 1:18-19), atonement (Romans 3:25), justification (Romans 5:9), cleansing (Hebrews 9:14), holiness (Hebrews 13:12) and victory." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1374.

The Tabernacle, Ark, and High Priest's Dress

The tabernacle was to provide a place where God might dwell among His people. The term *tabernacle* sometimes refers to the tent, including the holy place and the Most Holy, which was covered with embroidered curtains. But in other places it refers to the entire complex, including the curtained court in which the tent stood.

This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture. The tabernacle (the holy place and the Most Holy) are enlarged for clarity.

The high priest's dress represented his function as mediator between God and people.

The ark of the Testimony.

Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts, pgs. 33,34, 37.

LESSON 16

THE GOLDEN CALF

Exodus 32-34

Moses remained on Mt. Sinai for forty days, receiving God's instructions for the tabernacle. In the meantime, the people grew tired of waiting for his return. They flippantly told Aaron, whom Moses had left in charge, "As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him" (32:1). The people insisted on making their own gods to go before them. What followed amounted to the worst possible apostasy. Aaron collected the people's gold earrings and fashioned a golden calf. Then he announced a festival "to the LORD." This so-called religious celebration not only compromised God's command to have no other gods before Him (20:3-4), but also involved drunkenness and immorality.

While still on the mountain, the LORD told Moses about the betrayal of the people. God was angry enough to destroy them all and make a holy nation from Moses' descendants instead. But Moses begged Him not to bring disaster on the people, reminding the LORD of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel to give their descendants the land of Canaan. So the LORD agreed not to destroy the Israelites for their idolatry.

Moses went down the mountain, carrying the tablets of the Decalogue inscribed by God (32:15-16; 31:18). When he saw the golden calf and revelry, Moses burned with anger and threw down the tablets, breaking them into pieces before the people. Then he asked Aaron how he had allowed the people to become so out of control. Aaron blamed the rebellious people, then claimed he threw the gold into the fire and "out came this calf!" In reality, Aaron had shaped the idol himself (32:4).

Moses called for all those who had not been involved in worshipping the calf to come to him. Among those who came were all the Levites, and Moses commanded them to move throughout the camp to kill those who persisted in idolatry. Even though this took the lives of three thousand major instigators of the plot (except for Aaron, who was saved by Moses' intercession, Deut. 9:20), the nation as a whole still shared the guilt.

After this, Moses prostrated himself before the LORD to plead for forgiveness for his people (Deut. 9:18). The LORD told Moses that He would spare the nation, but each person would be responsible for his own sin. He also told Moses that He would no longer go with the people to the land, lest their "stiff-necked" disposition cause Him to destroy them. Instead, He would let His angel lead them. The people suffered a plague as a result of their sin, and they mourned before the LORD when they heard His Presence would not be with them on their journey.

Israel's relationship was strained with God, but Moses maintained intimacy with Him. Moses set up a "tent of meeting" outside the Israelite camp where the LORD would come in the pillar of cloud¹ to the entrance of the tent and "would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (33:11). Moses did not want to lead the people if it meant not being with the LORD. He also reminded the LORD that these were His people, and His reputation would suffer with the unbelieving nations around them if He did not go with them.

Because of Moses' intercession for the people and because of God's pleasure with Moses, the LORD once again agreed to accompany the people as they took the land of Canaan. Then, having found such favor with the LORD, Moses asked to see His glory (grandeur and majesty). The LORD explained that no one could see His face and live,² but He caused all of His *goodness* (His nature and character) to pass in front of Moses.

After this, the LORD instructed Moses to join Him on Mt. Sinai, where He would inscribe new tablets with the Decalogue of His covenant.³ There the LORD passed in front of Moses again, this time declaring His *name*, "Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin . . . Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished" (34:6-7).

As the LORD renewed His covenant with Israel, He promised that He would perform awesome wonders as He went before them to conquer their

enemies and give them the land of Canaan. In return, God called Israel to be obedient, and commanded them not to make treaties with the people of the land, which at that time included acceptance of the gods of the treaty people.

Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the new tablets inscribed by God. Unbeknownst to him, his face was radiant from being in the glorious presence of the LORD, and this frightened the people. So thereafter, when Moses would leave the LORD's presence, he would speak to the people and then place a veil over his face to dim the light of his countenance. But Moses wore no veil when he met with the LORD.

Read Exodus 32:1-35.

1. a. What did Israel do to turn away from God's commandments (32:8)?

b. What two most important commands had they broken (20:3-4)?
2. The people had promised to obey all the LORD's commands (24:3). How did their disobedience evolve, and what might have motivated their change of heart toward the LORD and Moses (32:1)?
3. What excuses did Aaron make for allowing the people to become out of control (32:21-24)?
4. a. What was God's initial response to the people's rebellion (32:9-10; see also Deut. 9:18-20)?

b. What was Moses' plea before God (32:30-32)?

Reference: Note 2, *Atonement*, p. 151.

Note: *blot me out of the book* (32:32) gives the image of a papyrus scroll on which a king kept royal records. Moses probably meant he was willing to die prematurely to pay for the people's sin and reconcile them to God.

5. What were some of the consequences of Israel's sin (32:26-28, 35)?

Note: vs. 26-28. The entire tribe of Levites were among those who had not participated in the idolatry. They were charged to move through the camp to execute those still involved. Walvoord & Zuck, p. 156.

Read Exodus 33:1-23.

6. a. Although God agreed not to destroy Israel, what did He decide (33:2-3)?

b. How did the people respond to this (33:4)?

Note: Taking off ornaments was a sign of remorse.

7. a. How did Moses respond to this situation (33:15-16)?

b. How did God respond to Moses' request (33:14,17)?

Note: God knew Moses *by name*, meaning Moses was His.

8. a. Describe the relationship between Moses and the LORD (33:7-11a).

b. Who guarded the tent of meeting continually (33:11b)?

9. How did the LORD respond to Moses' request to see His glory, or majesty and grandeur (33:18-23)?

Note: Moses was not allowed to see God (v. 20), but this does not contradict v. 11, which refers to God speaking to Moses "face to face." The latter is a figurative expression suggesting openness and friendship; i.e. God spoke clearly and openly with Moses (cf. Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10). Walvoord & Zuck, p. 157.

Read Exodus 34:1-35.

10. a. Why did the LORD call Moses up on the mountain (34:1-2)?

Reference: Note 3, *Decalogue of His covenant*, p. 162.

b. What did the LORD proclaim about His name or character as He passed before Moses (34:5-7)?

Reference: Note 2, *I AM (YHWH)*, p. 22.

c. How did He demonstrate this to His people (34:8-11,27)?

11. a. What particular sin did God address when He renewed His covenant with Israel (34:12-17)?

Note: At that time, making treaty with a people included accepting their gods.

b. *Optional.* What were the positive instructions given that would keep them from falling into this sin (34:18-26)?

References: Note 4, *Passover & Feast of Unleavened Bread*, p. 59. Note 3, *firstborn redemption*, p. 59.

12. a. What was the result of Moses' being in the glorious presence of the LORD (34:29-30)?

b. What did he do to protect the people (34:33)?

c. How did he appear in the LORD's presence (34:34)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Choices that Separate-; Choices that Unite

Certainly the most crucial issues in this lesson pertain to our relationship with the LORD--how to maintain unity with Him and how to reunite ourselves with Him when we fail Him, as the Israelites did. As we will see, many of the same principles that govern our relationship with God also apply to maintaining healthy relationships with other people.

The choices that separated the people from God -- impatience, ingratitude, vain imaginations, willfulness and rebellion-- can also break relationships with other people. In the same way, what reunited Israel to the LORD -- a

repentant heart and commitment to restoring a walk with Him -- can also promote healing in human relationships.

As we continue our study on the journey to freedom, we will look at biblical principles derived from the golden calf story which can help us make choices to preserve closeness to God and others.

1. What part did the following have in the break between the people and the LORD?

impatience

lack of appreciation

vain imaginations (misunderstanding or imagining what is not true; cf. Exodus 32:1c)

willfulness and rebellion

2. a. In light of this, what must we continually choose in order to stay close to the LORD?

b. How do these principles apply to human relationships?

3. What choices will help counter these mistakes? What do these verses suggest regarding:

patience with the LORD?

Romans 12:12

Psalms 37:7a

patience with others?

Colossians 3:13 (1 Corinthians 13:4a)

4. What constructive choices can we make regarding:

a. gratitude toward the LORD?

Psalms 100:4-5

Psalms 103:2 (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

gratitude toward others?

Philippians 4:8

b. countering vain (untrue) imaginations about God?

1 John 4:16

Psalms 119:11 (John 17:17)

countering vain imaginations which destroy relationships with others?

1 Corinthians 13:6-7

c. submission (willingness to yield) to God's will?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Romans 12:1-2

submission (willingness to yield) to others?

Ephesians 5:21

Philippians 2:4

5. a. Through Israel's repentance (remorse, change of heart and action), and through the intercession of Moses, the people were restored to fellowship with God. Who intercedes for us as Moses did for the people, according to Hebrews 7:24-25?

b. How can we restore our relationship with God when we have failed Him?

1 John 1:9

c. What desire accompanied Israel's genuine heart of repentance in Exodus 33:4, 15?

6. As always in Israel's history, God was merciful and forgave the people when they came to Him in genuine repentance. How does Exodus 33:14 describe the result of making choices to restore a broken relationship with the LORD?

Summary

7. What parts do (1) remorse over wrong doing, (2) a change of heart (repentance), and (3) a commitment to keep "walking together" play in restoring broken human relationships?

8. a. Can you relate with the Israelites' struggles with impatience, ingratitude, vain imaginations or willfulness toward God?

b. What choices can help you sustain intimacy with the LORD?

c. What similar choices help sustain intimacy with other people?

9. a. What can we do to restore our relationship with the LORD when we have made wrong choices?

b. What is the result, according to Acts 3:19?

LESSON 16 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

2 *no one may see me and live* (33:20). John 1:18 speaks of God incarnate in Christ and reads, "The Word became flesh, and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:14,18; see also Hebrews 1:3a). Since no human being can see God as He really is, Christ took on a human form to make Him known.

3 *Decalogue of His covenant*. It is important to understand the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, in relationship to the theocracy God was establishing with Israel. See Notes 1-3, p. 120.

LESSON 17

BUILDING THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 35-40

The golden calf incident was over. The LORD had renewed His covenant with Israel and promised Moses that His Presence would indeed go with the people as they journeyed to the Promised Land. Now it was time to carry out the specific instructions God had given Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31) where God would dwell among them.

Moses' instructions began in the same way God's instructions for the tabernacle had ended, with a reiteration of the importance of keeping the Sabbath (cf. 31:12-17).¹ God's holy place was to be connected with this holy day. The first order of business was then to gather all the necessary materials for the project. Moses called for freewill offerings, and "everyone who was willing and whose spirit moved him brought their contribution to the LORD." The response was overwhelming. The people were so generous that they finally had to be stopped from bringing any more gifts because the craftsmen had far more materials than they needed for the work!

Then Moses requested all who were skilled to come and work on the project. The LORD filled Bezalel with His Spirit and gifted him, along with Oholiab, to teach others in skills of designing, crafting and weaving. Every skilled and willing person came to take part in the work.

The people were generous with their freewill offerings as well as their talents and abilities. They were also anxious to do exactly what the LORD had instructed Moses. The account of the construction of the tabernacle is basically a verbatim repetition of the earlier account of the instructions given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Each time a particular task was completed, it was followed by the refrain, "as the LORD had commanded Moses." When

the work was completed, they brought the tabernacle with all its furnishings to Moses, and he blessed them.

After this, the tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting, and its furnishings were set up, anointed with oil, consecrated and made holy just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Aaron and his sons were brought to the door of the tabernacle where Moses cleansed them with water and consecrated them as a priesthood² which would continue for generations to come. With this, Moses and the people had carried out all the LORD had commanded.

Then the cloud of the LORD's Presence³ covered the tabernacle, which became filled with His glory. The same cloud that had led the people out of bondage in Egypt now dwelt among them to lead them to the land of promise. When the cloud lifted, they would travel; when it remained still, they would not travel.

As Exodus closes, we can look back over its pp. to see the incredible way in which the LORD revealed Himself to Israel as a supremely moral being whose leadership extended over all creation. Just as He had promised Abraham centuries before (Genesis 12:1-4; 15:5-21),⁴ the sovereign LORD had multiplied Abraham's descendants and made them into a great nation, had delivered them from terrible Egyptian slavery through mighty acts of power, and had established a covenant with them whereby He would be their King. Now the LORD had come to dwell among them in the portable tabernacle. His Presence, made visible in the cloud over the ark of the covenant, would be their guide for the rest of the journey to the Promised Land.

Read Exodus 35:1-36:38.

1. After God had dealt with Israel's disobedient attempt to make their own gods and raucously worship them, Moses presented God's plan for building the tabernacle where He promised to dwell among them. Describe the spirit with which the Israelites responded to the call for precious materials to do the work (35:20-29; 36:3,5-7)?

Reference: Note 5, *The tabernacle or Tent of Meeting*, p. 170.

2. a. Who chose Bezalel to do the work on the tabernacle and gave him the skills he needed for the job (35:30-31)?

b. What skills were Bezalel and Oholiab given (35:32-34)?

c. What skills were others given (35:35)?

Scan Exodus 36:8-39:43.

3. a. What emphasis is made in this section as it repeats the specifications, including even small details of measurement, that were given by God to Moses on the mountain (cf. 39:32, also vv. 1, 5, 7, 21,26)?

b. What resulted from the people following the LORD's instructions exactly (39:42-43)?

Scan Exodus 40:1-33; Read Exodus 40:34-38.

4. a. Why did Moses anoint the tabernacle, its furnishing, the altar and all the priests with oil (40:9-16)?

b. What did this make possible (40:34)?

5. What does the climax of Exodus reveal about the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land (40:36-38)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Rewards of an Attentive Heart

The golden calf incident had taught the Israelites the importance of listening to God. This was demonstrated as they explicitly and without question followed the specific instructions the LORD gave Moses for the building of the tabernacle. The joy and freedom they experienced as a result of their obedience pervades the atmosphere of this lesson's narrative. The people discovered that focusing on pleasing God produced far greater rewards than focusing on pleasing themselves. The project united them in an effort which would benefit them all. It allowed them to discover god-given gifts and abilities as well as the fulfillment found only in working with others to glorify the LORD. But more than this, their obedience led to personal holiness before God through the rites of the tabernacle creation, and allowed God in all His splendor to dwell in their midst and journey with them to the Promised Land.

Obedience is a word that causes many of us to shudder. It is easy for us to believe we know what will bring freedom and fulfillment in our lives, and we hope God will overlook our indifference at times toward His leadership. Furthermore, in many people's thinking, a holy God would never insist on submission and would show only mercy and lenience toward disobedience. However, the Scriptures declare that God, in His love and mercy and justice, requires our obedience because His instructions are always in our best interest. Yieldedness toward the LORD results in supernatural protection, fulfillment and inner freedom from guilt and other destructive emotions. In short, when we sensitively follow the LORD as we journey through life, we discover His will for us to be "good, acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

In the context of this lesson, we will continue our study of *Journey to Freedom* as we observe the rewards of cultivating an attentive heart toward God.

1. a. How would you contrast Israel's golden calf experience with that of building the tabernacle?

b. What wisdom do you see for today in this contrast?

2. What rewards of obedience are found in the following Scriptures?

Exodus 19:5

Deuteronomy 5:29

Matthew 7:24-27

John 14:23

3. a. The Bible is the chief means by which we receive God's instructions. How do the following verses describe God's word?

Psalms 19:7-8, 11

b. How is it wise to respond to God's word? What do these verses suggest?

Psalms 119:11, 97

Psalms 119:36-37

4. a. What are the rewards of carefully seeking and heeding the wisdom found in God's instruction book for life?

Psalms 119:32,45

Proverbs 2:6-8

Proverbs 2:9-11

Proverbs 3:13-18

b. Why is wisdom apart from godly truth undependable?

5. The Israelites also received supernatural abilities (35:30-36:1) as a result of their submission to the LORD. What do the following New Testament passages promise each committed believer today?

Romans 12:4-8

Reference: Note 6, *Spiritual gifts*, p. 170.

6. The greatest rewards of Israel's obedience in the building of the tabernacle had to do with the LORD and His salvation in their midst. What is the promise of Scripture to all those who follow the LORD with a heart attentive to do His will?

Exodus 33:14

Psalm 1:3

Psalm 16:11

Summary

7. How would you describe an attentive heart toward God?

8. What role does the Bible play in helping us walk in obedience to the LORD?

9. a. Is there an area(s) of your life where you are either struggling to follow God's leading or sincerely desire His direction?

b. Of what can you be assured as you follow the principles of His Word and will to do His will?

Psalm 32:8

10. What are the rewards of an attentive heart toward the LORD that you will experience in your own life as you trust Him?

LESSON 17 NOTES

1 *Sabbath*. See Note 7, p. 121.

2 *Priesthood*. "Priests are mediators or go-betweens who present the needs of the people to God. In the Old Testament this contact with God was accomplished through the sons of Aaron, who were set apart as priests to offer sacrifices for sins. Those who were not consecrated to the priesthood but who tried to do the work of priests were punished (Numbers 18:7). Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood, for he sacrificed himself and brought his blood into the heavenly tabernacle, in order to restore our relationship with God and take away our sin forever (Hebrews 9:12,26,28). He has made us clean again, so that we can now enter the presence of our holy God. He is at God's right hand, interceding before the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7:25) and assuring us that we will receive the benefits he died to win for us. Through faith in Him we can come directly to God, so that we no longer need a human priest (John 14:6; Heb. 4:15-16; Eph. 2:18). In this way, the New Testament teaches that all of us who believe are priests (1 Peter 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6). As priests, we can offer sacrifices of gratitude for the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus, we can offer ourselves in selfless service to others, and we can bring our daily needs and the needs of others to God in prayer." *NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 93.

3 *Cloud of the LORD's presence*. See Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

4 **Reference:** Note 1, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

5 The *tabernacle* or *Tent of Meeting* was "God's home on earth. He filled it with His glory--the overpowering sense of His presence. Almost 500 years later, Solomon built the temple, which replaced the tabernacle as the central place of worship. God also filled the temple with His glory (2 Chronicles 5:13-14). But when Israel turned from God, His glory and presence departed from the temple and it was destroyed by invading armies (2 Kings 25). The temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. God's glory returned in even greater splendor nearly five centuries later when Jesus Christ, God's Son, entered it and taught. When Jesus was crucified, God's glory again left the temple. However, God no longer needed a physical building after Jesus rose from the dead. God's temple now is His church, the body of believers (1 Corinthians 6:19)." *Life Application Bible*, NIV, p. 167.

6 *Spiritual gifts*. "The Bible lists numerous spiritual gifts. Many Bible interpreters divide them into natural gifts (such as speaking, serving others, showing mercy) and supernatural gifts (such as doing miracles and speaking in tongues). Some gifts may be enjoyed privately, but the main reason God gave gives them is to testify to Christ and to equip individuals

to serve others and build up the church. Each believer has been given a special gift of the Spirit, so that he or she can make a unique contribution to the body, Christ's church. Some believe the supernatural gifts were limited to the apostolic age, while others think they have been, and will be, present in the church throughout her history, right up to the present day." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1278.

Spiritual gifts are discovered as we walk closely with the LORD, try different service opportunities, and observe the response of others. Your spiritual gift(s) will be in line with what you enjoy doing and what results in others growing in faith. The building of the tabernacle illustrates that menial tasks of service are important and also require God-given gifting and calling.

References to spiritual gifts: Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

LESSON 18

LEAVING MT. SINAI: CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP

Numbers 9-12

The Exodus narrative ended with the children of Israel encamped at Mt. Sinai. The LORD had come to dwell in their midst and had filled the tabernacle with His Presence. During the year that Israel camped at Sinai, God directed Moses in organizing Israel's worship, government and military forces (Leviticus; Numbers 1-8).

In this lesson, we pick up their story in the first month of the second year after their deliverance from Egypt at the time of the first Passover celebration. Moses instructed them to celebrate the Passover at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month and to follow the instructions he had given them regarding the celebration. Consistent with the careful obedience they had demonstrated in building the tabernacle, the Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses. They had become very attentive to His direction since the golden calf debacle.

Their obedience was also demonstrated as they followed the LORD on their journey. The people moved only when the cloud¹ lifted from above the tabernacle, and they remained in camp as long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle. On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted, and the Israelites set out from Sinai and traveled for three days to the wilderness of Paran. Each tribe encamped² and marched together behind its own flag, and the tribes marched in divisions of three behind a standard, or flag, for their division.³ They all followed the ark of the covenant and the Presence of the LORD in the cloud. Numbers 10 ends depicting a very obedient people. Moses would recite a short poem as the

ark set out and another when it came back to camp, picturing the LORD as a divine warrior whose Presence over the ark would lead them into battle and back again to camp.

There is, however, an abrupt shift in Numbers 11 from obedience to a succession of rebellions. Three days into the journey, the people began to complain about their hardships. The LORD became angry⁴ and sent fire which burned some of the outskirts of the camp. The people cried out to Moses, he prayed for them, and the LORD stopped the punishment. This became the basic pattern for the complaint stories that followed.

Next, the "rabble," a term used to describe the people who joined the Israelites as they fled Egypt, began to complain about the monotony of the manna⁵ that God provided for them to eat. They looked back with great fondness to the delicacies they remembered eating in Egypt. Their complaint spread throughout the rest of the camp, and soon every family was wailing for meat to eat. Underlying their complaints was a rejection of the LORD Himself and His personal care for them, as well as a desire to go back to their old way of life in Egypt (11:20).

The LORD became very angry with the people, and, for the first time, Moses lost patience with the people and with his role as their leader. He poured out his heart to the LORD saying, "What have I done to displease you that you have put the burden of all these people on me? . . . Did I give them birth? . . . If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin" (11:11-15).

God responded with compassion toward Moses. He appointed seventy faithful leaders, or elders, from among the people to share Moses' responsibility in dealing with the people. The Spirit of God, which had empowered Moses, now also rested upon these men, and they prophesied.⁶ The Spirit also caused two men listed among the seventy, but who had not been at the Tent of Meeting, to begin prophesying. Joshua was afraid this would diminish Moses' place of authority and urged Moses to stop them. But Moses responded, "I wish all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!" (11:29).

After addressing Moses' need for help, the LORD responded to the people's craving for meat. He sent millions of quail for thirty days, and the people had so much meat that they grew to hate it. The LORD became angry as He

watched some of the people greedily consume the meat, and He caused a severe plague which killed many who had lusted for meat and for Egypt.⁷

The final rebellion and crisis in leadership came from Moses' brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. They began to criticize Moses among the people for having taken a Cushite wife.⁸ But the underlying problem seemed to have been the threat upon Miriam's and Aaron's positions of leadership when the Spirit appointed and came upon the seventy elders. Nevertheless, the LORD immediately and decisively came to Moses' defense. He called Moses, Miriam and Aaron to stand before Him at the Tent of Meeting where He exalted Moses above all other prophets as the one with whom He spoke face to face. Then the LORD struck Miriam with leprosy because she had attacked and undermined Moses. Aaron begged Moses to go to God on her behalf, and when Moses cried out to the LORD, Miriam was healed. Even so, she had to remain outside the camp for a week as a result of her pride.

With the crises averted and the leadership in place, the people of God resumed their journey to the Promised Land.

Read Numbers 9:1-14.

1. a. What did the Passover commemorate, and when was it observed (9:1-3; see also Note 4, *Passover*, p. 59)?

Note: Israel had been at Mt. Sinai nine months (9:1; Exodus 19:1)?

b. What did Moses do before answering the question of the men who were ceremonially unclean at the time of the Passover (9:8)?

Read Numbers 9:15-23; 10:33-36.

2. Describe how the LORD led His people.

Reference: Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

Read Numbers 10:1-10.

3. a. What function did the trumpets serve in Israel's journey (10:1-7)?

References: Note 2, *Encampment and Marching order of Israel*, p. 181, and Note 3, *The encampment of Israel*, p. 182.

b. What important function would they serve in future battles (10:9)?

c. Who blew the trumpets (10:8), and how were they used in worship (10:10)?

Read Numbers 11:1-35.

4. Describe the pattern of complaint and response established in this first complaint about the hardships of the journey (11:1-3).

5. What was the nature of their second complaint (11:4-9)?

References: Note 9, *Rabble*, p. 182, and *Manna*, p. 90.

6. a. How did this complaining affect Moses? What did he say to the LORD (11:10-15)?

b. What did the LORD do to help Moses (11:16-17; 24-25)?

Reference: Note 6, *Prophesied*, p. 182.

7. a. How did Joshua respond to the situation with Eldad and Medad (11:26-28)?

b. What was Moses' response to him (11:29)?

8. a. How did the LORD answer the people's craving for meat (11:18-23, 31-32)?

References: Note 7, *struck them with a severe plague*, and Note 9b, *Rabble*, p. 182.

b. What were the consequences of their complaining (11:33-34)?

Read Numbers 12:1-16.

9. a. Describe the final crisis regarding leadership (12:1-3)?

Reference: Note 8, *Moses' Cushite wife*, p. 182.

b. How is Moses described(12:3)?

Note: This is probably a later addition to the text to show the great unfairness of the charge of arrogance against Moses. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 208.

c. What did God say about Moses as he confronted Miriam and Aaron for undermining Moses' leadership (12:4-9)?

10. How did Miriam's and Aaron's story follow the pattern of Israel's complaints (12:10-15; cf. Question 4 above)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Choosing the Right Focus

For a time, the Israelites enjoyed peace and success as they faithfully followed the LORD. This period was shortlived, however, before they began complaining again. They complained about God's daily provision of manna as they looked longingly back to the riches of Egypt. They had forgotten the tyranny there and were no longer appreciative of God's great work in delivering them. The people also talked as if they would be eating manna in the wilderness forever. With unbelieving hearts, they disregarded God's promise to take them to the land "flowing with milk and honey."

In addition to fantasizing about their past in Egypt and looking with doubt toward the future, the people focused on what they did not have rather than on what God had provided for them. They cared only about their immediate comfort and paid no attention to the fact that the LORD was giving them freedom, establishing them as a nation, leading them to a land of their own, and dwelling among them in all His glory.

Not only this, but the story of Miriam and Aaron demonstrates how complaining can result from coveting the power and position of another rather than focusing on the specific purposes God has for one's own life.

Times have not changed. Complaining still results from choosing to focus on the wrong things. In this lesson, we will look at four choices of focus we can make which can keep us from a complaining spirit.

I. Focus on what we have instead of what we do not have.

1. a. Compare the results of focusing on what we have with focusing on what we do not have.

b. What are some blessings we can overlook if we focus on unfulfilled desires?

c. How can the habit dictated in Philippians 4:8 help us avoid focusing on what we don't have?

d. How does the right focus affect our relationship with God and other people?

II. Focus on the present rather than living in the past or grimly projecting the future.

2. a. The Israelites talked as if their existence in Egypt had been wonderful. What human tendency regarding memories does this exhibit?

b. How does Philippians 3:13-14 instruct us to act regarding the past?

3. a. The Israelites talked as if they would be in the wilderness forever. They ceased to believe God was taking them, as He promised, *through* the wilderness to a good land. What human tendency regarding projection on the future does this exhibit?

b. How does Matthew 6:31-34 instruct us to view the future?

III. Focus on the purpose God has for our individual lives rather than comparing ourselves to others.

4. a. Miriam and Aaron, and later some of the Levites (Numbers 16), fell into the trap of competing with the power of Moses. What human tendency is demonstrated here?

b. It is easy to feel jealousy toward the status or position of another, even in the spiritual realm. What do the Scriptures promise each person who commits himself to the LORD and His work?

Ephesians 2:10

c. What does Jesus promise to each one who "abides" in Him?

John 15:5, 8, 16

5. a. What is the greatest indication that we are abiding in Christ?

John 15:17

b. According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, why does genuine love negate comparison and envy?

6. In John 21:20-22, Peter tried to compare his lot in life with that of the Apostle John. What does Jesus' response to Peter tell us about the focus we must have?

7. What does Ephesians 6:18 suggest that we can do when we are tempted to compare ourselves to someone else?

IV. Focus on the LORD and His promises, not on our present problems or circumstances.

8. a. In their ingratitude, the Israelites forgot about past and present miracles of God which proved His faithfulness. They took for granted the cloud of the LORD's presence, which all could see over the tabernacle, and the manna which covered the ground each morning. What human tendency regarding faith in God does this reflect?

b. What do the following passages suggest we can do in order to keep our focus on the LORD and His faithfulness?

Psalms 105:4

Hebrews 12:2a

9. The Israelites did not ask God for meat; they demanded it. How should we come to the LORD with our present needs?

Philippians 4:6

Psalms 55:22

10. Of what are we assured as we focus on the LORD and His faithfulness?

Psalms 108:4

Isaiah 26:3-4

Summary

11. a. List the four unhealthy focuses discussed in this lesson.

b. What four constructive focuses were discussed?

12. a. Is there a problem(s) in your life today which is preoccupying your thoughts?

b. What are some positive decisions you can make regarding this area of concern?

13. What have you learned from this lesson on the relationship between complaining and choosing the right focus?

LESSON 18 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 3, *pillar of cloud*, p. 69.

2 *Encampment and Marching order of Israel* in the wilderness.

The NIV Study Bible, p.192. See also *Lesson 1 Introduction*, pgs. 3-4 and, *"The Twelve Tribes of Israel,"* p. 91.

3 *The encampment of Israel* "must have been one of the biggest campsites the world has ever seen! It would have taken about 12 square miles to set up tents for just the 600,000 fighting men--not to mention the women and children. Moses must have had a difficult time managing such a group. In the early stages of the journey and at Mount Sinai, the people were generally obedient to both God and Moses. But when the people left Mount Sinai and traveled across the rugged desert, they began to complain, grumble, and disobey. Soon problems erupted, and Moses could no longer effectively manage the Israelites. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers present a striking contrast between how much we can accomplish when we obey God and how little we can accomplish when we don't." *Life Application Bible*, NIV, p. 217.

4 *The LORD became angry*. See Note 6, *The Human God*, p. 79.

5 **Reference:** Note 4, *Manna*, p. 90.

6 *they prophesied* (11:25). "Probably means that they gave ecstatic expression to an intense religious experience (see 1 Samuel 10:5-6; 18:10; 19:20-24; 1 Ki. 18:29). *but they did not do so again*. It seems that the temporary gift of prophecy to the elders was primarily to establish their credentials as Spirit-empowered leaders." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 207.

7 *struck them with a severe plague*. "The principal issue, according to 11:20, was not meat at all, but a failure to demonstrate proper gratitude to the LORD, who was in their midst and who was their constant source of good." *The NIV Study Bible*, NIV, p. 207.

8 *Moses' Cushite wife*. This may be in reference to Zipporah, in contempt of her Midianite ancestry, but is more likely in reference to a new wife taken by Moses, perhaps after the death of his first wife. "The attack on the woman was a pretext; its focus was the prophetic gift of Moses and his special relationship with the LORD (v. 2)." *The NIV Study Bible*, NIV, p. 208.

9 *Rabble* (11:4). a. This was a term used for some of the non-Israelite mixed group of people who followed the Israelites out of Egypt. They were probably a continual source of complaints and trouble in the camp. Those who did not know the LORD and His mercies incited those who did know Him to rebel against Him.

b. As in Exodus 16, the people began to forget what God had done for them (see Psalm 106:14) and complain about their diet, saying "If only we had meat to eat!" As slaves in Egypt, no doubt meat was *not* common fare. Now that they were struggling with new problems in the wilderness, the people romanticized the past and minimized its discomforts. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 206.

LESSON 19

SPYING OUT THE LAND

Numbers 13-14

The people's grumblings and rebellions against God's care for Israel and against Moses' leadership would reach a climax as they openly protested against entering the land God had promised to give them.

Twelve men had been chosen, one from each tribe, to go and spy out the land. They returned after forty days with some of the good fruits of the land, including a single cluster of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole between two men!

The spies' reported that the land was indeed good, "flowing with milk and honey" as God had told them. . . *but* the people were powerful, and their cities were large and fortified. Even so, Caleb, one of the twelve spies, confidently asserted that they could certainly take possession of the land. However, ten of the other men began spreading a bad report among the people which became greatly exaggerated. The land was described as one that devoured those living in it, inhabited by unusually large and strong people, next to whom the Israelites would be like grasshoppers.

Terror spread among the people until they were all weeping and wailing, and once again they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. This time, instead of simply wishing that they were back in Egypt, they actually spoke of choosing a new leader who would take them back to Egypt.

Moses, Aaron, and two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, fell on their faces in front of the people and pleaded with them not to be afraid and not to rebel against the LORD. They reminded them that the LORD would lead them

into the land and give it over to them as He had promised. Tragically, this positive word enraged the people to such an extent that they now talked about stoning their leaders.

God's anguish could be heard as He cried out, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe me, in spite of the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" (Num. 14:11). God's initial response was the same as His response to them after they had rebelled in worshipping the golden calf: "I will destroy them, but I will make you [Moses] into a nation greater and stronger than they" (14:12). Moses immediately came to their defense and argued that the great name of Yahweh would be disgraced among the nations if the report circulated that God was not able to bring these people into the land He had promised to give them. Moses then reminded the LORD of His own words, spoken at Sinai, where He revealed Himself as "The LORD . . . slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion . . . Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished . . ." (14:18). Moses, as intercessor, asked God to forgive the sin of the people on the basis of His great love.

God relented and forgave them as a people, but not without consequences. The ten spies and the whole generation of people who had treated Him with contempt would never enter the Promised Land. Instead, their children, whom they were afraid would be plundered by their enemies, would enter the land. But first, they would suffer for forty years in the desert, one year for each of the days that their fathers spied out the land. The ten spies who were responsible for spreading the bad report died immediately of a plague, leaving only Joshua and Caleb. Joshua was to become Moses' successor and would lead the next generation into the land. Caleb, who followed the LORD wholeheartedly and gave a faithful report in the face of a negative majority, was promised an inheritance in the land for himself and his descendants.

The story ended with remorse and more disobedience. The people repented too late and determined to go up and take the land without the command of Moses or the ark of the LORD's Presence. In their arrogance, they were attacked and defeated. Even so, the promise of God's grace was already present in the LORD's next words to Moses, which began, "After you enter the land I am giving you . . ." (15:2).

Read Numbers 13:1-33.

1. How many men went to Canaan to spy out the land? How long were they there (13:2,25)?

2. a. How did they describe the land and its fruit in their report (13:23, 26-27)?

b. How did the ten faithless spies describe the people and possibility of a successful conquest (13:28-29, 31-33)?

Note: Anak's descendants were called Anakim, and the spies compared them to the giants of Genesis 6:4 called Nephilim.

c. What was Caleb's assessment of the situation (13:30)?

Read Numbers 14:1-44.

3. Forgetting all the miracles of grace the LORD had done for them, how did the people respond to the reports of the spies (14:1-4)?

4. How did Moses, Aaron and two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, react to the people (14:5-9)?

5. a. According to the account of this event in Deuteronomy 1, how did the people perceive the LORD felt about them (Deuteronomy 1:27)?

b. What did Moses remind them about God's attitude toward them (Deuteronomy 1:30-31)?

c. Why were the Israelites unwilling to enter the land (Deuteronomy 1:26,32)?

6. How did the LORD respond to His people? What did He say to Moses (Numbers 14:10-12)?

7. a. What was the first argument Moses used to persuade God not to destroy His people (14:13-16)?

b. What did Moses' final argument reflect about the LORD's Name and His character (14:17-19)?

8. a. What did the LORD do for Israel (14:20)?

b. How did the consequences that the unfaithful Israelites suffered fit the complaints and objections they had about entering the land (14:21-35)?

c. What was different about Caleb? What promise did the LORD give to him and to Joshua (14:24,30)?

d. What immediate consequence did the ten spies who had given the bad report suffer (14:36-38)?

9. a. What did the people do after they realized how wrong they had been to complain about taking possession of the land God had given them? What was the result (14:39-45)?

b. What does Deuteronomy 1:41-44 reveal about the attitudes involved in this action?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Not I, But Christ

The mistake that the ten fearful spies and the people made was to evaluate the battle from the perspective of what they could do, rather than in terms of what God would do as they trusted Him. Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, even having seen the giant people and massive fortifications of the cities said, ". . . the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid . . ." (Numbers 14:9). They knew taking the land was humanly impossible, but if they yielded to God's plan and trusted Him, *He* would give them miraculous victory.

God did not intend that the Israelites should take the land on their own, but that He would give it to them as they yielded, walked forward, and trusted in His faithfulness. The nations were trembling because they had heard of

the power of Israel's God, but the people of Israel missed this truth and therefore never saw the promised land themselves. Only their children would go in and receive God's blessings as *they* yielded to the LORD.

Although we do not face the literal battles with fearsome enemies which Israel faced, every sincere Christian faces the daily battle of trying to live the Christian life. Some are led to believe that when they invite Christ into their lives, there will be instant change, only to find themselves battling with the same habits and struggles as before. From within and without, battles rage with "giants" which we cannot fight ourselves. At this point, some give up on living the Christian life, while others try to live it in their own strength, finding only exhaustion from continual defeat.

As the LORD did not intend for the Israelites to fight the battles on their own, He does not intend for us to fight our battles alone, either. He simply asks us to surrender completely to His leadership and allow His Spirit to fill our lives. As we do this, we are empowered by His strength to live a godly life of peace and joy, in spite of our circumstances. It has been said that the Christian life is not just hard, it is impossible. Only One person, Jesus Christ, has ever lived it perfectly, and only He can live it through us by the power of His indwelling Spirit.

There will always be battles to face in life--everything will not be easy because we are Christians. But if we surrender our lives to the LORD and rest, trusting *Him* to produce the Christian life in us, we will see Him "win the land" for us.

The Israelites thought only in terms of their inadequacy, but Joshua and Caleb focused on what God could do as they surrendered completely to His leadership. The Israelites missed God's blessings, but Joshua and Caleb would see God's incredible strength and faithfulness. We can have the experience of Joshua and Caleb if we choose, as they did, to yield our lives entirely to the LORD. As we continue our study on the journey to freedom, we will look at this most important key to the Christian life.

1. a. What happened when the Israelites imagined doing God's will in their own strength?

b. What did the LORD want the people to do?

2. a. What kind of battles do people face in their Christian lives?

b. What does the LORD want His people to do as they face these battles?

3. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus gave final instructions to His disciples, whom He charged to take the message of salvation to a hostile world. What vivid picture from nature did the LORD use to show His disciples how they should face the impossible task before them?

John 15:5-8

4. a. What is the only thing the branch must do to produce fruit?

b. Jesus compares Himself to the vine. What does the vine do to enable the branch to produce fruit?

c. As we abide in Christ, as the branch abides in the vine, His life flows through us, enabling us to do His will. The analogy illustrates that we cannot live the Christian life unless we stay connected to the LORD and surrendered to His will. What would have happened had the Israelites done this?

5. a. In the same teachings, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of Christ, would come to dwell in them. The life of the vine (Christ) would flow through the branch (the believer) as the Spirit of Christ filled their lives. What did Jesus promise in John 14:15-17?

Reference: Note 5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 23.

b. How do the following verses describe the work of the Spirit of Christ in our lives as we choose to remain connected to Him and yielded to His will?

Ephesians 3:16, 20

Galatians 2:20

Galatians 5:22-23

6. a. The Bible states that the sin nature within us is continually in conflict with the Holy Spirit. Just as the battle for the promised land was too great for the Israelites, the battle with the sin nature is impossible for us to win on our own. What simple choices allow the Spirit of God to win this battle?

Galatians 5:16-17, 25

Ephesians 5:18b

Note: This command literally means "be being filled with the Spirit" It is a continuous, moment by moment decision to be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

b. When we sin by an act of disobedience or by passive indifference toward God's leadership, how can we be cleansed and filled with the Spirit of Christ again?

1 John 1:9

7. Abiding in Christ means surrendering our lives completely to the LORD, continually choosing to stay connected and yielded to Him. This is done once and for all when we accept Christ, and then moment by moment as we choose to be filled with His Spirit. What are some practices that keep us connected and yielded to the LORD?

Philippians 4:6

Romans 12:1-2

Proverbs 3:5-6

Summary

8. a. What mistake did the Israelites make in this lesson which you want to avoid in your life?

b. What do the Scriptures promise as you choose to abide in Christ, trusting Him to do what you cannot?

9. a. How would you define abiding in Christ?

b. Why is abiding in Christ crucial to living the Christian life?

LESSON 20

THE END OF THE OLD AND A NEW BEGINNING

Numbers 20-26

After more than thirty-eight years of desert wandering and several more rebellions against God, the Israelite community had come full circle and was again at Kadesh in the desert of Zin. It was the first month of the fortieth year after the Exodus, and most of the first generation had died. In this last year of punishment (cf. 14:33-35), the remaining few of that generation, including its faithful leaders Moses, Aaron and Miriam, would also die. The next generation, those twenty years and older, plus Caleb and Joshua, would prepare to enter the Promised Land.

Numbers 20 opens with the death and burial of Miriam, Moses' sister and a spiritual leader in Israel (Micah 6:4). God used Miriam as a child to help save the life of her brother, Moses, who became God's leader in Israel's deliverance (Exodus 2:4,7-8).

After Miriam's burial, the whole community rose up against Moses because they had no water. They hurled the same complaints against Moses as they had almost forty years earlier at Meribah (Ex. 17:1-4). Moses fell down before the LORD on behalf of the people, and the LORD instructed him and Aaron to gather the people before a rock. Moses was to speak to the rock which would pour out water for them and their livestock to drink. As the people gathered at the rock, however, Moses did not follow the LORD's instructions. An exasperated Moses called the people "rebels," and rather than turn their attention to the LORD to provide water, Moses said, "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then, rather than speaking to the rock as God had commanded, Moses struck the rock twice. The water gushed out in abundance, but Moses' actions brought God's judgment on him and

Aaron. "Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (20:12).

After this, Israel set out from Kadesh en route to Moab on the east side of the Jordan. As instructed by the LORD, Moses took Aaron and Aaron's son, Eleazar, up Mt. Hor in the sight of the whole community. There, Moses removed Aaron's garments and placed them on Aaron's son as a sign of the transferring of the priesthood, and Aaron died there on the mountain. After a thirty-day period of mourning, the people continued their journey and were attacked by the Canaanite king of Arad. The people made a vow to the LORD that if He would deliver these people into their hands, they would dedicate all the towns that were captured to God by totally destroying them.¹ The battle with Arad ended in a complete victory by Israel.

However, the people's enthusiasm over this victory soon waned when they had to take a detour around the land of Edom. They became impatient taking a longer route and complained against God and Moses about the lack of water and miserable food! Their disgust with the manna, the bread from heaven, was an indirect rejection of God's grace and care for them all these years in the wilderness. For this, the LORD brought a plague of poisonous snakes which killed many. As the people repented and cried out to Moses, his intercession before the LORD brought a plan of relief. The LORD instructed Moses to make a bronze snake, place it on a pole, and all who were bitten who looked upon it would live. Rather than removing the plague, God devised a plan for individuals to be saved as they chose to trust in God's plan of deliverance.

As Israel continued their journey to Moab, they defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, along the way. The news about Israel's victories spread, and Balak, king of Moab, was terrified when he saw so many people camped on the plains of Moab along the Jordan. Seeing no way to defeat the Israelites militarily, Balak hired Balaam, a professional prophet or diviner,² to pronounce a curse on the Israelites. But the LORD appeared to Balaam through an angel on the road and warned Balaam not to place a curse on Israel. Instead, each time Balak, king of Moab, took Balaam to view Israel's camp and pronounce a curse, God gave Balaam a blessing to pronounce on Israel instead. Even though Israel had been unfaithful time and again, God would be faithful to carry out His promises

to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). As the LORD declared through Balaam, "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind" (23:19).

The last of the original generation of Israelites died on the plains of Moab when Moabite women invited them to worship their gods and to indulge in sexual immorality. When they accepted the invitation, the LORD struck them with a plague which killed 24,000 Israelites.

After this, the LORD instructed Moses and Eleazar, Aaron's son, to take a census of all men twenty years or older. The total number of eligible fighting men who would enter the promised land was 601,730.³ In addition, the priestly tribe of Levites numbered 23,000.⁴ This census registered men for battle and would also serve in allotting land to tribes and individual families after the conquest of Canaan.

Soon the Israelites would cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. Before leaving the plains of Moab, Moses would address the new generation and remind them of all the LORD had done for Israel. He would then commission Joshua to lead them into the land.

Read Numbers 20:1-29.

1. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel was again at Kadesh and close to the promised land. What familiar complaints did the people bring to Moses (20:2-5)?

2. a. What specific instructions did God give Moses to remedy the situation (20:8)?

b. What exactly did Moses say and do (20:9-11)?

c. How did Moses' actions offend the LORD, and what were the consequences (20:12)?

3. Which two of Israel's great leaders died at Kadesh (20:1,27-29), and who was ordained to succeed Aaron as priest to the people?

Read Numbers 21:1-9; Scan Numbers 21:10-35.

4. a. Whom did the people speak against when they became impatient on their journey around Moab? What was their complaint (21:5)?

b. What were the consequences (21:6)?

c. When the people repented, how did God save them? Did the LORD save them individually or collectively (21:7-9)?

Read Numbers 22-24; Scan Numbers 25; 26:1-4, 63-65.

5. Where was Israel's last stop before entering the promised land (22:1)?

6. a. How did Balak, king of Moab, react to the Israelites (22:2-4)?

b. What did Balak do (22:5-7)?

Reference: Note 2, *Balaam*, p. 202.

7. a. What did the events with Balaam and his donkey accomplish (22:32-35, 38)?

b. Briefly describe the nature of the first three oracles.

23:7-10

23:18-24

24:3-9

c. What had Balak intended to happen (23:11,25; 24:10)?

8. What was the old generation's last apostasy, and what was the result (25:1-5,9)?

Note: At that time, Baal was a term used for any god.

9. a. After this, what were Moses and Eleazar instructed by the LORD to do (26:2)?

b. What were the totals of fighting men (26:51) and Levites (26:62)?

References: Note 3, *The census*, and Note 4, *The Levites*, p. 202.

c. What was amazing about this number (26:64-65)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Amazing Grace for the Journey

In the narrative of this lesson, we have seen several different manifestations of God's grace toward His people. First, we saw His patience with the people as they once again gathered to faithlessly protest a lack of water. He graciously supplied the water from a rock, but at the same time disciplined Moses for "taking over," rather than representing the LORD as he was told. The LORD's protective grace in demanding a higher standard for those who lead His people (James 3:1) was demonstrated in His dealing with Moses.

Even so, Moses' punishment was not extreme. Although he would only see the Promised Land from afar before his death, this faithful leader was almost 120 years old. God graciously spared Moses from the task of leading the people in the battles to conquer Canaan.

The LORD's grace was also demonstrated when the people lashed out against Him and Moses during the detour around Edom. He stopped their destructive attitudes with a plague of poisonous snakes, then graciously provided a way of salvation for the penitent if they looked in faith upon the bronze snake lifted up in the desert.

God was gracious again when He quickly put an end to the people's involvement in sexual immorality in the worship of Moabite gods. Unchecked, this practice could have ruined the fledgling nation, which was poised to enter the Promised Land.

But perhaps God's grace is seen most vividly as He stood up for Israel by forcing the prophet Balaam to pronounce blessing rather than a curse on His people before King Balak and the leaders of Moab. Even though the Israelites had been rebellious, ungrateful and unbelieving for forty years,

the LORD still worked behind the scenes to protect His people from their enemies.

Like the Israelites, it is easy for us to become impatient with the LORD because of unpleasant circumstances or delays we don't understand. When we become impatient, we can either choose to doubt God's faithfulness and be bound by our circumstances or find freedom in focusing on God's grace-grace that is all around us, as it was for Israel.

As we continue our study on the *Journey to Freedom*, let's make some observations about the freedom we find as we choose to dwell on the many aspects of God's amazing grace.

1. a. What are some issues people become impatient with God about?

b. Why is impatience usually counterproductive, as demonstrated in the narrative of this lesson?

c. Why are impatience and trust in God's grace incompatible? What is impatience always indicative of in our walk with the Lord?

2. a. When we are tempted to become impatient with the LORD's plan, what are some positive choices we can make?

Psalm 37:4-5a, 7a, 8

Philippians 4:6-7

James 1:5

b. Of what must we always remind ourselves?

Romans 8:28

2 Corinthians 12:9

Psalm 121:3, 7-8

Isaiah 55:8-9

3. a. God frequently had to discipline Israel, but because of His unconditional love, He never forsook her. What does Psalm 103:8, 17 tell us about the LORD's love toward His people?

b. What do these verses tell us about the LORD's discipline?

Hebrews 12:5-6a

Hebrews 12:10-11

4. a. How was the LORD's grace and faithfulness to His people demonstrated in His dealings with Balaam and the leaders of Moab?

b. What do the following verses say about God's dealings with our enemies, even ones we may not be aware of?

Psalm 34:7

Psalm 91:4 (1-8)

Exodus 23:22

5. Some define grace with the acrostic:

G od's
R iches
A t
C hrist's
E xpense

How is the grace of God demonstrated in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross comparable to the bronze snake lifted up to save the people in Numbers 21?

John 3:14-16

Romans 6:23

Summary

6. What do the events of this lesson tell you about God's gracious work in your life?

7. a. Is there an area of discouragement or frustration in your life today with which you are preoccupied?

b. What are some aspects of God's grace you can focus upon when you are tempted to become impatient with the LORD about this concern?

8. a. Why is it important that we never take God's gracious gift of salvation through the death of His Son for granted?

b. What must we continually do in the struggles of life?

Hebrews 12:2a

c. What is His promise in Matthew 11:28?

LESSON 20 NOTES

1 *totally destroy* (21:2). "The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them."
NIV text note.

How could God approve of the genocide of an entire group of people? God brought destruction on the Canaanites because they violently and steadfastly impeded or opposed His work over a long period of time. They ignored the natural revelation of God, as well as knowledge of God occasionally coming from other evidence (Deut. 13:12-15) and unabatedly tolerated idolatry over a long period of time. In God's prediction to Abraham of the 400 years' captivity of his descendants in Egypt, God explained that the long delay in their deliverance was because "the sin of the Amorites [the Canaanites] has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:13-16). God waited for centuries while the Canaanite groups slowly filled up their own cups of destruction by their sinful behavior. In His grace and mercy, He waited for them to repent and turn from their charge into self-destruction. Ezekiel 33:11 records, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

Furthermore, the Scriptures make it clear that it was not that Israel was without sin that they were used to destroy godless peoples. Deuteronomy 9:5 states: "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations."

The nations of Canaan were destroyed to prevent the corruption of Israel and the rest of the world (Deut. 20:16-18). When a nation starts burning children as a gift to the gods (Lev. 18:21) and practices sodomy, bestiality and all sorts of loathsome vices (Lev. 18:25,27-30), the day of God's grace and mercy has begun to run out. God was removing the cancer that could infect all of society and eventually destroy the remaining good. Rather than send pestilence, hurricanes, famine, disease, in this case He used Israel to bring an end to the Canaanite peoples. In the judgment of these nations some innocent people may have been killed, but only God knows if the women and children had been spared how long it would have been before a fresh crop of adults would have emerged just like their pagan predecessors.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, pgs. 106-108.

2 *Balaam* was a seer or diviner with a international reputation. Numbers 22:8 leads some to believe Balaam was a believer in Yahweh, the God of Israel. Based on the subsequent narrative, however, it seems best to see Balaam as claiming to be the spokesman for any god. (See 31:7-8, 15-16.) God indeed spoke to Balaam, but Balaam did not yet realize that the God of Israel was unlike the supposed deities that he usually schemed against. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 223.

3 *The census* (Numbers 26). Amazingly, all those 20 years or older involved in the first census died, as God had predicted, during the 40 years in the wilderness (except Caleb and Joshua). Even so, the LORD had blessed Israel with numbers, just as He promised Abraham, and the total was only 1,820 less than the first census.

4 *The Levites*. The event at Mt. Sinai caused Levi's descendants to receive the special status of priests in Israel (Exodus 32:25-29). They did not have land allotments, but were to be given 48 cities throughout the land (Numbers 35:1-3; Joshua 21). This "scattered" the Levites among the people to carry out their teaching ministry. Six of their cities were to be "cities of refuge" (Numbers 35:6), accessible to those seeking legal protection (Deut. 19:1-3, 7-10, 17ff).

LESSON 21

***SHEMA*: THE GREAT COMMAND**

Deuteronomy 4:1-40; 5:1-21; 6:1-25

The new generation of Israelites were now encamped on the plains of Moab, ready to enter the promised land. Before they proceeded, Moses gave three sermons which included his final instructions for the people as they entered the land God would give them. Each sermon begins with the words, "Hear, O Israel." The Hebrew word for *hear* is *shema* which means not only to hear with one's ear, but also to listen and obey, to respond to what is heard with one's entire being.

In these sermons, Moses declared the commands of God alongside the grace of God. Keeping the laws of God always promised blessing and rewards from God. "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will say . . . what nation is so great to have such righteous decrees and laws" (4:6-8). "Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers, thrusting out all your enemies before you" (6:18-19).

Moses also emphasized the grace of God demonstrated by His giving the Promised Land to the Israelites despite their past unfaithfulness. This land "flowing with milk and honey" would be complete with houses filled with all kinds of good things they had not obtained by themselves, and vineyards and olive groves they had not planted. God would give this gracious gift to Israel in fulfillment of His covenant with Abraham.¹

In his first sermon, Moses emphasized the importance of keeping the commandment, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything" (5:7-8). Israel's obedience would cause the surrounding nations to marvel at their wisdom and that their God was near to hear their prayers.

To strengthen their loyalty, Moses exhorted them to recount God's awesome works among them to their offspring. They should tell their children the stories of His mighty deliverance of the nation from Egyptian bondage through the ten plagues and the Red Sea crossing. They should teach them about how God spoke to them from the smoke and fire on Mt. Sinai and of how He provided food (manna) and water for Israel for forty years in the wilderness. By teaching their children, future generations would continually be reminded that the LORD is God in heaven and earth, and He alone should be worshipped.

Knowing the people's fickleness, Moses warned them of the results of abandoning the LORD to worship the Baals (gods) of other nations. If they did this, God would banish them from the land and scatter them over the face of the earth until they repented and called upon Him once again. When they sought Him, Moses assured, the LORD would be faithful to forgive them, for He would never abandon or destroy His covenant people.

In his second sermon, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments, or stipulations (see Notes 1-3, p. 120), of the covenant the LORD had made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. Moses exhorted the people to carefully teach the LORD's laws to their children and their children's children, so that they might also "fear the LORD" (6:2), meaning to revere Him, obey Him, and be wholeheartedly committed to Him in response to His graciousness.

The crowning statement of Moses' second sermon is known as the great *Shema* of Israel. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and remains at the foundation of the Jewish faith today. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Here lies the claim that Yahweh alone is God in heaven and earth. He is also "one," meaning faithful, consistent, undivided in mind, heart or self in any way. The LORD's oneness in turn commands oneness, or total devotion and commitment, from His people. His commandments were to lay at the heart of life for His people as they continually talked about them with their children at home, on the road, first thing in the morning and the last thing at night! This alone would fortify their faith in the LORD and His blessing after they found peace in the land God would give them.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-40.

1. What instructions did Moses give Israel concerning God's laws for them (4:2)?

2. How would Israel's decrees and laws demonstrate to other nations that they were God's people (4:6-8)?

3. a. What was unique about God's revelation to the people at Mt. Horeb, or Sinai (4:11-12)?

b. In light of this, what did Moses warn the people against (4:15-17; cf. John 4:24)?

4. a. Describe the experiences that formed Israel as God's own people (4:32-38).

b. How did God want Israel to respond to Him (4:39-40)?

Quickly Review Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

5. a. What three things did Moses command the people to do in light of Israel's covenant with God at Mt. Sinai (5:1)?

b. Why did Moses speak to the new generation as though they had actually been present at Mt. Sinai almost forty years earlier? What do you think this emphasized in their minds (5:2-4)?

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-25.

6. What were some of the blessings that would come as Israel was obedient to the LORD?

6:2-3

6:10-11

6:18-19

6:24-25

Reference: Note 2, *Righteousness*, p. 211.

7. a. What is the summation of the law, Israel's confession of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5?

b. Restate God's unique claim for Himself (6:4) in your own words. (See also commentary, paragraph 4, p. 204).

c. What response did He require of His people (6:5)?

8. How was this to be instilled in future generations (6:7-9; 20-23)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Obedience from the Heart

In his final sermons to Israel, Moses recounted the incredible faithfulness of God to His people, a weak nation drawn by God's hand out of the "furnace" of Egypt. How blessed Israel was to have been chosen to receive the revelation of God and the direction and promises of God for their future. The great I AM of Israel not only saved them, but promised them wonderful blessings in the land He would give them.

In response to His lovingkindness, Moses exhorted the people to, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Dt. 6:5). The people's natural response toward the One who had first loved them would be love and a desire to please Him. They would do this through reverence for the LORD and faithful obedience to His laws. These laws, designed to sustain harmony in their relationships to God and each other, would not only enrich their family and community life and lengthen their days, but would also cause nations around them to respect their wisdom and marvel at the goodness of their God.

To sustain this love and obedience toward God in Israel, future generations must also have a firsthand understanding of God's love for them. They must be diligently taught about Israel's phenomenal deliverance and how, at Mt. Sinai, God had audibly spoken the words of His covenant to make Israel His chosen people.

What was true then is also true today. Love for the LORD and a desire to please Him will only flow from our hearts when we personally comprehend what God has done for us. While the love of God can be demonstrated and taught by our parents and or other godly influences, each of us needs to embrace God's love personally. As the Scriptures explains, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

God not only saved Israel, He extended to them, as He does to us today, His very life--His grace, His love, His infinite mercy, His wisdom, His presence. But only those in Israel who personally acknowledged His saving love and placed uncompromising faith in Him would learn the joy of obedience from the heart.

As we continue our study of the *Journey to Freedom*, we will look at the freedom and blessings found in obedience from the heart.

1. a. What are various motivations for obedience to authority in the world around us?

b. What are some ways that people without a personal relationship with God view obedience to His laws (in the days of Moses as well as today)?

2. a. What was Moses' emphasis in his last words to Israel regarding obedience to God?

b. In light of God's goodness to His people, Moses encouraged them to love the LORD with all their heart, soul, and strength. How would their love for God be manifested in their lifestyle, according to Deuteronomy 6:6-12?

3. a. God showed His love for the people of Israel through their deliverance from bondage and His personal commitment to them as His chosen people. What must we understand before we can truly love God?

Romans 5:8

1 John 4:9-10, 19

b. What is the natural outcome of comprehending God's love for us?

1 John 4:7-8, 21

c. How are we enabled to unselfishly love God and others?

1 John 4:13

4. a. Israel was promised many wonderful blessings if they refused the temptation to take the LORD for granted and follow other gods. Briefly list the rewards of love, loyalty and obedience they were promised which might apply to our lives today?

Deuteronomy 4:6-8

Deuteronomy 28:1-13

b. What did Jesus add to this in His last words to His disciples?

John 14:15-17, 23

5. What rewards of obedience from the heart are promised in the following Scriptures?

Psalms 1:3

Psalm 122:6-7

Isaiah 43:2 (Psalm 34:19)

2 Peter 1:4b

1 John 2:25 (Revelation 21:4)

Summary

6. What is God's greatest active demonstration of love toward you, and how would you describe His love?

7. Why is it important to comprehend God's love in order to obey Him from the heart?

8. More than half of the commandments God gave in His covenant with Israel were directed toward loving others. Why does a comprehension of God's love enable you to obey these commands from the heart?

9. What are the promises the LORD makes to you in your circumstances today as you continually remind yourself of His love and obey Him from the heart?

LESSON 21 NOTES

1 *The covenant with Abraham* which brought gracious blessings to an undeserving Israel is like the new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ. In this new covenant, God promises to graciously pardon and provide eternally for those who receive, or put faith in, His Son (Matthew 26:28; John 1:12; Hebrews 13:20-21; Romans 3:22-24).

Reference: Note 1, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

2 *Righteousness*. The people would be declared righteous (6:25), or perfect and without sin, before God as they obeyed His commandments. These included the sacrifices for sin offered at the tabernacle by which their sins were forgiven and which foreshadowed the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for sin (see notes 1-3, *Sacrifices, Atonement, Blood*, pgs. 150-151). *Faith* in the revelations of God, which manifests itself in seeking to obey God, is the basis of being right, or justified, before a holy God. This is a blessed relief, because no one in their fallen state is able to perfectly obey God. Righteousness as a lifestyle is the natural outcome of wholehearted devotion to the LORD and is produced by Christ in the believer (see *Building on the Basics*, Lesson 19).

LESSON 22

FINAL PREPARATIONS AND THE DEATH OF MOSES

Deuteronomy 7:1-9:7; 30:11-31:8; 34

This lesson continues in the second sermon of Moses as he gave his final instructions to the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan to take the Promised Land. Moses emphasized God's command to totally destroy¹ the people of the land, along with their altars and their gods. This would protect Israel from being ensnared by the wickedness there. As God's holy people, the Israelites were to make no treaties with the people of the land. They were to refuse to intermarry with the people of the land and were to keep none of their silver and gold. They were chosen out of all the peoples of the earth to be God's holy people and treasured possession.

In the context of these exhortations, Moses made three important points. First, he reminded the Israelites that they had not been chosen by God because of their strength, because they were the weakest and fewest of all nations on the earth. This was a warning against presumption or pride as God's people. They had been chosen solely because of God's love and grace poured out upon them, and because of the covenant He had made with their forefather Abraham. Moses reminded the people of what their experiences with God had proven: "He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands . . . But those who hate Him He will repay to their face with destruction" (7:9-10). The promises of reward for keeping this covenant of love were great: "You will be blessed more than any other people . . . none of your men or women will be childless . . . the LORD will keep you free from every disease" (7:14-15).

After this promise of blessing, Moses once again warned the people of the danger ahead after settling in the land. When they had become wealthy and had wonderful things to eat and were satisfied, they should be careful not to forget the LORD, failing to obey His laws and neglecting to praise Him. They should also avoid the false thinking that it was by their own power and strength that they had obtained such wealth. If they forgot the lessons of humility learned in the wilderness where God fed them daily with manna, and if they forgot that the LORD gave them the power and ability to produce wealth, then they would be treated like the rest of the nations who followed after other gods.

Moses' final warning was against becoming self righteous after their conquest. After witnessing the LORD driving out their enemies, they should be on their guard, lest they begin to say to themselves, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness" (9:4). Moses made it very clear that the LORD was destroying these nations because of their wickedness, not because of Israel's goodness. Moses reminded the people that Israel's disobedience and ingratitude had continually provoked God's anger over the past forty years and highlighted Israel's worship of the golden calf when God was ready to destroy them.

Moses ended his speeches to the people with the presentation of a choice--a choice which he said was not too difficult for them or beyond their reach. "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you might love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. The LORD is your life . . ." (30:19-20).

Moses' final act was to lay hands on Joshua, who then received the spirit of wisdom to take over the leadership of the people as they entered the Promised Land. Moses exhorted Joshua: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you or forsake you" (31:6).

Like an eagle, Moses ascended Mount Nebo in Moab where the LORD showed him all the land that He had promised to give Abraham's descendants. He died there at the age of 120, still strong and fit, but knowing that it was God's time. Mystery continued to surround his death as no one claimed to know where his grave was. However, all remembered him as the greatest prophet that ever lived, for there was no one else with whom the LORD spoke face to face.

Read Deuteronomy 7:1-26.

1. a. What instructions did Moses give Israel concerning the nations that God would drive out from the land He would give them (7:2, 3, 5, 25)?

Reference: Note 1, *totally destroy*, p. 201.

b. Why was this necessary (7:4, 6, 26)?

2. Why did God choose Israel to be His own people (7:7-9)?

Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

3. What blessings did God promise the people if they would keep His covenant of love (7:12-15)?

4. a. Of what did Moses remind the people regarding the conquest ahead (7:17-21)?

b. How would this be accomplished (7:22-24)?

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20.

5. What did Moses want Israel to remember about God's purpose for the nation in the desert (8:2-5, 16)?

6. a. Describe the land they were about to enter (8:7-9).

b. What did Moses warn them not to do once they had settled in the land (8:11-14; 17-18)?

c. What would be the consequences if they abandoned the LORD (8:19-20)?

Read Deuteronomy 9:1-6; Scan Deuteronomy 9:7-29

7. a. What attitude did Moses warn the people to avoid after the LORD had defeated their enemies (9:4-5a)?

b. What aspect of their nature did he exhort them to resist (9:6)?

c. For what reason would the LORD destroy the inhabitants of the land (9:4b,5)?

Read Deuteronomy 30:11-31:8.

- 8. a. What final choice did Moses present to Israel (30:15-20)?

- b. How did Moses encourage the people that they could make the right choice (30:11-14)?

- 9. What words of blessing did Moses speak to Israel before he anointed Joshua to lead the people into the land (31:6)?

Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

- 10. a. Describe Moses' death (34:1-8).

- b. How was Moses described as a prophet of God (34:10-12)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Choosing Whom to Follow

Israel was on the verge of an incredible experience. With the same awesome power with which He had freed them, three million strong, from bondage in Egypt, God was going to drive out the strong nations of Canaan

and give Israel the land. They would instantly inherit homes already built and rich farm and pasture land already cultivated. Not only this, but God would supernaturally increase their numbers and multiply their herds and crops. No one would be childless or ill with any disease, but would live long lives in the land "flowing with milk and honey."

All these blessings would be theirs if Israel remained loyal to the LORD, who had been so faithful to them. The fact of the matter was, Israel's worst enemies would not be the giant people of the land and the fortified cities to be conquered. God would easily conquer these nations. The greatest enemies of Israel would be the self-centered mindsets of the people of Canaan and their pagan forms of worship. Israel would be strongly tempted, and her bent toward self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness had been proven many times over. She would not only be vulnerable to the immoral forms of idolatry practiced by the people of Canaan, but also to pride, self-righteousness, and a warped sense of self-accomplishment. Israel could easily forget the LORD who had saved her and provided her many blessings in the land He had given her by no merit of her own.

We face the same challenges in remaining faithful to the LORD. The bent toward self-centeredness is common to the human race. But recognizing the pulls in the wrong direction, we can choose to follow God and not ourselves. God has proven His love for us, and we can choose to love, obey, and hold fast to the LORD as our life. When this is the decision of our will, His Spirit gives the power to recognize and say no to the temptations that typically cause us to fall: pride, self-righteousness, ingratitude and stubbornness. And when we fall, the Holy Spirit helps us get up again, totally forgiven and encouraged to choose to walk forward with the Lord in control.

The choice Moses put before Israel was a simple choice that we face every day: the choice to follow God or our self-focused inclinations. If we make those moment-by-moment choices to allow God to lead us, the result is the "life to the full" experience Jesus promised in John 10:10. The rewards of choosing to follow God closely generally include prosperity that comes from clean living, but it always brings the richest blessings of God: His abiding grace, love, mercy and peace. This freeing choice is always within our reach. Let's look at some biblical principles that approach the issue of choosing whom we will follow.

1. The greatest enemies Israel faced in Canaan were not armies but the worldly self-centered thinking and practices of the people there. Why are the mindsets of the unbelieving society around us a similar threat to our walk with the LORD today?

2. a. After warning Israel to avoid the worldly thinking and practices of the Canaanites, what three temptations from within did Moses warn Israel about? (Review Deuteronomy 7:7; 8:10-11, 17-18; 9:4,6.)

b. What do the Scriptures warn about pride, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency?

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 28:26 (Proverbs 12:15)

1 John 1:8

Optional verses: Luke 12:16-21; Luke 18:9-14

3. How are temptations to follow self rather than God described in these New Testament passages?

James 1:14-15

1 John 2:16

4. Why did Moses warn the people that taking their eyes off the LORD would destroy them? What are the ultimate results?

Proverbs 4:19

Romans 1:21-32 (summarize)

Galatians 5:13-15

James 3:14-16

5. a. What is the result of choosing to keep our eyes on the LORD and His leadership? What does this produce in our lives?

Matthew 7:24

Galatians 5:22-23

James 3:17-18

b. How would you describe the benefits of choosing to follow the LORD found in Psalm 23?

6. a. How is the choice Moses put before Israel described in Romans 8:5-6, 13?

b. Who gives us strength to follow the right choice?

Romans 8:26a (Ephesians 3:16, 20)

7. a. It cost Moses a great deal to wholeheartedly follow the LORD with his life. What did he gain?

b. What did he give to future generations?

Summary

8. a. Of the temptations listed above, to which are you most vulnerable?

b. Why is the choice to walk consistently with the LORD not beyond your grasp?

9. a. What do we miss when we choose to follow the LORD instead of worldly self-centered ways?

b. What do we gain?

10. How does God receive us when we come to Him with a repentant heart?

Isaiah 1:18

Psalms 103:3-4, 11-12 (1 John 1:9)

Note: Perhaps you would like to take a moment and totally commit your life to following the LORD. The following is a suggested prayer:

Dear Lord, in spite of the continual pulls from within and without to follow a self-centered way of life, the wisdom of your word shows me that choosing to follow you is the constructive path for me. I choose to commit my life to following you and thank you for your Spirit who promises to help me fulfill this promise. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

LESSON 22 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 1, *totally destroy*, p. 201.

I Corinthians 10:13

2 Thessalonians 2:13

PART III

RECEIVING THE PROMISED LAND

LESSON 23

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Joshua 1-3.

The book of Joshua begins where Deuteronomy ends, with the death of Moses and a change in leadership for Israel. The new leader, Joshua, had been Moses' longtime aide and had previously led Israel into battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17). Moses had changed his name from Hoshea, meaning "salvation," to Joshua, meaning "the LORD saves," or "the LORD gives victory." Israel remained poised on the east side of the Jordan River. They were ready to cross over and possess the very land that God had promised Abraham nearly five hundred years before (Genesis 15:18). The people were about to experience one victory after another as the LORD fulfilled His promise to Abraham and his descendants.

The LORD's words to Joshua were: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never

leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5,9). The LORD promised Joshua that He would give him every place he set his foot. God always referred to the land as a gift to Israel which Israel would receive only because it belonged to God and He had chosen to give it to them.

The LORD also told Joshua that the success of the conquest depended on meditation upon the written law of Moses both day and night. He and the people must carefully obey God's laws and maintain their faith in His promises.

Three of the tribes had already received their land allotments east of the Jordan, but wholeheartedly agreed to follow Joshua's leadership as they crossed the Jordan to help the other tribes take their lands in Canaan. Joshua sent two spies to survey the land, especially the city of Jericho. They were received by a harlot named Rahab, who informed them that the people of the land were terrified of Israel and her God. They had heard about the waters of the Red Sea being dried up, and how they had defeated the kings of the Amorites. Rahab protected the spies and proclaimed her faith that Israel's God, Yahweh, was truly God in heaven and earth. For her kindness and faith, the spies promised to protect any family members in her house when they destroyed the city. The sign of protection over the household was to be a scarlet cord tied in the window.

The spies returned and reported to Joshua what Rahab had told them. "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us" (2:24). The Israelites left Shittim and camped across the Jordan from Jericho. The Jordan River, with its steep banks, was at flood stage at the time. But the LORD told Joshua, who informed the people, that as soon as the priests carrying the ark of the covenant set foot into the river, the LORD would stop the waters upstream from flowing. The people broke camp, and as the priests' feet hit the water, the upstream flow "piled up in a heap a great distance away" and "was completely cut off" (3:16). The priests stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan as all of Israel passed over. There could be no doubt that God was among them and would be true to His promises to give them the land. Joshua was also exalted that day as all could see that God was with this new leader as He had been with Moses.

Read Joshua 1:1-18.

1. What did the LORD promise Joshua (1:1-6)?

2. a. What did Joshua and Israel need to do in order to possess the land (1:3)?

b. What was required of Joshua as a godly leader, and what would be the rewards of his obedience (1:7-9)?

3. How did the tribes of Israel which had already received their land on the east side of the Jordan respond when Joshua instructed their fighting men to cross the Jordan and help the others take their land (1:16-17)?

Read Joshua 2:1-24.

4. a. How did Rahab help Israel's two spies (2:1-7; 15)?

b. What very helpful information did Rahab reveal to the spies (2:8-11)?

c. What was Rahab's belief (2:9, 11)?

5. a. What did the spies promise Rahab in return for her kindness to them (2:12-14)?

b. What sign would protect those in Rahab's house (2:18)?

Read Joshua 3:1-17.

6. Who led the people to the Jordan (3:3,14)?

7. a. What did the priests have to do before the waters would be stopped (3:15-16)?

b. How did this relate to what God had promised concerning occupying the land (1:3)?

8. a. What faith did this event build among the people of Israel (3:10)?

b. How did it establish Joshua as their leader (3:7)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Stepping Out on God's Faithfulness

The main theme throughout our study has been the faithfulness of God. Faithfulness is remaining steadfast to one's commitments. Because God is faithful, we can trust completely that what He promises, He will do. God's fulfillment of His promise to give Canaan to the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 15) is the crowning Old Testament demonstration of God's faithfulness. The most outstanding act of God's faithfulness in human history was in the sending of His only Son, Jesus Christ, the promised Savior Messiah (Isaiah 9:6; 53) who made possible the fulfillment of all of

God's promises. The second coming of Jesus Christ, the end of the world, the establishment of a new heaven and earth, and eternal life for all believers are all promises of Scripture we can know with certainty will also be fulfilled because God's word is as faithful and trustworthy as He is. Because God had proven His faithfulness to Israel, He expected them to be faithful to Him and to remain steadfast in their covenant with Him. This meant following Him into the Promised Land, and they did this despite the seemingly impossible odds. They stepped out in faith as they walked across the Jordan, and every step thereafter reinforced God's faithfulness again.

Our lives as believers are full of steps of faith where we choose to believe, regardless of our circumstances, that God is faithful to us as His much-loved children. This is why it is important to stop and contemplate the faithfulness of God we have seen demonstrated in our study of *Journey to Freedom*. There is freedom in trusting God with all our heart, but this trust is not blind; it is based upon facts of history--from the fulfillment of every promise to a man of Ur named Abraham, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for the world. Our faith is based on the proven faithfulness of God.

As we continue our study, let's look at the faithfulness of God and reasons why we can walk by faith with full assurance.

1. a. How would you define the faithfulness of God?

b. How would you define our faithfulness to God?

2. a. What did faithfulness involve for the people of Israel in this lesson?

b. Upon what did they base their steps of faith?

c. Upon what can we base trusting God with our lives?

3. a. Moving forward to take Canaan was a huge step of faith for Israel. What three tangible signs did God give Israel to assure them He would be faithful to give them the Promised Land (see 2:9,10b; 3:10)?

b. What can we expect if we are going in the right direction as we seek to walk by faith?

4. How can we demonstrate our faithfulness to God?

Deuteronomy 11:13

1 Kings 2:4

Romans 12:12

1 Peter 4:10

5. What are some promises God makes to those who are faithful?

Psalms 18:25a

Psalms 37:28

Psalms 101:6

Proverbs 2:8

Matthew 25:23

6. a. Of what do the Scriptures absolutely assure us?

Psalms 33:4

Psalms 86:15

b. In what other personal ways is God faithful to us?

1 John 1:9

2 Timothy 2:13

7. According to the Scriptures, through whom are all God's promises fulfilled?

Luke 24:44-48; 2 Corinthians 1:20

Summary

8. Why must the faithfulness of God be considered a major theme of our study? How many events can you think of demonstrating God's faithfulness to Israel?

9. Why is it significant that our faith is grounded in historical events and facts like the recorded beginnings of Israel, the conquest of Canaan, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How does the fact that Christianity is based on historical events help you trust God with your life?

10. a. How can you show your faithfulness to God?

b. In what ways does God promise to be faithful to you?

c. Is there an area of your life that you want to take this moment to trust God with completely? What promise from this lesson can you claim?

11. Why is it that the more assured we are of God's faithfulness, the more we experience a sense of freedom?

LESSON 24

THE FALL OF JERICHO

Joshua 4:1-6:27.

Before the first battle at Jericho, three happenings took place which prepared the new generation of Israelites to receive the Promised Land. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, only second-generation Israelites, those under twenty at the time of the Exodus forty years earlier, were now alive for the conquest of Canaan. Most of this new generation had been born in the wilderness. They had not seen the crossing of the Red Sea, which vividly displayed God's redemption of His people, Israel. They had not received the rite of circumcision,¹ which their parents had received before leaving Egypt, and which marked each Hebrew male as an heir of the everlasting covenant God had made with Abraham.² Also, most of this generation had never celebrated the Passover,³ the second and last of which had been at Mt. Sinai a year after the Exodus.

Now, in final preparation of the hearts of this new generation to inherit the land, they would first experience the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, where, much like the Red Sea, God displayed His awesome power. After this, the new generation would be circumcised and celebrate the Passover. These preparations, which we will see in this lesson, readied the new generation to be faithful in the awesome experience before them as God gave them the Promised Land.

Our lesson begins in Joshua 4. The Israelites had just crossed the Jordan as the priests carrying the ark stood in the middle of the riverbed. After all had arrived safely on the other side, Joshua instructed a man from each tribe to carry a stone from the middle of the riverbed where the priests stood with the ark. Joshua placed these stones together at Gilgal,⁴ where Israel initially

camped in the land, as a memorial of God's power demonstrated to all the nations when He stopped the waters of the Jordan. Like the Song of Moses after the Red Sea deliverance, the stone memorial at Gilgal stood as a proclamation of the LORD's greatness and would inspire the Israelites of all generations to revere and trust their God.

Their arrival in the land also came just at the time of year the Passover was to be celebrated. The LORD had promised Moses that Israel would again celebrate the Passover when they arrived in the land, and the time had finally come. However, circumcision was required to participate in the Passover (Exodus 12:48), and none of the generation born in the wilderness had been circumcised. In obedience to the LORD's instructions, Joshua required all men to be circumcised and remain in camp until they were healed. During this time, the incapacitated army was protected by the fact that the hostile peoples around them had heard of the miraculous Jordan River crossing and were terrified of Israel's God. After this, on the fourteenth day of the first month of their year, the Israelites all took part in the Passover celebration, commemorating God's redemption of Israel in Egypt. The next day, the people ate the food of the land, and the day after that, God stopped sending manna.⁵ This definitely marked a new beginning!

Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua had an encounter with a man standing before him. The man held a drawn sword, and instructed Joshua, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." Joshua was either facing an angel of the LORD or the LORD Himself, who made clear to Joshua that this was the LORD's battle, and Joshua was to carry out orders precisely as they were given to him.

And it was indeed an amazing battle plan. Jericho was an ancient city with massive fortified walls, which were 25 feet high and 20 feet thick in some places. The LORD instructed Joshua that there should be a march around the city each day for six days. The priests were to be at the front, carrying trumpets. The ark of the covenant⁶ was carried behind them, then came the marching troops. On the seventh day, they were instructed to march around the city seven times. After this, the priests would sound a trumpet blast, the Israelites would shout, and the walls of Jericho would collapse, allowing the Israelites to rush in to take the city. As Joshua and his men obeyed the LORD's instructions, this is exactly what took place, and the city was totally

destroyed.⁷ Only Rahab and her family survived because of her faith and help to Israel (cf. Joshua 2).

Jericho stands as an archtype example of the conquests to follow in Joshua 8-12 whereby the LORD progressively gave the land of Canaan to Israel. As they carefully obeyed His orders over a period of probably about seven years, Israel succeeded in campaigns in the middle of the land, taking Ai and Gibeon, then campaigns in the southern and northern regions. (See "The Conquest" chart, p. 238.) While disobedience would hinder complete victory, the battles and conquests that followed the victory at Jericho were nothing short of a miraculous fulfillment of God's promises made hundreds of years earlier to Abraham.

Read Joshua 4:1-5:12.

1. What did the memorial of the twelve stones mean to Israel and to each future generation (4:6-8, 20-24)?

Note: *Fear of the Lord* means reverent trust in the Lord.

2. What effect did the crossing of the Jordan have on the surrounding people (5:1)?

3. Why did God command the Israelites to be circumcised (5:5; see also Genesis 17:8-11 and Exodus 12:48)?

Reference: Note 5, *Circumcision*, p. 59.

4. What important event took place after this (5:10)?

Reference: Note 4, *Gilgal*, p. 238, and Note 4, *Passover*, p. 59.

5. What marked the end of the wilderness years and the bounty of the Promised Land (5:11-12)?

Reference: Note 5, *Manna*, p. 238.

Read Joshua 5:13-6:27.

6. How did Joshua's encounter with the commander of the LORD's army put Joshua in the right place to begin the conquest (5:13-15)?

7. Who planned the strategy for the battle of Jericho? Describe the plan (6:2-6).

8. Where was the focus placed in the taking of the city (6:6,16)?

Reference: Note 6, *Ark of the covenant*, p. 238.

9. Who was spared as the city was destroyed, and why (6:25)?

10. What description of Joshua spread throughout the land as a result of the battle at Jericho (6:27)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Trusting God's Ways

The new generation and their leader, Joshua, had learned that God performs His wonders in mysterious ways. Whereas their forefathers had complained and questioned God, the new generation was raised on manna which fell daily from the sky and water that came from a rock. They knew God worked in ways man could not, and they trusted God. When He gave orders regarding Jericho, they simply obeyed, knowing that God's ways are not man's, and only God's ways will accomplish God's purposes.

We often struggle to trust God when He does not work when or as we would expect. Our human nature imagines that God is like man and expects Him to work within the confines of human reason and resources. But the working of God in history, as recorded in the Bible, proves that in the end His way is perfectly on time and on course.

Examples abound in Scripture. Abraham was promised a nation from his descendants, but his wife Sarah remained childless beyond childbearing years. Then God gave the promised heir when Abraham was 100, and Sarah had a baby at 90.

God allowed Abraham's great grandson, Joseph, to be sold by his brothers to become a slave in Egypt. Joseph's circumstances worsened when he was unjustly imprisoned for years. But God used some unsettling dreams of Pharaoh to elevate Joseph to the position of prime minister of Egypt and to be able to save his father's entire family, Abraham's descendants, from death by famine.

Over three hundred years later, Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh was killing all Hebrew male babies in the Nile. But God arranged that Pharaoh's daughter would save and raise the future deliverer of Israel in Pharaoh's household.

Through ten incredible plagues, God forced Pharaoh to free his people from slavery, but then God led the people to the shores of the Red Sea where Pharaoh could trap and recapture them. As the people stood terrified of the approaching Egyptian army, God simply parted the waters of the Red Sea for His people's safe passage to the other side, then folded back the waters and destroyed their enemies.

If we are to follow God freely as Joshua and the new generation did, we must train ourselves to view life through eyes of faith. While we may not understand God's ways, history has proven that He alone sees the overall picture and is working for the greatest blessing for the most people for the longest time. His ways are good, they are redemptive, and they support His eternal purposes.

As those who marched around Jericho, we will not always understand God's way. But if we simply trust and obey, He promises victory in the battles of life. As our study of the *Journey to Freedom* draws to a close, let's look at some biblical principles that provide us with a liberating perspective on God's ways.

1. a. While the Israelites might have expected a battle to take Jericho, what did God's way prove to Israel and the surrounding nations?

b. While God's plans for our lives are often found in earthly order, why do you think God works in unconventional and extraordinary ways at times?

c. Why is it impossible for us to always understand God's ways?

2. As we look at John 3:16, we can see that for which God paid the ultimate price. What is God's greatest purpose in His workings with mankind?

3. How do the following Scriptures describe the ways of God?

Psalms 18:30

Isaiah 55:8-9

Hosea 14:9

Habakkuk 3:6c

Romans 11:33

Revelation 15:3

4. What do these verses suggest about God's care for us as He directs our way?

Exodus 14:16 (Joshua 3:17)

Proverbs 15:19

Isaiah 30:21

Isaiah 42:16

5. Of what can we be assured as we commit our way to God?

Isaiah 49:16

Romans 8:31b-32

6. What did Joshua and the people of Israel do to experience God's victory?
What choices assure God's victory for us in the battles we face in life?

Joshua 1:9

Joshua 22:5

7. What other choices give us freedom as we follow the LORD's leading in our lives?

Matthew 6:33-34

Proverbs 3:5-6

Summary

8. What does the battle of Jericho teach you about how to receive the LORD's victories in the battles of your own life?

9. When the LORD's ways don't make sense to you, what can you rest in by faith?

10. a. Is there an area in your life where you have expected God to work in a different way? What truths in this lesson encourage you to trust the LORD?

b. What can you do to assure God's ultimate victory in this and every area of your life?

The Conquest of Canaan ***Joshua 6:1-13:7***

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| A. The Conquest of Central Canaan. | 6:1-8:35 |
| B. Conquest of Southern Canaan. | 9:1-10:43 |
| C. Conquest of Northern Canaan. | 11:1-15 |
| D. Conquest of Canaan Summarized. | 11:16-12:24 |

LESSON 24 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 5, *Circumcision*, p. 59.

2 Reference: Note 1, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 12.

3 Reference: Note 4, *Passover*, p. 59.

4 *Gilgal* was Israel's base camp and their temporary center of government and worship during their invasion of Canaan. Here the people renewed their commitment to God and covenant with Him before attempting to conquer the new land. At Gilgal, the angel of the LORD appeared to take command of the conquest (5:13-15). Also at Gilgal, Israel's first king, Saul, was crowned (1 Samuel 11:14-15).

5 *Manna* was the daily food God had rained down from heaven to feed the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness. (See Exodus 16:4, 31, 35; Numbers 11:9.)

6 *Ark of the covenant* or *of the testimony* was a chest containing the tablets of the law (Ten Commandments). It rested in the tabernacle and later in the temple. At this time in Israel's history, it also contained a pot of manna (Exodus 16:32-34) and Aaron's rod. The ark represented the presence of the LORD in Israel.

7 Reference: Note 1, *Totally destroy*, p. 201.

LESSON 25

THE PROMISED LAND DISTRIBUTED JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

Joshua 14:6-15; 23:1-24:33.

Israel's conquest of the Promised Land probably lasted about five years, then "the land had rest from war" (11:23). There were still territories yet to be taken, and the LORD assured Joshua, who was at this point probably in his nineties, that He would complete the conquest. However, it was time to divide the land west of the Jordan among the nine and a half tribes who had not yet received their inheritance, and to send the two and a half tribes back to their land on the east side of the Jordan. Except for Joshua, Caleb, and the Levites,¹ the land was assigned by lot at the entrance to the tent of meeting in the presence of the LORD. Joshua, Eleazar, the priest, and the heads of the twelve tribes made the allotments.²

A highlight of this narrative is Caleb's request for the specific plot of land God had promised him. This land was a reward promised Caleb some forty five years earlier when he had given a faithful report after spying out the land. Caleb, now eighty five years old, praised God that he was as strong and vigorous for battle as when he was forty. The land God had promised Caleb was the yet unconquered land in the hill country, where the Anakites lived with their great physical size and well-fortified cities. But as Caleb came before Joshua requesting this territory, he had no doubt that the LORD would give him victory over the Anakites. So Joshua "blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron in the hill country as his inheritance . . . because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly" (14:13-14). Joshua had been a faithful spy forty-five years ago, too, and received the land the LORD had promised him in the hill country of Ephraim (19:49-50).

Some fifteen or twenty years later, when Joshua was one hundred and ten years old and nearing the end of his life, he summoned Israel's leaders to give his final words of encouragement and exhortation. First, Joshua reminded them of how powerfully the LORD had fought for them, giving one of them the ability to fight a thousand. Then Joshua assured the leaders that as they were faithful to the LORD, He would be faithful to drive out the peoples which were still unconquered from the land.

Joshua reminded them of words the LORD had spoken before they entered the land: "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left . . . and do not associate with the nations that remain among you . . . you must not bow down or serve their gods. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now" (23:6-8). Joshua also warned that the LORD, who had been absolutely faithful to His promises to Israel, would also be faithful to His promise to banish Israel from the land if they violated their covenant with Him.

After this, Joshua assembled all the people at Shechem to lead them in a covenant renewal ceremony. Using typical ancient Near Eastern covenant style, Joshua began with a preamble from the King, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says:" (24:2). Then he proceeded to recount the history of God's faithfulness to His promises to Abraham. He had made Abraham's descendants a great nation and delivered them from Egyptian bondage through great miracles and the parting of the Red Sea. Now, as promised, He had given them the land which they had not worked for with cities they had not built. The call of the LORD at this present time was a recommitment to put aside gods of Egypt and gods of Canaan and serve the LORD only. "Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness . . . choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (24:14-15).

Three times the people promised, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey Him" (24:18,21,24)." Joshua recorded their promise in the Book of the Law of God (24:25-26) and set up a large stone memorial at Shechem to bear witness to their covenant agreement.

Shortly thereafter, Joshua died and was buried in Ephraim. The striking characteristic of his life was submission to the LORD (cf. 11:15,23; Exodus 17:10). Throughout his days, Joshua maintained Israel's faithfulness to God, as witnessed by the closing words of the book bearing his name:

"Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him . . ." (24:31).

Read Joshua 14:6-15.

1. a. What was Caleb's conviction (14:7) when he spied out the land forty-five years earlier (Numbers 13:27-30; 14:6-9)?

b. For what did the LORD honor Caleb, and what two things did He promise (Joshua 14:9; see also Numbers 14:21-24)?

2. a. How had the LORD also prepared Caleb for receiving his land (14:7, 10-11)?

b. What were the circumstances in the land at the time Caleb asked Joshua for it, and with what spirit did Caleb request the land (14:12)?

Read Joshua 23.

3. What aspects of God's character did Joshua remind Israel's leaders about in his final words to them (23:9-10, 14)?

4. What did Joshua warn them could be a snare to them in the land (23:7, 12-13, 16)?

5. What simple instruction did Joshua give the people in order to avoid this downfall (23:6,8)?

Read Joshua 24.

6. Where did Joshua assemble the people to renew their covenant with God (24:1)?

7. Joshua began the covenant renewal service in the order of ancient Near Eastern covenants, beginning with a preamble from the King: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says:" (24:2). This was followed by a prologue which recounted God's acts of faithfulness to His covenants with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4; 15:5; 13-14, 18) and with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6, 8). What faithful actions of God did this prologue review (24:2-13)?

8. In light of God's faithfulness, what commitment to the covenant did Joshua challenge the people to renew at Shechem (24:14-15)?

9. a. How did the people respond (24:16-18, 21, 24)?

b. What did Joshua do to commemorate these promises (24:25-27)?

10. How old was Joshua when he died, and what resulted from his faithful leadership of Israel (24:29, 31)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

In the Spirit of Moses, Joshua and Caleb

God had promised Abraham a people, a nation, and a land. All these now given, the stage was set for the fulfillment of God's final promise to Abraham that all the peoples on earth would be blessed through his descendants (Genesis 12:3). God's plan was that as the nation of Israel gathered in her national life around God's throne and altar, obeying His commands and worshipping Him, all the world would see the goodness of the one true God and learn of His righteous decrees. Israel would create a testimony about God for the sake of all peoples, who would be drawn to Him and to His wisdom and righteous laws.

If this had been all of God's plan, however, it would have failed in time, because Israel did not remain faithful to the LORD. But God's ultimate plan of blessing would come with the birth of the Messiah in their midst, whom the prophets of Israel identified in their inspired Old Testament writings. Over the hundreds of years of Israel's history following those in our study, prophets inspired by God recorded the specific signs which would identify this Savior to come. Among other things, He would be a suffering servant, who would give His life to pay the penalty for sin (Isaiah 53). But He would also be the Mighty God, who would reign eternally as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Through the coming of His own Son, God would fulfill His promise to Abraham to use Israel to bring the plan of eternal salvation to all mankind.

In light of these truths, our study of Israel's foundation as a nation gives us the beginnings of God's plan of redemption worked out throughout the rest of the Bible. The *Journey to Freedom* for all of us begins and ends with God's promises to Abraham fulfilled finally and completely in the LORD Jesus Christ.

So, how do we respond? This was the question Joshua addressed in his last words to the people. In light of God's goodness as He had intervened in history to save them and dwell among them, what should they do?

Joshua's choice was clear, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua's desire was that his children and their children continue to experience the grace of God in their lives. They would never maintain a

walk of faith over a lifetime by being perfect--the sacrifices at the tabernacle, which pointed to the cross of Christ to come, would always be the basis of holiness before God. But to remain in the grace of God would require continually choosing to love and worship the LORD and cling to right amidst a world that refused to honor Him.

As we draw our study on the *Journey to Freedom* to a close, we will look at the choices of faithfulness that place us and keep us on the LORD's side.

1. a. What stands out to you about Moses? What do you admire about his life?

b. What strong points do you see in Joshua? What stands out to you about his life as a man of God?

c. Why is Caleb a strong and refreshing biblical character? How did God describe him?

2. a. What characteristics did these men share? Why was God able to trust and honor them?

b. How can we follow their pattern in our own lives, and what will be the result?

3. a. In his last words, Joshua charged the people to cultivate several important elements of wholehearted devotion to the LORD (Joshua 23:6-8, 11-12; 24:14). By each, state what it means and/or why it is necessary in maintaining a faith that lasts a lifetime and witnesses to unbelievers.

a. Be very strong. Be careful to obey godly principles; don't turn aside to the right or to the left.

b. Stay clear of worldly ways of thinking (self-centered). Refuse to worship the gods of the world around you.

c. Avoid binding alliances with unbelievers, such as marriage.

d. Serve the LORD with all faithfulness.

e. Hold fast to the LORD your God. Be very careful to love Him.

4. What is the result of choosing to live our lives for the LORD in response to His proven love for us?

Deuteronomy 12:28

Romans 12:2b (1-2)

Journey to Freedom Study Summary

5. What did you learn from the exodus--God's miraculous deliverance of Israel out of bondage in Egypt--that relates to your walk of faith today?

6. What did you learn from Israel's experience in the wilderness that is helpful to you today (i.e. their grumbling and complaining experiences and God's provision for them through manna and water from the rock)?

7. What did you learn about the value of the ten words, or stipulations (Ten Commandments), of God's covenant with his people? What is their value today?

8. What have you learned about the character of God from this study?

9. a. What keys to freedom stand out to you as you reflect upon the essence of this study?

10. What is your desire as a result of your discoveries?

LESSON 25 NOTES

1 *The Levites*, descendants of Jacob's son Levi, were set apart for priestly service and did not receive land allotments. The two sons of Joseph had been adopted by Jacob (Gen. 48:5), becoming independent tribes. They received Levi's portion (Josh. 14:3-4). God Himself was the Levites' portion (Num. 18:20; Josh. 13:33), but He also provided them 48 cities with pasturelands throughout Palestine (Josh. 21:1-42).

2 **Summary of Land Allotments** Joshua 13:8-21:45.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| I. Allotment East of the Jordan | 13:8-33 |
| Manasseh, Gad, Reuben | |
| II. Allotment West of the Jordan | 14:1-19:51 |
| Caleb, Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh, | |
| Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, | |
| Asher, Naphtali, Dan, Joshua | |
| III. Cities of Refuge (see Note 3) | 20:1-9 |
| IV. The Levitical Cities assigned (see Note 1) | 21:1-42 |
| V. Settlement Completed | 21:43-45 |

3 *Cities of refuge*. There were six cities of refuge designated throughout Israel in Old Testament times. These provided safety for people who killed other persons by accident from the "avenger of blood," the relative who considered it his duty to slay the killer. A judge determined eligibility for refuge to one of the six cities, which for convenience were located three on either side of the Jordan River.

Nelson's
Complete
Book of Bible
Maps & Charts,
p. 69.

Major Footnote and Chart Directory

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1	12	1	The Abrahamic Covenant.
	13	4	The date of the Exodus.
		6	Priest of Midian.
2	13	7	The author/compiler of Exodus.
	22	2	I AM (YHWH).
	23	4	Angel of the Lord (Ex. 3:2).
3	32	5	Holy Spirit.
		2	Redemption.
4	41	1	Pharaoh's hardened heart.
		2	secret arts (Ex. 7:11,22).
5	49	1	The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.
		3	leave livestock behind (Ex. 10:24).
		4	I will deal differently . . . (Ex. 8:22; 11:7).
6	59	3	firstborn redemption (Ex. 12:29-30).
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9	90	5	The glory of God.
		6	The Human God.
		1	grumbled (Ex. 15:24).
10	100	2	God tested them (Ex. 15:25).
		3	The twelve tribes of Israel (also chart, p. 91).
		4	Manna (also Note 5, p. 238).
		5	Horeb (Mt.).
		91	The Twelve Tribes of Israel chart.
11	108	2	sent away his wife (Ex. 18:2).
11	109	1	Mount Sinai.
		2	The Sinaitic Covenant.
		3	kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6).
		4	holy nation (Ex. 19:6).
11	109	5	Do not be afraid (Ex. 20:20).
		7	Fear of God.
		8	

(Major Footnote and Chart Directory Continued)

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12	120	1	be their King.
		2	Words (Ex. 20:1).
		3	These "ten words" or Ten Commandments.
		6	Jealousy of God
	121	7	Sabbath.
14	139	2	Book of the Covenant.
		3	Slavery.
		4	tablets of stone inscribed by God.
	140	5	The Law of Retribution.
		6	Feasts: Harvest, Weeks (later Pentacost), Ingathering. (See also Passover, Unleavened Bread p. 59), blood sprinkled on the people.
15	149		A. W. Tozer quote: "God is Easy to Live With."
	150	1	Sacrifices.
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	152		Illustration "The Tabernacle, Ark, High Priest's Dress."
16	162	2	no one may see me and live (Ex. 33:20).
17	170	2	Priesthood.
		5	The tabernacle or Tent of Meeting.
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18	181	2	Encampment & Marching Order of Israel.
	182	3	The Encampment of Israel (huge campsite).
		7	struck them with a severe plague.
		8	Moses' Cushite wife.
		9	Rabble (11:4).
20	201	1	totally destroy (21:2).
	202	2	Balaam.
		3	The census.
		4	The Levites (also Note 1, p. 247).
21	211	1	The covenant with Abraham.
		2	Righteousness (Dt. 6:25).
24	238	4	Gilgal.
		5	Manna.
		6	Ark of the covenant.
			Chart: The Conquest of Canaan (Joshua 6:1-13:7).
25	247	1	The Levites.
		2	Summary of Land Allotments (Joshua 13-21).
		3	Cities of refuge.

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