

# Lessons on the Life of Moses

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Taken from the Old Testament.

John Hendershot

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*Dedication*

To the memory of John B. and Lillian V. Hendershot – who taught us to “pass  
it on.”

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## Moses – The Beginning - Exodus 1-3

The life of Moses studies one of the central characters of the Old Testament. His life was a grand parade, so much so that Cecil B. deMille made an epic movie about it – twice. (One was a silent movie; the other one featured Charlton Heston.)

A little background from the first chapter of Exodus is necessary:

- ✚ At the time of Moses' birth, the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites and had them at hard labor.
- ✚ One reason for this was that the Egyptians feared that the Israelites, who were becoming more numerous, would side with Pharaoh's enemies, leading to the destruction of the kingdom.
- ✚ This fear reached such intensity that Pharaoh issued a decree that all the baby boys born to Israelites were to be drowned.

### The Ark

**Exo 2:1-10 NASB** Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. (2) The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. (3) But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set *it* among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. (4) His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. (5) The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it *to her*. (6) When she opened *it*, she saw the child, and behold, *the* boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." (7) Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" (8) Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go *ahead*." So the girl went and called the child's mother. (9) Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give *you* your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. (10) The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

It is a curious thing: we know from other passages of Scripture just who the parents of Moses were; we also know the sister's name, Miriam. His older brother, Aaron, is not mentioned either. It is as if God was telling us to pay attention to the events, not the people.

Moses' mother (Jochebed) is taking advantage of Egyptian belief. Much of Egyptian belief centers on the annual cycle of the Nile flooding – a form of rebirth. One of the Egyptian gods (Osiris?) was said to have been killed and reborn, returning on the Nile. So from the princess' point of view, this baby would be seen as something similar. Hence the favor shown, instead of just drowning the kid.

Interestingly, the word translated "basket" here is translated "Ark" when it applies to Noah. ("Ark" as in Ark of the Covenant is a different word.) It is as if God is telling His people that here is salvation just as the Ark was.

### Great Deliverance

God is about to work His great deliverance. But as he does, somebody (here, Moses' mother) has to play her part too:

- ✚ Somebody has to build the ark (basket). It is obedience to do so, and faith to know it will work, but somebody has to do the work.
- ✚ What's really tough is to put the child in the basket and then put it into the Nile. That takes faith – and courage.
- ✚ When the deed is done, hope remains. Here is hope in a time of hopelessness.

## Murder and Flight

**Exo 2:11-15 NASB** Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. (12) So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one *around*, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (13) He went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" (14) But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known." (15) When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

Let us not put too fine a point on it. This is murder.

- ✚ Moses knew it was wrong. We see that when he "looked this way and that." Only a guilty man would do that. Only a guilty man would hide the body.
- ✚ He did this in anger. This is a lesson to all of us, that losing your temper often leads to greater sin.
- ✚ Note the comparison: being Egyptian was enough to get the man killed. When the two Hebrews argued, he tried to settle the matter peacefully.

It does bring up the question: just when should righteous anger erupt?

## Discovered

It might just be that God allowed Moses to find that his crime has been discovered – the easy way. When he tries to break up the fight, it's clear he favors one person over the other (who is labeled the "offender"). If he hadn't tried, his first knowledge of discovery might have been his arrest.

So Moses "got out of Dodge." Apparently just in time, too – with Pharaoh's agents on his tail. He flees to Midian, which is a rather long distance for that time.

## Midian

Let's take a look at the landscape:



True color image of the Middle East, 2002. By NASA.

There are a couple of things we might point out from the picture.

- ✚ The land of Midian (now part of Saudi Arabia) is a hot, dry, dusty place. It is so harsh that the locals do not raise horses – only camels. Cows don't get enough water here, so it's sheep and goats only.
- ✚ It's also a place with large, volcanic mountains. The Gulf of Aqaba is actually part of the fault which causes the Great Rift Valley in Africa. So the mountains are geologically new (and thus steep!).
- ✚ To get to Midian is a long, difficult walk.

**Exo 2:16-25 NASB** Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. (17) Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock. (18) When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "Why have you come *back* so soon today?" (19) So they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock." (20) He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." (21) Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. (22) Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." (23) Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. (24) So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (25) God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them*.

The Midianites are descendants from Abraham. Evidently they retained some knowledge of the God of Abraham as well.

- ✚ The priest's name (given here) is Reuel, which means "friend of God." This is likely a title, as in the next chapter we are introduced to him as being named Jethro.
- ✚ Note also that he is "the" priest of Midian. The providence of God has directed Moses to a most likely instructor.

We may well wonder: What did Moses learn from this priest during the forty years he lived in Midian? The Scripture is silent.

It would seem a fair sentence: forty years in the wilderness as penalty for a second degree murder charge.

### Burning Bush

**Exo 3:1-22 NASB** Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (2) The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. (3) So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." (4) When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." (5) Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (6) He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (7) The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. (8) "So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. (9) "Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. (10) "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." (11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out



of Egypt?" (12) And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." (13) Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" (14) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (15) God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. (16) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. (17) "So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" (18) "They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' (19) "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. (20) "So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. (21) "I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. (22) "But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."

### Meeting God

It is a curious thing about modern, evangelical Christians: they deny the very existence of holy ground. It is likely left over from the anti-Catholic feelings; if the Catholics do it, then we don't. (And the Catholics do.) But we do refer to Israel as the "Holy Land," for wherever God sets foot, it is holy ground. Perhaps it is holy only when God makes it so.

One thing we may note: God calls Moses, not the other way around. So often we petition God so that we may do great things – whereas He calls the unlikely to do the impossible.

We may also note God's introduction. He clearly tells Moses that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. The point is important; a God who was new to the Israelites might not get the same reaction. There is a reason to praise the "God of our fathers."

### The Purpose of God

God now reveals why He has called Moses. Simply:

- ✚ He has seen the suffering of Israel.
- ✚ He is going to deliver them from it.
- ✚ And guess who gets to do the legwork?

## Objections

The world's greatest salesman, Monte Hipple II, once taught me that sales don't start until customer objections begin. Moses has his first objection. Just who is sending me? What am I going to tell these people?

God's response is a great revelation. He claims to be the self-existent one.

Why is this important? Walk with me through a few brief steps:

- ✚ One of the standard arguments for the existence of God is that there must be someone or something who is self-existent. That's someone who must exist as the Uncaused Cause, the Necessary Being.
- ✚ The standard objection raised to this simply says, "How do you know this philosophical God is the God of Abraham?"
- ✚ The answer is here: by His very Name, God proclaims Himself to be the self-existent.  
Here, for the first time in human history, God proclaims Himself as the only possible and true God. His statement is the same today. There is only one.

## The Call - Exodus 4

One of the most encouraging things about Moses is that he started his service for God by raising objections and pleading a lack of capability. We shall take this passage somewhat out of order, as this better serves the purpose of example.

Israel

**Exo 4:21-23 NASB** The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. (22) "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. (23) "So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'"

### The Firstborn of God

It is a consistent pattern throughout the Old Testament, back to the days of Abraham. The firstborn – whether human or animal – belongs to God. Here God proclaims that the nation of Israel is His firstborn – and therefore reserved to Him. It is troubling to note the extreme to which God will go to enforce this claim. As we will see later in the Law, the firstborn must be redeemed.

This seems to be of scholarly interest only. But look up “firstborn” in your Bible and you will see that Christ is the firstborn of creation. He belongs to God, and by His sacrifice we are redeemed.<sup>1</sup> We are called the church of the firstborn. Evidently God has lessons to be shown in the firstborn!

### Heard their pleas

**Exo 4:28-31 NASB** Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do. (29) Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; (30) and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. (31) So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

This passage seems to be rather glib, as if it was no problem for Moses and Aaron. But please note that the last time God spoke to Israel was over 400 years previously. So if they were skeptical, we can see why. Most of us have that same attitude when God does not immediately answer our prayers.

- ✚ We forget that God has a different view of time (since He created it.) He calls all times “soon.”<sup>2</sup>
- ✚ We also have the habit of assuming that since the time of trial has not yet arrived, it isn’t coming.
- ✚ Most of all, we complain that God just isn’t listening.

It seems we are impatient.

### Death proclaimed

The spooky part of this passage is in the death of the firstborn of Egypt. How do you know Pharaoh will be hard-hearted – especially in the face of all those miracles?

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:5

<sup>2</sup> Indebted to C. S. Lewis’ Aslan for this thought.

- ✦ It is a consistent principle throughout history: God blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse them.<sup>3</sup>
- ✦ Sometimes God takes his time about delivering the curse (as in this example) so that they might repent.
- ✦ But why the death? At least one reason is this: You know that God is serious about this.

## Excuses

### Miracles

**Exo 4:1-9 NASB** Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" (2) The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." (3) Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. (4) But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail"--so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand-- (5) "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." (6) The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. (7) Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of* his flesh. (8) "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. (9) "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

We should note that the signs and wonders (miracles) God gives are for His purposes. Sometimes His people take a little convincing:

- ✦ Please note that these miracles are given to Moses *before he starts objecting*. His response, however, is unfortunately the most common one.
- ✦ Miracles are given for God's purposes, not man's. In this instance, as in others, they are used to credential God's representative.
- ✦ In this instance, we may make one other point. Moses is about to give his objections after these three miracles *while he's standing in front of the burning bush*.

### Humility

**Exo 4:10-12 NASB** Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (11) The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? (12) "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

Moses, it appears, feels himself inadequate for the task, and he raises good objections to the plan. It seems reasonable. But consider: who among mortal men is good enough to do such things? The problem is that Moses is looking within – while the Lord is working within him.

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<sup>3</sup> Which should be noted at the State Department.

## Disobedience

**Exo 4:13-17 NASB** But he said, "Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever You will." (14) Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. (15) "You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. (16) "Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. (17) "You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

"Pick someone else." It sounds humble, but let us consider the implications:

- ✚ It means that "God made a mistake in selecting me." Really?
- ✚ It means that "God is not capable of empowering me to do this." Really?

It is in fact disobedience, and God reacts to it with anger. He does not explain any of this; He simply tells him to go and get on with it. He simply isn't going to discuss His commands.

## The Call

Moses finally goes. As he does, we can see that this will not be easy.

## Adversity

If God calls you to something, expect adversity on all sides.

- ✚ Expect it from your family and friends. If you hear the call, it's useful to assume that they didn't.
- ✚ Expect it from the circumstances around you.
- ✚ Expect it from Satan (and feel honored when you get it).

## Purity

**Exo 4:24-26 NASB** Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. (25) Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." (26) So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are* a bridegroom of blood"--because of the circumcision.

In this strange incident we see that God will insist on the purity of His messengers. The patriarchs had the command to circumcise, but evidently one of Moses' sons had not been.

Why would God insist on such purity?

- ✚ The pure heart is the only instrument capable of seeing God.<sup>4</sup>
- ✚ To the pure, all things are pure. Therefore the things of God blend in with the things of the world.
- ✚ Such a heart produces the queen of virtues, love.<sup>5</sup>

Such purity is required of those who serve the Lord – even in matters which are symbolic.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:8

<sup>5</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:22

### What He says, He will do

For those who have the call of Christ upon them, remember that God is not just using you – He’s shaping you to His own ends.

- ✚ If necessary, He will bring punishment upon you. Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines.
- ✚ He will not accept “I can’t do that” – but will transform you until you can.
- ✚ Much to our delight, if He promises blessing or reward, He will be faithful to provide it.

## Ten Plagues - Exodus 7-11

(Note: because of the extent of the Scripture being covered, we will omit the usual selections of Scripture. Reading through the chapters indicated will cover all but the tenth plague. That plague is found to be completed late in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter.

This story is one of the most well known from the Bible, and one of the most compelling. Particularly for Americans, this is holy ground. Many of the negro spirituals dating from before the Civil War use the Exodus as a metaphor for the freeing of American slaves. The spiritual *Go Down, Moses* is perhaps the best known of these expressions.

### Preliminary

#### Miracles

Let's begin with a partial review of miracles, adapted for this context. A miracle is:

- ✚ A supernatural event. It is often a natural event, but speeded up, or arriving out of season, or in a place not expected.
- ✚ Connected to the words spoken by one who speaks for God.
- ✚ In a context which makes it clear that the miracle carries a message.

This goes some way to explaining the "magicians by their secret arts." If something occurs naturally, it can often be made to appear on demand. Science and magic are twins. But only God is God.

#### Crescendo

It should be clear that the impact and scope of these miracles increases step by step. At first Moses demands only that the people go out three days journey to sacrifice to the Lord. By the end of the sequence, it is clear that the Israelites are not coming back. Similarly, the miracles themselves have increasing impact.

#### Hardening of the heart

One of the most difficult aspects of this package is that God hardens Pharaoh's heart (over and over again) for the explicit purpose of the glory of God. A comparable dilemma happens with the man blind from birth.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the glory of God is so important that extensive suffering may be required for it.

#### The Plagues

We shall not take too much time to detail these, but point out along the way the lessons which might not quite be obvious.

#### Aaron's snake

The word used for snake here actually means a creature of the water; to the Egyptians this would be from the Nile. Aaron's snake, therefore, attacks the credibility of the magicians. The miracle is harmless except to the ego, but it does serve to credential Aaron and Moses.

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<sup>6</sup> John 9

### Blood in the water

This is a natural phenomenon which occurs late in the summer. The miracle is therefore in the time of year and speed with which it occurs. We have the same sort of thing in the Pacific; an algae bloom. This is rather different; the normal version does not kill the fish. The magicians can do the same; just note that they can't undo the miracle. Moses can.

It's also interesting to note that this plague goes on for seven days. That's long enough to make everyone in Egypt needy for a well.

### Frogs

There is an annual glut of frogs in September in the Nile. Again, it's the timing of this invasion that is the miracle. Also, there is a primary deity in the Egyptian gods who is female and is portrayed with a frog's head. Thus, this miracle asserts the superiority of the Lord over this deity.

Interestingly, Moses allows Pharaoh to "call the shot" for the end of this plague. It's a very convincing technique. Anyone can say that the frogs will be dead some time next week; letting your enemy pick the day shows the confidence Moses had in the Lord.

### Gnats

The gnats (or possibly mosquitoes) are a step up in the plagues. This time the plague falls on the earth (from which the father-god in Egyptian culture is taken). But note this: the magicians can't duplicate this. So about this time they are thinking that Moses is just a more clever illusionist.

### Flies

This plague has a noticeable effect: Pharaoh finally is willing to let them sacrifice. But Moses insists on going three days out into the desert. It's a sign that Pharaoh is cracking. But not yet.

There is some suggestion that the flies are in fact beetles, a sacred insect to the Egyptians. They would be the representation of the sun god (remember scarabs?)

### Pestilence

Here, for the first time, we see a clear distinction between Egypt and Israel. Moses has, if you will, upped the ante.

### Boils

This is going to have quite an effect on the magicians. First, these frauds are encountering Reality in a painful way. The fact that they have no such trick up their sleeves starts a change of view.

Second, this is done with ashes. The Egyptians often cremated people, then scattered their ashes to the winds. To the magicians, this would have seemed a hint to the power of life and death.

### Hail

For the first time we have recorded that the people around Pharaoh are divided in their opinion of Moses. Those who think Moses really can do this head home to round up everyone and everything under a roof. Then the storm hits.



We're not really sure just what kind of storm this is. Those who tend to the opinion that this was just a natural event say that lightning flashed; the word actually used is not lightning, but fire. (The NIV has lightning; NASB has fire). Hebrew does have two different words for these; the one used here is fire.

Pharaoh, for the first time, acknowledges his sin. But as soon as the storm stops, he's back to his usual position.

### Locusts

At this point the only person in favor of keeping the Israelites is Pharaoh. His advisors are telling him to let them go. So Pharaoh once again "repents" ("forgive my sin just this once") when he calls Moses back to him. Now Pharaoh is willing to let them go – but leave the livestock.

### Death of the firstborn

This event is closely connected with Passover, which is in next week's lesson, so we shall defer comment to then. This, however, hits Pharaoh hard and he tells the Israelites to leave. Interestingly, even after this, Pharaoh will come after them.

### Lessons for us

#### The hard heart

It is useful to remember that in Scripture the word "heart" does not mean "seat of the emotions." It means the center of the will. When the heart is hardened, it is God's good pleasure (often enough) that he will gradually increase the affliction of the hard hearted. This is so that He gives them plenty of time to repent.

What should we do?

**Jas 4:10 NIV** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

#### Discernment

All of us have known someone who "just won't listen." Discernment is largely a matter of taking the facts and organizing them in God's way so that we might see what His will might be.

- ✚ We can combine the facts with the word of God. This is why we are always encouraged to read and memorize the Scripture; when the facts arrive, we have a framework to hang them on.
- ✚ We can combine the facts with words of warning from our fellow Christians. Such warnings are often taken directly from the Scripture, or can be related to it.
- ✚ We can combine the facts with our guilty consciences. The right way to get rid of guilt is to repent.

Whatever we do, remember that God will crescendo His actions toward us. It is better to repent quickly than at leisure.

#### Providence

Sometimes it's just a matter of seeing God in what He does. It might look natural, but you wonder about the "coincidence." There are no coincidences with God; therefore, watch for His hand working around you.



## Passover - Exodus 12

For many Christians the rite of Passover is filed under “historical use only.” But we might look at it differently. To do so, we must first make a philosophical distinction which is out of favor today. As it has proven useful in the past, I must ask you to bear with me.

That distinction is this: there is a difference between what a thing is, and what it is made of. Suppose I come to your house with my tools and totally disassemble the family car. I lay the pieces out neatly on the ground and announce that we now have complete understanding of this thing, the family car. You might make a few points to the contrary, like the mission of that car (to take you to work, for example); the mobility it gives you, and so on. A car is more than the sum of its parts.

In that same vein, we will see that Passover, far from being an empty ritual, is very fruitful in explanation. In particular, we shall see:

- ✚ Passover as forming the nation of Israel, and thus a picture of the forming of the church.
- ✚ Passover as the start of the Exodus, which is a picture of the flight of the church from sin to God.
- ✚ Passover showing us Christ, the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world.

For reasons of space, we omit the copy of the Scripture. The lesson is based on Exodus 12.

### Forming the nation

The nation of Israel was started at the first Passover, with the sacrifice of the lamb. The church has its deepest roots in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. So let us see what nation building we have here.

### Common

Three things I would put forward as common items which build community:

- ✚ God changed the calendar for the Jews; this is the start of it. Similarly, the church reckons her dates around what was supposed to be the advent of Christ (they missed by a few years).
- ✚ Nothing welds a group together like common suffering; the Jews in Egypt and the Christians suffering for Christ.
- ✚ Most of all, the Jews have a common savior, Moses. The church has The Savior, Jesus, the Christ.

### Sacrifice

There are three ways we see the sacrifice of the lamb as binding the nation:

- ✚ The lamb is personal. It's one per household, taken from your flocks. Therefore it is a genuine sacrifice. The Lamb of God is personal too.
- ✚ The lambs are all killed at the same time, which is a common sacrifice; every one of the Jews did it. This, in type, foreshadows the fact that there would be one sacrifice for our sins (same time implies one sacrifice.)
- ✚ The blood is on the doorposts – or it's not. There is no half way. Similarly, either you accept the sacrifice of Christ – or not. It is by his blood that we are saved.

### Memorial

A common memorial builds a nation – think of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in America. Here are the similar points:

- ✚ It's described as a *feast*! As the Jew "celebrates" Passover, the Christian celebrates the memorial feast of Communion.
- ✚ No stranger is to eat it, only the circumcised. But if circumcised, a non-Jew could eat Passover with the Jews. Baptism first, then Communion open to all.
- ✚ Most important: a formal effort is made to make sure your children understand what this is about.

## The Exodus

We are at the beginning of the Exodus. We need to see this as the flight from sin, through the desert of this world, coming home to the Promised Land.

### Flight from

This is a picture of the Christian experience.

- ✚ The Christian is a sojourner – just as the Jew is to eat the Passover with his sandals on, ready to march, staff in hand. This world is not my home, I'm just passing through.
- ✚ The meal is "roasted with fire." Perhaps this relates to the pillar of fire in the desert, but we can certainly see in it the fires of hell. That's what our Sacrifice went through for us.
- ✚ And for those left behind? Judgment!

### Sinless

All through the Passover we encounter the idea that the meal, and its participants, must be sinless. One common symbol of this is the unleavened bread. Symbolically, leaven represents sin, and the Jew is to be without it for seven days (seven, the number of completeness). As the Jew is to throw out the leaven, so the Christian is to come to Communion only after examining himself.

Hyssop, strangely, makes its mark here. Hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood; it became therefore a symbol of cleansing from sin<sup>7</sup>. Hyssop was used to provide Christ with his last drink – sour wine (vinegar).

### Flight to

One cannot just leave and wander in the desert all this time, right? Well, yes they did. But they didn't start out with that in mind. They had a destination: The Promised Land. We may see the Christian equivalent in two ways:

- ✚ We can equate it with heaven, or
  - ✚ We can equate it with the new heaven and earth to come.
- Either way, I like the picture.

Of course, we must note that they left after they had "spoiled the Egyptians." There is a great truth in this. In this time it would be normal for the conquering king to despoil the inhabitants of his

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 51:7

conquest. But do you see the parallel here? The riches of a Christian are indeed great. They become great when you leave your life of sin (Egypt) and head for the Promised Land.<sup>8</sup>

### **Christ, the Lamb of God**

The greatest parallel vision of Passover is to see the Lamb of God.

#### **Sinless**

We already have seen much on this, but may I point out the selection of the lamb of God?

- ✚ He was, like the lamb, unblemished – meaning, sinless. Even Pilate found Him such.
- ✚ He was sacrificed in the prime of life – not sinless like a newborn, sinless as a grown man.

#### **Suffering**

The Lamb of God's suffering is shown in Passover too.

- ✚ He was killed at twilight – after sunset, before dark.
- ✚ Just as the Passover lamb was roasted whole, the wrath of God came upon him and He became accursed for us.

#### **Savior**

It's not hard to see the Savior in the Passover lamb:

- ✚ There were to be no leftovers from the Passover lamb – because one Lamb of God was all that was needed.
- ✚ The lamb was to be eaten the same night – just as the Scriptures teach us that Christ saw no decay.
- ✚ There were no bones broken in the lamb – just as Christ died without His bones being broken.<sup>9</sup>

All the Old Testament points to Christ; God spent 1500 years drumming into the heads of the Jewish people just what kind of Messiah they were to look for. They were to know Him when they saw Him – and didn't. Yet their rejection of the Messiah meant the spread of the Gospel to the world; and when they accept Him, will it not be the resurrection of the dead?

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<sup>8</sup> One can also see the sinner's side of this. In the land of sin what good are riches when you die? Only when those riches are used to enter the Promised Land are they of any real use.

<sup>9</sup> John 19:33,36

## The Exodus - Exodus 12-17

It is with some trepidation that we bring you this lesson. After all, practically everyone has seen Charlton Heston part the Red Sea – and we don't think we can beat the special effects. But – as Exodus is the Pilgrim's Progress of the Old Testament – we shall see if we can find some nuggets along the way.

### Departure

**Exo 12:31-42 NIV** During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. (32) Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me." (33) The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" (34) So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. (35) The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. (36) The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. (37) The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. (38) Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. (39) With the dough they had brought from Egypt, they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves. (40) Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt <sup>[2]</sup> was 430 years. (41) At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt. (42) Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.

### In haste

At this point the Egyptians are dealing with mass funerals and Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and throws them out of Egypt. As in, immediately – now. So it is that the Israelites leave in great haste. As far as they are concerned this is a spur of the moment thing. God, however, sees it differently. He promised Abraham that this would happen, and it happens right on schedule.<sup>10</sup>

Has God ever done that to you? Provided for you so precisely that you can see the hour He had in mind? Or blessed you with exactly the right amount of money for your needs? It is the providence of God.

### The longer way

**Exo 13:17-22 NIV** When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." (18) So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. <sup>[1]</sup> The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle. (19) Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." <sup>[2]</sup> (20) After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. (21) By

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 15:13 is the reference for this, but you have to work out the genealogies and dates to make 430 years work. Most commentaries will show you this. Get a thick one.

day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. (22) Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

It comes as something of a surprise to us that God, while expecting us to “be strong in the Lord,” is also aware of our weaknesses – and sometimes even caters to them. God does so for the Israelites here; for those who pray, “lead us not into temptation” God does it for us.

We see also that Joseph’s bones are carried out with them. It is a promise 400 years old – and a promise kept. God is eternal; his word is sure.

We may also see the pillar of fire or cloud. It is a characteristic of God that He will not leave his people to guess. He will show them the way. Unfortunately, it is a characteristic of his people that they will get lost, turn their back on the signs of God, grumble about the accommodations and test God in the process.

### Deliverance

**Exo 14:1-31 NIV** Then the LORD said to Moses, (2) "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. (3) Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' (4) And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this. (5) When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" (6) So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. (7) He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. (8) The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. (9) The Egyptians--all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen <sup>[1]</sup> and troops--pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. (10) As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. (11) They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? (12) Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (13) Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. (14) The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." (15) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. (16) Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. (17) I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. (18) The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen." (19) Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, (20) coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other

side; so neither went near the other all night long. (21) Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, (22) and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (23) The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. (24) During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. (25) He made the wheels of their chariots come off <sup>[2]</sup> so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt." (26) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." (27) Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward <sup>[3]</sup> it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. (28) The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen--the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. (29) But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (30) That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. (31) 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.

#### Hardened heart

It is amazing that Pharaoh hasn't figured out just who is running things here. He's had plenty of examples. We may attribute the lapse this time to two things:

- ✚ God has hardened his heart for him. (It's not like Pharaoh is unwilling.)
- ✚ Note that it's Pharaoh and his officials this time. Group think is not a modern phenomenon.

One thing to note: Pharaoh must have had a colossal ego. He pursues 600,000 Israelite **men** using 600 or so chariots. I suspect this is not the way it's written out in the Egyptian army field manuals.

#### Fear in Israel

At 500 to 1 odds (two men per chariot) you'd think the Israelites would be happy to pound Pharaoh and company into the desert sands, right? Wrong. They've been slaves so long that a spirit of fear rests within them. For the next forty years are so you're going to find fear to be a consistent theme. Many Christians can say the same.

God's answer is the same now as then: "Why are you crying to me?" If we do what He told us to do, love casts out fear. In short, get on with it.

#### A section not strictly necessary

Several years ago a physicist named Condon was asked to head Project Blue Book, the Air Force's study of UFOs. Asked whether he thought UFOs were extraterrestrial, he made an interesting reply, one characteristic of the thought of a physicist. He said, in short, he'd answer that question when he had a sample UFO he could take down to the lab and go over it with a few good people.

The same attitude applies to archeology as well. In that case, samples (of the objects in question) and provenance (just exactly where did you find it, in what layer) are the raw data to be



analyzed. When someone brings in something that they “found in the desert”, you naturally look at it with more suspicion because you don’t know where it came from.

I mention this because of an “archeologist” named Ron Wyatt. He’s the man who found the chariot wheels in the Gulf of Aqaba. But may I point out:

- ✚ He found it in 1978 – and no one has been able to find any since. No serious archeologist has found one. And Pharaoh lost quite a few.
- ✚ The artifact in question was taken to the Cairo Museum where it was “authenticated” by someone – and then lost. They can’t find it. We have the tape of the authentication; but not the wheel.
- ✚ This is the same guy who claims to have found:
  - ↪ Noah’s Ark<sup>11</sup>
  - ↪ The real location of Mt. Sinai
  - ↪ The Ark of the Covenant, which is directly under his
  - ↪ True site of the Crucifixion.<sup>12</sup>But at least he’s not Immanuel Velikovsky.

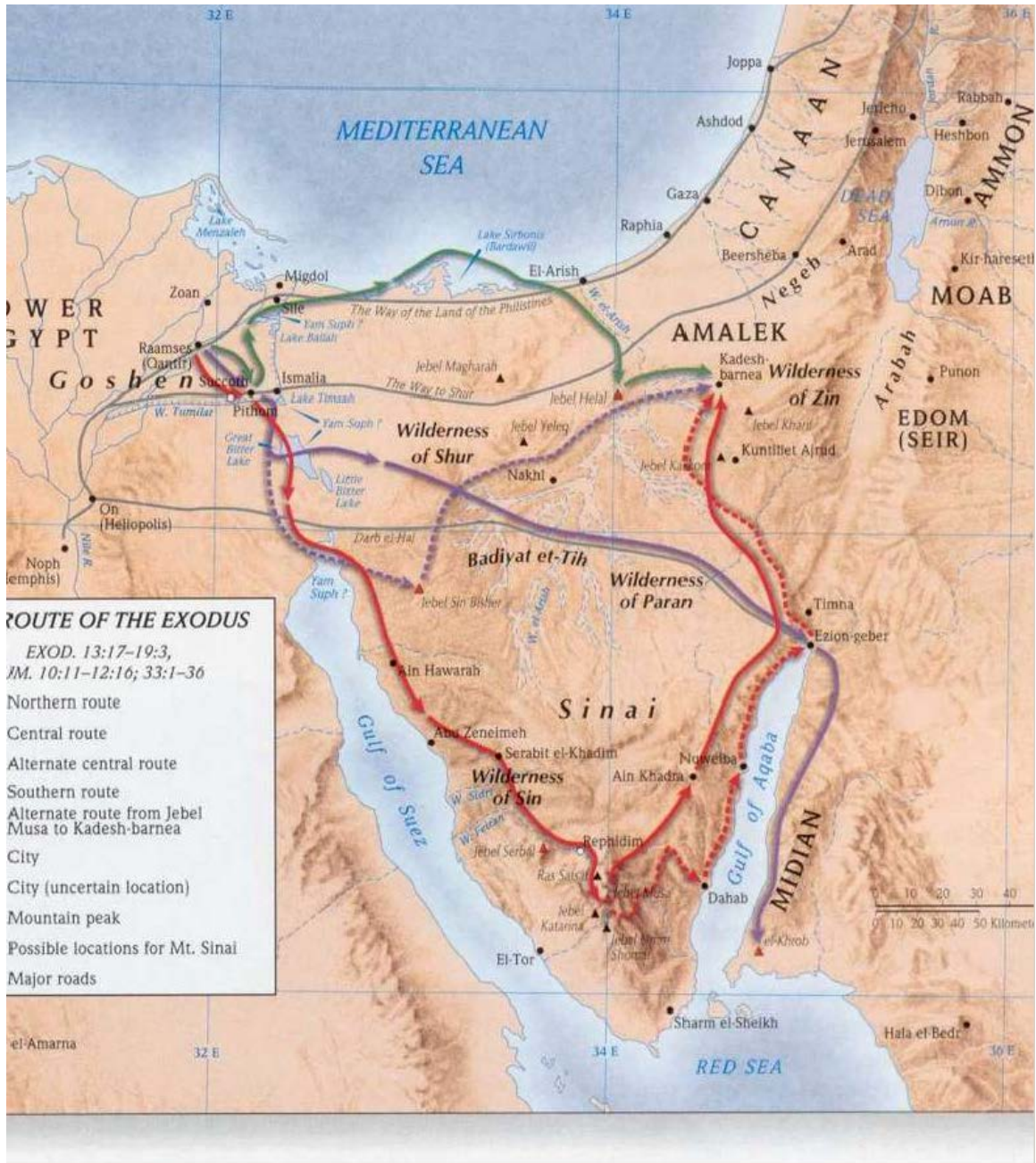
### God’s Provision

We might just want to take a look at a map for the moment.

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<sup>11</sup> In a location in Turkey, the government thereof prohibiting further access. Oh shucks.

<sup>12</sup> From which the blood of Christ dripped down through cracks in the ground to land on the Mercy Seat of the Ark.



As is evident, we're not really sure of the route of the Exodus. But wherever it was, God's provision is all along the way.

### Manna

#### Exo 16:1-36 NIV Manna and Quail

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. (2) In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. (3) The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve

this entire assembly to death." (4) Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. (5) On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." (6) So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, (7) and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" (8) Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." (9) Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.' " (10) While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud. (11) The LORD said to Moses, (12) "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' " (13) That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. (14) When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. (15) When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. (16) This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer <sup>[1]</sup> for each person you have in your tent.' " (17) The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. (18) And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. (19) Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." (20) However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. (21) Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. (22) On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much--two omers <sup>[2]</sup> for each person--and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. (23) He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' " (24) So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. (25) "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. (26) Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." (27) Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. (28) Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you <sup>[3]</sup> refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? (29) Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." (30) So the people rested on the seventh day. (31) The people of Israel called the bread manna. <sup>[4]</sup> It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. (32) Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.' " (33) So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come." (34) As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front

of the Testimony, that it might be kept. (35) The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. (36) (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

See how God provides – despite our grumbling! We may allow for a bit of puzzlement on the part of Israel (Manna means “what is it?”), but we may also note two common failings:

- ✚ First, these people are not very good at following God’s instructions. Whether it be greed, gluttony or cynicism, these people want to do it their way.
- ✚ Is there thanksgiving for the food? Or ingratitude?

#### Water from a rock

##### Exo 17:1-7 NIV Water From the Rock

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. (2) So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" (3) But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" (4) Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." (5) The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. (6) I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. (7) And he called the place Massah <sup>[1]</sup> and Meribah <sup>[2]</sup> because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Massah means “testing”; Meribah means “quarreling.” Those are two very good ways to irritate the Lord God. God’s reaction is to tell Moses two things:

- ✚ Follow my instructions to the letter.
- ✚ Bring along a large number of reliable witnesses.

It seems God understands that these people will take a lot of convincing. In fact, the next thousand years or so will be dedicated to that purpose. The question for us is, have we learned that lesson? Or do we still grumble and test God, letting Him know what hoops He’s going to have to go through?

#### Victory

Exo 17:8-16 NIV The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. (9) Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." (10) So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. (11) As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. (12) When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset. (13) So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. (14) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." (15) Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my

Banner. (16) He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The <sup>[3]</sup> LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

The Amalekites, should it be that Biblical genealogy is not your hobby, are the descendants of one Amalek (naturally), who is the son of Esau.

This passage seems like magic. As long as Moses isn't tired, we win. To the point that we have two people help him hold his hands up. Couldn't God just strike them with a plague or something?

Well, consider it this way: why didn't Joshua's arms get tired? Is this perhaps God telling us that we will engage in physical combat much more readily than in spiritual? It is a pattern that we shall see again and again: trust in the Lord for victory, not in your own strength.

## The Ten Commandments - Exodus 20:1-21

During the 1950's Paramount studios produced a large number of stone tablets with the ten commandments on them – in English, of course – and gave them to large numbers of courthouses. They were an advertising gimmick for the film (what else?) *The Ten Commandments*. Lately it has been the bustling business of the humanists to demand that these be removed from their public places – as certainly our court system now has little relationship to divine standards of justice. So, just to refresh your memory:

### Exo 20:1-21 NIV The Ten Commandments

And God spoke all these words: (2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (3) "You shall have no other gods before <sup>[1]</sup> me. (4) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. (5) You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments. (7) "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. (8) "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. (11) For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (12) "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. (13) "You shall not murder. (14) "You shall not commit adultery. (15) "You shall not steal. (16) "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. (17) "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (18) When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance (19) and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." (20) Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." (21) The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

### Preliminary

May we point out a bit of the obvious here?

- ✚ The Law is of God's own making – and therefore it comes in His power.
- ✚ The Law is also of His speaking – His word, a phrase with greater implications through the New Testament.
- ✚ It is brought in with great power and ceremony – but also in accord with His character. Its principles go back before time, and are clearly seen with the patriarchs.

### I am the Lord

It is well that remember just who is delivering here:

- ✦ He is the self-existent one; He does not need us, we need Him.
- ✦ He is the necessary being; we owe the concept of existence to Him.
- ✦ He is eternal, beyond time. He alone can see all ends.
- ✦ He is the creator; the source of all power.

### The right to command

Given the above, it should be clear that He is entitled to command His creation – as He does in the realm of physics. It is our duty to obey. But note this: because He wants children rather than pet primates, He stands at the door and knocks.

### Concerning God and Man

The Ten Commandments can be neatly divided into those which deal with the relationship of God and Man, and those which deal with man to man relationships. It is fitting that the first four center man on God; the others then follow as natural results.

#### I. No gods before Me.

This makes more sense when you remember that “before” can mean “spread out in front of me.” It simply means that you are to have one God, not one God and a collection of assistant gods. Don’t hedge your bets.

In the more modern sense – idolatry has not been a problem for about 1500 years – it is the worship of sensuality, materialism and pride.

#### II. Make no Idol

It should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church combines this with the first one, and splits the tenth to adjust the count. By this means they justify the numerous statues, medals and other idols used in their worship. An audit of a typical Catholic institutions will show dozens of statues of Mary and saints.

Idolatry today is not limited to Catholics, however. Celebrity is the new deity. There’s a reason they call the show “American Idol.” But note, please, the severe warning given in this commandment.

#### III. Do not take His name in vain

In its simplest sense, it means we are not to come into worship in a vain, frivolous way; rather, we are to worship in all seriousness. It sometimes appears that our worship is without solemnity; we forget the awe and respect due the King of Kings.

Traditionally, this has been interpreted to prohibit the misuse of God’s name in obscene language (“blasphemy.”) But it should be noted that it also includes giving someone advice that you’re sure God would have given, if He had the time to think about it. God is jealous for His name – and will punish those who misuse it.

#### IV. Keep the Sabbath holy

You should note that the Sabbath being set apart goes back to the days of the patriarchs. It is set aside as a day of rest, and a day of worship. This commandment has been largely ignored for the last

two generations, at least.<sup>13</sup> The church having shifted the day to Sunday, the Lord's Day – a shift done by the Apostles – reflects the change from an end to a new beginning in Christ Jesus.

### Concerning Man and God

Having set right the relationship between man and God, which is the core of righteousness, we now see the relationships between man and man.

#### V, Honor your father and mother

As is noted elsewhere, this is the first commandment with a promise of good in it. In our youth, obedience is required; in their age, their care; at all times, honor and respect are due them.

In our time, this is taught to young children as requiring obedience, which is as it should be. But we do not teach them to honor and respect their parents nearly so often. Why? Our society as a whole teaches that anyone as old as your parents is a hopeless incompetent, tolerated only for prior services rendered. Think not? Homer Simpson. Once a child leaves the 6<sup>th</sup> grade it is assumed that obedience should be grudging, avoided if possible. To become an adult, it seems, you must despise adults first.

#### VI. Do not murder

As the context later makes clear, this does not apply to lawful war, execution by authorities or legitimate self defense. Our ancestors concluded that this prohibition included suicide, however. It was viewed as "self murder." Interestingly, however, of the six suicides in the Bible, none is actually condemned. The point is touchy to those who have been touched by it.

We may make two other obvious points:

- ✚ Commandment is often a deterrent, even to the mentally ill. It has been suggested that the rise in serial killers is due in part to the fact that we so commonly portray murder in cinema and television – while we also argue that the mentally ill are somehow excused from fault in this.
- ✚ It is patently obvious to anyone who takes the Scripture as inspired and Christ as divine sees abortion as murder. The Prince of Evil is also the Prince of Choice.

#### VII. Do not commit adultery

Of all the commandments this is the one most commonly ignored. How important is it? God himself uses marriage as the metaphor for His love for Israel and later the church. The sanctity of marriage creates the strong building block of a society, indeed a civilization. If the family is destroyed, civilization follows quickly.

Which is why the abandonment of this commandment is most tragic. It is to the point where the average church member cannot imagine hearing a sermon on the subject (at least in California, anyway. This is not Nebraska here.) I recall the gasp of horror our congregation made when the

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<sup>13</sup> I can remember, growing up, encountering people who won little awards for being in Sunday School every Sunday for forty years. Today, attendance is often a question of whether or not they have something else to do. Anything is more important than the worship of God these days.



preacher said – as part of a message on a different subject – “of course, sex outside of marriage is wrong.” That was several years ago; I have not heard him refer to the subject since then.

#### VIII. Do not steal

The word in the original extends to such things as fraud and moving boundary markers. It seems a fairly obvious sort of command, and therefore not taught beyond childhood. But not denied either.

What has changed is our acceptance of theft and fraud. Particularly if the thief is one of a downtrodden minority, we are more willing to tolerate the theft. A congressman from a white, conservative district knows that getting caught with his hand in the cookie jar will stop his career, permanently. Standards for liberals are a little more lenient, though even yet the abuse of office is offensive.

#### IX. Do not bear false witness

It sounds a little formal in English, so we sometimes assume this means only as a witness in a court case. In fact, the prohibition extends to such things as slander and libel as well.

Consider, however, that it also applies to us when we want to tear someone else down to build ourselves up. The prohibition requires a rigorous honesty, which sometimes we do not wish to apply to ourselves.

#### X. Do not covet

This last commandment is unique in that it deals with our attitudes, wants and desires. It is not only that we don't steal; it is that we don't want what he has. This is the commandment to learn contentment – to be abased and abound, as Paul put it. The test here is contentment, the acceptance of what we have as our bounty from God. Is it not sad that the Christians of the richest nation in the world are not content with what they have? It is proof that having much has little effect on how much we covet.

Finale:

The shorthand version:

[Mat 22:34-40 NIV](#) Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. (35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'<sup>[2]</sup> (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[3]</sup> (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

## Rebellion - Numbers 11-12

**Pro 17:11 NIV** An evil man is bent only on rebellion;  
a merciless official will be sent against him.

Rebellion of the People

**Num 11:1-35 NIV** Fire From the LORD

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. (2) When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down. (3) So that place was called Taberah,<sup>[1]</sup> because fire from the LORD had burned among them.

Quail from the LORD

(4) The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! (5) We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. (6) But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (7) The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. (8) The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a handmill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. (9) When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down. (10) Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. (11) He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? (12) Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? (13) Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' (14) I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. (15) 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." (16) The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. (17) I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. (18) "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. (19) You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, (20) but for a whole month--until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it--because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" ' ' (21) But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' (22) Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" (23) The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you." (24) So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. (25) Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they

prophesied, but they did not do so again. <sup>[2]</sup> (26) However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. (27) A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." (28) Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" (29) But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (30) Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp. (31) Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It brought them <sup>[3]</sup> down all around the camp to about three feet <sup>[4]</sup> above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction. (32) All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. <sup>[5]</sup> Then they spread them out all around the camp. (33) But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. (34) Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, <sup>[6]</sup> because there they buried the people who had craved other food. (35) From Kibroth Hattaavah the people traveled to Hazeroth and stayed there.

Takes the form of...

- ✚ Murmuring. Oh, it wouldn't do to out and out defy the Lord God, especially as He has the odd habit of roasting people who do – literally. But we wouldn't hesitate to "discuss" it. Why is there no pizza delivery here in the Sinai?
- ✚ Unbelief. This is particularly true of the form of unbelief which picks and chooses what to believe. "A kind and loving God would never..." – which seems kind of stupid to me. I can see believe it or don't believe it; but to pick and choose as if the Bible were a breakfast buffet? (Hand me another pastry).
- ✚ Walking in our own thoughts.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes we don't just pick and choose, we invent what we think should be. This seems to be the main method of those today who know that God really approves of homosexuality, it really isn't a sin. It's not so much that they ignore the Scripture (they do) but that their own thoughts are taken to be equal with what the Bible says. It's the Revised Non-Standard Version.

Is caused by

- ✚ Gluttony – in this instance. A man whose god is his belly puts himself first ("look out for number one.") This is gluttony of the classic sense (food) but anything that you "absolutely just have to have" is going to get in the way of what God knows is best for you.
- ✚ Injustice and corruption<sup>15</sup> - If you're lining your pocket with money from under the table, if you can be bribed, and you call yourself a Christian, you're going to hear about it from God. And it's really going to bug you, and you're going to complain about it.
- ✚ Hypocrisy<sup>16</sup> - if you claim to be a Christian, and the world isn't all that convinced, it's convenient to distract attention from yourself and over to God. Just why is it that He hasn't solved world hunger yet?

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 65:2

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 1:23

<sup>16</sup> Hosea 7:13-14

## Impact

The rebellion of the congregation takes its toll on the leaders. Here are a few examples:

- ✚ Despondency. Look at Moses here; he's frustrated, doesn't know which way to turn and (as we used to say in the service) "busted, disgusted and not to be trusted." Bummed out. He's doing what he's supposed to do, and it's just not working. How would you react to that?
- ✚ Doubt. The man of many miracles is complaining that it would take tons of meat to feed these people. What's the problem? Discouragement tends to lead to doubt.
- ✚ Reticence. When the congregation rebels, often enough the preacher "knows better than to preach on that topic." (See last week's lesson on the Ten Commandments to know which topics those are).

## Rebellion of the Leaders

### Num 12:1-16 NIV Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. (2) "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. (3) (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) (4) At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. (5) Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, (6) he said, "Listen to my words:

"When a prophet of the LORD is among you,  
I reveal myself to him in visions,  
I speak to him in dreams. (7) But this is not true of my servant Moses;  
he is faithful in all my house. (8) With him I speak face to face,  
clearly and not in riddles;  
he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid  
to speak against my servant Moses?" (9) The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. (10) When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam--leprous, <sup>[1]</sup> like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; (11) and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. (12) Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." (13) So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" (14) The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." (15) So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back. (16) After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.

## Why?

Why is it that the leaders of the church – who really should know better – rebel? The reasons are rather unique to leadership – but they all start with one assumption: "I can choose my assignment in the kingdom of God." No, you can't. You can take it, or leave it, but you cannot choose it. God will not bless you in it if you do. But once that decision is made, the steps are clear:

- ✦ Envy. Admiration of the leader sometimes turns into envy. If I'm allowed to choose my spot, and I'm as wonderful as I think I am, the spot I choose is the one he occupies. And when you compare my brilliance with his humility...
- ✦ Envy then turns to ambition. In the world, ambition is a virtue. In the kingdom of God, it is a vice. (Not only do I want to be in his spot, I've decided to go for it).
- ✦ At the first sign of resistance, the ambitious must decide: accept the rebuke, or defend myself? Such a defense is called presumption: "I really am better at this than he is." This often winds up splitting a church, or even a fellowship of churches.

#### What's wrong with it?

- ✦ First, it's not what God told you to do. (An interesting example of this, and how seriously God views it, may be found in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15).
- ✦ Next, it's fairly clear that a leader's function included getting rid of rebellion, not encouraging it.
- ✦ Worst of all, this is arrogance. We're telling God what we will do, instead of Him telling us what we should do.

#### What can I do about it?

- ✦ Pray. You might not even understand what the conflict is about, but you are commanded to pray for those in authority over you. Just because one or more are in rebellion doesn't mean you should stop; rather, pray for their restoration.
- ✦ If possible, or called upon for such service, administer church discipline. Go to the one in error, one on one, and point out what you see. Ultimately, they may be thrown out<sup>17</sup>, but it's much better if the matter is resolved before that happens.

#### What's God going to do about it?

##### Send others to warn

- ✦ It's interesting to note that when God sends someone, it's usually someone meek and humble. He has no intention of injecting another sparring partner into the conflict.
- ✦ Often enough, He will have the true leaders intercede in prayer for the rebellious. He wants the rebellion to cease, sinners to repent – not for the conflict to produce winners and losers.
- ✦ He will often amplify those who are loyal to Him – as He did here with the seventy elders.<sup>18</sup>

##### Pronounce judgment

OK, we have fire from heaven, plagues, any number of natural disasters to deal with in this regard. But note one thing: He will often interrupt the happiness of the rebellious to emphasize His wrath without increasing the punishment.<sup>19</sup>

##### Patience

Sometimes He waits – until sense prevails, or someone gets the picture, but at least until He knows things now must be dealt with. We often mistake His patience for indifference.

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<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 20:38

<sup>18</sup> Note the word "amplify." God does not spread the Spirit thinner. Like a candle lighting others, the Spirit is given without limit.

<sup>19</sup> Numbers 11:23, in this instance

## Forgiveness

(Upon repentance, of course.) He will forgive the people as a group, for He knows they are but sheep. He will forgive the leaders, though theirs is the greater sin. But there is one consistent factor in this: someone intercedes on their behalf. Moses does that in this instance; so should we all.

## God on Trial - Numbers 14

Note: The last section of Numbers 13, the report of the spies on the land, is a necessary predecessor to this section. We omit it only for reasons of space.

### Num 14:1-45 NIV The People Rebel

That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. (2) All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! (3) Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" (4) And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." (5) Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. (6) Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes (7) and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. (8) If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. (9) Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." (10) But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. (11) The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? (12) I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." (13) Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. (14) And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. (15) If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, (16) 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.' (17) 'Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: (18) 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' (19) In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." (20) The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. (21) Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, (22) not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times- (23) not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. (24) But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. (25) Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea. <sup>[1]</sup>" (26) The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: (27) "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. (28) So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: (29) In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census

and who has grumbled against me. (30) Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. (31) As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. (32) But you--your bodies will fall in this desert. (33) Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. (34) For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' (35) I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die." (36) So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it- (37) these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. (38) Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived. (39) When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. (40) Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised." (41) But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! (42) Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, (43) for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." (44) Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. (45) Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

There is something fundamentally insane here; the people are putting God on trial for His refusal to gratify their every whim. This being an insanity with a long history, however, we shall examine it more carefully with an eye as to what might be done today.

## The Case Against God

So what are their accusations?

“God is not trustworthy”

This boils down to two things:

- ✚ The majority says that we cannot enter the land and conquer it. This takes no account of the power of God, of course. But it does reflect a mindset that says, “if we can’t do it, it cannot be done.” When John Kennedy declared the goal of putting a man on the moon within a decade, most people thought this far-fetched indeed. Nine years later, Armstrong and company showed that there is a difference between scientific fact and public opinion polls.
- ✚ Since we “know” we can’t achieve this, it is therefore obvious that God led us out into the desert to kill us all off.

Do we see this mindset today? I think so, but in a different style. Today, it’s not so much “God can’t” as “God won’t.” We have somehow developed the opinion that God will not do what He says He will do. Therefore (and I speak of the church in this) it’s up to us to do it, and do it our way. This goes along nicely with the idea that we don’t really need God, but He is nice to have around. He is therefore unlikely to deal with whatever apostasy we come up with.



### “The leader He appointed should be replaced”

Well, “replaced” is not quite the word. Stoned to death is what they had in mind. What they wanted was Moses the Mighty Magician at their beck and call; what they had was a devoted servant of the Most High who performed miracles only at the command of God. “A sound magician is a mighty god” (Faust).<sup>20</sup> That’s what they wanted.

Today? I have not heard of any preacher being stoned to death, but I’ve never met one who hasn’t had an occasional roasting (with some people that’s lunch after church), and virtually all of them suffer from “a constant drizzle of carping criticism.”<sup>21</sup>

### After repentance, my way

One of the drawbacks to moral repentance is that there is a temptation to feel pious and holy afterwards. We have the feeling that, having repented, everything will be just like it was before. If this is pointed out, the fallacy is obvious (I hope), but it’s seldom pointed out. The Israelites have the presumption to assume that God will now allow them to choose to obey His prior instructions. This doesn’t work, nor should it. Sin has consequences. Repentance restores you to God, but it doesn’t really do much for the person you just shot.

Today? We like pick and choose religion. Have you ever encountered someone whose religion is a selection from the buffet? It’s irritating that they will speak as a Christian would on some matters. How do you think God views such thinkers?

### God’s reply

It is customary to allow the defendant a few words. The fact that these words are the obvious reply should not detract from their being the right reply.

### Have you seen what I have done?

The surprise here (at least to me) is that these people have seen miracle after miracle, and they don’t believe. They not only don’t believe, they don’t have a clue as to which way to bet. But (no surprise) this attitude is still with us today.

- ✚ Have you seen what God has done in the universe? Its majesty and grandeur are evidence of His power and order. Before you say, “God can’t...”, weigh your words. If what you really meant was “I can’t” then you are speaking blasphemy.
- ✚ Have you seen what He has done in the church? Does the sacrifice at Calvary seem only “an interesting event?” Contemplate the greatness of His sacrifice as well as the greatness of His creation.
- ✚ Then, if these are not sufficient, remember the great things He has done in your own life.

Look at it this way: what is it that you deserve from God the Righteous? The wages of sin is death, and death and eternal damnation are what you (and I) rightly deserve. But we are offered the grace of God. If that is not sufficient, I cannot imagine what might be.

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<sup>20</sup> Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus, not Goethe

<sup>21</sup> A Churchillian phrase

### Forgiveness – with penalty

Remember again that “I forgive” on God’s part does not imply that there are no consequences to our sin. Indeed, it **must** be so, for God is not only righteousness but love – and He who loves us would surely discipline those who are called His children. If God did not correct us, even after repentance, it would mean that He did not love us.

Moreover, it is apparent that God’s justice should be seen. If your sins are done in public (and it’s hard not to) then God’s justice upon you should be seen in public too.

So what should you do after forgiveness? Make amends. Do whatever you can do to alleviate the impact of your sin. Don’t develop a convenient case of amnesia.

### Intercession

Sometimes we find ourselves in a different position. It’s not our sin we are concerned about, but another Christian’s sin. Besides the steps of church discipline, which should not be neglected, what should the Christian do? The answer is intercession – go before Almighty God and petition him to forgive the sinner. To do this, we must know how.

#### Intercede by the character, glory and strength of God

Successful intercession begins by an appeal to the Lord God based on his:

- ✚ Character. Are you asking for another’s forgiveness? Remind the Lord of His great love.
- ✚ Glory. Does what you are asking from bring glory to God? (If it doesn’t, then you might want to look more carefully at your request).
- ✚ Strength. Acknowledge that the best reason for appealing to Him is that you know you can’t do it alone.

You might think, “God knows all that. Why do I have to repeat it?”

- ✚ He want you to acknowledge them. It’s not just a formula, it’s a statement of who’s who.
- ✚ He wants you to acknowledge them *as the basis for your petition*. Not my works but His glory – that is the reason I appeal to Him.

#### Appeal for pardon, not excuse

Often enough the sinner has any number of excuses for his sin. But intercession makes its appeal upon the character, strength and glory of the Lord – not excuses. Indeed, to ask God to excuse someone because of his circumstances is the opposite of asking for forgiveness. Excuses explain why someone is not at fault (or less at fault than might otherwise be.) If his conduct can be excused, it needs no forgiveness. Mitigating circumstance may affect the penalty – but not the guilt.

#### The privilege of the mighty

The Scripture teaches us that we are made strong in Christ. It is by His sacrifice that we are admitted to the presence of the Almighty, there to present our petitions. The Holy Spirit translates for us, Christ Himself intervenes for us. We are, before Almighty God, the strong. It is the privilege of the strong that they intercede on behalf of the weak. Like who?

✚ We are commanded to pray for those in authority over us. Indeed, Paul commended prayer for the emperor. The emperor in question was Nero, so this is rather inclusive of authority.

✚ We are commanded to pray for our enemies. It is not given to us to judge those outside the church.<sup>22</sup> It is given to us to intercede for them before the Almighty.

Only the bold would dare go before the throne of grace on behalf of his enemies. But boldness comes from strength, and strength comes from God. Be bold, therefore, in intercession.

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<sup>22</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:12

## Moses' Sin - Numbers 20:1-13

It is one of the most mysterious stories in the Old Testament: the story of Moses' great sin. It is mysterious because, as we see it, the sin seems so minor. We shall see if we can decipher it.

### Num 20:1-13 NIV Water From the Rock

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (2) Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. (3) They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! (4) Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? (5) Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!" (6) Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. (7) The LORD said to Moses, (8) "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." (9) So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. (10) He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (11) Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. (12) But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (13) These were the waters of Meribah, <sup>[1]</sup> where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he showed himself holy among them.

### Allegory

It often happens that Bible believing Christians reject the concept of allegory as being a legitimate way of interpreting the Bible. This comes from the belief that any way of interpreting Scripture other than literal meaning is false, particularly as it concerns Genesis 3 and evolution. But in fact allegory is common in the Bible – Christ makes frequent use of it in His parables – and even Genesis 3 is allegory (which does not preclude its literal interpretation as well.) In this section we shall examine the allegorical significance of the staff and the rock.

### The staff

Note that the Bible says (vs. 8) that Moses is to take "the" staff. By that God means the staff of Aaron, the High Priest. What do we know about this staff?

- ✚ It was always before the Ark of the Covenant, *including the mercy seat.*
- ✚ It was chosen<sup>23</sup> above all other staffs by God Himself.
- ✚ It is specifically referred to as a "sign to the rebellious."

Now we know that the staff itself is a symbol of the priesthood. But consider how this fits with Christ, our High Priest:

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<sup>23</sup> Numbers 17:1-13

- ✚ As the staff is before the Ark, our High Priest is ever before the throne of God (remember “enthroned between the cherubim?”) interceding on our behalf for the grace of God.
- ✚ As Aaron’s staff was chosen above all others, so Christ is above all others. We are a royal priesthood; but He is our High Priest.
- ✚ Is He a sign to the rebellious? Where else may grace be found?  
So we may see Christ as a sign to the rebellious, offering the grace of God.

### The rock

The symbolism of Christ, the Rock is well known to Christians. If Christ is represented by this rock, what does that mean?

- ✚ One fact is this: Moses hit the rock *twice*. Is that sin? Yes indeed. Christ had to be smitten once, at His first advent, for our sins. But to be smitten twice is like crucifying Him twice<sup>24</sup>. This, then, is sin indeed.
- ✚ How then do we obtain the mercy of His sacrifice? Is it not by confession and repentance? We must “speak to the Rock.”
- ✚ All this is true even though the water was brought forth by a leader’s error. God’s grace does not depend upon the perfection of the leader.

### The water

The water from the rock is relatively easy to interpret, for we know the role of water in the faith.

- ✚ Who could miss the cleansing stream of baptism in this picture?
- ✚ The other picture that springs to mind is the flow of living water, the River of Life pictured in Ezekiel and Revelation.

Miracles have a certain divine style. Water does spring from rock (why do you think they are called “springs?”). But God insists that His servants do things His way, in His time. Failure to do so is sin.

### What’s the problem

Now we can understand why this is sin to Moses.

### What God commanded

What did God command?

- ✚ Take the staff (so the people can see it).
- ✚ Speak to the rock.

The staff, representing the priesthood and grace, the rock representing Christ, these commands would then be interpreted as:

- ✚ As a member of God’s royal priesthood, show forth grace to all.
- ✚ By prayer and confession, bring forward the living water, both to clean (baptism) and to nourish (River of Life).  
In short, show grace and speak the Word.

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 9:24-28

## Sin

So why didn't Moses do what God told him to do? God tells us why:

- ✚ Moses didn't trust God *enough*. Oh, he was trusting, but not quite to the point of doing what he was told, how he was told, when he was told.
- ✚ Moses did not honor God. "Must **we** bring you water..." That's how Moses put it to the people.
- ✚ Moses did not honor God *as holy*. His actions made it look like Moses was the one with the power, not the holy God.

## Penalty

For this, Moses was not to enter the Promised Land – only to look at it from afar. There are some thoughts we can gather from this:

- ✚ The penalty for leaders is more than the penalty for followers – which is as it should be.
- ✚ In allegory, we learn that the disobedient might see heaven – but not enter it.

## Lessons for Us

How do we get in such a mess anyway?

- ✚ Being smart people, if we don't see *why* we should do it God's way, we are tempted to look for another way that we do understand.
- ✚ Sometimes it's simple presumption: we think we have a better idea.
- ✚ Often, we are angry (always an entry point for Satan) and we have our own agenda to follow.

## Obedience

The answer to this is simply obedience. But may I submit that simple obedience requires humility?

- ✚ It requires humility to follow blind – if God says do it one particular way, it is a humbling experience to say, "I don't know why."
- ✚ It requires humility to let God have vengeance.
- ✚ Humility is at the core of the servant's heart; we must be such a servant. If Christ Himself came as a servant to all, should we not imitate our Lord?

## For others

And for our conduct towards others?

- ✚ Speak the word
- ✚ Show forth grace
- ✚ Lead them to the Promised Land.

## Balaam - Numbers 22-24

(We omit the Scripture for reasons of space, assuming that any reader of this lesson series can find a Bible somewhere about.)

### Final Obstacle

The Israelites are at last approaching the Promised Land. It is no surprise, therefore, that Satan will set before them the toughest obstacle. Which is?

#### The obstacle within

The deadliest opposition to the cause of Christ is always the enemy within. It sometimes comes as a surprise to find that God is worshiped at this time in other nations. In this instance there is a prophet named Balaam from the Moabites. Moab, you may recall, was one of the incestuous sons of Lot. The knowledge of Jehovah was no doubt passed down the generations from this time. But as often enough happens, it has become mixed with the pagan religions around.

Why is this such an obstacle? Think back to the legends of King Arthur, in particular Merlin the Magician. In the earlier versions of the story, Merlin has a choice: remain with Arthur, and watch his magic decline as the church increases, or go with Mordred – so that Merlin's power would increase in that pagan court.<sup>25</sup> A similar situation confronts Balaam. Balaam is no Merlin.

Ultimately, Balaam will side with Baal and lead some of the Israelites astray.<sup>26</sup> It's a choice that costs Balaam his life.

#### A man with two masters...

Thinks he is in control. Balaam practices divination. Roughly speaking, this is like reading tea leaves – a practice which replaces the truth with false confidence in dead, wet agriculture. Despite this, however, Balaam is given prophetic vision from God. Thus Balaam can see himself as being in control; if he doesn't like what God says, goat entrails might provide a more satisfactory answer.

You can see this in the little episode with the donkey. He is so sure of himself both as prophet and sorcerer that it doesn't phase him that the donkey talks. That's a man who thinks he's in charge

#### The hireling

Having been given the gift of prophecy, Balaam decides to make it his source of income. We must make a distinction here. It is acceptable (and marked as such in the Scripture) for a man of the Gospel to earn his living at it. But it's not acceptable if he does so **primarily** for the money. The laborer is worthy of his hire, but he should not be a hireling.<sup>27</sup>

### Oracles

We may now examine the oracles of Balaam. Here are four which seem of interest and profit.

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<sup>25</sup> This is not apparent in the musical version, Camelot. Of course, that version exalts the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere, which ultimately destroys the kingdom.

<sup>26</sup> Numbers 31:16

<sup>27</sup> John 10:11-15

### How can I curse

**Num 23:8 NIV** How can I curse  
those whom God has not cursed?  
How can I denounce  
those whom the LORD has not denounced?

It is a surprising statement from Balaam. The vision he has seen tells him that he cannot go against what God has revealed to him. Divination was under his control; God is not. It is not surprising that he thought he could manipulate God. It's normal human behavior. How many times have you received a chain letter/e-mail which told you to pray this prayer, pass it on to twenty-seven of your closest friends and thus receive a miracle?

Much of magic concerns the concept of a curse. Indeed, God cursed the ground for Adam's sin, and witch doctors and shamans ever since have been cursing everything else. Don't fear the witch doctor; fear the living God.

### God is not a man

**Num 23:19 NIV** God is not a man, that he should lie,  
nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.  
Does he speak and then not act?  
Does he promise and not fulfill?

Sometimes God's fulfillment takes a while. As we shall see, one of these prophecies concerns the Christ – who doesn't arrive for another 1500 years or so. But God is eternal – not affected by time. His character does not change, therefore. He is righteousness eternally – and therefore He cannot lie. He is Almighty, and if He says it's going to happen, count on it.

### A vision from the Almighty

**Num 24:4 NIV** the oracle of one who hears the words of God,  
who sees a vision from the Almighty, <sup>[1]</sup>  
who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:  
If you've ever wondered just what a vision of God would seem like:

✚ It comes with power. "Almighty" in this verse is *Shaddai*, a word specifically translated that way, not a translation of one of the names of God.

✚ It is a vivid experience – power to make you fall prostrate, but with your eyes open.

Something like this must be handled with care – even if the vision is over three thousand years old.

### A star will rise

**Num 24:17 NIV** "I see him, but not now;  
I behold him, but not near.  
A star will come out of Jacob;  
a scepter will rise out of Israel.  
He will crush the foreheads of Moab,  
the skulls <sup>[2]</sup> of <sup>[3]</sup> all the sons of Sheth. <sup>[4]</sup>



Here is the evidence of it all: Balaam sees the coming of the Christ. This is the point of this entire history, that is, here is God's point. He tells you that Christ is coming, but only after He has made it clear that:

- ✚ God can't be manipulated. His purposes cannot be altered.
- ✚ This comes from His eternal nature. In short, this is plan A and there is no plan B.
- ✚ He has the power to bring it to pass.

#### Lessons for us

All well and good, but what's the point for us today? The New Testament gives us three passages that warn us about Balaam's ways.

#### The way of Balaam

**2Pe 2:12-15 NIV** But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. (13) They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.<sup>[5]</sup> (14) With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! (15) They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

What's this about? It refers to those in the church whose ways are blatantly carnal, yet they feel themselves perfectly justified. Peter mentions two sins in particular:

- ✚ Adultery, which is as common as mud in our time.
- ✚ Greed, which is often honored in our time.

The key phrase in this is "loved the wages of wickedness." What does this mean? Think of a ghetto drug dealer who is proud of himself – after all, he's driving the Cadillac, right? Things that decent men would be ashamed of, such men are proud of. In the church, too.

#### The error of Balaam

**Jud 1:10-11 NIV** Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals--these are the very things that destroy them. (11) Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

What does an evil man do when confronted with things spiritual, things he cannot understand? He abuses them. He mocks them. He treats them like a joke. Christians today are familiar with this; almost no part of Christianity has escaped the mockery of the cool. They belittle what they do not understand.

It's a form of pride. It is a sad thing to be proud of your failings.

#### The teaching of Balaam

**Rev 2:14 NIV** Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

How's this for a nightmare: you have teachers in the church who are teaching people how to lead others astray. It's bad to be on Satan's team to start with – but as a coach?

## Final Words - Deuteronomy 32

It is customary for a departing leader to make a farewell speech. In business this usually takes the form of a collection of platitudes. Moses, however, goes right to the heart of the problem remaining: how good the Lord is, how derelict his people in acknowledging it.

### The Lord Portrayed As

#### The Rock

As previously noted, the Rock is a symbol for God. We might also point out that as such there is some human experience with “the rock” here:

- ✚ It is a common description of a fortress (think of Masada.)
- ✚ The Israelites have seen water flow from the rock on more than one occasion. In the desert, water is life.

In the New Testament this Rock (note the capitals) is identified as being Christ.<sup>28</sup> So we see for the contemporary Christian that Christ is both fortress and source of life.

#### Power

It is a source of amazement how the Israelites could see so many miracles with so little effect on their minds. So Moses reminds them of the power of God:

- ✚ First, he says, ask your fathers. They’ve been around longer, seen a lot more and (theoretically) should be wiser. (And no, my kids wouldn’t either).
- ✚ Then look at his providence – the working together of things for those who love him. Miracles are rare; providences much more common.
- ✚ Looking forward, there will be enemies who will scourge Israel – and then vengeance will be taken on them by God. The time will come when you see them fall.

This is only a sketch, of course. But the modern Christian might well ask why he doesn’t see these things.

#### Truth

This goes deep into the nature of God: He is truth. We see it here in three ways:

- ✚ His works are perfect. This is more and more apparent the more we know about science – God’s laws are, as the physicists say, elegant.
- ✚ He is upright and just – the very idea of right and wrong comes from Him. As Job found out, there is no blame attached to him.
- ✚ Perhaps most important of all, God is infinite – and therefore there are no other gods.

So, is this a problem? Indeed it is. Look at verse 9:

**Deu 32:9 NIV** For the LORD's portion is his people,  
Jacob his allotted inheritance.

Which doesn’t sound all that threatening until you see what the rest of the Scripture says about “the LORD’s portion.”

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<sup>28</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:1-4

**Num 18:28-29 NIV** In this way you also will present an offering to the LORD from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must give the LORD's portion to Aaron the priest. (29) You must present as the LORD's portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you.'

We are to be the best and holiest, as God's people. As will be seen, this is a target that is hard to hit.

## The Depravity of Man

Moses shows us an increasing scale of man's evil ways.

### Blindness

The first thing you need to know about spiritual blindness is just that: it's spiritual. It starts with a decision that says, "I won't see." In particular, it is a refusal to see where your conduct leads. Christian minds can see that the progress of sexual misconduct – adultery, homosexuality – leads next to pedophilia being the civil rights debate of the next decade. Our society denies this; they will not see it. But soon, blindness will see attractive again.<sup>29</sup>

### Ingratitude

We often forget that we have been blessed by God. But should we not at least acknowledge our debts to Him?

- ✚ He is our creator. Without Him, there is no universe. No universe, no "us." We are contingent beings.
- ✚ He has blessed us richly in the past.
- ✚ He remains to this day our Rock – fortress, supply and shelter.

That's a lot to forget! But we manage the trick, and can therefore be heard asking for big things without acknowledging who He is.

### Infidelity

In the Old Testament, adultery was often used as the symbolic description of the idolatry of Israel. God is betrothed to Israel, just as the church is the bride of Christ. It is interesting to note that we have abandoned a women's submission in marriage (it's just "respect" now), and in parallel to that the church is no longer in submission to Christ. Rather, she adapts to the times around her. It is better to be "cool" than to be righteous, evidently.

But this can be a personal infidelity too. The most common, in my observation, is the love of money. Money is a useful servant; making it your god will ruin your life.

### Reproof

Having explained the problems with much more poetry and power than I could ever create, Moses reproves the Israelites. Here are three themes in that reproof:

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<sup>29</sup> Proverbs 17:16

## Adoption

If you are a child of God, you are required to separate yourself from the ways of this world.<sup>30</sup> Once you become a Christian you become a member of the family of God – just as the Jews did here – by adoption. This is why our Lord taught us to pray, “Our Father.”

But, as can be seen, if you are disobedient you forfeit this blessing. Verse 5 says it well:

**Deu 32:5 NIV** They have acted corruptly toward him;  
to their shame they are no longer his children,  
but a warped and crooked generation. <sup>[1]</sup>

(Baptists may now be permitted a few minutes of chanting, “Once in grace, always in grace.”) It seems some things never change.

## Obligation

If for no other reasons than these, you are obligated to the Lord God Almighty:

- ✚ It’s His universe. He is your creator. You borrow the very idea of existence from Him. I’m not sure just how much that obligates us, but it’s not “none.”
- ✚ We are the recipients of His grace – the love given to a wayward child. Heaven and hell hang in the balance; do we see no advantage to heaven?
- ✚ We are the heirs of promise – in particular the promise of the resurrection. He is faithful and will do it.

It is hard not to see obligation here.

## Obedience

This is what it comes down to: obedience. Adoption provides our benefits; obligation is a motive for obedience.<sup>31</sup> Obedience to His commands signifies two things:

- ✚ First, it signifies a love for God.<sup>32</sup> God does not beat you into submission; rather, He woos you with His love, asking your love in return.
- ✚ Second, it is a mark of the follower of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

It is a simple thing, really – love God, and do as you please. You will be pleased to be obedient indeed.

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<sup>30</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6:17-18

<sup>31</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 12:24

<sup>32</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:2-4

<sup>33</sup> John 10:27