

**THE GROWTH OF GOD'S NATION: MOSES Part 2,**  
**EXODUS Chapters 21 to 40**  
**with summary of Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God's plan for a holy people</li> <li>• God's love, punishment and provision</li> <li>• God wants to use our gifts</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God's guidelines for life</li> <li>• God prepares the way ahead</li> <li>• Going forward in life through faith in Christ</li> </ul> |
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**THIS IS THE** true story, 3500 years ago, of the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to God's Promised Land in Canaan. That is where nearly half the Jews live today. God taught them on the way through the desert many things that are still useful today. As well as His laws and guidelines, this book teaches about the great importance of personal holiness. Sin deserves God's punishment. We read here how God chose the sacrifice of innocent animal blood at the time of Moses to take away the sins of the people. Christians believe that this process was replaced by the sacrifice of the innocent blood of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. This happened 2000 years ago. Ever since, repentance and faith in Jesus has been the way back to God for millions of Jews and non-Jews who have been saved from unholy living.

**MANNA PUBLICATIONS** supply Bible teaching commentaries written by Fred Morris. For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. When they returned home they wrote these notes for printing locally wherever there was a need for basic Christian teaching.

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**WE PRAY** that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. As you read, think about what Jesus said and did 2000 years ago and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return.

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**FOUNDATIONAL BIBLE TEACHING COMMENTARIES**

"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)



**THE GROWTH OF  
 GOD'S NATION  
 MOSES Part 2**

**A Bible Teaching Commentary  
 for personal or group study  
 by Fred Morris**



**EXODUS Part 2,  
 Chapters 21 to 40**  
**with summary of Leviticus,  
 Numbers & Deuteronomy**

### To the reader or leader

These Bible commentaries explain the truth about God's Word in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. You can use these books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.



**Bible reading:** Where you see this, it means you should always read the Bible passage first before reading the words in this book.



**Talk about this:** Where you see this, there are questions that can be asked and discussed in a group study. This will help the readers understand the Bible.



**Think about this:** Where you see this, the question requires more time for personal meditation.



**Ruled text boxes:** Where you see this, the information gives extra teaching on special topics for students, teachers and pastors which are useful for believers today.

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When Joshua took his place, the people listened to him. 'They did what the Lord God Almighty had commanded Moses' (34:9). For the next 1000 years there were many prophets of God who guided the Israelites. But they never had a leader like Moses who knew God face to face (34:10).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. How did God warn the people if they did not worship Him joyfully in their prosperity (28:43-47)?
2. How did Moses choose Joshua to be the new leader of Israel (31:1-2)?
3. Why did God give a song to Moses to sing with the new generation of God's people (31:21)?
4. What happened to Moses (34:6; Mark 9:4)? How do we remember him today?



**Think about this:** What do you remember of God's blessings in your life? How can we encourage new, young believers? What blessings can we use from the prayer of Moses in our prayers for others (33:6-29)?

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The people of Israel were called by God out of Egypt to become a holy people; but they were far from perfect. A whole generation of Israelites died in the wilderness before reaching the Promised Land. Was this because they remembered the rich farmland and enjoyed the sinful worship of idols in Egypt? God spoke to them through Moses about the need to obey Him and trust in His plan of salvation. It is our prayer that these Manna Bible commentaries will strengthen your understanding of the purpose of God for His special people and for their Messiah. This was finally fulfilled through God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is Saviour of the world for all who believe He is the Son of God.

## **Exodus Chapters 21-40 with summary of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In our first Bible commentary on Exodus, Moses part 1, we told you how God saved over a million Israelites from slavery in Egypt. We explained how the 12 families of Jacob (Israel) escaped from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on the way to God's Promised Land of Canaan. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham.

- God encouraged the people of Israel to cry out to Him to leave the fertile land of Egypt, because they were being persecuted (Exodus chapters 1 and 2).
- God called Moses to lead them out and take them to the Promised Land that He had chosen for them (chapters 3 to 6).
- God saved them from the 10 plagues which He sent on the Egyptians and also saved them from slavery (chapters 7 to 11).
- God's angel of death spared them and passed over the houses that had the blood of a lamb on the door posts; they were told to remember this event each year in the Jewish Passover Feast (chapter 12).
- God made the people of Egypt give them many valuable things to take with them out of Egypt (12:35-36).
- God led the people of Israel safely through the desert and the Red Sea. The army of Egyptians followed them but were drowned (chapters 13 to 14).
- God saved the people of Israel from death and starvation in the desert and wilderness. He defeated their enemies and gave them food and water (chapters 15 to 19).
- God spoke through Moses and gave the people of Israel the Ten Commandments (chapter 20).

These things fulfilled the promises that God made to Abraham more than 500 years earlier: "Your children who live after you will be strangers in a country that does not belong to them. They will become slaves. They will be treated badly for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that makes them slaves. After that, they will leave with all kinds of valuable things... Your children's grandchildren will come back here [Canaan]" (Genesis 15:13-16). This was an everlasting covenant or agreement between God and His people. It was repeated by the prophet Isaiah. "I will pour out My Spirit on your children... and on their children after them" (Isaiah 44:3).

Many changes took place before God's plan was fulfilled. It took many years to happen. Some lived hoping to see the fulfilment. Some lived and died in hope. Others lost their faith and lived and died without hope (Exodus 6:9).



### **Yahweh, the Special Name of God**

A name is often used to describe the whole person, his character and his authority. God told Moses he must use one of God's special names, Yahweh. It means 'I AM, the One True, Living and Everlasting God, Powerful Creator of the World' and much more. God's name, Yahweh, was so holy, that the people of Israel were afraid to speak it. They wrote down the letters YHWH for God's name. When they spoke to each other about God they used the word 'Adonai' instead of 'Yahweh'. In this Bible commentary, we use the words 'Almighty God' to remind us of 'Yahweh' or use 'LORD' as in some English Bibles. Note that the word 'Adonai' is plural and addresses Almighty God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## **A NEW HOPE IN GOD**

On the way to the Promised Land, God gave the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel. That was 3500 years ago. He gave them His Law because He did not want them to live like the people of Egypt. Later, God reminded them more than 100 times that He had saved them from the land of Egypt. He told them again and again, "You must not do what the people of Egypt do" (Leviticus 18:3).

The Law reminded the people that they were a chosen, special people, holy, who worshipped Yahweh, Almighty God, the Creator of all things. The Law also reminded them that they must love other people and respect their possessions. The Law explains what is right and what is wrong. Their new life and hope was in God through obeying the Law. This is God's Old Testament covenant.

Later, the prophet Jeremiah said that God would make a new covenant with Israel and all mankind: "I will put My Law into their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This would bring new meaning to the wonderful truths from God that are found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17) and to salvation through the sacrifice of blood. We believe that 2000 years ago, Jesus fulfilled all the words of the Law and through His precious blood, the words were fulfilled for all who believe in Him as the Son of God.

The Hebrew name for Jesus is Yeshua which means 'He will save His people from their sin' (Matthew 1:21). God raised Him from death and sent the promised Holy Spirit to live in the hearts and minds of all His followers. His Spirit guides believers into all truth today (John 14:26; 16:13). Therefore, our new life and hope in God is through believing in His Son, Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah (Matthew 1:21). He is God's new covenant. He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament Law.

This song would become a witness against the people when they went away from His truth (31:19). "The song I am giving you... will not be forgotten by the children and their children. For I know what is in their minds to do" (31:21). God knew that many people would stop worshipping Him when they grew rich and had plenty to eat in the Promised Land of Canaan. They would quickly forget that those wonderful blessings were from God (28:1-14). They and their children must be reminded regularly of God's salvation, provision and guidelines for holy living.

God has freely given us all we need for living our Christian lives. We, too, must continually teach and remind each other and our children of God's truth (2 Peter 1:3-12) and live our lives to show thankfulness for the blessings of God's love in good times and in bad.

Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy gives the song of Moses. It contains teaching for the future. It includes a record of history. It reminded them of the things they did wrong and how God called them and saved them.

Moses warned Israel that they risked becoming a nation "without sense or understanding" (32:28). They needed reminding to obey the LORD God Almighty because they were at risk of a day of destruction (32:35). God puts to death and brings to life (32:39). May all of us realise that the future of our nation today is in God's hands, to prosper or to perish.

## **The final prayer of Moses**

The song of Moses was followed by a blessing and prayer for the people of Israel before he died (Chapter 33). In it, Moses declared his faith in God's love for His people (33:3).

A song or a hymn is a useful way to remember God's truth. Moses began his song with these words: "Let my teaching fall like rain... on new grass" (32:2). Moses wanted the truth of God to help the people to grow strong in faith. It was important to encourage the faith of these new young believers. They were the new generation of God's people. We, too, must encourage each generation of new believers and also those whose faith is shallow or whose faith has failed in times of testing and temptation.

Then Moses prayed for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, one by one (33:1-29). Each prayer of Moses was in line with God's will. We do well if we pray in the same way. It is important to understand the mind of God before we pray boldly in faith for others (John 5:14-15).

Moses climbed a mountain where God showed him the Promised Land of Canaan (34:1). He was the servant of God but was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. He had sinned against a holy God by being angry. (32:51). But he would be remembered for the miracles of Almighty God in Egypt which 'Moses did against Pharaoh, his officials and the whole land' (34:11).

Israel renewed their covenant with God and:

- He sealed it with an oath (29:12);
- He confirmed that they were His people (29:13);
- He joined it to promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (29:13);
- He spoke of new generations who would have the same faith as Abraham (29:13).

Moses said to Joshua, "Carefully follow ... this covenant, so that you may have success in everything you do" (29:9).

### Joshua takes over as leader

Faith enabled people to enter into the covenant of God by "taking God's words to heart" (30:1) and "turning to the LORD with all your heart" (30:10). People were instructed to keep themselves close to God by obeying His laws (30:10,19).

Today, under the New Covenant, Christians are instructed to have faith in Christ Jesus, God's Son. And His wish for us to keep close to God is made possible with the help of the Holy Spirit promised to all believers (1 John 3:24).

Moses again taught the people to "obey God and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 30:10).

"You shall not cross the Jordan," God reminded Moses. He was sad but accepted God's plan. "I am now 120 years old," he told the people, "and I am no longer able to lead you."

Then Moses called his assistant, Joshua: "Be strong and brave... go with this people into the land the Lord God Almighty promised... divide it up among them" (31:7). "The Lord Himself will go ahead of you. He will be with you. He will never leave you. He will never abandon you. So do not be afraid" (31:8).

Moses told Joshua, "You must read the Law at the end of every seven years. Gather the people together... men, women and children. Also bring together the outsiders who are living in your towns. Then they can listen and learn to respect the LORD your God. And they will be careful to obey all the words of this Law" (31:10-12). Their children must hear it read too... They must learn to respect the LORD your God... You are about to cross the River Jordan and take the land as your very own" (31:13).

### The final song of Moses

Then God told Moses to write down a song to teach the people. This song would be God's reminder of His truth. God also revealed the future unfaithfulness of Israel to Moses. It warned that after the death of Moses and Joshua, some of the people of Israel would desert their God Almighty and worship the gods of Canaan (31:16). This song would remind them that God turned His back on them because He cannot look on sin (31:17-18).



### Jesus and the Old Testament laws (Matthew 5:17-48)

Jesus came to complete and fulfil everything written and prophesied in the Old Testament laws and prophets (v.17). He wants us to obey these commandments and to teach others to do the same (v.19). He then gives an example how to do this today in v.21-22. "Do not kill" means "Do not get angry with your brother". In v.23-26, He warns us to make peace with our brother before worshipping God or, as Paul says, before sharing communion. Jesus gives a further example that "Do not commit adultery" must be applied as "Do not look at another person with sinful desires" (v.27-28). In a further example, Jesus warns us that "Do not swear an oath falsely" should be applied as "Do not make any oath at all, either by Heaven or by Earth" (v.33-34). He also gives many examples of showing love to the unlovely including our enemies (v.40-48).

### THE OLD COVENANT

Exodus chapters 21 to 40 includes a long list of laws given by God to Moses. There are even more rules and guidelines in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They are called the Old Mosaic Covenant.

It is useful to try to understand WHY God gave the people these written laws. They had the testimony of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph handed down to them by word of mouth. But the Children of Israel at the time of the Exodus also knew about the written laws of Egypt. Many laws in Egypt were cruel, and unjust. God revealed to Moses His laws that helped His people to be holy, kind and just. For example, a man should look after his parents and relatives and not find a reason to neglect them when they are old (21:15, 17; Mark 7:9-13).



Moses with the Ten Commandments from God

God's laws also encourage us to look after what we and others own and to be careful what we do, so that people and things around us are not hurt or damaged. They encourage us to care for the world we live in. God wants us to look after the world He created (Genesis 2:15).



## Bible reading: Exodus 20 to 22

### OBEDIENCE, FEAR AND LOVE

After Moses read the Ten Commandments to the people, they were afraid (20:18). When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain smoke, they trembled with fear.

Moses told them that fear of Almighty God was a good thing to stop them from sinning. God also wanted to test them to see if they would obey Him (20:20).

The Ten Commandments were an important new beginning written down for the Children of Israel. Jesus said "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God. Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second equally important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' There is no commandment more important than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

John repeats these words of Jesus. He says: "I am not writing a new command. I am writing a command we had from the beginning... that we love one another. We show we love God when we obey God's commands. He commands you to live a life of love. That's what you heard from the beginning" (2 John 5-6).

The Ten Commandments therefore remind us how much we need Jesus to put us right with God, and His Spirit to guide us. For the children of Israel it was a big change from the life they lived in Egypt.

In this Bible commentary we will talk about some of the laws given to Moses by God. We will also explain what happened on the way to the Promised Land. The Children of Israel are often called simply 'Israel' or 'Israelites' or 'the people of Israel' or 'the people of God'. They were also known as 'Hebrews' and later on 'Jews'. They were chosen by God for a special purpose (Exodus 19: 5-6; Malachi 3;17-18; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Part 2 of Exodus includes the year the people of Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Important things happened at Mount Sinai.

### THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

The laws that are grouped together in these three chapters are called the Book of the Covenant (24:7). They are part of the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham. These laws showed how Israel should worship and live each day. They provided God's guidelines to help live good lives.

Moses told the people all the commands and laws that God gave him on Mount Sinai. And he put them in writing for future generations.

God commanded the people of Israel many times, "Do not make for yourself gods of silver or gods of gold" (20:4,23). And He added later, "Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Almighty God must be destroyed" (22:20). These commands are so important to God that people deserve death if they disobey them.

place. He will put His name there. That is where you must bring everything I command you to bring. That includes your burnt offerings and sacrifices" (12:8-11). "Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in [each] one of your tribes and observe everything I command you" (12:14).

This was said "so that your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you and so that you may enjoy long life" (6:2).

They do only "what is right in the eyes of the LORD God Almighty." He instructed them to "go to the place the LORD will choose" to offer sacrifices in repentance and worship. "Make sure you obey all these rules I am giving. Then things will always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God" (12:25-28).

If they obeyed God, there would be no poor in the land and they would be able to lend freely to many nations (15:4-6).



#### Talk about this:

1. Why must parents tell their children about God's truth and blessings (5:29)?
2. What, how and why must we teach from the Bible today (6:6-9; 2 Timothy 1:13-14)?
3. Why did God want the Canaanites driven out of the land (9:4; 18:12)?
4. Why is it important to do what God wants and not what we want (12:8)?
5. How can parents be a blessing to their children (15:25-28)?



**Think about this:** How can a nation be blessed by God and become a blessing to others (15:4-8)?

### Israel renews the covenant

Deuteronomy Chapters 24 and 25 list some of the many social, moral and religious commandments and guidelines from God given to Moses for the people of Israel in preparation for living in the Promised Land of Canaan.

In Chapter 28 God warns of one of the things that will happen if His people ignore or disobey Him. "Foreigners who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher but you will sink lower and lower... They will become the leaders and you will become the followers" (28:43-44). Why? God said, "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly when times were good" (28:47).

In Chapters 29 and 30 of Deuteronomy, Moses again reminded the people:

- the history of God's plan for them from the time they were slaves in Egypt (29:2-9);
- the covenant of God (29:10-15);
- what happened when they broke God's covenant (29:16-29);
- the blessing when they kept God's covenant (30:1-10);
- a final challenge to obey the Lord (30:11-20).

## Moses continues to teach the people

God warned Moses, "Make sure to follow every command I am giving you" (8:1,6). The Promised Land which was full of good things. God instructed Moses to say to the people, "Praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. Make sure that you do not forget the Lord your God" (8:10,11).

He explained that He had "guided you in the desert for 40 years ... to make you humble. He wanted to put you to the test to know what was in your hearts... He let you get hungry then gave you manna to eat ... He tested you to teach you that man does not live only by bread. He lives on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD God Almighty" (8:2-3).

Paul wrote, "Our people who lived long ago ... all ate the same supernatural food [manna] ... but God was not pleased with most of them" and "things happened to them as examples for us... to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed [fulfilled]. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall" (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

Then Moses gives a summary of God's way of life (Deuteronomy 10:12-21). The people's own love for God would be seen in their care of the orphans, widows and aliens who lived among them. Aliens had no country of their own. God loves the aliens, too, and wanted them to follow Him (10:18). They were like the refugees of today. When Israel cared for the aliens and widows among them, they remembered that they were once slaves and aliens themselves (10:19).

Moses knew that he could not change people's hearts. God promised Israel rich blessings, but they did not always thank Him or believe Him. They would not always trust in His promises. The hearts of that new generation of God's people often were far from God.

Paul realised it was still true in his day: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This is why the world needs to come to Christ to receive God's special plan of salvation through Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The name of Jesus (Yeshua or Joshua in Hebrew) means 'salvation'.

Moses told the people of Israel again and again to love the Lord their God and keep His commands (Deuteronomy 11:1,8,13,22,32). They must remember what He had taught them and how He had disciplined them and not be influenced by any children who did not experience these things (11:2).

Moses included in his long speech before entering the Promised Land, "Observe all the commandments I am giving you today so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land" (11:8). They must teach their children at all times about what God said and did (11:19). They must also trust God to provide for them in the future (11:10-15).

Moses warned the people of Israel, "All of us are choosing only what we think is right... but you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance... The Lord your God [Himself] will choose a special

## THE NEW COVENANT OF GOD

The Old Testament laws reminded the people of the good things to do when they chose to follow and obey God. They also remind us of the punishment the Law required for disobedience and other sins. However, we no longer live in the fear of punishment for breaking His Law under the Old Covenant. Instead, under the New Covenant, we live in the joy of our salvation through Jesus the Christ, and choose to love and to please God in the power of His Spirit.

These Old Testament laws contain many guidelines for New Testament believers. For example, when there are disputes, bring them to the attention of more than one leader. "Both people are to bring their cases to the judge" (22:9).

A free choice is now offered by God to all people for all time. Faith in Jesus as the Son of God frees us from God's punishment. This is possible through the love and mercy of Almighty God, which Christians call the grace of God. He has set us free from trying and failing to obey the laws. But without the Law given in the Old Testament writings, it is not easy to know what is right or wrong. For example the Law says, "Do not want what belongs to other people" (Exodus 20:17). Paul says, "If the Law hadn't said that, I would not have known that it was sinful to want what belongs to others" (Romans 7:7). Our God-given consciences also help us not to sin (Romans 2:15).

Through Christ, Paul says, "I am now controlled by the law of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 8:2). The sacrifice of Jesus and the power of His Spirit enable us to fulfil each law: to honour parents; to avoid too much alcohol; not to steal...

Jesus said that the first two commandments, 'the royal law of love', fulfil the requirements of all the Law (Matthew 2:40). We please God because we love Him and He loves us. It is therefore a relationship with God of faith and love and no longer a religion of laws.

Sin is a barrier between man and God. Jesus died to take away the barrier of sin between us and God and enable the righteousness of God to be seen in our lives.



### Talk about this:

1. What changes did God want His people to make in their lives after leaving Egypt?
2. What use is the Law today?
3. What promises did God make to bless the children and grandchildren of believers?



**Think about this:** Explain the grace, mercy and salvation of God under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant. How does God want us to live today?



## Old Covenant laws and guidelines

*Exodus 21:1-11. Fair treatment for servants and their wives and children:* choice of freedom for male servants to leave after six years (v.2) or accept life service (v.5-6); rules for fair treatment of servants' wives (v.3) and their children (v.4); rules for female servants (v.7-11).

*Exodus 21:12-36. Crimes deserving death or exile, fines, compensation or other forms of punishment:* for murder (v.12,14); manslaughter (v.13); harming parents (v.15,17); kidnap (v.16); injury (v.18-27); allowing an animal to cause death (v.28-32, 35-36); causing danger to other animals (v.33-34). It records God's old covenant teaching on righteousness based on the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (21:24). It also describes God's judgement and punishment for both innocent sin and for deliberate sin which are given here together with His merciful plan for redemption and forgiveness. It expresses God's heart's desire to teach us His righteousness and obedience, with His punishment due for sin and His willingness to offer forgiveness through repentance and sacrifice. It was given to the people of God 1500 years before His final plan for dealing with sin through repentance and faith in His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who took the punishment for sin on our behalf through the sacrifice of His life on a Roman cross. This was under God's new covenant.

*Exodus 22:1-15. Punishment for criminal or careless acts of theft, self-defence or neglect:* stealing farm animals (v.1,4); causing injury during self-defence (v.2-3); damage to crops and farm property (v.5-6); compensation for loss or theft of goods (v.7-9); compensation for damaged goods and property while in the care of others (v.10-15). This Bible teaching requires us to compensate and pay back gladly and generously for what is lost, stolen or damaged.

*Exodus 22:16 to 23:9. Punishment for ungodly living:* seducing a young woman; using a sorceress; sex with an animal; idol worship; taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable; giving false witness. *Miscellaneous guidelines for godly and healthy living and fair treatment:* caring for strangers; returning borrowed clothing; giving loans to the poor; not blaspheming God nor cursing rulers; dedication of firstborn boys and livestock; harvest offerings; not using meat killed by wild animals; not following wrong actions of crowds; not showing favouritism to the poor when in court; giving justice to the poor; care of other people's property including your enemy's property; not passing false judgement; rejecting false charges; not accepting bribes; not attempting to deceive those who understand the truth; not giving false meanings to words of the righteous. It also warns the people not to ill-treat foreigners or to oppress them, for the Israelites were all foreigners and oppressed when in Egypt.

*Exodus 23:10-12. Rest days and years for land and workers:* do not plough or sow the fields one year in seven but let the land rest, and whatever grows, allow the poor people and wild creatures to eat the food from it. Also, allow your workers, including immigrants, and working animals to rest one day in seven.

*Exodus 23:13. A reminder to do everything that God has instructed and not to use or speak the names of other gods:* 'Do not let them be heard on your lips.'

them to your children," he told the people, "and do not forget what God has done for you" (4:7-10).

After receiving the Ten Commandments, the people promised "We will listen and obey". God responded, "I have heard what the people said to you... I wish they would always obey all my commands. Then things will go well with them and their children for ever!" (5:27-29).

The Holy God of Israel planned to use them to drive out the evil people from the land of Canaan. He warned them: "Do not say to yourselves, 'God has done it because we are holy people which is why He brought us here to take over this land.' That isn't true. I will drive out these nations to make room for you because they are evil... as I promised to Abraham" (9:4-5).

## A great miracle and a holy God

Moses told the people that the exodus from Egypt was the greatest miracle ever seen. Egypt was probably the greatest power on earth at that time until God took away their Hebrew slaves (4:34).

Then Moses repeated the Ten Commandments (5:6-21). These young Israelites needed to learn God's laws and to keep them and teach them to their children. This was the only way they would have them in their hearts and 'enjoy long life' (6:2).

This was so important and Moses told them how to do it: When your son asks you, "What is the meaning of all these laws and rules?" tell him, "We were slaves... in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand" (6:20-21). "Speak of God's commands all the time," Moses said. "Don't let His commands grow cold in your hearts!"

This is important teaching for today. Those who know the Lord must teach their children and grandchildren to know God's truth.

The nations of Canaan were very evil and God told Israel to break their sacred stones, cut down their sex symbols and burn their idols. "For you are a people holy to the Lord" (7:6). This did not mean that God had no love or mercy for the heathen. He loves all people, but He hates sin. Anyone from among these nations who turned to Him was saved (Joshua 2:14; 2 Peter 3:9).

Because of the sins of these nations, the young Israelites could not sign any treaties nor make any agreements with them nor marry their sons and daughters. "They will turn your sons away from following Me", God said (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Moses warned, "Pay attention to the laws of the Lord God Almighty. Be careful to obey them. Then He will keep His covenant of love with you. ... The Lord will love you and bless you" (7:12-13).

These words confirm the 'covenant of love' between God and His people and declare His desire for them to obey His commands and fulfil His desire to "bless you more than any other nation" (7:14).



Moses agreed to their plan. "When the land is under Yahweh's control, you can come back here. Your duty to Almighty God and Israel will be over. Then He will give you this land as your own" (32:22). This included land for the half tribe of Manasseh. "But what if you fail to do your duty? Then you will be sinning against Almighty God. And you can be sure that your sin will be discovered. It will be brought out into the open" (32:23).

God finished with a general instruction. "Do not pollute the land in where you live... I the Lord live there, too. I live among the people of Israel. I am the Lord God Almighty" (35:33-34). This is an important teaching for Jews and Christians today wherever they live.

Israel did not take and hold all the land as God had planned. They marched boldly into Canaan but they did not drive out all the enemies of God within their borders (Judges 1:27-36). These enemy strongholds later became a problem to the Israelites and a cause of sin in the land.

## THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

In this fifth book assembled by Moses, he tells the next part of the plan of God for the Hebrew people, the children of Jacob (Israel). These are the final words of Moses from God to the people. God wanted them to live in the land of Canaan and make it their own land. He had promised it to them; now they must take it. They must overcome the wicked tribes living in the land and be a witness for Yahweh, our Almighty God and Creator of the world and the universe. God in His grace and mercy chose them to be His special people and by obeying Him, to show people everywhere how men should live, and how they should honour Him.

After forty years in the wilderness and desert, the people were ready to cross over the Jordan River and enter the land that God had promised. This time in Israel's history was 'the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month after they left Egypt' (Deuteronomy 1:3). The place was 'East of the River Jordan, in the territory of Moab' (1:5).

God told them to pass carefully through the land He had given to Esau, Jacob's brother, and not to quarrel with the distant relatives who lived there (2:2-5). God gave the same warning about the distant relatives who lived in the land He had given to Lot, the nephew of Abraham (2:9,19).

Moses reminds the new generation of people of the instructions God gave them and what happened to their parents who disobeyed. No other nation had rules and laws like these (4:8).

Moses told the people, "Obey these laws and that will show the nations how wise and understanding you are" (4:6).

God was with the people of Israel. He cared for them and protected them. As the people kept His laws, the heathen nations would see how right and holy God was. Moses asked them, "What other nation is like Israel to have the Lord our God near us whenever we pray?" (4:7). What other nation had such good laws? "Teach



## Bible reading: Exodus 23

### THREE ANNUAL FESTIVALS

God provided three festivals that the people should keep each year in the Promised Land of Canaan. He asked them to come to worship Him with gifts in their hands.

1. Passover, or the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Passover reminded the people of the night before their ancestors left Egypt when God's Angel of Death passed over the people of Israel but killed every Egyptian first-born male child and animal (23:15; Luke 22:15).
2. The Festival of First Harvest (23:16) or the Day of First Fruits, when the people offered a share of their first crops back to God. It came fifty days after the beginning of Passover. It was a time to thank God for His provision in the Promised Land.
3. The Festival of Final Harvest (23:16) was at the end of harvest time. This feast reminded Israel that God provided for all their needs on the journey to the Promised Land. At harvest time, families used branches to build shelters in the fields. They lived in the shelters while they gathered the harvest.

### THE ANGEL OF GOD GOES WITH THEM

Moses then wrote down that God promised He would watch over and protect His people as they journeyed to Canaan (23:20-23). The promises that God gave here are interesting for their detail. God also outlined the future boundaries of the Promised Land (23:31).

The people of Israel did not know which way to go to this far-off land. However, the Angel of God's Presence guided them along the way and brought the people safely to Canaan. It provided a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:21).

God said it was a place prepared for them (23:20). Six powerful nations that lived in the land (23:23) were descendants of the family of Canaan, who was a grandson of Noah. Nearly 1000 years earlier, Noah cursed Canaan, but not the land of Canaan (Genesis 9:25). This is why Abraham refused to let his son Isaac marry a Canaanite woman (Genesis 24:3-4). Instead, he married someone from his own tribe. Isaac did the same for his son Jacob who was later called Israel (Genesis 28:1). God promised to destroy the wicked people of Canaan who lived in the Promised Land (Exodus 23:23).

God also knew that the Israelites would meet other tribes as they travelled toward Canaan. Some would be hostile to them, so God promised: "I will send My terror ahead of you. I will throw every nation you meet into a panic. I will make all your enemies turn and run away" (23:27).

God goes ahead of us and gives us victory over our enemy, Satan. If we have faith in God and obey His Holy Spirit, He will forgive us and not allow sin to

destroy us (23:25,26). Under the New Covenant, Jesus died for the punishment we deserve, then sent His Spirit to guide His followers (Acts 1:3-5).

Our days are in His hands (Psalm 139:10). This means we can trust God today and every day. But He may not overcome all our problems immediately or even in our life-time. And He doesn't normally tell us of all the problems ahead and what He will do for us. We need to go forward in faith and trust God to fulfil His purposes in our lives in His own way and own time (Genesis 13:17; Exodus 23:30). This means living one day at a time and facing each problem in faith, ready to prove God's wonderful purpose and provision in our lives. Only then will we know the true peace that God alone can bring when we are tempted to go the wrong way or surrounded by the sins of others.

The people were also told to pay attention to the Angel of God. "Listen to what he says and do not rebel against him..." (23:21).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. What can we bring to God when we meet to worship Him (23:15)?
2. What did God promise to do to the enemies that Israel met along the way (23:27)?
3. Can we claim these promises for ourselves (23:25-26)?



**Think about this:** Why doesn't God show us all the problems ahead of us and provide all His answers to the problems (23:29)? Why does God take us forward, little by little (23:30)?



#### **Bible reading: Exodus 24**

### **THE PEOPLE PROMISE TO OBEY GOD**

God told Moses to take Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel with him to meet Him (24:1). But only Moses approached the foot of the mountain. He told the people all God's words and laws (24:3). They replied, "We will do everything Almighty God has told us to do." Then Moses wrote down everything that God said in the Book of the Covenant (24:4).

He built an altar there and set up twelve stone pillars to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men to offer burnt animal offerings to Almighty God.

Moses took half the blood from the sacrificed bulls and sprinkled it on the altar. He took the Book of the Covenant, and read it again to the people. Again the people replied, "We will do everything Almighty God has said." They added, "We will obey Him" (24:7).

Then Moses took the remaining blood and sprinkled it on the people. He said, "This is the blood of the Covenant that Almighty God has made with you which confirms all these words" (24:8).

Then Moses said, "Almighty God... please appoint a new leader for this community. Then your people ... will not be like sheep without a shepherd" (27:16-17).

God replied, "Take Joshua, the son of Nun... Give him some of your authority" (27:18,20). God told Moses to lay hands on Joshua before the entire assembly to commission him in their presence and to pass on to him some of his authority so that everyone will learn to obey him. Moses "did just as the LORD commanded him. And [Joshua] did just as the Lord instructed through Moses" (27:23).

From that day, Joshua shared with Moses in leading the people. He had been a helper for Moses from his youth. He was successful in war (Exodus 17:13) and gave a good report of the Promised Land when he went as one of the twelve spies (Numbers 14:6-9). He also guarded the Tent of Meeting which Moses put up outside the camp (Exodus 33:11).

Moses gave the authority for judging the people to Joshua, but he could not give him the office of prophet. Only God could do that. God had given Moses the gift of prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:15). In future, Joshua would have to go to the High Priest to find God's will for himself. This was a new way to seek God's guidance. God later appointed judges, kings and prophets as well as priests.



#### **Talk about this:**

1. Did Balaam harm the people of Israel? How did they fall into the evil plan of King Balak (23:11-12; 24:25)?
2. How did Israel harm themselves after Balaam and Balak went home (25:1-3)? What made God angry?
3. What help did Joshua have to take over the leadership from Moses (27:18-23)?



**Think about this:** Is God angry today over disobedience and immorality? How should we encourage new leaders and leaders in training? How and why should we pass on authority in the church?

### **Some tribes remain east of Jordan**

Some of the tribes had very large herds and flocks (32:1). At this time they defeated the kings Sihon and Og. They then saw that the land around them, to the east of the River Jordan, was good for the cattle and sheep. So they asked Moses if they could live there with their families and animals (32:4-5).

Moses feared they might separate themselves from the community of Israel and not help their brothers take the land God had promised to the west of the Jordan. "Should the rest of us go to war while you stay here?" asked Moses (32:6).

The leaders of the two tribes of Gad and Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh then agreed to arm themselves and go ahead of the Israelites. They would leave their women and children protected in fortified cities while they were away fighting in Canaan (32:16).

Amorites were the largest tribe in the land of Canaan. They had descended from Canaan, the son of Ham, who was one of the three sons of Noah. They lived from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea as God promised (Deuteronomy 11:24). The king of the Amorites would not let the people of Israel pass through his kingdom. They went to war with Israel.

God told Moses, "Do not be afraid" (Numbers 21:34). So the people of Israel captured many of the cities of the Amorites. Then they began to live in them. They took over the land for themselves (21:35).

### **Balaam, the false prophet, could not stop Israel**

Balaam was not a prophet of God. He was a witchdoctor. He offered food to idols and worshipped demon spirits. He could work magic and people knew he had demonic powers. People were afraid of him. If he did not like someone, he would curse them.

King Balak of Moab saw the camp of Israel. The Israelites were not like any people King Balak had ever seen before. He heard how they had fought his neighbours and killed their kings. Would the Israelites come over to his land and kill him also? He was so frightened he did not know what to do.

At this time, God warned Balaam, "You must not put a curse on these people because I have blessed them" (22:12). Several times Balak tried to force Balaam to curse the people of Israel but God allowed only a blessing. So Balaam and Balak went home (24:25) and there was no war between Israel and Moab.

### **Israel sins with Moab**

Satan failed to put a curse on the Israelites; so he tempted them to sin with the women and idols of Moab. This happened when Israel camped at Shittim, the last stop before crossing the Jordan River. Then they saw their heathen neighbours worshipping the gods of Moab. Some of God's people were invited by young women from Moab to join them (25:1-3). God was angry because of their sinful sexual activities and He told Moses to kill the men who had disobeyed Him (25:5).

Then the people of Israel came to the Tent of Meeting, weeping because of the plague that had come among them (25:6). This was also a judgement from God and many died (25:9).

### **Joshua chosen to lead**

Moses counted the people a second time. This time there were 1820 fewer adult men over 20 years old (26:51). Nearly all the older people had died during their time in the desert (14:28-35). This was part of God's judgement.

Reuben's families were much fewer than before because his relatives were from the tribe of Korah which God judged (26:9-11). The greatest loss, however, was from the tribe of Simeon.

So the Covenant between God and His people was sealed by the sprinkled blood of a sacrificial lamb or other innocent animal. The blood 'covered over' the sins of the people. Everything or everyone sprinkled with blood was made holy and set apart for God.

### **NEW LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD**

This sprinkling of blood was repeated many times during the next 1500 years. The blood of sacrifice covered the sins of God's people. Today only the blood of the Son of God, Jesus, is sufficient to take away the sins of people who confess (Matthew 26:28; 1 Peter 1:19). He called it 'the blood of the New Covenant'.



#### **Atonement: God's plan to punish and to forgive sin**

Atonement means making peace with God through receiving His forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, if a man wanted to get right with God, God said he must sacrifice the best animal from his flock or herd, then sprinkle its blood on the altar as an offering to pay for his sins.

The sinner understood that either he should die for his sins or an animal should die in his place (Leviticus 4:27-35). God allowed the sacrifice of an innocent animal to pay for their sins. This was not a permanent sacrifice; at least every year these sacrifices had to be repeated to cover their sins.

In the New Testament, at the time of Christ, God had a better plan to deal with sin. But at the time of Moses, innocent animals were punished in place of sinners. God saw their sacrifices and He forgave the sins of all those who were sorry and who promised to obey Him (Exodus 24:6-8). This meant that God no longer saw the sin. The relationship between God and sinner was then restored.

This is called 'atonement'. God was able to look at the person who had sinned just as if he or she had not sinned. So there was peace with God. This was the Old Covenant way that God, in His justice and mercy, dealt with sin.

God planned that one day He would Himself provide a sacrifice that would be perfect, without any fault. Jesus, the Son of God, was innocent, so He was the perfect sacrifice. Through the sacrifice of God's own Son, all who believe in Him have eternal salvation. In this way, through Jesus the Jewish Messiah, God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled: "All nations will be blessed" (Genesis 22:18) through faith in Christ alone. Read Romans 5:8, Galatians 3:29 and Hebrews 9:26.

The sacrifice of animal blood under the Old Covenant was an important plan or provision of God to punish and to forgive sin. It pointed the way forward towards the sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, under the New Covenant. His sacrifice was the final plan or provision of God to punish and to forgive sin. "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; also Revelation 7:10). Jesus Christ took the punishment for our sins so that we can be forgiven and have peace with God. Alleluia! (Romans 5:1-11.)

Jesus asked His followers to remember His sacrifice every time they celebrate the Last Supper (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26): "This cup [of wine] is the New Covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do it in memory of Me."

His sacrifice was the final sacrifice that God required; no more innocent animals need to die for our sin, no more innocent blood needs to be spilt for offering as a sacrifice. Those who believe this know that their sins are forgiven by the sinless and innocent blood of Jesus. In this way, followers of Christ receive a new life, holy and set apart to do the will of God (Romans 12:1).

Life is the most precious thing of all. Only God can create life. He creates all life. He said, "The life of each creature is in its blood" (Leviticus 17:11). At the time of Moses, God accepted the blood of an animal sacrifice in place of the sinner's death. The blood was an 'atonement' for the people's sins: it enabled the people to be forgiven and come close to God. Today, 3500 years later, the blood sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, remains sufficient atonement for our sins to be forgiven and remove the barrier between us and God. His sacrificed blood brings new life which is eternal to all who confess and believe.

The Old Testament Law showed the people how serious were their sins. Only the death or sacrifice of innocent blood could possibly cover over their sin. Then God would forgive them because of the blood of the sacrifice.

## THE ELDERS SEE GOD'S GLORY

Then Moses and the seventy elders went up to the mountain. The group included Aaron and his sons. Only Aaron's two older sons are named (24:9).

God was not angry with them for coming near to Him. 'He did not raise His hand against those leaders...' (24:11). He showed some of His glory and splendour to them. This was allowed without coming to any harm.

The elders saw 'under His feet... something like a street made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself' (24:10). Sapphire is a clear, blue precious stone sometimes seen in visions of heaven (Ezekiel 10:1; Revelation 21:19).

After the elders returned to the camp, they ate and drank (Exodus 24:11). It was not unusual to end the signing of a covenant with a fellowship meal (Genesis 26:30; Luke 22:15). Then God said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here. I will give you the tablets of stone, with the Law and commands I have written to teach the people" (24:12). He was in the midst of the fiery presence of God for 40 days.



### Talk about this:

1. What do you know about the Book of the Covenant?
2. Why did God give the people so many laws at this time?
3. Are there important occasions in our church life which we could celebrate with a fellowship meal (24:11)?
4. Why is sacrificed blood so important to Jews and to Christians?

God is full of grace and mercy. He gave them water to drink, just as He had given water before. He did not hold back His supply because of their sin and rebellion. But to Moses, God said, "Because you did not ... honour Me as holy in front of the Israelites, you will not bring this people into the land I give them" (20:12; Matthew 4:1-11).

On the way to Canaan, they came to the land of Edom, descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. They refused permission for the children of Jacob (Israel) to travel north along the Kings Highway (20:17-18) so they journeyed round Edom another way (20:21). The Edomites later became great enemies of Israel. Later still, God allowed the Assyrians to destroy both Edom and the unfaithful tribes of northern Israel.



### Talk about this:

1. What did God tell Moses to do to get water for the people? Did Moses obey God fully (20:9-12)?
2. How did the Israelites solve the difficult problem with the Edomites (20:17-21)?



**Think about this:** Do we do things God's way or our own way? What can we do to honour God? What example did Israel set in refusing to fight against the Edomites? Why do we sometimes fail to lead others into the Kingdom of God?

## The death of Aaron

At this time, God commanded Moses to take Aaron and his son Eleazar up the mountain. Moses took the High Priest's tunic off Aaron and put it on Eleazar. Aaron died there on the mountain and Eleazar buried him (20:23-27). They went back to the people and told them Aaron had died.

Moses received the words of God for the people and Aaron was his speaker. Aaron was a willing and faithful speaker for the commands and wise judgements of God (20:27-29). Both Moses and Aaron made mistakes and disobeyed God so they were not allowed into the Promised Land (20:24).

Aaron's wife and family and all Israel mourned Aaron's death (20:29). Now that Aaron had died, Moses turned to Eleazar who had the faith of his father. Eleazar's son, Phinehas also served God well and He blessed his family (25:13).

## Israel begins to possess the land

The new generation of the Children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land vowed to Almighty God, "If you deliver these enemies into our hands we will give them over to You to totally destroy." Their destruction was total (21:1-3). They were not attracted by the immoral behaviour of those around them. They did not buy cheap food offered to idols nor were they seduced by 'free love' and risk the punishment of the God Almighty.

As the Israelites moved further north, they faced the feared Amorite warriors who lived in the Promised Land.

God provided water, manna and quail for them to live in the desert between Egypt and Canaan for a total of forty years until a new generation was born to move forward and create the nation of Israel in Canaan. God's plan was not defeated to use Moses to save the people of Israel from Egypt and live in the Promised Land of Canaan.

During the next 38 years, a whole generation of Israelites died through war, disease and old age (Numbers 32:11-13). Only Caleb and Joshua survived the exodus from Egypt to live in the Promised Land. Eleazar, Aaron's son, became High Priest to Israel.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why did Joshua and Caleb live to see the Promised Land (14:38)?
2. Why and how did Moses change God's mind to destroy all the people (14:13-19)? How can this help us when we pray?
3. How did some of the people destroy themselves (14:44)?



**Think about this:** How can we help one another to believe God's promises when things look bad? Do we pray to God for others to repent and receive His forgiveness? Do we understand that sinners and non-believers bring God's judgement upon themselves?

## **Moses sins against God**

The remainder of the people wandered in the wilderness for another 38 years. Now most of the people over 20 years old at the time of the exodus from Egypt had died.

At times, they were far away from the Promised Land. Then at last Moses led them to the plains of Moab, where they camped on the banks of the Jordan River overlooking the Promised Land of Canaan. The city of Jericho was on the other side of the river. The people waited there to cross and take the land that God had promised their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel).

God then tested the new generation when they had no water. It was a testing time for Moses, too, although they had lacked water before. Moses and Aaron fell face down before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. God's glory appeared and He spoke to Moses. "Take your wooden stick. You and your brother Aaron gather the people together in front of the rock... so that they and their animals can drink" (20:6-8).

All Moses had to do was to speak the words and water would come from the rock. But Moses was angry with the people. He did not obey God's command to speak, but hit the rock with his stick (20:9-12). Nor did he give the glory to God. "Will we bring water out of this rock?" Moses shouted in anger. He did not speak the holy name of Yahweh but hit the rock twice and water poured out of it.



**Think about this:** What does 'atonement' mean? How can we come close to God today (Hebrews 10:19-25)?



## **Bible reading: Exodus 25 to 30**

### **GOD'S PLAN FOR WORSHIP**

Next, God told Moses His plans for building a special place of worship. He asked Moses to tell the people to bring him their offerings. "Receive the offering for Me from each man whose heart moves him to give." There was no pressure that everyone should give, only those who knew within themselves that God was asking them to give. This is part of the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 9:6-9).

Exodus 25:2 gives an early example of 'free-will offering as the Spirit leads us'. No preacher or church leader should force people to give offerings. Nor should they keep asking for money. Instead, they should trust God to supply the needs of the church through their faithful preaching and teaching of the word of God. Then the people should meet together for worship ready to give God whatever He asks (23:15).

The people gave all that was needed to build the Tabernacle. God provided their riches from Egypt. Their Egyptian neighbours had given them everything they asked for as they were leaving Egypt (12:36).

God said, "Let them make a sacred tent for me. I will live among them." Moses had to build the Tabernacle exactly to the pattern that God showed him (25:9; 31:1-6).

God told Moses everything that had to be placed in the Tabernacle. He gave Moses all the measurements for its furniture and told him how to use everything. Moses followed God's instructions. Nothing was left for him to decide.

God told Moses to build the Tabernacle in pieces so that the people could easily take it apart. Only certain people were allowed to carry it. They carried it from place to place as they marched through the desert. It was 'The Tabernacle in the Wilderness'.

There God's people and their leaders met together to worship Him, Yahweh, the living Almighty God. There He met with them, after they had made a sacrifice for their sins. The families of Israel agreed to come to this Tent of Meeting on certain days at certain times of the year.

The Tabernacle had two rooms or areas in it:

1. The first two-thirds of the Tent or Tabernacle was called the Holy Place. Only the priests could enter here.
2. The back was separated by a curtain. This place was called the Holy of Holies and could only be entered by the High Priest once a year.

Outside was a courtyard that surrounded the Tabernacle where the people could come and bring their animal sacrifices to God.

The tabernacle helped Israel to worship God for nearly 500 years until Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem.

## **THE ARK OF THE COVENANT**

God described to Moses how to build the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10-22). This was the most sacred piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. It was a large box, 1.25m long, made of wood and covered with gold. It had a lid made of pure gold. Inside the Ark there was space for the tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments.

Long poles were placed through rings that were fixed to the Ark. These were used to carry the Ark. There were four rings, two on each side. When the Ark was carried in this way, it was also covered in skins or cloth.

At each end of the lid, God told Moses to make a heavenly figure called a cherub (25:18-19). They faced each other, looking down on the cover. They were winged creatures, with their wings raised above the Ark (25:20). God said to Moses, "I will meet you ... between the two cherubim... There I will give you all My commandments for the people of Israel" (25:22).

When the people of Israel moved camp, only the priests of Levi carried the Ark. No other person was allowed to touch it. It was the holy place of God's powerful and shining Presence.

The priests came near with fear and trembling after they had made a sacrifice of animal blood.

## **THE TABERNACLE OF GOD AMONG THE PEOPLE**

Instructions for making the Tabernacle and its contents were given in great detail to Moses by God. The Ark, the table, the lamp stand, the Tabernacle itself, the altar of offering, the courtyard, the oil for the lamp stand, the priest's garments, the ephod, the breast piece, the altar of incense, the atonement money, the washbasin, the oil for anointing, and the incense. These were later made for the Temple at Jerusalem.

The reason for it all was so that they could know and worship God personally, the Almighty God, Yahweh, the only true and living God (29:46). They needed to learn that He is Creator and above all the gods of other nations and religions around them. Today, we do not need to come to God through the priests in a tabernacle or a temple. We can now come to God through His Son and through the sacrifice He made to receive the punishment for our sins. We can all know God personally through Jesus.

Ten of the spies answered Caleb, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are" (13:31). They failed to trust God and step out in faith to take the land that God had promised them. Only Caleb and Joshua trusted God.

God had a plan for His people. He would go before them and defeat their enemies. He did not want the people to go alone and attack these giants or the walled cities of Canaan in their own strength. The people had seen how God worked for them at the Red Sea. Moses answered their fear with the words: "Don't be afraid. Stand firm. You will see how Almighty God will save you today" (Exodus 14:13).

But the people cried out in their tents, "We wish we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land? We will be killed by swords" (Numbers 14:2-3). True faith always looks forward. Fear holds on to the old ways of the past. We should therefore remember and trust God's guidance in the past to meet our needs for the future.

"We should choose a new leader and go back to Egypt," they said to each other (14:4). Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb all knew the people were rebelling against Almighty God, not just against them.

### **"The Lord is not with you"**

The glory of Almighty God appeared at the Tent of Meeting. "How long will these people mock Me?" God asked Moses. "How long will they refuse to believe in Me?" (14:11). God had done many miracles for these people. He showed His power in signs and wonders, but the people's hearts were hard and they did not trust Him.

"I will destroy them," God told Moses, and said for the second time, "I will make YOU into a nation greater and stronger than they are" (14:12). Moses knew God could destroy them all in a moment. But Moses loved his people, so he stood between them and his angry God. He cried out to God to spare the people. He reminded God of His own justice and mercy. He reminded God that He was slow to get angry and was full of love and forgiveness (14:17-19).

The Lord replied to His servant Moses, "I have forgiven them as you asked (14:20). But these men will not see the land I promised to give them" (14:22-23). Instead, their children will walk into the Promised Land (14:31). They would become God's witnesses in the world in place of their parents.

The leaders heard God's judgment on the ten spies. "We have sinned," they now said. "We will go to the place God promised."

Moses knew God was not with them in this show of boldness. "Do not go," he told them, "because the Lord God Almighty is not with you. Your enemies will defeat you..." (14:42).

But they disobeyed their leader, Moses. They went to fight the Canaanites and many were killed (14:45).

Moses stayed in the camp with the Ark of the Lord's Covenant. This became a symbol of God's Presence with them.

with them (10:13-17;33-34). Moses requested his father-in-law, a local Midianite, to go with them across the desert "for you can be our eyes" (10:29-32).

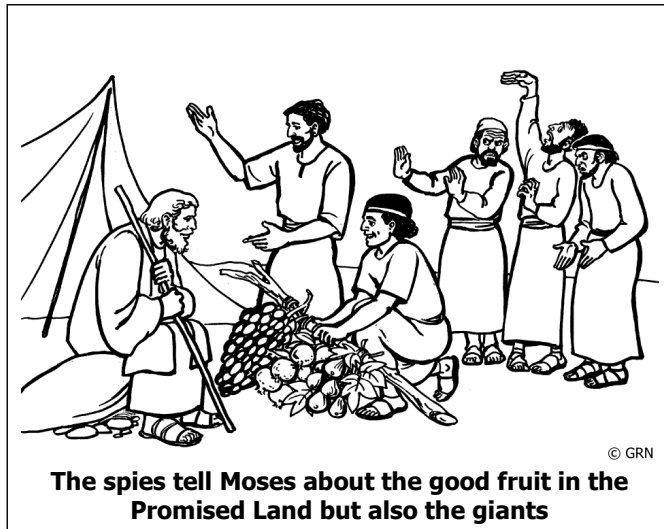
Each morning when they moved on, Moses said, "Rise up, O Lord God Almighty! May Your enemies be scattered!" Each evening when they rested, Moses said, "Return, O Lord God Almighty, to be with the countless thousands of Israel" (10:35-36). In this way, Moses had the pillar of fire to guide them and the help of his father-in-law in desert knowledge and the protection of God Almighty from the surrounding tribes by day and by night.

**?** **Think about this:** Do we boldly declare our faith in God, the joy in our salvation through Jesus Christ and the power of His promised Spirit at work in our lives? Do we remember to daily seek the guidance of God and His protection from our enemies plus the wisdom of others who travel with us in life's journey?

### Twelve spies go to Canaan

Moses chose twelve men, one from each tribe, and sent them to look at the land God had promised to give them. They went to explore Canaan (13:17). "Bring back some of the fruit of the land," he told them. Moses had already told them it was a good land (Exodus 3:8).

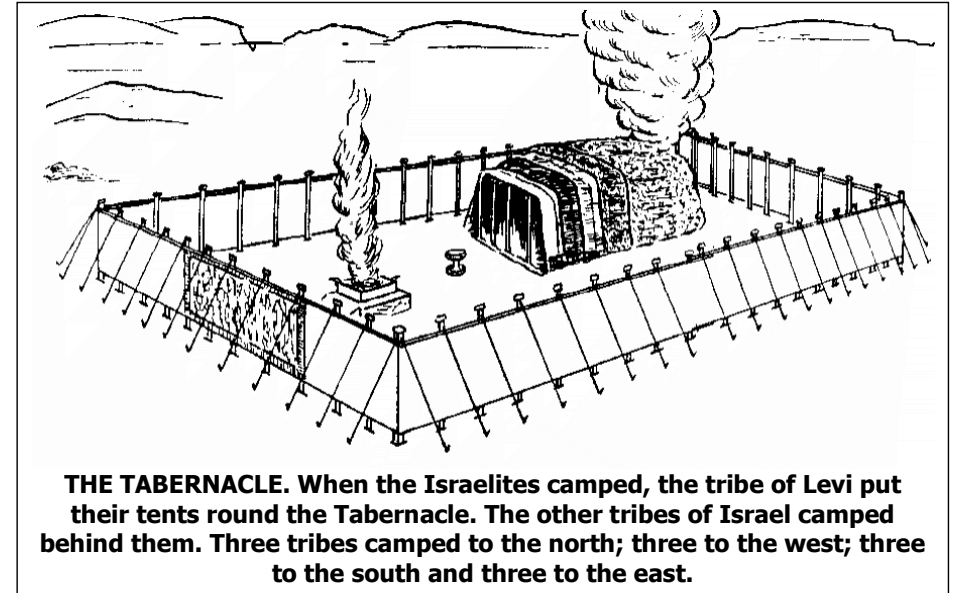
Before they went, Moses called Hoshea and changed his name to Joshua which means 'the Lord saves'. It has the same meaning as 'Jesus' today. The spies went into Canaan and found a beautiful land, with many different fruits growing there. They also saw very tall men, giants, who were sons of Anak, and the strong walled cities of Canaan. And they came back afraid, feeling very small, 'like grasshoppers' (Numbers 13:33).



**The spies tell Moses about the good fruit in the Promised Land but also the giants**

They reported all these things to Moses and the people. They also said, "It is true! It does flow with milk and honey." They had fruit to prove it (13:27).

But the people feared the giants and the walled cities and the risk of war. They began to complain. Caleb silenced the people and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it" (13:30) "for Almighty God is with us" (14:6-9).



**THE TABERNACLE. When the Israelites camped, the tribe of Levi put their tents round the Tabernacle. The other tribes of Israel camped behind them. Three tribes camped to the north; three to the west; three to the south and three to the east.**

### GOD'S SALVATION PLAN: SACRIFICE AND WORSHIP

From the very beginning of creation, God told Adam and others after him how they should worship Him. Because God is holy, He knows what is needed for His creation to be holy. God did not want man to decide for himself what was holy. He gave guidelines and laws to cover every area of life.

After the Flood, Noah built an altar. He knew how God wanted this to be built. Then he and his family worshipped God. They offered to God a sacrifice of certain 'clean' animals which God had told Noah to take with him into the Ark.

Abraham offered sacrifices to God. So did Isaac and Jacob and all the men who obeyed God. So we know that God told man, from the very beginning of creation, the only way He would accept their worship (Genesis 4:4). And through the centuries, God made sure that every generation knew the need for animal sacrifice in order to worship Him. They did not always keep this knowledge, but they had it at the beginning.

The sacrifice of a 'clean' animal made peace possible between God and man. The system of priest and sacrifice prepared the way for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now all our sins are taken away forever through trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus and following Him (Psalm 103:12; Romans 4:8, 8:1 Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:5-10).

By God's grace and through faith in Christ's death on the cross, we are saved from our sins and come to God directly without the help of a priest or pastor. The sacrifice of Christ enables us to worship God.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Let us make full use of our free access to God. Let us daily give ourselves to following Jesus. He knows what is best for us.

And then, after the final sacrifice and resurrection of His only Son, God sent the Holy Spirit to guide us and set us free in every area of life and worship (Romans 8:1,2).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. How were the sins of the people of Israel 'covered' so that a holy God could meet with them?
2. Who offered sacrifices to God in the Old Testament and who offered the final sacrifice at the time of the New Testament (Hebrews 7:20-28)?



**Think about this:** How do you explain to others why Jesus Christ died (Romans 6:23)? How do we tell others that Christ is the way to receive forgiveness of sins and to know Almighty God personally. How should we pray for our nation to uphold the Christian faith?



#### **Bible reading: Exodus 31**

### **CALLED AND GIFTED BY GOD FOR HIS GLORY**

Here we find a summary of the things that God told Moses to make (31:7-11). It was a huge task for one man. But God told Moses that there were many people with gifts to do the work (31:6). In this way Moses had no doubts that it would definitely happen. Why? Because God said, "I have given them ability" to do the work. In addition, God also filled two men with His Spirit to organise the work, Bezalel and Oholiab (31:2-6).

Sometimes God surprises us by revealing to us so much of His plans (Amos 3:7). This should encourage us to go forward without doubting. At other times, God tells us only a little of his plans; then we must go forward in faith a little at a time. Either way, our faith grows strong.

This story of Moses shows how great things can be done for God because He goes ahead and prepares the right people with the right gifts. He does this when people seek God, hear His voice and obey Him. He also calls certain people who have the power of His Spirit to know what to do at the right time. It is important for us to believe this.

Why does God do this? He provided gifted people blessed with the Holy Spirit so that the Israelites could worship God in the way He wanted. In this way, God received the glory that is due to Him as our Creator and Saviour. It is important for us to remember to give glory to God in our ministry to Him and to others believers.



#### **Talk about this:**

1. How did a holy God meet with sinful people at the time of Moses? What did the people have to do? What did the priests do?
2. How do sinners come near to God today?
3. What was God's purpose to send a goat far away into the desert (16:22-24)?



**Think about this:** The theme of Leviticus is holiness (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). What advice does Peter give us (1 Peter 1:14-16)? How can we help others to come near to God (Romans 3:23; John 3:16-18)? Do we seek help for the poor with cleansing of infections in their bodies and homes?

### **THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

This is the fourth book assembled by Moses. It is the story of Israel's further journey on the way to the Promised Land of Canaan. After they left Egypt, the children of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years, so the Hebrew name for this book is 'In the Wilderness'. We now call this book 'Numbers' because it gives details of the numbers of people in each tribe at the beginning and the end of the forty years travelling to the Promised Land. They counted the number of men 20 years old and over.

The total number of adult men came to 603,550 (Numbers 1:46). Later, this dropped to 601,730 (26:51). This meant there were over one million, perhaps nearly two million, people in total. It was therefore important to have a quick method of communicating with everyone.

The book of Numbers records the appointment of certain Levites under Eleazar, son of Aaron, who were in charge of the Ark of the Covenant, the table, the lamp stand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain and everything related to worship and the animal blood sacrifices for the sins of the people (3:31-32).

God told Moses to bless the people with these famous words: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn His face toward you and give you [His] peace" (6:22-27, NIV). These words would put the blessing of Yahweh, the LORD God Almighty, on the people and He would bless them.

God also told Moses, "Make two trumpets out of hammered silver... Blow them when you want the community to gather together and when you want the camps to set out" (10:2). They were also used when going into battle. "If you do, I will remember you. I will save you from your enemies" (10:9). This enabled the Children of Israel to declare boldly their faith in God, their strength and guidance He gave through His Spirit and also their joy in the Lord. The trumpets were often used to communicate messages quickly to all the tribes of Israel.

In the journey from Egypt to Canaan, the twelve tribes of Israel followed the cloudy pillar of fire through the Sinai desert (10:11-12). The tribe of Judah went first under their banner, taking the Tabernacle and the ark of the covenant of God



of God and to pass on His blessings to the people. This is to share in the purpose of God to restore our relationship with Himself. The greatest blessing is that our sins are forgiven by Jesus under the New Covenant. He is our Great High Priest who came to replace the Jewish priesthood. He lives for evermore to bring us back to God (Hebrews 7:23-27; 8:9-13).

When Moses and Aaron had done all that God commanded, 'the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and burnt up the offerings. And when the people saw it, they shouted for joy and bowed down with their faces to the ground' (Lev. 9:24).

Leviticus also warns us to cleanse skin diseases and house moulds. Those who are poor were asked to tell the priest to gain help from others for cleansing until every part of the disease was destroyed (14:21-43). We should learn that God wants us to seek the support of others in cleansing unhealthy skin and unhealthy parts of the house we live in. Let us follow God's guidelines and accept any help from those who are qualified to advise us about our personal health and cleanliness in our homes. This is an important caring ministry in the Church of Christ for today.

Leviticus 16:20-22 describes a further final part of sacrifice and atonement for the sins of God's people given to Moses and Aaron. After the sacrifices in the sanctuary of the Tent of Meeting containing the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron must take a live goat. "He is to lay both hands on the live goat and confess over it all sins of wickedness and rebellions of the Israelites, all their sins, and put them on the goat's head. He shall [then] send the goat away into the desert... The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place."

This goat is known as the scapegoat to confirm that the sins of the people have not only been forgiven but have been removed to a far place and forgotten. God does this for sinners today who confess their sins and accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour though the punishment He took on the cross for our sins.

The Lord God Almighty made His desire clear to His people. He wanted to establish liberty for all inhabitants. If the people freely obeyed His laws, they would live safely, and enjoy much food from the land (25:10,18).

The laws caused other nations to see the respect that believers had for God Almighty. The blood of a 'clean' animals sacrificed in worship by Israel also explains the final sacrifice of the blood of our Messiah, the sinless Son of God. The importance of this is shown throughout the Old Testament from the first sacrifice by Abel, through Noah's sacrifice after the Flood, through Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, through the Passover sacrifice in Egypt, through the commandments given to Moses on the way to the Promised Land, right up to and through the final sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The laws required 'perfect' offerings to God Almighty. However, the priests were told to accept any sacrifice to the Lord as holy from poor people even if imperfect (27:9-10). We must be careful not to ignore the sacrifices of all who seek to worship God.

## GOD'S SEVEN-DAY PLAN FOR MANKIND

Then God told Moses to remind the people of his Sabbath Day law. "You must always keep my Sabbath days... for all time to come" (31:13). "Do your work in six days" (31:15). It was so important that if they broke the Sabbath rule they deserved punishment, even death. The freedom from spiritual death that Christians receive through faith in Christ should not lead us to work for money seven days a week. By resting from work one day in seven "you will remember and know that I am the LORD God Almighty" (31:13).

God also wants us to remember that He made the heavens and earth in six days (31:17). He is Creator of all things including the Sabbath day. God loves everything and everyone He has created (Genesis 1:31; Deuteronomy 7:6-8). It is important for us to know this and care for the world that He created.

These were the last words that God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses was on the mountain for 40 days (24:18). Then God gave Moses the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments to take down from the mountain (31:18).



### Talk about this:

1. Do we trust God when there are many tasks to do?
2. Do we trust that God will find gifted people to do His work?
3. How does God encourage our faith to grow?
4. Why did God repeat the Sabbath day rule (31:13)?



**Think about this:** What are our motives for using our gifts and skills in the church? Are they to benefit us or to glorify God? Which brings joy in the end?



### Bible reading: Exodus 32

## THE LAW OF GOD AND AN IDOL

Moses had left his brother Aaron in charge of the people of Israel. While Moses was up the mountain, some of the people grew impatient. They said to Aaron, "This fellow Moses... we do not know what has happened to him" (32:1).

They disobeyed God Almighty and asked Aaron to make them an idol like the Egyptians worshipped. Some of the Egyptians had left Egypt and travelled with the people of Israel (12:38). They said, "Make us a god that will lead us" (32:1).

So Aaron made a statue out of their gold earrings from Egypt (32:2-4). It looked like a golden calf. The people of Israel had much gold and silver given to them by the Egyptians (12:35). They chose to use some of it to live and worship in a wrong way.

When the people saw the calf idol they said, "Israel, here is your god who brought you up out of Egypt" (32:4).

When Aaron saw it, he built an altar in front of this idol and said, "Tomorrow will be a feast day in honour of our LORD" (32:5). Aaron gave the people the choice between worshipping the idol made from gold or God Almighty.

The next day, the people got up early and offered sacrifices to Yahweh, God Almighty. Then, 'They sat down to eat and drink. Then they danced wildly in front of their god' (32:6). Idol worship and wild parties lead to sinful sexual behaviour.

This happened at an important time in God's plan for His special people and for the salvation of the world, when He gave laws and guidelines to Moses for holy living.



### Talk about this:

1. When we are waiting on God and nothing seems to happen, what does Satan try to do? (32:1).
2. How did God punish those who had sinned with the calf idol (32:27-29). Do we deserve eternal death for disobeying God?



**Think about this:** What do we say when unbelievers live in our land and tell us what to do? How do we control, for the glory of God, our powerful sexual behaviour that He has created and the temptation to worship false gods?

## GOD SAYS: "GO DOWN, MOSES"

On the mountain, God said to Moses, "Go down. Your people... have become very sinful. They have quickly turned away from what I commanded them. They have made themselves a statue of a god that looks like a calf. They have bowed down and sacrificed to it. And they have said, 'Israel, here is your god who brought you up out of Israel' " (32:7).

God told Moses to go down and leave Him alone. His anger was ready to destroy the people. "Then I will make YOU into a great nation" (32:10).

Moses ignored the offer of God to fulfil his promises through his own children instead of the children of Israel. He did not want fame for himself. He wanted the name of God to be famous and respected. He also wanted the children of Israel to be blessed by God. This is why we think of Moses as one of the great men of the Bible. He was humble and became one of the great servants of God. He understood the heart and mind of God and wanted God's purpose to rule in the lives of His people.

Moses pleaded with God not to let other nations see God's special people destroyed in this way, nor see His anger. "Please take pity on Your people. Do not destroy them" (32:11-12). Moses reminded God of His promise to Abraham to provide a big family who would live in the Promised Land for ever (32:13).

When Moses asked God to stay true to His own words, God had mercy and changed His plan (32:14). We, too, should ask God to forgive our nation and spare us His punishment and restore what we have lost through turning our backs on Him.

God chose ordinary people like Abraham, Jacob (Israel), Moses, Joshua and David to become great men of God because they were humble and knew how to obey Him and to lead and serve the people. Their relationship with God and their

In the third month after they left Egypt, the people of Israel camped in the desert in front of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1-2). It was here that God called all the tribe of Levi to serve Him as priests. They taught the Israelites the way God wanted them to worship Him at that time. The priests accepted the sacrifices from the people to God of animals, birds and also food (Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17).

The instructions for offering an animal to sacrifice before God in the Holy Place were most important in ancient Israel, originating from the time of Abel and established by Noah after the Flood. They provided forgiveness and life for individuals through the shedding of blood (6:24-30). It is called 'atonement for sins' and enables us to understand today what the death of Jesus on the cross achieved. Today, the blood of Jesus is sufficient for the forgiveness of all sins.

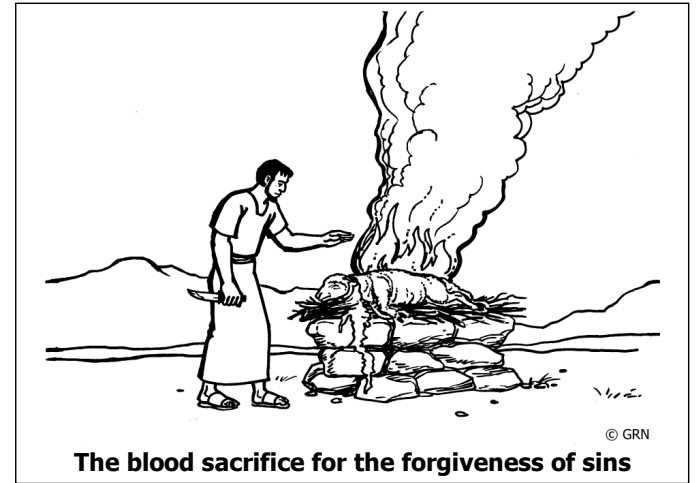
God sent Jesus to be the great High Priest so that, by giving His own sinless blood, all sinners could repent, be forgiven and come close to God. 'Without the giving of blood there is no forgiveness of sin' (Hebrews 9:22).

Leviticus therefore gave answers to the question: How can a holy God meet with sinful people? All people are sinners: God alone is holy. The key word in Leviticus is 'holy' (Leviticus 11:44). God is holy and just and He will not receive sinners. Leviticus tells how Moses prepared the Jewish people to worship Him. God did not allow the people to come near to Him. They brought their sacrifices for God to the priests for them to offer to God. Then the priests came near to God on behalf of the people and took God's forgiveness and blessings back to the people.

On the eighth day after his appointment, Aaron and his sons began their work (8:33). There was no long time of training or waiting. God told Moses and Aaron what to do and they obeyed.

When Moses and Aaron had done all that God commanded, Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed the people (9:22). Then he went into the Tent of Meeting. The priests received God's blessings and then they, too, gave God's blessing to the people.

We believe that God calls all Christians to be priests to the glory of God (1 Peter 2:9). It is therefore the duty of all believers to live the commands and truth



**The blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins**



### Talk about this:

1. What guidelines should church leaders follow when they ask for donations for the church buildings? Whose money is it really?
2. How do we seek God to know when it is time to 'move on' in our Christian life?

## CONCLUSION TO THE BOOK OF EXODUS

In Exodus part 2 we read how the people of God were set free to obey Him and to worship Him in faith by following His directions.

The laws of God show how much He loves us and how much punishment we deserve if we sin. They were a guide to His salvation plan which was fulfilled later through Jesus Christ, for the Jews and for all people worldwide.

Later, some of the religious leaders added to the laws and guidelines of God. They made it difficult for true believers to know God and live by faith in Him. This was not the plan of God. But at the right time, Christ came to set us free from the traditions of men (Romans 5:6). He was born of the Spirit of God to Mary as a baby in Bethlehem to be the Son of God (Galatians 4:4). His sacrifice restored our relationship with God. This enables us to worship and obey Him under the direction of the Holy Spirit, just as God planned from the beginning. Through Jesus, it is possible for His Father, Almighty God, to have fellowship with us just as if we had never sinned (Galatians 3:24). What amazing grace!

The book of Exodus concludes with God's glory filling the Tabernacle, just as His glory fills the believer who is cleansed from sin and is ready to be filled by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send.

## THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

In his third book, Moses wrote down more laws and directions given to him by God. It shows how our powerful, Almighty God, Yahweh, Creator of the Universe, is interested in the smallest things in the lives of ordinary people.

These laws included:

- Instructions for sacrifices (1:1 to 6:7).
- Instructions for the priests (6:8 to 7:38).
- Instructions for personal cleanliness (11:1 to 10:20).
- Instructions for the annual sin offering (16:1 to 17:16)
- Instructions for personal holiness (18:1 to 27:34).

1500 years later, Jesus reminded the people that the most important of these commandments is to love God totally and the second most important is to love others (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40). He said that these are the two great laws which fulfil all the other Old Testament laws. Then "everyone will know that you are My disciples" (John 13:35).

understanding of God was more important than their titles or position. This is an important foundation for serving God and loving others (Mark 12:29-31).

## MOSES MEETS JOSHUA AND AARON

Part way down the mountain, Moses met Joshua who was faithfully waiting for him. Moses and Joshua heard the sound of people shouting in the camp of Israel. Joshua thought it sounded like war in the camp (32:17). Moses knew the people had sinned (32:8) but he said to Joshua, "It is the sound of singing that I hear" (32:18).

When they came near the camp, Moses saw the golden calf idol and people dancing around it. He was overcome with anger. In his anger, Moses threw down the stone tablets and they broke into pieces (32:19).

Aaron met Moses and said, "Please do not be angry." Aaron blamed the people for the calf idol. "They gave me the gold," he said. "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (32:24).

Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is on the side of the LORD God Almighty, come to me" (32:26). All the sons of Levi stood with Moses. They were from the same tribe as Moses and Aaron.

God commanded the Levites to kill some of the people. They obeyed, and even killed some of their friends and neighbours. It was a sad day in the camp of Israel. About 3000 died. All this happened because men and women refused to obey God's commands. They received the punishment from God that they deserved.

We, too, deserve death when we sin, but Jesus took the punishment in our place so that we can repent and be forgiven and have everlasting life with Him. We must also be ready to forgive others and help them to repent and receive this same salvation of God through Jesus.

Then Moses said to the Levites, "You have been set apart to Almighty God today... and He has blessed you" (32:29). God chose the men of Levi to be His priests in Israel.

## MOSES RISKS HIS LIFE TO SAVE THE PEOPLE

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a terrible sin. But now I will go up to Almighty God. Maybe if I pray to Him He will forgive your sin" (32:30).

Moses risked his life to face an angry God. He acted as an intercessor to plead with God for the people. Moses was ready to risk his own life if God would forgive these people.

Alone, Moses went back up the mountain. He said to God, "Please forgive their sin, but if not, then wipe out my name from the book You have written" (32:32). The Bible calls this the Book of Life (Luke 10:20; Rev 20:15). It contains the names of believers in Almighty God who have been promised eternal life.

Moses was ready to sacrifice his life and his eternal salvation, if God would spare His people and forgive their sin. God was not angry with Moses. He replied, "I will wipe out from My book only the names of those who have sinned against Me" (32:33).

God said to Moses, "Now go. Lead the people to the place I spoke about. My angel will go ahead of you. But when the time comes for Me to punish, I will punish them for their sin" (32:34). God warned Moses that He would remember this sin whenever there was a need to punish His people 'with a plague, because of what they did with the calf Aaron made' (32:35).

Jesus not only intercedes for us at the throne of God but took the punishment we deserve. God punished the people at the time of Moses (32:28,35) but took the punishment Himself at the time of Christ.



#### **Talk about this:**

1. What did Aaron say when the people complained and told him what they wanted him to do (32:1-2)?
2. Where did the gold come from to make the calf idol (12:35)? What had God planned to do with these things (25:2-8)?
3. When God was angry, what did He want to do with the people (32:10)? What did Moses say to God and what was God's reply (32:11-14)?
4. What did Moses do when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf? (32:19-26)?
5. How did God punish those who had sinned by worshipping the calf idol (32:27-28)?



#### **Think about this:**

1. When God seems a long way off, why is it so important to understand the heart and mind of God? Is it important to understand the mind of Satan? Did the people of Israel deserve death for disobeying God? Do we deserve death for disobeying God? What do we teach others about the need to be holy?
2. What do we know about God's Book of Life? How should believers, who are promised eternal life with God, live today (Hebrews 10:22-25; Malachi 3:16-18)?



#### **Bible reading: Exodus 33**

### **GOD'S ANGER, PUNISHMENT AND GUIDANCE**

Perhaps Moses wrote Psalm 90 at this time. When the people rebelled against God, Moses saw His anger. "Your anger destroys us. Your burning anger terrifies us." The reason for God's anger is then explained: "You have placed our sins before You where You can see them clearly" (Psalm 90:7-8). He ended, "May the favour of the Almighty God rest upon us and establish the work of our hands for us" (Psalm 90:17).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. Was Moses allowed to see God's glory? Was he allowed to see God's face (33:22-23)?
2. Why were the people afraid? What did Moses do?
3. What did God say about His own nature (34:6-7)?
4. What new promises did God give Israel at this time (34:10,11)? What warnings did He give (34:12-16)?



**Think about this:** How can we live in the presence of God today? To whom do we go to find God?



#### **Bible reading: Exodus chapters 35 to 40**

### **THE PEOPLE LEARN TO OBEY AND FOLLOW GOD**

Most of the rest of the book of Exodus records God's detailed instructions to Moses to build the portable Tabernacle as a place of sacrifice and worship. The people were asked to bring offerings of the jewellery and cloth that God had provided in Egypt (12:35,36; 35:29). They gave back to God some of what He provided. These were used in the decoration of the Tabernacle. The Israelites were not forced to give; it was a freewill offering. And they were not expected to give more than was needed (36:5-7).

On the way to the Promised Land, the people of God grew in number. More importantly, they learned about Almighty God and His love and His holiness. And they learned about their sinful nature and the need for repentance and God's salvation. They also learned to obey God (39:42).

### **GOD'S GLORY AMONG THE PEOPLE**

Moses checked their work in building the Tabernacle. Everything was done correctly so that God could be worshipped and could receive the glory that was due to Him. Then Moses gave the people his blessing (39:43).

When everything was finished, the column of cloud, showing the presence of God, moved over the Tabernacle (40:34). The glory of Almighty God filled the tent. Moses could not go inside. There was fire in the cloud at night (40:38).

This cloud could be seen a long way off. Therefore, everyone knew that Yahweh, Almighty God, was with them at all times wherever they went. This meant that over one million people knew that God was with them. Also, the nations around Israel could see that Yahweh, Israel's God, was with His people. This also brought glory to God and respect for the people who belonged to Him. "I will show that I am holy among you. The nations will see it" (Ezekiel 20:41).

Wherever they went, if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out, until the day it moved (40:37). This discipline of not moving until God moves is an important principle for us today. Equally important, we must be willing to move forward in life when God directs us.

Moses did what God commanded and was there for a further 40 days. God came down in a cloud and stood with Moses. He described who He was to Moses: "I AM Almighty God, Yahweh, the Eternal One." Then He described His loving and holy nature: "I am tender and kind. I am gracious, slow to anger, faithful and full of love. I show love to thousands. I forgive those who do evil. I forgive those who refuse to obey. I forgive those who sin. But I do not let guilty people go without punishing them" (34:7a).

God then warned that the sins of the people would affect their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (34:7b). It is again clear from the Old Testament writings how much we all deserve punishment for our sins. But when we ask God to forgive our sins through Jesus, we are set free from the curse of our sins and the sins of others, including the sins of previous generations.

Yes, the blood of Jesus takes away our sin so that we are put right with God. Hallelujah! It is an amazing act of God's mercy. It was God's plan from the beginning that without the giving of innocent blood there can be no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). God accepts the sacrifice of Jesus as the full punishment for our sin. The barrier caused by sin is destroyed for all who believe. We can come to God the Father through Jesus the Son at anytime.

Moses bowed down with his face to the ground and worshipped God. Again, Moses asked God to go with His people. "Forgive our sin," Moses pleaded, "and accept us as Your people" (34:8-9).

God answered Moses and offered the same covenant that He had given before (24:8). "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonderful things that I have never done before in any nation in all the world. Obey what I command you today" (34:10,11). What a wonderful promise from a holy God who hates sin!

Then God named all the tribes of Canaan. He promised to drive them from the Promised Land. He warned Moses that the Israelites must not make a peace treaty with any of them, nor give their sons and daughters in marriage to them (34:12-16). There are several other warnings and in the next verses (34:17-26), some of God's commandments are repeated.

## **GOD'S GLORY ON THE FACE OF MOSES**

When Moses returned with the two new stone tablets, his face shone 'because he had spoken with the Almighty God' (34:29). Aaron and the people saw the glory of God on the face of Moses and they were afraid. Moses told them not to be afraid of him.

Moses told Aaron and the people all the commands God had given him. When he finished speaking, he put a veil, or cover, over his face. He took the veil off each time he went into God's presence in the meeting place in the tent.

God's love for His people is longsuffering but at that time He was angry and wanted to destroy them all, immediately. He did that once before at the time of Noah's Flood (Genesis 7:23-24). Moses pleaded with God so He punished only those who deserved to die. Then He wanted the faithful people to move on. They were sad because of the sins of the people and they were terrified to see God's punishment. Sometimes we all suffer as the result of the sins of a few people. We should pray to our merciful God for deliverance and guidance for the way ahead. Then we should be ready to move on in life and forget the past.

God commanded Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised..." (33:1). God promised the land of Canaan to Israel many years before, to Abraham and his family (Genesis 13:12-15). He repeated this promise several times to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel), as well as to Moses.

However, God did not want to go with the people because they had sinned. He told Moses that the people were stubborn. "I might destroy you on the way" (33:3). So God promised to send His angel ahead of them to show them the way. They must drive out the inhabitants from the land (33:2).

The people mourned because of their sin of rebellion. They were sad and took off their jewellery (33:4-6). They needed to humble themselves, remove their golden ornaments, which reminded them of the golden calf, and confess their sin to God (33:4). The Bible teaches us that He forgives all those who repent and turn away from their sin (1 John 1:9).



### **Talk about this:**

1. Who did God send to guide and protect the people (32:34)? Who did Jesus promise to send to help and guide His people today (John 16:7,13)?
2. Why does it feel sometimes that God has left us alone? Does God ever leave us?
3. How should we pray when the sins of a few people affect the lives of many people?



### **An intercessor for God**

Moses stood between God and the people. He was an intercessor. An intercessor seeks God's mercy on behalf of others. If you know someone who has rejected God, pray for them. Ask God to give them another chance. That is what Moses did for the people of Israel. He spoke to God about the sins of the people and their needs, so that God would have mercy, forgive them and help them.

Today, because of the sacrifice of Jesus, we are all allowed to come close to God. So when we pray for others we should ask God, in His mercy, to restore their personal relationship with Him.



### **The barriers caused by sin**

If we sin, and disobey God, we must repent. God will forgive us but it may feel at times as if He has left us. This is because sin causes a barrier between God and ourselves. We deserve to be left alone by God. That is the punishment we deserve. But He is merciful. He still loves and cares for us. God does not punish us in the way we deserve, but He forgives us through the sacrifice of Jesus who defends and justifies us (1 John 2:1). We may not always escape the results of our sinful actions or the sinful actions of others, but God will keep us in His presence as we trust and obey Him to move forward in our Christian life. The Holy Spirit will guide us and help us to do God's will. His angels will surround us. Jesus sacrificed His life in order to remove the barriers caused by sin so that we can have fellowship with God. When we have confessed our sin and received forgiveness we must not allow the guilt and memory of sin to destroy our relationship with God or with others.

## **THE TENT OF MEETING WITH GOD**

Because of Israel's sin, God withdrew His presence from the camp. Moses knew that a holy God would not come near to meet with such unholy people. Moses went outside the camp and put up a new meeting tent (33:7). This action reminded the people of God's holiness.

Anyone who wanted to ask God about something went out to the tent and spoke to Moses. Moses took their requests to God. Every time Moses went into the tent, the cloud of God's presence came down and rested at the entrance. In the tent, God spoke to Moses face to face (33:11). Joshua guarded the tent.

When the people in the camp saw the cloud at the entrance of the tent, they all stood and worshipped God.

## **KNOWING GOD PERSONALLY**

Moses and Aaron saw God's miracles in Egypt and how God answered their prayers for the people. God told Moses to lead these people; but who would help him now? Aaron had failed God; only Moses stood before God for the people. He was Israel's intercessor: he repeated the words of God to the people and he told God the needs of the people.

Moses was very shocked by the sins of the people and the warnings given by God. He wanted to understand God better. He needed God's encouragement. "If You are pleased with me", Moses asked God, "teach me Your ways so that I can know You and continue to please You. Remember, this nation is Your people" (33:13; Psalm 103:7). Moses wanted to know God more and more so that he could help the people more and more to become the children of God. This is the heart of a true Christian leader of today.

When we draw close to God in worship, prayer and reading or listening to His truth, He is able to bless us. He does this by changing our sinful minds and bad habits and restoring hope and peace to our hearts. In this way, we are blessed by God and we become a blessing to others. This is a work of God's Holy Spirit.

Then God replied to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (33:14). This rest means peace of heart and mind. This is a very important gift from God that we should seek at all times.

## **MOSES PLEADS TO GOD FOR HIMSELF**

Moses wanted even more encouragement from God. "If You do not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that You are pleased with me and with Your people? You must go with us. How else will we be different from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (33:16)

Moses was bold in trying to tell God what to do! He reminded God of an important principle: God's people must be different to all others. When the people of Israel were still in Egypt, God did not allow the ten plagues of Egypt to harm the Israelites. The Egyptians saw this and feared God. We, too, should fear God and choose to be different from all other people on the face of the earth as we follow His ways. Above everything else, ask Him to go with you and give you His peace (33:14).

God said to Moses, "I will do exactly what you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name. I know you personally" (33:17).

Then Moses said to God, "Now show me Your glory" (33:18). Moses had previously seen God's glory in the cloud that went with them through the desert (16:10). But now he wanted to be sure of God's favour and blessing as he led the sinful and stubborn people into the Promised Land.

God answered Moses, "I will make all My goodness pass in front of you, and I will announce My name, Yahweh, Almighty God, before you... but you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and stay alive" (33:19,20).



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why should we say to God: "Teach me Your ways so that I can know You and continue to please You" (33:13,16)?
2. Why is it important that God's people are seen to be different to other people? In what ways does God want to bless us (33:14)?
3. Why is it good to remind God of the things He has said (33:12-17)?



### **Bible reading: Exodus 34**

## **MOSES PLEADS TO GOD FOR THE PEOPLE**

God then said to Moses, "Cut two stone tablets that are like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Then come up Mount Sinai. Meet with Me there on the top of the mountain. No one must come with you" (34:1-3).