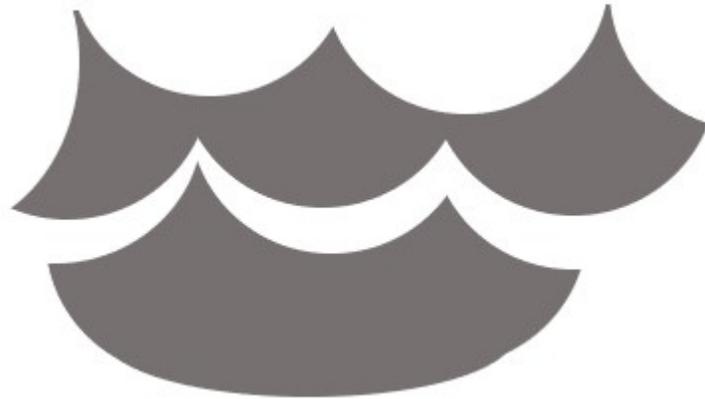


EXODUS

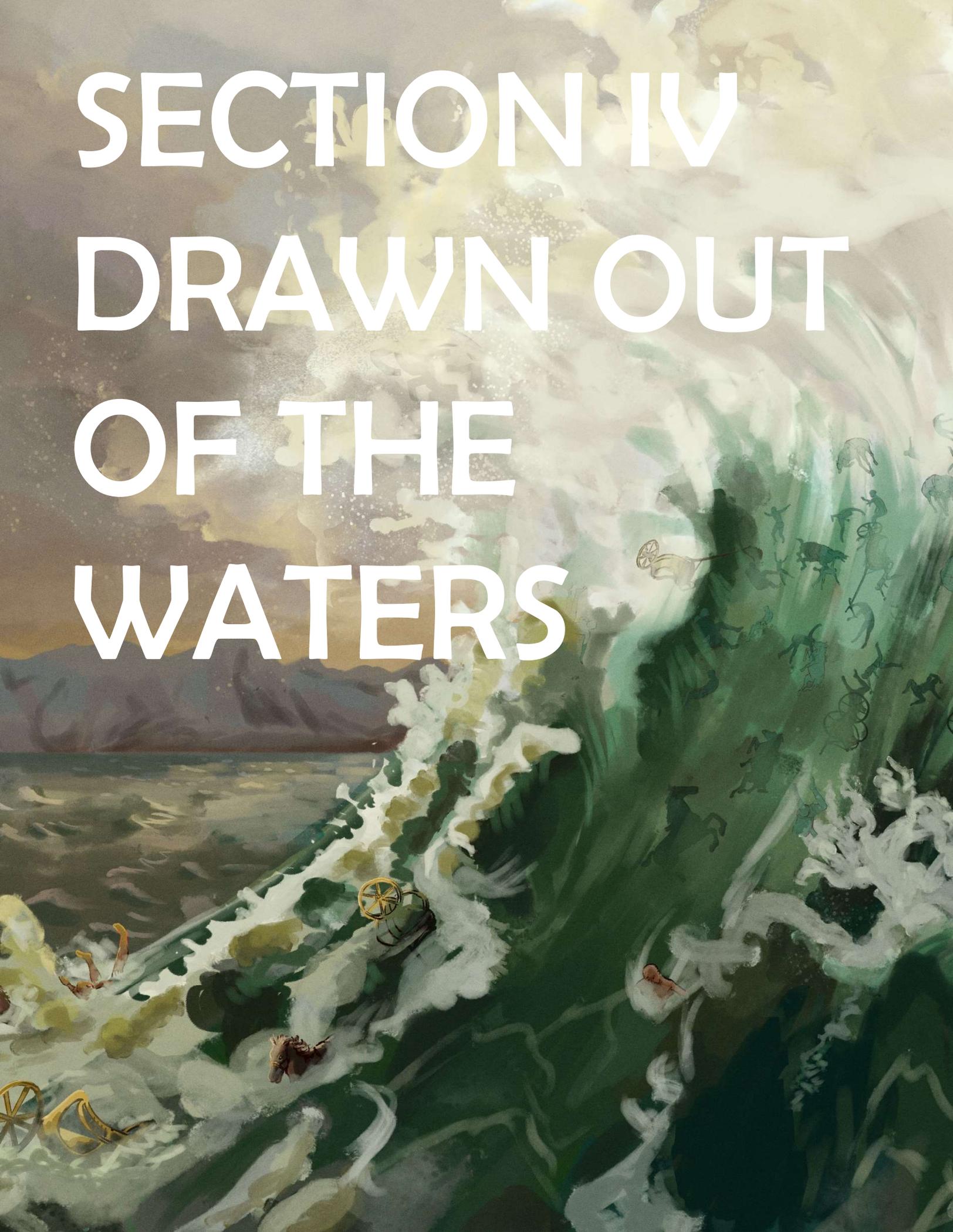
SO YOU MAY KNOW THAT **I AM** THE LORD



VOLUME II

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SECTION IV DRAWN OUT OF THE WATERS





LESSON **ELEVEN**

EXODUS 13:17-14:31

**You are a servant of a
NEW MASTER**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



Learn the distinction between redemption and salvation.



Understand God's purposes: why does He save?



Hope in God for His salvation.

Leader Notes

What a great passage to lead a discussion on! With redemption fully accomplished and the people out of the land of Egypt, God is their undisputed master now and He has a plan for Israel. He is about to lead His people into the wilderness to learn five lessons before they get to the Mountain of God. All of these lessons will involve Israel learning who God is and their relationship to Him. Five times, they will see God's salvation. They have experienced God's redemption - the transfer from one master to another. The Passover accomplished and commemorates that redemption. But redemption alone is not the whole picture. Now they will see His salvation. Salvation involves more than just being rescued from danger; it involves being saved FROM the power and the presence of our enemies and being saved TO the power and presence of our God. The Red Sea owns a special place in the Scriptures because it is the first great act of salvation. It will often be looked back on and discussed throughout the scriptures. But salvation stories imply hardships. If there are no hardships, no enemies, no tough circumstances, there is no need for salvation. We can ask why God does not just get rid of all of our enemies, especially in tough times. The answer might be because God has a higher purpose for you and that involves looking forward to something so much greater!

Scripture Reading

This discussion will draw from the story of the Red Sea found in Exodus 13:17-14:31.

EXODUS 13:17-14:21

Discussion Questions

1. At what times in your life do you look forward to spending eternity with the Lord the most?

Read Exodus 14:10-18

2. Observe the text: How did the Israelites respond to seeing their old master? (10-12)

3. The people cry out to the Lord AND complain to Moses. How well do you think these two responses fit together?

4. Why do you think the people were still so afraid of Pharaoh?

5. The Bible says that our sin nature, the world, and the devil are our enemies. Are there times in your life when you have had mixed responses when these enemies attacked? If so, when? Why do we have mixed responses like this?

 6. Observe the text: What does Moses tell the Israelites they will see? (13-14)

7. Israel has already been redeemed; they have transferred from Pharaoh to God. Here the word “redemption” is not used, but instead, the word “salvation” is used. What does salvation mean in this context?

 8. Those who believe in Jesus now belong to God, we are redeemed. We have also been saved from the penalty of sin (Eph. 2:8), yet the Bible says that we are still “being saved” (1 Cor 1:18) and we still look forward to a “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). What does salvation mean in these verses?

9. Observe: Why did God not just kill these armies when He redeemed Israel earlier? (15-18)

10. How might this help us make sense of why our enemies are still around? How can this influence our response to their attacks?

CALL TO ACTION

 What is a way that you can turn your back on your old masters of the flesh, the world, and the devil, and trust in God's salvation in this next week?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Hebrews 11:29**

2

Food For Thought

Faith and Sanctification. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned." -Hebrews 11:29

Would you have walked out into the sea? You might think, "Of course! What other option was there? Face Pharaoh's army?" But take some time to think about what walking into the sea meant.

Waters are a place of death. Two walls of water on either side of them does not change that. In some ways, it makes the whole thing seem more frightening. Water does not just hold itself up in walls. How long can those walls last? If those walls do what water has always done, everyone in the water is dead. The Egyptians learned this. They entered into those waters at the proud command of Pharaoh and they learned that those waters were death. Walking into the waters was walking into death for both groups. Only the Israelites did so by faith.

In order to be changed by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we must face a situation that might as well be death as well. We have to face our sin and confess it as sin. That means we have to lay aside all of the rationalizing of sin. That means we have to lay aside all of the excuses we make for our own sin. That means we have to be willing to give up our sin and the way of life we have built for ourselves around it. We will have to die to our sin.

What will I do without that sin? Who will I be without that sin? Can I live without it?

God is calling you to enter the waters of death to your sin by faith in Him. It might be a scary thing to do. But God can see you through this death to your sinful desires and give you life on the other side of that process. Today, no matter how long you have been a Christian, will you face the sin in your life with Him? Will you confess it as sin to the God who redeemed you with the blood of His Son?

3

Meditations for the Day

- Are there any sinful attitudes or actions that you are harboring in your life? Why is it hard to confess or forsake these attitudes or actions?
- How can trusting that God has something better for you than your sinful attitudes and actions help you forsake them?
- What does God have for you that they could never offer?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Isaiah 43:1-2**

2

Food For Thought

I Will Be With You. "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you..."

God was calling His people to trust Him through some very trying times in Isaiah. These were not days that would be easy for them. These were days when obeying God was going to come at the price of danger for His people. But God tells them what they need to hear, "I will be with you."

Just as He was with His people when they went through the sea, He would be with them in these trying times. How could they know He would be with them? Because of what He had already done. He had redeemed them. They were His. They could trust that He would be with them.

And He will be with you through the hardships in your life. He will be with you if those hardships are caused by your sin, lovingly guiding you back to Him. He will be with you if those hardships are caused by your obedience to Him, lovingly walking with you through the hardships. He will be with you if those hardships are a result of the fallen world we live in, lovingly pointing you to glories to follow.

How can you know He will be with you? Because of what He has already done. He has redeemed you. He has summoned you by name. He says that you are His. He has tied Himself to you and you to Him so much that Jesus went through the waters of death for you so that He could bring you to the other side.

3

Meditations for the Day

- What are some hardships that are in your life today?
- Were these hardships caused by your sin, by your obedience to God, or just by the fallen world we live in?
- How do you know that God is with you in these hardships and how can that help you walk through them in a way that honors Him?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **1 Peter 1:3-5**

2

Food For Thought

A Salvation ready to be Revealed. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Israel was saved from Pharaoh's armies at the Red Sea and saved to, ultimately, serve the living God in the promised land. They were saved from something and saved to something. We know that we were saved from the penalty of our sin to a new life in Jesus Christ as well. We were saved from something and saved to something.

But here Peter speaks of a future salvation. It is one that we do not have yet. It is one that is "ready to be revealed in the last time." What salvation is he talking about here? He is talking about the bodily resurrection from the dead into our incorruptible, undefiled inheritance forever. We will be saved from death's clutches and saved to an eternal life with God.

How will we overcome the power of death over us? We won't. We don't have to. We are kept by a power greater than anything we could ever imagine. We are kept by the power of God through faith. His power will overcome death for us. We will, like the Israelites, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today." It is the hope of that day that we have placed in our heart when we are born again. It is that hope that will be accomplished when we are raised from the dead.

3

Meditations for the Day

- How does resurrection from the dead change your view of physical death?
- What does God have in store for you after resurrection?
- What can you do today to live in the hope of the resurrection?

LESSON **TWELVE**

EXODUS 15:1-21

**You are a servant of a
GOOD MASTER**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



We who are redeemed by the Lord, are called to a life of worship and service. Why? Because He is a good Master.

Leader Notes

The long dark night has passed. A short time earlier, as the sun was about to rise, the congealed waters were ordered to resume their usual liquid state and cover up the imperial forces which had been sent to destroy God’s first-born son, Israel. Now, in the early morning light, Israel gathers at the shoreline, watching the remnants of the most powerful army on earth float in the waters, a few bodies washing up on the otherwise peaceful shoreline.

Likely, it is silent. What can you say about what has happened in these last few, desperate hours? Then, the realization begins to set in...

They’re gone. My enemies are all gone. Those who had enslaved us all these years are gone. Spectacularly, overwhelmingly, awesomely defeated. Such that my enemies can never recover, can never reclaim, and never re-enslave me again.

Who did this? The LORD. He is a Warrior. His right hand shatters the enemy. He overthrows those who rise up against Him!

It is the LORD! Who is like You, O LORD?

And then, from somewhere in the middle of the approximately two million human beings, the leader raises his voice. He begins the “Song of the Sea”:

“I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted.”

Yes. Yes! We must worship the LORD! And hundreds of thousands begin to join their voices: “The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation!” More and more join until all the people are singing and dancing there on the beach! The LORD says He has redeemed us (vs. 13), we have been purchased (vs. 16)! And He will bring us home to, “the mountain of Your inheritance...Your dwelling...”

The shoreline reverberates with the sound: “The LORD shall reign forever and ever!”

This song and its theme resound throughout scriptures, sung by people redeemed from the enemy by the mighty hand of the Lord God right up to today, and will continue into the future (See Revelation 15:3).

Come. Let’s join our voices to the choir of the redeemed!

Scripture Reading

This discussion will draw from the story of Israel worshipping God in Exodus 15:1-21.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think you would feel if it was you standing on the shoreline that morning?
2. How are verses 1 and 2 a good example of worship? What is the place of worship in your life?
3. What does it mean in verse 3 that “The LORD is a warrior”? How does the LORD act as a warrior for us today?

4. From verse 9, describe what the enemy desires to do to the redeemed. How do we see this in operation today?
5. How will other nations react to the news about what the Lord has done for Israel? (verses 14-16)
6. How does the Lord feel about His people, Israel? What other passages show that He feels the same about the church?

7. How might you answer the central question of the song (vs. 11): “Who is like You...O Lord?”
8. What are a few of the thoughts from the “Song of Moses” that stood out to you?

CALL TO ACTION

The Song of Moses (also known as the Song of the Sea) is a testimony of what God did for Israel. This week, would you be willing to share with someone (or your small group) what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you? How has He redeemed your life?

REFLECTION: At the Red Sea, God saved Israel physically and nationally. Yet their individual hearts would remain a spiritual battle ground. Only those who chose to follow the Lord by faith, whole-heartedly, looking forward to the coming Lamb of God, would be saved after their physical death.

Now, how is it between *you* and the Lord Jesus Christ? He has provided awesome salvation by His death on the cross. Have you firmly believed that He did this for you, the sinner? If not, what holds you back? If you have believed, are you singing the song of salvation? (In your heart, if not out loud) Are you walking with Him to the land of promise? Does He reign in your life?

If you would like to discuss these or any other questions, please speak with an elder or a spiritually mature believer. We are here for you (John 15:12-13).

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is 1 Corinthians 1:9

2

Food For Thought

God's Great Desire What is God's greatest desire concerning His people? We can certainly think of many great and noble tasks that He may want us to do. We are commanded to reach the world with the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20), to grow up to maturity in the faith (Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 6:1), to serve faithfully in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), and to love one another in the same way that Jesus has loved us (1 John 4:7). But do these things represent God's great desire for His people?

Early in his first book to the Corinthians, Paul summarizes a list of God's blessings to the believers by saying,

"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor 1:9).

We are called to have fellowship with Jesus. This is the great desire of God for His people. He makes this clear throughout the Bible:

"They shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God." (Exodus 29:46)

"Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you." (Leviticus 26:11)

"My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people." (Ezekiel 37:27)

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

"Abide in Me, and I in you." (Jn 15:4)

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them" (Revelation 21:3)

In Exodus 15, As the people of God celebrate their salvation on the far shore of the Red Sea, the great song turns from what God has done, to what He is going to do:

"In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation." (Exodus 15:13)

The final goal is not salvation, though salvation must occur first in order to reach the final goal. The final goal is that God wants to dwell with His people. To have deep, vital relationship. To live together. To know each other personally, to interact and work together. To have communion.

It is with this loving, familial relationship in mind that the "Song of the Sea" concludes:

"You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever." (Exodus 15:17-18)

3

Meditations for the Day

May we be encouraged by God's great desire for His people, and may our great desire be for Him!

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **John 4:23**

2

Food For Thought

True Worship. As followers of Jesus, we have a high position as His people, His peculiar people. We also have a high calling to serve the risen Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. And, we have no greater privilege than to, by faith, enter into His presence and offer Him worship. But what is worship?

There are many definitions of what worship is. Perhaps the simplest is this: worship is telling God about God: Who He is, what His character is like, what He has done, how He has loved, what sacrifices He has made. Worship focuses on God, and removes the focus from the worshipper. Jesus explained to the "woman at the well" that true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth. To worship in spirit means that we must first be in a right relationship with God, that our spirit is in agreement with His spirit, that there is no sin blocking fellowship between the Creator and His creature. This relationship starts at salvation and continues throughout eternity.

To worship in spirit also means that it must come from the "heart", where the will, the mind, and the emotions are centered. The will is intentionally submitted to the authority of God; the mind is stimulated by the truth of God, and the emotions are stirred by the thought of God.

To worship in truth means we must have a knowledge of God. This knowledge is based on the truth of the Word of God about Who He is, what His character is like, and what He has done. That which is not based on truth cannot be called worship.

Jesus' description of spirit and truth provide the perfect balance in worship. To worship in truth, without the spirit, leads to joyless legalism and dryness. To worship in spirit without truth leads to shallow, emotional experiences where the feelings are the object rather than the Lord.

On the bank of the Red Sea, Moses and the people of God worship Him in spirit and in truth. Their spirits are perfectly aligned with God. Their hearts are full of what God has done for them. At this moment, there is nothing between them and their Redeemer.

Using music as the powerful tool that it is, they sing the truth of God to their God: "I will sing to the Lord". They exclaim who He is: "The Lord is my strength and song,...my salvation,...(He is) a warrior." They marvel at His character: "...the greatness of Your excellence,...Your burning anger,...Majestic in holiness,...Your lovingkindness..." They recite His wonderful deeds: "The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea!" "...You overthrow those who rise up against You." "You have led the people whom You have redeemed...to Your holy habitation."

Finally, the people proclaim their loyalty and love to God: "The LORD shall reign forever and ever." This infers that His reign will be over them as His subjects. Though short lived, this moment of worship is one of the high points in all of Hebrew history. In all of this, the worshippers are only mentioned as the beloved objects of God's blessing and protection. The listener only hears about a great, saving, warrior God.

The worship is not restricted to a certain section of the people. All the people sang: men, women and children. Because all had passed through the Red Sea. That is what worship is: God's people telling God about God, based on the study of His Word and their experience with Him.

3

Meditations for the Day

How is your worship? Do you spend time telling God about God? Are your will, mind and emotions stirred by the thought of Who God is? By all He has done for you? When you sing, do you sing to Him? About Him? Is your spirit in communion with His Spirit? Are you fueling and preparing your worship by studying about Him in His Word?

Is there anything in this Song of Moses which you can use to worship your Savior? Then don't let the moment pass. Take that thought, right now, and express to God what you think of Him, "for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." There. True worship!

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker." -Psalm 95:6

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Ephesians 6:11**

2

Food For Thought

No Weapons, Just a Savior. The Christian life is one of spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:10-19 instructs the believer to "Put on the full armor of God" so that we may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil and to resist in the evil day. It describes wonderful and powerful weaponry: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, gospel shoes and an arrow-quenching shield of faith. Under a helmet of salvation, we are to wield the sword of the Spirit, and remain in constant communication with the Lord, our Captain, through prayer.

All this, so we can live victoriously, fighting the good fight and bringing honor to our King.

But it is not so with our salvation. There were no weapons for us to use in procuring salvation. We were helpless, defenseless and without hope. Our sin condemned us before a holy God. We were doomed, damned, and bound for destruction. All we had...was a Savior.

A Savior. That's all Israel had as the enemy sought to overrun them on the western shore of the Red Sea. They had no weapons to speak of. No strategy. No defense against all the royal armor of Egypt bearing down on them. Just...a Savior.

But He was all they needed for salvation. He defeated the enemy, brought them to safety, and sent them on a journey to walk with Him. He would arm them, lead them, teach them to live in victory. They would not listen and suffer defeats, finally listen and win and move forward. Sound familiar? But He would not leave them.

Jesus, and what He did on the cross, is all that is needed for our salvation. He tells us to believe in Him for salvation... and it is done, according to His promises (Jn 3:16; 3:36; 5:24, 8:24). In this, we rejoice! Like Israel on the eastern shore, we cannot help but rejoice in our salvation! And the joy continues in our Christian life as we put on the armor of God, growing to maturity (Heb 6:1), being faithful and fruitful until He calls us home. Then we shall enter into our full inheritance granted to us by our Lord Jesus. Then, we shall see Him face to face in all His glory.

Jesus, our Savior.

Until that time: Onward, Christian soldiers!

3

Meditations for the Day

Take some time to thank Jesus that He has won the battle for us.

LESSON THIRTEEN

EXODUS 15:22-17:16

**You are walking with God
in the wilderness**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



God's rule is kind, loving, and forgiving – the exact opposite of the kingdom from which we were delivered



We can and should trust God's loving rule even when our situation is not exactly how we want it to be



God uses testing in our lives to show us things that we need to know about ourselves

Leader Notes

The deed is done. Yahweh has redeemed Israel out of Egypt. Pharaoh, who had claimed to be the master of the Israelites, has watched first his country and then his glorious army be utterly destroyed by God, and he has now been left on the farther shore of the Red Sea as the Israelites journey away into the wilderness under a new Master. But, what awaits the Israelites in the wilderness? Now that they belong to Yahweh, will their lives be different compared to when they belonged to Pharaoh? Across these chapters, we will watch God caring for His own people, demonstrating Himself over and over, through His tender, loving care, to be everything that Pharaoh was not. God provides healing, sustains life, and gives victory to this former slave nation. As this relationship grows, there will also be testing on both sides. God will test the Israelites in order to reveal their own hearts to them, as well as to demonstrate to them their need to trust Him. The Israelites also will test Yahweh, but theirs will be a different type of testing: an unlearning, unbelieving, even rebellious testing.

Scripture Reading

This discussion will draw from the stories of Israel's testing in the wilderness in Exodus 15-17.

Discussion Questions

1. Romans 6:22 tells those of us who are believers that, though we were once slaves of sin, we have now become slaves of God. Think back to the time that transition took place, the moment that you were saved. What changes did you notice in your own life immediately after you "transferred ownership?"

-  2. What specific examples do you see in these passages that highlight the difference between belonging to God and belonging to Pharaoh? What do each of these contrasts tell us about God?
3. In these passages, the Israelites consistently complain, even though their lives have been changed dramatically for the better. Why do you think this is? What are they implying about God by their complaints? Do the Israelites have any specific evidence to back up or to refute the accusations that they are making against God?
4. In what specific ways can this complaining tendency show itself in our lives today? What are we implying about God when we complain? Do we have any specific evidence to back up or to refute the accusations that we make against God by our own complaining?
5. In Exodus 5:15-18, the Israelites complained to Pharaoh. Now, here in these passages, the Israelites complain to God. Compare Pharaoh's response to the Israelites' complaints with God's responses to His people's complaints. In what way do God's motivations, priorities, and attitude toward the Israelites differ from those of Pharaoh?
-  6. In chapter 16, verse 4, God says that He will test the children of Israel in order to see whether they will walk in His law or not. They then proceed to fall flat on their faces as a result of that test (verses 20, 28). What was God intending to show the Israelites through this? What should have been their response?
7. In Deuteronomy 6:16, the Israelites are commanded not to test God again in the way that they tested Him in the episode of the water from the rock. Jesus quotes this command when the devil suggests that He throw Himself down from the temple (Luke 4:12). What specifically is entailed in testing God in this way? What would it look like for us to test God today? Why does God make such a big deal out of telling us not to do it?
8. In the battle against Amalek, Joshua and the Israelite army were fighting on the ground, and Moses, Aaron, and Hur were on the hill with the rod of God. Were both groups necessary? If yes, in what way was each necessary? If not, which group was unnecessary and why? What was God teaching His people through this? What parallels do you see with our lives today?

CALL TO ACTION

Something that we do not see much from the Israelites in this section is gratitude towards the Lord for the wonderful changes in their lives ever since He redeemed them. We should make sure not to commit the same sin of ingratitude. For what post-salvation changes in your own life do you want to make sure you give thanks to the Lord?

-  1 Corinthians 10:6 tells us, in reference to the Israelites' experience in the wilderness with God, that "these things became our examples." What example do you see for yourself in these chapters, and in what specific way can you apply that example in your life this week?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **John 6:49-50**

2

Food For Thought

Bread from Heaven. Hundreds of thousands of people in a barren wasteland. They had brought food with them at the beginning of their journey, but by now all their reserves have been used up. At any other time, this would be a hopeless situation, but not now. God is fully capable of providing for His people's needs, and He provides in a way that no one would have possibly imagined. He rains down bread from heaven on them! And this is not a one-time occurrence – He provides for them for 40 years in the same way!

And yet, at the end of the 40 years, hundreds of thousands of those who had eaten it would be dead. Not as a result of the blessing itself, of course, but as a result of their unbelief in and disobedience towards the God who had so lovingly cared for them for so long. Manna was a wonderful blessing; it sustained the life of those who ate it; in a sense, it gave life, but only in the same sense that any other ordinary food could. But God's provision of bread from heaven was never intended to stop there. Manna was to be the precursor and picture of something much greater! About 1500 years later, the true Bread from heaven would be given to the world.

Billions of people are spiritually dead. Everyone was born a rebel against God, and each one has consciously committed acts of rebellion as a matter of habit. This should be a hopeless situation, but God is determined to save the lives of these rebels. And, just as a spiritual problem is infinitely greater than a physical problem, so the spiritual solution will be infinitely greater than the physical solution. God will again send bread from heaven, bread to these rebels so that all may live, but this bread will be priceless. It will be His own son, sacrificed on their behalf.

And the life given by this Bread will be infinitely greater than that given by manna. All who believe in the Son of God will have eternal life, life that nothing can take away! So that, at the end of 40 years – at the end of 40 centuries – at the end of 40 millennia – those who have eaten of this Bread from God will still live life in the completest way possible, praising their Lord who saved them! "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

3

Meditations for the Day

- In what way have you experienced true satisfaction, life to the fullest, as a result of knowing the Lord Jesus?
- How could you share this with someone who does not yet know the Lord?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is 1 Corinthians 10:4-6a

2

Food For Thought

Unresponsive. Imagine the scene: an angry mob facing off against a solitary man in the middle of a dry, barren wilderness. The crowd demands water, and it is pretty clear that, if the man is unable to produce, he will be summarily executed. Suddenly the man holds up the rod, and a hush falls on the crowd. He strikes a nearby rock, and immediately the rock opens, and water comes out of the rock! Water pouring out, creating first only a wet spot on the ground, then a pool, then an actual stream of running water! The people rush forward and drink to their hearts' content. The man is once again vindicated as spokesman for the living God, and more importantly, the people once again see that their God is able to provide all that they need.

You would think that would be enough. This should be the end of any doubting, any questioning, any unbelief. This last miracle should really and truly establish forever that God is both fully able and fully willing to care for his people in any situation whatsoever. The hundreds of thousands of people who witnessed this event should live transformed lives, finally trusting the God who has proven himself faithful yet again, in spite of His chosen people's unbelief.

But seeing, or even experiencing a miracle does nothing to change the heart. A sinner is expected to respond to God's grace in his or her life. An experience alone will do nothing of true spiritual value in a life. Change of lasting value will only come from a humble and repentant heart, a heart broken before God. And lack of lasting change is exactly what we see. Continuing right on after this event, the children of Israel lived in regular disobedience and unbelief. And ultimately, aside from two godly men, none of the adults who experienced this miraculous event would live to enter the promised land.

And, in the passage that we read today, this story is held up as a warning for us. Just as being among God's chosen people did nothing for those who chose to resist God's Spirit, so being in a church and seeing God's work does nothing for those who are unwilling to respond to God's grace. Friend, have you responded in faith to the God who has given His only Son for you? It must be a response from the heart; nothing less will suffice to save you.

3

Meditations for the Day

What great works have you seen the Lord do? How do you think God wants you to respond to those?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **1 Samuel 15:1-3, 10-33**

2

Food For Thought

War from Generation to Generation. When God declares war, it's serious business. The Amalekites tried to hurt God's people, and, as we have already seen in the case of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God does not stand passively by when that happens. He caused Amalek to be defeated by those they had ambushed, and furthermore, He declared war on Amalek for the rest of their existence as a result of their actions.

For us as believers, God has done something similar with our old nature. There is nothing redeemable about our old self; instead, when we trusted Christ, God had to give us an entirely new nature that has no connection with sin whatsoever (Col 3:10). One day, when the Lord returns, that old nature will finally be destroyed forever. However, we still fight it today, and we have been strictly commanded to make no provision for it (Rom 13:14).

Back to Amalek. Hundreds of years later, God continues to mean what He had said just as much as when He first declared war on Amalek. Saul, the leader of God's people, didn't share God's zeal. Instead, he felt that there was room for negotiation, for compromise. If God wanted to declare war on Amalek and to destroy that nation, fine. Saul could mostly go along with that. But when it came down to the actual act of destroying Amalek and all that belonged to that nation, Saul was not quite ready to go all in. After all, there was stuff Saul could gain from Amalek; livestock, valuables, perhaps even a king's ransom! So, when God told Saul to utterly destroy Amalek, he almost did. But not quite. Saul saved just a little bit as spoil for his soldiers and for himself. And, as a result, Saul was rejected as king. Partial obedience in God's eyes is no obedience; in fact, it is stubbornness and rebellion.

We today have been placed in a very similar situation to solve. God has declared war on our sinful nature. We are to give it no quarter, but rather to put it to death daily. But, just as there were things that belonged to Amalek that were appealing to Saul, so there are aspects of our sin nature that we may be reticent to bring an end to. Attitudes, secret sins, personal offenses, and more. But let us not act like Saul and fool ourselves into thinking that God will accept partial obedience in this. No! Instead, let us follow the example of the elderly Samuel, grab a nearby metaphorical sword if necessary, and do uncompromising and unrestrained business for God!

3

Meditations for the Day

- Where have you been acting like Saul in fighting your sinful nature?
- What would it look like to fight against sin in a way that truly pleases God?

LESSON **FOURTEEN**

EXODUS 16

**You are made to enter into
HIS REST**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



- Understand the difference between earthly rest and God's rest
- Realize that no amount of effort will ever give you rest or peace
- Understand what Sabbath has to do with God's purposes: why does He save?

Leader Notes

What does it mean to be the people of God? How are God's people to be distinguished from any other people who walk the dust of this fallen world? You will not be able to identify them by their riches. They will not be immune to disease or impervious to arrows. They are the ones who don't work on Saturdays. In this beautiful story at the center of this wilderness testing, God institutes the Sabbath: He requires a group of former slaves to take a day off every single week. In so doing, God would communicate several truths that were essential for these slaves to be transformed into the people God intends to use to make His name known in the earth.

1. Life does not come as the result of my toil but comes from God. This would be particularly difficult for slaves to believe. Their whole lives taught them that if you work hard you stay alive, but God is telling them something different: "trust Me, I will provide for you tomorrow." They had to act out this trust in only gathering enough manna for one day at a time - totally dependent on God to provide for the next day. This would be doubly true on the Sabbath - to take a whole day off would require a great deal of trust in God - that's a whole day of not gathering, a whole day of not cleaning or mending clothes, a whole day of not preparing food. If God did not come through, they would be in trouble.

2. Sabbath connects them to the divine purpose God has for them. In Exodus 20, God will tell His people to observe sabbath because "in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day." Because God rested, Israel is to rest. God wants His people to embrace the reality that they are totally different from the animals. Despite what Pharaoh, their old master, may have told them, their lives are about so much more than toil. They are made in the very image of God and are His special people for whom He has beautiful and glorious purpose. In six days, God created beautiful things and then rested to enjoy what He had made - and He wants His people to follow His example after a fashion. They can't speak planets into existence like God, but they can make a tent where God will dwell. They can make sacrifices, a pleasing aroma to that God who flung the stars into space. They can be a kingdom of priests, bringing blessing to the whole world, preaching the truth of YHWH to every nation. God has given them gifts and instructions and everything they need to make this world into a beautiful place, and at the end of all that good work they can sit down and rest, even as God rested.

GROUP DISCUSSION

You are made to enter into HIS REST

3. Sabbath would point to a hope of ultimate rest in God (Hebrews 4:1-10), it would be a reminder that time is a gift given by God, and it would teach them to rely on God as the ultimate and sufficient provider. The divine purpose God had for them explained in #2 above, would never be realized in their lifetimes. But that should not stop them from looking forward to it. God wanted them to have a reminder, every single week, that they were made for more than working the dirt and staying alive. They are eternal beings made to accomplish God's awesome purposes for this world. That is really hard to remember and often very difficult to believe. The daily grind can pull our eyes down from heavenly things to earthly things very quickly. So every week God had them act it out. They acted like God did on the 7th day of creation week. They acted out the reality of who they really were – not beings made for toil but beings made to serve God and rest in Him.

We see in Israel the same thing we often see in ourselves – that it is relatively easy to pay intellectual assent to these truths and it is incredibly difficult to believe them in a way that leads to real action and life change. I can say that I trust God with my tomorrow, but I still have a really hard time ceasing from my toil because I think if I just work a little harder, I can get what I've been looking for. I think I can find satisfaction through my own toil instead of trusting God to give me the desires of my heart. I can say I know that God has an amazing purpose for my life, but I get so enamored with the shiny things that this world has to offer. I can say I believe in the hope of future rest, but all too often I'm more interested in getting earthly rest here and now. Let's agree with God that we need to rest in Him and enjoy His Sabbath.

Discussion Questions

1. What does our culture think of as “rest”?
-  2. On day 1, after bread fell from the sky God told Israel to only gather enough for one day – why would that have been a difficult command to follow? Can you think of any modern analogies? What are some ways that we, as modern believers, find it difficult to trust God to provide for tomorrow?
3. On day 6, God told Israel to gather enough for two days – why would this have been a difficult command to follow? Sometimes, God calls us to step out in faith in a way that our experience tells us is a bad idea. Can you share any examples? What happened?
4. This passage is painting a different picture of rest than what our culture may think it is – God is giving them difficult tests! Read Isaiah 30:15 and discuss the difference between what our culture means by rest and biblical rest.
5. Give some examples of things in your life that demand work but bring you joy or peace.
6. In Exodus 16:29 God calls Sabbath a gift to His people. In the ancient world it would not have been easy to lose one day of work every week – that could risk putting you way behind on taking care of the farm, competing in business, etc. In what ways is Sabbath a gift?

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

-  7. The author of Hebrews tells us that Sabbath is pointing towards a rest even more profound than the rest the people got from Joshua. At the end of the book of Joshua, these former slaves are settled in a land of their own and they have rest from their enemies all around. What greater rest is He talking about?
8. Hebrews 4:11 tells the reader to “be diligent to enter the rest” which at first sounds like a contradiction. What does that mean? How can we be diligent to enter rest? The following verse (vs. 12) seems to hint that the word of God will play a key role in this – how does the word of God help us to enter God’s rest?

CALL TO ACTION

-  The word Sabbath means “to cease.” In order to enter God’s rest, we first need to cease from our toils. That is, to stop relying on our own efforts to find peace, satisfaction, hope or life. In our day and age, toil can mean many different things – could mean jockeying for position at your job, making one more post to solidify your social status, or even wringing your hands in worry about the same old thing for the thousandth time. What is one thing you will cease from for at least one day this week?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Exodus 31:12-17**

2

Food For Thought

gods in the gold. It seems a little funny: God has just given Moses plans for a huge, huge undertaking. Everyone in Israel will have a job to do and a part to play in this Tabernacle. But before Moses is allowed to leave the mountain and tell anyone anything about this great work to be done, God stops him and reminds him about the need for rest. This rest is holy, sanctifying, and if you don't honor it, you'll be cut off and die. It's obvious God takes rest pretty seriously. So seriously He did it Himself! Writing this from the Bay Area, I can see why God would include it. We're so anxious to go, and keep going, and climb the ladder to the next thing that we never pause to rest and be refreshed. And based on what happens next in this story, I have to believe that the Bay Area is not so different from the Israelites, as their inability to rest and wait for God gets them into heaps of trouble.

The story of the tabernacle is a good one because it shows us how God wants to accomplish His work through us, and it also paints a contrasting picture of what happens when we try to accomplish work apart from God. We see that impatience and lack of faith leads to wasted assets, missing out on God's work and rest, and ultimately (for some) punishment. Moses was up on Sinai for 40 days, and as God was giving him clear instructions and plans for equipping the people, Israel was sitting down the hill waiting rather impatiently. The story of the golden calf opens with:

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Essentially, they didn't know what God's plan was and got tired of waiting so they decided to make gods of their own. What really gets me is that while they're talking about why they need a new god, they mention what God did for them in bringing them out of Egypt through Moses. It's like they're saying, "Yes, we know He did all that great stuff back then, but it seems like nothing is happening now, so we'd better move on. Let's worship a farm animal." But before you're too hard on these dummies, let's not forget the 4 fingers pointing back at us. How often do we see God do huge acts of deliverance for us (like, oh, I don't know, saving us from the bondage of our sin and into eternal life through His Son) and then as time goes on and the initial excitement wanes, we think, "well maybe God isn't doing anything in my life anymore." Not long after that we find ourselves investing in our jobs, relationships, hobbies and whatever else we can look to, to find that initial thrill of purpose and belonging that first came when we were delivered. The problem with the calf and with our modern "gods" is that, while families and hobbies are good, they are no replacement for waiting for God's plan. Furthermore, we squander our resources on these replacements, and are left drained of our time, money and energy. Like the Egyptians' plunder that Israel melted to make the calf, we often burn ourselves out trying to chase after fulfillment, when God often is asking us to Sabbath with Him.

3

Meditations for the Day

- What are your "calves" or the things that you tend to turn to when you find yourself spiritually bored, restless, or frustrated?
- How could you rest in the Lord today? (Not zone out in front of Netflix, but actually rest.)

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Matthew 11:28-30**

2

Food For Thought

Equipped for service. As a 3rd generation city slicker who has always lived within walking distance of at least 8 Starbucks, I have never actually put my hand to a plough, but my distant kin were farmers and I read *Little House on the Prairie*. Thus, I can say with pretty decent assurance that I have a handle on the subject of yokes and oxen. It's because of this deep-rooted farming instinct that I have always found Matthew 11:28-30 to be a bit befuddling. Jesus calls us to come and get rest with Him by taking on His yoke and burden. The farming instincts tell me enough to know that a yoke involves work, heavy, burdensome work; and in my experience, work and rest tend to be mutually exclusive. You work hard and then you rest (or rather, black out with a full bag of chips and come to at the end of 2 seasons on Netflix with an empty bag of chips and greasy fingers). But this is not the way God created rest and work to be. God did not make us to toil and labor until we're so exhausted we become zombies that watch the same shows again and again to "unwind and forget it all." God created work for us to do: hard, burdensome work. But within that hard work is built in beautiful, life-giving rest.

Exodus gives us a beautiful picture of the contrast between the work-rest that Jesus refers to, and the toil that we are accustomed to think of when we say "work." Consider, for a moment, how lovely it is that God takes a bunch of former slaves and makes craftsmen out of some of them. In the beginning of Exodus 31, after God has laid out His clear plans, He specifically names the people to do the task. Imagine being Oholiab and Bezalel and having the Lord call you out by name in the Bible for your craft! But the burden does not rest squarely on their shoulders; God explains these men have been filled "with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft." Moreover, He continues "I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you..." Many have claimed that the men were given a chance to use the skills they had developed in Egypt, but the text clearly says that Spirit of God filled them with the skills. Jesus' burden is light because He equips us to accomplish the task, in the very same way that God equipped these men to construct His tabernacle. For the first time in their lives, these men were going to be making things of Spirit-filled beauty that they would be able to enjoy in their worship for the rest of their lives! No more strawless bricks here!

Now, if you were a pessimist, you might argue that God equips some people to do His work, in this case only 2. You might even use that as a nice excuse to sit on your fanny, because you're clearly not one of them. But don't get too cozy- let us not forget that in the beginning of chapter 25 God asks Moses to take a contribution from all of Israel. He says in verse 2 "From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me" and then goes on to list all the materials needed for the tabernacle. Everything from gold to goat's hair, from stones to spices are required for this tent. Furthermore, let's not forget that Israel is currently comprised of former slaves, living in tents in the wilderness. Where did they get gold and those spices and stones? The Egyptians! God promised them they would plunder the Egyptians, and as they walk out of Egypt, their pockets are heavy with the treasures that were willingly given to them by their former owners. God had their enemies physically hand them the things they would need to contribute to His work! How can we ever say "I'm not _____ enough to be a part of God's work?!" Clear instructions and supernatural equipping sound like the beginnings to a pretty restful project to me!

3

Meditations for the Day

- What gifts has the Spirit equipped me with? What may be some ways that I could use them to serve the Lord in a new, rejuvenated way?
- As we think about rest and work, consider what you do for rest. Do you fall into the zoning out trap? How can you replace escapism with good, creative, peaceful rest that may even help further the Kingdom?

1 Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Luke 4:16-22**

2 Food For Thought

Jubilee. There is no shortage of astounding claims Jesus is making about Himself in this passage. The reaction of those present shows that they find what Jesus is saying about Himself hard to believe, to say He least (vs 22). But I want to focus on the last clause. As the anointed of the Lord, the Father has given Him the duty to, "proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." What year is that? This is a reference to the year of jubilee. Every 7 years, the Israelites were to observe a special "sabbath year" in which they would let the land itself rest. They were to let their fields lie fallow and trust that what the Lord provided in the 6th year would be enough to carry them through. However, every 7th seven, something even more extraordinary was to happen. Leviticus 25:8-10 states

You shall count off seven Sabbaths of years, seven times seven years; and there shall be to you the days of seven Sabbaths of years, even forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. You shall make the fiftieth year holy, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee to you; and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family.

The year of jubilee was to be a total reset. Everything was to go back to how it was when they first divided up the land at the end of the book of Joshua. EVERY debt was to be forgiven; EVERY slave set free. This is so outrageous it is hard to even imagine. How would an economy even function if all debt was cancelled every 50 years? It is not terribly surprising that we do not have a record that Israel ever actually practiced this. It's very easy to see how greed and selfishness would prevent those in power from wanting to return land they bought to its original owner. It's just as easy to see though, how much hope this would give to the poor. Any family that had fallen on tough times and had been forced to sell their land would have the chance to get it back. They would be able to start fresh. Those who were enslaved to another because of debt, could have those debts wiped clean. What an opportunity!

Sabbath was a day when Israel did not work, acknowledging that their daily bread came from God. The year of jubilee was like a mega-Sabbath, acknowledging that all things come from God. This is the year that Jesus came to proclaim. His kingdom was to be one that would bring liberty to captives, liberty to the oppressed. He was coming to offer a total reset – a chance for those who are caught in hopeless debt to start over, to have their slate wiped clean. So, is Jesus promising to erase your mortgage if you only trust in Him? No, the debt He is dealing with is much more serious than that. The spiritual debt we have to God because of our sin is more important than any monetary debt. Praise God, Jesus came to deal with that!

However, we should not make the mistake of thinking that because Jesus is proclaiming something spiritual, that means it has no implications for the physical. What was the year of jubilee about for ancient Israel? It would have been a resounding proclamation that all possessions come from God and belong to Him. It would have said that every person in this kingdom had value, they all had a place (land) regardless of choices in their past. Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God – and He is saying that kingdom is going to act like jubilee has come.

3 Meditations for the Day

If I am a follower of Jesus and am part of that jubilee kingdom, what would that look like for me? Here are a few examples: If I have two tunics I should give one up to one who needs it more (Luke 3:10-11). The things God has trusted to me are as much my brother's as they are mine (Acts 2:44-45). I should forgive debts of any kind considering how much I have been forgiven (Luke 11:4). What else?

LESSON **FIFTEEN**

EXODUS 18

You are learning to
LIVE FREE



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



Discuss how our testimony of what the Lord has done for us can impact other people.



Discover what God shows us about the future kingdom of Jews and Gentiles together.



Learn how Israel begins to organize as a nation after centuries of slavery.

Leader Notes

Moses had married a woman of Midian when he ran away from Egypt 40 years earlier, and she must have gone back to Midian with their two sons while Moses was dealing with Pharaoh in Egypt. Her father Jethro now brings her back to Moses after hearing about what God has done to deliver Israel. Here we finally learn the name of their second son, Eliezer, and what his name means.

Jethro is described as a priest - the third person in the Bible described that way - but of what god or gods we are not told. A priest represents God to people and brings people before God through prayer and sacrifices. The first priest named in the Bible was Melchizedek, who gets a lot of attention in the book of Hebrews as a priest of God Most High. While we are never told directly that Jethro is a priest of God, this chapter gives us several hints that he might believe in the one true God.

We see here a wonderful reunion taking place, with testimony given of the Lord's work through Moses and a clear response by Jethro. They rejoice together in a banquet with the elders of Israel, foreshadowing the future banquet in the kingdom of God prophesied later by Micah and mentioned even later by the Lord Jesus.

The next day Jethro observes Moses providing judgment for the people. The line to see Moses must have been quite long, as people were there all day. Jethro suggests that Moses get some help from qualified leaders who can help judge the smaller matters, so he can focus on the weightier matters and teach the people God's laws. This is the beginning of Israel organizing their civil government as a nation. Note the qualifications given for these new leaders, as it is important for leaders to have the character qualities God desires in them. Jethro tells Moses to check with the Lord about this idea, and Moses implements it as Jethro heads off the pages of Scripture back to his land of Midian.

Scripture Reading

This discussion will draw from the story of Moses' meeting with Jethro in Exodus 18.

Discussion Questions

1. Jethro is described as the priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moses. To understand the long-term connection between the peoples of Israel and Midian, look back about 500 years to the birth of Midian in Genesis 25:1-2; what ancestor of Israel was also the father of Midian? A few generations after that, what did some of Midian's descendants do to Israel's son Joseph? (Genesis 37:28,36)
-  2. Jethro is called a priest. What earlier priest was called a priest of God Most High? (Genesis 14:18) From our chapter, what evidence do you see that Jethro, the priest of Midian, was possibly another priest of God Most High?
3. How do the names of Moses' two sons give a testimony of what God was doing in Moses' life around the time when they were born? (vv. 3-4)
-  4. When Moses tells Jethro about Israel's recent history, what phrases does he use to bring the Lord into it? (v. 8) How does Jethro respond to Moses' testimony? (vv. 9-12)
5. How might v. 12 be a foreshadowing of Micah 4:1-2 and Matthew 8:11?
6. What does Jethro observe about Moses the day after their banquet? (vv. 13-14) How does Moses explain the two jobs that he is doing? (v. 16)
7. What reasons does Jethro give to Moses for his counsel? (vv. 17-23) How could Jethro's advice help Israel transition from an unorganized group of slaves to an organized nation of free people?
-  8. What important qualities does Jethro say the new leaders/judges should have? (v. 21) Discuss why each of these qualities is important for a spiritual leader.
9. What would Moses' roles be under the new system recommended by his father-in-law? (vv. 19, 20, 22) What important step does Jethro encourage Moses to take before he implements this new system? (v. 23) Why was that step necessary for this plan to work?

CALL TO ACTION

- What can we learn from Moses' testimony to Jethro (v. 8) about whom we should include when we tell people about our own lives? What might be the result if we do?
- Which of the qualifications listed for leaders (v. 21) do you need to grow the most in?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Exodus 18:1-12**

2

Food For Thought

What's in a Name? In Exodus 18 Moses reunites with his family and his father-in-law Jethro. The text takes a moment to give us some details about Moses' family that at first may seem inconsequential. We are told the names of each of Moses' two sons along with their meanings. One of those names, though, should ring a bell: we already were told Gershom's name and its meaning back in chapter 2 (2:22). Moses named that boy when he was at his lowest point. What a name to give your son! "I am a stranger." It really gives you some insight into how Moses must have been feeling about things: he felt estranged and purposeless, having been rejected by his people. He felt he had no place to call home.

Well, we can learn something about Moses' psychology from the name of his second son as well: "the Lord has been my help." Chapter 18, when Moses reunites with his family, is a time spent in reflection. Consider, Moses and Jethro take time to catch up (18:7), Moses reflects on what happened in Egypt (18:8), Jethro reflects on what God has done for Israel (18:9-11) and they take time to worship (18:12). It's like the narrative takes a pause from the intense action of Exodus for a moment while these two men just consider all that the Lord is doing. Up until now the story has been all plagues, miracles, seas parting, bread from the sky, and battles. After chapter 18 the story will be about burning mountains, earthquakes, the voice and face of God. But here in this quiet moment they take some time to reflect. I don't think it's a coincidence that at this point in the story Moses chose to tell the readers the name of his second son, because it was at this moment in Moses' life that he fully realized the truth of that boy's name. The name means "the Lord is my help," but now Moses can apply that name to a specific situation: The Lord has been my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.

The fascinating thing is, Moses must have had a second son at some point between chapters 2 and 4 because in 4:20 we see that "Moses took his sons and set them on a donkey." So there surely must have been more than one. Moses must have named that boy a long time ago, and I'm sure at the time he named him he believed those words "The Lord is my help," but now, on the other side of Egypt he can appreciate them in a new kind of way. I think, when Moses was reunited with his family at the beginning of chapter 18, it really dawned on him just how appropriate that name was, just how true the words were.

It can be incredibly easy to get caught up in the business of life and never stop to think about what God has done and is doing in our lives. Often there are things we think we know; lessons we think we've learned that haven't fully hit home yet. When we don't take time to reflect it can be easy to forget how far we've come. Maybe once you, like Moses, felt like a stranger in a foreign land: without purpose and without a real sense of belonging anywhere. How many, with that story, has God helped by putting them in church families - communities where they belong and have purpose surrounded by people they love. It's important to take time to reflect on these things, to take a break and remember where you were and realize what the Lord has done in your life.

3

Meditations for the Day

- What are some ways the Lord has been your help?
- When are you prone to forget all God has done for you? What are some ways you could better remember?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Deuteronomy 1:9-18 and James 2:1-5**

2

Food For Thought

Partiality in Judgement "You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it." - Deut. 1:17

"My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." - James 2:1

Today's passage from Deuteronomy takes place about 40 years after the events of Exodus 18. Moses is recounting Israel's history to a new generation, since the previous generation had died during those intervening years in the wilderness. He tells them what changes in leadership he had made after Jethro's visit, and fills in more of the details for us.

One thing we learn is that Moses had the people select their own leaders and bring them to him, so he could appoint them in confirmation of their new roles. In verse 16, he charges these new leaders to judge the people righteously. Then in verse 17 he gives them several specific guidelines about how they are to do that:

1. Do not show partiality in judgment. Each person who comes to you with a problem is to be heard and to be treated fairly.
2. Hear the small and the great alike. Their temptation was to show favoritism to the rich and powerful over the poor, everyday person. Similarly today, we are not to show favoritism to the rich over the poor, or to the powerful over everyone else.
3. Do not fear man. Judges could worry about how their decisions might come back on them in some way and be afraid to carry out a righteous judgment. But Moses tells his new leaders that the judgment is God's, not theirs, so they do not need to fear. The Lord will protect those who issue His righteous judgments.
4. Don't give up because a case is too hard. There is an appeal process in place where you can take these hard cases to Moses so he can hear them.

3

Meditations for the Day

Think about how these four guidelines are still very applicable to the church today. The passage in James shows us how necessary the first two still are for Christians in the New Testament era

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Selected Proverbs 1:5, 12:15, 13:10, 19:20, 27:9**

2

Food For Thought

"Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you." – Exodus 18:19.

Jethro saw that Moses was judging every dispute among his people by himself, and thought this was not a healthy situation for the long-term. So he offered Moses some counsel, which Moses took to heart and acted upon. Let's think today about how willing we are to receive good counsel from others.

Proverbs 1:5 tells us, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel." To get counsel from others shows us to be wise and understanding. Choose carefully who you get counsel from, as not everyone is pointing you in the direction the Lord wants you to go.

Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel." There is danger in thinking our own way is always right. We should get a second opinion from someone who is not as self-biased as we are. Who could you get counsel from in the decisions you need to make at this point in your life?

Proverbs 13:10 (NKJV) adds, "By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom." If we persist in following our own way because we think we know best, we are headed toward conflict with others – strife. Wisdom seeks the advice of others, perhaps several good counselors, so that we become well-advised.

Proverbs 19:20 exhorts us to, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days." Getting good counsel when you are younger can last you a lifetime, so that you make good choices in your younger years. These choices will carry forward into your later years, so that you will be wise for the rest of your life!

Proverbs 27:9 concludes our thoughts for the day with, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend." Good counsel from a friend who cares about you is compared here to the sweetness of oil and perfume. These leave a pleasant fragrance in our lives, the gift of a helpful counselor.

3

Meditations for the Day

How willing are you to receive counsel from others?



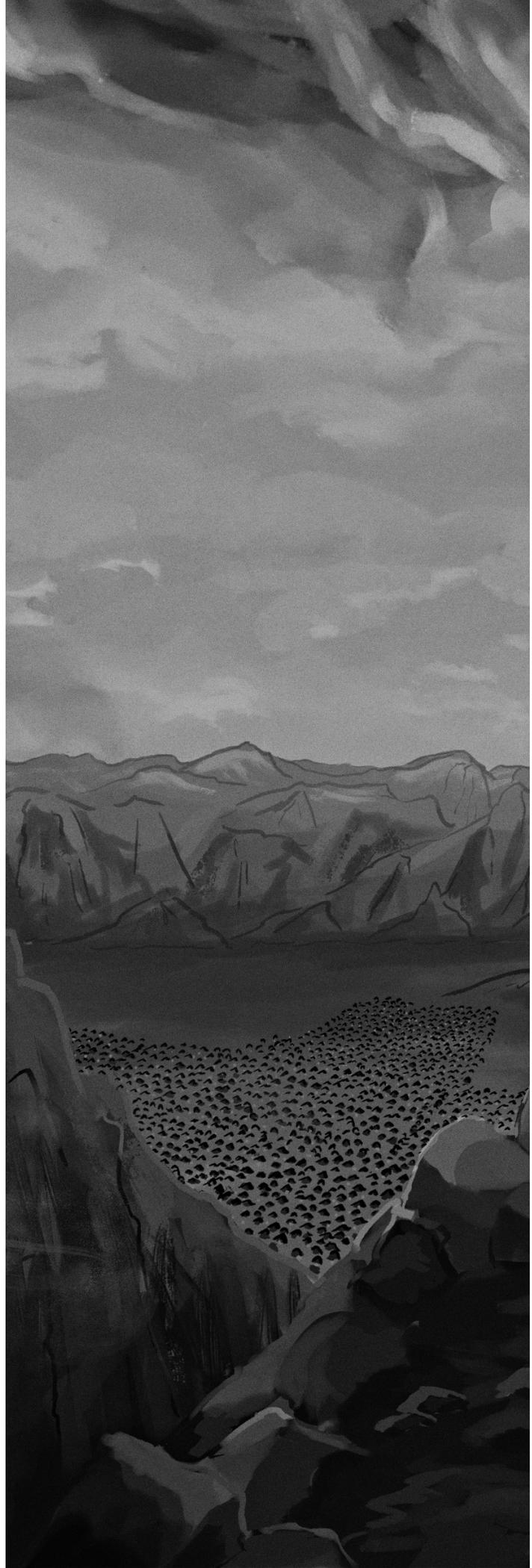
**SECTION V
MEETING
GOD ON THE
MOUNTAIN**



LESSON **SIXTEEN**

EXODUS 19:1-24:11

**You are under a
NEW COVENANT**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



See Moses as an intercessor & as God's faithful servant.



See this covenant experience through the eyes of the Israelite people.



Consider the covenant you have with God and how it has changed and continues to change your life.

Leader Notes

Moses brought the people before the mountain and prepared them to enter into a proposed covenant with God. Every command Moses is given by the Lord is followed. Moses makes sure to record for the reader each time “the Lord said” or commanded something and the corresponding response that “Moses did as the Lord commanded.” He continued to be a faithful servant of God and leader of the people of Israel. Next week we will review all the commands the Lord gives, including the 10 Commandments, which are all part of this covenant. This week, we look at the circumstances and story covering HOW it was given and the Israelite response to the proposal. God proposes that if they obey His commands, He will make them His own possession out of all the people of the earth. We know that they will not keep His covenant, but we see that they accept it as a nation. This scenario is similar to a wedding, where an officiant (Moses) intercedes between a bride (the Israelites) and groom (God) who are entering into a covenant. After the covenant is entered into, they celebrate with a meal. Despite the fear and trembling in chapters 19 and 20, you can really feel the joy of being God’s covenant people in chapter 24. This whole story has many interesting moments that we can easily read through quickly (two days of consecration, the sounds and sights of the mountain, being sprinkled with blood, some of the men seeing God). This week’s discussion is meant to take us through the process, while allowing the actual Law to shine through next week.

Scripture Reading

The actual text covered this week is all of chapter 19, 20:18-21, and 24:1-11.

Discussion Questions

1. Just as God had told him would happen in Exodus 3:12, Moses was now standing at the mountain as leader of the people of Israel after bringing them out of Egypt (19:1-2). Tell the group about a time or situation in your life where you saw God be true to His Word.

 2. A covenant is about to be entered into by two parties – between God and the sons of Israel. Review with your group the actions of each of these two parties over the course of the book of Exodus so far. How do their actions very clearly differentiate them from each other?

3. The covenant being entered into is described in Exodus 19:5-6. This covenant is an “if/then” statement, a conditional statement. Compare the covenant in these verses to the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Is the new covenant an “if/then statement” or something else altogether? Why is another covenant needed?

4. Put yourself in the sandals of an Israelite at this time. Try to picture what it was like to experience Exodus 19:10-20. Discuss with your group what these 3 days might have been like. For example, what would it have been like to consecrate an entire nation of former slave laborers and shepherds traveling through the wilderness?

5. How does creation react to the Lord visiting the mountain? How do the Israelites react? (19:16-20)

Read Exodus 20:18-21

6. What is the reason Moses gives for why God is visiting them in this way? How is the fear of the Lord to help the people? In similar fashion, how does a healthy fear of the Lord help us as Christians today? (Keep 1 John 2:1-2 in mind - that we have an advocate before the Father when we do sin.)

 7. In Exodus 24:1-11, the covenant is made official. Once again, put yourself in the place of the Israelites and talk about what this experience might have been like. Talk through the various perspectives: Moses, the young men who helped with the sacrifices in verse 5, the people, and the men in verse 9.

8. In 24:9-11, these men “saw the God of Israel.” They worshiped the Lord and celebrated their new covenant with food and drink together. Think back to when you entered into your own covenant with God, accepting forgiveness for your sins through faith in Jesus. How did you feel? In Luke 15:7&10, we are told of the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. How can we continue to celebrate our salvation?

CALL TO ACTION

How can you be faithful to the commands God has given you?

 How can viewing your salvation specifically as a covenant with God help in your everyday life?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Psalm 111**

2

Food For Thought

He will remember His covenant forever. The people of Israel had much to rejoice for. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He led them through the wilderness, providing for them along the way. He proposed and entered into a covenant with them to make them His own possession, a holy nation. He gave them His commandments and promised them incredible blessings if they would obey Him. Now read Psalm 111 in its entirety with this perspective (out loud, if possible). What a God He is!

Much of the language used in Psalm 111 reminds us of God's actions in the book of Exodus. Here are some examples:

"He has made His wonders to be remembered"

"He has given food to those who fear Him"

"He will remember His covenant forever"

"He has made known to His people the power of His works"

"He has sent redemption to His people"

"He has ordained His covenant forever"

What do each of these phrases remind you of from the story of Exodus so far? What God did for the people of Israel in their exodus from Egypt continued to be a reason for them to praise Him throughout the generations.

3

Meditations for the Day

- Consider God's goodness towards you in the many ways He has blessed you. Take some time to praise God for these things.
- Dwell on the fact that God remembers His covenant forever. How does that make you feel about the security of the covenant He has made with you through Christ?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Hebrews 12:18-24**

2

Food For Thought

Not Sinai, but Zion. The author of Hebrews spends much of the book talking about the differences between the old and the new, the good and the better. Much of the focus is on Jesus – how He is a better high priest of a new covenant by His own sacrificial blood. In Hebrews 12:18-24, we read a contrast of how we can approach Mount Zion, instead of experiencing the fear the Israelites felt at the foot of Mount Sinai. Instead of being terrified to come before God, we come “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.”

Examine the list of what Christians have come to in Hebrews 12:22-24.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

A few notes on these verses:

“Myriads of angels” refers to angels we will join in the presence of God, who are natural citizens of heaven.

“The general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” refers to the church of God whose names are written in the book of life.

“The spirits of the righteous made perfect” refers to the Old Testament saints, who believed and it was credited to them as righteousness.

“The sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” refers to the blood of Christ shed on our behalf. Christ's blood is a better sacrifice than the blood of Abel, whether we view that as the blood of Abel's sacrifice or the blood of Abel himself. The blood from either interpretation can't do anything for you and me. We needed the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Take a moment to recognize the grandeur of the future you have because of what Christ has done. Sometimes in our western culture, we can over-emphasize the importance of the individual. Being in Christ as an individual is amazing, but think of the large group of Christians over the history of this world that you are a part of. You have entered into a new covenant with God along with so many others. From those who first called themselves Christians to the saints at our church today, we have all come to “the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” You are part of a heritage of believers that will continue forever.

3

Meditations for the Day

- Take a few minutes to thank God for those who brought you to or taught you about Christ.
- How will you pass on the heritage you have in Christ to others?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **1 Peter 2:9-10**

2

Food For Thought

The new priestly nation. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."

These words from 1 Peter bring us back to that great covenant proposal that the Lord made to Israel at the foot of Mt Sinai. Look at the similarities between them:

"And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'" (Ex. 19:3-6)

What is similar is striking! We see that they were God's special people, a people to represent His interests on the earth, a people set apart for God's service, and a people whom God has brought to Himself.

When Peter applies the teaching about Israel's special office and responsibility under the old covenant to the church under the new covenant, he is saying that these roles were not lost or done away with! No, instead of doing away with them, God has now brought the church into these offices and responsibilities, under the new covenant.

So how do we fulfill our calling as His special people who represent Him on earth?

He tells us to represent Him by how we interact with those around us. Our interactions are our priestly duty. How do we declare His excellencies? By our interactions. Then he lays out the specifics for how Christians were to interact with outsiders (2:11-12), authorities (2:13-17), masters (2:18-25), spouses (3:1-7), and other brothers and sisters (3:8-12).

3

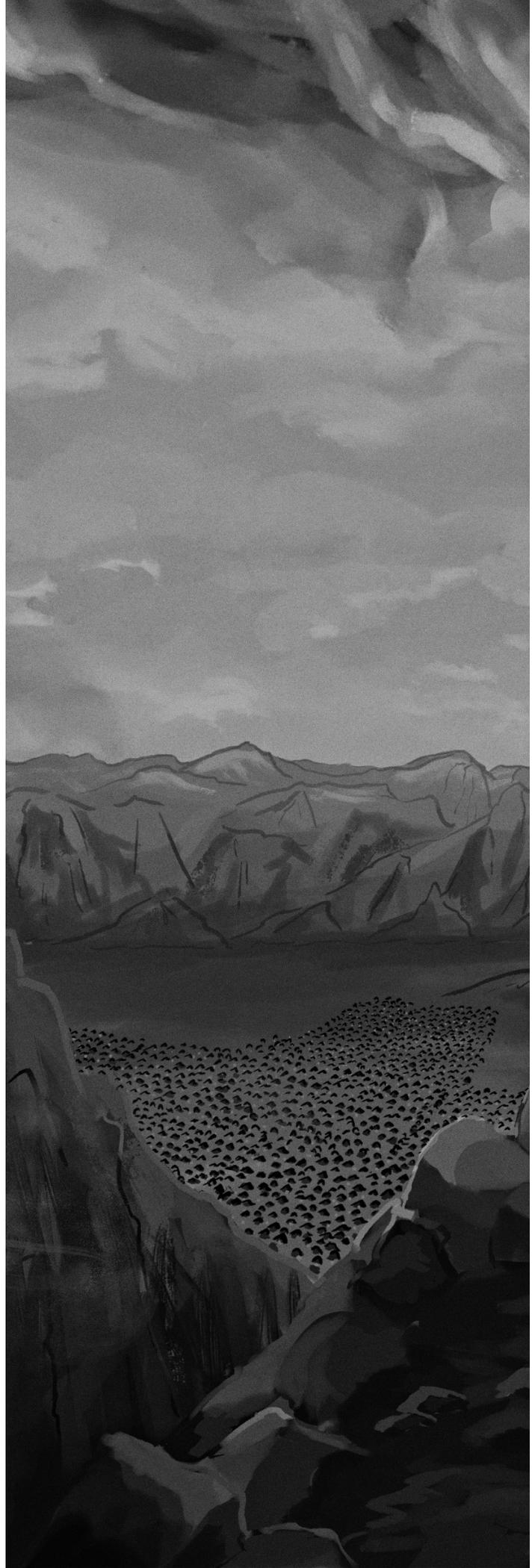
Meditations for the Day

- Pick one of the groups to interact with above and read what Peter says would be your priestly duty in these interactions.
- How have your interactions lived up to your priestly calling?
- How could you grow in these interactions to better fit your priestly calling?

LESSON SEVENTEEN

EXODUS 20:1-23:33

**You are part of a
MORAL REVOLUTION**



Discussion Goals

This group discussion is aimed at bringing out the following principles:



- See the character of God expressed in His covenant love for Israel.
- Understand God has offered a new covenant to those who believe in His Son.
- Understand how the laws of God could transform His people into a “kingdom of priests”.



Leader Notes

Last week we learned that God made a covenant with His people in the wilderness in the shadow of Mt. Sinai. We saw that the ceremony in chapter 24 is reminiscent of a wedding - a ceremony in which a covenant partnership is ratified. It would be a strange thing indeed if, after attending a wedding and hearing the vows spoken between the bride and groom, you decided that you were going to try to keep the vows made by one or the other. You were not part of the covenant! Those vows were meant for another not for you. It is the same when we, as modern Jesus followers, read the words in Exodus 20-23. We are reading the vows made between two covenant partners and neither one of them is us! So, is there anything we can learn? How should we read these words? I want to offer two perspectives on how to read Torah Law:

A. We are reading the terms of a covenant partnership. We should not think of these laws as “the things that make God happy.” Certainly, the Law is in alignment with God’s character and His purpose in the world but as soon as we start thinking about Torah (a word that means “teaching”) as universal principles on how humans should live their lives, we are missing the point. These are first and foremost terms of a covenant partnership between two specific parties at a specific time in history. There are absolutely principles we can draw from these laws that are universal and for all time but that needs to be done thoughtfully as it is not the primary purpose of this text. The reaction reading these words (i.e. witnessing this wedding ceremony) should inspire in us is to be more dedicated and loyal to our own covenant relationships. We too, just like Israel, have been offered entrance into a covenant relationship with the almighty God of the universe. The details of our covenant can be found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (also see Hebrews 8:10-12).

B. The Law shows us the wisdom and character of God, The Covenant Partner. If I could stretch this wedding analogy a little farther: imagine the groom wrote his own vows at this wedding you attended, and in them he described the perfect marriage. If he laid out a map that led to the perfect utopian relationship and he gave all the secrets of a vibrant marriage relationship, you would learn a great deal about the character of that groom. You would also be a fool to not take some notes for your own marriage. “The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.” Psalm 19:7. We can learn a great deal about who YHWH is by examining the terms of His covenant partnership with His firstborn son.

So, what are the main things we should take away from this big chunk of law code? If we hold the perspectives above in the right view, there is a great deal that we can learn from examining the terms of God’s covenant with Israel.

1. God’s people are to follow God’s word rather than human wisdom. We see again and again in this text that when God comes near to His people and when they obey His words, when they walk in His steps, they will know blessing unlike any they have yet imagined. Life is a blessing from God, and when He is near, life is the result. When God’s words come into our lives the result is inevitably the same: they make sense of the chaos. Disorder is left behind; chaos and darkness give way to order and light. (20:12, 20:24, 23:23-33)

2. God's people have purpose - He means to accomplish much through them. In 20:20 Moses tells the people that God has come to test them. Even as they had been tested in the wilderness, so they are being tested again. God is testing them not as a cruel teacher to show their inadequacy but as a benevolent king to test their loyalty - that He may teach them. Teaching them is essential because He means to accomplish great things through these people. They are to be a kingdom of priests, that is, they are to communicate God to the world. They cannot do that unless they know God's character and live as He would have His people live. That means they need to be truth tellers and promise keepers. They need to show mercy to the lowly and justice to all. If they don't do those things, they cannot really bear His name because they won't be representing Him. We get a glimpse of what the world could be like if Israel kept this covenant in the description of the Sabbath and feasts in 23:10-19. If the Sabbath was kept as God intended there would be unprecedented peace and rest in the land. The poor could pick up food out of any field they passed; even servants and the beasts know peace and rest. It's like the whole world is brought back into harmony.

3. God's people bear His image. God makes it clear in 20:22-26 that there are to be no sculptures of gold or silver involved in worshipping Him. Although this would have seemed crazy to the surrounding nations the reason for it is simple: God has already made images of Himself - man and woman! God has always meant human beings to be the ones who carry His image, and in His estimation we do it better than any block of shiny rock ever could. God tells His people that He wants them to bear His name (20:7). "Taking the Lord's name" is not so much about speaking it aloud as it is about bearing His name - taking it as a woman would take the name of her husband. He wants us to be His representatives on this earth! That gives us unbelievable privilege to approach His presence, to be a part of worshipping Him, but it also comes with incredible responsibility. His people needed to be holy and set apart if they were to be His image in worship ceremonies. He could not allow sickness, infirmity or even nakedness (20:26) near His altar. This has an impact on our conduct towards others as well. Since humans are made in the image of God, they should be treated with a dignity and sanctity befitting that position. In 23:1-9 we see that the justice Israel was supposed to maintain was to extend to all people, even the poor, the stranger and one's enemies.

4. God's people are to uphold His justice. 21:1-22:15 gives a long series of "judgements" describing how the Israelites are to deal with people and how they are to deal with property. For a group of former slaves trying to form a society these are essential moral signposts. The first thing God does is to limit and constrain the practice of slavery (21:1-11). They are not to carry away from Egypt any of the cruelty they were shown. If slavery is necessary in order to settle a debt, it is to be for no more than six years and the family of the enslaved are to be kept intact and cared for. Then God condemns violence in their society. No longer are they to solve disputes by striking one another as in Egypt. He then tells them to respect one another's property and to care for your own animals lest they be a nuisance or hurt another. God tells them to care about their fellow man, to uphold justice, and at every turn God is limiting cruelty or carelessness.

God was seeking to transform His people into priests, to make them people who could carry His name forward into the earth and show the world what He was like. That would require a moral transformation, it would require practices of holiness, and it would require God to be in their very midst.

Scripture Reading

This discussion will draw from the list of covenant terms presented in Exodus 20:1-23:33 and the "new covenant" presented in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Discussion Questions

1. Imagine yourself as Jethro: an outside observer to the covenant of God with His people Israel. You are not part of the covenant, but you have acknowledged YHWH as the supreme God. When you read the 10 commandments, what do you learn about who YHWH is?

2. In 20:18-21 we learn that the people are afraid to approach the fiery mountain. Moses tells them that they are experiencing a 'test' - that God's fear is before them in order that they may not sin. How was God testing them and why was God testing them? To what end?

 3. In 22:20-24 God expresses harsh punishments for violating those laws in particular - why does God take those ones so seriously?

4. Generally speaking, how would these laws transform life for a group of former slaves walking in the wilderness? What would their society look like if they lived by these laws?

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

 5. We've been looking at the terms of the old covenant, the covenant with Israel. What are the terms of the new covenant? In Luke 22:20, Jesus makes it clear that He is ushering in this new covenant - what are some important ways the new covenant differs from the old one?

6. One of the terms of the new covenant is that "they will all know Him, from the least to the greatest." What does that mean? Have you ever stopped to appreciate that a follower of Jesus can know God in a way someone under the old covenant never could?

 7. In the new covenant God states that He will write the laws on their hearts. Instead of having law code in stone, we will have law code in our very flesh. Later, He says that He will not remember our sins - that we will be justified by grace. We see from this, that even though participants in this covenant are under grace, it is still important that they behave in a way that is consistent with the character of God. Even though the believer is justified by grace Jesus still calls all to repent (Matt 4:17). Why is it important that we repent? Why do we need to undergo moral transformation?

8. If you have time, discuss the 10 commandments one by one and share one or two things they teach you about God and God's wisdom.

CALL TO ACTION

- What is one area where God wants to transform you?
- If this new covenant really applies to you, how should that change how you think about yourself? How should it affect how you treat other people?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Jeremiah 33:14-22**

2

Food For Thought

Freedom in Covenant. If you can break my covenant with the day and the night, then you might have a chance at breaking this one. That is what the Lord has to say about his promises to Israel. That is how sure His promises are. During the time that Jeremiah wrote these words things were looking very bleak for God's people. Remember, this is the same prophet who wrote a whole book called "lamentations." If you ever decide to write a book full of poetry called "wailings" you might be able to identify with the man. It looked as though God did not care for His people. But the word of the Lord is that the days are coming... days when his people will not be pitied, they will not be called slave, or serf or unfortunate or tortured. No, they will be known by another name: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. YHWH Tsidkenu. When things were at their darkest, and they were at their lowest, God was there. He was their covenant partner, come to lift them up to restore and to cover them with His righteousness.

In Exodus, God made a covenant not just with one man, but with an entire people. In some ways, that covenant was very restrictive. It required them to follow a whole slew of rules and regulations. It changed the way they ate, how they spent their weekends, how they dressed, how they married, and how they conducted their business. All covenants are similarly restrictive. If you get married, you can be sure that some of your freedoms will be taken away – either that, or you will have a very bad marriage. Your marriage will change the way you eat, how you spend your weekends, how you dress, and so on. Our culture tends to think that freedom is an end in itself, so any mention of the loss of freedom is looked on negatively. But what is freedom without love? It is only loneliness. What is freedom without purpose? It is only hopelessness. Any person who is at the end of themselves, who is trapped by the consequences of their own mistakes doesn't need freedom, they need love. They need friendship and rescue and covenant. They need boundaries and guidelines. Love is always restrictive, but not restrictive in the way that handcuffs are restrictive. It's restrictive in the way that an airplane is restrictive. There are a lot of rules you have to follow in an airplane – laws of physics, guidelines of the airline etc. – but it lets you fly. It's the only way to get where you want to go.

When God's people were trapped under the consequences of their sins, He didn't say to them "you wanted freedom, go ahead and have it." He made a promise to them, and the strongest steel couldn't break it, the sharpest knife couldn't cut it. He was there for them at their lowest because He said He would be. Covenants, far from making us feel trapped, make us feel free. They give us certainty and make us feel grounded. In them we can have confidence and security. This is never more true than in a covenant with God. God, who swears to His own hurt and does not change. In Him we can find real security and in that we can know real freedom.

3

Meditations for the Day

- What is one relationship that has provided security in your life?
- How can your relationship with God bring such security?
- How can you lean deeper into your relationship with Him?

1

Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is **Psalm 19**

2

Food For Thought

The Law of the Lord is Perfect. Imagine you are an ancient pagan peasant. You live in a world where you do not know what the gods want of you. It is a world where they are fickle, often silent and ever changing. Many ancient pagan prayers that archeologists have discovered sound something like "I'm not sure what I did wrong but I'm sorry, please send rain."

If that was your reality, how would you feel? The question of morality is one of the most important and fundamental questions in life. What is right? What should I do? These are not just questions for theologians and philosophers, they are practical questions we have to ask every day. How do I respond to the conflict in front of me? To that person who is undermining me at work or not pulling their weight on a group project?

Think of what a relief it would be to actually hear what God wants from you. To know His character and His judgements and His commands. You would find that to be welcome and helpful. That is how the psalmist feels about the Law. The judgments reveal the heart of his God and as such they provide direction for his life. They give wisdom and keep him from faults and mistakes. We take that for granted far too easily.

Often in evangelical Christian circles we talk of the Law as this yoke or burden that was foisted on Israel and we're so glad we don't have to deal with it. Not so fast. The law became a curse because we couldn't keep it, not because it was a curse! The problem was our flesh. The Law itself is perfect and it was something that could bring blessing into the lives of the Israelites.

We can often look at the commands in the New Testament to love each other, to care for our brothers and sisters, to live with radical generosity as burdens as well. Instead let's imagine life where we didn't have those commands and didn't know God's heart. Wouldn't that be worse? Those commands are a blessing in our lives - they tell us the wisdom of God, set our feet on the right path and prevent us from making mistakes. More than that though, they show us the very heart of our God. He is not hidden, mysterious and fickle. He can be known! And we can do things that delight and please Him! What a blessing to have His word in our lives.

3

Meditations for the Day

- How has the word of God been a light to your path?
- Consider what it says about God that He reveals Himself to us.

1 Scripture Reading

Today's scripture reading is Romans 8:1-5

2 Food For Thought

What the Law could Never Do. When the Lord gave Israel the Law through Moses He presented them with an incredible opportunity. God makes it clear time and time again in the five books of the Torah that obedience to the Law will bring blessing. If the people would only keep the commandments that God gave them, they would know peace, joy, and plenty. This would come about in at least two ways, first as a direct and supernatural reward from God for their obedience as His covenant partner. It is impossible to be in right relationship with the very source of life and not experience life as a result. If flows from God to any whom He calls friend. The second way is that they would experience the benefits that come from living by the wisdom of God's words. The Law represents the heart and the wisdom of the one who invented peace, the one who designed joy. Living by His word is bound to make your life better. By walking in these ways they would know benefit over the nations around them. They were to be a beacon, a testimony to all around that to follow YHWH brings life and joy to the fullest. As Paul says so eloquently in Romans 7:12 (just before our reading today) therefore the Law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good.

So what happened? Why didn't Israel experience all that blessing? Did God fail at His part of the bargain? What happened was, they didn't keep the Law. They couldn't. Despite knowing all the benefits that would come from keeping it, despite believing in the power of God they could not keep the Law. I think it's important to note here that they didn't fail on a technicality. It's not as though they were close, they kept 99% of everything God wanted but some priest made a wave offering when he was supposed to make a grain offering. No they violated the very spirit of it and they did so time and time again. Far from worshipping God alone they worshipped a golden calf. Later in their history they put idols in the very temple itself. Far from caring for the orphan, the widow and the stranger they oppressed the less fortunate and exploited them. They made alliances with foreign powers, trusting more in their power than the power of God. They were murderers and liars and sinners. The Law was perfect but the flesh, that is corrupt. The same is true of each one of us.

We can't keep the law. Forget about the letter of the law written in Exodus, Numbers and Leviticus, we can't even keep the law in our own hearts. I can't even manage to do what I think is right – to live up to what I think a good person should be. And it's not as though I've failed on a technicality. I have gone so far away from the path I intended to walk – I have fallen so far short. So what do we do? How can we find life that comes from being in right relationship with God if we can't stay in right relationship with God? How can we experience the benefits of living by His wisdom if we can't live by His wisdom? What the Law could not do God did by sending His Son. From the very first page of the Bible we learn that God has a plan to make this world a place where life can flourish, where joy can grow and where peace can be known. "Fill the earth and subdue it" was the command He gave to those first humans. God meant to make the earth beautiful, and He meant to do it through partnership with human beings. There was a wonderful opportunity in that command – one that was forfeited through the continual failure of those human beings. But God did not give up. He offered His hand of partnership to generation after generation of human beings, looking for someone somewhere who could keep His commands and bring the life He so longed to bring to this world. To and fro His eyes searched on the earth through the ages to find one such person, a person of righteousness who could hear His voice and do as He commanded. None was found. In all of humanity there was not one who could do it. He still didn't give up on human beings. With no other options God decided to partner with Himself. He became a human being, and filled the role that we never could. He did what the laws could never do – He brought life to a world that knew only death. In the Son of God we can find that relationship with God that brings life. With the Spirit of God living in us we can live in God's wisdom.

3

Meditations for the Day

Consider all the things in your life that you have fallen short of where you thought you could or should be – How has Jesus made up for those failings?

If you have never given your life and loyalty to Jesus, consider making that decision today, He alone can deal with guilt and with sin. His work on the cross can give us hope for the future no matter how dark our past was or how inadequate we may feel. That's the whole point of grace.

The End of Volume II