

Exodus: Escape From Evil

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Chapter One

AN ABUNDANT INCREASE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them." Exodus 1:7

"And the number of the disciples multiplied." Acts 6:7

The birth and growth of a child gives joy and hope to parents. When God's spiritual family increases, We rejoice and God and the angels of heaven also celebrate.

The Book of Exodus tells the story of the birth of Israel as a nation and her subsequent growth. Abraham indelibly etched the name "Hebrew" upon the pages of human history as he responded to the call of God. His grandson, Jacob, became a "Prince in Israel." Twelve sons (and one daughter) were born into his family, hence the "twelve tribes of Israel."

When a famine struck hard in the land of the Hebrews, Jacob's family sought bread in Egypt. During their four hundred years in Egypt, God shaped His Chosen People into one family. Their Exodus became their birthday as a nation. While in Egypt they multiplied.

God wants His people to increase. Ponder the words of the text again: "...fruitful ..increased abundantly ... multiplied ... waxed exceeding mighty ... land was filled with them..." We get the idea from these words that God's people can grow. This is the age for "The Greening of the Church," in the words of Findley Edge.

The story of Exodus is "God's Way Out." This is His way out of sin, slavery, and smallness. It is also His way into freedom, fullness, and future blessedness. God can cause us to prosper and multiply. Human and divine reasons come together when growth takes place. Glance at these growth factors.

I

God's management of His people causes growth. Theologians say God's control over life is His providence or sovereignty. God's gracious acts are heart-warming. Our forefathers believed this and honored Providence, Rhode Island, with that name as an expression of gratitude and confidence in God Who provided for the early colonizers. God's gracious

care and guidance of His people today should inspire us to continual renewal and expansion.

Some years after Joseph, the son of Jacob, had been sold, he said to his brothers who stood before him in Egypt: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life...So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Gen. 45:5, 8). God shaped Israel's history at moments like those.

Egypt's ruling line of Pharaohs (the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings) showed deep sympathy to the Israelites who lived among them. From about 1725 B.C. until 1550 B.C. those West Semitic people ruled Egypt and gave Israel freedom to expand. The gracious hand of God which protected His people ages ago is the same hand of God upon us now. We should accept and rejoice in God's providential placement of His people in this moment of personal history so that growth may take place. Whatever may be our geographical location or our place within some denomination, our spiritual legacy in Christ affords us a surpassing opportunity for expansion, even though we keep in mind that most areas where Christ and the apostles served are no longer Christian, but have become strong centers for Moslems, Hindus, and other religions or cults. And yet, God can make your place or your circumstances fruitful. We trust in the Providence of God, His overruling in all of life's circumstances. This is God's benevolent guidance is what Joseph felt in Egypt. This is what you may recognize during life, too.

Before the U.S. Presidential Election in November, 1976, many read *Why Not The Best* by Jimmy Carter. In that book he tells about his submarine duties aboard the USS Pomfret in the South Pacific in 1949. The vessel had to surface every 24 hours in order for the batteries to be recharged. One dark night Officer Carter stood on the bridge of the surfaced submarine, fifteen feet above the water level. A big wave from a vicious storm swept over the sub and despite the strong grip of the young officer, the waves tore him away from the iron railing to which he tried to hold. Carter swam about in the wave for what seemed to him an eternity. The water finally subsided and the Naval Officer settled on a five-inch gun thirty feet aft from the place he had been. He felt only the "gracious providence of God" preserved him from being swept out to sea and a watery grave. An awareness of God's marvelous acts of kindness should stimulate us to be an expanding, growing people for the glory of God.

A superb Heritage encourages our spiritual growth. Even as twinkling stars adorn a midnight sky, so Israel's skyline is illuminated by her glorious past. The names of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph can never be scrubbed from her history. Israel's heritage also included a place called "the land of promise." Abraham left his home in Babylon because God directed him to that inheritance. This nation's name has become indelibly linked to Palestine. And yet, the greatest fact of Israel's inheritance was a person -- God! He gave meaning to everything related to that excelling heritage.

Is our heritage a place? Partially. The Bible reminds us that the Christian has a home on earth as well as in heaven - - dual citizenship. The longer we live, the more we find our imagination stirred about that heavenly inheritance. Is our heritage a people? Partially. Again, God promised to make Abraham a great person, with nations flowing from his loins. God had to do a lot of carving and chiseling on His people. He had to place the broken pieces of humanity back on the potter's wheel, time and time again (Jeremiah 18). Doesn't He do the same today?

Look at our people, our heritage. A few boast about stalwarts in their ancestral line. However most of us come from "humbler stuff" than Abraham and Moses and David. Not many wise, noble, and mighty are called; God often chooses ordinary people for his service (I Corinthians 1:26-28). Actually, we all come from fallen humanity made from dirt. Humbling, isn't it? However, our heritage is more than an appetizing land "flowing with milk and honey." It is more than a people who live in tents or houses. Our inheritance is a Person. God is our heritage!

The best way to describe our superb heritage which should stimulate us to growth and expansion is found in the Holy Scriptures. Here it is: "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:5-6). Again, the Psalm writer encourages with these words: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (73:25-26). God is our portion, our inheritance. If not, He can be!

Through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God becomes our Heavenly Father. By His Holy Spirit all believers are baptized into His body, the Church (I Corinthians 12:13). Encouraging words are found in Galatians 3:29: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We Christians belong to a noble

ancestral line and can glory in our sonship to God. Everyone has -- or can have -- an unbelievable heritage. Christ places us in the greatest spiritual tradition ever known. Let's not forget that the Savior qualifies us to be God's people! This truth encourages us to expand spiritually and numerically.

As children of God, we should be like the young slave whose father was a tribal king. The young lad, although enslaved and far from home, stood straight and walked with dignity. He never forgot that he was the son of a king. This kind of remembrance will encourage us! What a fabulous, eternal heritage is ours! God is our portion forever!

III

The promises of God encourage spiritual growth. Second Corinthians 1:20 refreshes the Christian like a flood of waters upon a scorched Sahara. 2 Corinthians 1:20 startles us, "For all the promises of God in Him (Christ) are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." His promises remain unchanged and unbroken. Why not claim them?

God promises to redeem us. We become His Chosen People. More than 400 years before the giving of the Law at Sinai, God took the initiative and made a Covenant with Abraham. That Covenant went into effect twenty-five years *before* the ritual of circumcision started. That rite became the seal of a deeper spiritual reality, even as baptism is an outward sign of a deeper spiritual change that takes place in the lives of God's redeemed people. God's Covenant (or agreement) with Abraham did not lose its worth or effect, even with Israel in Egypt.

We who live on the opposite side of the cross from Abraham have a new and everlasting Covenant in Jesus Christ. God promises to deal with us, not on our merit or works, but through His promises of grace through faith. We belong to God because of that unfailing promise through the "blood of the New Testament (covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

On May 24, 1738 John Wesley sat reading Martin Luther's Preface to Romans. Suddenly he realized the mighty change which God works in the life of man through faith in Jesus Christ. Grabbing his pen, Wesley scribbled the following words: "I found my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sin, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Don't misunderstand or misconstrue our relationship to Jesus Christ. God saves us in Christ and wants to fulfill His purpose through our

redeemed humanity. He never saves a person because that one is committed to the Lutheran, Brethren, Church of Christ, Catholic, or Baptist faith. Never! We have redemption through God's covenant relationship of grace in Christ. Dr. Bernard Ramm writes that this "covenantal-personal relationship is the strongest possible relationship and Christians are bound to God the Father personally and by covenant." (*His Way Out*, p. 22).

God promises to renew us. Just as He gave Israel a fresh spiritual beginning as they left the land of Goshen in Egypt, even so God wants to see a spiritual awakening break in upon His people today. This takes place only by the action of the Holy Spirit who is mightier than the Mississippi and more life-giving than the Nile.

Like Israel in Egypt, we often slumber, stagnate, and suffer a spiritual decline. God wants us to regain a vibrant spiritual life - and His way of renewal is possible for every person.

Renewal is more than a shallow treatment of a deep spiritual malady. Friendly ushers, a thermostat set on 72 degrees in a beautiful building, and lively activities are not frowned upon. But more than surface activity is needed to bring about the reformation and renewal desperately needed. Deep plowing must be done! The prophet Jeremiah preached. "For thus saith the Lord...Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (4:3). Renewal and increase happens when our spiritual roots become firmly embedded in God's covenant relationship of grace in Christ - - not in the top-soil of hyperactive subjectivism. Spiritual growth will take place as God's redeemed experience a renewing or an awakening from Him.

Fresh breezes from God need to come upon us again. God has brought on a mighty increase of His people from New Testament times through men like Chrysostom, Martin Luther, John Wesley, D. L. Moody, Billy Graham, Luis Palau, and multiplied thousands of others whose names are in "the book of life." And God performs the miraculous on the contemporary scene, as well as in yesterday's world. Your church and town, your state and nation, your family and personal life - - yes, we are all targets for God's redemption and renewal, so that an increase of His people may take place. God's promises of renewal and growth are valid today.

IV

The commitment to Christian mission encourages spiritual-numerical growth. Just as God called ancient Israel "to be a light unto the Gentiles" (Isaiah 49:6), even so He has chosen us to be a missionary people. We are His ambassadors, His representatives. We are to share our faith.

Christians have the privilege and responsibility of telling about Christ our King. This happens to be the day of good tidings, and we must recognize our missionary task: a call to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. Growth can become a reality as God's people are mission minded. His Word never returns void (Isaiah 56:5-6), even though some "spots" respond more than others. Explosive growth does not often take place in Moslem, Hindu, and Buddhist lands or in most inner city areas. We rush to suburbia.

As Lord Nelson of England prepared to fight the combined forces of Spain and France under Napoleon, Nelson announced on the deck of his flagship: "England expects every man to do his duty!" Does God expect less of us?

What is the place of our Divine Mission? It may be Seattle or St. Louis, Dallas or Durham, Memphis or Miami. We are His witnesses on our job, our leisure spots, our world. The grass is not necessarily "greener on the other side of the fence." Like the Hebrews, we are responsible in the place where God places us. And He can make even the "desert rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). Don't let difficulties daunt us. The place where God plants us may be thorny, but roses grow among the thorns. Our location may be as dry and dusty as the desert of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, but let us remember God's provisions there: "I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19). We need to expand and prosper and "brighten the corner" where we are.

What is the procedure, if we are a missionary people? God's purpose and plan is that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). That ancient word to Abraham became the word for the children of Israel. Pagan nations were to see the light of God through His people. They were to be a responsible people, sharing God's truth with all Gentile nations. But the Hebrews needed to get outside the four walls of their church! God's purpose remains unchanged. If we are to expand, we must proclaim God's redemptive truth with people everywhere.

Take a quick examination of our role. How effective are we in being honest-to-goodness missionaries? Can we get caught up in the mere operation of organizational machinery and committee duties? What percentage of Sunday School teachers, deacons, and young people demonstrate spiritual boldness by sharing openly Jesus Christ? Make a list of ten people you know who measure up as vibrant witnesses for Christ. Does your name belong here? Ask God to include you in the list.

Is our "grass roots" level of teaching, evangelizing, and disciple-making effective? Most of us on the local scene must painfully and

embarrassingly confess a fractional reach-out operation. Notable exceptions may be pointed out, without doubt. Are changes needed?

Are we sometimes overloaded with top-heavy machinery? Some may deny the right for such probing questions. Foreign, State, Home Missions, and local church plans sometimes are honey-combed with dreams, but with too few foot soldiers in the trenches 24-7 who carry out the Great Commission on a "house to house" basis. Paul and Jesus did that kind of work, didn't they?

Do we need "hot line" approaches to find and recover luke-warm members? Church workers need to share their load in a more thorough, systematic way with all of God's people if the lost are to be reached. Backsliders as well as the committed Christians need a fresh touch and move of the Holy Spirit, don't you believe?

What about our statistics? Figures may impress those who enjoy the pride of large numbers, but do we gloss over the spiritual tragedies behind the scene? Most spiritually vibrant Churches and all the rest of us don't see God working in our lives as God wants to work. There is a more exciting side of the picture, too! Many victories are won, and we rejoice and praise God for thousands who go on mission trips and share Christ at home or wherever they may be.

Dr. Howard Hendricks who recently retired from teaching at Dallas Theological Seminary tells a story about a certain Christian ophthalmologist of his city. That eye specialist had lived a nominal, non-exciting Christian life for ten years. A Campus Crusade man invited him to "go witnessing" with him one day at the Dallas Love Field Airport. The doctor returned to his office, and excited man. He put the "Four Spiritual Laws" booklet on the reading table in his office. Then he started using it for his reading chart! He would say to his patients: "You need glasses, but I expect you have a greater need than glasses." Thus, he led many people to faith in Jesus Christ.

A number of years ago, Dr. Hendricks spent a sabbatical leave in India. While speaking in that country, he mentioned the experience of his friend in Dallas, without relating the doctor's name. At the conclusion of the service an Indian approached him and said: "You're talking about Dr. "So and So," aren't you?" Hendricks said, "Yes! How did you know?" "Well," said the Indian, "I did graduate work in Dallas one year. While there, my eyes needed attention. I happened to visit a specialist who witnessed to me and told me to come back to India and tell my people about Jesus Christ." A professional man shares his faith in that country today because a doctor witnessed and encouraged his

client to talk about Jesus who saved him. This is our need! God will give spiritual expansion as we witness faithfully about Jesus Christ.

How do we witness? Sometimes one person may visit by himself. The timid may not like such an idea. Then go in teams of two or three. One day four men got together to take a paralytic to Jesus. One Sunday School class may help another class. One youth group may assist another age group. A Church group of twenty or one hundred may go to another Church for a week-end of witnessing. That will cause a spiritual stirring of the forces. Mega churches may share their members with those who need encouragement, like the frontiersmen did when they helped one another build log cabins in wilderness lands. God wants to give spiritual and numerical expansion as we witness faithfully about Jesus Christ.

God's people through the anointing of the Holy Spirit may become vigorous and make mighty conquests. Abraham heard God say that his seed would become as numberless as the stars of the sky and as countless as the sand upon the seashore (Genesis; Hebrews 11:12). God said they were going to multiply. Even when adverse conditions of slavery and suffering showered upon Israel in Egypt, they increased. We may face tough times, but God never leaves us. He stays with us in the struggles in order that we may cope with them.

He gives us new heart and renewed hope so that a miraculous multiplying may break in upon us. Can we afford smaller dreams and visions than this? Because of everything that God is, let's move to liquidate littleness. Let's become great for God!

THE PUZZLE OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

"Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph,.... Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens...And the Egyptians made the Children of Israel to serve with rigour.. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage....And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river....." Exodus 1:8, 11, 13, 14, 22

"Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.. " John 9:2-3

Some people enjoy working with cross-word puzzles. Some become masters at putting together "jigsaw puzzles." The Spanish name for a puzzle or riddle is "rompecabezas" - meaning "breaker of heads" or that which breaks heads. Almost every day we face situations which baffle our understanding and leave us dumb-founded.

One of life's puzzles is that of evil and suffering. The Christian knows that Satan is the original sinner and the primary cause of evil and its consequent suffering. But even when the first cause of evil and suffering is known, there remain many unanswered questions about this problem.

The righteous sometimes suffer when they do good. Jesus suffered, although He never sinned. Shakespeare's Macbeth said: "Fair is foul and foul is fair." What about Ecclesiastes 7:15? "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness." Some evil-workers go through life without any apparent suffering for the wrong they commit. Suffering often is the consequence of some wrong which is done; and yet again, there may be no relation between the two.

The first chapter of Exodus tells the story of Israel's suffering and Egypt's sin. The chosen people of God did not understand the agony of their enslavement. They could not push back the gloom that settled upon them. As tough Egyptian task masters shuttled among them, the Hebrews trembled like horses in a hailstorm. What could the enslaved ones do? Nothing! As confined as a corpse in a tomb! Help had to come from some other source, or Israel would never see the mangled pieces of life put together again.

Modern man continues to face evil and suffering. How does he solve this intricacy? this enigma? Is there an answer to the dark riddles of life? Yes, because God wants to help those in every dungeon of despair. He understands the entangled, twisted puzzle of evil and suffering. God has the answer that perplexed people need. Let's examine this puzzle.

I

Suffering happens when one person abuses another. Israel lived in Egypt for four centuries. Nearly one-half of that time she suffered "under the taskmaster's lash." The suffering intensified. The captains over the work forces had authority to carry whips and clubs and use them. Abuse became a common practice, a way of life!

The story of Israel's suffering is reflected in several passages in chapter one of Exodus: "They did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens" (v. 11); ... "If it be a son, then ye shall kill him" (v. 16); ... "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (v. 22). Evil and suffering increased for God's chosen people. Man abuses man! How does this abuse happen?

Abuse is inflicted through jealousy or envy. Jealousy is a giant-like evil. We recall the background story of Joseph and his brothers from Genesis (Chapters 37-50). Jacob loved his younger son and made Joseph a "coat of many colors" which provoked his brothers to jealousy. Once Joseph told his brothers that he dreamed he was the sun and they were the moon and stars who bowed down to him. He also told them he dreamed he had become the principal sheaf of grain in the field and all the others inclined before him. That did not prove to be a good course in public relations!

One day Jacob asked Joseph to go search for his sheep-herding brothers and bring back a report concerning them. When Joseph found them, they decided "the dreamer" had bragged enough about his superiority. They grabbed their teen-age brother and sold him to a band of Midianites, who resold their hostage, and he landed in Egypt.

Jealousy remains an evil with which we have to contend. Proverbs 6:34 declares: "Jealousy is the rage of a man." One nation becomes jealous of another; one race lets the destructive fire of jealousy flame up against another race. Many homes rip apart because of this devastating evil. Sin and suffering often are related. Do you ever notice any streaks of jealousy in your life?

Abuse is inflicted on others because of spiritual ignorance. Exodus 1:8 reads: "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not

Joseph." Historically, this new line of Pharaohs knew about Joseph. Spiritually, they did not know how to appreciate the fact that Joseph had saved the Egyptians from "mass starvation" as he prepared them to confront a seven-year famine. The "new king" of Egypt did not understand Joseph's contributions to their welfare.

Why do wars take place today? Why does the Vietnam war-skeleton of 1960-75 rattle in our Nation's closet as well as the Iraq debacle? Why do multiplied thousands of inmates in federal and state penitentiaries suffer mental anguish? It must be that we have all committed atrocities against our fellow man. Falsehood and physical abuse against others lives on.

A pastor and wife received temporary custody of children from the Welfare Department. They received one child who had been severely and cruelly mistreated, apparently by the mother and other sadistic-minded people. The three year old had been burned, gouged, and lacerated time after time. The burns from cigarettes scarred her body. Hot instruments such as an iron or spatula left indelible marks all over that precious little body -scars upon scars! That physical frame somehow endured beatings those stripes refuse to go away. The pastor and wife helped heal that little one's deep psychological scars inflicted upon a tender life by calloused, wicked people. Is this a case of spiritual ignorance? Yes! It is wickedness that blinds a person to the worth of man created in the image of God.

A person sometimes abuses another because of greed. The Midianites bought Joseph and sold him for financial gain in Egypt. Those traders were greedy. A few years later when Joseph arose to prominence in Egypt, a famine caused the brothers to travel there in search of grain. Soon the entire family located along the Nile delta. The Israelites multiplied. The Pharaoh upon the throne realized he had an enlarged labor force at his fingertips. Whereupon, the Egyptians took them over.

The enslaved ones worked in the fields. Their captors forced them to build "treasure cities" (Ex. 1:11) and do back-breaking work beneath the Nile valley sun. One group exploited another! They crushed, but never conquered the Hebrews.

Human nature does not change! Because of the insatiable desire for gain, man often walks over others and takes what they have. Enron and Ponzi schemes and the glitter of gold - - greed is a wicked fountainhead from which many other sins flow. "The love of money is the root of all evil" (I Tim. 6:10). Watch out for this sin. Jealousy, ignorance, and greed are a few of man's moral evils which cause suffering.

II

Suffering may take place through collision with the natural laws of life. When a person runs counter to laws which are designed for an orderly and ongoing planet, he most likely will suffer the consequences.

In his book, *Suffering: A Personal Perspective*, Dr. T. B. Maston concludes that suffering occurs when man violates some basic law. Over-indulgence in eating or over-exertion through activity causes suffering. One who disregards health laws must "reap what he sows." He abuses himself! Or again, a person falls and the "law of gravity" spells out injury for him. Such "tragedies" probably happened to numbers of Hebrews as they built Pharaoh's treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses (Exodus 1:11).

A few facts may be noted. (1) God is supernatural and can set aside or abrogate His own created laws for a higher purpose, if He deems it wise. For instance, Jesus stilled the storm, raised the dead, and multiplied bread. (2) Natural or physical catastrophies such as earthquakes, tornadoes, blizzards, and some diseases are not caused by man violating some laws. (3) It should be observed that our world order suffers because of Satan and man's original sin (Genesis 3:17-18). (4) As a harsh "taskmaster," nature one day will be "redeemed" (Romans 8:22). (5) "Time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Tragedy and triumph happen to the good and the bad. Thus, an "involuntary violation" of the laws of nature will cause the finest people to suffer as surely as a conscious and deliberate disregard of those laws. Do we ever ask, "Why me, Lord?"

III

God gives hope to those who live under the blight or handicap of suffering. In the *Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis impresses us with his words: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain. Suffering is His megaphone to arouse a dead world." God certainly got Israel's attention through their sufferings. What is God's message to us about pain?

If there is no escape from suffering, God promises His sustaining grace. He watches over us today just as He looked upon Israel in Egypt. This fact should remind the suffering one that he does not have to walk alone. God reassures us of His presence. Isaiah 43:1-2 reads: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." In His love and grace God stays

with every pilgrim so he can cope with his difficulties and triumph over them.

In God's permissive will, He may allow suffering so the one who suffers may fulfill a purpose which no one else can fill. Suffering becomes a valley for soul-making. Moses' family and many others discovered that character forms during the agony process.

Some of the world's greatest literature has come into existence as a result of a writer going through the crucible of pain. Poet John Milton lost his eyesight. Robert Louis Stevenson lived in a body wracked with pain. Scientist Louis Pasteur suffered a stroke in his mid-forties. Paul endured "a thorn in the flesh" which refused to go away. In his blindness and soul agony, George Matheson wrote a hymn that lives on. The first stanza is:

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

God may allow suffering and even an early death because He is ready for His chosen one to begin life on a grander scale in His presence. Dr. Hoke Smith is remembered as a brilliant, beloved missionary. Concerning him, Theologian W. T. Conner said that as a student, Hoke Smith ranked among the best he had known in his 40 year professorship. As a young missionary, Smith taught Greek and New Testament at a Seminary in Cali, Columbia, for eleven years. He accepted a new assignment in the southern half of the South American continent and fulfilled that task in a magnificent way. Hoke endeared himself to missionaries and churches wherever he visited, preached, and labored. The future seemed in front of him and his family, when "minor surgery" proved fatal.

God sometimes permits suffering in order to turn His people back to Him. Israel forgot God in Egypt. In the agony of her affliction, that nation looked up and pleaded with God for help. Through that bitter bondage God gave Israel a distaste for Egypt and a desire for another way of life. Don't you feel that God allows difficulties to happen so man will realize his need of Divine help and return to Him?

All suffering should be a fresh reminder that Jesus has already suffered for us and will give the redeemed a life without pain in the

future. We cope with our trials through God's redemptive love in the cross. There really is no other way out!

The Scriptures are clear. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by His Spirit" (I Peter 3:18). Jesus has suffered for our sins. He enters life's arena where we live. He knows about us and identifies with us. We may place upon Him our anxieties and burdens. We may trust Him for the relief of sin's penalty. What next? A new world! A life without pain. All broken limbs are to be healed. All twisted minds will be made whole. In God's new, reshaped cosmos, there will be no hospitals, no funeral parlors, no evil nor suffering. Let present privations cause us to reflect upon the glory of that brand new age, even while we struggle to help or eliminate the pain and anguish of crushed people all over planet earth.

Is there an adequate answer to evil and suffering now? Yes, but we can't grasp it. The Bible declares that "now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). From the human viewpoint there are unknown factors about suffering. Pain keeps on being a puzzle. The experience remains a mystery. But even if man is not able to explain his hardships, he can experience by faith the Savior who is Lord over all unanswered questions. And since God knows the way down every perplexing pathway, isn't it wise to trust Him for ultimate victory over evil and suffering? Web site: www.PrestonTaylorBooks.Net

Chapter Three WHAT WILL FAITH DO?

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.. " Exodus 3:2

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt By faith he forsook Egypt... for he endured, as seeing Him who is eternal... Through faith he kept the passover.... " Hebrews 11:23-28

Most of us readily confess that we have a few defects in life. No person except Jesus has had a perfect life. Your life and mine may not be a big reflection of the way that God is able to work in the lives of those who trust Him. However, we can learn from the life of Moses that God in His own time rewards those who trust Him. The New Testament text about Moses shows three dramatic actions which faith makes possible. Genuine faith acts! It prepares us for leadership roles.

I

Faith makes definite refusals. "By faith Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24). Our permissive society has almost eliminated the words "no" and "refusal" from our vocabulary. If Moses had accepted the honor of remaining among Egypt's royalty, secular historians would have hailed the decision as a sane one. However, Moses refused the benefits of Egypt's throne and his name became emblazoned in God's "Hall of Fame." The ability to say "no" at the right time is a "water-shed" experience -- it is destiny-determining. How can we prepare to decline the wrong offers in life?

Definite refusals may be made when one has a vital relationship with God. Faith enables us to refuse what naturally appeals to sensual desires. The text links "by faith" to Moses' refusal. That "Covenant-relationship" made it possible for Moses to turn away from the enticement of Egypt.

Family life has much to do with one's faith or lack of it. The early life of Moses fascinates us. A death warrant hung over his head at the time of his birth (Exodus 1:16, 22). One day his parents made a little ark of

bulrushes, placed him carefully in it, and let the ark float gently near the bank of the Nile river. The daughter of Pharaoh came to the place where the baby lay asleep in his boat and the sister of Moses "happened" upon the scene. Quick arrangements were made from Miriam to find a Hebrew mother to nurse the three month old baby. Jochebed raced there!

For five or six years Moses was "cradled" in the faith of the Hebrews. Amram and Jochebed must have taken advantage of every opportunity to tell Moses about God's promises to His chosen people. Who would their anticipated deliverer be?

Let's not overlook the vital role which parents have upon their children. The tender years are formative times. Proverbs 22:6 reads: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is God's spiritual equation.

A personal commitment is necessary for one to be related to God. Each one must come into a vital relationship with God through personal belief and trust in Jesus. A "constellation" of religious parents or persuasions cannot save us. Faith is an individual matter! A vital relationship with God is a personal experience. This kind of relationship equips us for the definite refusals which are necessary in life.

The principle of self-denial is another basis for definite refusals. We must deny ourselves the luxury of self-indulgence. Most believe the opposite ! "Moses...refused." How could he reject what Pharaoh's palace offered? He knew and practiced self-denial.

The life-style of Egypt's ancient court enchanted every observer! Egypt offered learning. The "golden age" dawned upon that nation nestled along the Nile in the days of Moses. Law, architecture, bookkeeping, geometry, literature, journalism, religion, and the physical sciences formed a part of their educational processes.

Moses attended Egypt's universities and absorbed her knowledge! Acts 7:22 declares: "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." God put Moses in that environment for a special purpose:

1. Moses associated with the greatest earthly kingdom and learned to be comfortable in that atmosphere of royalty.
2. Moses studied and became proficient in the culture of the world's most advanced civilization.
3. Moses learned that false religion darkens the minds and decays the lives of those committed to it.

Moses perhaps is/was the world's greatest mortal man. He trained in the place where God put him for forty years. Then God moved Moses to the discipline of the desert for four decades. Those were years of preparation through self-denial. Egypt offered unlimited luxury: pride, prestige, power, and other passions of the flesh were available to the heirs of Pharaoh's palace. Moses "turned his back" on that which could have been his. At this point "Moses refused." He exercised self-denial.

Does a young person today need to practice the spiritual principle of self-denial? Is it all right to do "one's own thing?" What about our "life-style?" Jesus says: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." (Luke 9:23). Self-denial is a sharp, dissecting experience! The majority does not want spiritual surgery or separation. Discipleship has never been an easy road. "By faith Moses...refused." Faith still leads us down "refusal road."

II

Faith makes daring choices. "By faith Moses....refused...choosing rather." Faith is positive. It is more than "don't." It is also "do." Faith involves bold, aggressive choices. Faith confronts life with life-enveloping challenges.

Daring choices place the Christian in the company of people with an eternal purpose. The Scriptures say that Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Hebrews 11:25). He got on the side of a people who had a significant reason for living. Moses knew that the puppets at Pharaoh's palace lived only for the moment. They enjoyed their sin for a season - a "chronos" type of pleasure-tasting that soon produced bitter fruit. On the other hand, Moses identified himself with a suffering, but eternity-bound people. In which group are we?

William Borden of Yale became identified with a people of purpose. Like Moses, he chose affliction with the people of God. On Borden's tombstone in Cairo, Egypt, are these words: "Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no explanation of such a life." Are we making that choice?

The daring choice may be made in a good season. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years..." He chose the right Master at the right moment. Faith in a "good season" caused that daring decision.

When is the good season for making right choices? Now! Ecclesiastes 12:1 says it is "in the days of thy youth..." The good season for another may be under adverse circumstances. One thief who hung beside Jesus on the cross made an "eleventh hour" decision.

While we are mentally alert and have our faculties, God wants us to give Him our lives. We may acknowledge Jesus as our Savior with

mature judgment...almost any time...any age...any place. But there is danger in delay.

Billy Sunday, a fiery and colorful evangelist of another day, said : "Death-bed repentance is burning the candle of life in the devil's service and blowing the smoke in the face of Jesus." What about our "candle of life?" Charles Luther, a hymn writer, expressed it this -way:

O the years in sinning wasted,
Could I but recall them now,
I would give them to my Savior,
To His will I'd gladly bow.

One man became a Christian at eighty-six years of age. When asked what he would do if he could live again, he replied: "I would become a Christian early in life and not waste all those years." The good season to confess sin and change the direction in life is now. The "good season" to begin living totally dedicated to God's purpose is now. We should not postpone God's offer of today's possibilities. "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15). Like Moses, we should choose at the right time.

III

Faith makes decisive evaluations. "By faith, Moses...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater..." Esteem means to consider, judge, or weigh. Faith rightly evaluates the issues of life. Faith places life in the balance and discovers what really is worthwhile in time and eternity. The results of such an evaluation are phenomenal!

The Eternal God survives all earthly Pharaohs. For 40 years Moses associated with Egypt's ruling monarch. He may have been the "heir apparent" to the throne, but Moses saw another throne far greater. "He endured: as seeing Him, who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). He "saw" the invisible God.

Where are the "pharaohs" today? They still die! Augustus Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and every earthly lord dies. Only God is eternal! What about Pharaoh and the empire of Moses' day? Those pyramids are empty and the mummified pharaohs are gazed upon by curious visitors. Egypt's Sphinx of a lion's body and a man's head is dumb. Pharaoh's oracles gather dust and never did anything for the people. But God's Pentateuch lives on. The words of Moses are still heard around the world. God's throne remains unshaken and everlasting.

A second decisive evaluation concludes that eternal rewards outweigh earth's momentary benefits. Moses' life with Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration and in "the life beyond" is better than a mummified, caged-in pharaoh for tourists in museums. The treasures of Egypt vanish. That learning becomes obsolete. The aroma of this age passes. This world is perishing; God's age is permanent. Discern between the passing and the eternal.

A clipping appeared several years ago in one metropolitan daily paper about two well-known men. On the left side of page one near the bottom is an article with the caption: "Billy Graham Opens Big Revival In New York." On the opposite side of the same page another article appeared with the caption: "Elvis Swallows Cap Off Tooth." These lines followed: "Singer Elvis Presley underwent surgery at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital to have a porcelain cap of a tooth removed from his right lung. He had swallowed the cap while doing a dance number for the film "Jailhouse Rock." There is the Graham-kind versus the Presley-kind of evaluation!

What about our sense of values - our decisive evaluations? Which has more worth - this age or the coming one? Do we "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt?" A third evaluation is that an "escape from evil" is better than extinction in Egypt. Moses "forsook Egypt...(and) through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Hebrews 11:27-28).

Egypt offers excitement. There is magic in sin. Sinful pleasure gives enjoyment, but it also guarantees extinction! The one-world-only pleasure-principle deprives a person of God and the fellowship of His people. The world leaves the soul enslaved to misery, despair, and hell. Faith says there is a choice of a better world.

There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.
-Isaac Watts

Do we want life to be a glorious event? Then we cannot ignore faith in "The Lamb of God." Faith leads us to trust and obey the living Christ. Faith puts us in contact with Jesus who initiates life-changing activity. The blessings and benefits of this kind of life are far superior to everything that a person claims apart from Jesus Christ. Faith makes the difference!

Chapter Four MAN'S EXCUSES AND GOD'S ANSWERS

"And Moses said unto God, Whom am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee, When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." Exodus 3:11-12

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse." Luke 14:18

A few years ago Cruz Casarez left the management and full benefits of a big farming-ranching enterprise because God called him into the ministry. Countless people respond to God's call to live "ordinary lives in ordinary places" and do what God wants them to do wherever they live and whatever God wants them to do.

At an unexpected time and place in his life, Moses received a supernatural call from God. God revealed Himself to Moses who was guarding the sheep of his father-in-law in the Sinai peninsula. That eighty-year-old man looked upon the burning bush and heard God tell him to take off his shoes because he stood on holy ground. (Any ordinary or out-of-the-way place becomes holy, if we meet God there).

God saw the sufferings of Israel and planned to redeem His enslaved people. Moses must be the leader. That responsibility frightened the sheep-herder who began to offer excuses to the One speaking from the bush. God gave clear answers to the excuses Moses verbalized about fifteen hundred years before Christ.

God calls people to serve Him today. The task may not seem monumental or dramatic, but man still plays the old game of excuse-making. God may not be asking most people to change their vocations or venture into another life-encompassing duty. The Lord simply wants us to live and serve Him in the daily routine of life. Our duties are not minimal, but monumental if God calls us to them. No one should shirk or draw back from his or her task. Excuse-making is common, but God answers those excuses.

I

What is the first excuse we give for not wanting to serve God? "I'm not qualified." Moses fearfully answered the Divine voice: "Who am I, that I

should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel but of Egypt?" (3:11). Our first response is usually that we are not prepared for *any* job. We may become filled with fear in the face of an awesome or ordinary assignment.

God's answer to excuses is the same as Moses heard. It is two-fold. This is highly interesting that the Lord gives two reasons why we are qualified to serve Him when we offer the first reason for not wanting to do it! God qualifies us for every task. Notice how He does it.

God promises His presence. He said to Moses: "Certainly I will be with thee" (v. 12). His presence qualifies us as nothing else can. Any doubt concerning that presence is erased by the word "certainly." That sure word of God's presence runs like a golden thread throughout the Bible and Christian experience. If we read the Word of God with His presence in mind, we'll bump into some big surprises.

God intends for His people to do His work with Him, not without Him. We will fail if we try to do anything for God in the energy of the flesh. Earlier in his life (40 years before the burning bush experience), Moses tried to deliver Israel and met with defeat. He tried to do the job alone. That is not God's way. For this reason God says to His people: "My presence shall go with thee." That's a hard lesson for some to remember.

On a cold, wet February 11, 1861, a train left Springfield, Illinois. One thousand people came to tell a fellow townsman goodbye. Abraham Lincoln, the newly elected President, stood on the back of the train platform and spoke to the crowd. He reminded them that for 25 years he had lived among them. His family had been reared there. One died in their city. He said he was leaving, not knowing if he would return to them or not. And then the President said: "If God gives His presence, I shall not fail, but if not, I shall fail. I go trusting Him who can be with me and stay with you at the same time." The enabling power of our duties, whatever they may be, is the presence of Almighty God.

God promises us success. That is another thing He says to us when we offer the excuse: "I'm not qualified." Notice the words which tingled in the ears of Moses that day: "This shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). That entire mountain soon would be ablaze with the glory of God. Not only would one man worship God before one little bush, but all Israel would worship God at that mountain filled with the splendor and awe of His presence. God

fulfilled His promise and let Moses taste of success in letting Israel "Escape from Evil."

The God we serve is not a defeated or weak. He gives success to those who obey His voice. Our orders from the Lord are to simply share His message "with or without success." People have to respond, and that's not our duty to "make them do it." Only the Holy Spirit changes hearts. There may be pharaohs who stand in the way and a "mixed multitude" who grumble and complain along the way, but we do God's will whatever the reaction of the people may be. Some seed falls among thorns or on hard ground and we leave the results in God's hand. Let's throw away the excuse about not being qualified when God calls us. He qualifies us for the work He wants us to do. He answers our excuse!

II

What is the second excuse we give for not wanting to serve God? "I lack authority!" Moses said he wouldn't know what to say to those who asked him the name of his God: "What is His name." "What shall I say unto them?" (Exodus 3:13). The authority problem is a real one today. Who sends us? Who is our authority? Is God adequate?

The Eternal, Self-Existing Lord is our authority. He says: "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This is YAHWEH -- Jehovah God! He is the ageless God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He's the "Always" Lord. Time presents no problem to the One who "inhabits eternity." We have a time-situation hang-up. God doesn't.

During World War II when bombs were falling on England, a young boy began asking God to bless his country. He prayed for Prime Minister Winston Churchill, their bombed cities, and their soldiers. Then the child said, "And dear God, please take care of yourself, for if anything happens to you, England is a goner!" We don't have to worry. God is "going to make it." God is no "absentee Landlord," but the One who always is ready to act in our lives in powerful ways.

III

What is the third excuse we give for not wanting to serve God? "People will not believe me!" we say (Exodus 4:1). This is undoubtedly a big problem for those who go back home after 40 years as Moses did. It became a problem for the people of Nazareth when they saw Jesus return to his boyhood town. Whether one is away from home or at home, the fear of rejection is a real one.

God has an answer for the third excuse. He asked Moses what he held in his hand. "A rod," Moses said. God told him to throw it upon the ground. At that moment the "shepherd's staff" became a serpent and Moses jumped away from it. "Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail," God told Moses. When Moses touched the tail of the serpent, it changed into a staff again. The snake in Egypt symbolized divine power. God show Moses that He is Lord and that the snake is nothing when God speaks. Just as God has power over the rod and over the snake, so He has power over Egypt. The miracle-working God deals with every doubting Moses so these servants can trust Him and not be afraid.

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God has a second sign or miracle to offset skeptics who might not believe Moses. God told Moses to put his hand into his bosom. When he withdrew it, the hand had become leprous. "Put your hand in your bosom and take it out again, Moses." When that had been done, the hand became whole again. God is the healer of His people!

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A third sign related to water from the Nile. It turned into blood when poured upon the ground (Exodus 4:9). This sign showed the greatness of Yahweh over the deities of Egypt. Moses' eyes bulged out with astonishment at those three signs! God showed to him that his message had integrity. He chose Moses as His prophet, His mouthpiece. Aaron met Moses as he returned from Midian. Israel's leaders also gave the former "run-away" a big welcome. God's "people believed!" (Exodus 4:31) Do we need credentials so people will believe God sends us? We only need to walk out by faith and God will show us that He acts. Our disbelief will disappear.

IV

What is the fourth excuse we may give for not wanting to serve God? Here it is! "O my Lord, I am not eloquent!" (Ex. 4:10). That is a rather flimsy excuse and God can answer it, too. The answer is that God made man's mouth. The Creator can coordinate the tongue, the brain, and the mouth so that man can speak - eloquently or non-eloquently. And if your house is on fire, you don't wait until someone can eloquently and calmly pass the news on to you. Any old tongue will do! The person who feels that he cannot speak needs only to turn his "speech department" over to God.

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Clelia Machinandiarena is a superb Christian of Argentina. For several years she served effectively as a Home Missionary in that country. Clelia is an excellent writer, speaker, and an organizational genius. Mirta, her younger sister, is also dynamic. During her final year in High School, one person continually ridiculed Mirta for her evangelical faith. After being harassed one day, Mirta openly challenged that boy who continued to insult her. "Look, fellow, I go to a "Villa Miseria" every weekend and

teach and help boys and girls in one way and another. This is all on my free time without pay! What do you do?" The attacks ended.

Two years later Mirta studied in the Philosophy Department at the University of Buenos Aires. A paid agitator frequently stood up in class and disrupted the professor. He protested against the country's government or some other question. In a spiritual outburst, Mirta jumped to her feet and shouted back at the man: "Look! Why don't you sit down! All you do is interrupt class and repeat the same old political garbage! So hush!" Other students joined in, saying, "Yeah! Enough out of you!" The heckler sat down and said, "All right, I'll be quiet." Mirta almost fainted when she realized what she had done.

Can God free the tongue of Moses so that he can speak? Can He free yours and mine? Absolutely. Don't offer excuses for not serving God. He can answer our weak arguments! God can enable our inabilities and make us able!

But Lord, let me add a postscript to my speaking problem! "Send someone else." Does God become angry with Moses and with us for all our excuses? Well, does a parent sometimes become angry with a child who does not want to obey? Yes! And God becomes angry with us! What does God do? He gives Moses an assistant. His brother Aaron is to stand by his side and interpret the message. God still sends Moses and He still sends us. Start early and eliminate the excuses so the duty can be done.

Will the way of service be easy? Not necessarily. God never promises that. However, He can remove the major problems and put the job on our agenda for today. It happened with Moses. Pharaoh dies, Jethro gives consent for his son-in-law to leave, Aaron comes to assist, and the people want deliverance. So go back, Moses, and help the slaves "Escape from Evil."

When we face a job, will we say, "Why me, Lord?" Will we begin and complete the work which God calls us to do? Will we listen to encouraging words about Divine enablement for our duties? Where and when may we begin? The issue boils down to the fact that we will do God's will or we will refuse to do it. The choice is really that simply, isn't it? What will our answer be?

Chapter Five

THE DRAMA OF REDEMPTION

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Exodus 8:1

"And I say another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." Revelation 15:1

Dr. Wayne Ward, emeritus Greek and N.T professor of Southern Baptist Seminary in Kentucky, has written a concise, helpful book entitled *The Drama of Redemption*. In those pages the reader is able to experience God's unfolding acts of redemption from the dawn of creation to the glory of a new heaven and a new earth. During this long time-span, we recognize the titanic struggle between God and Satan.

In the book of Exodus a combat takes place between Moses and Pharaoh. That struggle is more than a word-war between Egypt's Pharaoh and Isarel's Moses. It is more than a story about a stubborn king, a monumental Moses, and devastating plagues. The Exodus event tells the story of God redeeming His Chosen People after centuries of oppression. Exodus also reflects the spiritual conflict that exists between Satan and God. Pharaoh represents all evil forces that try to keep man from being set free. Moses is God's representative of the Savior.

Round one of the duel begins in chapter five of Exodus. The "knock-out blow" of round ten takes place in the twelfth chapter. Following God's victory, Pharaoh struggles to his feet and attempts to drag God "back into the ring." A fatal "jab to the jaw" leaves Pharaoh and his army dead in the sea.

God will eventually trample Satan under His feet. Victory belongs to our God and His Christ. The struggle is not short nor simple. It is complex and cruel. However, we may "take heart." Redemption is assured. Christ, our "Passover Lamb," is sacrificed. God only awaits His moment to end forever the attacks from a defeated, but pursuing "pharaoh." Meanwhile, the duel between God, Satan, and their aligned forces continues.

I

God wants His people set free. We are commissioned to a grand task -
- to announce God's way of salvation. God called Moses to stand before

Egypt's king and ask for Israel's freedom. The day came when Moses and Aaron entered the palace of Pharaoh. The physical surroundings looked familiar to Moses who had spent the first forty years of his life there. He anticipated a tough task because he knew that the king had become more hardened - - arrogant, proud, and stubborn. His request for an end to slavery would fall on deaf ears! But Moses gave the word: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel let my people go" (Exodus 5 : 1).

As we plead for the spiritual freedom of God's people, do we expect an easy answer from the soul's tyrant? Satan is not soft! He knows what God's message for His people is; but he does not plan to heed it. Look at the Exodus event for an evaluation of what takes place today.

II

Satan wants to keep everyone under his control. A negative answer from the devil is given to all who seek freedom. Satan's nature is like that. Slaves make up his kingdom. Why let them go? He never wants to lose one disciple.

The negative response from Pharaoh relates itself to God. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (Exodus 5:2). The age-old attack is directed against God. "Who is He? Your God is insignificant! I don't have to obey Him. Which one of the 'zodiac symbols' is He?" This sums up the attitude of Satan and the world about the all-powerful, ever-present Lord. People generally do not believe that God makes any difference in world affairs or in the lives of Christian people. Why waste time listening to God? No need to obey His orders.

Is there another negative nod from Pharaoh? "Yes, Moses!...Your freedom is denied!...Now go back and keep doing your work. Your slavery is to be intensified because you dared to ask about freedom!" This spells out Satan's strategy. The person who contemplates an "escape from evil" may expect an acceleration of evil forces surrounding and subjugating him. The strangle-hold tightens.

How harsh does the "old taskmaster" become? Pharaoh required a full quota of brick production from his slaves every day. When they asked for freedom, their assignment became more crushing. The suffering slaves were forced to gather their own straw and make the same quota of quality bricks as before (Exodus 5:7-8). Those who think of leaving the slavery of sin will meet a tough taskmaster! Does some evil habit have you "hooked?" Satan will keep you there and you can't become free. Only the power of God can loosen the bonds of slavery and let you go.

III

God intervenes in the lives of those who want to "escape from evil." The sixth chapter of Exodus is reassuring. God will redeem His people. Notice God's ways of becoming involved in our situation.

God reminds us that He will take action against our enemies. "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh" (Exodus 6:1). The half has not been seen as yet. Just wait until God turns His wrath against the wicked one. Wait and see what God will finally do to Satan! The plagues upon the Egyptians stand as only a "fore-taste" of the plagues that God will let loose upon Satan and the unbelieving world one day. Yes, God is now involved in our lives and He will continue that involvement.

God reminds us who He is. He is the all-powerful God (El Shaddai) who revealed Himself to Abraham. He is also the "always present One" (Yahweh, Jehovah) who is with His people in their sufferings and perplexities.

God reminds us that He is the Covenant-keeping God. He made an agreement with Abraham more than four centuries before Moses, saying that He would redeem Israel (Genesis 15:13-14). God fulfilled His Covenant or agreement with Abraham and His seed! He does not forget His word. He told Moses: "I will redeem you with a stretched out arm" (Exodus 6:6). Notice seven "I wills" of God in Exodus 6:6-8 which relate to His Covenant or agreement with Abraham.

1. "I will bring you out."
2. "I will rid you of their bondage."
3. "I will redeem you."
4. "I will take you to me for a people."
5. "I will be to you a God."
6. "I will bring you unto the land."
7. "I will give it to you for an heritage."

IV

An interlude before the plagues are poured out upon Egypt will help us understand in a better way the involvement of Moses and Pharaoh (God and Satan) in the "great duel."

God's attitude and actions are always just. He does not want anyone to die. Ezekiel 18:32 declares: "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." The New Testament sounds that same note: "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God's actions are perfect. He chooses His own time to move into the devil's domain. His seeming delays do not signal His defeat. He allows His enemies time to repent.

Pharaoh's attitude and actions are not just. Pharaoh's heart is one of unbelief and rebellion against God's will. He rejects every demonstration of God's miraculous power. Satan-like, Pharaoh defies God! His "heart is hard."

Does God "harden Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 7:3)? Yes and no. The sun melts the snow and hardens clay. God's love and grace revealed in the cross attracts some people and repels others. The difference is in the "heart substance." Satan-like hearts quite often stay as stubborn as steel and remain rock-like in their resistance. Don't blame God! He tries to persuade us. Man decides for or against God. Pharaoh stands for all that is perverse, unrepentant, and demon-like.

What about the plagues which God sent upon the Egyptians? Dr. David Garland of Southwestern Baptist Seminary states five truths relative to those plagues:

1. All of the plagues touched the deities of Egypt in some way.
2. The plagues showed God's unchanging grace to His own people.
3. God is superior to the gods of Egypt.
4. It is futile to resist the purpose and will of God.
5. There are great possibilities of a minority that is submissive to God.

V

The titanic struggle erupts. God has heard the groans of His people. He has seen enough of their suffering. He enters into direct conflict with Satanic powers. God is not afraid to "pit" His people and His power against Satan. The plagues are a clear demonstration of the clashing of those awesome powers.

The first three plagues were repulsive and loathsome to the people. They were related to (1) water, (2) frogs, and (3) lice; A "warm up" miracle took place before the onslaught of plagues. When Pharaoh asked Moses for a miracle, Aaron cast his rod on the ground and it became a serpent. When the magicians did a similar act, Aaron's rod swallowed theirs. Pharaoh remained unmoved and refused to let the Hebrews go.

The first plague affected the water. The Nile river remained the source of Egypt's life by its overflow. Hapi, the river-god of fertility, stood as one of the principle gods in Egypt's pantheon. Moses lifted his rod above the river as Pharaoh walked near by and the water turned to blood. All Egypt stank! The fish died. A nauseating, loathsome sight and smell confronted everyone. The magicians weakly imitated Moses, but they could not reverse God's act. When Pharaoh cried to Moses, God removed the plague. Pharaoh's heart hardened.

A second plague-warning sounded in the king's ears. He refused to submit at the threat. The frogs came! Wave upon wave and still they kept coming. People sat on them. When bedtime came everyone screamed as slimy frogs crawled and hopped over them. Women reached into the meal and flour containers and fainted as frogs leaped on them. When the cooks put bread in the ovens, frogs tumbled out of those places, too! They invaded every place. Read Exodus 8:2-4. The magicians did another weak imitation of that plague, but again they could not stop the problem. God removed the plague and Pharaoh's heart grew hard again.

The third plague came as itchy lice. Aaron obeyed God's Word through Moses, raised his rod, and the dust of the land converted into lice everywhere and on everyone. The magicians failed to perform that miracle and proclaimed: "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). Pharaoh's heart did not soften.

The second group of plagues brought pain and loss to Egypt. Thereafter, Israel escaped the plagues because the land of Goshen remained untouched by them. In rapid succession three terrible plagues fell upon Pharaoh's people. But the violent attacks of flies, murrain, and boils did not bring Pharaoh to his knees or cause him to let Israel go.

The third trial of plagues affected nature. Hail fell and caused such devastation that no insurance company could have paid off their claimants! Locusts soon invaded the land and devoured all that survived in the plant kingdom. Three days of darkness settled upon the land, leaving it in chaos. The sun god, "Ra," became stripped of his power and glory. Pharaoh now had to act in some other foolish way!

VI

What does Satan do when He is not able to do His work as planned? He offers a "compromise strategy." He still wants to "call the play." When Pharaoh found himself facing plagues he couldn't handle, he tried to bargain with God's people. Watch out for that maneuver.

Satan tells us that we may worship God within his own kingdom when he sees some getting free of his grasp. Pharaoh said: "Sacrifice to your God in the land" (Exodus 8:25). Shall we worship the Lord while we are yet under Satan's yoke and in his territory? "No," said Moses. Will our answer be the same?

Satan offers a second compromise. Pharaoh said: "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away" (Ex. 8:28).

This compromise, when yielded to, debilitates and caves us in. Don't go far. Leave your faith in an endangered place. Stay in the wilderness. Many redeemed people are hurt by the "plagues of Egypt" because these never move far enough from the old habits and old masters of life. The devil jumps up and down with glee when the redeemed stay near by the slave fields.

What does this second compromise say to us? "Play it cool." Go "all out" for entertainment, education, employment benefits, but don't become enthusiastic about your faith! Get all excited about the "soap operas," a sports event, or the reading of a book. Such excitement means that one is a "fan" - - a strong supporter of some area of life. However, if one becomes excited about Jesus Christ, he is called a fanatic. Satan whispers to compromise our convictions about Christ and "stay cool."

A third compromise offer is to leave the family in Satan's control. Pharaoh's question is: "Who are they that shall go" (Exodus 10:11)? "The men may go, but leave the women and children behind," Pharaoh says. That satisfies Satan, too.

A final compromise offer of the devil is to leave all property in his hands. Pharaoh remarked: "Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed" (Exodus 10:24). The enemy of man's soul does not want us to give God our material goods. Leave all money and real estate circulating in the devil's camp. Don't consecrate it to God. Don't give God a tithe or twenty-five percent of one's earnings. Satan wants our inheritance left in his hands. He wants the economic force of the world on his side.

Moses says "no" to that appeal from the adversary and finds himself thrust forth from Pharaoh's presence. Are there those among us who yield to the final compromise proposed by God's rival? If so, don't give in to Satan's wishes.

VII

God redeems His people. God becomes one hundred percent involved in our salvation experience. Before the final plague fell upon Egypt, God asked every household in Israel to kill a young lamb and sprinkle the blood upon the door posts of their houses. Israel obeyed the command of God. At the midnight hour the death angel from God slew the oldest child in every Egyptian family.

Wailing took place in Egypt because the final plague brought death and desolation to her people. Pharaoh arose with a broken, but unrepentant heart and gave orders for Moses to leave his land. God gave

His people an "escape from evil." In the cross of Jesus Christ, God offers us that same route of redemption. There is no other way. The shed-blood of Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to leave for the promised land.

Leo Tolstoy recounts the march of Napoleon against Russia in *War and Peace*. When the French general paced in front of the Kammer-Kollenzki rampart, he stood in the midst of desolation. The city had been burned and deserted by the fleeing Russians as the forces of France approached. Tolstoy compared that city left in ashes to a queenless beehive when life is no longer there. The smell and sounds that formerly met the beekeeper are different. A disconnected, dissipated humming from different parts of the hive are heard. An odor of emptiness and decay pervades the place. The queen is dead. Napoleon faced that kind of hopelessness and despair in the middle of a cold, deadly winter as his troops shivered and died in the snow of Moscow.

The tenth and final plague left Pharaoh with a shriveled, spirit-less empire. The earthly potentates may win some skirmishes. The battle belongs to God. He tramples Satan under His feet and takes His people away from the enemy's stronghold. The way to life is open. God implores us to share that life with Him. What is our answer?

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Chapter Six

CHRIST OUR PASSOVER LAMB

"The blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt." Exodus 12:13

"For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." I Corinthians 5:7

Adoniram Judson returned to America for a brief furlough, following a tenure of 30 years of missionary work in Burma. A big crowd came to look upon and hear the famous missionary. Judson could have told about the graves of his wife and four children in the Orient, but he didn't. He could have held the crowd breathless by recounting stories about his imprisonments in foul jails until flesh rotted and fell from his body. He could have mentioned his language struggles, the growing of a vigorous Church under adverse circumstances, and the sustaining grace of God in pagan lands, but none of that became his theme. For a brief time he talked about the sacrifice of Jesus for man. The missionary quickly ended his message and sat down.

Someone expressed disappointment because Judson had delivered an "ordinary" sermon. He replied that he preached what he considered the greatest story ever told. The critic exclaimed, "Yes, but we've heard about the cross before...We expected a different message from one coming from the other side of the world." The man of God answered: "Well, I'm glad to say that one who comes from beyond the seas has nothing more thrilling to tell than the story of Jesus."

Moses could have written about his life in the courts of Pharaoh. He could have unlocked the secrets of the pyramids, or given more details of Israel's suffering. Instead, he recorded the Passover Event. That ancient happening foreshadowed what Jesus came to be and do for humanity. That first Hebrew Passover found fulfillment about 1400 years later in Christ, God's Ultimate Passover Lamb. Shout it from the housetops. Preach it from the pulpits. Tell it in the streets. God has provided a covering for our sins. He blots them out. Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. An "Escape from Evil" is possible through Jesus Christ.

I

God designs redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is bound up in a divinely appointed sacrifice. Neither the Passover Event or

the death of Jesus took God by surprise. Dr. Bernard Ramm states the truth clearly: "The cross was God's provision, not man's manipulation." Even as God intervened and let Israel escape from Egypt, He also gave man life through the shed blood of His Son. What kind of sacrifice is there for man's shame and sin?

Christ sacrificed Himself as our substitute. Just before the Exodus, each family needed a substitute for the oldest son. God has said that His death angel would pass through the land and slay the oldest son in every home (Hebrew as well as Egyptian), unless blood from a sacrificed animal was sprinkled above the doorway of each home. The tenth plague fell upon Pharaoh because he did not have a substitute or heed God's voice to release Israel. At the midnight hour wailing burst forth in every Egyptian home because the oldest son died. The tragedy didn't occur in Israel because they killed a little lamb and sprinkled the blood above the door entrance as God commanded.

The Christ of Calvary's cross become our substitute. The "death angel" will never touch us if by faith the blood of Jesus is accepted as our "Passover Lamb." The Scripture declare, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (I Corinthians 5:7). That "for us" means "in our place" or "in our stead." (Huper in the Greek). Without Christ, death would certainly come. With His blood sprinkled by faith over our "heart's door," we're safe! Listen to Paul again: "For He (God) hath made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21). The *only* substitute.

Charles Dickens tells the story of Charles Darnay, a young Frenchman, and Sydney Carton, an English friend, in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Both fell in love with the same girl, and Lucie decided to marry the French aristocrat. The young couple soon moved to London, escaping the revolution in their country. A few years later Charles returned to Paris for a visit, leaving Lucie and their golden-haired daughter behind. Authorities imprisoned and kept Charles in his cell for one year. The *Reign of Terror* dawned and Charles was tried and condemned to die. The English friend who had arrived back in Paris made a quick visit to the cell of the condemned man. The two resembled one another so much that they could exchange clothes, allowing the condemned man to walk out of his prison. One hour later the Englishman died at the guillotine as a substitute for his friend. Why? Love caused him to do it.

When Jesus went to the cross, He became our substitute. He took our place. He died for condemned sinners. All who accept Him as Savior are free from condemnation and death. Jesus is our sinless sacrifice. Nothing less than perfection is adequate. God's instruction at the time of the first Passover called for a lamb without fault. Exodus 12:5 reads:

"Your lamb shall be without blemish." What if the lamb had sustained a broken leg, had become blind, or had some other defect? He had to be replaced by one which had no imperfections. From the tenth day of Abib or Nisan (March-April) until the fourteenth day, every family had to observe carefully their sacrificial animal.

Man found no imperfections in Jesus during His three years of public ministry. Four days before His death, during the Passover festival, the eyes of all Jerusalem focused upon and scrutinized the "Lamb of God." Would some flaw be seen in Him? Would some hidden sin come to light? Would His words reflect a heretofore undisclosed evil nature? Satanic forces hammered away at the Son of God, but to no avail. As the malign powers withdrew from the maltreated, bleeding, dead body of Jesus upon the cross, they knew their attempts to expose sin in His life had failed totally and eternally.

The testimony of the entire body of Scripture points to Jesus as one without sin. Yes, He "is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners..." (Hebrews 9:26). Simon Peter interprets the Divine death-event as "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19).

Jesus is our sacred sacrifice. The blood of sacrificial animals in the Old Testament economy was regarded as sacred. On the night of the Exodus when the head of each household killed the Passover Lamb, the people took a bunch of hyssop, dipped it in a basin of blood, and sprinkled that blood above the door and on the two side posts of the door (Exodus 12:7). No one dared sprinkle the blood on the threshold or floor. None must trample upon the blood! The means of their redemption was sacred.

The Christian realizes that the blood of Jesus is sacred. We understand that Jesus poured out His life unto death for us. It is not a shame to sing about and preach about the "blood of the Lamb." Our only shame is that our sin caused the death of the Son of God.

Unfortunately, many disregard the blood of Jesus. Many "have trodden under the foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing" (Hebrews 10:29). All who reject Christ count as inconsequential that sacred sacrifice.

A story from *Out of the Night* tells of a young Jew during WW II whom the Gestapo falsely accused of asking a German girl for a date. The agents beat the young man mercilessly until he fell unconscious on the floor. The Gestapo agents walked over him during the day until life had

been trampled from his body. The one who casts aside as useless the holy life which Jesus lay down as an atonement for sin commits an act more wicked than the Gestapo squad. The "death angel" will strike again unless that person turns from his way and accepts God's covering for his evil.

Jesus is our sufficient sacrifice. The blood of the Passover or Paschal Lamb proved itself adequate to ward off the death angel from every Hebrew home. Jehovah God said: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). All who were "under the blood" rested safely during that night when death stalked throughout the land of Egypt.

God provides protection for mankind today through the blood of Jesus Christ. John The Baptist proclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Hebrews 9:22 is clear: "Without shedding the blood is no remission of sins." Christ's blood is available and adequate to cleanse from all sin. It justified the sinner, gives peace in this life, and assures victory for life's struggles. Without Christ's blood, there is no meaning and no purpose for faith.

Atonement means "to cover." Fig leaves did not cover the sin of Adam and Eve in ancient Eden. The year's brazen silence didn't squelch the gnawing, guilty conscience of David. One's own religion or personal goodness never atones for sin. God's design for man's redemption is the blood of His eternal Son. This answer is spelled out in capital letters in Jeremiah 23:6: "THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." The words from an old hymn echo the ancient truth:

I want no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.

II

Man discovers that redemption becomes a meaningful experience. Salvation or the "Escape from Evil" has vital lessons for all of God's people.

Redemption begins life, rather than ends it. God said to Israel: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:2). The Hebrew civil year began in the fall. Their spiritual year had its birth in springtime. The Hebrews named that spring month, Abib meaning, "a green ear." That proved to be the best time to journey across deserts.

Isn't it always "springtime" when one's spiritual life gets underway? When a person is ransomed from the world's "Pharaoh," life just begins! Some imagine that everything comes to a "dead standstill" at the moment of spiritual conversion. Life only begins to blossom when one is "Born Again." A new day, a sacred moment, a new life comes into being when one has sin removed and the Savior enters life as Sovereign Lord.

Redemption is a clarion call for us to leave our old, sinful life-style. As God prepared the Hebrews for their "deliverance at midnight," He didn't allow them to remain in Egypt. They had to leave in haste. Exodus 12:11 graphically describes the situation: "Your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand."

One of the great problems in Christendom is at this point. Many want to flirt with Egypt. These are the ones who often perish "in the wilderness" without tasting of the richer, more abundant life in the land of promise. They don't "gird their loins" for travelling. As they walk over rough terrain, their feet ache and bleed because travelling shoes for life's spiritual pilgrimage are left behind. Some never put their staff in hand as they journey toward the Promised Land.

Get out of bondage and get into blessings! Leave the old world - - in haste! Be divorced from every "house of bondage." Claim the fullness of Christ's life every day. The "more abundant life" can be experienced by the Christian who cuts himself loose from the Egyptian life-style.

The redemptive Passover Event reminds the Christian that strength comes from Jesus and fellowship is with Him. "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8). Strength came to those who ate roast lamb during their "Escape from Evil." Unleavened bread had to be eaten because their quick departure left no time for yeast to rise. (Leavened bread later became the symbol of impurity). The bitter herbs reminded the freed people of their bitter bondage under a foreign yoke. The fruit of sin is always bitter!

As Christians share in the Passover meal (Lord's Supper), this becomes a fresh reminder that our strength comes from Christ and our fellowship is with Him. During that Passover night, Jesus sat with His disciples and broke bread, saying: "This is my body...this is my blood" (Matthew 26:27-28). The broken bread and the poured out wine represent His broken body and His shed blood. Those elements symbolize what the crucified-resurrected Christ has done for us.

Do you need strength for life's journey? Do you know of one who feels the sting of loneliness and desires fellowship with an unfailing friend?

Here is good news. The living Savior wants to be every person's companion and champion. He gives Himself to us for sustenance and song. Don't dare walk life's highway without Him.

The redemption moment reminds the believer that God exchanges our "rags for riches." The Hebrews served the Egyptians for four centuries without pay. Pharaoh exacted "day labor, light denied." Before leaving their labor camps, the Israelites "borrowed" (asked) jewels, clothing, and flocks of sheep from their captors. As they left Goshen, they had received riches to replace rags.

God gives us lasting treasures when we leave our sin. He makes us heirs to His fortunes! First Corinthians 3:21-23 says it beautifully: "For all things are yours. The world...life...death...things present...things to come...all are yours...Ye are Christ's...Christ is God's." The pauper becomes a prince when he becomes a member of God's family. All of this takes place because Jesus gave His life for us. The "Passover Lamb" is our redemption. An unknown poet puts redemption truth this way:

The rain beat on my window pane,
And I said, Come in, O rain, O rain!
Come in from out the stormy night,
And wash my soul and make it white.
But the rain replied for the soul that died,
There is only One, the Crucified.

The wind beat on my window pane,
And I said, Come in, O wind, O wind!
Come in from out the dark cold night,
And waft my soul to realms of light.
But the wind replied for the soul that died,
There is only One, the Crucified.

The blood beat on my window pane,
And I said, Come in, O blood, O blood!
Come in from out dark Calvary's night,
And wash my soul and make it white.
And the blood replied for the soul that died,
I am thine own, the Crucified.

Is Jesus your Passover Lamb? When doom's day approaches, will you be safe? An "Escape from Evil" is God's sure word to all who accept the blood-sprinkled way of Calvary. Why die enslaved in Egypt when God offers an exciting earthly journey and a big bonus beyond?

Chapter Seven

A CALL TO ADVANCE

"The Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore crieth thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Exodus 14:15

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. " Luke 9:62

A person who enters military service learns to march. Orders are barked out: "Left flank, march! Right oblique, march! To the rear, march!" The most important marching command is: "Forward, march!"

The fourteenth chapter of Exodus speaks of God's command for His people to advance. Egyptian forces pressed upon the Hebrews from behind. Mountain passes and deserts threatened them. Waves from an angry sea splashed in front of them. What could they do? God says to Moses: "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exodus 14:15).

In every age God challenges His people to get out of neutral and "get in gear" - - to advance. Stalemate and stagnation is out of the question. He expects us to be obedient unto divine orders and move at His command. Notice three truths relating to God's call for us to advance. One, the attitude toward His command. Two, the areas of advancement. And three, the assurances given to those who advance.

I

What is our attitude about the call to advance? Attitudes serve as a thermometer in life. Our feeling, our thoughts, our disposition about God's expressed will is highly significant. What mental attitude do we have when God asks us to go forward?

Some may panic and want to retreat. The Scripture tells that many of the Israelites looked back at the oncoming armies of Pharaoh and cried to God and then screamed at Moses: "We told you to leave us alone in Egypt! We had food and houses back there. You have brought us into the wilderness and now you are going to get us killed!"

Many people of our day look back! Some rebel because the elders, deacons, or pastors try to flush them away from fixed patterns of life. We have nervous jitters as we look upon new pressures from all sides. Can't we be left alone where we are? Why upset the status quo of a class? Why

renovate a building or build a new one? Why move to another location? Why expect an accelerated growth by a program of out-reach? Why?...Why..."Wherefore hast thou dealt with us?" Let's go back!

Do we understand the price of retreat, of going back? That's a costly step. The mariners who sailed with Christopher Columbus pleaded with him to turn their small vessels around and return to Spain, but he pressed on and on. What a loss it would have been to the entire world if Columbus had listened to those who clamored for him to give up.

Shall we go back? Lot's wife looked back and met death (Genesis 19:26). Jesus says the plowman who looks back is not fit for His kingdom. To go back is the coward's choice. It means to forfeit or lose all the territory gained. It means the adoption of the "crayfish strategy." God says: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 11:38).

Whoever entertains an attitude of returning to the "slave days of Egypt" forgets the price paid for redemption. Neither does such a person remember his or her horrible chains of bondage. Sin galls and gouges! It binds, blinds, and bruises. Read again the first chapters of Exodus to get a picture of sin's devastation. Who wants to live again under "the taskmaster's lash?" Who wants to die without hope? An "escape from evil" is a thousand-fold better! Be done with the attitude of retreat.

A second attitude concerning advance is to wait for God's marching orders. Don't retreat in panic. Don't rush forward at one's own whim. Wait on the Lord! Moses declares: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord...The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13-14).

God's red light and caution light flash in the text. Don't rush out into the sea until God turns on the green light. Let God reveal His moment to march. The victory belongs to Him. We are not to march to the beat of a different drummer. We can't win God's battles, or our own. This is a hard lesson to learn. Look at Lamentations 3:26: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord!"

Forty years before the time of the text, Moses disqualified himself. He had not learned to wait upon God. He wanted to do God's job and then check in at the office for the work-order. We still run ahead of God! A person may be too hasty about the choice of a school. Some run too hurriedly to the divorce court. A few, in the excitement of a great spiritual moment, may step into an ordained ministry when God wants their zeal and fire to burn among the laymen in the pew. The Bible says:

"Wait on the Lord." Blind poet John Milton wrote: "They also serve who only stand and wait." Maybe some people need to slow down and let God "catch up!"

A third attitude is that of advancing at God's Word. We are to respond to and obey His command. Just at the right second God tells Moses: "Wherefore crieth thou to me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward" (Exodus 14:15). When God's hour to march arrives, we are not to stand still any longer. Banish every idea of "the leek and garlic and onion of Egypt" - - besides, that stale life only gives spiritual halitosis. Take in the fresh air of adventure and excitement. Advance when God speaks the word.

The lines of Annie Johnson Flint challenge all of us as we face every "Red Sea" experience in life. This is another reminder that we are to let fear turn to faith, cowardice to courage, and bashfulness to boldness!

"Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where, in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?
Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene
Till the night of your fear is gone;
He will send the wind, He will heave the floods,
When He says to your soul, "Go on!"
We must not be insensitive to the attitude of progress when God says,
"March!"

II

What are the areas in which we are to advance? Can we name the parish, the district, the "ghetto," the spiritual world where we should make "tracks for the Lord?" What are the avenues down which we need to go?

Let us advance in freedom from evil forces which try to hold us. God's message is one to escape from the "pharaohs" of the world. God offers us freedom for every galling chain!

The story of the raising of Lazarus from death is a thrilling one. Four days after the burial of Lazarus, Jesus called him out of his grave, bound tightly in the garments of death. The Master said: "Loose him, and let him go!" (John 11:44). God offers that same life and freedom today. A person can be liberated from loneliness and emptiness, from family turmoil, from drugs, from a slanderous tongue, from bitterness, from moral impurity. Multitudes of Church people need to read Christ's "Emancipation Proclamation." Here it is! "If the Son therefore shall me you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Live in this freedom which

God gives! Praise Him for broken chains and snapped fetters. Walk forward in the atmosphere of a new spiritual life. Don't long for "the flesh pots of Egypt" anymore. Thank God now that you are free at last!

Let us advance in fellowship with God's redeemed. Israel was redeemed one by one, individually. A personal faith in the "Redemptive Lamb" of each household gave promise of deliverance from the "death angel." And yet, as the redeemed marched from Egypt, they marched together.

The twelve tribes became one family as they left Egypt. They walked together; they camped together; they worshipped together. They shared life with one another! The Scriptures know nothing of a redemption that leaves a person out of fellowship with the Church. We journey together, not in isolation.

We celebrate our victories with one another. We share our sorrows. We weep and laugh together. "And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (I Corinthians 12:26). Is this our fellowship experience?

Let us advance in our mission of sharing God's message of salvation. He is our redeeming God, and He wants us to share His message with the unsaved world. Why do so many know the story of Jesus, but never tell it?

Missionaries Harold and Betty Cummins served in Kenya, East Africa (and previously of Pakistan). Harold had a great Christian dad. One day Daniel B. Cummins, his dad, puttered along in his outboard motor boat on the Ouachita River near Champagnolle Creek in south Arkansas. Dan noticed the run-down, one-room house of "old Doc Baab," among the trees that lined the river bank. The intelligent, "home remedy" doctor didn't have any license to practice medicine, but he knew when man hurt and what would help him! Hundreds of Calhoun county folks had gone to him. The aged "Doc Baab" just existed "out there" on the river.

The one room shack built high up on stilts away from flood waters looked deserted as Dan Cummins slowly passed it in his boat. He thought: "What a shame that "old doc" is over there by himself. But people say if you witness to him he will likely `cuss you out'."

A little while later that morning Dan came back down the river. Fish were biting good!..."He will cuss you out," echoed in Dan's soul, but he decided to stop anyway. He walked up those rickety steps and looked in upon the eighty-year-old, white-bearded man whom he had known for a long time. "Hello, Doc, how `ya feeling?" A slow answer echoed from the

man lying on a battered cot: "Not so good, Dan..." When asked if anything could be done to help him, he said: "Yeah, Dan, squeeze out that orange for me over there, if you will."

The shrivelled-up orange on the wood stove begrudgingly gave up a little half-soured juice that trickled into a dirty glass. Doc's head was raised and he drank the juice and wanted more. Dan said, "Say this fall morning is beautiful. Wouldn't you like to go outside?" Dan helped "old doc" up from his cot and down the rickety steps to a big cypress log nearby. As both men sat down, Dan thought, "Now, Lord, what am I going to say to him?"...Then he spontaneously asked: "Say, Doc, I just wonder how it is with you and the Lord?" ... "That's funny, Dan, I was just thinking of that very thing when you came up." The experience of leading the old, weather-beaten "doc" to faith in Christ that day remained almost too sacred for Dan Cummins to repeat.

Dan soon returned to his boat, revved up the motor, and rushed home to tell his daughter, Faye, about the experience. She said: "Oh, Daddy! Let's take "Doc" something to eat!" A tablecloth was spread over a discarded fish box on the river bank. The steaming steak, mashed potatoes, apple pie, and a pot of hot coffee smelled mighty appetizing to hungry, lean old Doc when they got him down the steps and back to the cypress log... Flood waters soon started rising on the Ouachita River, splashing underneath Doc's shack. Friends came for Doc and kept him in their home in Calion for two months. One day as someone walked into his room, there lay "Doc Baab" with a Bible lying open across his chest. He had gone to be with the Lord.

Our mission? It is to witness. We are to tell the story of Jesus. And don't forget those who "hold the ropes" and are as deeply committed to missions as those who go to distant lands. A little boy said to his Sunday School teacher, "Do I always have to pay to come to Sunday School?" Well, those who pay, pray, sing, teach, visit, attend, and do a dozen other unheralded duties help enormously in the advance of God's mission. This is a grand avenue for advancement. We must succeed as a mission-minded people!

III

What assurances does God give us as we advance? Plenty! Trust Him, march, and He will bless! God guides us! The "pillar of cloud and fire" that went before Israel as they left Egypt guided them by night and by day. Our God is contemporary. He directs by His Holy Spirit, His "Shekinah Glory," today! Charles Erdman says: "The redeemed of the Lord can depend upon the guidance of the Lord."

God's guidance is not always by the shortest route, and that may depend upon people He didn't take Israel directly from Egypt to Canaan. Sometimes the path from "our groans to our glory" is a long detour. We may need the "discipline of the desert" just as much as Israel did. We may be guided to "the edge of the wilderness," through the middle of a sea, and into desert wastelands. But God guides!

God protects us. The pillar of cloud and fire stood between Israel and the pursuing Egyptians by day and by night. As Israel camped on the shores of the Red Sea, God told Moses to lift his rod, and the Red Sea opened up before them. Our Supernatural God relates Himself to the natural and performs the supernatural! (Exodus 14:21).

With walls of water high on both sides of them, Israel marched out of Egypt's domain into another land. God gave a passage through the sea with all the protective benefits. He can do the same today for us!

John Bunyan tells about Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* who saw two threatening lions near the road he traveled as he escaped from the city of destruction. He faced the temptation of returning, but didn't. As he got nearer the roaring lions, Christian saw chains about the necks of the lions. The wild beasts could get near the road, but they could not reach the one walking. God's word is "Fear not! March on!" God protects His people until He promotes them to paradise!

God gives us assurance of ultimate victory. What happened when the Hebrews passed through the sea and stood on the eastern shore? They looked back and saw the whole Egyptian army charging toward them. God told Moses to lift his rod over the sea and at that moment the walls of water collapsed upon the armies of Pharaoh, drowning all of them beneath the waves. God's people never forgot that impressive victory. They were free at last. Advance spelled out victory for them.

Do we need to see a work of God in our times? We can! Let's advance at His command, and God will show us what will happen. Do we need to "leave Egypt?" God can take us out! Do we need to cross an "impassable sea?" God can open a way through it - - even if some have to wait 400 years! God wants us to march with Him so we can also sing "The Song of Moses and the Lamb." Is this the end of the story? No, these words assure us of more exciting days ahead. Let's keep going with God.

Chapter Eight

OUR UNIQUE GOD

"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Exodus 15:11

"And Thomas answered and said unto Him (Jesus), My Lord and my God." John 20:28

Howard Hughes, a shriveled-up 70 year old billionaire bachelor who owned the Hughes Corporation, died in 1976. It seems that possessions had become the most important fact in his life. Countless people "build bigger barns" because money becomes their god.

What seems to be the greatest fact in your life? Is it health or wealth? Man often struggles to have a big bank account and then invests it all in an attempt to regain his health. Is the desire for a more robust body or a more radiant personality your top priority? If so, you are missing the mark!

What do you consider the most important fact in time and eternity? If your answer is God, then you are right. In chapter fifteen of Exodus we see the Egyptians meeting God in judgment in the midst of the sea. In that hour of danger, the Israelites marched out of Egypt under the protective hand of God. No other event in Old Testament history is more dramatic than Israel's Exodus from Egypt. God broke the bonds of Pharaoh and set His people free. In that act of deliverance, God demonstrated that He is the superlative God of history. He is unique among all powers everywhere. He showed Himself different from all ancient gods and He retains that same exalted position. He transcends every being. God is unique! His uniqueness is seen in His Presence, His Purity, and His Power. Moses raises the question: "Who is like unto the, O Lord, among the gods?" The implied answer is "none," for God is the only Lord.

I

The Presence of God indicates He is unique. Several years ago a woman died in Manhattan. She willed her property to God. The court appointed a committee to study the problem. (Sounds "church-like," doesn't it?). The committee report came back: "After due and diligent search, it has been determined that God cannot be found in New York."

New Yorkers have not been the only ones who thought they could not find God!

During Israel's exile in Egypt when suffering increased and hope waned, they wondered if God could be found there. Would He visit them again? Not for one day, however, did God forget His "people of promise." The entire Exodus story implies and reveals the presence of God. His presence is a grand fact of Christian experience. Notice what may be said concerning this Divine Presence.

God remains "near" His people. He watches over us just as carefully as He looked upon Israel. He is our "near-at-hand" Lord. God observes every sparrow that falls to the ground and sees every tear that stains the face of a despairing soul. He is near when children leave home, at the time of illness or death, when success brightens our path, or when life tumbles in upon us.

Moses discovered the nearness of God in the desert as he tended Jethro's sheep. God called to Moses from a "burning bush." That self-disclosure of God on a sun-parched spot indicates that He is always near and never far away. The "pillar of fire" and pillar of cloud" phenomenon also spoke clearly to Israel of God's nearness. The portable tabernacle in the wilderness became His dwelling place. He is always close at hand.

God remains "with" His people. A simple "nearness" never satisfied the "Chosen People." Man longs for a full revelation of God. Our Lord's response and promise to all who desire Him is "I will be `with' you." The birth of Jesus is God's "with-us" experience. "Emmanuel" means "God with us." The incarnation, or the coming of Jesus is human flesh as the everlasting God-man, spells out the fact that God is indeed among us. Jesus says: "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

One day a young boy gazed upon a picture of his father who happened to be on the other side of the world. Someone asked the child what he wanted. He said: "I want my daddy to come out of that picture and be with me."

God stepped out of eternity into time in Jesus Christ. He came to earth, clothed in flesh and blood. Without fear of contradiction we assert, "God is with us." Jesus boldly said: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). To see Jesus is to see God who is with us.

God remains "in" His people. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, He returned to Heaven. Would His followers become orphans? By

the grace and genius of the Holy Spirit, God lives within His followers throughout their earthly lives.

Pentecost became an historic event as the Holy Spirit came to live within the lives of God's redeemed people. Just as we celebrate Christmas as the birth of Jesus and Easter as His resurrection and victory over death, we also celebrate Pentecost as that non-repeatable day when God gave the Holy Spirit as the indwelling Presence of God for believers everywhere. The birth of Jesus, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension stand as once-and-for-all, non-repeatable historic acts. And so is Pentecost.

At the time of one's spiritual conversion, the Holy Spirit takes up His dwelling place within the believer. One can never have Christ without having the Holy Spirit. God is not divisible or fragmented. One does not have God as His Father apart from the Holy Spirit and Jesus. The gift of the Holy Spirit is simultaneous with one's salvation experience, not subsequent to it. He resides within us to glorify Jesus Christ and wants full control of every redeemed life. The Holy Spirit yearns for us to be yielded to and filled continually with His Presence. Otherwise, He is grieved. The Holy Spirit is God "in" us.

The Divine Presence near us, with us, and in us means that God is different from all other gods. The followers of Buddha, Mohammed, and all non-Christian groups can never experience God as we do. They do not have a "present" God. This triune presence of God means He is unique.

II

The Purity of God indicates He is unique. The text reads: "Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness?" God commanded Moses to take off his shoes, because the ground upon which he stood had become holy, sanctified by God's presence (Exodus 3:5). Centuries later in the temple of Jerusalem, Isaiah heard the seraphim proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Man becomes foul and unclean. God never does. He is holy and that purity or holiness ought to evoke a worthy response from man.

God's purity inspires us to praise Him. Chapter fifteen of Exodus is a "song on the seashore" that praises God for what He did. Moses exalts the name of God and offers Him thanksgiving for that grand victory over enemies. God delivers us from Satan and deserves our praises, too. Do we thank Him for every-day victories? Do we praise Him when He rescues us from the ugliness of depression and despair? Do we exalt God among our associates? He equips us to say with Alfred Tennyson's Sir Galahad:

"My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

One facet of life in heaven will be songs of praise. What hymns will we sing there? At least two are known. We will sing about the triumph which Moses and Israel sang on the eastern shores of the Red Sea. We will also sing about the blood of Calvary. Look at Revelation 15:3: "And they sing the song of Moses...and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." How may we praise God? David says: "Praise Him with stringed instruments (that could be a guitar or piano!) and organs...Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord Praise ye the Lord!" (Psalm 150:4, 6). The discovery of the Holiness of God should cause us to praise Him!

God's purity or holiness instructs us to fear Him. Down in Egypt, Pharaoh didn't fear God or man. He hardened his heart and scoffed at the name of God saying: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (Exodus 5:2). His ruthless disregard of the Holy One ushered in a catastrophic destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts.

A calamity eventually falls upon all who become calloused toward God. Don't overstep your bounds with God. The Bible declares: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). That includes every pharaoh and every pauper, the educated and the empty-headed, the oppressed and the oppressor. Don't throw aside your fear of God. "The fear of the Lord is, the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

The early Christian Church expanded. Then the sacred became "commonplace" for some. Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions and took a fraction of the proceeds to the Apostles. That action was taken under the pretense of dedicating all they had to God's Cause. Simon Peter told them that they had lied to God, not to men. Whereupon, the two died (Acts 5:5, 10). God's holy judgment is measured out against all who do not revere or fear Him. Because He is holy, let us fear God.

God's purity or holiness impels us to be like Him. Leviticus 11:45 reads: "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." Whom are we imitating? Whose life-style do we mimic? Is it the latest fad or celebrity? God ought to be our perpetual pattern. His Holy Life is to permeate our being and cause us to be like Him. We are to be like Him.

France and Russia battled one another in the early 1880's. During that Napoleonic era, the French captured a Russian soldier and engraved the letter "N" upon his arm - - a symbol of Napoleon. That Russian felt so dedicated to the Czar of his country that he grabbed an instrument and cut off his arm. He refused to be identified with a foreign power. Whom do we live for? Because of Calvary and Divine redemption, let us live a pure, Christ-like life. Our unique God is pure and wants us to praise Him, fear Him, and be like Him.

III

The power of God indicates He is unique. Gaze at the text again: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord...doing wonders?" He is the God who acts! He does wonders. He's a miracle-working God: alive, strong, and well. God is not a weakling who trembles when an atheist or an agnostic raises his voice or his pen in defiance. He has survived all attempts to annihilate or assassinate Him. The glorious power of God reminds us that He is unique.

God is powerful enough to redeem His people. Pharaoh held God's people with a vice-like grip. Now watch God act. He tells Pharaoh to let the people go. The monarch balks. Then God let His death angel move across the Nile delta until Pharaoh screamed for the people to get out of his land. Death-bed repentance didn't last for Pharaoh. When he thought he had the Israelites trapped against the sea, he pursued them again. God instructed Moses to lift up his rod, then "with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea" (Exodus 15:8). Is that all? No..."Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters" (Exodus 15:10).

God is powerful enough to use weak instruments for His glory. Even though Moses considered himself inadequate for the task, God didn't take "no" for an answer. God used Moses in a supernatural way. Look at the first five books of the Old Testament which Moses wrote. When that forty year old run-away from Egypt herded sheep beneath the sultry sun and sparkling stars of the desert, he never dreamed of becoming God's instrument for the writing of a big section of the Bible. He did, however, when he became a vessel in God's hand. God's greatness is such that He can use any instrument, when that one becomes adaptable or pliable to Divine purposes.

God can use a nation for His purposes. One Church can become a mighty force in the hands of God. An individual can be used to accomplish mighty deeds for the Lord. What kind of a person is God looking for? What does he demand? He requires yielded lives. Do you know of someone who should be a useful instrument in the hands of

God? Tell that one to place his life upon the "altar of consecration." God will not let any volunteer stay idle. God may need to prepare and fit the person and wants to work through the lives of His people. Do you prefer that God use or by-pass you? You hold the answer.

God is powerful enough to sustain His people. What about the long marches across the desert? God's promises are His provisions. He never fails. What about the long spiritual droughts and blights in the life of churches? There, too, God can give "water from the rock" and "manna from heaven." What about the plagues that pound down upon us and the serpents that strike? God has healing for those evils, also. What about the sorrows that surround us and the tragedies that take their toll? God never closes His eyes to that! His promise to Moses is His promise to us: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus 33:14). God's strength does not wilt nor diminish. He declares: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increases strength...they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:29, 31).

God is powerful enough to lead His people into a life full of meaning. Where can one live that abundant life? At home and in the office. Your school room may become God's "promised land." A hospital bed or the job is the place where we experience "the more abundant life." The "crossing of the Jordan doesn't mean heaven, but it is our spiritual life here and now. This means the fullness of life, moment by moment, in Jesus Christ. God is strong enough to lead us out of the barren desert-like wastes and take us into the "land flowing with milk and honey." We may move out of slavery, across the wilderness wastes, and into the fruitful hills and valleys of the life which is our appointed heritage. As the strong arm of God leads us, a richer life will be our experience.

God is unique! His Presence, His Purity, and His Power indicate that grand truth. Our unique God invites us to have a new standing with Him. He makes us His new creation. How does that happen? We invite Jesus Christ to enter life as Savior. We trust His shed blood on Calvary for our sin debt, our redemption. By faith in that crucified, risen Christ, we become the redeemed and unique people of God.

God now expects His people to be unique because of that unique experience at the cross. He pleads with estranged humanity to place its faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Unredeemed man can be cleansed and made ready for God's holy habitation. Will man be like

Pharaoh and rebel against God or will he be like Moses and surrender to our unique God?

Chapter Nine

THE COMPANY OF COMPLAINERS

"Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted there for water and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me." Exodus 17:3-4

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings." Phil. 2:14

I grew up in the country where all kinds of birds were observed. The migratory martin and the beautiful bluebird are among my favorites. They often build their nests in man-made bird houses or swinging gourds, bringing delight to bird watchers. One bird that the farmer despises is the crow. That rather large, black bird will scratch up seed, tear up roasting ears, peck holes in watermelons, and call his "cousins" to help him with his destruction. Did you ever hear a crow sing? He can't. He only lets out an ugly squawk. When a number of crows get together, they become a company of complainers, squawking about everything and nothing in particular.

Some people refresh those who associate with them. Their eyes sparkle, their smile radiates an inner joy, and their conversation is wholesome. Others whine, nag, and complain.

The complaining habit is common. Monitor the talk that goes on in your family, business, or Church for one hour. Tabulate the results; you may be in for a big surprise. Complaining is contagious. It is a spiritual disease that spreads rapidly - - one individual can start an epidemic. Such a practice is also costly. The complainer ruins his own personality, while he spews his poison on others.

A few chapters in the book of Exodus relate to whining and chiding. The ancient people of God knew how to grumble! We are not immune

from this devilish practice. People complain. Let's explore the reasons for the complaining habit.

I

We often complain when physical needs are lacking. The body demands attention. Rest, food, water, and other comforts are necessary to sustain life. A failure in one of these areas may cause complaints. We complain when there is an inadequate water supply. The body cannot survive long without water. On the third day after Israel's passage through the sea, they began to moan and groan. Why? The water at Marah (meaning "bitter") had a brackish taste. Moses became the target of the people's complaints. He turned to God who solved that problem.

God answers us when we complain. Don't you suppose He would also supply our needs without the complaints? Wouldn't it have been better if Israel had only said: "Hey, Moses, we praise God that He has given us an abundance of water. The sheep and cows have all they need. We humans, however, have sensitive taste buds and wonder if God would be gracious enough to sweeten the water that happens to be a little bitter?" God probably would have answered: "Certainly I will do that for my people, Moses. See that tree out in the desert? Pitch it in the water and watch what happens." Let's make our requests with rejoicing. Since God is great enough to give us water, He can give good water. Romans 8:32 reads: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" God can give an abundance of good water without our murmuring.

When Israel arrived at Rephidim and howled for water, Moses feared they would stone him to death! (Exodus 17:4) Had they used up God's water supply? Never! That rock which Moses smote that day continued with them for forty years, giving two million people and their animals all the water they needed. That rock was Christ (I Corinthians 10:4). Shouldn't God's supply stop our complaints about hardships in the body? We need to remember that Israel's God is ours, too. He is Jehovah-Jireh - "the Lord who provides." Confide in Him, don't complain to him!

Sickness is another source of complaint. Illness comes and we "get on edge!" Appropriately, God reminds ancient Israel and contemporary Christians that "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26). Wonder of wonders is Jehovah-Rophe, "God our healer." Most often God touches our bodies by natural means - - medicines, hospitals, nurses, and doctors. He is the supernatural Lord who may also intervene when human resources fail. Let's trust God when illness strikes, rather than annoy Him with our laments.

A deluge of grumbling buries a leader when his followers become hungry. It happened with Moses. The people cried for the "flesh pots" of Egypt (Exodus 16:20). They failed to realize that God would supply their food when all visible means of support had been exhausted. Out in the desert, God gave His people manna and quail. Delicacies in a desert. Full rations came by His grace every day! Count on God to supply your food. Claim the promise in Psalms 37:25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Trust. Work. Obey. God always comes through!

Three bears walked through the forest one day before lunch. As soon as they arrived home, Daddy Bear grabbed his bowl and said, "Someone has eaten my soup!" Baby Bear ran and picked up his bowl and cried: "Yes, and someone ate my soup, too!" Mother Bear growled back: "Will you two stop your complaining! I have not even poured the soup!" Do we give God enough time to "pour our soup?"

In *His Way Out* Dr. Ramm states the truth clearly: "God supplies our daily bread through sun, rain, farmers, bakers, truck drivers, and markets, yet there may be times that our bread comes to us unexpectedly through a very special providence of God" (page 102).

II

We complain when enemies threaten. Will we be free from them? No. The young people have rivals - - some friendly; others, unkind. The politician faces enemies. One nation never stays on good terms with the entire world. The Sunday School teacher or pastor will not hear the praises of everyone. Don't expect that! Jesus says: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). Get ready for a few assaults, and don't argue that it should not happen to you! When enemies surround you, don't complain. Handle them wisely.

Be kind to enemies. Trace the movement of Israel in her pilgrimage. Below the surface, one will be surprised to learn how that nation endeavored to deal justly with her neighbors. Moses showed patience with Pharaoh. The wandering Israelite tribes tried to deal kindly with the Edomites and all the other peoples they met in the desert. This is the best approach. Try to find a trail of kindness which will lead to the heart of the enemy. Beware of complaints.

There may come a moment when one needs to step aside and let God handle the enemies. Such an approach occurred with Israel at the Red Sea. Exodus 14:14 reads: "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." God tells us: "Don't be perturbed; be peaceful. Don't complain; confide! Don't rush into battle; rely on Divine orders."

God's way of dealing with our enemies may surprise us. To Israel, God promised "the Angel of His Presence." God may use His heavenly messengers for the safety of His people more often than we realize. Psalms 37:4 and Hebrews 1:14 give clear indications of such care.

God may use natural forces to safeguard His children. The Lord of Battles works in many ways! Exodus 23:27-29 grabs our attention: "I will send my fear before thee...and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee...And I will send hornets before thee...to drive out the enemy...By little and little I will drive them out..." God can cause panic to explode in the breast of His enemies.

Did a wasp ever sting you? A hornet inflicts agony more excruciating! A swarm of hornets can put an entire army to flight. And when God sends a squadron of those vicious insects on a stinging mission, they reach their target! Do you have some enemies? Don't complain. Give God an opportunity to come on the scene.

Sometimes, God may give a fresh order for His people to enter the fray. He may expect us to face a situation with boldness and dynamism. If so, we should meet the responsibility without complaining. Israel met stiff resistance all her days. Those pockets of opposition stared her in the face at every turn in the road. Exodus 17:8 tells about one group that leaped against God's Chosen Ones: "Then Amalek came." (The Amalekites descended from Esau, Genesis 36:12). The two forces met in a pitched battle at Rephidim. How did Israel fare? Super! They liquidated the attackers. An assuring word comes to those alert to the Divine plan, "God is our banner" (Exodus 17:15). Don't panic nor protest because enemies stalk near by. Proceed according to God's plan!

III

Why do we sometimes complain? Isn't it because we never realize the seriousness of this sin? The religious leaders may warn about other sins. We attack the drug traffic, the murder and rape problems, and the problem of theft. What about the sin of complaining? Is it only a "misdemeanor"? God thinks otherwise.

Does there ever come a time when God becomes tired of our complaining? He did with Israel. He told Moses that He would send deadly snakes among the complaining people. Those poisonous serpents must have crawled from beneath large rocks or boulders to strike an Israelite when he walked along the way, or when he sat down to rest. The serpents probably bit children who complained at play, sank their fangs into men who cursed as they watched after their herds or fumed

about the scorching sun, and hissed at mothers who unhappily gathered sticks for cooking. No one knows how many people died from those bites. God allowed death to come to many complainers.

Beyond Sinai, Miriam complained of Moses' leadership. She didn't like his wife, either. God's anger kindled against Miriam and leprosy covered her body. (Numbers 12:10). To criticize another person is not always healthy. Find a better way to handle those who may be in error.

Korah also complained. He led two hundred fifty strong men against Moses. The consequences proved to be catastrophic. "The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up...and all their goods...and they perished" (Numbers 16:32, 33). God took drastic action against those violent, wicked complainers.

Penalties are still assessed against complainers. One's joy can't survive this sin. Radiance retreats from those who grumble. The one who constantly complains will find others avoiding his company. Grumbling and complaining will harm a person.

Are you guilty of complaining? Forgiveness comes at a big price. It is hard to forgive sin. Someone pays a big price for the removal of transgression and the restoring of fellowship. That person "happens" to be Jesus. God told Moses to place a serpent of brass on a pole for those who had been bitten (Numbers 21:9). All who looked upon that uplifted symbol of death lived. Centuries later, Jesus referred to that event, reminding us that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree (John 3:14). If the grumbling habit "saps away your life," remember there's only one remedy. The brass serpent in the wilderness will not solve your problem, but Jesus will. Dispose of this devastating habit at Calvary!

IV

A Christian is tempted to complain when he forgets God's gracious dealings with Him. How many times this past week or today have you thought of God's goodness and mercy? Listen to the words of Lamentations 3:22-23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: Great is thy faithfulness." This Old Testament reminder of God's compassion and mercy should revive every despairing person. Be grateful to Him for His goodness! Don't protest, but praise the King for His greatness to us.

One year during "hog killing time," my Dad told me to cut a small hickory tree in the nearby woods and drag it up to the "smoke house." (The green hickory bums slowly and the smoke gives a richer flavor to

the hanging meat as well as helps cure it.) I harnessed Ada and soon had her hitched up to a fair-sized hickory sapling that I had cut down. Instead of walking beside the mule and the pole for that quarter of a mile back home, I decided to ride. As soon as I mounted Ada, the frightened animal made two quick jumps and through the woods we went, losing the hickory tree first of all, then the harness was ripped off, and I fell to the ground. Only the grace of God saved me from death or serious injury that day. If our hearts are overflowing with gratitude for His goodness, there will not be room for protests and grumbling.

Can you list some of the ways God has shown His favor to you? Count your blessings. Write them down on a sheet of paper. Start with your youthful days. Try early adulthood and the middle years. Don't forget job experiences. Think about your family. Include your physical and material blessings. Think of the miracle of your body. Five million cells are in a speck of blood. Your body creates more than two million new cells every second to replace the old ones that live less than four months. God gives us a miraculous body, designed through His own wisdom. He will reshape and make it for an eternal purpose one day. Yes, remember "all His benefits." If we try to remember them, we will rejoice. A joyful person draws others to himself or herself. Live this route.

V

We often complain because we overlook God's grand purpose for His people. The abundant life is God's desire for us. He offers much more than a future salvation. God gives life now! He promised Israel the land of Canaan. The majority never got there! Instead of entering their long awaited inheritance, they died in rebellion in the wilderness wanderings. Many of the Lord's redeemed ones are still "in the wilderness." These have escaped from Pharaoh, but they don't enjoy the fruit from the "land flowing with milk and honey." They travel with the "caravan of complainers." Since God offers "life more abundant," why would any Christian deprive himself of it?

God wants us to be His means of sharing His message with all the world. God says to Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 that if she will keep His covenant, "then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine : And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." And this is God's plan for His redeemed!

God never saves anyone just "to take him to heaven." God uses today's world as a showcase for His "trophy of grace." Our lives are to be a testimony of His ability to save. We must tell people who live in darkness and despair that God loves them. Let us tell them that Jesus died and

arose again to be their Savior. We are to stand as one great kingdom of witnesses to God's glorious truth of redemption. What happens if a Christian establishes a complaining habit? He can't live the over-flowing life. Neither can he tell the "good news story" while he's whining. That dual purpose of God for one's life will be negated instead of accentuated if complaining is not stopped.

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If we are a part of "the company of complainers," God can change us. Protests can be converted to praise. Grumbles can be changed to gratitude. Our complaints may undergo spiritual therapy and come forth as a concert of happiness. Do we need to ask God to forgive this sin? He can pardon our transgression and put us on a path of praise. When things don't go our way, we don't have to fuss and fume. We can sing and smile. God can turn every dissatisfaction into a doxology. This is a worthwhile exchange.

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Chapter Ten

IN-LAWS CAN BE A BLESSING

"And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent." Exodus 18:7

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." I Corinthians 1:10

Good family relationships are important. The total family structure ought to be one of love, trust, and mutual support. This includes in-laws! The in-laws have been the target of many caricatures and jokes for ages. We recognize, however, that "in-laws" form a vital part of the family constellation. Unchristian attitudes and behavior in this area of life destroy the joy which all members of this social unit should experience. Life becomes enriched when every member in the family circle lives in harmony.

The story of Jethro and Moses is a superb one. That father-in-law and son-in-law may have lived in the same house for forty years. The Biblical record does not make any suggestion of any problems that arose between them. In-laws may live together in unity. They can be a blessing.

I

In-laws should recognize the worth of every person. We remember the story of Moses during his middle years. He left Egypt at 40 years of age because of a foul act. When Moses saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews, he over-reacted. Moses killed the Egyptian and had to run for his life. Pharaoh threatened to put Moses to death (Exodus 2:15).

Moses entered the land of Midian. One later afternoon as he sat on a well, seven sisters came to draw water for their father's cattle. Wandering shepherds frightened the young ladies away from the watering troughs. Moses quickly entered the scene, drove away the nomads, and drew the necessary water for the cattle.

The girls returned home earlier than usual that day. Their father, Jethro, asked why they had returned so soon. They related the incident about Moses. "Where is he?" Jethro inquired. Jethro told them to rush back to the well and get him. He realized that Moses was an unusual man. Jethro looked deep into the life of Moses and discovered his sterling quality and realized that Moses displayed a true character by defending the daughters who could not take care of themselves.

Are we able to see another's worth? Are we ever blind to an in-law's noble deeds and desires? Many people may be "sitting on some well curb" with a feeling of loneliness, alienation, and fear. People of great worth may at times come to "wit's end" and stare into space with an inner, empty feeling. Let's give them a chance!

Jonathan Edwards, a juggernaut of spiritual power in early America, saw David Brainerd as a man of devotion and dedication. Edwards welcomed him into his household as son-in-law. Before he reached the age of thirty, Brainerd died while investing his life as a tireless missionary to the North American Indians. That Presbyterian preacher of "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God" fame was always glad that he saw greatness in young Brainerd and gave him permission to marry one of his daughters.

II

In-laws should be ready to assist family members in a crisis. Moses worked for Jethro for forty years. One day God called and commissioned Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the Hebrews from slavery. What would Moses do with Zipporah and their two sons? Jethro accepted the responsibility of their well-being in the absence of the faithful son-in-law. For nearly two years that extra family responsibility rested upon the shoulders of Jethro who never whimpered one time. He set a good example which may have followed since that day.

Young men have gone into military service. Wives and children have been left behind with the parents. These have welcomed back into the "family nest" the daughter and grandchildren during the absence of the son-in-law. Other in-laws have been a great help when school responsibilities proved to be too heavy upon the newlyweds. Illness has come and in-laws have stepped in to play a supportive role. Sometimes young couples with children have divorced or some other tragedy has befallen them, and the in-laws have be-friended the struggling parties. In-laws can be a blessing when some crisis strikes as well as during the calm, prosperous years of marriage.

The in-law story is one which nearly everyone will face at one time or another. God can prepare us for that day in order that we who have not known this kind of experience may fulfill the "Jethro role" in a commendable way. It is sort of frightening to think about, isn't it?

III

In-laws should rejoice when God gives victory and blessings to other family members. Moses returned from Egypt with the young Hebrew nation. A beautiful reunion took place as they met near Mt. Sinai in a joyful meeting. Shouldn't all in-laws get together like that? After their embrace and exchange of greetings had taken place, Moses began to tell his father-in-law about God's dealings with them. He recounted their deliverance from Egypt. He told about the Red Sea experience. He told about the people's thirst in the desert and all the other travails along the way. Moses gave God credit for the miraculous happenings on their journey. Excitement filled his soul as he talked. No hum-drum, routine recounting of dusty, stale experiences came from Moses. Those supernatural events etched themselves upon his soul, and he could not help but tell what God had done.

Jethro listened with awe, wonder, and gratitude. He "rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 18:9). When victory comes to another member of our household, we should celebrate that good day with them. It may be graduation day. God may bless the family with the precious gift of a new life - - a grandchild. Perhaps for some it is hearing for the first time about God's gracious and miraculous leading in the life of one related to us. Let this' be a good day for everyone!

IV

In-laws should be anxious to worship God with family members. As Moses recounted the stories of God's dealings in the lives of His people. Jethro praised the Lord. He believed in "heart-felt religion." He had no fear of being called a fanatic! Jethro exclaimed: "Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians...Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods" (Exodus 18:10-11). He knew that Jehovah God is the Lord. He didn't ask Moses to excuse him from the worship service. Instead, he "rounded up" the seventy elders of Israel and joined Moses and Aaron in a great praise service on the spot! It could have been on a Tuesday morning or a Friday afternoon. He couldn't wait until the sabbath. Burnt offerings and sacrifices were made unto God (Exodus 18:12). They enjoyed a fellowship meal in that moment of spiritual ecstasy.

In-laws should get together to praise the Lord. And why not? We talk about the weather. Others grow pessimistic over the stock market, while some whisper about the latest rumor that has just began to circulate in town. Why not talk about God? And why wait until Sunday? Let Jethro set us straight and call us to recognize the supremacy of God in all the affairs of life. We ought to have countless "share-groups" spontaneously arising all over the world as in-laws get together to talk about the One who "made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel" (Psalm 103:7).

V

In-laws should be ready to offer wise counsel when it is needed. Jethro did not dictate, but he did offer sane suggestions to Moses. Moses acted as the head of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government. He sat from morning until evening on the cases which came before him (Exodus 18:13). Even with all the powers which he summoned, Moses could not continue with the grueling task which he faced each day. In Numbers 11:14 he complained to God about the devastating work: "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." What would he do? What could Moses do but collapse under the burden of his job?

Jethro stepped upon the scene. He surveyed the events of the day. He warned Moses that no person could continue for long with his kind of schedule. That became a good day in the life of God's man. He accepted the counsel of his father-in-law and appointed judges over the people (Exodus 18:18-22). The men who took the heavy load off the shoulders of Moses met stipulated qualifications:

1. They were able men. God's work demands quality workmen! The Lord still searches those who have disciplined and prepared themselves for noble service.

2. They were men who feared God. If one is to do the work of God, he must have a reverence and even a holy fear of God. The ever-present God is also the transcendent, holy God. Let's not bring Him down to "chummy" terminology.

3. They were men of truth. Integrity is God's "order of the day." The Lord looks for those who work for Him in honesty.

4. They were men who hated covetousness. A covetous person is not one who meets God's specifications. One who thinks about personal gain fails the test.

Moses survived the first onslaught of relentless problems after the Exodus because his father-in-law spoke wisely to him about human

limitations. Undoubtedly, that same principle of "team work" saved Moses during the forty years' wilderness journey.

Where is the man who wants to do all the work by himself? He can't last long. D. L. Moody is credited with saying, "It is better to have ten men do the work than have one man do the work of ten men." This truth is applicable in every area of life. Can one person listen to all the complaints that come in? "My child is suffering from a 101 degree fever...Our family dog has a new litter of puppies...The teacher at school gave my child a failing grade in history...Car payments are killing me...Why is our Sunday School attendance dropping off in the summer time?" Can one person handle every minor case which may come to him in a week? Then will he have time for the family? What about the other jobs that are within the priority list? What's the answer? A division of labor! Let others who are well-equipped for the work do it. They need the practice. Let the children of the household help with the chores. Let some members of the Church visit the hospitals and rest homes. Others can teach or lead in prayer, too! One man or one small group should not try to do it all. Listen to Jethro. He's a good father-in-law!

VI

In-laws should be ready to retreat at the right moment. The Scripture is interesting: "And Moses let his father-in-law depart; and he went his way into his own land" (Exodus 18:27). Moses loved his father-in-law. At the same time, Jethro knew when his time for departure had come. He walked away from Moses and we hear of him no more. But how he has enriched us by appearing for a brief while upon the scene with Moses.

When is it appropriate to say "good bye?" That depends on the situation and the people involved. But knowing when and how to say farewell gives us a good standing with those who have a relationship with us. Tears may well-up within our eyes. Parting when circumstances have been pleasant may prove to be heart-rending. However, the Christian should realize that one day all of God's redeemed will be brought together again, and there will not be other partings. And so, like Jethro and Moses, we may each depart to our own particular tasks which God has placed before us.

Do we want to be a blessing to others? We can be! A person does not have to be associated with a great people in order to be of great service. There are plenty of us "little people" out in the world. Everyone needs help at one time or another. All of us may be helpful to those who cross our paths. Jesus tells us that the greatest is really the servant of all. The Savior says we can be a blessing to others. Who wants to miss this opportunity?

Chapter Eleven

GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE

"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." Exodus 19:4-6

"And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Mark 12:23

Dr. A. J. Glaze, a retired missionary professor, states that an understanding of the covenant is the key to understanding the Old Testament. He says a boy may agree to mow the lawn for a family for a stipulated amount. The boy promises to do a certain job and the family agrees to pay for the work. Their agreement is a covenant. Two or more people are involved in any contract or covenant.

After the Exodus experience, the Hebrews entered into what is called the Mosaic or Law Covenant. In the midst of thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a trumpet blast, smoke, fire, and a shaking mountain. God revealed Himself to the budding Hebrew nation. Hebrews 12:18-24 reviews the events related to the giving of the Law and the people's entering that covenant relationship.

The New Testament gives strong emphasis to the new covenant of grace in Christ. It fulfilled and superseded the legal or law covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24). Jeremiah had foretold that great Event in Christ (33:31). God's New Covenant with man took effect through the death of Jesus (Matthew 26:28).

There is a clear distinction between the two covenants. The Law remained limited to Israel. The Covenant of Grace relating to Abraham

has universal significance. The Apostle Paul gives strong emphasis to the contrasting covenants in Romans and Galatians. The writer of Hebrews makes the same emphasis by contrasting the two covenants as Paul did. The purpose of the covenant was to bind God's redeemed people to Himself. Israel accepted the terms of the covenant. The pact or covenant called for Israel's obedience to God's commands, resulting in the promised blessing of God upon the nation.

I

The covenant contained laws for the welfare and protection of man. The laws reminded man that God expected His people to live uprightly. They never produced righteousness. Those laws were three-fold in nature: moral, ceremonial, and civil.

The moral aspect of the covenant related to the ten commandments. Exodus 19 and 20 deals extensively with this area of the covenant that was given to God's redeemed people to regulate and guide their lives.

There are eternal principles within the commandments which still serve to guide man today. For instance, theft is still wrong; slander, murder, and profanity are not right. A person should work, honor his parents, and worship the Living God. These aspects of the commandments do not change.

The ceremonial part of the covenant related to worship. Exodus 20:21-26 presents in embryo the ceremonial laws which are fully discussed in later chapters of Exodus, as well as in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These laws related to: (1) the tabernacle, (2) the priesthood, (3) the offerings and sacrifices, and (4) the sacred seasons of the year.

The civil laws incorporated within the covenant pertained to the court or judicial system. This section of the covenant had to do with people and property: administration of justice, court procedures, penalties for law breakers, property rights, and other legal rulings. Those ancient rules are set out in Exodus 21:1-24:8. Those laws changed with time. Indeed, changes came about even before Israel entered Canaan. Civil law can never be finalized. It has to be adjusted to the times and hardness of man's heart (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:3-9).

II

God's redemption of man stands as the basis of the covenant. In fact, God always takes the first step toward man. We respond to Him because He first acts in our behalf. At no place is this fact of divine initiative more clearly demonstrated than in man's redemption. God's three-fold description of the way He saved Israel is the pattern we have in Jesus Christ.

God defeats the enemy. Exodus 19:3 declares, "Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians." Surely no one doubts God's victory during the death-angel visit and the defeat of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

God's greater victory over the enemy is viewed at the cross. Through the death of His Only Begotten Son, God has given us the guarantee of Satan's doom. The devil who "throws himself across man's path" (diaballo: to throw across) has been mortally wounded by the death-resurrection of Jesus. The final and everlasting defeat of our enemy is not far away.

God delivers His people. "I bare you on eagles' wings" (Exodus 19:4). The eagle is the greatest of birds, the "jet age flyer." The eagle pushes the eaglets from the nest high up on a mountain peak. The little ones struggle to stay in a secure place, but they don't belong there. As they plummet out of the nest one by one, the big eagle soars beneath each one to give protection until flying becomes a natural art (Deuteronomy 32:11).

God pushed Israel out of her nest in Goshen! The people cried out for deliverance, then protested because they didn't believe God was strong enough to care for them. He brought them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. He saved them from thirst and starvation. God gave His people protection countless times in the desert wanderings. He does take His people along on "eagles wings." God accepts us in a personal way. "And (I) brought you unto myself" (Exodus 19:4). The redeemed have the consciousness of being drawn unto God. The Christian becomes conscious of a Divine-human relationship that is personal and perpetual. We belong to our Redeemer!

III

Man is responsible to God because of the covenant relationship. All the earth belongs to God, but He elected Israel as His "peculiar treasure" (Exodus 19:5). This relationship spells out a responsibility. Sigmund Mowinckel says that "God's election is always an election for service, humiliation, service."

The same principle of responsibility given to ancient Israel finds clear expression in I Peter 2:9. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a witnessing community. Anything less is sub-Christian. Multitudes of Christians remain in the sub-standard category. We need to reawaken to our high and holy calling. Ours is a spiritual responsibility with great privileges.

We are to reign as kings. Exodus 19:6 reads: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests." The idea seems to be two-fold: "kings and priests." At least, the New Testament concept is of a dual nature. After stating that the Christian is loved by the Father and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, Revelation 1:6 emphasizes the kingship and priesthood ideas: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."

Kings reign with dignity and honor. They are not slaves nor cowards. Kings are free, not subjugated to others. Our spiritual relationship to God gives us the noble status of kings. Paul declares: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him; He also will deny us" (II Timothy 2:12). The reign of the redeemed on earth finds expression in Revelation 5:10. Following the first resurrection, John declares that the Christian will reign with Christ on the earth for one thousand years (whatever that perfect number may mean Revelation 20:6). An eternal reign of all redeemed is foretold in the description of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 22:5). This kind of spiritual rule will undoubtedly be one of continued responsibility.

We are to serve as priests. Exodus 19:6 states this truth. God instituted the Aaronic line of priests. When Jesus died, that priestly system with all its sacrifices came to an end. Mormonism's claim to a continued Aaronic priesthood is false because that priesthood is as outmoded just like the animal sacrifices of the old Covenant. That ancient priestly system does not have any place in the new Covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ.

The universal principle of the priesthood, however, is a vital part of the New Testament. This means that every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ (I Timothy 2:5). The "rent veil" gave every believer an entrance into God's presence through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The priest-believer is to be consecrated and yielded unto God. When Aaron and his sons were consecrated to God, blood from a sacrificial victim was placed upon the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe on the right foot (Exodus 29:20). What one hears, does, and wherever one goes is to be a "holy pilgrimage." That was the consecration service for the priests.

We are to be consecrated unto God. This is the appeal of Romans 12:1. The call for the Christian's dedication runs throughout the New Testament. The priest-believer is to be anointed for service. Exodus 30:30 puts the truth this way: "And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office." That which God designated as spiritual preparation for the ancient priests is "Standard Equipment" for contemporary Christians.

Ah! Let's not forget the spiritual anointing! The fresh, dynamic breath of God must fall upon the Church again and again! Well-known servants of the Lord and multiplied numbers of every day Christians know what it means to walk in the fullness and the freshness of the Spirit of God. The redeemed of God must have the power of God. In the words of a chorus arranged by B. B. McKinney, may we experience and sing:

Spirit of the living God,
Fall fresh on me,
Spirit of the living God,
Fall fresh on me.
Break me, melt me,
Mould me, fill me,
Spirit of the living God,
Fall fresh on me.

The priest-believer is to intercede on the behalf of others. We are to be a channel through which God may bless all people everywhere. We remember each other in prayer. An illustration of the total concern we are to have for others is illustrated by the ephod worn by the high priest. Two onyx stones had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them. "And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial...and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial" (Exodus 28:12). Furthermore, the breastplate had four rows of stones (28:17). That garment was worn by the high priest with the stones representing all of Israel upon his heart (Exodus 28:29). Aaron and succeeding high priests symbolically carried all of Israel upon their shoulders and in their hearts.

Are we involved in a comparable spiritual ministry? Do we intercede for those who are a part of "our tribe," as well as for all of God's creation? This is a vital part of our priestly role. We live in the midst of a people who struggle in a helpless, hopeless condition. Jean Paul Sartre, a French philosopher and novelist who declined the Nobel prize for literature in 1964, declared: "There is no escape from present despair." Many would shout, "Help me!" if they knew how. What is the duty of the Christian in the face of those crushed beneath an avalanche of problems? Help must be given in whatever dosage it may be administered. Priesthood entails this kind of role which is missionary to the core.

Years ago George Mason worked for his church denomination. A caller at his office waited for Mr. Mason to finish his conversation which was going on inside the office. As the visitor waited, he heard Mr. Mason say: "Lord, take care of that widow and four children...she needs coal and groceries..." The silence settled over the room for a few moments. The

voice continued again: "That's alright, Lord. I'll take care of it myself on the way home this afternoon." This is ministry!

We are to live as a holy people. "And ye shall be unto me...an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Engraved upon the mitre or headdress of the high priest were the words: "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (Exodus 28:36). That one man represented the entire Israelite nation before God. Everyone was to be an integral part of God's holy people.

The truth of our being made right with God in order to form a holy community is deeply imbedded within the total Biblical context. Since God is holy, He expects His people to be holy. Trust produces obedience. If we are God's people, we become God-like. Morality follows redemption as fruit follows the blossom. Holiness in thought, word, and deed is the natural product of redemption. And yet, God's holy character is imparted to His people as an achievement of His grace.

Moses served as the mediator of the covenant at Sinai. All of Israel bound themselves to that covenant. But not even Moses could live up to the covenant terms! The people said: "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (Exodus 24:3). They failed to realize the weakness and total inadequacy of the human flesh.

The sealing of the covenant came about as the people committed themselves to the hearing and doing of God's commands (Exodus 24:7). Blood was then sprinkled upon the altar and upon the people (24:6, 7). At that moment the seventy elders along with Moses, Aaron, and his two sons had a vision of God "and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" (Exodus 24:10). They "saw God, and did eat and drink" (v. 11). The covenant relationship was confirmed !

The new covenant of grace is confirmed, too. Jesus has become our mediator. The holy meal has been celebrated and the sacrifice of God's Son has taken place. God's protecting and enabling presence is with us because of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. Henceforth, in faith and obedience we are to live and serve our God.

Chapter Twelve

THE COMPANY OF THE COMMITTED

"Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? Let him come unto me,, And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him." Exodus 32:26

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24

The name of Dr. Elton Trueblood stands among the great Christians of any generation. Trueblood was a member of the Friends or Quaker denomination. He was a marvelous Christian preacher and teacher, a perceptive thinker and a prolific writer. More than thirty books came from the pen of this former college professor. His books are profound and are loaded with wide-ranging concepts. One of the books by this noted author is entitled *The Company of the Committed*. In this book, Trueblood indicates that a small nucleus of Christians wholly committed to God can make a great impact upon the world.

Jesus selected twelve men to be His disciples. They became His "Company of the Committed." When Saul became the king of Israel, a band of men followed him "whose hearts the Lord had touched." That small company made a big difference in the time they served their king. God called Gideon to fight the Midianites, saying: "Gideon, we do not need 30 thousand to conquer the enemy. Ten thousand soldiers are too many! My plan does not call for vast numbers, Gideon; three hundred can defeat the Midianites" God reduced the troops to a small fighting force who defeated a great pagan army that surrounded the Hebrews.

One day Moses called for those who would get on God's side to stand with him. The Levites responded. They committed themselves unto God. That type of commitment sets the pattern for you and me. Moses asked an important question and gave an invitation: "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me." God's committed people have a unique, multi-faceted role to fulfill. We must not shirk this responsibility of being committed to God for His purposes.

I

The Company of the Committed remembers the cost of redemption. We know that God paid a big price to make us His own people. A few months before the Scripture text, God redeemed the Hebrews from centuries of Egyptian slavery. They could not extricate themselves from their plight. They did not have military power. Pharaoh had them! When the redemption moment came, God acted and set them free.

God asked that a sacrifice be made - - the death of a little animal. The blood from the animal was sprinkled upon and above the doorway of each Hebrew home. The Lord had declared: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). Later on, God reminded His people : "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exodus 19:4). Would God's chosen people ever forget? They did! They soon gave the glory of their liberation to a golden calf.

The Christian should never forget that we owe our lives to Jesus Christ. Our exodus is far greater than the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt. God brought us from the land of sin to the place of freedom and life eternal in Jesus Christ! Can we ever forget God's act of kindness and redemption in Jesus? Some do forget so soon.

We are "redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19). The Bible states the truth clearly in I John 1:7: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." We would be destined for hell were it not for the fact that God intervened between us and death by the giving of His only begotten son. We owe our redemption to the One who loved us and Who gave Himself for us. We owe our lives to the One who set us free.

II

The Company of the Committed recognizes the treachery of sin. Sin is magical. Sin allures, entices, and attracts. Sin makes promises, but does not fulfill them. Evil promises pleasure, but never warns that the sinner will reap bitter fruit within a short time. Sin is always a snare of Satan.

We read of Moses and Israel who camped near Mt. Sinai in the Exodus Scripture. That great leader and non-compromiser walked to the top of Mt. Sinai, and the glory cloud filled that place. Among the thundering, lightning, and mighty voice on that mountain, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. That should have been a high spiritual hour in the life of all of Israel. It seems that they could never have wanted a more brilliant moment. But spiritual tragedy exploded down in the valley.

The people said to Aaron: "We wot not what is become of him (Moses)" (Exodus 32:1). They could not behave themselves while that spiritual giant spent forty days with God in the holy mountain. This is the treachery of sin. Israel forgot about God's redeeming power. Their memory bank ran dry so quickly. They said to Aaron: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us" (Exodus 32:1). The great high priest became a part of their plot against Jehovah God. Aaron said: "Break off the golden earrings...and bring them unto me...and he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:2, 4). The people then brought their peace offerings to the idol! Next, they turn to unruly living (Exodus 32:6).

Sin is most often a sly, insidious act. It may begin to lead people away from God by a simple complaint or murmur. The Israelites said they did not know what had become of Moses! (They knew where he was). Sin calls for another step. "Let us have a god!" The next move is one of atrocious, shameful behavior. Aaron caused the people to be stripped of their clothing. Immoral and lewd acts began to break forth in all the camp. God asked Moses to go down and see what the situation looked like to him (Exodus 32:7).

Sin strikes like lightning - - suddenly and mortally. There is not much distance between one's redemption and return to ruin. The gap may be spanned in a brief moment of time. The distance between salvation and sanctification is often a long journey.

God brought Israel out of Egypt, but He didn't get Egypt out of Israel. This is the oft-repeated story of modern Christians. God pulls us out of the world, but the world seeps back into our hearts or comes in like a flood. That which is redeemed becomes polluted and stripped of glory because we never claim victory over it. As one of our poets declares:

"The world is too much with us, late and soon...we lay waste our powers." The sights, smells, and sounds of this world become overwhelming for the careless Christian. He soon finds himself delighted, drawn away, and damaged by the deluding power of sin.

Sin is like a giant magnet that pulls us to itself. The world-system is like a mighty lodestone that inches us away from the spiritual life. Multitudes are travelling down "Avenue Aaron," bewitched by some god of this world. Christians are enslaved and charmed by the gods that surround us. We need to heed again the words of I John 5:21: "Little children, keep

yourselves from idols." Some darling sin entraps the unwary. The alert, committed Christian sees this happening. We are all warned : "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

III

The Company of the Committed realizes that sin brings punishment. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation" (Exodus 32:9-10).

God is always deeply hurt by sin. He is a jealous God. He does not want His people to be ruined by sin's power. God knows that the devil uses sin to rob man of all that is good and enriching in life. We should know that anything which degrades and tarnishes life is not worthy to be our master. Consequently, God becomes jealous of it.

God wanted to blot His people out and start again with Moses. Moses proved to be a great logician. He presented three reasons why God should not do what He proposed to do (Exodus 32:11-13):

1. God redeemed Israel. He brought them out by His own power. Therefore, Moses asked God not to let His anger "wax hot" against Israel.
2. Egypt would say that God brought the Israelites out of their country simply to slay them in the mountain where they were. Moses argues that God should not give their former enemies the satisfaction of knowing that the redeemed people "did not make it."
3. God made an agreement or Covenant with Abraham that his seed would be multiplied and the land of Israel given to them. Moses asked God to remember that promise to past generations.

God listened to Moses! Did that excuse sin? No. The Lord asked Moses to go down into the valley and see for himself what really was taking place. As he and Joshua approached the people, Joshua said: "There is a sound of noise in the camp" (Exodus 32:17). Moses told him that it was not a war-cry which they heard, but "the noise of them that sing" (Exodus 32:18). The people were eating, drinking, and dancing. Lust had overtaken them.

Moses drew near the camp of Israel, carrying the Ten Commandments which God had recently given him. Then he beheld that shameful sight! With a full-orbed anger, Moses suddenly threw the tablets of stone upon the ground, breaking them into a thousand pieces. Moses rushed to

Aaron and asked: "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron began to "hedge." He made excuses. He blamed the people! The guilty always look for a scape-goat. Moses knew that sin had to be punished. That is always the case.

When Moses asked those who stood on God's side to come unto him, hundreds of Levites moved to his side. Then he said to them: "Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his companion, and every man his neighbor" (Exodus 32:27).

On the day that God handed down His Law from heaven, three thousand people were slain because of breaking the commandments of God. On the day of Pentecost when God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit, three thousand people were saved. What a contrast! The Law condemns. Grace offers pardon and forgiveness. Sin's penalty had to be paid. This is always the case. The Law of sin and death is unrelenting. Death is the end result of those who live under the Law and expect salvation by it.

The Bible says: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). God's Word declares "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Galatians 6:8 reads: "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." God's ancient people experienced tragedy because of their sin. The story of sin never changes. Sin ruins and wrecks countless people. Those among "the company of the committed" become keenly aware of the destructive power of sin.

IV

The Company of the Committed requests mercy and forgiveness for those who sin against God. Moses said to the ones who had sinned so grievously: "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Exodus 32:30).

Look at the heart of a man who cares! This person will take the spiritual disasters of others to God in prayer. Moses did! Exodus 32:31-32 is instructive for us. Moses admitted the people's sin. He called their acts a "great sin." We need to have the proper perspective of wrong-doing. We cannot minimize nor gloss over the corruptness and evil of life. If we are going to request forgiveness for others, we must know about the seriousness of sin.

Verse 32 stands as one of the greatest prayers man ever voiced. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin." The King James version of the Bible has a line drawn after the first section of that prayer. Some have suggested that at that moment in his prayer, the heart of Moses broke!

He became overwhelmed with grief because of the people's sin. He sobbed. He wanted God to show mercy and grant forgiveness to Israel. After regaining his composure, the man of prayer continued : "and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Moses was ready to die if that would bring forgiveness to the sinning people. This is praying which touches the heart of God.

Do we want forgiveness for someone? If we approach God in the spirit of Moses, God will show mercy. He is not blind to our tears nor deaf to the petitions which rise from our souls. If we are among the company of the committed, we will ask for God's mercy for sinful mankind.

Do you have a prayer list? Do you have some secret "mountain top" where you may meet God all alone to intercede for others? Have you ever really been prostrate upon the ground in God's presence as Moses was for the purpose of seeking forgiveness for others? Do you know as many as ten people who are backslidden and ten who are lost? Do you realize these lives could be touched by the Holy Spirit if Christians started fervent prayer for them? If we are not praying for others, do you think we are really committed Christians? What may an individual or a Church do about the habit of praying for others? Should we be concerned?

V

The company of the committed receives a revelation from God and about God. One of the superb passages of Scripture about God is found in this section which deals with the Covenant and its renewal. In chapter 33 we see how God relates Himself to man.

Because of man's sin, God refused to remain in the midst of His people! His tabernacle was moved from the center of the camp (Exodus 33:7). Sin separates man and God. We have this revelation of the holiness of God which does not permit sinful man the right to draw near unto Him.

Because of Moses' dedication unto God, the Lord speaks to him. Exodus 33:11 tells us that Moses and God communed with one another. God condescends to speak to those whose lives are filled with His righteousness and holiness.

God promises to give His grace and guidance to those who follow Him. He promises His presence and rest to Moses (33:14). He does the same for us today. Because of that grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, we may walk life's pathway with new confidence. God is with us!

God reveals the glory of His presence to His people. Even though God told Moses that "no man shall see me, and live," yet Moses caught an overwhelming glimpse of the glory of God who passed by Him.

Dr. Ramm points out an often overlooked, but fascinating feature about the glory of God. Theologian Ramm reminds us that God's "tov" or glory may also mean His beauty. God is beautiful! We need to catch a glimpse of God's glory which Moses saw, as Isaiah beheld in the temple, as John saw on Patmos, and as that which the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. Such a sight of God's glory would transform our spiritual lives.

VI

The company of the committed realizes that God renews His covenant with His people. After Moses had broken the tables of stone upon which were written the commandments, God asked him to hew two other stones. When Moses ascended into the mountain with God again, God renewed His agreement or Covenant with Israel. What is the character of the Lord who renews His relationship with His redeemed people?

He is a merciful God (Exodus 34:6). He withholds punishment which is already overdue. If Moses had not interceded, God would have blotted out all three million Hebrews. If it were not for Divine mercy, we would be punished beyond our ability to endure.

He is a gracious God. He gives His favor to us. He is slow to anger and does not quickly "snort" as the original states. God is not in a rage when we go wrong. God is not quickly aggravated and irritated. He describes Himself as "long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6).

He is a faithful God. He is firm. It is not always easy to find people of integrity and truth. God is totally trustworthy. We never need to be concerned about any variance in His life.

He is a God who is merciful to thousands. That mercy continues to extend out to all who accept it. Jonah fretted because of God's mercy. The Christian should rejoice because of it.

God punishes sin, but He would rather forgive it. For those who may be on the brink of spiritual disaster, God gives assurance of acceptance and pardon. Man has only to repent and turn to the Lord. No one else can forgive sin. God takes our transgressions and iniquities and removes them from us forever when we ask Him to do it. He can give us a new day, a new beginning, a new start.

What is the conduct of the ones who experience a renewal from God? We see the right reactions clearly demonstrated in the life of Moses. A

spiritual renewal causes one to worship God. "Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped" (Exodus 34:8). When God works mightily in the lives of His people, we don't have to drag them to Church! Moses rushed to worship the Lord. And that happens to all who experience God as Moses did.

God ought to so overwhelm us that we can never do less than bow in His presence. He is not a little God who may be placed in a capsule in some corner. He is a God who occupies the entire universe and wants to fill the sanctuary of our lives.

One day God will have His perfect will executed. The kingdoms of this world will become His forever! He will reign over all. He will put down all sin, all wicked works. He's going to undo the work of Satan. God is going to put the devil in the pit forever. Those who reject Him and refuse to bow their knees to Jesus as Lord will also be cast into outer darkness with Satan.

A spiritual renewal causes one to heed God's voice about entanglements with the wicked world. God told Moses: "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, let it be for a snare in the midst of thee" (Exodus 32:12). When George Washington served as President of the United States, he warned about foreign entanglements. Our covenant with God should mean that spiritually we will stay aligned with Him and aloof from the world wickedness.

A spiritual renewal causes one to walk away from the place of renewal with the glory of God filling his life. After Moses' second venture of forty days into the mountain with God, his face shone! "The skin of Moses' face shone" (Exodus 34:35). We can't keep back the radiance of Jesus Christ from our lives when we have been in the presence of God. Perhaps we need to linger longer in the glory of God's presence, if we desire transformed lives!

We have a new covenant with God in Jesus Christ. Because of the cross we belong to Him. If any person is hesitant to make a total commitment to our God, the words of Moses come to us as a fresh invitation. "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me!" Moses asked for a public commitment. Jesus asks the same from all who would follow Him. We can be a part of "the company of the committed." Is there a better group anywhere to which we may declare our allegiance?

Chapter Thirteen

GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE: THE LAYMEN

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship...and I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee." Exodus 31:1-3, 6

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."
Colossians 3:17

The stories of Alton S. Newell, of San Antonio, Texas, should be told over and over again. For years he was a "recycling expert" who used his expanding, financially strong business enterprises as a testimony for Jesus Christ. The following story is living proof of this layman's witness. Some years ago an electrical engineer filed a suit against a church in Florida. That engineer accused the pastor of having preached that God would prosper those who honored Him with their tithes and offerings. The man said God had not prospered or blessed him since he had given eight hundred dollars to the church three years before the case was filed in court. UPI flashed that story across the country. Mr. Newell of Texas read the story, sent the man eight hundred dollars, and the case ended.

The Texas layman said he never gives his tithes nor offerings with the expectation of a monetary benefit. He declares, however, that for many years, he and his wife gave their money and their service to God and received countless rewards in return.

Christian history is studded with the names of great people of God-prophets, preachers, priests, and kings. But let's not forget the laymen. The names of Bezaleel and Aholiab are given in chapters 31, 35, 36, 37, and 38 of Exodus. Five chapters emphasize the name of Bezaleel and mention is given to others like these two men who invested life in the building of God's first house of worship, the tabernacle. God loves lay people - - not "ordained." Let's recognize them, too. Chapter thirty-one and chapter thirty-six emphasize the beautiful relationship that exists

between the "non-clergy" group and God. The lay-people are special people of God.

I

God knows His lay-people. The Lord knows the name, rank, and the serial number of the generals, admirals, colonels, and lieutenants in His spiritual army. He also knows the unheralded foot-soldiers. He never forgets them! God has an intimate knowledge of every person among His troops.

Do we know Bezaleel and Aholiab? Hardly. But God tells Moses that He knows them. God speaks to Moses and to us: "Look at this layman!" God never forgets us.

We do not recognize all the people of God, but God does not bypass them. God knows the name of His people. "I have called thy name Bezaleel--and I, behold, (that means, "Hey, look, General Moses! Let me tell you about a layman, too!") I have given with him, Aholiab" (Exodus 31:2, 6). Jesus reminds us of this same truth in John 10:14: "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine."

God's knowledge of all His people should encourage and refresh every "plain vanilla" lay person. God is conscious of who we are and where we are. Dozens of solid people of God are often unknown outside the small towns where they live. Thousands of great Christians are never known beyond the state in which they live. Dedicated, dynamic, Christ-honoring layman never think about the praise of man, but God sees and knows them. The Lord doesn't forget you, either.

God's knowledge of us may humble us. Psalm 103:14 states: "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." We don't need to become proud and boast that we are big and important. God knows our frailties, our flaws, and our needs. He knows every solitary soul that belongs to Him. We may be a foundation stone out of sight of all the others; some may be "precious jewels" to be seen, admired, and applauded by the crowds; or we may be in a category all by ourselves. Let us remember, however, that the Heavenly Father knows us. He calls us by our own name.

II

God spiritually equips each layman for his particular task. The Old Testament text nearly startles us. "And I have filled him with the spirit of God." If God did that in olden days, He does it in a greater measure at this present time.

Are you one of God's laymen "filled with the spirit of God?" Like Bezaleel, you can be, you ought to be. We ought to know the gracious overflow of God's presence in our lives. We talk of a river being filled with fish, the sky filled with stars, the ocean filled with water, or land filled with oil wells. There is something greater for you and me. We may be filled with God's Holy Spirit!

The Christian life takes on more glory, beauty, power, and meaning when it becomes filled with the Holy Spirit. Years ago Vance Havner said that God does not have any favorites. He just has "intimates." Do we want to be among His "intimates?" There are great advantages for those who are filled with God's Spirit.

The Spirit-filled layman is wise. God wants to fill His people with wisdom. The layman may not have a Ph.D., but he may have Holy wisdom. Like Bezaleel, thy layman may have the spiritual ability to invent, organize, and work in a fashion that will glorify God

The spiritual-minded layman is a man of understanding. He receives direction and suggestions in the work to which God has called him. Bezaleel and Aholiab kept an open mind so that they might receive the instructions which Moses gave to them concerning the building of the tabernacle. God instructed Moses about worship plans during his forty-day stay on Mt. Sinai and brought those instructions back and placed them before Bezaleel and Aholiab. They had an understanding of God's intent concerning the building enterprise. The spiritual-minded layman keeps an open mind and has an understanding concerning God's purpose for their particular lives and for the lives of all of God's people.

A spiritual-minded layman is a person of knowledge. He learns through personal experience. He is acquainted with that which he does. These are not "ivory tower" dreamers, but are men of practical minds. The philosophers would call them "pragmatic." God calls them "Spirit-filled."

III

God gives varied talents to the laymen. Our abilities are gifts come from God. Our talents may be consecrated to God; often people desecrate or lose what God has placed within their grasp. But this does not have to happen. God gives manual skills to His laymen. Bezaleel knew how to make the furniture in the tabernacle. Aholiab made the most gorgeous curtains human eyes ever looked upon.

God uses those who have manual skills. Laymen by the thousands use their skills in "ministry" all over the world. These people make investments with eternal significance. Untold thousands of dollars are

saved for other purposes in the gospel ministry by laymen who dedicate their abilities and their services to God.

Laymen have the ability to prosper financially. Many of these dedicated people give large sums of money week after week to God's work. Every pastor, evangelist, and church has a new sense of spiritual freedom when financial needs are met, without having the burden of appealing for more funds.

During the construction of the tabernacle, Moses encouraged the people to bring offerings every morning. Soon he ordered the Hebrews to stop bringing those gifts because the tabernacle workers had all the contributions they needed! (Exodus 36:6-7). That's the kind of predicament in which every Church likes to find itself. At the same time, those who make such contributions never suffer because of their sharing. Such gifts become a "boomerang blessing." James M. Thomas expressed the blessing of giving in his poem, "Recompense."

So many gifts we give to God
Become as that which Joseph gave
When from the cross he took the Christ
And laid Him in his own new grave.
For as the gifts we give to God
Return with interest beside,
There came a day when Joseph's tomb
Was given back - all glorified.

Some lay-people have great musical talents like the choir of Levites. We have "Gentile choirs" with varied talents which are used to the glory of God.

Jerome Hines became recognized as the world's greatest bass singer. A few years ago, he gave a free concert in Jerusalem. At that time he asked the people to listen to his personal testimony following the concert. He often starts his testimony at such a time. He speaks about Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord and King of his life. Lay-people use their voices to sing and speak about Jesus.

Think of the faithful lay people in the Christian and secular publishing business. They use their talents for God's glory. Psalms 68:11 reads: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." No one who writes would have his work published and circulated without the incomparable work of those in that field.

There are laymen who have the gift of strength and dexterity. There are those with unbelievable athletic abilities.

Paul Anderson who became the world's strongest man could lift more than four thousand pounds. After lifting incredible weights, he would speak about Jesus Christ through whom God made the world. He would tell of the limitless power of Jesus who keeps the universe from disintegrating into nothingness. Many others are set on fire for God, showing that physical strength can be used to the glory of God. Are you using your physical abilities to glorify God? You may! God provides many avenues whereby one's strength may rightly honor His name.

Some have talents and abilities to encourage those who need encouragement. Brokenness, sadness, and decay are all around. Death, divorce, and despair strike hard. Do we have the special ability to give hope and heart to others? Don't let this talent get wrapped up in a napkin, buried, and lost. Let your life be used to help those who stumble or struggle beneath the pressures of daily living.

A prisoner languished in solitary confinement in Singapore during World War II. Another prisoner wondered what he could do to help his buddy. He started giving haircuts to the other prisoners - practicing on them! Some said, "Hey, John, I didn't realize that you were a barber." The answer came back: "I'm not. I am just learning. I've got a friend in solitary confinement who can have a haircut once a month, and I am applying for the job."

He got the job. When someone asked how the prisoner in solitary confinement was coming along, the "barber" answered, "Pretty good. While I am snipping away at his hair, I keep saying, 'Please keep your chin up! Keep your chin up!' The guards think this has something to do with barbering, so I just keep telling him, 'Keep your chin up! Keep your chin up!'"

IV

God allows ordinary lay persons to inspire others with their cooperation. God's lay-people stand together as they share a spiritual load.

Look at Bezaleel. He came from the tribe of Judah. Hur was his grandfather. Hur helped hold up the hands of Moses while Israel defeated the Amalekites. Bezaleel had a great and noble heritage. He could boast of his tribe as being one of the greatest among all of Israel. He knew that future generations would look back to him as a man filled with the Spirit of God and a man who build and designed all the furniture in the tabernacle.

Look at Aholiab. He came from the tribe of Dan. That happened to be the smallest tribe of Israel. That tribe had less honor than the tribe of

Judah. Aholiab did "needlework." The job as a tailor was not one that would give a great deal of honor to Aholiab in comparison to the furniture job which Bezaleel was doing; yet, Aholiab and Bezaleel cooperated. They worked together. These people inspire us because of that beautiful spirit of cooperation.

We not only unit our efforts in building God's material or physical temples today, but we unite life in becoming a part of God's great spiritual temple. Ephesians 2:19, 21-22 states: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

We are united. We stand together. We cooperate. We form one great spiritual building to the glory of God. Laymen inspire us as they set the pattern for this kind of spiritual unity in Jesus Christ. Look inside our Church buildings on any given Sunday. The activity would remind us of a bee-hive - - spiritual honey is being made! Listen to the teaching of God's Word in classes in every segment of the buildings. Ladies in the nursery and pre-school departments share love and valuable lessons. Teachers hover over children as truths are imparted. Youth and adult leaders "chat" back and forth with their class members as everyone learns more and more about God. The entire spiritual army advances because of this kind of mutual sharing.

Between Sundays, God's work moves forward as lay-people remain united. The "Church Scattered" remains united in love, in prayer, in witness. The body of believers becomes edified and built up in the faith because of the spiritual cooperation that is expressed through the lives of God's people -- the laymen. Lay-people inspire "full time" ministers by their example.

V

Lay-people share in the experience of God's glory. At the dedication of the tabernacle, the glory of God filled that place, and everyone saw that glory shining above the building of God. Moses beheld it and bowed in reverence. Aaron saw it and must have trembled. Aholiab, Bezaleel, and all of Israel got a vision of that glory cloud, too! That Shekinah or glory could was the visible manifestation of the presence of God.

That marvelous presence of God was not reserved for Moses on top of Mt. Sinai, but for all the people of God "in the valley" as well. Day after day the layman's life may be filled with the glory of God. Paul wrote to

the Corinthians, saying: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (II Corinthians 3:18). The Christian life becomes a better one every day. One of our Christian choruses goes like this: "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before." Why is this so? It is because the glory of the presence of the Lord continues to change us. Lay-people become more beautiful with the passing of time. The sharing of God's glory transforms us into the likeness of Jesus.

Hardships cannot eclipse the glory of God within the life of the lay-people. Illness strikes. Death invades. Financial reverses may go into effect. Persecution may one day take its toll. Will any of this remove God from us? Never! To those who suffered in New Testament times or in our own day, the Scriptures have encouraging words: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (I Peter 4:13-14). Don't be afraid, nor ashamed, nor apologetic if evil times fall upon you. God's glory rests upon you.

What's your name? It could be Bezaleel or any other name. Keep in mind that as a lay-person, you are one of God's chosen people. You are one of His jewels! A better claim upon life can never be made than this.

Chapter Fourteen

THE TABERNACLE: GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them...And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." Exodus 25:8; 40:35

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth... Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" John 1:14; I Corinthians 3:16

Most of us could make a list of what we consider to be some of the greatest needs in life. Do you think freedom is one of those great needs? We would place food, clothing, and shelter on the priority list. Our worship of the true and living God is more basic and fundamental than any other need which might be placed on the priority list.

God wants us to stay in touch with Him. He wants us to make worship an essential experience in life. David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1). The writer of Hebrews emphasized worship in these words: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, when we see the day approaching" (10:25).

God knew that man needed to worship. As a continual reminder of this great spiritual need, the Lord instructed Moses to build the tabernacle in the center of Israel's camp so that God would not be hard to find. The Israelites would be constantly reminded of Him every time they came out of their tents. Exodus 25:8 is most instructive: "Let them make a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

The tabernacle court was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide (the length equals one-half the length of a football field). The tabernacle was located within the courtyard which was encircled by tall linen curtains. The tabernacle measured 45 feet in length and 15 feet in width. The Holy of Holies contained the ark of the covenant. The Holy Place contained the altar of incense, the golden candlestick, and the table of bread. Between

the tabernacle and the courtyard entrance stood the brass laver for washing and the brass altar for sacrifices.

The tabernacle became God's dwelling place. He dwells within the believer and in the midst of His Churches. Israel's ancient tabernacle offers great lessons for us today. The tabernacle gives symbols, shadows, and types which have their fulfillment in Christ. At least, the New Testament writers (and especially the author of Hebrews) believed this! The eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters of Hebrews reveal many truths which remained concealed during Old Testament days. We need to look again at the lessons we may learn from the tabernacle.

I

The tabernacle door reminds us of one entrance which we have to God. The worshippers who came to the tabernacle entered the open court through that one door. There were not several entrances, but one. As the sacrifices were brought to that sacred place, no one dared climb over the tent wall or break through the tent curtains that encircled the tabernacle itself. No, they entered through the one door.

We approach God today by one way. It is not the Catholic door, or the non-denominational door, or Methodist door. It is the Jesus door. Jesus said in John 14:6 that He alone is the way, the truth and the life, and that no person can go to the Father except through Him. Acts 4:12 is our message always: "...for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby ye must be saved." First Timothy 2:5 declares: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ." Look at John 10:1: "Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. Do we wish to approach God and worship Him? We must go through the door He provides for us.

II

The brazen altar reminds us of the cross. The altar stood in the outer court. The ancient worshipper brought his sacrificial animal to the brass altar which was in the outer court or the place just inside the temple courtyard. The animal was slain as the substitute for the worshipper. The blood was sprinkled upon the altar, and the animal was then burned in part or totally upon that altar, depending upon the type of offering being made. Exodus 25:1-8 describes Israel's altar of sacrifice.

The place of sacrifice is the place of our redemption. Our altar is Calvary's cross where Christ was lifted up in our place. John the Baptist preached this message, according to John 1:29: "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).

Upon the cross, Jesus became our once-and-for-all substitute and Savior. The animals lost their lives upon an ancient altar, but that only pictured or symbolized what Jesus, God's perfect sacrifice, would do for sinful man. Only Jesus Christ offers the guilty conscience release. Jesus is our only substitute. He brings redemption to sinful man. Hebrews 9:12 gives us the message: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Do you know of anyone who carries the burden of guilt of sin? Speak to that one about the Christian's altar. Jessie Pounds, a hymn writer, tells the story most aptly:

"I must needs go on in the blood-sprinkled way,
The path that the Savior trod,
If I ever climb to the heights sublime,
Where the soul is at home with God.
The way of the cross leads home."

III

The laver or basin for washing reminds us of the need for daily spiritual cleansing. Exodus 30:18-21 tells something about the lavatory. It was made of melted-down mirrors. That laver revealed the presence of pollution upon the face, and the need for cleansing.

As we prepare to enter God's presence, we behold the dirt on the outer and inner man. We recognize the need for personal cleansing. The pollution, however, is most often on the inside of man and not so much on the outside. The inner man is where spiritual cleansing and change must take place.

We gaze at ourselves in the mirror to see how beautiful and clean we appear on the outside. Often we never see the real person. Only as we break through with God's help and look inside life are we able to see and discern the filth of sin in our lives. The mirror is melted down and becomes the laver. God furnishes a way for the Christian to bathe after he has been to the altar and found redemption. The outer and inner man is cleansed as he comes to the brazen altar.

A little girl once visited a friend. She saw a dog and became afraid of him. Someone said to her: "Look! The dog is only wagging his tail. You don't have to be afraid of him." She said, "He may be wagging his tail on the outside, but I know he's growling on the inside." That's where the transformation must occur.

Do we Christians have a problem with our fleshly nature? Are we carnal-minded? Are we struggling with that inner life and find that a civil war is continually in process within us? Do we find life becoming corrupted and stained by sin? Isaiah 52:11 declares: "...be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD." If we want to serve God with power and victory, we need to be cleansed at the laver.

How does cleansing take place? The Christian finds cleansing through God's word. Jesus says in John 17:17: "Sanctify them through thy word: thy word is truth." John 15:3 is vital: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Christ offers cleansing. He offers sanctification. He wants to set us apart for holy living. Through His word, Jesus makes us pure. He cleanses us. Let's not by-pass the laver.

IV

The shew bread within the holy place reminds us of the strength we receive from Christ. Exodus 25:23-30 gives details about the table of shew bread. The twelve loaves represented the tribes of Israel. They represented all of God's chosen people. The bread also stood for the life, strength, and the fellowship which one had with God.

We need that bread today. Are we spiritually hungry? Do any of us suffer from malnutrition, spiritually speaking? Is there an emaciated face among us? Then we need to partake of the bread from God's table. Let us stop devouring the husks of the world and start delighting in the true bread which God provides.

In the wilderness temptation experiences, Jesus told Satan: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Again the Savior says: "...I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). We may receive daily nourishment from the One who is the Bread of Life.

V

The golden candlestick reminds us of the need of light. Christ is the Light of the World. The candles represent churches which He holds in His hand. They give light to the world because of the light and life which they receive from Jesus.

The holy place of the tabernacle was a rectangle - - fifteen feet by thirty feet in measurement, without windows. Without the light from the candles, total darkness would have enshrouded the place.

As lights in the world, our business is to shine. We are in the midst of the world's darkness. We are not to be blowing out each other's candles

which are burning on the lamp stand. We are to share the light which we receive from Jesus who said: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Let us also keep in mind the words of John 1:4 and 1:9: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men...That was the true Light, which lighteth ever man that cometh into the world."

How would man get along in the world without the light of God's churches and God's individual believers? A lot of criticism is waged against Christians and the churches - - some of the negativism is justified; much of it is biased, prejudiced attacks. Would you like to live where there are no churches? What kind of a world would ours be where no one attended a Sunday School class or participated in a worship service? Never forget that we are the salt and light of the world.

VI

The altar of incense reminds us of the believer's place of intercession. Exodus 30:1-9 tells about this marvelous altar of incense. It stood next to the veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies.

The incense altar is a constant reminder of our need for prayer and praise. Prayer is the communion and conversation which we have with God. We are to pray without ceasing. We talk with family members. We make a lot of long distance telephone calls. Let's not get out of the habit of talking with God. His circuits are never too busy; our calls always "get through" to the heavenly Father.

Charles Spurgeon said, "I cannot remember a half hour that I have passed without prayer." Henry Moorhouse prayed so often that, many times as he slept, he lifted his voice to God in prayer. Samuel Chadwick said that Satan fears only those who pray. David Brainerd (a man whom Richard E. Day called "Flagellant on Horseback") had a weak and feeble body, but he prayed among the snowy woods in colonial America until he became wet with perspiration. He had fruitful prayers which have been the inspiration for sending out some of our greatest missionaries to foreign lands.

General Gordon, a British general who is credited with discovering Christ's tomb, used to tie his handkerchief to the outside of his tent door when he went to pray. No one dared disturb him during that time because everyone realized that Gordon's business with the King of kings was far more important than any other matters to which he gave his attention.

David Livingstone in Africa was found dead upon his knees after having spent his last breath in holy prayer. He carried the altar of incense with him among the savage tribes of Africa which later resulted in thousands of missionaries proclaiming the gospel in that continent and untold thousands of Africans coming to a personal faith in Jesus.

John Bunyan suffered in Bedford prison for twelve years because of his faithfulness in preaching. Bunyan carried the altar of incense with him. He wrote from behind prison bars because he was strengthened through prevailing prayer. His words became immortal because they were words steeped in prayer. Are we tempted to leave off our praying habits? Let's not do it. Set your daily prayer time now!

The altar of incense reminds us of the need of praising God. Psalm 119:164 declares: "Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments." How many reasons can you give for praising God? Take your Bible concordance and find the word praise. Isn't it amazing that we may praise the Lord in all circumstances of life? When we are lonely, crushed, or shackled with life's burdens, we may let the fragrant aroma of praise ascend from our soul to the presence of God. God welcomes our praise every moment.

Exodus chapter thirty states that incense was burned upon the altar every morning and every evening. That stood as a perpetual memorial. That kind of prayer and praise from our souls needs to continually ascend unto God.

VII

The holy of holies reminds us that God dwells in the midst of His people. God's presence is a reality! That ancient room was a cube fifteen feet in measurement. Only the great high priest could enter that place once each year at the season called Yom Kipper - - the great Day of Atonement. He sprinkled blood in that area for his own sins and the sins of the people. He entered the holy of holies through a veil or curtain which separated that most holy place from the holy place. That curtain symbolized the body of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the temple veil as a symbol or type of the "veil of Jesus' flesh" (10:19-20).

The death of Jesus upon the cross opened the way into the holy of holies for every child of God. The veil of the temple was torn or became ripped apart the day Jesus died (Matthew 27:51). As believers, we are encouraged to enter boldly into God's presence. All obstructions are removed. We have an access or a free entrance into the throne room of the King of Glory.

The holy of holies contained only the ark of the covenant. The ark was about the size of a communion table or a large cedar chest. It housed the tables of stones upon which were written the ten commandments. Aaron's rod that budded and a container of manna also were kept in the ark of the covenant. There was a lid or top on the ark or box that contained the three sacred objects.

The top of the ark was covered over with gold. That was called the mercy seat. See Romans 3:25 and I John 2:2. Two seraphim of gold were attached to either end of the ark. The seraphs faced one another with their golden wings almost touching. The glory of God filled the place between the seraphim. That shekinah or heavenly glory ascended through and above the holy of holies. The great high priest met God there. Man's sins were propitiated or covered by the sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat.

Every day man continued during the old economy to make sacrifices for himself. Once a year the great high priest entered the holy of holies to make atonement for the people's sins. Those sacrifices and the blood of animals never took away sin nor gave the guilty conscience of man a sense of total forgiveness. Any attempts of this nature to find forgiveness through man's own sacrifice are futile.

Jesus came. He paid the price for our redemption. He gave His life for us. He made eternal atonement for our sins. His sacrifice gives us remission from all sin. We can't afford to miss the cross. We receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and His atonement, forgiveness, peace, strength, and life everlasting become ours.

Where is God's tabernacle today? You and I are His tabernacle and His temple. We become His dwelling place. The Church is the place where His shekinah glory appears. That glory of God is shown on the face of redeemed people. He fills us with His presence. Just as there came a day when the temple was dedicated to God, so God wants our lives to be consecrated to Him. Will we let Him make our lives a fit dwelling place for His glorious presence?

The book of Exodus opens with the growth of God's people amidst their groans under the lash of cruel taskmasters. It closes with the glory of God revealed in the newly constructed tabernacle. God still redeems His people from the gloom of sin to the glory of salvation. Exodus is the story of redemption: man's Escape from Evil.

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