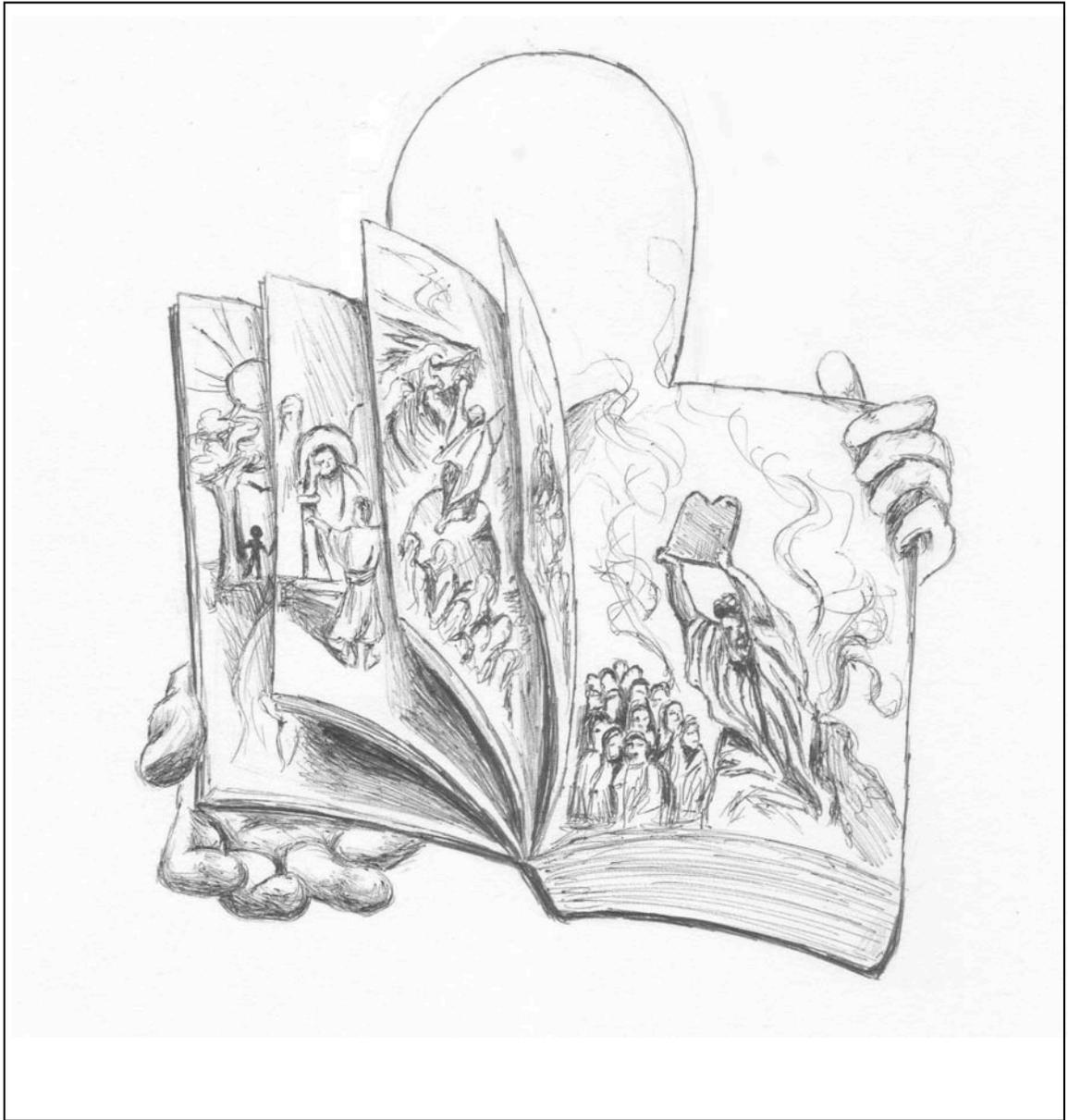


FINDING GOD IN THE BOOK OF MOSES



SANTA BARBARA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Winter / Spring Calendar 2007

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Title
1/28	1	Genesis 1:1-2:3	Finding God in the Beginning
2/4	2	Genesis 2-3	In the Garden: God Betrayed
2/11	3	Genesis 11:27—12:9	Calling a Chaldean: God's Promise
2/18	4	Genesis 21—22	A Son Called Laughter: God Provides
2/25	5	Genesis 16; 21:8-21	Hagar and Ishmael: God Hears
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3/18	8	Exodus 1-2	Moses: God Knows
3/25	9	Exodus 11-12	Passover: God Delivers
4/1	10	Exodus 19	Smoke on the Mountain: God Unapproachable
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4/15		Easter	
4/22	12	Exodus 24:15—27:19	The Tent: God Dwells
4/29		Retreat Sunday	

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SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

Childs	Brevard Childs. <i>The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary</i> , Westminster, 1967
Cole	R. A. Cole. <i>Exodus: And Introduction and Commentary</i> . Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1973
Craigie	P.C. Craigie. <i>Deuteronomy. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i> , Eerdmans, 1976
Dods	Marcus Dods. <i>The Book of Genesis, Expositor's Bible</i> , Hodder & Stoughton, 1893
Dyrness	Dyrness, William. <i>Themes In Old Testament Theology</i> , IVP. 1979
Eichrodt	Walther Eichrodt. <i>Theology of the Old Testament</i> . (2 vols.), Westminster Press, 1961
Hamilton	Hamilton, Victor. <i>The Book of Genesis</i> , 2 volumes, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, 1995
Kalland	Earl S. Kalland. <i>Deuteronomy</i> . Expositor's Bible Commentary. Zondervan, 1992
Kidner	Kidner, Derek. <i>Genesis: An Introduction & Commentary</i> , Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1967
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PAN	Sailhamer, John. <i>The Pentateuch As Narrative</i> , Zondervan, 1992
Ross	Ross, Allen. <i>Creation & Blessing</i> , Baker, 1986
Sailhamer	Sailhamer, John. <i>Genesis</i> , The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 2., Zondervan. 1990
Wenham	Wenham, Gordon. <i>Genesis</i> , 2 volumes, Word Biblical Commentary Word, 1987
Vaughn	Curtis Vaughn, <u>James</u> , Zondervan, 1969

Introduction to the Book of Moses

Did you know that there is a book in the Bible called *The Book of Moses*? It is often overlooked, forgotten or denied. You'll not find this title in the table of contents, but the first five books of the Old Testament, usually referred to as the Pentateuch¹ by students of the Bible, are a book. It is not a collection of five separate books, but rather, a single book with five chapters of similar length. Later writers, and Jesus himself, refer to this book as *The Book of Moses*.²

The author of this book truly begins at the beginning as he weaves the story of our origins. The scope of the Book of Moses is vast. The writer traces the roots of the universe! He chronicles the creation of Adam and Eve, their descent into sin, and the promise of God for deliverance.

- Genesis begins with chaos and ends with the death of Joseph in Egypt.
- Exodus begins in Egypt and ends with Israel wandering in the desert.
- Leviticus instructs a fledgling nation about the proper ways to worship God.
- Numbers continues the chronicle of a people wandering in the wilderness.
- Deuteronomy consists of three sermons given by Moses to prepare the people to enter the land of promise.

Along the way we have 187 chapters (5,848 verses if you care to know) that tell the story of God calling a people for himself, a people whom he chooses to bless and from whom he will receive glory. We enter a world very unlike our own and we meet a God who surprises twentieth-century readers with both his wrath and his ceaseless grace.

When looked at as a whole, the Bible displays a remarkable unity and symmetry. Adam and Eve are created and placed in a garden. Paradise! They disobey God and are compelled to leave the garden lest they eat from *the tree of life* and live forever (3:22). Paradise lost! On the very last pages of our Bible we find a return to this tree. Jesus has conquered death; he rules and reigns. The curse of sin is removed. In the very last scene of John's book of Revelation the nations are gathered in the heavenly city and are invited to *eat* from the *tree of life* (Revelation 22:14). Paradise regained!

¹ The word *pentateuch* in Greek means the book consisting of five parts. (See PAN, p. 1)

² See 2 Chronicles 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Mark 12:26.

Satan tempts Eve to disobey God in the form of a serpent (Genesis 3). His schemes and wiles are felt and endured through the ages. At the end of the Bible story we again meet Satan identified as *that ancient serpent*. If Satan was successful in the garden, he is utterly defeated at the end of the story (Revelation 12:9).

John Sailhamer, an Old Testament scholar, develops the idea that the Book of Moses was written/compiled by Moses to prepare the people to enter the Promised Land. The people of Israel

. . . needed to know who they were and the great purpose God had for them in his covenant. Thus, as part of the overall task of forming this people into a nation obedient to God, Moses wrote a history of the “children of Israel.” In this history he explained to Israel who they were and why they had come to Egypt. Moreover, he showed them that they were not an ordinary people. They were descendants of a promised seed—heirs to the great covenant promises that God had made to their forefathers. Moses wanted Israel to know that what was happening to them was not simply a liberation from a particularly bad period of enslavement. Rather, God was beginning to work in their lives and they were now becoming a major part of his program to redeem the world to himself. (PAN, p. 5)

Consider the following overview of the Book of Moses:

Genesis		Exodus		Leviticus-Numbers-Deuteronomy
Primeval History	Patriarchal History	Deliverance from Egypt	Law & Covenant	Wilderness wanderings; Instructions for the priesthood; Census; Re-affirmation of the law
ch. 1-11	ch. 12-50	ch. 1-19	ch. 20-40	

Again, Sailhamer stresses the unity of the Book of Moses which we should keep in mind as we begin our journey in this wonderful book.

We believe it is evident in reading the Pentateuch that its broad stretches of narrative, spanning the time from the Creation to the covenant at Sinai and, further, to the conquest of Canaan, cannot conveniently be broken down into the “books” of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy as we now have them in our Bibles. There is an appreciable loss of sense when we view the Genesis narratives without following them all the way to Sinai and the conquest. There is an even greater loss when we attempt to read the exodus, wilderness, and conquest narratives apart from those in Genesis. (PAN, p. xix).

Why is so much of this book so weird?

Brace yourself. Much of the Book of Moses is unsettled territory. In these pages we catch a glimpse of an unfamiliar time and a few unfamiliar cultures. Going back only as far as Abraham,¹ we find ourselves toward the beginning of the second millennium before Christ, roughly four thousand years ago. Wenham writes,

Modern man makes assumptions about the world that are completely different from those of the second millennium B.C. Consequently when we read [the Pentateuch], we tend to grab hold of points that were of quite peripheral interest to the author . . . and we overlook points that are fundamental. (Wenham, 1, p. xlv)

The culture gap and time gap we experience when reading Genesis is eased when we seek an understanding of ancient oriental culture.

Though Genesis shares many of the theological presuppositions of the ancient world, most of the stories found in these chapters are best read as presenting an alternative world-view to those generally accepted in the ancient Near East. Gen 1-11 is a tract for the times, challenging ancient assumptions about the nature of God, the world, and mankind. (Wenham, 1, p. xlv)

As we study we will find that this book challenges our own assumptions about the world, about God, and the nature of humanity.

What are the theological themes of the Book of Moses?

Covenant

The most prominent event in this book is the covenant (agreement) God makes with Israel in the desert of Sinai. If the Book of Moses were a strict chronology (highly unlikely) it would cover 2,706 years from the creation to the death of Moses. About one fifth of the book has its focus on one year of Israel's history. After her rescue from Egypt, the nation camps at the foot of Mount Sinai for almost a year. Exodus 19:1—Numbers 10:28, 1,987 verses, cover this time period. What happens in Sinai that warrants this kind of attention? This is where the nation enters into a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel. God promises land, protection and blessing. Israel promises fidelity, worship and obedience.

¹ Abraham is dated about 1800 B.C. Before his time we are very uncertain of dates. The ten generations between Adam and Noah and the ten between Noah and Abraham do not appear to be strict chronology.

God

The Book of Moses teaches us about the living, self-revealing God of the universe. Yahweh will not compete with the gods of the ancient Near East. He doesn't need to, for he is the sovereign Lord of all that is.

The creation story has settled the matter, and subsequent history confirms that God is as much the master of events in the rise and fall of nations (Genesis 15:14, 16; 25:23) as in the conception of a child or the call of a follower. Time and space, sin and even death (Genesis 5:24) are not a match for Him, whether He is working through obvious miracles or hidden providence. (Kidner, p. 32)

He created all things, and he sustains all things by his grace. The God of Abraham chooses to bless the entire earth through the seed of this Chaldean. As the Book of Moses progresses God enters into a covenant with his chosen people and reveals his will for their lives in the law. Sin breaks the heart of God (Genesis 6:6), but his wrath is tempered with mercy.

Man

In Genesis we learn of our true identity. Fundamentally we are God's creative handiwork, made by him and for him. In Adam and Eve's sin we, along with the creation, were tainted (Genesis 3). From the time of Adam onward, humanity has found itself longing for redemption, but unable and unwilling to obey God. The Book of Moses shows us the beginnings of God's gracious provision. Men and women were made by God and for God, but because of sin, we find ourselves in opposition to God.

At the end of this book we find Israel, poised to go into the Promised Land. The people will cross the Jordan River having heard Moses utter prophecies of blessings and cursing for their future (Deuteronomy 28). But they also have the promise that one day God will give them a *new heart*. In other words, the Book of Moses ends with the promise of a new covenant.

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Deuteronomy 30:6

Salvation

The Book of Moses could be seen in terms of promise and fulfillment. God promises redemption to a fallen race of men and women. In so doing God chooses to use a particular family, the family of Abraham.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of

you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1)

The Pentateuch tells the beginning of a story, God's story. Here we learn, page after page, incident after incident, that God is creating a people for himself, for his own glory! In spite of the sins of the major characters, and there are many, God's purposes will stand. His promises will not fail! In the end we find in these pages our own story. Those of us who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ are indeed the recipients of God's promise to Abraham.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29)

During our twenty-five studies in the Book of Moses let us keep in mind these great themes in our story. We will find God in this book. We will learn of his gracious covenant. We will marvel over God's sovereignty even as we realize our deep need for redemption and his provision of salvation. If we do this, our vision of God will be enhanced even as our love for Him deepens! May God bless us as we ponder his Word.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study One

Finding God in the Beginning

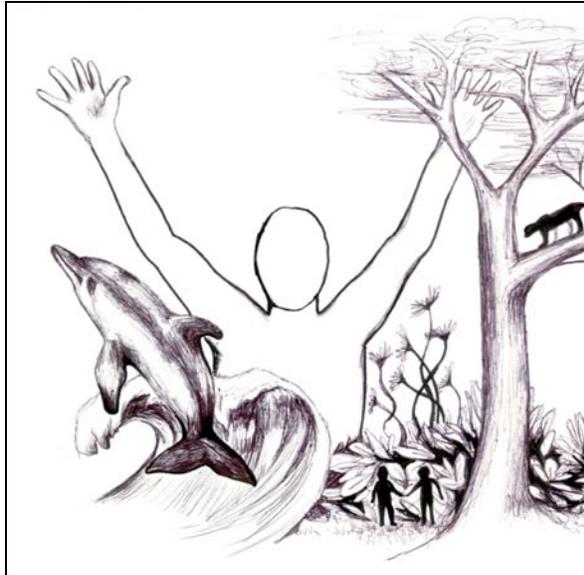
Genesis 1:1-2:3

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalm 90:2

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. . . . while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

Job 38:4, 7



In his film *Love and Death*, Woody Allen says, *If God would only speak to me—just once. If he would only cough. If I could just see a miracle. If I could see a burning bush or the seas part. Or my Uncle Sasha pick up the check.*

Genesis begins with God. We learn that before anything existed there was God. And then there was God's speech. The God of the universe exists and then he *speaks* the universe into existence.

The sublime beginning of Genesis sets forth the major theme of all reality; God. This deity will dominate the book we call Genesis, the larger Book of Moses, and the remaining pages of Scripture. God is introduced as *Elohim*¹, the sovereign God of the universe. The second major theme of the Bible follows closely. God creates *man* in his own image. Adam and Eve, the first pair of human beings are created in *Elohim's* image.

Before going on in this study, read these verses. For the time being, try to avoid asking 21st-century questions regarding how this narrative corresponds with science, evolutionary theory etc. Read and enjoy. Notice the simplicity of the story along with the orderliness of the account.

¹ *Elohim* is the name used for God in the Hebrew Bible. We will find other names for God in Genesis. The writer uses *Yahweh* (designated in this study and in several English translations by small caps, LORD), *Most High*, (14:18-22), *Almighty*, (a translation of the Hebrew 'êl shaddai, 17:1), and *Everlasting* (21:33) *Yahweh* is also called *The God of seeing* (16:13), *God, the God of Israel* (33:20), the *God of Beth-el* (35:7), the *God of Abraham* (28:13), the *Mighty One of Jacob* (49:24), etc. (Cf. Kidner, p. 33)

Consider the summary of this chapter offered by one prominent Old Testament scholar.

Simple and majestic, dignified yet unaffected, profound and yet perfectly clear, Genesis [1] makes a superb introduction not only to the Book of Genesis itself but to the whole of Scripture. (Wenham, 1, p. 36)

Jot down a few thoughts as you read. What is the author seeking to do in these verses?

Now re-read these verses with the following questions/comments in mind.

As you read through the six days of creation notice the progression:

Undefined	Defined
Day 1 Light and dark	Day 4 Light of Day and Night
Day 2 Sea and Sky	Day 5 Creatures of Water and Air
Day 3 Fertile Earth	Day 6 Creatures of the Land

- In what ways are Adam and Eve similar to the animals?
- How are they different?
- What is the significance of the repetition of the phrase *And God saw that it was good*. What does 1:31 tell you about the nature of God?

- What are the primary jobs of Adam and Eve? What is their function? What does this tell us of our purpose in life?
- What does this section teach about work and rest?
- What does it teach about God's blessing and grace?

There are interpretive questions involved with our chapter. Many Christians want to read Genesis 1-2 as something of a scientific textbook. They are likely to be disappointed.

The writer does not attempt or want to *explain* creation. With reverence, he wants to catch us up into its wonder. He is not concerned with the question, 'How did God do it?' He would not, I think, have been terribly interested in our debates about the time-scale of evolution, or the physics of the First Three Minutes. These are not questions he is asking. And when we bring such questions to the text, we are disappointed. The author does not say—He is concerned with something else. He is safeguarding and proclaiming something of the unsearchable mystery of God.¹

Readers wonder, for example, what the writer had in mind when he spoke of the *days* of creation. It is probably safe to say that most scholars see the word *day* as representative of a period of time. Derek Kidner is one such scholar. He writes,

The *days of creation* . . . give the reader a simple means of relating the work of God in creation to the work of God here and now in history. While a scientific account would have to speak of ages, not days, and would group them to mark the steps that are scientifically significant, the present account surveys the same scene for its theological significance. With this in view it speaks of days, not ages, and groups them into a week. The significance of the week is explicit in the sabbath-hallowing (2:3; cf. Ex. 20:11; 31:17) which makes man's proper rhythm of work and rest a reminder and miniature of the Creator's... (Kidner, p. 56)

¹ G. J. Wenham, cited in *The Message of the Living God*, by Peter Lewis (2000), p. 30.

It would be difficult to overestimate the theological importance of Genesis 1. Here we catch our first glimpse of God. What do we learn about God in the beginning? Consider the following truths about God from this passage.

1:2 A God who is active

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The word the ESV translates as *Spirit* is *rūah* in Hebrew and can mean *wind*. As Kidner points out, *In the Old Testament, the Spirit is a term for God's outgoing energy, creative and sustaining.* (Kidner, p. 45)

What do we learn of God in this verse?

1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26 A God Who Speaks

And God Said recurs eight times in this text.

What do we learn about God from this eight-fold repetition?

Respond to the following:

The most important thing we are told about this process is that it is *God's* way of proceeding. It is not automatic or self-enclosed, or the result of random chance, but the result at every point of his creative and directive Word. (Lewis, p. 32)

Notice the rejoinder after each *And God said*. . . each time we read, *And it was so*.

What does this teach us about God?

1:3-25 A God With Purpose

Referring to the eight-fold repetition of *And God said*, Kidner writes,

These eight specific commands, calling all things into being, leave no room for notions of a universe that is self-existent, or struggled for, or random, or a divine emanation. (Kidner, p. 46)

The universe is the result of God's creative purpose. It did not come into being by an accidental explosion, nor was the universe *just there*.

What does this truth about God teach you about your life? How does this truth about God inform the way in which you relate to the universe? Every philosophy of life, every religion, indeed, every man and woman asks certain questions of life.

Who or what am I?
 What behavior is right and wrong?
 Where is everything headed? What can I hope for?
 Is there a God? Can I know that God?

Consider the following:

Impersonal Universe	Adherents
The universe had no beginning. Matter is all there is. Ethics and values are ultimately meaningless.	Materialists, communists, naturalists
The universe had no beginning. God is all that is. The universe is an extension or manifestation of God.	Pantheists, Hindus, idealists
The universe, as we know it, had a beginning. All that is came into being spontaneously out of nothing.	Atheistic evolutionary theory

Against these impersonal views of the cosmos stands the biblical understanding of the world. Our text teaches that the universe is the product of the creative work of God!

Most Hebrew scholars translate Gen. 1:1 *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*. . . . But Old Testament scholars are careful to point out the comprehensive meaning of these words. The Hebrew word translated *heaven* (sometimes *sky*) refers to the abode of God. The other word means *earth world*, or the home of humans. Wenham translates these words, *In the beginning God created everything*. (Wenham, 1, p. 15) Those who adopt a biblical view of things understand that the created order is the product of an all-powerful, personal God.

We believe this according to inspired Scripture, but the idea also makes good common sense! One of the fundamental laws of logic is *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (*Out of nothing, nothing comes*). The believer looks out at the world and sees something other than a cosmic accident.

What are the implications of this understanding of things? How does the Christian answer the basic questions of life listed above? How does a reading of

Genesis 1 help you understand how you fit into the universe? How does the atheist or pantheist answer these questions?

Answers to basic life questions:

Atheistic worldview

Pantheistic worldview

Judeo-Christian
worldview

1:1—2:3 A God Who is Supreme

At the outset the reader is jolted into seeing that the God of Moses is supreme over all things.

The author is preparing Israel to enter the Promised Land. By the time we get to the end of the book of Moses, Israel has left Egypt, sojourned in the desert, and is preparing to enter the land of Canaan. The author wants the reader to understand that the God who created all things is also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who has guided Israel 40 years in the wilderness also created the world.

When Israel crosses the Jordon and enters the Promised Land, the nation will come face to face with the gods of Canaan, gods identified with the sun, moon, stars, animals, mountains, rivers, etc. Israel's great and ongoing temptation will be to capitulate and worship these deities. So the author of Genesis introduces God as the one Lord of the universe who created everything! The notion was utterly unique in the ancient Near East.

. . . Genesis 1 is undertaking and accomplishing. . . a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism [as opposed to] polytheism, syncretism¹ and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principal

¹ *Syncretism* is the combining of religions.

categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but creatures—creations of the one true God who is the only one, without a second or third. Each day dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in a cosmological and symmetrical order.

On the first day, the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On the second day, the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, earth gods and gods of vegetation. On the fourth day, sun, moon and star gods. The fifth and sixth days take away any associations with divinity from the animal kingdom. And finally human existence, too, is emptied of any intrinsic divinity—while at the same time all human beings, from the greatest to the least, and not just pharaohs, kings and heroes, are granted a divine likeness and mediation. (Conrad Hyer, Biblical Literalism: Constricting the Cosmic Dance, p. 101)

The *gods* of our time and place which compete with *Elohim* for our allegiance and adoration are certainly more subtle and very different from the false gods of Canaan.

- Who (or what) are the *gods* of our era? Think carefully. How does our text address the impotence of these gods?

- To which of these gods are you most susceptible?

God created the heavens and the earth. We might sigh and say, *So what?*

Such a lackluster response misses the point of creation. One of the dominant themes of worship throughout the Scriptures is that of praising God *for* his creation. Since everything that exists was made by God, God must be in control of everything. He is the sovereign one. And so his children praise him accordingly.

Read the following passages and allow them to take your homegroup into worship! Notice the response of God's people to the fact of creation.

- Psalm 8

- Psalm 136

- Job 38

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Two

In the Garden: God Betrayed

Genesis 2-3



What do we learn about God when we examine his response to betrayal? Is God capricious? Is he fussy? Does he say, in effect, *No biggie. . . I'll let you off on this one?* In other words, what kind of God does Moses reveal in the Garden of Eden?

Genesis 2-3 is great literature. The story of Adam and Eve in the garden is told with brevity and charm. As Gordon Wenham, one of the finest commentators on Genesis, writes of these chapters,

[The writer] communicates to all— young and old, the educated and the unsophisticated. He describes God's relations with men, not in high-flown abstract theological jargon that needs special linguistic aptitudes and a long training to

acquire, but in a simple vocabulary drawn from peasant life. Yet the ideas he puts so clearly in story form have theological ramifications that have stretched the minds of the greatest thinkers down the ages. (Wenham, 1, p. 87)

Read Genesis 2-3. What stands out as you read? Write your own (brief) outline of these chapters. What are the major divisions of our passage?

By this point in our study we have probably asked the question, *What am I reading in the opening chapters of Genesis? Is this myth? Is it history? Is it science? Is this story theology?* The answer is easy: yes and no.

Is it history? Yes, insofar as the story seeks to give an accurate record of what happened. The writer ties us into the events which lead to the call of Abraham. We learn of specific people (their generations), places and events. But the story is not history in the modern sense of the word. Moses is not writing a *newspaper* story. He doesn't attempt to offer brute facts. Chronology is not always important. We have a *multi-perspective* approach to creation (compare Genesis 1 and 2).

Is it science? Yes. Our story deals with zoology, botany, taxonomy and anthropology. But Genesis 1-3 is anything but a scientific textbook. The famous astronomer Galileo said, *The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heaven goes.*¹ The language is not theoretical or mathematical. Moses' purpose is instructive, not descriptive.

In order to give clarity to these chapters let us outline the text as follows.

1. Life in the Garden 2:4-25
2. A Fall in the Garden 3:1-13
3. God's Judgment in the Garden. 3:16-24

1. Life in the Garden 2:4-25

What do we learn about the original situation of humankind? What was the setting of Adam and Eve at their creation?

A Garden of Delight

Consider the Garden. It is said to be *in* Eden (2:8). Eden means *delight* in Hebrew. Furthermore, this garden is in the *east* which in the ancient world was a symbol of life. Adam, and later Eve, were placed in paradise! The garden is that ideal place which God made for his creatures. It is a place of great wealth, abundant food and a place where intimate fellowship between God and humans takes place.

2:7 What do we learn about Adam's creation? Why does the author make a point of Adam's creation from *dust*?

¹ From *Dialogue on the Two Principal World Systems*, 1632. Quoted in Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection: Resolving Conflicts Between Science & the Bible*, IVP, 1986, p. 9.

2:9 God made trees which were *pleasant to the sight* and which produced good-tasting food.¹ What do we learn about God from this verse?

What do we learn of Adam's environment in these verses?

2:15 is loaded with significance.

First, we read that God *placed* or *put* Adam in the garden of Eden. The verb the author employs has its roots in the verb *to rest*. Psalm 95:11 uses this same verb to refer to the *rest* Israel will experience when the nation enters the Promised Land. Remember, the Pentateuch is Moses' book for Israel as she enters the Promised Land. Moses wants the readers to understand that in the beginning God gave Adam everything the nation now longed for.

Second, we learn that Adam's job description is that of *tilling* and *keeping* the garden, or *working* and *taking* care of the garden. Our English translations may miss something of the richness of the Hebrew text.

These two verbs are used throughout the Pentateuch for spiritual service. "Keep" (*samar*) is used for keeping the commandments and taking heed to obey God's Word; "serve" (*abad*) describes the worship and service of the LORD, the highest privilege a person can have. Whatever activity the man was to engage in in the garden (and there is no reason to doubt that physical activity was involved), it was described in terms of spiritual service of the LORD. (Ross, p. 124)

Sailhamer, accordingly, translates verse 15, "Adam was placed in the garden *to worship and to obey*." (Sailhamer, p. 45)²

A Garden With One Restriction

In 2:17 we learn that Adam (and Eve) may eat of any tree of the *garden* save one, the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

Thus Adam is both permitted to eat and invited to obey his creator in the garden. He has a responsibility to worship and serve his creator (2:15) and he is placed

¹ Kidner writes, *The trees could be meant as metaphors for the respective means of gaining either life or forbidden knowledge... Yet there is much to commend the literal sense, naive though it may seem. It does not make the trees magical (for the Old Testament has no room for blind forces, only for the acts of God), but rather sacramental, in the broad sense of the word, in that they are physical means of a spiritual transaction.* (Kidner, p. 62)

² Wenham notes, *The word is commonly used in a religious sense of serving God (e.g. Deut. 4:19), and in priestly texts, especially of the tabernacle duties of the Levites (Num 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26 etc.).* (Wenham, 1, p. 67)

on a type of probation. Adam is called to demonstrate his love for God through his obedience.

Read vs. 15-17 again.

What does this command teach us about Adam? Is he a robot programmed to obey? What does it teach us about ourselves?

What do you think was involved in eating from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*? What knowledge is in view here? (Compare Ezekiel 28:6ff.)

A “*Not Good*” in the Garden

2:18 jumps off the page at the reader. After seven repetitions of the phrase *it was good*, we read,

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Even in this paradise which God has created, something is missing. Adam has no counterpart. In this section of our chapter Moses describes the creation of Eve, Adam’s wife to be. In so doing we find the beginnings of the institution of marriage which will become the social foundation of Israel’s society.

What does 2:18-24 teach us about what it means to be a human being? What does this text teach us about marriage? What do we learn of God’s intentions for marriage in this story?

How does this ideal marriage of Adam and Eve (without sin) instruct those of us who are married (with sin)?

2. A Fall in the Garden 3:1-13

2:25 serves as a transition in this very carefully told story. Adam and Eve are in the *Garden of Delight*. They have meaningful work, deep relationship with one another and with God Himself. Now we learn they are without shame. Within eight verses all of this will come crumbling down.

A Crafty Serpent

Without preface or introduction a serpent appears in the *garden*, slandering God and tempting Eve. While the text does not say so explicitly, some New Testament writers identify the serpent as Satan, or the devil.¹

This is the Bible's way of making it clear that evil is the product of created beings. It is not a dark force within God or a dark deity in the universe who is equal and opposite to the good God, as certain dualistic philosophies taught. (Lewis, p. 68)

A Seductive Dialogue

3:1-5 Consider the dialogue between the serpent and Eve. Note carefully how the serpent and Eve distort God's instructions. This is especially true in Eve's case. What changes can you find?

What is the serpent's strategy in tempting Eve?

What does the serpent emphasize? How does the serpent attempt to discredit God's authority?

Think about your own life, your relation to temptation and sin. How do these strategies play out in your own life? In what ways are you vulnerable to temptation? What *mind games* does the adversary play with you?

¹ See Revelation 20:2; Luke 10:18ff and 2 Corinthians 11:3-4.

What helps you as you seek to stay away from sin? Notice the parallels in the following verses to Genesis 3:1-7. What do they teach you about your own vulnerability and resistance to temptation?

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Ephesians 6:10-18

1 Peter 5:8-9

The description of Adam and Eve's response to sin is startling in its brevity. Eight words in the Hebrew Bible describe the most significant act in history, save the cross of Christ. *She took*, and *ate*. *She gave*, *he ate*. The apple is eaten.¹ Life would never be the same.

Unpack what happened in the garden.

In what sense did Adam and Eve *die* as a consequence of their sin? If we read on in Genesis we learn that Adam lived to be 938 years old (5:5).

Did the serpent's (Satan's) predictions prove to be true or false? Did Adam and Eve *become like God, knowing good and evil*?

In Genesis these verbs (*took* and *eat*) are verbs of death. Jesus, in his sacrificial grace would one day use these same verbs for life, "*take and eat* . . ."²

3. God's Judgment in the Garden. 3:16-24

Read again Genesis 3:8-24. Keep the following outline in mind. What thoughts come to your mind as you re-read these verses?

1. Confrontation by the Lord (vss. 8-13)
2. Judgment of the Lord (vss. 14-19)
 - a. on the serpent
 - b. on the woman

¹ Genesis does not identify the fruit which was consumed. We don't really know where the *apple* imagery comes from. One guess is the common sounds in Latin for "evil" (*malus*), and "apple" (*malum*).

² See Matt. 26:26. Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, *Take, eat; this is my body*.

c. on the man

3. Grace from the Lord (vss. 21-24)

3:8-13 Confrontation

Adam and Eve are found in vs. 8 hiding themselves from God. The brief description pinpoints a tragedy: humans were created by and for God, but now they seek to live apart from God. Sin has produced estrangement. The husband and wife know, without any confrontation from God Himself, they are unworthy to commune with him as in former times.

What three questions does God ask Adam?

Where does Adam place the blame? What do we learn about Adam's sin, sin in general and our own sin from this answer (vss. 10-11)?

3:14-19 Judgment

After the confrontation God pronounces judgment in the form of oracles (vss. 14-19). Sin has changed everything.

They are not commandments to be obeyed but declarations of how life now must be lived. (Ross, p. 144)

Make a list of the specific consequences of sin upon each of the characters involved. Which of these consequences make sense to you? What questions do these verses raise?

The Serpent

The Woman

The Man

Look at the lists above for the woman and the man. How do you see these consequences of sin being played out in your own life?

3:14 says the serpent will eat dust. We have a symbol of abject humiliation.¹ The snake (Satan in a larger context) is defeated by the judgment of God.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first glimmer of the gospel to be revealed in Jesus Christ. God tells the snake there will be *enmity* between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

*He will strike your head
and you will strike his heel. (3:15)*

The promise is vague, even cryptic. Yet it foretells of hope for the future. One day God will defeat the serpent and bring new life to those who fell under the curse given in the garden.

Look over these verses again. How many instances of God's grace can you find in 3:17-24? Share these with your homegroup.

¹ See Ps. 72:9; Isa. 49:23, Micah 7:17 for examples.

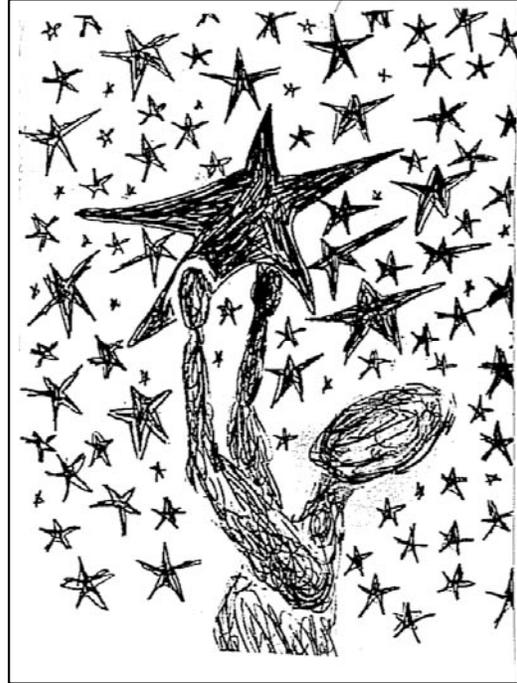
Study Three

Calling a Chaldean: God's Promise

Genesis 11:27—12:9

Abraham is, without question, one of the key figures in all history. Three of the world's great religions claim Abraham as their *father*. Jews, Christians and Muslims¹ all trace their spiritual roots to this ancient Chaldean.

Abraham, according to the Bible, is the father of all who place their faith in God for salvation. In his letter to the Roman church, the Apostle Paul calls Abraham *the father of us all* (Romans 4:16). Indeed, all who place their faith in Jesus for salvation are the true *children of Abraham* (Romans 9:6-8). It would be impossible to overestimate the importance and role of Abraham in the Scriptures. In this study we will catch a glimpse of the calling of this great man. But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves. What is the context in Genesis when we meet Abram²?

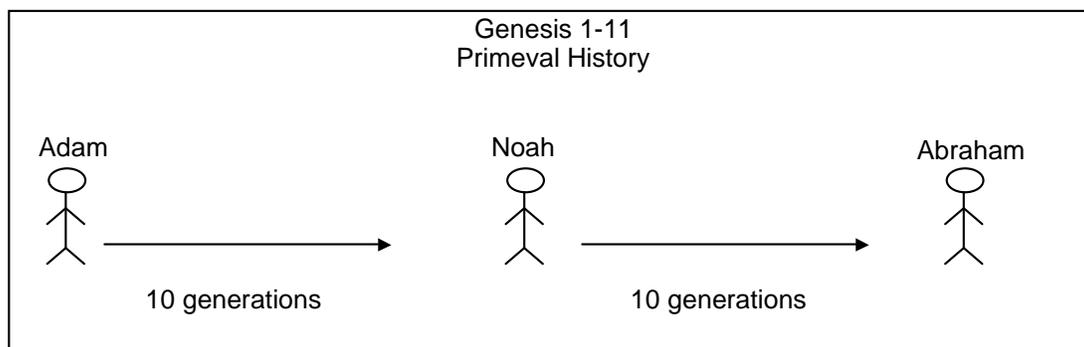


The story told in Genesis is far from a happy one. After Adam and Eve sin they are compelled to leave the Garden of Eden. Their son Cain commits fratricide against his brother Abel. As we read on we find the offspring of Adam and Eve descending into every kind of greed, lust, violence and debauchery. And so it goes. Rebellion against God in Genesis is endemic. God's help is desperately needed.

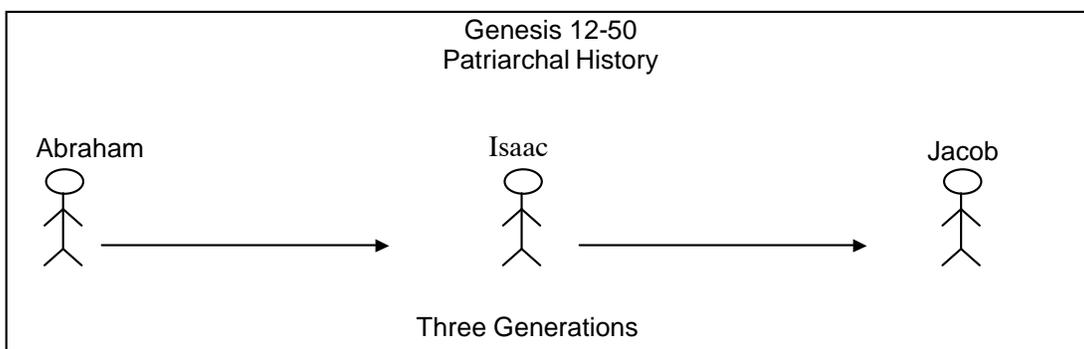
¹ Abraham is the second greatest of the prophets according to Islam (Mohammed is regarded as the greatest). The Koran refers to Abraham 188 times.

² *Abram* is this patriarch's Babylonian name. It means *exalted father*. God changes his name to *Abraham* which means *father of a multitude*, or, *father of many*.

Before reading our passage, consider where Moses has taken the reader. In Genesis 3-11, the writer has told the story of ancient civilization by presenting two series of ten generations.¹

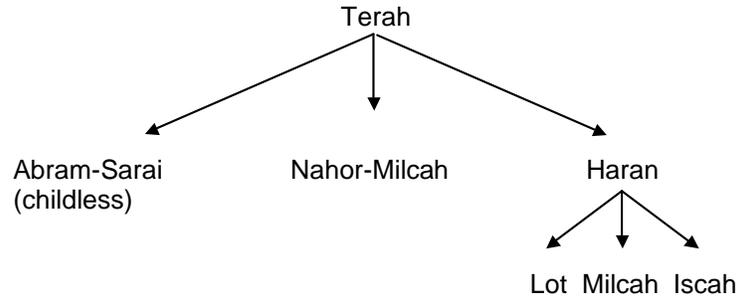


At this point the story told in Genesis slows down dramatically. Genesis 1-11 covers 20 generations. The remainder of the book concentrates on three generations: the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.



With the above in mind, read Genesis 1:27—12:9. We are peeking in on a very close family (the chart below helps clarify the family tree). Make a list of the things that stand out to you. What questions do you have of this passage?

¹ Genealogies in ancient Near Eastern texts often have gaps and the Old Testament is no exception. Ezra, for example, gives a span of 900 years between himself and Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5). But 1 Chronicles gives a longer line of 25 generations from Aaron to the Babylonian Captivity (1 Chronicles 6:3-15). The vast majority of OT scholars understand the ten generations between Adam and Noah and the ten between Noah and Abraham to be round numbers. If this is the case, we have no idea how long of a time period we are actually dealing with.



We ought not underestimate the importance of these verses. As one commenter writes,

Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11:27-12:9. It looks forward to the later patriarchs and beyond them to the nation of Israel and the Davidic monarchy, the great nation that will inherit the land of Canaan. It also looks back to the primeval history, announcing the divine intervention that will bring blessing to all the families of the world, whose history hitherto has been overshadowed by divine judgments from Eden to the flood to Babel. But in Abraham all the nations of the world will find blessing. (Wenham, 1, p. 281)

Notice again 11:27-30. This paragraph ends on a tragic note. Sarai has no children. This short verse is repetitive and means to startle the reader. *Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.* In the ancient Near East, children (and grandchildren) provided for the father in his old age. Of equal or greater importance was the fact that a son would perpetuate the name of his father. A childless wife was deeply shamed; she had little social status.

With this in mind, re-read 11:31—12:3. Compare this with Stephen's rendition of this call in Acts 7:2-5. The key difference between the two passages is that they show Abram was originally called in Ur of the Chaldees. In the Genesis passage we might think that the call of God first came to Abram in Haran, an important trading center in present day Syria, but Stephen makes it clear that God called Abram out of Ur, an ancient city of some 300,000 inhabitants.

- How many times can you find the word *bless* in these verses?
- How many promises did God make to Abram? What are they?
- Abram's call from God was very specific. What is the most specific call God has made in your life? Share this with your group.

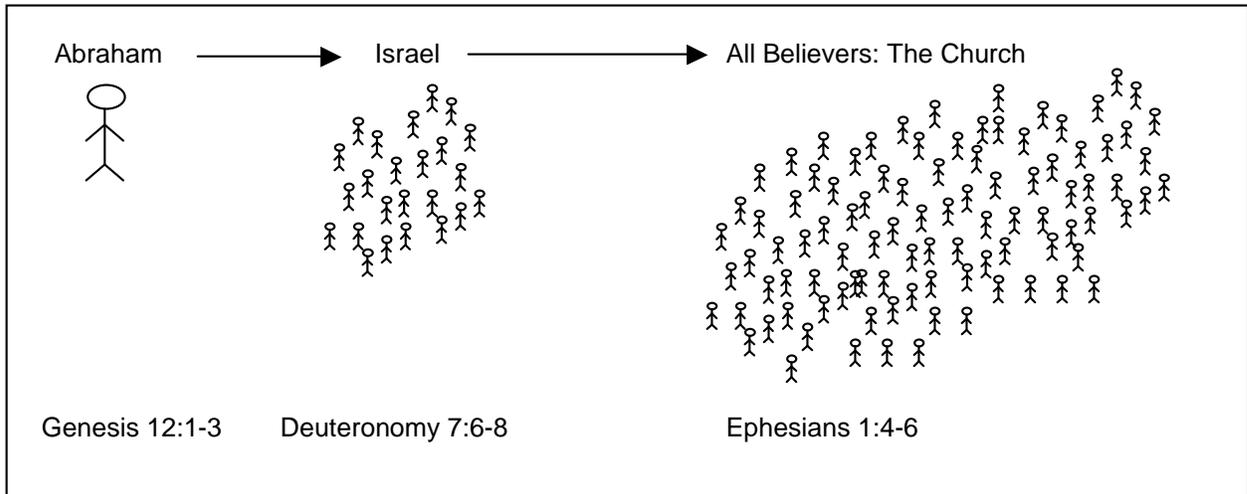
William Dumbrell explains the dramatic nature of Abram's call from God.

The call was to abandon all natural connections, to surrender all social customs and traditions, to leave land, clan and family. These were the very areas of strong attachment which in the ancient world would have been thought to provide ultimate personal security¹.

With the above in mind, compare your call to follow Christ. What did this calling cost you in *areas of strong attachment*?

In Genesis 12 we find the beginning of the biblical doctrine of election. Abram is living in Ur, a metropolis by ancient standards. In Abram's day some 300,000 people live in this city. Ur was a center of religion and housed an impressive *ziggurat*, that is, a building like the tower of Babel that promoted worship of Nanna, Sumerian moon-god. Abram is one man among thousands, and is chosen by God! God chooses to bless this man and promises blessings to *all the families of the earth* through Abram. This becomes a major theme of the Scriptures. Out of his grace and mercy God chooses to bless the world through Abraham. Consider the following chart. Look up the verses in Deuteronomy and Ephesians.

¹ William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, 1984, p., 57.



Ponder the purposes of God's election. Read and discuss the following verses:

- Genesis 12:3
- Isaiah 49:6 (the *servant* in Isaiah stands for both Israel as a nation and for the coming Messiah)
- 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9

God promises to bless *all the families of the earth* through Abraham (12:3). How does Paul understand this promise to be fulfilled? Read and grapple with the following verses:

- Galatians 3:26-29
- Ephesians 2:11-22
- Romans 4:16

How do the above verses (all six sets of verses) shape your view of God? In what ways do they shape the way you respond to God in worship?

12:5 indicates that Abram took *the people that they had acquired in Haran*. . . Some commentators see here a reference not to slavery, but to evangelism. After Abram responded to the call of God he spread the message!

12:6-7 Here we find Abram passing through what would eventually become Israel. Shechem is the dead center of the Land of Promise. Shechem, in the future, will become a significant point of geography for the nation. In Deuteronomy 11:29ff. Moses instructs the nation to assemble in the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Here, in the center of Palestine, Israel was to reaffirm her loyalty to Yahweh. Here they would choose between God's blessing and his curse. It was in Shechem that Joshua would utter his final encouragement to the nation (Joshua 24).¹

12:7 marks a significant juncture in God's relations with Abram. This is the first instance in Genesis, and thus in Scripture, where God is said to appear to anyone.

- What promise does God give Abram at this point?
- Why doesn't God simply give Abram the land of promise immediately? See Genesis 15:15-16. What does this teach us about God?
- What does Abram do in response to this appearance and promise?

Abram moves east of Bethel and camps for a season. This seems to be an acted prophecy. This land is reserved for the descendants of Abram!

Abram's faith compelled his obedience. He leaves his home and follows the Lord's leading.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same

¹ Notice how Joshua's speech looks back to the call of Abram.

promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Hebrews 11:8-12

Abram's faith took him out of his *comfort zone*. In following God, Abram proved to be a blessing to countless generations of believers.

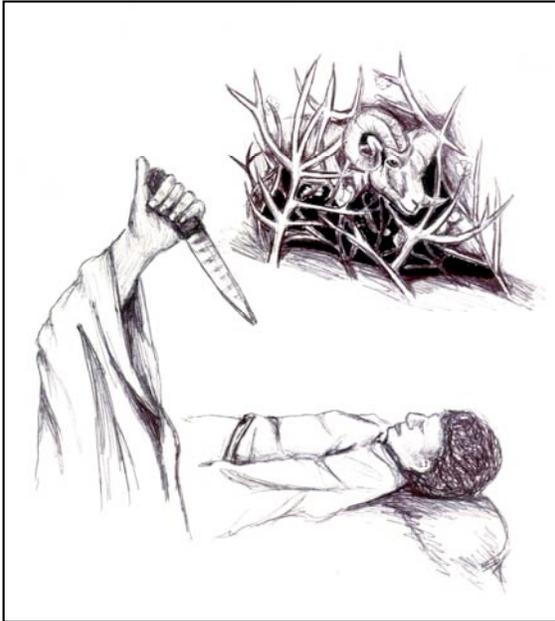
How has your faith challenged you with regard to leaving that which is comfortable? Has your faith shaped your career choice? Has it forced you to be a better mate to your spouse? Has your faith prompted you to *follow* even though you didn't *know where you were going*?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

A Son Called Laughter: God Provides

Genesis 21—22



When God called Abram (Genesis 12), he promised to make him into a great nation. The obvious problem Abram and Sarai face is that they have no children, a tragic truth starkly stated in Genesis 11:30: *Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

Nevertheless, God, in his sovereignty, promises offspring that will be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). But how would this promise be fulfilled? Abram is an old man and his wife is well past her childbearing years.

Read Genesis 21—22. Notice that much has taken place in the Genesis story

since our last study in chapter 12.

- Abram and Sarai have sojourned through Israel to Egypt where Abram almost loses his wife to the Pharaoh's harem (12).
- Abram and Lot quibble over land rites and Abram almost gives the promised land (Israel) to his nephew (13).
- Abram rescues Lot from the kings of Chedorlaomer and emerges both faithful and powerful (14).
- Abraham makes a covenant with God (15).
- Abram makes a baby with Hagar, his maidservant (16).
- Abram is circumcised as a sign of his covenant with God. His name is changed to Abraham (17).

At this point in the narrative, Abraham and Sarah are promised a child of their own.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Genesis 17:17

- Abraham almost gives his wife away to Abimelech the king of Gerar (20)!

God's sovereign control of people and events is, beyond question, one of the dominant themes of the Book of Moses. Chapters 21-22 are written to teach this truth. God, and God alone, will produce a nation for his own glory with little help from the human participants themselves. God picks deeply flawed people to be the heroes and heroines of the biblical drama¹. Is this a group of people you would choose to begin a godly nation?

What do we learn from the fact that God chooses such disobedient and undiscerning people to fulfill his purposes? What does this teach you about how God relates to you?

Before going on in this study, read these two chapters. The drama is intense. What thoughts come to mind as you read? Which is your favorite verse in these chapters? What questions do you have of the text?

21:1-7 Finally Isaac is born! The actual birth of the son is something of an anti-climax. Much more attention was paid to the announcement of his birth than to the birth itself. Look carefully at verses 1-2. Where is the emphasis placed? Who receives credit for Isaac's birth? How many times?

¹ Adam and Eve raise dysfunctional children. Noah, after spared from the flood, falls into a drunken state which has family repercussions. Sarah advises Abraham to make a baby with Hagar, and thus fulfill God's promise. Lot, while not one of the patriarchs of Israel, commits incest with his two daughters. Abraham, on two occasions, lies about the identity of his wife and comes close to losing her to another man's harem (Gen. 12 and 20). Isaac will imitate his father's cunning when he finds himself on foreign soil (Gen. 26). Jacob takes advantage of his brother Esau, lies to his father and then to Esau (33:12-18). Judah, one of Jacob's 12 sons, fathers twins by his daughter-in law, who he thinks is a prostitute (Gen. 38). A motley crew to be sure!

21:1 reads in the NIV, *Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah. . .* while the NRSV reads, *The Lord dealt with Sarah...* The Hebrew word is *pâqad* which means *to visit*. Commentators point out the verb is used when God's care and concern (hence *gracious*) is expressed. We find the verb, for example in Exodus 3:16. *I have watched you. . .* The point is, God has not forgotten his covenant promise to Abraham, twenty-five years after his original promise (Genesis 12), *the Lord visited Sarah*.

21:6 Notice the wordplay here. Sarah laughed, probably in bitterness when first told she would have a child (18:12ff.). Now, as she holds a son named *Laughter*¹ in her arms, she laughs with great joy and invites the world to laugh with her!

21:8ff. continues the theme of laughter. In 21:9 NRSV reads,

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.

The NIV does better. Here we read,

But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking. . .

Literally Ishmael is *Isaac-ing* his half-brother. *This is the intensive form of Isaac's name-verb 'to laugh,' its malicious sense here demanded by the context. . .* (Kidner, p. 140)

As this section unfolds notice the grace God shows to Abraham, to Hagar and to Ishmael.

Advanced assignment: Read Galatians 3-4 and observe what Paul does with this story. Notice the analogies Paul draws between Isaac and Ishmael (this will be challenging). Paul uses Genesis 21 as an allegory to explain our relationship to the law in light of the cross of Christ².

Note, especially, the sustained parallel drawn between Sarah and Hagar, grace and the law in Galatians 4:21-31.

¹ Isaac means *he laughs*, or, *laughter*.

² Ross points out, "This analogical application of the story harmonizes with the point of Genesis 21 very well, but it is by no means taught in Genesis 21. Paul saw the principle of removing the threat to the fulfillment of the promise, and so drew the analogy between Christian experience and the patriarchal experience." (Ross, p. 383)

Law
Hagar (slave woman)
Ishmael (natural birth)
Old Covenant
Earthly Jerusalem/Mt. Sinai
Judaism (the way of law)

Grace
Sarah (free woman)
Isaac (born by the power of the Spirit)
New Covenant
Heavenly Jerusalem
Faith

What are the implications of this passage for our faith? In what ways do you see yourself as a *child of Sarah*? What difference does this make in the living of your Christian life?

Twenty-five years have elapsed between God's initial promise to Abraham (12:4) and the birth of Isaac. What is it like for you when you wait for God to answer a prayer? Are you waiting right now for God's promise?

After the joy that came with the birth of Isaac, and the complex family relations that came with Hagar and Ishmael (21:8ff), Abraham is tested by God. Genesis 22 is one of the high peaks of the Old Testament.

No other story in Genesis, indeed in the whole OT, can match the sacrifice of Isaac for its haunting beauty or its theological depth. So much is packed into so few words. . . (Wenham, 2, pp. 112-113)

Read 22:1-19 aloud as a homegroup. Assign roles to a narrator, to God, to Abraham and to Isaac. Try to play out the drama of this passage as a group.

22:1 *After these things* indicates a period of time has transpired since the birth of Isaac.

God tested Abraham sets up all that follows. On the one hand, God's request of Abraham in verse 2 is as startling to the reader as it must have been to Abraham.

On the other hand, the reader knows something Abraham doesn't; this is just a test. The point is this: God never had any intention of a genuine immolation of Isaac. The demonstration of Abraham's faith is what is important in this event.

Respond to the following comment on the testing of Abraham:

The occasion for the test is the idea of sacrifice, and this passage forms an important part of the understanding of that subject. Although the commandment was to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to the Lord, the real point of the act was Abraham's sacrifice of himself, that is, of his will and his wisdom with regard to his son Isaac. . . . The passage shows that the faithful worshiper will hold nothing back but will obediently give to God whatever he asks, trusting that "the Lord will provide." (Ross, p. 393, emphasis added)

22:2 Abraham's test is delivered in three abrupt imperatives: *take, go, sacrifice!* That's it. No explanation is offered, no rationale is provided.

Think of the *tests* in your life (marital faithfulness, honesty as a student or as an employee, internet purity, etc.). Is there a rationale behind these *tests*, or are they more like the testing of Abraham? Share an example with your group.

22:2 What hint does God give Abraham that he understands the magnitude of this test?

22:3-5 How long did it take for Abraham, Isaac, and the servants to make their way to Moriah? What thoughts and emotions do you think were at the forefront of Abraham's mind? What did father and son talk about?

Where was Mt. Moriah? Read 2 Chronicles 3:1. What impact does this have on the story as you read it almost 4000 years after the event took place?

22:5 Notice the wording. . . .We will *worship and come again to you*. What is Abraham thinking? Is he telling a lie in order to keep Isaac from running for his life? Does Abraham have a sense that an alternative sacrifice will be provided? Does he have some notion of resurrection based on God's previous promise, *through Isaac shall your offspring be named* (Gen. 21:12)?

Read and respond to Hebrews 11:17-19.

Genesis 22 is, on a literary level, quite parallel to Genesis 21. The author seems intent on showing the intimate involvement, protection and providence of God in Abraham's life (and in our own). Consider the following parallels:

Genesis 21	Genesis 22
God orders Ishmael's expulsion (21:12-13)	God orders Isaac's sacrifice (22:2)
Food and water taken (21:14)	Sacrificial material taken (22:3)
Journey (21:14)	Journey (22:4-8)
Ishmael about to die (21:16)	Isaac about to die (22:10)
Angel of God calls from heaven (21:17)	Angel of the Lord calls from heaven (22:11)
"Do not fear" (21:17)	"Fear God" (22:12)
"God has heard"	"You have obeyed (heard) my voice" (22:18)
"I shall make into a great nation" (21:18)	"Your descendants will be like stars, sand," etc. (22:17)
God opens Hagar's eyes and she sees a well (21:19)	Abraham raises his eyes and sees a ram (22:13)
Hagar gives Ishmael a drink (21:19)	Abraham sacrifices the ram (22:14)

22:9-14 Notice the literary drama. The story slows down. Details are given attention. The reader holds his breath. Just as the knife is about to fall, God says, *Wait!* Abraham has proven himself. He is a man of faith.

22:12 Note God's response to Abraham, *I know that you fear God*. . . . What does it mean for you to *fear* God? Have you demonstrated this in your life? In what ways?

22:14 God provides a ram for the sacrifice. Abraham responds by calling God Yahweh- *yir'eh*. The KJV reads *Jehovah-jireh*. The name means, *The Lord will provide*, or, *Yahweh will provide*.

Think of your life as a whole. How has God provided for you? Are you confident he will do so in the future?

As Derek Tidball says of this passage, *Here, the father gives. The son surrenders. The Lord provides. The ram dies. And the people profit. Here, for sure, the cross is anticipated.*

The provision of a sacrificial ram undoubtedly looks forward in biblical history to the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 and the final lamb of God, Jesus the Messiah! Think about the geography. Again, where is Moriah? Where was Jesus sacrificed?

What Abraham almost did, God completed in the death of his *son* Jesus. A staggering concept. Read the following texts from the perspective of Genesis 22:

- Isaiah 53:4-6
- Romans 8:31-32
- John 3:16

22:16 This is the only time God takes an oath in his own name in Genesis. This is equivalent to a *double* guarantee.

From now on, the Lord promises that he will not simply bless Abraham but really bless him. His descendants will be so numerous that they will be compared not just to the stars but to the sand on the seashore¹. . . . God's test had put Abraham on the rack. Yet torn between his love for his son and his devotion to God, he had emerged victorious with his son intact and his faithful obedience rewarded beyond all expectation. (Wenham, 2, pp. 115-116)

¹ This is the first time Abraham's descendants are compared to the sand of the seashore. The promise is intensified in light of Abraham's obedience.

God's real blessing on Abraham came in the context of Abraham's obedience. Do you believe the same is true in your life? What helps you believe that God's best for you will be realized in the context of obedience? When is it tough to believe this?

Abraham's faith was tested. Do you sense the Lord has ever tested your faith? How? What were the results? Did the *test* show what you are really like?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Five

Hagar and Ishmael: God Hears

Genesis 16; 21:8-21

If the Scriptures teach anything, they teach, uniformly, that God intends to bless people from every nation and tribe, from every language and people group. When the apostle John summarizes the end of the ages in the book of Revelation, he sees the infinite majesty of Christ with a view to Christ's redemption of people from a broad swath of humankind.

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

In our study we have learned that God will fulfill this blessing through the seed of Abraham.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2-3)



And so the story is told that God blesses the descendents Abraham and Sarah. This blessing eventually leads to the birth of the Messiah through whom the whole world will be blessed. The above sentences are true, but this is not all of the truth. Abraham had another family! And while that family grew out of Abraham and Sarah's sin, God blesses that line of descendents as well as the line that came through Isaac.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Before going on in this study, read Genesis 16. Look for the following:

- What crisis prompts Sarai's plan?
- Whom does Sarai blame for the crisis?
- What happens relationally when Hagar becomes pregnant?
- What is God's response to this family in crisis?

- Name one thing you learn about Sarai, Abraham, Hagar and God from this chapter.

Note the underlying tragedy in this story. The whole of chapter 16 is born out of the faithlessness of Abram and Sarai¹. But the reader is surprised by God's gracious response to the patriarchal couple's sin.

Consider the progression of faithless missteps:

- Sarai loses all hope of God's promise being fulfilled in her life. God promised that a son would come from Abraham's loins (Genesis 15:4). Sarai's reasoning could have been, *God only spoke to my husband; He didn't speak to me. My time has come and gone; I'll never have a child.*
- Sarai counsels her husband to make a baby with their Egyptian servant Hagar.
- Abram *went in to Hagar, and she conceived* (16:4). He doesn't pray about this, or ask God for wisdom; he simply follows his wife's advice.
- When pregnant Hagar shows *contempt* for her mistress Sarai (16:4), the rivalry begins.
- Sarai turns on Abraham: *May the wrong done to me be on you!* (16:5).
- Abram shamelessly absolves himself from all responsibility. *Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please* (16:6).
- *Then Sarai dealt harshly with her* (16:7).
- Then Hagar fled from Sarai (16:7).

What does God do in the midst of this sin and faithlessness?

16:10 contains a little-noticed and very surprising promise from God. Often western Christians see Isaac as the child of blessing and Ishmael as the child of God's curse (is there an anti-middle-eastern prejudice in this understanding?). But look carefully at 16:10. As readers we ought to be shocked. The verse is utterly unique in all of the Book of Moses. There are many instances of the patriarchs being promised numerous descendants.² But Hagar is the only woman in Genesis who receives a similar promise,

¹ Much of this study and the following bullet points are based on Don McCurry's book, *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims*, 2001.

² Abraham in Genesis 12:2; 13:13-16; 15:5; 17:8; 18:14; 22:17; Isaac in Genesis 26:4 and Jacob in 28:3-4.

I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.

16:7-14 In the midst of the family conflict, Hagar goes to the *wilderness*.¹ Once there she has a dialogue with God. Look at these verses again.

- What command does the angel of the Lord² give Hagar?
- God himself names the child to be born. What does the name *Ishmael* mean? What does this teach us about God and his plan of salvation?
- Again, what is God's promise to Hagar? How is it similar to the promise made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3? What are some of the differences?

The similarities between Hagar in Genesis 16 and the woman at the well in John 4 are striking.

Both women were outcasts of society; the one an expelled slave girl, the other a woman who moved from man to man, finally living with one to whom she was not married. Both encounters took place at wells. To Hagar, the Lord provided life-sustaining; to the other, Jesus offered "living water." Hagar said, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (Gen. 16:13). The Samaritan woman said: "He told me everything I ever did" (John 4:39). God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well of water that gave life to her and her dying son Ishmael. Jesus opened the eyes of the woman at the well to reveal Himself to her as the Messiah.³

¹ The *wilderness* in Scripture is a place of death, a place where life is all but impossible.

² The phrase *angel of the Lord* appears fifty-eight times in the Old Testament. The phrase is shrouded in a bit of mystery. Is this Christ in the Old Testament? Or is it God the father appearing in some sort of human form? Both are possible. What should be clear is that the phrase refers to some manifestation of God, usually bringing good news.

³ McCurry, p. 24.

In both stories God pursues the least respectable members of society. What does this teach us about God? What does it teach you about living your life as a believer?

Hagar will be blessed by God, but Hagar's blessing proves to be Israel's nemesis. Ishmael is the father of many Arab nations (cf. Gen. 25:12ff)¹ who will give the nation Israel no end of trouble in the years to come. Indeed, the nation of Israel today is surrounded and threatened by the sons of Ishmael.

Think about your own life and your own sin. Sarai's sin had a long shadow that is cast, in a sense, even to our own day. How have your past sins followed you through life? What were (or are) the consequences of your sin(s)?

Now read Genesis 21:8-21. After the birth of Isaac the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar continues. This passage is quite similar to Genesis 16. But what changes do you see? Look for the following:

- Why is Sarah concerned about the presence of Ishmael?
- Why is Abraham *displeased* at his wife's request?
- Where does Hagar go when expelled from the family?
- Notice 21:17. What is the key action of God in the midst of Hagar's distress?

¹ Kidner writes, *To some degree this son of Abram would be a shadow, almost a parody, of his father, his twelve princes notable in their times (17:20; 25:13) but not in the history of salvation; his restless existence no pilgrimage but an end in itself; his non-conformism a habit of mind, not a light to the nations.* (Kidner, p. 127)

In both Genesis 16 and 21 we find God showing his grace and care to an Egyptian slave girl.¹ He also promises to make the offspring of Ishmael into a *great nation* (21:13, 20). Twice God intervenes to save Hagar from death. He was *with* Ishmael as he grew up (21:20). What does this tell us about God?

Presently there are about one billion Muslims in the world. Each of them traces his or her identity to Abraham through Ishmael. Don McCurry is a missiologist who is deeply concerned that the church take the gospel to Muslims, to the children of Ishmael. Accordingly, McCurry interacts with these passages in Genesis. Respond to the following:

Our premise is that if God was so concerned to save the life of this Egyptian slave girl and her son, we should be just as concerned today to reach those who claim to be her children. I believe the basis for this concern can be found in the opening chapter of Genesis. There we read that not only man, but also woman was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Hagar, in spite of her lowly estate as an Egyptian slave, and marred by the propensity to sin (as we all are), still bore that noble image of her Creator God. He valued her. She was important to Him. If Abraham was chosen to be the agent of blessing to the rest of humankind, Hagar was representative of those who were to receive that blessing.²

The point of McCurry's book is that the Christian church should embrace the descendants of Ishmael. Instead of resenting the world of Islam for cultural reasons and because of acts of terrorism, the church should be praying for and evangelizing Muslims. The author points out what many are beginning to notice: Muslims are turning to Jesus in ever-increasing numbers.

Read the following verses with this in mind.

In Matthew 8:10-12 Jesus marvels over the faith of a gentile. He says he has not found such faith among *Israel*, that is, among the Jews.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of

¹ The ironies of this story are deep. Earlier in Genesis Abram gives his wife to an Egyptian king (Gen 12). Here Sarai gives an Egyptian slave girl to her husband. Later in the Genesis story the Egyptians will send Israel into the wilderness, but here Sarah sends the Egyptian into the wilderness.

² McCurry, p. 23.

the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What should the church's response be upon learning that God plans to bless the forgotten family of Abraham?

First, we should be praying for the broken family of Abraham. We should be in the habit of asking God to soften the hearts of millions of Muslims to the truth of the gospel. As a homegroup, use the following to pray for the world of Islam:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

- Pray that God will protect his church from Muslims that would do it great harm.
- Pray that God will restrain the evil of radical Islam.
- Pray that God will draw Muslims to Christ.
- Pray for those who are doing missional work in the world of Islam.¹

Second, become more informed about Islam. There are a wide variety of people who call themselves Muslims. After Mohammed died (June 8, 632 A.D.), Islam split into many factions. Why not commit yourself to becoming somewhat informed about the world's second most popular religion?

Third, pray that God will send believers to spread the good news about Jesus. Be careful here, perhaps he will send you!

¹ There are 49 Muslim countries in the world.

Study Six
Jacob's Blessing: God Chooses
Genesis 25:19-34; 26:34—28:5



If nothing else, Genesis tells the story of a highly dysfunctional family. The story of the patriarchs is a saga of grace, a chronicle of God working in spite of his subjects, not because of them.

Genesis 25-29 allow the reader an intimate glimpse of the inner workings of the patriarchal family. Isaac and Rebekah marry. Eventually they bear twins and a family feud heats up into a full-blown war. Isaac's sensuality compels him to pursue a feast.¹ Rebekah sees this as an opportunity to elevate her favorite son. Esau goes on a hunting trip. Jacob becomes an impersonator and a blasphemous liar. In the end Esau resolves to murder his brother. Rebekah advises her son to go to Haran for a while, but it is twenty years before he returns. Rebekah never sees her favored

son again. Isaac lives a relatively insignificant life and Rebekah dies (35:8) without proper memorial. Genesis is never dull!

In spite of all the shenanigans of this family, God's will is never thwarted. His sovereign choice stands. The promise of Genesis 12:3 is being fulfilled. If we learn nothing else in Genesis we learn that God's will prevails. His purposes will come to pass.

Read Genesis 25:19-34. As you read, look for the following:

How long does it take for Isaac and Rebekah to have children (compare 25:20 and 25:26)?

- 25:22-28 Describe the two sons.

Esau

Jacob

¹ cf 25:28. Isaac's sensuality governs his affections.

First, a son's birthright and a father's blessing are not identical, but they are related. Both pertain to the inheritance.¹ Esau essentially cut himself off from his inheritance in 25:33. Consider how the writer of Hebrews interprets his action.

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Hebrews 12:15-17

How do we apply this to our lives? What lesson is the writer of Hebrews making for us? How would it be possible for you to forfeit your blessing?

Notice the family dynamics that are involved here.

It is interesting to note that in the six scenes the family is never together: in the first it is Isaac and Esau; in the second, Rebekah and Jacob; in the third, Isaac and Jacob; in the fourth, Isaac and Esau; in the fifth, Rebekah and Jacob; and in the sixth, Isaac and Jacob. In fact, Jacob and Esau never meet in the story; nor do Rebekah and Esau. In four of the six scenes we find the parent with his or her favorite son. (Ross, p. 472)

How would this family have been helped if they worked on these issues together, or would *togetherness* only exacerbate the problems?

In some sense the family of Isaac and Rebekah is quite typical. They experience rivalry, communication problems and worse. Every family since Adam and Eve is *dysfunctional*. Every mother and father is tainted by sin. Together they (whether in the same household or not) attempt to raise children who are tainted by the same sin. Various levels of chaos prevail.

¹ Waltke writes, *The family blessing in patriarchal times was given at departures, on a journey (see 26:40) or immanent death. It was given to only one person and could not be altered. The blessing had sanction because the Lord, using the legal social customs of those times, mediated it through the faith of the patriarch (see Heb 11:20). After the law as given God's blessing was mediated to all His people through the priest (see Nu 6:22-27).* (Bruce Waltke, Regent College, unpublished class notes on Genesis, p. 50)

Reflect on your own family heritage. What positive lessons did your parents teach you? How would you like to be like your mother and father?

What can you do at this point in your life to soothe the errors of the past (yours or theirs)? What can you do to make peace where there once was war?

The second feature of this story that seems unfair is God's choice of Esau. Why, before the boys are even born, does God choose the *older* to serve the *younger*? Why will Abraham's blessing be fulfilled through Jacob rather than Esau? We're not told specifically, but the pattern is a familiar one in Genesis.

- Cain, the older brother, had his offering rejected. Abel's was accepted (4:1-16).
- Seth, the younger brother, is chosen over Cain (4:26-5:8).
- Isaac is chosen over Ishmael (25:19-26).
- Rachel is chosen over Leah (29-30).
- Joseph is chosen over all his older brothers (37).

Paul will pick up on this feature of the story in his letter to the Romans and put the point starkly. In a section of the letter emphasizing God's sovereign choice he writes,

... when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."¹

Romans 9:10b-13

¹ This latter quotation is from Malachi 1. There God is explaining to Israel, through the prophet Malachi, that his love for the nation is based on his own decision and not on Israel's performance. God uses Jacob and Esau as an object lesson.

As Sailhamer points out,

“The intention behind each of these ‘reversals’ was the recurring theme of God’s sovereign plan of grace. The blessing was not a natural right, as a right of the firstborn son would be. Rather, God’s blessing is extended to those who have no other claim to it. They all received what they did not deserve.” (Sailhamer, p. 183)

Respond to the above quotation. Have you *received what you didn't deserve*?

If you have, praise God for the gift of his love and for the effectual call on your life. Your salvation is nothing that you earned. If you love God it is because he first loved you and drew you to Himself. As Jesus said,

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:44

If you haven't received the grace of God, humble yourself before Him, and ask for his gracious pardon from your sin.

The story of Jacob and Esau teach the biblical doctrine of election. On the one hand, each brother is completely responsible for his choices. On the other, God's calling and purpose will stand. As a homegroup, discuss J. I. Packer's comments on this teaching:

The fact is that the doctrine of election, dealing as it does with the inmost secrets of God's will, is strong meat: very nourishing to those who can take it, but acutely indigestible to those whose spiritual system is out of order. And the symptoms of indigestion (let it be said) appear not only when the doctrine is rejected, but also when it is misapplied. Biblical teaching on election is meant to make Christians humble, confident, joyful and active, but the doctrine can be held and propagated in a way that makes them instead proud, presumptuous, complacent and lazy; so that this teaching may become a stumbling block to those who receive it no less than to those who object to it. (God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes, 1981, p. 157)¹

¹ John Calvin warned in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of being overly curious regarding this doctrine. *The discussion of predestination - a subject of itself rather intricate - is made very perplexing, and therefore dangerous, by human curiosity, which no barriers can restrain from wandering into forbidden labyrinths, and soaring beyond its sphere, as if determined to leave none of the Divine secrets unscrutinized or unexplored. . . . Let us, then, in the first place, bear in mind, that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than what is unfolded in the word of God, indicates as great folly, as a wish to walk through unpassable roads, or to see in the dark.*

Has this look produced any *indigestion* in your soul? Has it produced *humility*, *confidence*, *joy* and *godly activity*? Give at least one example to your group.

Sermon Notes. . .

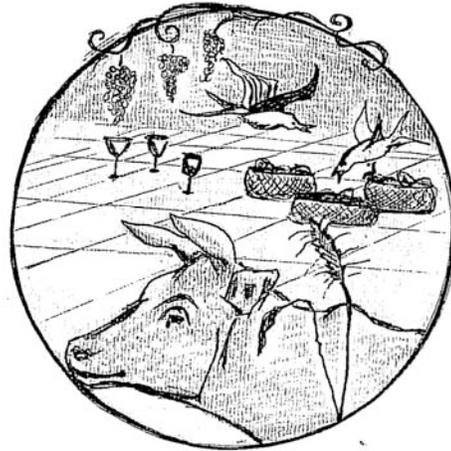
Nor let us be ashamed to be ignorant of some things relative to a subject in which there is a kind of learned ignorance. (From A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. By Hugh T. Kerr, pp. 127-128)

Study Seven Joseph: God Plans Genesis 42—47

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

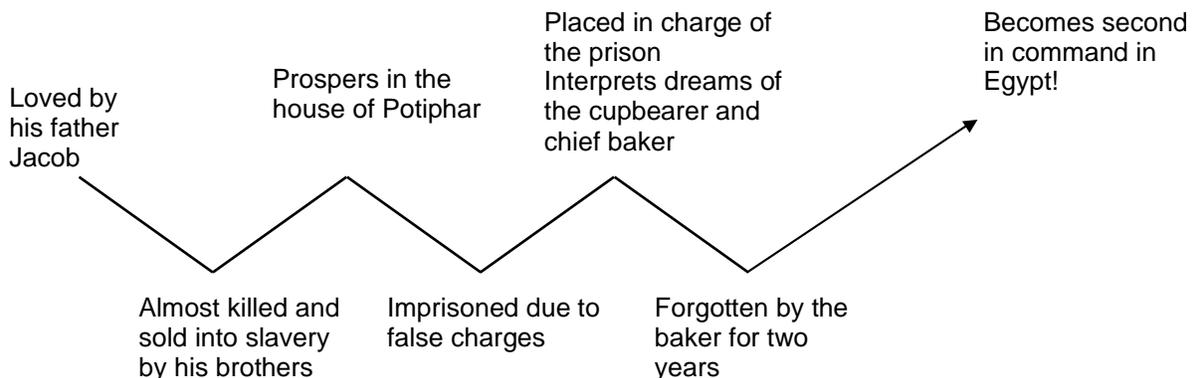
Proverbs 16:9

Picture a man who has suffered the rejection of his family. In fact, his brothers hate him so much that they beat him senseless and then arrange for a gang to kidnap him. This man spends time in a forced labor camp. After gaining his freedom he is arrested for attempted rape and serves time in prison. How would you assess the prospects for such a man?



How would such a man assess his life? Would he be bitter? Would he be full of anger? Would you be surprised if this man understood the undulations of his life as a gift from God?

The paragraph above describes Joseph, the great-grandson of the patriarch Abraham, and the chart below shows the dramatic change of circumstances Joseph experienced.

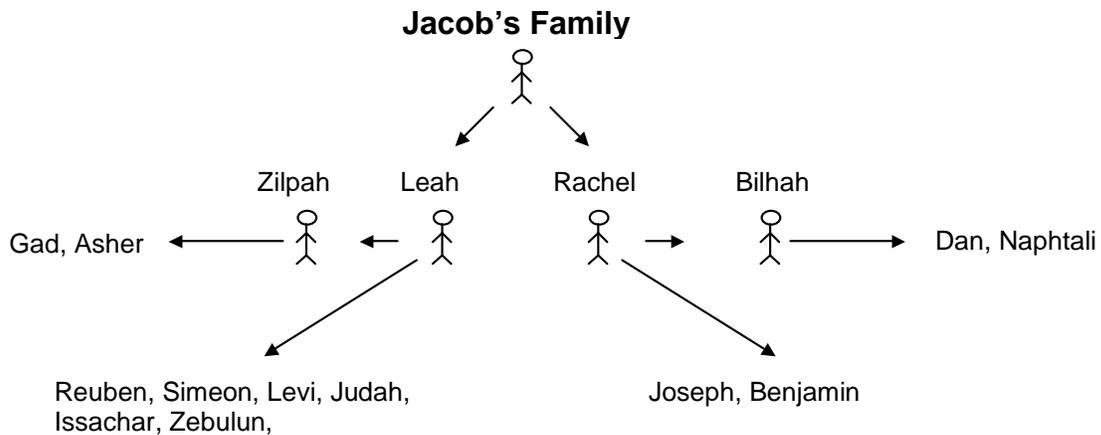


Beginning with chapter 37 we enter the last phase of the Genesis story and Joseph is the main character. The family's migration to Egypt becomes the main focus. This sets the stage for chapter two of the Book of Moses, the Exodus.

Take a minute and think of an overview of the entire book of Genesis.

- Genesis 1-11 Primeval History (Adam, Noah & Abraham)
- Genesis 12-36 The Birth of a Nation (Abraham, Isaac & Jacob)
- Genesis 37-50 The Migration to Egypt (Joseph)

Jacob has two wives and two concubines with whom he has 12 sons and one daughter. Jacob's family is, to put it mildly, quite sick. He loves his wife Rachel and tolerates his wife Leah. Leah produces six sons while Rachel bears only two. Imagine the problems a family would have with a family tree that looked like Jacob's.



In many ways Joseph is the hero of Genesis. He is the least flawed of the patriarchs and the most worthy of our admiration. Joseph puts his faith into action as he displays day-by-day confidence in the providence and provision of God. Yahweh leads, protects and guides. Joseph trusts, whether his circumstances are fair or foul.

How shall we proceed in this study? If time allows, read the entire Joseph story in Genesis (chapters 37—50¹). If time does not allow, read chapters 42—47.

At the opening of chapter 42, twenty years have passed since Joseph was separated from his family. Jacob has long since given up hope of ever seeing his favored son. Joseph has only a fading memory of his family, heritage, mother tongue and his hostile siblings.

¹ Chapter 38 may seem like an interlude in the Joseph story, but it is not. There we read a rather racy account of Judah, one of Jacob's 12 sons and his sexual union with Tamar, his daughter-in-law. She seduces him by pretending to be a prostitute. The offspring of their union is in the line of the coming Messiah. The writer of Genesis is showing, again, how Genesis 12:1-3 will be fulfilled.

Again, at a minimum, read and enjoy these six chapters. They contain the climax of the Joseph story in Genesis. They also form the important bridge to the opening incident in the book of Exodus. The chapters again rehearse the marvelous grace and sovereignty of Yahweh who is creating a people for Himself. Jot down your own notes and observations as you read. The outline below may be helpful to follow as you read.

37—42 Joseph Finds His Way to Egypt

37:1-11	Joseph's Dreams
37:12-36	Joseph Sold into Slavery
38	Judah and Tamar
39	Joseph in The House of Potiphar
40	Joseph in Jail
41:1-36	Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams
41:37-57	Joseph Exalted Over Egypt

42:1-38 The First Journey: Joseph Toys With His Brothers

42:1-5	Jacob Sends Ten Sons to Egypt
42:6-17	Joseph Puts His Brothers in Jail
42:18-24	The Brothers Confess and Joseph Holds Simeon
42:25-28	Joseph's Trick
42:29-36	The Brothers Report to Jacob

43:1-34 The Second Journey: Joseph Prepares A Feast

43:1-10	Judah Assumes Family Leadership
43:11-14	Jacob Prepares His Sons for the Journey
43:15-25	The Brothers Approach in Fear
43:26-34	Joseph's Feast

44:1-34 Joseph Tests His Brothers

44:1-13	The Steward's Test
44:14-34	Joseph Tests Judah

45:1-15 Joseph Glorifies God in Revealing His Identity

45:1-8	Joseph's Self-Disclosure
45:9-11	Joseph Arranges For the Family to Come to Egypt
45: 12-15	The Brothers are Reconciled

45:16-28 Pharaoh Brings Israel to Egypt

46:1-27 The Third Journey: Israel Moves to Egypt

46:1-7	Jacob Receives Assurance for His Journey
46:8-27	The List of the Seventy Who Went with Jacob

46:28—47:31 Israel Established and Preserved in Goshen

48—50 Jacob Blesses His Family

Notes and Observations:

In our chapters a contrast is set up in the story between the ten sons who go on the first journey (42:3) and the two sons of Jacob from his favorite wife Rachel (44:27).

As the chapters develop, two sons of Leah (Reuben and Judah) are contrasted with the two sons of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin). Notice how Reuben fades into the background and Judah rescues the family.¹ The reader is being prepared for the fulfillment of God's promise through Judah (see Gen. 49:8-10). We should recognize this pattern by now. God's plan will be fulfilled in God's way.

42:9ff. Why does Joseph play his game with his brothers? Why does he call them *spies*, etc.?

43:26ff. What does this section teach us about Joseph? What kind of a person is this man?

44:33 Here we find the first notion in Scripture of a human substitute. Judah offers to be the substitute for Benjamin. How interesting that the Messiah would come from this line! Explain this to those in your homegroup who are newer to the Scriptures. What is being hinted at here?

45:1-11 begins the climax of the Joseph story. Look closely at

- 45:5
- 45:7-8
- 45:9

¹ Notice Judah outshine Reuben in 37:21-22, 26-27; 42:37; 43:8-10.

Notice Joseph's view of the last twenty years. Certainly these years (especially the first thirteen) were not pleasant.

The grand finale of the Joseph story doesn't take place until the last chapter of the book. By this time, Jacob has died, and his sons reason, *Maybe Joseph was just waiting for dad to die. . . now he'll punish us for our evil deeds. . .*

Read Genesis 50:15-20.

Joseph and the writers of the Bible understand history not as a series of accidents, but as a series of events directed by God.

Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?

Amos 3:6

God uses, much later in the biblical narrative, the wicked Assyrians to punish northern Israel. He uses wicked Babylon to plunder the southern kingdom of Judah. Here, Joseph understands all that has happened to him in the context of God's will.

How do we reconcile this view of things with the Bible's teaching on genuine human responsibility? Think through and discuss the following quotation.

[Providence] is maintained in the NT. Jesus says, "Your heavenly Father feeds [the birds]" and "clothes the grass" (Matt 6:26, 30), and the apostles pray to the "Lord" who ordered affairs "to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:25, 28). It is belief in God's power to control affairs that underlies all intercessory prayer, for if God does not order our affairs, why pray for daily bread, healing, or world peace?

Yet, at the same time, human responsibility is equally strongly affirmed. That God used the brothers' hatred to send Joseph to Egypt does not, according to Genesis, excuse that hate. The story spends most of its time portraying the cost of this hatred to the whole family: Jacob's unquenchable grief, Joseph's unjust imprisonment, and the brothers' own guilty consciences. Twenty-two years after selling him, they are acutely conscious of divine retribution overtaking them for their sins, "we are guilty because of our brother"; "God . . . has found out your servants' guilt" (42:21; 44:16). . . Though Genesis emphatically states that God uses the sins of Joseph's brothers for good, it nowhere excuses their sins or pretends they can be forgotten; rather they needed to be acknowledged and repented of. (Wenham, 2, p. 432-433)

How do these verses in Genesis 45 and the above quotation inform your understanding of God? How do the verses shape your understanding of yourself?

How do these verses affect your understanding of your present circumstances (whether good or bad)?

Can you think of a time in your life which is parallel to Joseph's time in Egypt? A time when the Lord used someone's evil intentions for his glory?

Respond to the following statement by the Puritan Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Have you, with Joseph, experienced *extraordinary afflictions* and found them to be *spiritual promotions*?

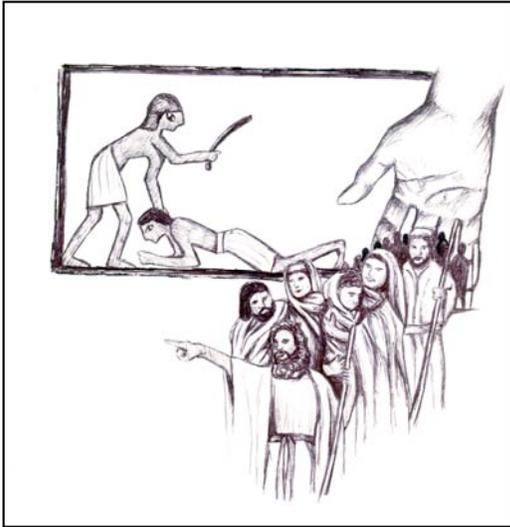
Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces. Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions.

Study Eight

Moses: God Knows

Exodus 1-2

God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.
Exodus 2:25



Exodus. The very word evokes images of deliverance. From reggae music to the Jewish migration to Israel after World War II to Christian ministries emphasizing redemption from past sin, the word is employed to symbolize liberation. Exodus is also the title of the second book of what we are calling the Book of Moses. As we open the book we find the family of Jacob in Egypt. Four centuries have passed since the close of Genesis. Israel is becoming a nation. The story opens with a problem to be solved.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. (Exodus 1:8)

In the forty chapters that comprise this book, we follow Israel as a nation from her bondage in Egypt to the desert in Sinai. Exodus makes for great reading and the reader will find at least four emphases:

1. The exodus itself. Deliverance from the oppression of Pharaoh is the primary concern of the early chapters of Exodus (chapters 1-12). The exodus was to Israel what the cross of Christ is to Christians: the decisive event that gave shape and identity to a people. The Old Testament constantly looks back to the exodus from Egypt as the salvation of God. The New Testament employs this event as a symbol of deliverance from sin to salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1-2).
2. The covenant established at Mt. Sinai. Exodus 19:1—24:18 depicts the nation of Israel entering into a covenant agreement with Yahweh, the God who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
3. The giving of the law. The law is summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and expanded upon throughout the rest of the Book of Moses.
4. Worship. Exodus gives elaborate instructions on the form of Israel's corporate worship (chapters 25-31).

Exodus 1-2 consist of a total of 47 verses. Before going in this study guide, read these two chapters. Enter in to the story. Jot down any thoughts/questions that come to mind.

1:7 At the outset we learn that the Jews are *fruitful*, that they *increased greatly*, and *grew exceedingly strong*. Here we find God fulfilling his promise to Abraham made in Genesis 12:1-2.

What are the king's solutions to the growing population of Jews?

What happens as the king tries to shrink the Jewish population? Note the irony in these chapters. God is in control of history regardless of the king's efforts.

1:11-14 Make a list of the words which describe the hardships which were imposed on the Israelites by Pharaoh.

1:16 The ESV preserves the Hebrew text. It is not *boys* rather than *girls* who are being put to death (as some translations paraphrase). It is *sons*, rather than *daughters*. The story is deeply personal and tragic. Each of these children is a *son* to his father and mother. The suffering of God's people is real and deeply painful.

Think through these verses in practical terms. Does it surprise you to find *God's people* suffering and oppressed? Since becoming a Christian, what have you been taught to expect in this regard? Are Christians to expect trouble and persecution or are they to expect green pastures and level paths? Do we hear much of the message of Paul and Barnabas, *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God?* (Acts 14:22)

With the above question in mind, consider the following quotation.

These [chapters] are the bare bones of a great story. It is a story to delight in, showing how the weak and powerless of the world overcame the strong and mighty; a story to horrify because of the terrible suffering it portrays; and a story to encourage because of the sure, providential care of God. It is, however, more than anything, a story to puzzle, because the people to whom these dreadful things happened were the people of God. We are forced to ask ourselves why those whom God had chosen and to whom he had made his covenant promises should have had to suffer like this.

Whatever else Exodus may say to us, this is where it starts—with the suffering of God's people. (Motyer, p. 30)

When we look at Exodus 1-2 in light of the latter chapters of Genesis we realize that privilege and status are not permanent. Once, Jews were a favored people in Egypt. Now they are a slave people. Are Christians living through a similar transforming time in America in the new century? Is the advance of secularism our equivalent of a *new king who did not know Joseph*? Is the position of believers in American society changing? How should believers respond to this change in social position?

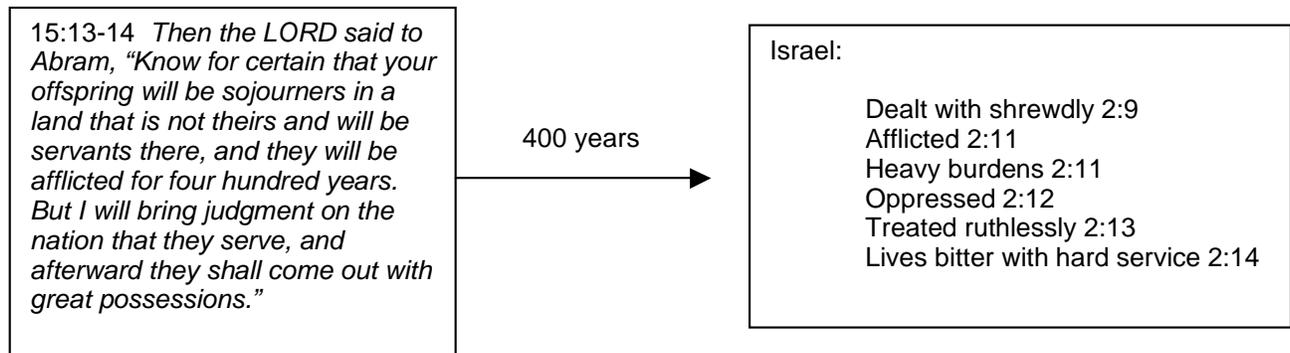
The latter half of Exodus 2 contains two short stories that may foreshadow later events in Moses' life. First, we read of Moses rescuing a Jew who is being beaten by an Egyptian. Second, we learn of his provision of water for the seven daughters of Jethro, a priest from Midian. Later, Moses will deliver the nation from Egyptian bondage and provide water for the nation in the desert (Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:7-11).

What do we learn of the personality of Moses from these chapters? Moses is said to have lived to 120. Do you think he will mature as the narrative moves along?

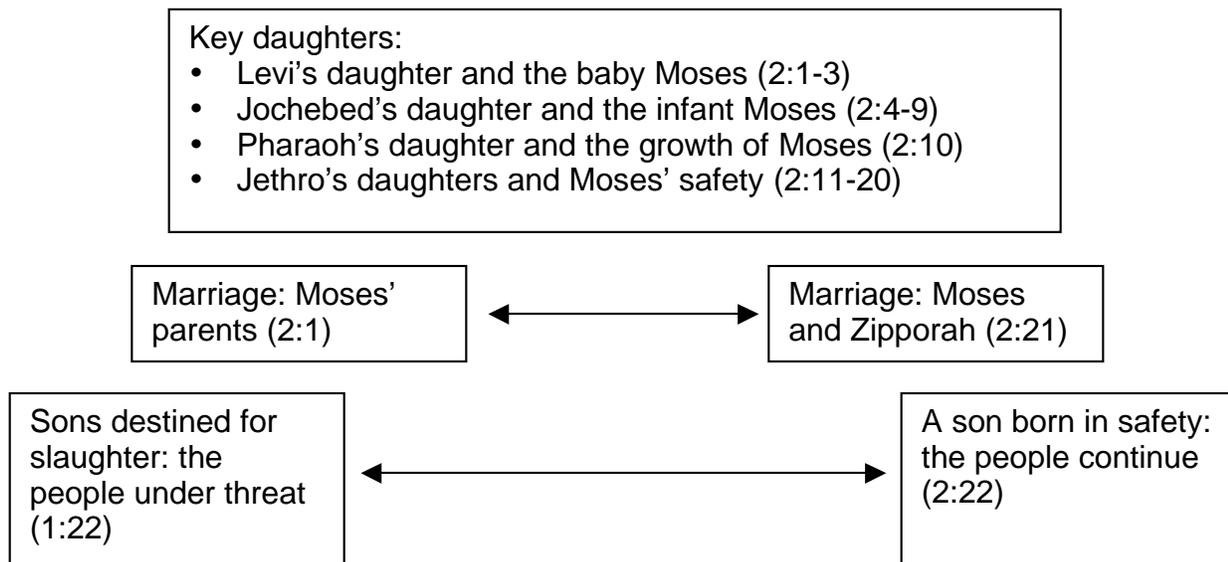
2:23-25 How does Israel’s suffering affect God? Does God care about the suffering of people today? Our passage addresses these questions in detail.

First, the reader of the Book of Moses has the assurance that God is in control. Things are going according to his plan, even though he never specifically explains that plan.

Israel has come to Egypt according to the plan of God, and their hardships are according to that same plan.



Second, God is in control of this specific situation. Motyer shows how the providential hand of God is embedded in this story in a poetic chiasm. Notice the way in which the story is told. It is God, not Pharaoh, who is in control.



2:23-25 contain six verbs that demand our attention. Notice the parallel.

The people in their distress:	God in heaven:
Groaned	Heard
Cried	Remembered
Cried for rescue	Saw

There is a climax after these parallels. The writer tells us, *and God knew* (ESV).

The Hebrew word used here is *yada*, which means *to know*. It is the same word used in Genesis 4:1 (and elsewhere) when Adam *knew* his wife Eve, i.e., he had sexual intercourse with her.¹ The verb in 4:1 is not a blushing euphemism. The Hebrews aren't afraid to call sex, sex. Instead, the biblical writers understand the meaning behind sexual intercourse. Sexual union probes the depths of human relations. The verb describes what happens when a man and a woman unite sexually.

What is the writer of Exodus telling us when employing this verb? What does this verb teach us with regard to God's relation to our pain?

To put the above question in slightly different words: God hears, remembers and sees your groaning, cries and your plea for rescue. *God knows*. How should this shape your relation with God?

Notice that the people, in their distress, pray. What else does it mean to groan and cry before God? What do the words *and God knew* teach us about how God hears our prayers?

¹ 'Knew' is sadly lost in the NIV's choice of 'lay with', just as here in Exodus the NIV evaporates it into 'was concerned with' (cf. NKJV 'acknowledged'; ESV 'knew'). (Motyer, p. 43)

Read on in Exodus. Read 3:1-8. When we get to 3:7 we run in to the same wonderful verb.

I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings. . .

The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses is the God who knows. Here we find the God who stoops to enter our pain. His relation with us is intimate. He doesn't see us from a distance. God is our intimate companion. He stoops to rescue.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Nine

Passover: God Delivers

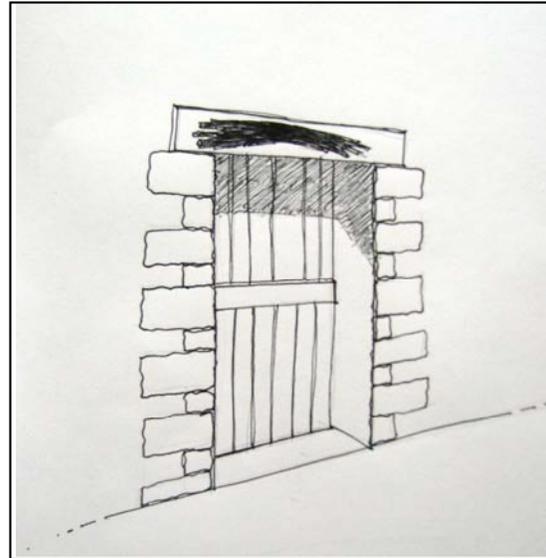
Exodus 11-12

In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.

Exodus 12:11

Exodus 11-12 records the most decisive event in the history of Israel. From the perspective of latter biblical history, it is not too much to say that the nation of Israel was born on the night of the Passover (cf. Psalm 114:1-2). So significant is this event that marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar (12:2). Time and history are to be measured from this first Passover.¹

Israel understood her existence to be the result of Yahweh's divine deliverance, who *with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm* brought his people out of Egypt.



Israel knows YHWH chiefly as the One who brought His people out of the Egyptian bondage, led them through the wilderness and gave them statutes and ordinances (Ezek 20:9-11). . . . The Exodus dominates in a very real sense the OT perspective and the Passover is the reminder of what God has done for His people. Liberation from Egypt and settlement in the land of Israel is regarded as the seal of YHWH's loyalty to the Covenantal promises (cf. Mic 6:3ff.). (J. Jocz, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. IV, p. 607)

Exodus 11-12 is a mixture of narrative and instruction. The story of Passover is told even as the author gives instruction as to how Passover should be observed in future generations.

Passover/Exodus occurred in the spring during the month of *Abib* (13:4, later called *Nisan*, cf. Nehemiah 2:1). On the tenth day of the month a lamb was selected to be sacrificed. After four days, the animal was killed at *twilight*. Blood from the animal was used to mark the door frames of the homes in which the meat was consumed.

¹There are four liturgical calendars mentioned in the Book of Moses (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16:1-7). Each begins with Passover.

The eating of the meal was in preparation to leave Egypt. *Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. . .* (12:11).

Read Exodus 11-12 noticing both the story and the instructions to future generations.

The account is complex because it is not a straight reporting of the introduction of the Passover. It weaves instructions about observing subsequent Passovers (12:14, 24-28, 43-49) into the instructions about the first Passover, and it inserts other instructions about the related, yet distinct, Feast of Unleavened Bread (14-20) into the middle. (Tidball, p. 52)

Keep the following outline in mind as you read:

1. The Tenth Plague Described: Death of the Firstborn (11:1-10)
2. Preparations for the Passover (12:1-13)
3. Preparations for the Unleavened Bread (12:14-20)
4. Celebration of the Passover (12:21-28)
5. The Tenth Plague Administered (12:29-30)
6. The Exodus (With Further Instructions on the Passover Feast for Future Observance) (12: 31-51)

Note the bitter irony in 11:6. At the beginning of the book we found Israel wailing in her oppression (2:23; 3:9). God hears and brings justice.

11:4-8 What is the nature and purpose of this judgment?

11:7 *Not a dog shall growl* literally reads, *sharpen its tongue*. This is thought to be a colloquial phrase indicating calm in the homes of Yahweh's people.

11:8 Why is Moses angry in this verse?

12:8 The Passover was to be eaten with *bitter herbs*. These were probably local

condiments but may also have symbolized the bitterness of Israel's oppression.

12:11 reads, *it is the Lord's Passover*. One Bible scholar explains,

Probably the word pesah, 'passover', in itself referred primarily to the victim, and secondarily to the feast in which the victim was the central feature. Literally we should translate 'it is a passover victim for YHWH'. (Cole, p. 107)

Think of this in light of Paul's stunning statement in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Read the above verse in its context. What does it mean for your Christian life?

12:15 speaks of eating unleavened bread. Leaven is frequently a symbol in the Bible for corruption (see Matthew 16:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9).

Because the prohibition on leaven has wider application than the Passover, it is likely that the process of fermentation was associated with decomposition and putrefaction, and so became emblematic of corruption. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to associate such a symbol with a sacrificial ritual whose function was to effect conciliation between man and God and to raise man to a higher level of spirituality. In like manner, the ban on leaven during the Passover week signifies that national liberation also involves moral and spiritual rejuvenation, and must not be tainted by moral corruption. (Sarna, 90)

Think of areas where believers today are called to live unleavened lives. Share these with your homegroup.

12:21-23 Placing blood on the doorframe was to avert the *destroyer* from entering the home. We learn from Hebrews 11:28 that this was an act of faith rather than a magical rite of protection.

Looked at from a broad perspective, the tenth plague described in these chapters is God's response to Pharaoh's attempt to commit genocide against the people of Israel (1:16). The wages of sin is death, and Pharaoh and his people will receive God's justice on this night.

He who had sought to reduce God's created order to chaos now finds that 'the moral order has "boomeranged"' on him and the avenging angel is reducing his world to chaos. No one is exempt, unless sheltered by a blood-marked house. . . . High-born and low, rich and poor, human and animal were all trapped in the web of Pharaoh's evil, and paid for it with the price of young life. The grief was tangible, the *wailing* universal and the effect catastrophic (12:30). (Tidball, p. 57)

Perhaps modern and postmodern readers of these chapters bristle a bit at such harsh judgment. We struggle to find the *fairness* in an angel of death marauding through Egypt striking down the firstborn of every family. Can a God who performs such judgment be called *good*?

Reflect upon and discuss J. I. Packer's comment on the goodness and justice of God.

The truth is that part of God's moral perfection is His perfection in judgment.

Would a God who did not care about the difference between right and wrong be a good and admirable Being? Would a God who put no distinction between the beasts of history, the Hitlers and Stalins (if we dare use the names), and His own saints, be morally praiseworthy and perfect? More indifference would be an imperfection in God, not a perfection. But not to judge the world would be to show moral indifference. The final proof that God is a perfect moral Being, not indifferent to questions of right and wrong, is the fact that he has committed Himself to judge the world.¹

This original Passover is the first of many. Passover was an annual remembrance and celebration of the deliverance God provided Israel. From a New Testament perspective, each of these annual celebrations point to the Passover of the Lord's Supper observed by Jesus and his disciples the night before the crucifixion (Luke 22:7ff.).

Seven famous Passovers are recorded in Scripture to have been kept. The first, this which Israel kept in Egypt. The second, that which they kept in the wilderness, Numbers 9. The third, which Joshua kept with Israel when he had newly brought them into Canaan, Joshua 5:10. The fourth,

¹Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 130.

in the reformation of Israel by King Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 30. The fifth under King Josiah, 2 Chronicles 35. The sixth, by Israel returned out of the captivity of Babylon, Ezra 6:19. The seventh, that which Jesus our Savior desired so earnestly, and did eat with his disciples before he suffered, Luke 22:15 etc. At which time, that legal Passover had an end, and our Lord's Supper came in the place, the memorial of Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.¹

What new significance does this overview bring to your observance of the Lord's Supper?

The original Passover gave its participants the sense that they were sojourners, people on the way to another place. 1 Corinthians 11:26 contains the same idea.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

How should this inform the way in which you celebrate the Lord's Supper next Sunday?

The Exodus Passover was an act of God's grace in the midst of his judgment. God *passed over* the homes of Israel as he judged the nation of Egypt (12:27). Later in biblical history we learn this was a picture of future judgment. Notice how Paul's recollection of the Lord's Supper combines both the judgment and the grace of God. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

Think about this passage in light of Revelation 19:11-21. Here the second coming of Christ is clearly depicted as God's judgment on sinful humankind. It is at this point when Jesus will again eat and drink something of a Passover meal with his followers (Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:24-25; Lk. 22:18).

Read again the family remembrance which was to accompany the Passover observance (12:26-27). How would you answer a child's question regarding the

¹ Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations Upon the Five Books of Moses*, p, 260, cited in Sailhamer.

observance of the Lord's Supper, *Hey, why do all the people eat that bread and drink from that cup each week in church?*

Consider some of the *lamb* imagery used in the New Testament. How should we respond to this imagery in light of Passover? What implications are brought out by the New Testament writers? What do these verses do to you at an emotional level?

- John 1:29
- 1 Corinthians 5:7
- Hebrews 9:13-14
- 1 Peter 1:18-19
- Revelation 5:9-13

What should be our response to Christ as our Passover lamb? The words of the Passover Haggadah (liturgy) are instructive. Jews who celebrate the Passover today pray this prayer, and so should we.

There, we are bound to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, extol, and adore him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He has brought us forth from slavery into freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, and from bondage to redemption. Let us then recite before him a new song; Hallelujah.¹

¹ N. N. Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah*, 1953, p. 55.

Study Ten

Smoke on the Mountain: God Unapproachable

Exodus 19

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

Exodus 19:18



called Horeb). There Yahweh promised,

. . . I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

Exodus 3:12

This chapter describes what has been called a marriage ceremony between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Yahweh and the people will both say, in effect, *I do*. It is here that the people enter into a covenant relation with their God.

Read Exodus 19 before going on in this study. What do you learn about God himself from this chapter? Does the picture of God presented here match up to the picture of God presented in the contemporary church?

¹ The nation will stay in this location for a year (see Numbers 10:11-12). The rest of the book of Exodus takes place during this encampment as Moses makes seven ascents up Mount Sinai to meet with Yahweh. The first three of these ascents are in Exodus 19, the fourth is in Exodus 20:1, the fifth in 24:12 (this time Moses stays for forty days and nights and receives the 10 Commandments and the plans for the tabernacle [25-27]), the sixth in 32:30 (after the golden calf idolatry) and the seventh in 34:1 (to receive a second copy of the 10 Commandments. (See Motyer, pp. 192-194)

Now, think through this chapter with the following questions in mind:

Up to this point Israel has enjoyed a rather one-sided relationship with Yahweh. God has called, directed, protected and finally delivered a nation. But now we see the beginnings of a reciprocal relationship. Israel is entering into a covenant (agreement) with Yahweh. Notice 19:5: *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. . . .* The nation was to promise covenant obedience and loyalty. Yahweh was to be King. Israel's side of the covenant is contained in the Ten Commandments but is spelled out in the following chapters of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

19:5-6 Yahweh sends Moses down the mountain with a message to Israel. If the people will enter into a covenant with God, then the nation of Israel will be, from this point forward,

- *my treasured possession*
- *a kingdom of priests*
- *a holy nation*

Explain each of these. What do you think they meant to the people encamped at Sinai? What do they mean to you as a New Testament believer? Explain what each means to you personally.

Compare 1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

19:10-15 Why did Israel have to prepare herself for Yahweh's appearance? What is the point of these outward acts of preparation?

Almost forty years after this event, Moses, now an old man, delivered three sermons to the nation as it is about to enter the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy contains these sermons. The speeches look back to the forty-year wilderness wandering period.

In Deuteronomy 4:10-14; 5:1-5, Moses reflects back on the events of Exodus 19. Here he is telling a new generation what happened to their parents and grandparents at the foot of Mount Sinai.

What further insights do these recollections add to Exodus 19?

Note the response of the people to God's appearance on the mountain in Deuteronomy 5:23-27. They are so terrified that they want Moses to go alone before God. God, in his holiness, is unapproachable. Indeed, to catch just a glimpse of God's holiness is a terrifying experience. Compare the reactions of three other people who came close to God's glory. What do these reactions teach you about how you should approach God?

- Isaiah 6:1-5
- Ezekiel 1:1-28 (esp. vs. 28)
- Revelation 1:9-18 (esp. vss. 17-18)

In Exodus 19, God in his holiness disrupts the tranquility of Mount Sinai. To even approach the mountain was to forfeit one's life. Yahweh was present. This was holy ground!

What is holiness? What comes to mind when you think of God's holiness?

We usually think of *holy* as a synonym for *purity*, or *moral perfection*. This is certainly part of the biblical idea of holiness. The Hebrew word literally means to *cut off*, or to *mark off*.

The Bible refers to many things as *holy*. We can find references to a holy day (the Sabbath for instance), holy ground, a holy nation, holy oil, holy house, holy tithe, etc.

It was used to denote that which is separated from regular, everyday use for sacred service (Dyrness, p. 51). It is interesting to note that in Near Eastern religions the powerful, uncontrollable forces of nature were said to be *holy*, but the word rarely was employed to describe the various gods (cf. Eichrodt, vol. 1, pp. 271-272). Places and certain persons were *holy* and needed to be treated appropriately. They needed to be appeased, sacrificed to.

Quite a different conception comes to light in the OT revelation of holiness. In the first place, holiness is primarily associated with God himself and only secondarily (and by his instruction) with objects and places (Ex. 15:11 and Is. 40:25). . . . Objects and places are marked off by God as holy, not because they are places of fear or terror, but because he himself is present or has identified himself with that place. (Dyrness pp. 51-52)

Holiness, then, is the idea of the separateness of God Himself. God is *marked off*. He is something other than we are. He is superior in every way. Throughout biblical history, God's people are terrified when they catch a glimpse of God in his holiness (as we have seen in Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 5).

Ps. 97 is one of many Psalms which proclaim the holiness of God. Read these verses. How do they inform your understanding of God?

*The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are
the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his
adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and
trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of
all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples
see his glory. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their
boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and is glad,
and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD.
For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far
above all gods.*

To understand the holiness of God is to come face to face with our own sinfulness. God, far from being a cosmic *buddy* in the sky, is a being to avoid at

all costs. This was Peter's discovery when he witnessed Jesus' power over the forces of nature. *Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!* (Luke 5:8) The people in Exodus 19 are so frightened of God's holy presence that they place a barrier (Moses himself) between themselves and God.

John Calvin reflected on scriptural passages which speak of the utter holiness of God. He pondered:

Hence that dread and amazement with which, as Scripture uniformly relates, holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God . . . Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God. (from R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, p. 68)

Dread, amazement, the conviction of insignificance. Have you experienced these things when thinking about God? How can you gain these postures of worship if you have become too casual in your approach to God?

Does your conception of God need to change? In what ways?

How do we balance the holiness of God (and all that this implies) with those Bible passages which proclaim the fatherly, benevolent side of God (Jesus calls his disciples *friends* in John 15:15 for example)? Respond to the following quotation.

He is our Father, but he is our holy and heavenly Father, a father like no other, the Lord, the King. We may not stroll up to him with our hands in our pockets, whistling! (Lewis, p. 147)

Gordon-Conwell Seminary professor David Wells is not happy with the American church. This church historian is highly critical of the emphasis of the contemporary evangelical church. In his book [No Place for Truth](#), he suggests that the church tends to be self-absorbed, focused on what God can do for us, and entertainment-centered. Respond to the following quotation: does SBCC have a proper perspective of God? Does our worship, common life, ministry to the world, etc., reflect this perspective? Answer these same questions for yourself.

Christ brought everything into harmony with the holiness of God. To be sure, this harmony has two entirely different expressions: justification and judgment. In both, the holiness of God comes into its full and awful

expression. In one case, it does so in him who bears the consequences of that wrath on behalf and in the place of those whom he represented; in the other case, it is expressed in the final and awesome alienation of those in whom God's judgment vindicates for all eternity his holiness.

It is this holiness of God, then, without which the Cross of Christ is incomprehensible, that provides the light that exposes modernity's darkness for what it is. For modernity has emptied life of serious moral purpose. Indeed, it empties people of the capacity to see the world in moral terms, and this, in turn, closes their access to reality, for reality is fundamentally moral. God's holiness is fundamental to who he is and what he has done. . . .

. . . Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach of etiquette. Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation. Divorced from the holiness of God, our gospel becomes indistinguishable from any of a host of alternative self-help doctrines. Divorced from the holiness of God, our public morality is reduced to little more than an accumulation of trade-offs between competing private interests. Divorced from the holiness of God, our worship becomes mere entertainment. The holiness of God is the very cornerstone of Christian faith, for it is the foundation of reality. Sin is the defiance of God's holiness, the Cross is the outworking and victory of God's holiness, and faith is the recognition of God's holiness. . . .

It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world. He has been replaced in many quarters by a God who is slick and slack, whose moral purposes turn out to be avuncular advice that we can disregard or negotiate as we see fit, whose Word is a plaything for those who wish merely to listen to themselves, whose Church is a mall in which the religious, their pockets filled with the coin of need, do their business. We seek happiness, not righteousness. We want to be fulfilled, not filled. We are interested in satisfaction, not a holy dissatisfaction with all that is wrong. (pp. 299-302)

Spend time as a group pondering the holiness of God in prayer. Spend time in God-centered worship.

Study Eleven

The Ten Words: God Wills

Exodus 20:1-21

The events described in Exodus 19 are dramatic. God meets his people in a spectacular audio and visual revelation. The mountain shakes, the thunder claps, smoke rises upward, a trumpet is heard and the people are terrified.



However, when it comes time for God to reveal his will to his people, he relies on his spoken (and later written) *word*. Unlike the peoples of Canaan who worshipped images they could see, Israel is to cultivate a religion of the word. The people are forbidden to make a visual representation of their God. They are to hear God speak and respond to his voice. In Exodus 20 we come to God's *ten words* which summarize Yahweh's character and being. These Ten Commandments are an expression of who God is, and what he wants for his people.

In our last study we saw the dramatic change taking place in Israel's relation with Yahweh. The nation is entering into a covenant with her God. *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. . .* (Exodus 19:5). Israel was to promise covenant obedience and loyalty. Yahweh was to graciously provide for and lead the nation.

The legal side of Israel's covenant response to God's grace is summarized in the Ten Commandments and drawn out in the following chapters of the Book of Moses. As we look at these Ten Commandments, or *ten words* as the Hebrew Bible reads, consider the following observations about Old Testament Law.

First, the law is a part of God's grace. Often, those steeped in the pages of the New Testament pit law against grace, or law before grace. But the Ten Commandments come in the context of God's already-given grace, and they are an expression of that grace. The preamble to the Ten Commandments makes this clear.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:2)

Second, the law is personal. We find in the Book of Moses instructions and laws on how to live life. The text is clear that what is of utmost importance is the

condition of the heart. Israel was called to *circumcise* their hearts as well as their bodies (Deuteronomy 10:16). Obedience to the law was to be understood as a response to the grace of God and his love as opposed to a meritorious act which would procure his love and grace. Consider the following commands to *love* God from the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 6:5 *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*

Deuteronomy 10:12 *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,*

Deuteronomy 11:13-16 *And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. . .*

Notice in these verses that faithfulness to God precedes obedience to his law. In other words, obedience is a response to God and not a means to salvation.

Third, the law is comprehensive. The law God gave to Moses was to order the life of a nation. The rabbis numbered 613 separate *laws* or commands in the Book of Moses. Accordingly, the law includes instructions on everything from ceremonial worship to personal ethics and social policy.

One Old Testament scholar points out that the law represented a *total ordering of the people's life as a revelation of the saving will of God*. (Eichrodt, p. 92) The law showed people how to live. It was God's gift to a nation even as it was a people's obligation to their Lord.

Fourth, the law is consequential. Consistently we read that obedience to the law will produce *life* while disobedience will produce *death*. Obedience is in the people's best interest.

Deuteronomy 4:1 *And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.*

Deuteronomy 4:40 *Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.*

Deuteronomy 5:33 *You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.*

Deuteronomy 8:1 *The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.*

Deuteronomy 16:20 *Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

Deuteronomy 25:15 *A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*

Read Exodus 20:1-21. Try to put the Ten Commandments¹ into your own words. Write a twentieth century paraphrase of each command using the following chart. Share these paraphrases with your homegroup:

Command	Paraphrase
1. Exodus 20:2-3 <i>You shall have no other gods before me.</i>	
2. Exodus 20:4-6 <i>You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.</i>	

¹ We know Moses thought of these words, or commandments as ten in number (Exodus 34:28). But what are the specific ten commandments? It is difficult to know where to divide verses 3-6. Is this one command (against the worship of other gods)? Or is it two commands (the first prohibiting the worship of other gods (verse 3) and the second prohibiting idolatry (verses 4-6)? If we understand Exodus 20:3-6 as a single command, then the command about not coveting becomes two commands: 17a, *do not covet your neighbor's house*; and 17b, *do not covet your neighbor's wife or servant*.

3. Exodus 20:7 <i>You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.</i>	
4. Exodus 20:8-11 <i>Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.</i>	
5. Exodus 20:12 <i>Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.</i>	
6. Exodus 20:13 <i>You shall not murder.</i>	
7. Exodus 20:14 <i>You shall not commit adultery.</i>	
8. Exodus 20:15 <i>You shall not steal.</i>	
9. Exodus 20:16 <i>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.</i>	
10. Exodus 20:17 <i>You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.</i>	

Notice how these commands fall into two categories.

1. Right relations with God: commands 1-4 (vss. 2-11).

2. Right relations in society: commands 5-10 (vss. 12-17).¹

- What is your favorite and least favorite commandment? Why?
- Which commandment is the most difficult to follow?
- Why does the first commandment come first in the list?
- What *other gods* compete for your attention?
- Why is Yahweh so concerned about idolatry? So what if the people make an image which represents Yahweh?
- What literal/visual idols do we see in our time and place? How are you tempted to break the second commandment?
- What does it mean in our day to use God's name in vain? Is this a reference to profanity?

¹ Motyer makes the interesting observation that the 5th commandment doesn't seem to fit into such a scheme. *The fifth commandment belongs neither in the first group nor in the second, but in its distinctiveness it recognizes our first and primary earthly obligation.*

- A¹ Our duty to God (commandments 1-4)
 - a¹ Our hearts (commandment 1)
 - a² Our deeds (commandments 2-4)
 - B Our family obligations (commandment 5)
- A² Our duty to our neighbor (commandments 6-10)
 - a² Our deeds (commandment 6-9)
 - a¹ Our hearts (commandment 10)

- The word *Sabbath* means *to cease*. God's people were invited to cease from their normal work-week and enter into restful worship. Describe your observation of the Sabbath. If you don't observe a Sabbath in your week, what do you think the result would be if you began to practice/enjoy a Sabbath day of rest? Discuss this as a homegroup.
- Why is coveting saved until the end of the list? How does this command differ from the others? When Paul wants to identify himself as a lawbreaker in Romans 7:7, he uses this command as his point of failure. Can you think why he would choose this command?

Reconsider your answers to the above questions with the following quotation in view. How can you celebrate the Ten Commandments as *the law of liberty*?

The Ten Commandments is the Bible's fundamental statement of 'the law of liberty.' The fact that it is in the main a series of prohibitions has led to the unthinking charge that it is negative in tone and purpose. This is to forget that a negative command is far more liberating than a positive one, for a positive command restricts life to that one course of action, whereas a negative command leaves life open to every course of action except one! Once more, the law of liberty in the garden of Eden is the perfect illustration. The single negative command, 'You must not eat . . . of it' left open the broad prospect that 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.' (Motyer, p. 215)

Joy Davidman, the wife of C. S. Lewis, wrote a book on the Ten Commandments. She makes a mockery of Christians who see the Ten Commandments as drudgery. What do you think of her comments? Have you turned the Ten Words into a *dull denial*?

How many thousands, in . . . America, picture Christianity as something old, sapless, joyless, mumbling in the chimney corner and casting sour looks at the young people's fun? How many think of religion as the enemy of life and the flesh and the pleasures of the flesh; a foe to all love and all delight? . . .

We are in danger of forgetting that God is not only a comfort but a joy. He is the source of all pleasures; he is fun and light and laughter, and we are meant to enjoy him. . . . We shall try to be negatively good, and make a virtue of misery; plume ourselves on the rejection of delights for which we are too weak, measure our piety by the number of pleasures we prohibit. And others will react against us by rejecting religion altogether, probably announcing with pride that they are choosing "life" instead.

. . . [T]his is not the good news but a counsel of despair and defeat, at best of escape. This not the law of Moses but a meaningless law of fear. "Thou shalt not enjoy life" was never Christ's teaching; it is we who have brought our terror and impotence into religion, and then accused religion of bringing it to us. . . . No wonder the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) make us uncomfortable. We have turned it from a thrilling affirmation into a dull denial. (Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain*, 1953, pp. 14-15)

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twelve

The Tent: God Dwells

Exodus 24:15—27:19

Think through what we've learned about God's people thus far in the Book of Moses. God calls Abram and creates a nation out of his descendents. God delivers this nation from bondage in Egypt and brings it to a campground at the foot of Mount Sinai. There the people camp for about a year. God's presence and glory are with them as they camp.

A quick test question. Why did God do it? Why did God create a people and rescue that same people from Egypt? The answer comes in 29:45-46:



I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.

Israel is camped at Mount Sinai, but soon it will be time to pack up their tents and move toward the land of promise. Will Yahweh come too? Or will his presence stay in Sinai? Exodus 24:15-27:19 answer our question. The people are *dwelling* in tents. In these chapters God says, essentially, *Make me a tent so that I can dwell with you*. Bible translators usually render the word as *tabernacle*, but Hebrew scholars point out that the word simply means *tent*.

'Tabernacle' has become the conventional name for the Lord's tent, intended presumably to express a sense of dignity and uniqueness, but we must not lose sight of the fact that it is the common word for 'tent' used to refer to the homes in which the Israelites themselves lived. (Motyer, p. 251)

But while Yahweh will be *with* the people, the people need to keep their distance from their God. His holiness is such that they need a buffer between themselves and his holiness.

Exodus 25-40 concentrates on the worship of the nation of Israel. Here we find elaborate instructions on how the tabernacle is to be constructed, on how the priests are to dress, etc. Readers of these chapters who have been spiritually nurtured from the New Testament are likely to wonder, *What is all the fuss*

about??? The fuss is about the holiness of God and the sinfulness of his people.

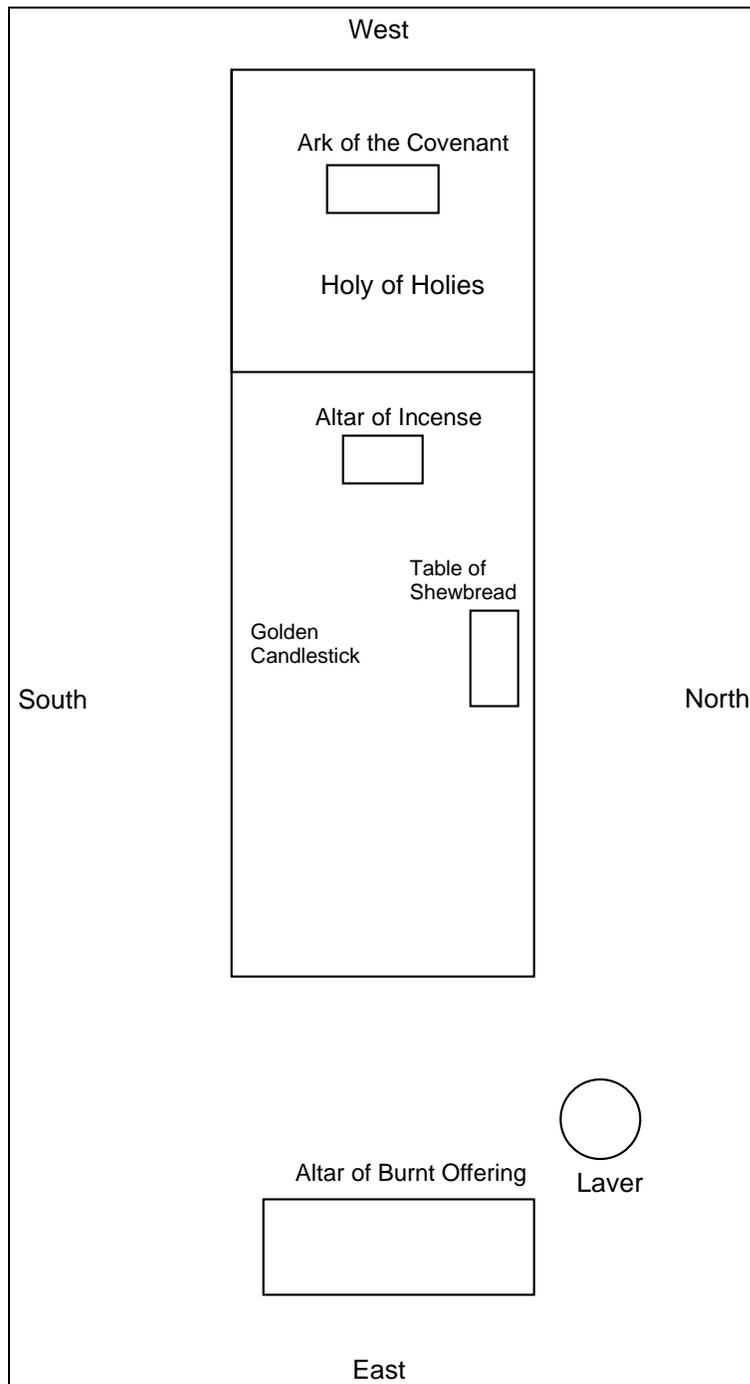
Perhaps the simplest and yet most serious consequence of sin is that it creates distance between the sinner and his creator. The wages of sin (disobedience to God) is death (Rom. 6:23). In the day you eat of it (the tree) you will surely die (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve ate from the tree of *knowledge of good and evil* and were alienated from God. From this point on, men and women have difficulty in approaching God. God is holy; his creation is self-tarnished.

Atonement (sacrifice) needs to be made to appease the displeasure of a righteous God. The final blood sacrifice for sin is the person of Jesus (Romans 3:25), but before this pivotal event God's people are to make atonement for their sin with the blood of animals.

The tent, described in Exodus 25-31 and 35-40, was a portable house of worship which

the Jews made and carried during their wilderness wanderings. Later this portable house of worship was replaced with a permanent copy. King Solomon finished building the temple in Jerusalem during his reign as king.

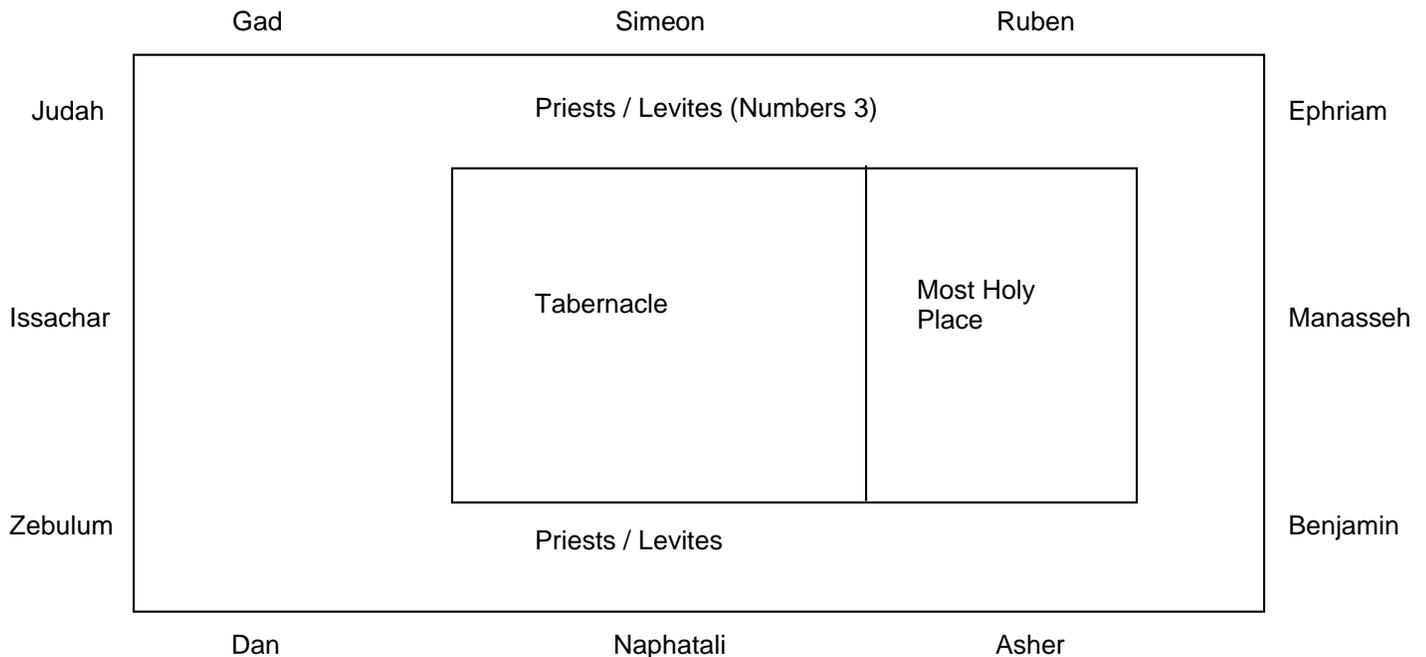
The outer court of the tabernacle was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was surrounded by a curtain fence which stood about 7 1/2 feet tall. The entrance was 30 feet wide.



The tabernacle itself was 45 feet long and 15 feet wide. Two thirds of the tabernacle was called the Holy Place. This contained the Table of Shewbread (a table upon which twelve loaves made of the finest flour were laid each Sabbath), the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense. Behind the Altar of Incense was a veil which closed off the Most Holy Place, a room 15 feet square. Here was the Ark of the Covenant: a box which contained the golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod and the Ten Commandments.

We might think of the tabernacle as a tangible parable, a visual object lesson, that assured Israel of God's presence and taught Israel the severity and the gravity of sin. The tabernacle was God's tent, the place where God lived. Because of sin Israel was alienated from her God. The ordinary woman or man could go no further than the gate of the tabernacle court. The priests and the Levites were allowed to enter the outer court. Only the priests were permitted into the Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was entered only once a year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (described in Leviticus 16).

The tabernacle was set in the center of the tribes of Israel. This is certainly a symbol of the centrality of worship in the life of the nation.



The important question with regard to the tabernacle is *What did it mean?* What was its significance? What symbolism was intended in the various components of the tabernacle? Philo and Josephus said the tabernacle represented the universe (the court = the earth, the tabernacle itself = heaven, the lampstand = the seven planets, etc. (cf. Kaiser p. 451). Some have seen a type of the church

in the tabernacle.

Two extremes are discernible in discussions of the symbolism of the Tabernacle. There are those who make little or nothing of the symbolism of the sanctuary in spite of [numerous] NT references to that structure. On the other hand, there are those who seek to draw some spiritual truth from every thread and piece of wood. (Charles Fienberg, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5. p. 583)

We should avoid both extremes. The tabernacle teaches us primarily about Israel's worship.

It thereby assumes that God is the Great King who reigns and is therefore worthy of our praise and adoration. Even more specifically, the meaning of the tabernacle is that God has come "to dwell," "to tabernacle" in the midst of Israel, as he would one day come in the Incarnation. . . . (Kaiser p. 452)

Sailhamer notes,

In the tabernacle-temple complex, the holy God lived among his chosen people. The special arrangements of the dwelling (e.g., the Holy of Holies, outer court, etc.) were not intended to exclude God from his people but to safeguard the proper approach to this holy God, that is, an approach through the blood of the atonement sacrifice. This theology of the tabernacle-temple complex is the basis of the NT teaching that the individual believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and that the blood of Christ is the means whereby the believer's heart is made approachable to the holy God (Heb 9:25-26). (Sailhamer p. 298)

Enough introduction; read Exodus 25-27. Make a few notes of those verses and ideas that stand out. What are your initial impressions of these chapters?

Why would Moses include all the details of these chapters?

Think about these chapters as a unit. What do they teach us about worship? Try to list four or five lessons about worship from this section of Exodus.

25:2 Were the building materials to be donated out of obligation or desire?

25:8 What was the purpose of the tabernacle?

Picture yourself in the desert with Israel. Each day you go about your business: gathering manna, training your dog, swapping stories about life back in Egypt. As you come and go, socialize and work, you are constantly aware of the tabernacle. You hear the worship of the priests from time to time. You witness the procession of animals presented for sacrifice. You smell the cooked flesh. On the Day of Atonement you gather with the nation and participate in the worship.

- How does all this affect and shape your understanding of God?
- Of sin?
- Of forgiveness and grace?

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the tabernacle is the way in which the New Testament writers use it to describe the work of Christ.

John begins his gospel telling us that Jesus *tabernacled* among us.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:14).

When Jesus was crucified, Matthew's gospel informs us the curtain in the temple which separated the people from God was torn *from top to bottom*. (Mt. 27:50-51) We have access to God in the blood of Jesus.

Paul sees the believer himself, and the church gathered, as the location of God's

new dwelling. No longer does Yahweh live in a tent or a temple. He lives in us!

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*

Finally, Revelation depicts the dwelling of God with men and women spatially (Rev. 21:3). In Revelation 21 the *New Jerusalem* descends to earth. It is in the same shape as the Most Holy Place. God now lives in and among his people in a new and unique way.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:22-23)

Hebrews, more than any other book in the New Testament, draws parallels between the old tabernacle in the desert and the new spiritual realities found in Christ.

Read Hebrews 9:1-28:

How was the work of Jesus similar/different from the work of the High Priest in the tabernacle?

Similar

Different

In what ways is Jesus' sacrifice superior to the sacrifice offered by the High Priest in the tabernacle?

Respond to the following quotation by Terence Fretheim.

[The tabernacle teaches us] . . . the importance of places. . . . God chooses a place because God has entered into history with a people for whom place is important. If places are important for people, they are

important for God. . . . Because the human is so shaped by place as well as time, worship for Israel could never be careless of times or places. Because the human is not simply a spiritual creature but physical through and through, there had to be a tangible place, as well as sights and sounds, touch and movement, in Israel's worship. The tabernacle provides for this. (Fretheim, p. 273)

Has the evangelical church missed some of this? Have we been too *spiritual* in our approach to worship? Do we see worship as private felicity between ourselves and God without regard to the larger body of Christ, or without regard to the gravity of our sin (the Lord's Supper)? Express your thoughts on these questions.

The conclusion to the book of Hebrews (which has contemplated the tabernacle thoroughly) calls us to praise.

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. (Hebrews 13:15)

Spend time as a group doing this. Extol God simply because he is God. Praise him for his great provision in our lives.