



YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE!

***The Exodus of Israel
from Egypt:
God Fulfills His Promise
to Abraham***

Exodus 1-24; 32-34; 35

BOB UTLEY
PROFESSOR OF HERMENEUTICS
(BIBLE INTERPRETATION)

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FREE BIBLE COMMENTARY

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE!

THE EXODUS OF ISRAEL FROM EGYPT: GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

By Dr. Bob Utley, retired professor of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Brief Explanations of the Technical Resources used in this Commentary

Brief Definitions of Hebrew Verbal Forms that Impact Exegesis

Abbreviations Used in this Commentary

A Word from the Author: How Can this Commentary Help You?

A Guide to Good Bible Reading: A Personal Search for Verifiable Truth

The Old Testament As History

OT Historiography Compared with Contemporary Near Eastern Cultures

Genre and Interpretation: Old Testament Narrative

Commentary

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. In Hebrew (MT) it is the first phrase of the book, “and these are the words (names),” which links the book of Exodus to Genesis, where the very same words appear in Gen. 46:8.
- B. In the LXX translation it is *ek 'odos* which means “a way out” or “a road out.”
- C. In the Latin Vulgate of Jerome it becomes “exodus.”

II. CANONIZATION

- A. It is part of the first section of the Hebrew Canon called “The Torah” or “teachings” or “Law.”
- B. The section is known as the Pentateuch (five scrolls) in the LXX.
- C. It is sometimes called “The Five Books of Moses” in English.
- D. It includes a continuous historical account by Moses, from creation through Moses’ life, Genesis - Deuteronomy.

III. GENRE – The book of Exodus includes four literary genres.

- A. Historical narrative, Exodus 1-19; 24; 32-34
- B. Poetry, Exodus 15
- C. Law, Exodus 20-23
- D. Specifications for the Tabernacle, Exodus 25-31, and its construction, Exodus 35-40

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. The Torah is one unified account. Exodus starts with the CONJUNCTION “and.” See lengthy discussion in Genesis online (www.freebiblecommentary.org).
- B. There are several places in Exodus where it says that Moses wrote:
 - 1. Exod. 17:14
 - 2. Exod. 24:4, 12
 - 3. Exod. 34:27, 28
- C. Joshua 8:31 quotes Exodus 20:25 and attributes it to Moses. Jesus quotes Exod. 20:12,17 and attributes it to Moses, Mark 7:10.

- D. I have been so impressed by a new book that presents the orality of the ANE culture. I think it will solve many of the issues related to authorship and manuscript variants. It is by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

V. DATE OF THE EXODUS

- A. There have been several scholarly opinions on the date of the Exodus:
1. from I Kings 6:1, which says, “480 years from the Exodus to the building of Solomon’s Temple” (see Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 191-198).
 - a. Solomon’s reign began in 970 B.C. This is figured by using the battle of *Qarqar* (853 B.C.) as a certain starting date.
 - b. The Temple was built in his fourth year (965 B.C.), then the Exodus occurred about 1445/6 B.C. ±.
 2. This would make it occur in the 18th Egyptian Dynasty.
 - a. The Pharaoh of the oppression would be Thutmose III (1490-1436 B.C.).
 - b. The Pharaoh of the Exodus would be Amenhotep II (1436-1407 B.C.).
 - (1) Some believe evidence from Jericho based on the fact that no diplomatic correspondence occurred between Jericho and Egypt during the reign of Amenhotep III (1413-1377 B.C.).
 - (2) The *Amarna* texts record diplomatic correspondence written on ostraca about the *Habiru* over-running the land of Canaan in the reign of Amenhotep III. Therefore, the Exodus would have occurred in the reign of Amenhotep II.
 - (3) The period of the Judges is not long enough if the 13th century (i.e., 1290 B.C.) is the date of Exodus.
 3. The possible problems with these dates are:
 - a. The Septuagint (LXX) has 440 years not 480.
 - b. It is possible that 480 years is representative of 12 generations of 40 years each, therefore, a figurative number.
 - c. There are 12 generations of priests from Aaron to Solomon (cf. I Chronicles 6), then 12 from Solomon to the Second Temple. The Jews, like the Greeks, reckoned a generation as forty years. So, there is a 480 year period back and forward (symbolic use of numbers, cf. Bimson’s *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*).
 4. There are three other texts that mention dates:
 - a. Genesis 15:13,16 (cf. Acts 7:6), 400 years of bondage
 - b. Exodus 12:40-41 (cf. Gal. 3:17)
 - (1) MT – 430 years of sojourn in Egypt
 - (2) LXX – 215 years of sojourn in Egypt
 - c. Judges 11:26 – 300 years between Jephthah’s day and the conquest (supports 1445 date)
 - d. Acts 13:19, exodus, wanderings, and conquest – 450 years
 5. The author of Kings used specific historical references and did not round numbers (Edwin Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 83-85).
- B. The tentative evidence from archaeology seems to point toward a date of 1290 B.C., or the 19th Egyptian Dynasty.
1. Joseph was able to visit his father and Pharaoh in the same day (i.e., Exod. 2:1-10). The first native Pharaoh who moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes back to the Nile Delta, to a place called *Avaris/Zoan/Tanis* which was the old Hyksos capital, was Seti I (1309-1290). He would be the Pharaoh of the oppression.

- a. This seems to fit two pieces of information about the Hyksos reign of Egypt.
 - (1) A stele has been found from the time of Rameses II that commemorates the founding of Avaris four hundred years earlier (1700's B.C. by the Hyksos)
 - (2) The prophecy of Genesis 15:13 speaks of a 400 year oppression
 - b. This implies that Joseph's rise to power was under a Hyksos (Semitic) Pharaoh. The new Egyptian dynasty is referred to in Exod. 1:8 (i.e., "now a new Pharaoh arose over Egypt").
2. The Hyksos, an Egyptian word meaning "rulers of foreign lands," were a group of non-Egyptian Semitic rulers. They controlled Egypt during the 15th and 16th Dynasties (1720-1570 B.C.). Some want to relate them to Joseph's rise to power. If we subtract the 430 years of Exod. 12:40 from 1720 B.C., we get a date of about 1290 B.C.
 3. Seti I's son was Rameses II (1290-1224). This name is mentioned as one of the store cities built by the Hebrew slaves, Exod. 1:11. Also this same district in Egypt near Goshen is called Rameses, Gen. 47:11. *Avaris/Zoan/Tanis* was known as "House of Rameses" from 1300-1100 B.C.
 4. Thutmose III was known as a great builder, as was Rameses II.
 5. Rameses II had 47 daughters living in separate palaces.
 6. Archaeology has shown that most of the large walled cities of Canaan (Hazor, Debir, Lachish) were destroyed and rapidly rebuilt around 1250 B.C. In allowing for a 38 year wilderness wandering period this fits a date of 1290 B.C.
 7. Archaeology has found a reference to the Israelites being in southern Canaan on a memorial stele of Rameses' successor Merneptah (1224-1214 B.C. [cf. The Stele of Merneptah, dated 1220 B.C.]).
 8. Edom and Moab seem to have attained strong national identity in the late 1300's B.C. These countries were not organized in the 15th century (Glueck).
 9. The book entitled *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* by John J. Bimson, published by the University of Sheffield, 1978, argues against all of the archaeological evidence for an early date.
- C. There is a new theory popularized on the History channel, called "The Exodus Decoded," which basically asserts that the Pharaohs friendly to Joseph were Hyksos Kings. Josephus quotes Manetho's history, which linked the Hyksos with the Israelites (i.e., *Against Apion* 1:73:7). The Hyksos controlled parts of Egypt from 1720-1570 B.C. ±. This would put the date earlier than option A.
- The route of the Exodus suggested would follow the coast of the Mediterranean on a highway called "the way of the Philistines." Therefore, Mt. Sinai would be close to Kadesh-Barnea.
- D. Another recent theory suggests that "the darkness" and "the wave" that killed the Egyptians were caused by the volcanic eruption of Thera on the Island of Santorin, which is 500 miles northwest. The date would be 1477 B.C. This would make the Exodus slightly earlier than option A. See "Science," 1986, which refers to evidence from Egyptologist Hans Goldicke of John Hopkins University and oceanographer Daniel Jean Stanley of the Smithsonian Institute.
- E. There is no mention in Egyptian records or pictographs of God's plagues or Israel leaving. Remember, Egyptian history was for the purpose of supporting the monarchy (like Chronicles in the Bible). No negative events are recorded.

VI. OTHER UNCERTAINTIES RELATED TO THE EXODUS

- A. The number of people to leave in the Exodus is in doubt.
1. Numbers 1:46; 26:51 report that there were 600,000 men of fighting age (20-50 yrs. of age, cf. Exod. 38:26). Therefore, if one estimates women, children, and old men, a number of 1.5 to 2.5 million is possible.
 2. However, the Hebrew term for thousand, *eleph*, can mean:
 - a. a family or clan unit, Jos. 22:14; Jdgs. 6:15; 1 Sam. 23:23, Zech. 9:7
 - b. a military unit, Exod. 18:21,25; Deut. 1:15
 - c. a literal thousand, Gen. 20:16; Exod. 32:28
 - d. used symbolically, Gen. 24:60; Exod. 20:6 (Deut. 7:9); 34:7; Jer. 32:18
 - e. from the Ugaritic (a cognate of Semitic language), the same consonants as *alluph* which means “chieftain” (cf. Gen. 36:15). This would mean that for Num. 1:39 there were 60 chieftains and 2700 men from Dan. The problem comes when there are obviously too many chieftains for the number of men in some tribes.
 - f. there is a good discussion in the NIV Study Bible, p. 186
 3. Archaeology has estimated the size of the armies of Egypt and Assyria during this period in the tens of thousands. Some passages in Joshua seem to imply that Israel had an army of about 40,000, (cf. Jos. 4:13; 7:3; 8:3,11,12).
- B. The route of the Exodus is in doubt.
1. The location of:
 - a. the Egyptian cities
 - b. bodies of water
 - c. early Hebrew camp sitesare all uncertain.
 2. The term “Red Sea” is literally *Yam Suph* (see Special Topic: Red Sea), which:
 - a. means, “sea of weeds” or “sea of reeds.” It can refer to salt water, Jonah 2:5; 1 Kgs. 9:26 or fresh water, Exod. 2:3; Isa. 19:26. The LXX first translated it as “Red Sea,” followed by the Vulgate and then the King James Version.
 - b. referred to the “sea to the south” or “sea at the end (of the earth).” It could have referred to the modern Red Sea, Indian Ocean, or Persian Gulf.
 - c. had several usages in the OT (cf. Num. 33:8,10).
 3. There are three possible routes involving three different bodies of water:
 - a. A northern route – this was along the Mediterranean coast, following the commercial highway known as “the way of the Philistines.” This would have been the shortest way to the Promised Land. The body of water that they would have encountered would have been one of the shallow, marshy areas called: Lake Sirbonis or Lake Menzalach. However, one must take into account Exod. 13:17, which seems to negate this option. Also the presence of Egyptian fortresses along this route militates against this option.
 - b. A middle route – this would involve the central lakes called:
 - (1) “The Bitter Lakes”
 - (2) “Lake Balah”
 - (3) “Lake Timsah”This would also have been following a caravan route through the wilderness of Shur.
 - c. A southern route – this would involve the large body of salt water we call the Red Sea today. There was also a caravan route from this area that linked up with the “King’s Highway” (the trans-Jordan road to Damascus) at Ezion-Geber.

- (1) Militating against this is the absence of reeds in this body of water.
 - (2) Pointing toward this is that 1 Kgs. 9:26 says “Ezion-Geber is on the Yom-Suph.” This would be the Gulf of Aqaba or part of the Red Sea (cf. Num. 21:4; Deuteronomy 27; Jdgs. 11:16; Jer. 49:12).
 - d. Numbers 33 clearly shows the problem. In Num. 33:8a they “pass through the sea,” then in 33:10 they camped by the “Red Sea,” a different body of water.
 - e. Whichever body of water was crossed, it was a miracle of God. Israel was provided weaponry from the dead Egyptian soldiers who floated to their side of the body of water, another miracle, Exod. 14:30; 15:4-5.
 - f. It is possible from other literature that “the *Yam Suph*” was the uncharted, mysterious body of water to the south. In some literature the Indian Ocean or the bay of Bengeli is called “*Yam Suph*.”
4. The location of Mt. Sinai is also in doubt.
- a. If Moses was speaking literally and not figuratively of the three day journey he requested of Pharaoh (Exod. 3:18; 5:3; 8:27), that was not a long enough time to get to the traditional site in the southern Sinai peninsula. Therefore, some scholars place the mountain near the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea.
 - b. The traditional site called “Jebel Musa,” in the Wilderness of *Sin*, has several things in its favor:
 - (1) a large plain before the mountain
 - (2) Deut. 1:2 says it was an eleven day journey from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea
 - (3) The term “Sinai” is a non-Hebrew term. It may be linked to the Wilderness of *Sin*, which refers to a small desert bush. The Hebrew name for the mountain is *Horeb* (wilderness).
 - (4) Mt. Sinai has been the traditional site since the 4th century A.D. It is in the “land of Midian,” which included a large area of the Sinai peninsula and Arabia.
 - (5) it seems that archaeology has confirmed the location of some of the cities mentioned in the Exodus account (*Elim, Dophkah, Rephidim*) as being on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula.
 - c. The traditional site of Mt. Sinai was not established until *Pilgrimage of Silvia*, written about A.D. 385-8 (cf. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, p. 151).
 - d. History Channel, “Decoding the Exodus,” places it on the northern caravan route to Canaan (i.e., the shortest route to the Promised Land).

VII. SOURCES CORROBORATING THE HISTORICAL SETTING:

- A. There is no written evidence from Egypt at all about the exodus. This is not unusual in light of
 1. YHWH’s total defeat of the Egyptian gods
 2. the literary nature of Egyptian writings (i.e., royal propaganda)
- B. There are some cultural examples of laws similar to the decalogue:
 1. The *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar* (Sumerian), from the king of Isin (1934-1924 B.C.)
 2. The *Laws of Eshnunna* (old Babylonian), dating about 1800 B.C. from the reign of Dadusha, king of Ashnunna
 3. The Code of Hammurabi (old Babylonian) from the king of Babylon, Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.)
 4. The law codes of the Hittite kings, Mupsilis I or Hattusilis I, from about 1650 B.C.

5. The Mesopotamian law codes focus primarily on civil laws, while the biblical laws focus primarily on religious/cultic laws. “. . .we might suggest a civil bias in all cuneiform law and a cultic bias in Israelite law. . ., in Mesopotamia, offense is ultimately viewed in relation to society; while in Israel, all offense is ultimately against God,” (Walton, p. 80).
 6. Albrecht Alt, in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 81-132, has identified two types of laws:
 - a. casuistic, which uses conditional clauses. It is characterized by an “if. . .then” structure. It does not appeal to religious or societal norms but states a prohibition and consequence.
 - b. apodictic, which does not use conditional clauses.
 - (1) Exodus 21 and Deut. 27:15-26 use the THIRD PERSON which relates to individual, specific cases
 - (2) Lev. 18:7-17 and Exodus 20/Deuteronomy 5 use the SECOND PERSON which is more general in scope.
 - c. Mesopotamian law is primarily casuistic, while Israelite law is primarily apodictic.
- C. As to the old liberal argument that Moses could not have known how to write, archaeology has confirmed the existence of an early Canaanite alphabet which was used in Egypt in Moses’ day.
1. Correspondence from 1400 B.C. has been found concerning the Semitic slaves in the Egyptian mines of Sinai (cf. Albright, BASOR, #110 [1948], p 12-13).
 2. The ostrakon (broken pottery used to receive writing) from the Valley of Queens has been found at Thebes (Albright, BASOR, #110 [1948], p 12).

VIII. LITERARY UNITS (CONTEXT)

A. Brief Outline

1. Israel in Egypt (the ten plagues), Exodus 1-11
2. Israel leaves Egypt (the Exodus), Exodus 12-18
3. Israel at Mt. Sinai, Exodus 19-40
 - a. Laws of covenant at Mt. Sinai, Exodus 19-24
 - b. Laws of worship at Mt. Sinai, Exodus 25-40
 - (1) tabernacle design, Exodus 25-31
 - (2) rebellion and covenant renewal, Exodus 32-34
 - (3) tabernacle built, Exodus 35-40

B. The Plagues

1. They show God’s judgment on the gods of Egypt (as Genesis 1 shows the depreciation of Mesopotamian gods). They seem to have occurred over an 18 month period. They involve natural events, yet with:
 - a. supernatural timing
 - b. supernatural intensity
 - c. supernatural location
2. Brief outline of the ten plagues
 - a. Nile turned to blood, Exod. 7:14-25
 - b. frogs, Exod. 8:1-15
 - c. lice, gnats, Exod. 8:16-19
 - d. flies, Exod. 8:20-32
 - e. disease of cattle, Exod. 9:1-7

- f. boils, Exod. 9:8-12
- g. hail, Exod. 9:13-35
- h. locusts, Exod. 10:1-20
- i. darkness, Exod. 10:21-29
- j. death angel, death of firstborn, Exod. 11:1-8

C. List of feast/fast days of Exodus 23:

- 1. weekly Sabbath, Exod. 23:3
- 2. Passover (14th of Nisan), Exod. 23:5; Exodus 12
- 3. Unleavened Bread (15th-21st of Nisan), Exod. 23:6-8; Deut. 16:1-8
- 4. First Fruits (22nd of Nisan), Exod. 23:9-14
- 5. Pentecost or Feast of Weeks (50 days after 21st of Nisan, 6th Sivan), Exod. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12
- 6. Blowing of Trumpets (1st Tishri), Exod. 23:23-25; Num. 29:1-6
- 7. Day of Atonement (10th Tishri), Exod. 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11
- 8. Feast of Booths (15th Tishri), Exod. 23:33-44; Num. 29:12-40; Deut. 16:13-17

D. Detailed outline

- 1. for Bob's detailed outline see Special Topic: Detailed Outline of the Book of Exodus
- 2. see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the OT*, p. 560-562
- 3. see E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the OT*, p. 63-72
- 4. see NIV Study Bible, p 85-87

IX. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. It continues the history begun in Genesis. It documents the development of the chosen family into a chosen nation. Though they are enslaved in Egypt, they will possess the Promised Land by divine decree (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:12-21).
- B. It records the covenant laws given at Mt. Sinai (Horeb)
 - 1. How should we live? (Decalogue and supplements)
 - 2. How should we worship? (Tabernacle, priests, procedures, time, and rituals)
 - 3. It is a "how to" manual for the Tabernacle (Leviticus)
- C. It documents God's great acts of love and mercy toward Israel which were prophesied to Abraham, Gen. 15:12-21.
- D. God's dealing with Pharaoh shows the balance between God's sovereignty and mankind's free will:
 - 1. God hardened Pharaoh's heart
 - a. Exod. 7:3, 13
 - b. Exod. 9:12,34-35
 - c. Exod. 10:1, 20, 27
 - d. Exod. 11:10
 - e. Exod. 14:4, 8
 - 2. Pharaoh hardened his own heart
 - a. Exod. 8:15, 32
 - b. Exod. 9:34

EXODUS 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Israel Multiplies in Egypt	Israel's Suffering in Egypt	Israel's Bondage in Egypt	The Israelites Are Treated Cruelly in Egypt	The Prosperity of the Hebrews in Egypt
1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1-7
				The Hebrews Oppressed
1:8-14	1:8-14	1:8-14	1:8-14	1:8-14
1:15-22	1:15-22	1:15-22	1:15-18 1:19-22	1:15-21
				1:22

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Exodus 1 sets forth the plan of God for Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen. 15:12-21).
 1. prosperity/blessings of God
 2. opposition
- B. Exodus continues the history of God's special covenant people which began in Genesis 12. A proper reading of Exodus assumes one has previously known Genesis.
- C. The Exodus is seen by Jewish people as the major event and miracle of God in the OT. It is foundational for their understanding of themselves and their God. It shows God's power and the certainty of God's covenant promises.

Exodus 1 sets the literary stage for the rest of the book.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-7

¹Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; ³Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; ⁴Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵All the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was *already* in Egypt. ⁶Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

1:1 “these are the names” This very phrase is used in Gen. 46:8, describing those who traveled to Egypt. This shows the close literary connection between Genesis and Exodus. Exodus also starts with the Hebrew CONJUNCTION, “and.”

▣ **“Israel”** See Special Topic: Israel (the name).

▣ **“Jacob”** Jacob, the second son of Isaac, has a life-changing encounter with God in Genesis 32, and in Gen. 32:27-28 his name is changed to “Israel.”

▣ **“household”** This would include all relatives and slaves/servants.

1:2-4 This is a list of Jacob’s sons by means of their mothers, but Joseph’s two sons who will inherit (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh) are not included in this list because Joseph and his family were already in Egypt (cf. Exod. 1:5). Because they both inherit, there are thirteen tribes.

1. from Leah
 - a. Reuben
 - b. Simeon
 - c. Levi
 - d. Judah
2. from Rachel
 - a. Joseph (already in Egypt but not named)
 - b. Benjamin (the youngest of the sons but from the favorite wife)
3. from Bilhah (Rachel’s maid)
 - a. Dan
 - b. Naphtali
4. from Zilpal (Leah’s maid)
 - a. Gad
 - b. Asher

1:5 “persons” This is the Hebrew NOUN *nephesh* (BDB 659; see note at Gen. 2:7 online).

▣ **“who came from the loins of Jacob”** This is a Hebrew idiom (lit. “come out,” BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* PARTICIPLE) for children from

1. a father – Gen. 35:11; 46:26; Judgs. 8:30; 2 Sam. 7:12; 16:11; 1 Kgs. 8:19; 2 Kgs. 20:18
2. a mother – Num. 12:12; Job 3:11; Jer. 1:5; 20:18



NASB, NKJV,
NRSV, TEV,
NJB

“seventy”

LXX, DSS (4QEx^a) “seventy-five”

The LXX and DSS reflect Gen. 46:26 and Acts 7:14. However, most English translations follow the MT, “seventy” (cf. Deut. 10:22). The UBS Text Project (p. 88) gives “seventy-five” a “B” rating (some doubt), but does not explain why.

It is a round number (see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture). The later rabbis suggested it reflected all the languages of the world (cf. LXX, Deut. 32:8).

1:7 This numerical expansion of Israel in Egypt fulfilled:

1. command of God in Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7
2. the prophecy of God to Abraham about his descendants
 - a. “great nation”
 - (1) Gen. 12:2a
 - (2) Gen. 17:4,5
 - (3) Gen. 18:18
 - b. “too many to count”
 - (1) Gen. 16:10
 - (2) Gen. 17:20
 - c. “as the dust of the earth”
 - (1) Gen. 13:16
 - (2) Gen. 28:14
 - d. “as the sand on the sea shore”
 - (1) Gen. 22:17
 - (2) Gen. 32:12
 - e. “as the stars of heaven”
 - (1) Gen. 15:5
 - (2) Gen. 22:17
 - (3) Gen. 26:4
 - (4) Exod. 32:13
 - (5) Deut. 1:10
 - (6) Deut. 28:62

It will also be the reason for their persecution.

Notice the repetition of terms to describe Israel’s growth.

1. “were fruitful” – BDB 826, KB 963, *Qal* PERFECT
2. “increased greatly” – BDB 1056, KB 1655, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw* (lit. “swarmed,” cf. Gen. 1:20,21)
3. “multiplied” – BDB 915, KB 1176, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
4. “became exceedingly mighty” – BDB 782 I, KB 868, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*, plus the ADVERB (BDB 547)
5. the land was filled with them – BDB 569, KB 583, *Niphal* IMPERFECT with *waw*

“the land” This probably refers to the land of Goshen in the delta region, where the Israelites settled (cf. Gen. 45:10; 46:28,29,34; 47:1,4,6,27; 50:8). It was also the seat of government (i.e., Gen. 45:10).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:8-14

⁸Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. ¹⁰Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.” ¹¹So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹²But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. ¹³The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; ¹⁴and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at *all kinds* of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.

1:8 “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” This represents a time gap of about two hundred years. Israel was in Egypt for four hundred thirty years (cf. Exod. 12:40).

This could be understood in two ways.

1. It refers to a new Egyptian dynasty (i.e., Amosis, 1570-1546 B.C.) who threw off the yoke of the Hyksos kings (Semites, possibly Hurrians).
2. It refers to a new king who had not personally experienced the God-given administrative powers of Joseph, or was possibly jealous of his influence (i.e., “know” in sense of personal relationship; see Special Topic: Know).

1:9 Again, depending on one’s opinion about Exod. 1:8, this could refer to

1. Israel’s numbers
2. Israel’s Semitic ethnic identity (cf. Exod. 1:10)

1:10 “Come” This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 396, KB 393), meaning in this text, “grant” or “give attention to.” This new Pharaoh wants to act immediately to deal with a perceived problem.

1. Israel’s numbers
2. Israel’s Semitic origins
3. Israel’s possible revolt and exodus

▣ **“Let us deal wisely with them”** This is a *Hithpael* COHORTATIVE (BDB 314, KB 314). It means, “let us take actions to preemptively deal with the potential problem” (i.e., Israel’s growth or ethnicity).

For a Hebrew hearer this would be irony. There is no wisdom apart from knowing and following YHWH.

1:11 Pharaoh’s (title first used in Exod. 3:10, BDB 829; here called “King”) first attempt at solving his perceived problem was to make the Israelite slaves work harder.

What a change has occurred from a welcomed guest to slaves!

▣ **“taskmasters”** This term (BDB 978 CONSTRUCT BDB 586 I) refers to labor unit directors. See Walter Duckat’s, *Beggar to King: All the Occupations of Biblical Times*, p. 251.

▣ **“storage cities of Pithom and Raamses”** These two cities are probably located in the delta region (possibly linked to Gen. 46:28). The name “Pithom” (BDB 837) is from the Egyptian phrase, “the house of *Atum* (i.e., Egypt’s sun god, and high god). “House” could relate to a

1. temple
2. fortress

It seems to be one of several fortresses on the eastern highway along the Mediterranean, called “the Way of the Philistines.”

The name “Raamses” (or “Rameses”) was a royal name (i.e., the father of Seti I) for Egyptian kings. The Pharaoh of the exodus may have been Rameses II. It is also another name for the delta region (cf. Gen. 47:11).

This city was a royal residence and fortress on one of the main outlets of the Nile (i.e., Pelusail branch). It was a large, impressive city. There is even a papyrus (i.e., Papyrus Leiden 348) that mentions the stones for one temple were brought by “Apiru” slaves, which may be referring to the Hebrew slaves.

1:12

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, JPSOA “in dread”

TEV, NJB “fear”

NEB, REB “loathe”

LXX “disgusted with”

KJV, Peshitta “grieved”

The Hebrew VERB (BDB 880 I, KB 1089, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) means “to feel a loathing,” “abhorrence,” or “sickening dread.” This last option of BDB is how the VERB is used in this context (also note Num. 22:3; Isa. 7:16). Usually the word denotes an abhorrence (i.e., Lev. 20:23; Num. 21:5).

1:14 Notice how the Israeli’s taskmasters did their assigned task.

1. made their lives bitter (BDB 600 I)
2. hard (BDB 904) labor (BDB 715; notice Exod. 2:11; 5:4,5; 6:6,7)
3. with vigor (LXX, BDB 827)

This was done in two areas.

1. building projects
2. agricultural projects

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:15-22

¹⁵Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; ¹⁶and he said, “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” ¹⁷But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?” ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them.” ²⁰So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. ²¹Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. ²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.”

1:15 After the first attempt to limit the Israelites failed (cf. Exod. 1:12-13), they devised a new and terrible second plan (i.e., killing the male children, Exod. 1:16,22; Acts 7:19).

The term “bear,” “bring forth,” “beget” (BDB 408, KB 411) is used eight times in this paragraph (i.e., Exod. 1:15-22).

▣ **“Hebrew”** The term (BDB 720 I) is used in the OT to designate the people of God apart from other ethnic groups.

It is possible to see this term as

1. defining the midwives ethnicity (i.e., their names are Semitic, not Egyptian)
2. referring to the people they served (LXX, Vulgate, Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 2.9.2; this would make the non-Israelite midwives’ faith all the more wonderful)

▣ **“Shiphrah. . .Puah”** These are Semitic names (i.e., “beauty” and “splendor”). It is surprising that only two midwives are mentioned serving so many Israelites. Possibly they are examples of what occurred in other places. These would have been close to, or in, the capital of Pharaoh in the delta. These were brave, believing followers of YHWH (cf. Exod. 1:17, “feared God”); see Special Topic: Fear (OT). God honored them in Exod. 1:21.

Notice the name of Pharaoh is omitted but the names of these two midwives are recorded. This account is theological more than historical!

Remember, Scripture is an eastern history, not a western, cause-effect, chronological history. It is selective, theological history. See Special Topic: OT Historical Narrative and Special Topic: OT Historiography Compared to Near Eastern Cultures. Also note the new book on the initial orality of the OT by Walton and Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

▣ **“birthstool”** This is a MASCULINE NOUN (BDB 7), which usually refers to a potter’s wheel (cf. Jer. 18:3). Apparently, this involved two stones (Hebrew PLURAL).

1. One laid flat and one lifted up. A woman would squat on one and hold on to the other.
2. One stone under each thigh with a gap in between on which the pregnant woman sat (ZPEB, vol. 1, p. 617). The Syriac has “the two knees.”
3. It is possible that this word refers to the stool on which the midwives sat (KB 16).
4. The LXX has “at the birthing stage” (Knox Translation).
5. Possibly it refers to the male genitalia (Edgar Goodspeed, Rotherhams Emphasized Bible; i.e., look out for the sex of the child; the FEMININE form of the Hebrew root means “stone,” BDB 6).

1:17 “God” This is the name *Elohim* (BDB 43, KB 52), which is common in Genesis and Exodus. See Special Topic: Names for Deity.

Exodus will use several names for Deity.

1. *El*
2. *Elohim*
3. *Adon*
4. YHWH

Many scholars have seen this variety as reflecting different authors whose works were combined by editors into the Pentateuch (i.e., J,E,P,D, sources; see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism). However, I think this says more about modern, western, literary theory than Hebrew usage. Each of these names carry a different characteristic of God. See notes at Genesis 1:1.

1:19 The Hebrew midwives lied and God blessed them for it (Exod. 1:20-21). This is ethically similar to Rahab and the spies in Jos. 2:1-7. It reminds me of those who lied to Nazi soldiers looking for Jews in WW II. It was a lie to save a life. Which ethic is more valuable? Their “fear” of God was greater than their fear of Pharaoh.

For a fuller discussion of the ethics, see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 137 and Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 109-110.

1:22 “cast into the Nile” The Nile was one of the chief gods of Egypt (i.e., *Hapi*, god of the annual flood which brought life to Egypt). In a sense, these deaths were sacrifices. It is uncertain exactly what this verse implies as the means of death.

1. drowning immediately
2. attacked by animals
3. floating away in a basket like Moses and death by malnutrition

I think number 1 is more likely. Number 3 was an attempt to save Moses, not the general procedure.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Exod. 1:7 related to Gen. 12:1-3?
2. Was Israel in Egypt as a punishment?
3. Why were the Egyptians afraid of the Hebrews?
4. Were there only two midwives?
5. Why were the Hebrew children cast into the Nile?

EXODUS 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Rebirth of Moses	Moses Is Born	The Infancy and Early Career of Moses	The Birth of Moses	The Birth of Moses
2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4
2:5-10	2:5-10	2:5-10	2:5-6 2:7 2:8-10	2:5-10
	Moses Flees to Midian		Moses Escapes to Midian	Moses Escapes to Midian
2:11-14	2:11-15	2:11-15a	2:11-13 2:14-15a	2:11-15
Moses Escapes to Midian			2:15b-18	
2:15		2:15b-22		
2:16-22	2:16-25		2:19 2:20	2:16-22
		The Call of Moses (2:23-4:17)	2:21-22	God Remembers Israel
2:23-25		2:23-25	2:23-25	2:23-25

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Like the book of Esther, the unseen hand of God (cf. Heb. 11:27) is active to fulfill His plans for Israel and the world (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).
Remember, Israel's plight was not a result of disobedience but God's unfolding plan (cf. Gen. 15:12-21).
- B. Moses is the third child of a slave family, yet, he will become God's strategic leader, teacher, and organizer.
In the ANE the first child had preeminence (see Special Topic: The Firstborn), but God often chose another child to show He was in control. This same theology is reflected by the barren wives of the Patriarchs having children.
- C. Moses had the best possible education of his day (i.e., the court of Pharaoh, cf. Acts 7:22).
1. law and order (other ANE cultures)
 2. military
 3. academic (i.e., geography, literature, math, science, medicine, etc.)
 4. desert survival (Egyptian culture and life in Midian)
- D. Where Moses learned of the monotheistic (see Special Topic: Monotheism) covenant-making (see Special Topic: Covenant) God, YHWH (see Special Topic: Names for Deity), is uncertain but possibly from
1. his mother while at home (most likely option)
 2. information from his Egyptian teachers about the slaves' religion
 3. Jethro, a descendant of Abraham and priest of Midian
- E. There are several Egyptian words in this chapter that reflect a true historical setting.
1. "ark"/"basket" (BDB 1061), Exod. 2:3
 2. "bulrushes" (BDB 167), Exod. 2:3
 3. "reeds" (BDB 693 I), Exod. 2:3
 4. "by the bank of the Nile" (lit. "the lip of the river"; although the root is widely known in several Semitic languages), Exod. 2:3
- F. The last paragraph is such a great text about the character of God and His commitment to His word and His people (see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT)!
- G. Moses' birth and life are discussed in Acts 7:17-39 and Heb. 11:23-31.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-4

¹Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. ³But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set *it* among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. ⁴His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.

2:1 Both parents of Moses were from the tribe of Levi (they are named in Exod. 6:20; Num. 26:59), from which the priests and Levites would later come.

2:2 “bore a son” We learn from other texts that Moses had an older brother and sister (cf. Exod. 7:7). This shows Hebrew historical narrative is not a western history. See Special Topic: OT Historical Narrative and Special Topic: OT Historiography Compared with ANE Cultures.

☐ **“she saw that he was beautiful”** Has any mother not felt this way? The Hebrew ADJECTIVE (BDB 373) means “fair looking” (cf. Gen. 6:2; 1 Sam. 9:2; 1 Kgs. 20:3; Dan. 1:15).

☐ **“she hid him for three months”** Why this time period is mentioned is uncertain. Possibly it is just a way to say she hid him as long as possible (Exod. 2:3).

1. he cried too much (Alan Cole)
2. he was too big (F. B. Huey)
3. Egyptians and their spies were becoming more active in seeking out male children

2:3

NASB, JPSOA “a wicker basket”
NKJV “an ark of bulrushes”
NRSV, NJB “a papyrus basket”
TEV “a basket made of reeds”
Peshitta “an ark made of acacia wood”

The MT has “a basket of” (BDB 1061) CONSTRUCT “papyrus” (BDB 167). The word “papyrus” comes from the VERB “to swallow” (BDB 167), thereby, a plant that sucks up water. Isaiah 18:2 mentions ships made of papyrus reeds woven together.

The term “basket” is used of Noah’s ark. It may be an Egyptian root for “chest.”

☐ **“tar and pitch”** Both (BDB 330 and 278) are petroleum based (cf. Gen. 11:3; 14:10), stinky substances (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 711), which were liquid enough when heated to plaster over the woven papyrus reeds to form a water tight seal.

☐ The last sentence of Exod. 2:3 implies a purposeful plan of Moses’ mother to have her child found by an Egyptian princess (cf. Exod. 2:4-7).

2:4 “his sister” We learn from Exod. 15:20 that her name is Miriam (cf. Exod. 7:7; Num. 26:59; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 942-943).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:5-10

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, *the* boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?” ⁸Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go ahead.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, “Because I drew him out of the water.”

2:5 The Nile was considered a god (i.e., Hapi, who was responsible for the annual life-giving floods) in Egyptian mythology. To bathe in it was a religious act.

2:6 The princess responded to a child in a characteristically expected way! She must have known immediately why the child was in the Nile. Moses' sister was standing by ready to offer help!

▣ **“child. . .boy. . .children”** There are two different terms used to describe Moses.

1. child – BDB 409 (SINGULAR)
2. boy – BDB 654
3. children – BDB 409 (PLURAL)

NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 125, shows the wide range of ages the term “boy” (BDB 654) can carry.

1. unborn child – Jdgs. 13:5,7,8,12
2. newborn – 1 Sam. 4:21
3. three months old – Exod. 2:6
4. child not weaned – 1 Sam. 1:22
5. weaned child – 1 Sam. 1:24
6. seventeen year old – Gen. 37:2
7. thirty year old – Gen. 41:12,46

2:8 “girl” This is the word *almah* (BDB 761), which means a young woman of marriageable age. In the ANE this could be 12 and up. This is the word used in Isa. 7:14 (see full notes online). Miriam would have been a virgin but this word is also used of young married women of child-bearing age (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 415-419).

2:9 How long Moses stayed with his mother is not specified. Women in the ANE nursed their children for many years. How much she told Moses about Israel's God and Israel's predicament is also unspecified. She must have told him something because he knew his ethnic origin and had compassion for their plight.

▣ **“I will give you your wages”** This is a literary touch of divine irony!

2:10 “she named him Moses” The princess gave the “basket child” an Egyptian name, “Moses” (BDB 602, KB 642). The name

1. is formed on the root (*mosheh*) for “born of” in Egyptian but with the connotation of “begotten or preserved by a god.” Which god is not specified (KB); lit. “son of. . .” (i.e., *Thut-Moses*).
2. is formed on the sound of the Hebrew PARTICIPLE *mashah* (“he who draws out,” cf. 2 Sam. 22:27; Ps. 18:16; NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 1120). This fits the comment in Exod. 2:10 better.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:11-14

¹¹Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. ¹²So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³He went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, “Why are you striking your companion?” ¹⁴But he said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.”

2:11-12 There have been two distinct ways to view Moses' drastic actions.

1. Jewish commentators see it as positive

2. Christian commentators (some) see it as negative

One wonders if this was a failed attempt by Moses to help alleviate the pain of his people. This may be reading too much into the motives of Moses. His compassionate act which resulted in the death of an Egyptian caused Moses to flee Egypt and dwell in the desert for 40 years. Was this

1. divine preparation for his later task (cf. Acts 7:25)
2. punishment for attempting to accomplish a divine promise in human strength

Moses' actions are affected by

1. his own feelings of compassion for his people
2. his feelings of betrayal by a bombastic Hebrew slave
3. his fear of Pharaoh (Josephus, *Antiq.* 2.10.11)

2:11 Moses' age is not specified but he is said to be "grown up" (BDB 152). The term is used of

1. Isaac being weaned in Gen. 21:8
2. in Gen. 25:27 it is used of young manhood
3. in Gen. 38:11,14 it means "marriageable age" (probably around 13)
4. in Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:23, he says Moses was 40 years old at this time

It seems (at least from tradition) that Moses' life can be divided into three forty-year periods.

1. up to Exod. 2:11 he was part of the royal family of Egypt (i.e., thought he was "somebody")
2. lived with Jethro in exile until 80 years of age (i.e., Exod. 2:23; 7:7; thought he was a "nobody")
3. from 80-120 years old he learned what God could do with a "nobody"

For the number 40 see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **"looked on their hard labor"** This implies a sense of deep compassion on Moses' part. A feeling so deep he will act to his own ruin.

Notice the different ways this is expressed.

1. forced labor – Exod. 1:1
2. hard labor – Exod. 2:11
3. work – Exod. 5:4,5
4. yoke – Exod. 6:6,7

2:12 This shows Moses realized he was doing something dangerous to himself! Yet, still he acted (cf. Heb. 11:24-27)!

2:13-14 Moses' compassion is again obvious. However, his previous action was not secret but well known. Someone had seen and told!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:15

¹⁵When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

2:15 The tension at Pharaoh's court is obvious. Pharaoh was not concerned about the death of a taskmaster or assistant but it gives him an opportunity to remove Moses from his family.

▣ **"Midian"** This name is used of different people/places in the OT.

1. a child of Abraham by Keturah sent away to the east (cf. Gen. 25:1-6; 1 Chr. 1:32)
2. a group of traders associated with the Ishmaelites (cf. Gen. 37:25-36)
3. some part of the Sinai peninsula where Moses fled (Exodus 2-4; esp. 3:1-2)
4. somewhere in the southern trans-Jordan area (1 Kgs. 11:18)

5. in Num. 22:4,7, its leaders are associated with Moab's leaders
6. enemies of Gideon in Judges (cf. Judges 6-8)
7. their five kings are listed in Jos. 13:21, which implies a city-state society, like the Philistines in the southern trans-Jordan area south to the eastern Gulf of Aqaba area

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:16-22

¹⁶Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock. ¹⁸When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "Why have you come *back* so soon today?" ¹⁹So they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." ²¹Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. ²²Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

2:16 "the priest of Midian" This man goes by several names/titles in the OT.

1. Reuel ("friend of *El*," Exod. 2:18)
2. Jethro ("pre-eminence," Exod. 3:1; 4:18; 18:2,5,6,9,10,12)
3. Jether (a variant spelling of Jethro, both appear in Exod. 4:18)
4. Hobab ("beloved," Num. 10:29; Jdgs. 4:11)

There is a tradition that he is from the Kenites, not the Midianites, Jdgs. 1:16; 4:11.

▣ **"seven daughters"** One wonders:

1. did he have no sons
2. is "seven" a symbolic number (see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture)
3. why send all seven to draw water

I think the third question has two options.

- a. the herd needed lots of water
- b. the girls were fearful of others needing water (apparently they always had trouble with the local shepherds, cf. Exod. 2:18)

2:17 "Moses stood up" This VERB (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) could mean

1. he was sitting and now stood to his feet
2. he took action to stop the shepherds and help the young women
 - a. stopped the shepherds' interference
 - b. watered the animals himself
 - (1) drew the water
 - (2) carried it to the troughs

Notice how silent the text is on Moses' exact actions. This is not traditional ANE folklore. Moses is portrayed as the kind of person who tried to help others (cf. Exod. 2:11,17).

2:19 "an Egyptian" Moses dressed and spoke as an Egyptian. These young women did not detect any subtle racial differences between Semites and Egyptians.

▣

NASB, NKJV,
TEV, NJB "he even drew the water"

NKJV “he drew enough water”

This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT TENSE VERB from the same root (BDB 194, KB 222), which denotes intensity, or here, fullness of an act. Moses protected them and performed their task.

2:20 This reflects typical ANE hospitality. The immediate welcome turned into a long term relationship.

2:21-22 These verses are a brief summary of a long relationship between Moses and this family (cf. Exod. 2:23). Exodus 3:1 implies a long period of time has elapsed.

2:21 “Zipporah” This term (BDB 862, KB 1047) may denote a type of little bird.

2:22 “Gershon” This name (BDB 177) comes from two Hebrew words, *ger sham* (“a stranger there,” in NASB margin; this word, “stranger,” BDB 85 II, occurs in Exod. 12:48). This firstborn son of Moses is listed several times in the OT (cf. Exod. 2:22; 18:3; 1 Chr. 23:15,16; 26:24).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:23-25

²³Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. ²⁴So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them*.

2:23 “the king of Egypt died” I think this would refer to Seti I (1309-1290 B.C.). This is only an educated guess (see Intro. V).

▣ **“the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out”** This information is repeated in Exod. 2:25; 3:7,9; Deut. 26:7; also note James 5:4. Their prayer affected God (cf. Exod. 2:24; see Special Topic: Intercessory Prayer).

2:24 “heard. . .remembered” We are forced to use human terms and categories to describe the God of Israel. We call this anthropomorphic language. See Special Topic: God Described As Human.

God heard His people cry out (cf. Exod. 3:7,9; 6:5; Deut. 26:7) and He still does!

▣ **“God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”** God’s promises to Abraham (esp. Gen. 15:12-21) are going to be a reality because of

1. God’s character
2. God’s promises
3. Abraham’s act of faith (Gen. 22:16-18)
4. Israel’s prayers
5. Israel’s acts of faith, even mixed with acts of unbelief

This is every believer’s hope/trust that YHWH remembers His promises (and forgets our sins).

2:25

NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA

“took notice of them”

NKJV

“acknowledged them”

LXX, TEV footnote,

Moffatt trans.

“he became known to them”

Peshitta

“noticed their oppression”

The MT has “and knew God.” The VERB “know” (BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) could refer to

1. God acknowledged their situation (follows an Arabic root).
2. God revealed Himself to them (by His acts).
3. God had an intimate love for His covenant people (see Special Topic: Know).
4. The footnote of the Jerusalem Bible (p. 81, K.) suggests the MT is missing the conclusion to the sentence (“and he knew. . .”). The VERB has no OBJECT. The LXX supplies “them.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Was it a sin for Amram to marry his aunt?
2. Did Moses’ mother plan for Pharaoh’s daughter to find the baby or was it an accident?
3. What does the name “Moses” mean?
4. Who is Jethro and why is he called by four different names?
5. Did Moses truly try to deliver his people in his own strength?
6. Where is Midian?

EXODUS 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Burning Bush	Moses At the Burning Bush	The Call of Moses (2:23-4:17)	God Calls Moses	The Burning Bush
3:1-6	3:1-6	3:1-6	3:1-3 3:4 3:5-6	3:1-6 The Mission of Moses
3:7-9	3:7-12	3:7-12	3:7-10	3:7-10
The Mission of Moses				
3:10-12			3:11 3:12	3:11-12 The Divine Name Revealed
3:13-22	3:13-22	3:13-22 (3:15)	3:13 3:14-17 3:18-20 3:21-22	3:13-15 Moses Instructed for His Mission 3:16-20 The Egyptians to be Plundered 3:21-22

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is a crucial chapter that reaffirms YHWH's special commitment to and relationship with the descendants of Abraham (cf. Exod. 2:24). It is the main event in YHWH's deliverance of His people from their enemies!
- B. God protected Moses in chapter 2, now He appoints him as leader to accomplish His task of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. This fulfills His prophecy and promise in Gen. 15:12-21 (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).
- C. God reveals His special covenant name and explains it. This is the only text in the OT which does this. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.
- D. Israel's departure will be supported by Egyptian booty (Exod. 3:22). This is imagery for a military defeat. YHWH confronts and overcomes the Egyptian deities (i.e., the plagues).
- E. This account of Moses' call is very similar to Exod. 6:2-13 and 6:28-7:7. The question for westerners has been "do these reflect multiple separate authors?" (i.e., J, E, D, and P, see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism). However, it may simply be an aspect of orality, see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.
- F. Many commentators mention Moses' five excuses and YHWH's responses.
 - 1. Exod. 3:11-12 – Who am I?
 - 2. Exod. 3:13-22 – They will ask who sent you.
 - 3. Exod. 4:1-9 – What if they do not believe?
 - 4. Exod. 4:10-12 – I cannot speak well.
 - 5. Exod. 4:13-17 – Please send someone else.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-6

¹Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. ³So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

3:1 "Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro" There could be two main reasons for this.

- 1. Jethro had no sons
- 2. Moses was working off the price of his wife, as Jacob did for Rachel (cf. Gen. 29:20)

▣ **"Jethro"** See notes at Exod. 2:18.

▣ **“priest of Midian”** See notes at Exod. 2:15.

▣ **“Horeb”** Notice that the place of the giving of the law is called “Horeb.” Horeb is a Hebrew word for “waste” or “desolate” (BDB 352, KB 349). Sinai (BDB 696) is a non-Hebrew word, and they seem to both refer to the place where Moses brought Israel to meet YHWH (e.g., Horeb, Exod. 3:1; Deut. 1:6,19; 4:10,15; 5:12 and Sinai, Exodus 19; Lev. 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34; Num. 1:1,9; 3:1,4,14; 9:1,5).

Why the name “Horeb” is used most often in Deuteronomy and “Sinai” most often in Exodus is unknown. There is literary variety in the writings of Moses. This could refer to:

1. oral traditions recorded by different scribes
2. Moses using different scribes
3. changes by later scribes for unknown reasons
4. literary variety

▣

NASB, REB “west side”

NKJV “back of”

NRSV “beyond”

NJB “far side”

LXX “beyond”

The MT has “a place behind” (BDB 29). Josephus (*Antiq.* 2.12.1) says Sinai was the tallest mountain and that people were afraid to go there because it was considered “the mountain of God,” but the grass was very good and ungrazed. Moses ventured there.

▣ **“the mountain of God”** Horeb/Sinai is characterized in this way in Exod. 4:27; 18:5; 24:13. This could be

1. a sacred site before Moses’ day (Josephus, *Antiq.* 2.12.4)
2. a sacred site after Exod. 3:1,12; 19:24

3:2 “the angel of the LORD” This is a physical representation of Israel’s invisible God (YHWH). See Special Topic: The Angel of the Lord.

▣ **“LORD”** This is the way English translations designate the covenant name of God (i.e., YHWH, cf. Gen. 2:4). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

This is the first time it appears in Exodus. It will be explained, as to its meaning, in Exod. 3:14-16.

▣ **“the bush”** This (BDB 702, found only in this chapter and Deut. 33:16) was a typical desert bush. It was not special until God chose to use it as the site of His encounter with Moses.

▣ **“blazing fire”** Fire is a symbol of God’s presence (cf. Exod. 13:21). See Special Topic: Fire. Zoroastrians depict deity as a flame. YHWH has no physical representation, so the fire is simply a way to get Moses’ attention.

3:3 Notice that Moses turns aside (BDB 693, KB 747, *Qal* COHORTATIVE) to see this phenomenon because of curiosity, not religious reasons.

3:4 “LORD. . .God” In this paragraph three names/titles of Deity are used in theological parallel.

1. the angel of the LORD, Exod. 3:1 (notice how “from the midst of the bush,” Exod. 3:2,4 link #1 and #3)

2. YHWH, Exod. 3:4 (cf. Exod. 3:7,13-16)

3. *Elohim*, Exod. 3:4 (cf. Exod. 3:6)

For #1 and #2 see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

▣ **“God called to him”** Notice God is purposefully initiating a revelation of Himself and His plans to Moses. Humans cannot know about God except by His Divine disclosure! Theologians call this “revelation.” The Bible records some of God’s revelations to humans. Thank God for His self-disclosure and a written record of much of it!

In this case God spoke directly to Moses, as He did to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 21:12-13; 22:1-2). God also revealed Himself to Abraham by

1. visions
2. dreams
3. the angel of the LORD (as here)

▣ **“Moses, Moses”** The doubling of the name was a way of showing intensity (cf. Gen. 22:11; 1 Sam. 3:10). Jesus did this several times (cf. Luke 10:41; 22:31,32; Acts 9:4).

YHWH knows Moses’ name and family (cf. Exod. 3:6)!

▣ **“Here I am”** This is another Hebrew idiom denoting availability to hear and respond (cf. Gen. 22:1,11; 1 Sam. 3:4; Isa. 6:8). But the text from here through part of chapter 7, clearly shows Moses was not available!

3:5 The bush and its surrounding area was “holy” (see Special Topic: Holy) because of God’s presence.

▣ **“remove your sandals”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 675, KB 730, cf. Jos. 5:15). Why, is not stated. There have been several theories. Removal of shoes was:

1. a sign of openness, intimacy
2. a sign of family
3. a sign of a servant/slave
4. a sign of a preventative measure of no pollution (i.e., animal dung) in God’s presence (also note Deut. 23:12-13)

Notice the tension between God’s immanence (Moses, Moses) and God’s transcendence (of Exod. 3:5).

The ground may refer to

1. all of God’s mountain
2. the area around the bush

3:6 “I am the God of your father” Notice the NOUN “father” is SINGULAR (UBS Text Project gives it an “A” rating, i.e., highly probable), as it is in Gen. 26:24. This is different from the typical use of this phrase, “the God of your fathers” (cf. Exod. 3:15,16).

Here it functions as a way for Moses to know that YHWH is the God of his parents (slaves in Egypt, cf. Exod. 15:2). Moses’ father was in a line of believers. God knew his family, his origin, his circumstances!

▣ **“Abraham. . .Isaac. . .Jacob”** These are known to them as the Patriarchs of Israel. To each of these YHWH revealed Himself and made covenant promises (cf. Exod. 32:13).

1. Abraham – Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-11; 17:1-8; 18:17-19; 22:16-18
2. Isaac – Gen. 26:2-4,24
3. Jacob – Gen. 28:12-17; 35:10-12

Notice Jesus' use of the verse in Matt. 22:32, where the ever-living aspect of God's revealed name is emphasized! Eternal life depends on the eternal nature of God Himself!

▣ **“Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God”** The Hebrews believed their God was so holy that for sinful humans to see Him meant death (cf. Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 33:20; Jdgs. 6:22-23; 13:22; 1 Kgs. 19:13; Isa. 6:5). The purpose of “the Cloud” was to veil Deity's personal presence.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:7-9

⁷The LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. ⁸So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ⁹Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.

3:7 This is a repeat of Exod. 2:23-25 (cf. Deut. 26:7; Neh. 9:9; Isa. 63:9; Acts 7:34). God hears and knows the problems and trials His people face. He is the God who is with us (cf. Exod. 34:6); see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT).

▣ **“surely seen”** This translation is the result of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 906, KB 1157). It was a grammatical way of emphasis.

▣ **“My people”** Wow! What a great word of encouragement. The Hebrews, though now persecuted slaves, are still God's people, the descendants of the Patriarchs, the people of the covenant!

3:8 “I have come down to deliver them” This is both

1. powerful anthropomorphic imagery (see Special Topic: God Described as Human, cf. Gen. 11:5; Exod. 19:11; Num. 11:25)
2. spacial imagery (see Special Topic: Heaven, #4); this is OT cosmology; John H. Walton, *Genesis One As Ancient Cosmology*

Notice it is God's desire and purpose to deliver (BDB 664, KB 717, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT and “bring,” another *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT), but He chose to use frail, sinful, human instrumentality (i.e., Moses, Aaron, cf. Exod. 3:10). God chooses, equips, and sends broken, flawed people to accomplish His purposes (one day He will choose a sinless One, Jesus, to fully redeem His people).

▣ **“the power of the Egyptians”** This is literally, “the hand of. . .” See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“to bring them. . .to a good and spacious land”** The land of Canaan was very productive of both crops and livestock (cf. Num. 13:18-19,23-24,27; Neh. 9:35).

▣ **“a land flowing with milk and honey”** This refers to goat's milk and date juice (according to the rabbis). It is imagery for a fertile, productive land. This was the descriptive title for Canaan in ANE documents.

▣ **“Canaanite. . .”** The native tribes of Canaan are listed several times, first in Gen. 15:19-21. See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

▣ **“Jebusite”** See Special Topic: Jebus.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:10-12

¹⁰Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” ¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” ¹²And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”

3:10 There are two IMPERATIVES in God’s initial command to Moses.

1. come now (lit. “go”) – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. bring. . .out – BDB 422, KB 495, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE; this VERB is used in Exod. 3:10,11,12; it stands for the exodus from Egypt

3:11-4:17 Moses is terrified by God’s call and task. He offers several excuses.

1. Who am I? – Exod. 3:11-12
2. Who are You? – Exod. 3:13-22
3. Who will believe me? – Exod. 4:1-9
4. I cannot speak. – Exod. 4:10-17

3:12 “**Certainly I will be with you**” This is the greatest promised blessing (i.e., the personal presence of God, cf. Exod. 4:12,15; 33:14-16; Gen. 26:3,24; 28:15; 31:3; Jos. 1:5; Isa. 43:2; Jer. 1:8; Hag. 1:13; Matt. 28:20; Acts 18:10).

In a sense this promise links up with God’s name given in Exod. 3:14-16 (i.e., “I Am”)! The focus is not on Moses’ abilities but YHWH’s presence!

▣ **“this shall be the sign. . .”** God gave Moses a future sign but he must act in faith now for that sign to be fulfilled (cf. Exod. 19:1-2). Even in the face of a theophany, faith and action are required (cf. Acts 7:7).

There are several more possible interpretations of this verse.

1. The NJB does not finish verse 12, but puts three ellipsis points (“...”) showing something is left out, which the footnote says is Exod. 4:1-9, a list of several specific signs to Moses.
2. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (p. 60), asserts that the sign was the burning bush itself.

▣ **“worship”** See Special Topic: Worship.

▣ **“you shall worship God at this mountain”** It really was “the mountain of God.” Notice the description of its awesome nature when YHWH approaches it in Exodus 19:16-20; 20:18.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:13-22

¹³Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. ¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite

and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”¹⁸ They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion.²⁰ So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.²¹ I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed.²² But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.”

3:13 “What is His name?” One would expect “Who,” but possibly the name, YHWH, speaks of God’s ever-existing character more than a title. He is the ever-living, only-living One (see Special Topic: Monotheism).

3:14 “I AM WHO I AM” There has been much speculation about the meaning of this name (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1295-1300). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D. There is still mystery here. It is surely possible that Moses’ question is about God’s character (cf. Exod. 34:6), not a title. God’s answer is

1. I am too mysterious for you to grasp.
2. I am the ever present One.
3. I am sovereign and will do what I will (“He causes to be,” Albright).
4. The *Hiphil* implies causality, therefore, “I Am The Creator God.”
5. John Walton, the God who creates a relationship (i.e., covenant-making God).
6. The Jewish Study Bible (p. 111) suggests it means “My nature will become evident from My actions.”
7. Summary, see NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 1024-1025 and my Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

Should we look for etymology or imagery? The JPSOA lists three possible options for the Hebrew.

1. I Am That I Am
2. I Am Who I Am
3. I Will Be What I Will Be

3:15 One wonders if the name referred to is

1. I Am (YHWH) of Exod. 3:14
2. “The YHWH; the *Elohim* of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (full Patriarchal title) of Exod. 3:15 (cf. 3:6).

I think the Israelites would have wanted to be sure Moses’ God was their ancestral God!

▣ **“My memorial-name”** This is parallel to “an everlasting name” or “This is My name forever.” The people of Israel needed to realize that the God of the Patriarchs (cf. Exod. 3:16) who promised in Genesis is the same God who now sends Moses!

His revelations, promises, and acts must always be remembered and praised (cf. Ps. 30:5; 97:12; 112:12; 135:13; Isa. 26:8; Hos. 12:5). He is the God who acts (i.e., the idols cannot see, hear, walk, respond)!

3:16 “elders” See Special Topic: Elder.

▣	
NASB	“I am indeed concerned”
NKJV	“I have surely visited”
NRSV	“I have given heed”
NJB	“has indeed visited”
JPSOA	“I have taken note”
REB	“I have watched over”
LXX	“with concern I have concerned”
Peshitta	“I have surely remembered”

The MT has an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB (BDB 823, KB 955) of the same root, meaning “to attend” or “to visit.” This grammatical feature focuses on God’s great care for and knowledge of His people in Egypt.

3:17 For an explanation of the different people groups of Canaan see Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

▣ “a land flowing with milk and honey” This was a descriptive title for Canaan in this ANE period. See note at Exod. 3:8.

3:18 “LORD” This is YHWH, the I AM of Exod. 3:14-16. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.

▣ “God” This is *Elohim*. See Special Topic: Names for Deity.

These names first appear together in Gen. 2:4. Notice these two names appear again at the end of the verse.

▣ “Hebrews” See note at Exod. 1:15.

▣ “Let us go. . .sacrifice” These are both *Qal* COHORTATIVES. This shows that sacrifices pre-date the Mosaic legislation (cf. Genesis 4; 9). See Special Topic: Sacrificial Systems of the ANE.

▣ “three days’ journey” This time designation (cf. Exod. 5:3; 8:27) has always caused problems related to the route and destination of the exodus. The traditional site of Mt. Horeb/Sinai is too far (see Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai).

It may be simply idiomatic for a longer period of time. However, it would fit one of the suggested routes of the exodus which follows the road beside the Mediterranean called “the way of the Philistines” (but note Exod. 13:17; see Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus).

So, the time could be

1. one day there, one day of sacrificing, one day back
2. three days to get there
3. Oriental dialogue denoting a permanent exodus of the slaves but put in a way so Pharaoh could save face (cf. F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 7)

3:19 This verse clearly shows YHWH’s knowledge of future events (cf. Exod. 3:20) and that there is a purpose in Pharaoh’s denials. YHWH will use the plagues to show His power over the Egyptian pantheon.

There is some doubt as to the subject of “strong hand” (i.e., God’s or Pharaoh’s; see the detailed textual issue in UBS Text Project, pp. 92-93 or NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 81).

3:20 “I will stretch out My hand” This is anthropomorphic imagery. See Special Topic: God Described as Human and Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“My miracles”** God is going to take approximately eighteen months to administer the plagues to a reluctant Pharaoh. It is my opinion that every one of the plagues seems to attack and discredit one of the Egyptian gods. God loves the Egyptians as much as the Hebrews and He is also using this opportunity to bring them to faith as He is delivering His people. These miracles will involve both natural and supernatural timing, but again, God is involved in His sovereign, supernatural way to manifest His presence in His world.

3:21-22 This is imagery of a military defeat (i.e., “plunder,” BDB 664). Israel will leave as victors not slaves (cf. Exod. 11:2-3; 12:35-36; Ps. 105:37)! This fulfills Gen. 15:14. Israel’s history is not guided by fate or their own strength. It is guided by God for a larger purpose (see Special Topic: YHWH’ Eternal Redemptive Plan).

3:22 “but every woman shall ask of her neighbor” The King James translation has “borrow from his neighbor,” but the modern sense of borrowing would mean that the Hebrews were lying about the fact that they would bring them back later. The Hebrew word does not imply “borrow” but “take.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why are there two different names for this special mountain where God met Moses?
2. Is there special theological significance either in the burning bush or the place where God met Moses?
3. Why did Moses have to remove his sandals in the presence of God? What did it mean?
4. Why was Moses afraid of God?
5. Why did God take the land away from the Canaanites (cf. Gen. 15:12-21) and seemingly play favorites with the Hebrews?
6. What does the term “YHWH” mean?
7. Did Moses really want to go only a three days’ journey and then return to Egypt or is this a scene of Oriental bargaining where much more is implied than is stated?
8. Does God always use supernatural means to perform the plagues? If one says no, does this show lack of faith on his part?

EXODUS 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Moses Given Power	Miraculous Signs for Pharaoh	The Call of Moses (2:23-4:17)	God Gives Moses Miraculous Power	Moses Granted Miraculous Powers
4:1-5	4:1-9	4:1-5	4:1 4:2 4:3-5	4:1-5
4:6-9		4:6-9	4:6-9	4:6-9 Aaron, the Mouthpiece of Moses
4:10-13	4:10-17	4:10-17	4:10 4:11-12	4:10-12
Aaron To Be Moses' Mouthpiece			4:13	4:13-17
4:14-17	Moses Goes to Egypt	Moses Returns to Egypt to Arouse the Faith of His People	4:14-17	Moses Leaves Midian and Returns to Egypt
4:18-20	4:18-23	4:18-20	4:18 4:19-20	4:18 4:19-23
4:21-23		4:21-23	4:21-23	The Son of Moses Circumcised
4:24-26	4:24-26	4:24-26	4:24-26	4:24-26 Moses Meets Aaron
4:27-31	4:27-31	4:27-31	4:27-31	4:27-31

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. It is obvious that Exodus 3 and 4 form a literary context. They contain a series of excuses by Moses of why he thinks he cannot be God’s spokesman and deliverer. See note at Exod. 3:11.
- B. Exodus 4:18-31 describes Moses’ journey back to Egypt and the initial contact with the Hebrew people.
- C. Exodus 4:24-26 has been an extremely difficult passage for commentators to interpret. The truth of the matter is that the interpretation has been lost in the precise meaning of certain terms and idioms which are used in this account. There are no parallel passages.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-5

¹Then Moses said, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’” ²The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he said, “A staff.” ³Then He said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴But the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail”—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

4:1 “What if they will not believe me” Apparently Moses was reflecting on his experience of Exod. 2:14, when the Hebrew people did not want his help. However, he must have overlooked God’s significant promise made to him in Exod. 3:10. The truth is that Moses was still trying to find excuses for not doing the will of God. It is helpful for us that the Bible records the faults, as well as the strengths, of God’s leaders. This makes the Bible relevant to all of us and not just to “super saints” (because there are none)!

The term “believe” (BDB 52, KB 63, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) occurs several times in this chapter (cf. Exod. 4:5,8,9,31). This is a key theme in OT theology. See Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT.

▣ **“listen”** This VERB (BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to hear so as to do” (cf. Deut. 6:4). The goal is not knowledge but obedience (cf. Deut. 5:29,31,32,33; 6:1,2,3,4,17,24,25; see Special Topic: Keep).

4:2 “What is that in your hand” This is a series of three specific signs to convince the Hebrews that YHWH has appeared to Moses and has sent him on a mission of redemption.

1. the staff turning into a snake
2. leprosy and its cure
3. the Nile turning to blood

▣ **“staff”** This is probably the crooked staff of a shepherd (cf. Ps. 23:4). Some have assumed that Moses would not bring a shepherd’s staff into the presence of Pharaoh because shepherding was odious to the Egyptians (cf. Gen. 46:34). However, just because the Egyptians did not like shepherds was no reason why God would not use the traditional symbol of Himself as Shepherd and the pastoral crook as a symbol of His power and presence (cf. Exod. 4:20).

This “staff” (BDB 641) will become the power of God in the hands of Moses (Exod. 4:17; 14:16; 17:9). It will symbolize God’s personal presence and character (Shepherd of His people).

4:3 “Throw it on the ground. . .it became a serpent” The general term for “serpent” (BDB 638) is different from the one used in Exod. 7:9 (BDB 1071), where Moses, using this same staff, performs the feat through Aaron for Pharaoh. Because Moses fled from the serpent, it may have been a cobra, which was the symbol of Pharaoh’s power and was worn on his headpiece. Most of the plagues on Egypt were against the Egyptian deities to show YHWH’s power over them, and this may be the first example of that.

4:4 “Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail” These are two *Qal* IMPERATIVES. Ken Medema’s musical about the call of Moses is right on target concerning the faith required for Moses to have taken a poisonous snake by the tail. God was testing Moses.

4:5 “LORD” This is the revealed name of Exod. 3:14-16. Israel’s God goes by two titles.

1. YHWH
2. the God of. . . (see below)

▣ **“the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham. . .”** It is significant to compare this with Exod. 3:6, where the SINGULAR “father” is used, referring to Moses’ father. But, in this passage it is a way to refer to the covenant God of the Hebrew people (cf. Exod. 3:13,15-16). The repeated formula “the God of. . .” shows God’s relationship with each one.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:6-9

“The LORD furthermore said to him, “Now put your hand into your bosom.” So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷Then He said, “Put your hand into your bosom again.” So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of his flesh*. ⁸“If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. ⁹But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

4:6 “his hand was leprous like snow” When Moses placed his hand inside his robe, close to his chest, it became leprous. Leprosy was a common disease of tremendous social consequence and is described in Lev. 13:4. To the best of our knowledge, this miracle was never performed before Pharaoh. It seems from Exod. 4:30 that all three of these signs were performed before the Hebrews and they were convinced that God sent Moses. The only account of this type of sign is found in Num. 12:10, where Miriam is stricken with leprosy because of her anger, apparently over Moses marrying a black lady (Num. 12:1).

4:9 “you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground” Here again, the Nile was seen as a chief deity of Egypt (i.e., Hapi) and yet, God can control and manipulate it. A form of this miracle is one of the plagues whereby Moses touched the Nile and the entire river became blood (cf. Exod. 7:14-19). This is a diminutive form of that plague in a restricted sense to convince the Hebrews that He had truly called and sent Moses.

God’s control of water is powerful OT imagery. See Special Topic: Waters.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:10-13

¹⁰Then Moses said to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”
¹¹The LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” ¹³But he said, “Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever You will.”

4:10 “LORD. . . Lord” Notice how English translations differentiate YHWH (LORD) and *Adonai* (my Lord, 4:13). These two names are used together in Ps. 110:1 also.

▣ **“I have never been eloquent”** This is another of Moses’ excuses. We also learn, surprisingly, that Paul was not a good public speaker (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10). It is important to remember that God did not promise we would be eloquent, but effective (cf. Acts 7:22)! This is an important word for God’s servants today. When God gives a task, He equips us for it. God takes the weak of this world to confound the wise (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31) so that the glory might be God’s, not mankind’s.

The rabbis have used this verse to assert that Moses had a speech impediment.

▣ **“Your servant”** This is an honorific title. See Special Topic: My Servant.

4:11 This is an affirmation that God is the only God, the Creator of all that is (possible meaning of the term YHWH) and He can certainly take care of Moses’ speech problem!

4:12 “I, even I” This is a purposeful grammatical feature (cf. Exod. 4:15), which emphasizes God’s presence and actions. He is the God who acts!

4:13 “Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever You will” This seems, in an English translation, to be Moses’ willingness to now do what God wanted him to do. But, in the Hebrew it is really Moses’ last attempt at an excuse not to be God’s spokesman. That is why God’s anger is kindled in Exod. 4:14. The rabbis say that this was Moses’ excuse because he did not want to offend his older brother, Aaron. This is just one of the many attempts by the rabbis to make Moses look better.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:14-17

¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, “Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. ¹⁶Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. ¹⁷You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

4:14 “the anger of the LORD burned against Moses” It is as difficult to speak of the anger of the Lord (YHWH) as it is the love of the Lord. Both of these are human emotions projected on God (see Special Topic: God Described as Human). They do communicate a truth but we must be careful not to push them to the extremes. Though God is angry with Moses, He will still use him for His purposes. This applies to us too!

This is the first time in the Pentateuch that YHWH’s “anger” (BDB 60 I) is mentioned. It will become a common theme in Numbers (cf. Num. 11:1,10; 12:9; 22:22; 25:3,4; 32:10,13,14).

▣ **“Aaron the Levite”** Why Aaron is called a Levite is because he is from the tribe of Levi. This is a typical non-priestly usage. Moses was also a Levite. Notice that God had communicated to Aaron earlier for he was already on his way to meet Moses. Aaron may have left as soon as Pharaoh died in order to bring his brother home.

▣ **“he speaks fluently”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 180, KB 210), which denotes emphasis; here, Aaron’s speaking ability.

God knew Aaron, as He knows all humans.

▣ **“he is coming. . .”** God also knows the future. He is the God of the eternal present. All history is before Him. He knows no past, nor future. The God who hears and acts is also the God who knows!

4:16 “and you shall be as God to him” This is the use of the Hebrew term *Elohim* (similar usage in Exod. 7:1). The term is usually translated “God,” but it can also be a reference to the angels (cf. Ps. 8:5) or even to the judges of Israel (cf. Ps. 81:1,6). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. God will speak to Moses who will pass on the message to Aaron who will then speak to the people.

4:17 “you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs” We are certain of some tasks which were performed by God through Moses by means of this staff.

1. the plagues of Egypt, Exod. 7:15,17,20; 9:23; 10:13
2. the splitting of the Red Sea, Exod. 16:14
3. providing water, Exod. 17:5
4. defeat of Amalek, Exod. 17:9

The staff was a symbol of God’s power (cf. Exod. 4:20).

This refers to both the miracles like the staff becoming a snake and the plagues.

1. before Israel they are called “signs” (BDB 16, cf. Exod. 4:8,9,17,28,30)
2. before Pharaoh they are called “miracles” (BDB 68, cf. Exod. 4:21; 7:9; 11:9,10)
3. the general term is “wonders” (cf. Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 11:9,10; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 28:46; 34:11; see Special Topic: Wonderful Things)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:18-20

¹⁸Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.” ¹⁹Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” ²⁰So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

4:18 Here Moses, in the normal Oriental custom, asks his father-in-law for permission to leave. It is interesting that he does not share with him God’s message or the real reason why he wants to leave. The Bible does not record interesting details as western histories do. It is written for a theological purpose. See Special Topic: OT Historical Narrative.

▣ **“Go in peace”** Remember, Moses may have been working off the debt for his wife. Jethro sends him away with a blessing. See Special Topic: Peace (OT).

4:19 “all the men who were seeking your life are dead” This refers to the Pharaoh of the oppression (cf. Exod. 2:15,23), whoever that may be.

4:20 “So Moses took his wife and his sons” So far we have only been introduced to his first son, Gershom, in Exod. 2:22. Later in the account (Exod. 18:4) we learn of a second son, Eliezer. We are not sure of the age of these boys at this point.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:21-23

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

4:21 “but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go” God informs Moses that the Hebrews will believe but Pharaoh will not be convinced. This passage and ones similar to it have caused tremendous problems to western theologians. We must allow this to speak in its original context and not bring to this passage questions that it was never intended to ask or to explicate (i.e., Calvinism). In the ancient Orient, and particularly in Israel, God was the source of all things (i.e., one causality, cf. Job 2:10; Eccl. 3:38; Isa. 6:10; 45:7; 54:16; Lam. 3:37; Ezek. 14:9; Amos 3:6b). Therefore, the Jews saw no contradiction in God hardening Pharaoh’s heart or in Pharaoh hardening his own heart.

It is only in light of further New Testament revelation about humans’ need to respond to God that the problem of God’s sovereignty and human free will becomes a mysterious paradox for the church (see Special Topic: Predestination). It is best to affirm both truths than it is to magnify one over the other (see Special Topic: Eastern Literature [paradoxes]). The best place in the Bible to ascertain the relationship between these two is Romans 9 on the sovereignty of God and Romans 10 on the free will of mankind.

In Exodus Pharaoh is described as being hardened in three ways.

1. that God hardened his heart, Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8; (cf. Rom. 9:34)
2. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, Exod. 8:15,32; 9:34
3. his heart was hardened but with no mention of the source, Exod. 7:13,14,22; 8:19; 9:7,35

It is also interesting to note that three different VERBS are used to describe this hardening.

1. “to be strong” (BDB 304, KB 302) in the sense of callous, Exod. 4:21; 7:13,22; 8:19; 9:12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8
2. “to be heavy” (BDB 549, KB 540) and, therefore, lack responsiveness, Exod. 7:14; 8:15,32; 9:7,34; 10:1
3. “to be hard” (BDB 904, KB 1151), Exod. 7:3

However, all of these seem to be used in a synonymous relationship. The Bible emphatically teaches that each of us is personally responsible for our actions, including Pharaoh and Judas.

▣ **“heart”** See Special Topic: Heart.

4:22 “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn’” This is extremely significant in that it speaks of the fatherhood of God (see Special Topic: Fatherhood of God). This is not an unusual OT concept but can be found in Deut. 1:21; 8:5; 32:6; Hos. 11:1; Isa. 1:2; 63:16; Jer. 3:19; Mal. 1:6. However, it must be seen that God’s fatherhood is not in the sense of creation but in His unique relationship to Israel (see Special Topic: The Son of God), His covenant people (see Special Topic: Covenant). This same concept of “My Son” will later be used of the Messiah (cf. Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). This is also the first time in Exodus that the significant concept of the “firstborn” is used. The firstborn had preeminence in the family, was the major inheritor, and became the protector of the family and family rights (see Special Topic: Firstborn).

There is also an undercurrent here that I think is significant. God is father only in the sense of redemption but I think the ultimate purpose of God is the redemption of all humans made in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). As Israel was the “firstborn” (i.e., a kingdom of priests unto God, Exod. 19:4,5), the goal of the firstborn was to encourage the other children to faith in God. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

4:23 “I will kill your son, your firstborn” This is a foreshadowing of the tenth and last plague, where just as Pharaoh refused to let Israel, God’s firstborn, go, he shall lose his firstborn, not only his son, who was considered to be the son of the sun god, *Ra*, but also the firstborn of all the land of Egypt (another example of YHWH’s power over Egypt’s gods).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:24-26

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

4:24 “Now it came about at the lodging place on the way” Apparently this was a common campground, near water, that many travelers used. It would be similar to roadside parks in the USA.

▣ **“the LORD met him”** It is assumed that “him” is Moses, although the PRONOUNS are ambiguous in Exod. 4:24-26. It is uncertain if the text is speaking of Moses or one of his sons. The writers of the Septuagint obviously became distressed that YHWH tried to kill him, so they changed the translation to “the angel of YHWH.” The rabbis say (i.e., Jewish folklore) that the angel of the LORD took the form of a serpent and tried to swallow Moses, but when he came to Moses’ circumcision he could not completely devour him and that Zipporah saw this, understood the problem, and circumcised their son. Whether this refers to the oldest or the youngest son is uncertain.

4:25 It is obvious that something happened to Moses and that Zipporah knew exactly what caused it (see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 139-140). Apparently it was somehow related to the rite of circumcision (either to Moses or his children), which was a symbol of the covenant of God with Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:1,9-14). The reason we believe this is because Zipporah does three specific acts in Exod. 4:25:

1. she circumcises her son
2. she does something with the foreskin related to Moses
3. she calls Moses by a specific title, “a bridegroom of blood”

These ambiguities make it extremely difficult to interpret this particular paragraph. The NASB has “threw it as Moses’ feet,” which basically follows the Septuagint. The term “Moses” is not in the Greek Septuagint or in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, which says, “touched his feet.” We are not sure if this refers to (1) the son’s feet; (2) to Moses’ feet; or (3) if the feet are a euphemism for the genitals (male – Exod. 4:25; Jdgs. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:3; Isa. 7:20; female – Deut. 28:57; Ezek. 16:25, cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1199). This is the translation adopted by the Jerusalem Bible.

The last phrase, “a bridegroom of blood,” repeated in Exod. 4:26, seems to show something of Zipporah’s reluctance to circumcision as a rite of passage into manhood and not a rite of a child 8 days old as commanded by God to Abraham. Some believe that Moses’ life was put in jeopardy because he did not circumcise his sons, which would limit his leadership of Israel. The truth is that we are simply not certain what this passage means or how it relates to the context. In some ways, it is theologically similar to Gen. 32:25-33. It is certain that it shows the significance of circumcision and obedience in following God’s commands. It is so strange it must be historical. No one would make this up!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:27-31

²⁷Now the LORD said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him *to do*. ²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; ³⁰and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

4:27 “Go to meet Moses” As YHWH spoke directly to Moses, now to Aaron. Apparently Aaron knew where Moses was living, in Midian, near the mountain of God.

YHWH knew Aaron would come because he had sent him earlier. He already knew of Moses’ excuses!

▣ **“the wilderness”** This is not a reference to the desert but to uninhabited, arid pastureland.

▣ **“the mountain of God”** This refers to the special mountain on which Moses met God (Exodus 3) and where he will later bring the children of Israel (Exodus 19). The non-Hebrew name for this mountain is Sinai and the Hebrew name is Horeb. See Special Topic: The Location of Mt. Sinai.

4:29 “assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel” It would have been very difficult to speak to the entire group of people at one time, so Moses spoke to the elders of each tribal group and they, in turn, went home and told their constituents.

4:30 This shows that the three signs that God gave to Moses in Exod. 4:2-9 were shown to the people of God and they believed (Exod. 4:31).

4:31 “the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD” The Septuagint has the word “rejoiced” here. The Hebrew words for “heard” and “rejoiced” are similar (NET Bible, p. 122, #12). It is obvious from the context that the people were so excited that the Lord knew their plight (cf. Exod. 3:7,9) and was going to fix it (cf. Exod. 3:8,19).

▣ **“they bowed low”** In the Bible there are several ways used to describe the position of the body in prayer.

1. kneel – 1 Kgs. 8:54; 19:18; 2 Chr. 6:13; Ezra 9:5; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Dan. 6:10; 10:10; Mark 15:10; Luke 22:41; Rom. 14:11; Eph. 3:14; Phil. 2:10
2. lifting hands – Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; 143:6; Lam. 2:19; 2 Tim. 2:8
3. both #1 and #2 – Exod. 9:29,33; 1 Kgs. 8:38,54; Job 11:13; Ps. 143:6; Isa. 1:15
4. bowing low – Gen. 47:31; Exod. 4:31; Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35

It is more an attitude of the heart than a position of the body.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What does Moses's reluctance to answer God's call have to say to us?
2. Is Exod. 4:4 a test?
3. How can we understand the hardening of Pharaoh's heart?
4. Why is Exod. 4:22 so important to Israel?
5. What is your understanding of Exod. 4:24-26? Why?

EXODUS 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Israel's Labor Increased	First Encounter with Pharaoh	The First Audience with Pharaoh Fails (5:1-6:1)	Moses and Aaron Before the King of Egypt	The First Audience with Pharaoh
5:1-9	5:1-9	5:1-9	5:1 5:2 5:3 5:4-5 5:6-9	5:1-5 Instructions to the Taskmasters 5:6-9
5:10-14	5:10-14	5:10-14	5:10-14	5:10-14 The Hebrew Scribes Complain
5:15-21	5:15-19 5:20-21 Israel's Deliverance Assured (5:22-6:13)	5:15-21	5:15-16 5:17-19 5:20-21 Moses Complains to the LORD	5:15-18 Recrimination of the People – Prayer of Moses 5:19-6:1
5:22-23	5:22-23	5:22-6:1	5:22-6:1	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is the account of Moses' and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh and its result.
- B. Notice the different NOUNS and PHRASES used of Israel's Deity.
1. the LORD (YHWH), Exod. 5:1,2,3,17,21,22
 2. the God (*Elohim*) of Israel, Exod. 5:1
 3. the God (*Elohim*) of the Hebrews, Exod. 5:3
 4. the LORD our God (YHWH, *Elohim*), Exod. 5:3
 5. our God, Exod. 5:8
 6. Your Name (BDB 1027), Exod. 5:23
- For YHWH and *Elohim* see Special Topic: Names for Deity. C. and D.
- C. Notice the number of different words used to describe the task of making sun dried bricks.
1. work, Exod. 5:4,13 – BDB 795
 2. burdens, Exod. 5:4,5,13 – BDB 688
 3. make bricks, Exod. 5:7 – BDB 527 CONSTRUCT BDB 527 (INFINITIVE and NOUN)
 4. work, Exod. 5:9,11 – BDB 715
 5. labor, Exod. 5:9,16 – BDB 793 (VERB)
 6. daily task, Exod. 5:13,19 – BDB 182 CONSTRUCT BDB 398
 7. task, Exod. 5:14 – BDB 349 (of making bricks, BDB 527, Exod. 5:7,14)
 8. work, Exod. 5:18 – BDB 712 (VERB)
 9. quota of bricks, Exod. 5:18 – BDB 527 and BDB 670 (VERB)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-9

¹And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" ²But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go." ³Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get *back* to your labors!" ⁵Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!" ⁶So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, ⁷"You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

5:1 "Pharaoh" This title originally meant "great house" (BDB 829). This became the title for all Egyptian rulers, which relates to the Egyptian concept of the deity of the Pharaoh. He was believed to be the son of the sun god, *Ra*. Because Seti I is the first Pharaoh to move his capital close to the delta region, many believe (me included) that this Pharaoh, mentioned in Exodus 5, must have been his successor, Rameses II, who began reigning in 1290 B.C.

▣ **“YHWH, the God of Israel”** Here are the two names for God combined with the title of the nation. The term “YHWH” stands for the covenant name for God, and from Exod. 3:14, it relates to the Hebrew VERB “to be.”

The term “God” is *Elohim*, which is the PLURAL of the general name for God in the ANE, *El*. See Special Topic: Names for Deity. These two named first appear together in Gen. 2:4.

▣ **“that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness”** The following phrase, “Let My people go” (BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERATIVE), shows the connection between YHWH and His covenant people. Egypt had many gods; Israel had but One (see Special Topic: Monotheism). These were God’s people, not Pharaoh’s.

The feast refers to a religious pilgrimage which included a sacrifice (cf. Exod. 5:3). It is quite possible that nomadic Semites had regular festivals. This may imply only a few days’ celebration, but it really was meant to refer to a much longer period of time. It is obvious that God wanted to permanently deliver Israel from Egypt and not just for a short period.

5:2 “and Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice’” Pharaoh considered himself to be a god. Every national entity had its own gods during this period of time. Pharaoh’s question reflects his obvious abhorrence to being “bossed around” by a god of a slave people. If this god was so powerful, how did his people get to be in slavery in the first place?

▣ **“I do not know the LORD”** This VERB (BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* PERFECT) implies

1. a knowledge of
2. a relationship with

See Special Topic: Know. YHWH will reveal Himself to Pharaoh in the plagues which depreciate Egypt’s deities and worldview. The theological purpose of the confrontation was to vividly demonstrate to the ANE the power, majesty, and glory of Israel’s God. There was no more powerful nation at this time than Egypt!

5:3 “The God of the Hebrews has met with us” The original meaning of the term “Hebrews” is uncertain. Some Jews say that it goes back to an ancient relative, *Eber*, Gen. 10:21. It may be related to the nomadic Semites of the period, *Habiru*, which seems to mean “beyond the river.” We know that in the second millennium B.C. a large group of nomadic Semites crossed the Euphrates River and a large number of them, call the Hyksos (or shepherd kings), were believed to have controlled even the land of Egypt during the 1700-1500 B.C. period.

▣ **“Please, let us go a three days’ journey”** This is either

1. literal, and if so, Mt. Sinai cannot be in its traditional location in the southern Sinai peninsula
2. figurative, if so, it refers to a much longer period of time which Pharaoh would have understood (i.e., Oriental dialogue)
3. a ruse

Jewish commentators spend very little time at all on this subject but Christian commentators agonize over #3.

▣ **“lest He fall upon them with pestilence or with the sword”** This is the only place this VERB (BDB 803, KB 910) is used with God as the subject. This is a veiled threat to Pharaoh. If God’s people would be punished for not obeying His voice, even when they were not responsible, how much more would God’s anger fall on Pharaoh?

5:4	
NASB	“draw the people away”
NKJV, NRSV	“take the people from”
TEV	“making the people neglect”
NJB, JPSOA,	
REB	“distracting the people”
LXX	“diverting my people”

The VERB (BDB 828 III, KB 970, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) means “let go,” or “let alone.” Only here in *Hiphil* does it mean “cause people to refrain.”

I wonder if there is a play on words here. This VERB is from the root פָּרַע. The title “Pharaoh” is רַעֲהֹפִי. Pharaoh’s will for the Hebrew slaves is “the” only will!

▣ **“Get back to your labors”** Pharaoh sees the Hebrews as slave laborers for his bidding (BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE).

5:5 “the people of the land” This phrase has a wide range of meaning in the OT (see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 70). It can be used of non-Israelites.

1. in Gen. 23:12-13 it is used of the Hittites
2. in Gen. 42:6 it is used of Egyptians
3. in Num. 14:9 it is used of Canaanites

It was also used of the children of Israel but in various ways during particular stages of their national development.

1. it was used of the citizenry vs. the ruling aristocracy (monarchy)
2. it was used of non-kosher common folk vs. kosher religious groups (NT)

In this context the JPSOA (Jewish Study Bible, p. 114) suggests an emendation from the Samaritan Pentateuch, which reads, “Even now they are more numerous than the people of the land” (i.e., Egyptians). This fits the context better (cf. TEV, NRSV, REB).

▣ **“are many, and you would have them cease from their labor”** This same fear of the number of the Hebrews is referred to in Exod. 1:10. Not only was there fear of their number in size (and possibly their ethnic origin) but also fear of the loss of their economic value.

The VERB (BDB 991, KB 1407, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is the same root as “Sabbath.” Both mean “rest” or “cessation of labor.”

5:6 “their foremen” The term “taskmasters” (BDB 620) refers to Egyptian supervisors, while the term “foremen” (BDB 1009) refers to Hebrew supervisors (cf. Exod. 5:14). It seems that this is an attempt to drive a wedge between Moses and the Hebrew leadership by demanding extra hard labor. Pharaoh is not going to discredit Moses directly, but indirectly, by his treatment of the Hebrews (cf. Exod. 5:15-21).

5:7 The lack of good straw would make Pharaoh’s building projects weaker! He is afraid of the Hebrews’ numbers and he will soon be afraid of their God! Josephus (*Antiq.* 2.13.4) says they had to make bricks by day and gather straw by night.

5:8 Pharaoh accused the Hebrews of being lazy when it seems that the real problem was his fear of their numbers and possibly of their aligning themselves with another Semite power (i.e., Hittites).



NASB, NRSV,

NJB, REB “lazy”

NKJV, Peshitta “idle”

JPSOA “shirkers”

This same term (BDB 951, KB 1276, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) is doubled in Exod. 5:17. Its basic meaning is “to sink,” “to drop,” or “to relax.” The *Niphal* is found only in this context.


This is a false charge to cause division between Moses/Aaron and the Hebrew workers.

5:9 “false words” This is Pharaoh’s characterization of the request of Moses and Aaron.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:10-14

¹⁰So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I am not going to give you *any* straw. ¹¹You go *and* get straw for yourselves wherever you can find *it*, but none of your labor will be reduced.’” ¹²So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³The taskmasters pressed them, saying, “Complete your work quota, *your* daily amount, just as when you had straw.” ¹⁴Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?”

5:12 This is a hyperbolic statement. The Hebrews lived only in the delta region. The store cities were built here.

 **“gather stubble for straw”** This term “stubble” (BDB 905, NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 996) means “small pieces,” which implies a poor grade of straw.

5:14 The persons beaten (BDB 645, KB 697, *Hophal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) were the Hebrew foremen.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:15-21

¹⁵Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why do you deal this way with your servants? ¹⁶There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your own people.” ¹⁷But he said, “You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, ‘Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.’” ¹⁸So go now *and* work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks.” ¹⁹The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, “You must not reduce *your* daily amount of bricks.” ²⁰When they left Pharaoh’s presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. ²¹They said to them, “May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

5:16 Pharaoh blames the extra work and beatings on Moses (cf. Exod. 5:8,17). The MT has a VERB (BDB 306, KB 305, *Qal* PERFECT) for “sin,” but this does not fit the context. The NASB’s “fault” changes the meaning (cf. Gen. 41:9). The LXX and Syriac have, “you sin against your own people,” putting the blame on Moses.

5:21 The foremen express a desire (JUSSIVES) that God

1. take notice of
2. judge

the actions/message of Moses/Aaron. They even fear for their lives (Exod. 5:21).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:22-23

²²Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “O LORD, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? ²³Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all.”

5:22 “O LORD, why have You brought harm to this people?” It is theologically significant that in parts of the OT, God is attributed with not only good and blessings, but also with evil. One needs to compare 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chr. 21:1 to see the relationship of this understanding. Also, 1 Sam. 16:14 is helpful at this point. The Hebrews believed that God was the only God, and therefore, He was the only causality (cf. Isa. 45:7; Jer. 20:7; Ezek. 14:9; Amos 3:6). God’s plans are above our understanding. He has long term good plans for His people, but this world of sin and rebellion (see Special Topic: The Fall) confuses the issue (cf. Isa. 55:6-13).

5:23 “You have not delivered Your people at all” The statement is grammatically reinforced by the use of the *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the *Hiphil* PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 664, KB 717).

Moses cannot understand how the powerful God of Exodus 3-4 has now seemingly failed to deliver Israel. He has even made things worse (Exod. 5:22).

It is good advice for all believers to take the long look! God is sovereign and there is a plan!

This will not be the last time the people of Israel grumble and complain to Moses!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the purpose of the confrontation between Israel and Egypt?
2. Is the end of Exod. 5:3 a warning or a forecast?
3. Exodus 5:22-23 is the first intercession of Moses. Why is Moses so confused with God’s silence and inactivity?

EXODUS 6

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
God Promises Action	Israel's Deliverance Assured (5:22-6:13)		Moses Complains to the LORD (5:22-6:1)	
6:1		The Call of Moses and the Appointment of Aaron (6:2-7:7)	God Calls Moses	Another Account of the Call of Moses
6:2-9	6:2-9	6:2-9	6:2-9	6:2-9
6:10-13	6:10-13	6:10-13	6:10-12 6:13	6:10-13
The Heads of Israel	The Family of Moses and Aaron		The Family Record of Moses and Aaron	The Genealogy of Moses and Aaron
6:14-27	6:14-19	6:14-25	6:14-19	6:14 6:15 6:16 6:17 6:18 6:19
	6:20-25		6:20-22 6:23-25	6:20 6:21 6:22 6:23 6:24 6:15
	6:26-27	6:26-27	6:26-27	6:26-27
			The LORD'S Command to Moses and Aaron (6:28-7:7)	The Narrative of Moses' Call Continued (6:28-7:6)
6:28-30	6:28-7:7	6:28-7:7	6:28-29 6:30	6:28-30

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. In some ways, Exodus 6 seems to repeat many of the things previously recorded.
- B. There are several theories why.
 1. They are from two different authors. This chapter is from a priestly source. The UBS *Handbook* (p. 129) says “scholars have noticed in this material significant differences in style, vocabulary, and theology that reflect a priestly point of view.” See Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism.
 2. There are a number of “doublets” in the OT. They may reflect streams of oral traditions. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, which discusses ANE oral sources.

Brevard Childs, in his commentary on Exodus (p. 112), asserts “the nature of the similarities, as well as the differences, appear to me, better explained by positing a common oral tradition with a long period of independent development.”
- C. Genealogies were important for the Israelites, especially the family tree of the priests/Levites and Kings (i.e., Ruth).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:1

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land.”

6:1 “for under compulsion he will let them go” Exodus 6:1 should go with Exodus 5. Literally, this is “with a strong hand,” and is used twice. This is historically described in Exod. 12:33,39. There is some play on the strong VERB literally “drive them out” (BDB 176, KB 204, *Piel* IMPERFECT), for this had occurred to Moses earlier (i.e., he was a stranger/sojourner in a foreign land, cf. Exod. 2:22).



NASB	“under compulsion”
NKJV, Peshitta	“with a strong hand”
NRSV, NJB, LXX	“with a mighty hand”

JPSOA “a greater might”
REB “will be compelled”

The MT is reflected in the NKJV (cf. Exod. 3:19-20; 13:3). See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ “he will drive them out of the land” This is reflected in Exod. 12:31,33,39; 13:3.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:2-9

²God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD; ³and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.* ⁴I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. ⁵Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.’” ⁹So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of *their despondency and cruel bondage.*

6:2 “I am the LORD” Here again is a play on the name, YHWH, and its etymological relationship to the Hebrew VERB, “to be” (cf. Exod. 6:6,7,8,29). It denotes the character of Israel’s God (cf. Exod. 34:6). For “the name” see the extensive note at Exod. 3:14-16 and Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

6:3 “and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty” This verse states that the Patriarchal name for Deity was *El Shaddai*; see Special Topic: Almighty (*Shaddai*). It is used often in the early parts of Genesis, but so too, is YHWH (cf. Gen. 2:4; 4:26).

▣ “but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them*” This is somewhat unusual in light of the use of the name in Genesis 1-3 and the specific reference in Gen. 4:26. Possible explanations are:

1. that the Hebrews sometimes used this name for God but did not understand its full significance
2. a later writer wrote this covenant name back into earlier accounts (anacronism)

See Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH.

6:4 “I also established My covenant with them” This refers to the repeated covenant beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22 and his children. See Special Topic: Covenant.

▣ “to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned” Canaan was a “gift” (cf. Exod. 6:8) to YHWH’s covenant people. This, of course, refers specifically to the promises in Gen. 15:16-18 and the subsequent history of Isaac and Jacob.

6:5 “I have heard the groanings of the sons of Israel” This refers to Exod. 2:24; 3:6,7.

▣ “I have remembered My covenant” This refers to the prophetic fulfillment, not only of the freedom from Egyptian bondage, but also of the deliverance described in Gen. 15:16 (i.e., the conquest). It has often been thought that God unfairly drove out the Canaanites and allowed the Hebrews to take their place. However, when one looks at the big picture, when the Hebrews continued in the same sins as the Canaanites, they too, were taken out of the land (i.e., the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles). God said that the immediate

judgment of Canaan was not complete, but it had to wait until the sins of the Amorites were full (cf. Gen. 15:16). God is no respecter of persons.

6:6 “Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel” Here we have three specific promises that YHWH made to Abraham and his descendants.

1. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, Exod. 6:6
2. I will take you for My people, Exod. 6:7
3. I will bring you to the land that I swore to your fathers, Exod. 6:8

▣ **“redeem”** This term is etymologically related to the concept of a near kinsman purchasing a relative back from debt or captivity (i.e., *go’el*). By using this VERB for God we see the personal, intimate agency upon which the OT understanding of God is based. See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

▣ **“with an outstretched arm”** This is an anthropomorphic metaphor because God does not have a physical body, but it is a human analogy to show God’s power (cf. Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 26:8). See Special Topic: God Described as Human (anthropomorphic language).

▣ **“with great judgments”** This phrase is used in Exod. 7:4; 12:12; Num. 33:4. It refers to God’s great acts of deliverance, which also provided the opportunity to reveal the helplessness of the Egyptian deities.

6:7 “Then I will take you for My people” This is covenant language (cf. Exod. 19:5-6; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 4:20; Jer. 7:23; 11:4).

This is a formulaic statement in the ANE for marriage (i.e., Hosea 1-3). Here, it denotes an intimate covenant which is characterized by familial terminology (i.e., Hos. 11:1-4). See Special Topic: Father.

The term “know” (cf. Exod. 6:3) was also used of marriage (cf. Gen. 4:1; see Special Topic: Know).

▣ **“I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians”** This phrase becomes the central statement of the relationship between God and Israel (cf. Exod. 7:5; 16:6; 29:46). The exodus was seen as the tremendous act of God on behalf of the Jewish people (cf. Exod. 20:2). See Special Topic: Know.

6:8 This reflects Gen. 12:1-3; 15:12-21.

▣ **“land”** The Abrahamic promise involved

1. descendants
2. a homeland

Canaan was “YHWH’s land” (cf. Lev. 25:23). In a sense, all lands were YHWH’s (cf. Exod. 19:5), but Canaan was the special place where “His name would dwell.”

▣ **“which I swore”** This is literally “lifted My hand.” It was an oath-taking gesture (cf. Gen. 14:22; Num. 14:30; Ezek. 20:5). It theologically points toward the unconditional promises of Gen. 15:12-21. Israel’s deliverance from Egypt had a wider purpose (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

6:9 “but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage” Discouragement (i.e., “shortness of spirit,” cf. Pro. 14:29) is infectious. It happens to even the best of God’s children (cf. 1 Kings 19-20).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:10-13

¹⁰Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land.” ¹²But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, “Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?” ¹³Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

6:11 This verse has

1. two IMPERATIVES
 - a. go – BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal*
 - b. tell – BDB 180, KB 210, *Piel*
2. JUSSIVE, “let the sons of Israel go out of his land” – BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

No longer is Pharaoh to let them go for a short period (cf. Exod. 3:18; 5:1,3; 8:27), but for good (cf. Exod. 6:13; 7:2). The time for Oriental bargaining is over.

6:12 This verse could refer to

1. Moses’ first attempt to help his people in Exod. 2:11-15
2. Moses’ fear expressed in Exod. 4:1
3. the people believed in Exod. 4:31 but not after Pharaoh’s extra burden, i.e., Exod. 5:21, which discouraged Moses (Exod. 5:22-23)
4. simply a doublet of the account in Exodus 3
5. what is referred to in Exod. 6:9

▣ **“for I am unskilled in speech”** This is literally “uncircumsized of lips” (also Exod. 6:30). The Bible often used the concept of a part of the human body being uncircumsized to show relationships and rebellion (i.e., the uncircumsized heart or ear, cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10). Even OT faith was meant to be a personal relationship, not just a series of rules (cf. Jer. 9:26). See Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness (OT).

Moses, like all humans, was a man of faith and doubt.

6:13 “gave them a charge” This VERB (BDB 845, KB 1010, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*) denotes an authoritative command to deliver a message (cf. Exod. 25:22; Lev. 27:34; Esther 3:12; 8:9).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:14-27

¹⁴These are the heads of their fathers’ households. The sons of Reuben, Israel’s firstborn: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵The sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi’s life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred and thirty-three years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram’s life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. ²¹The sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri. ²³Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu,

Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' *households* of the Levites according to their families. ²⁶It was *the same* Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." ²⁷They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the sons of Israel from Egypt; it was *the same* Moses and Aaron.

6:14-25 This genealogy seems to break into the context of the account until one realizes the extreme significance of genealogies in the Hebrew mindset (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 654-664). This was a way of introducing both Aaron and Moses (i.e., but particularly Aaron, the High Priest to be). It would also set the stage for some events that would happen in the lives of some of these men and women. This is only a partial listing but it begins with the first son of Jacob, Reuben, and the second son, Simeon. Then it moves to a detailed listing of the third son, Levi (which is the theological purpose of the list). It is only a selected list of descendants from Jacob's first three sons to Aaron's day.

6:14 "the heads" See Special Topic: Head.

6:16 "Merari" This term (BDB 601 I) and the term "Assir" (BDB 64) of Exod. 6:24 and "Phinehas" (BDB 810) in 6:25, are all Egyptian names. Also, the word "Putiel" (BDB 806) of 6:25 is half-Egyptian and half-Hebrew. This implies the intermarriage of this period.

▣ **"one hundred thirty-seven years"** There are three direct ancestors of Aaron whose length of life is given.

1. Levi – 137 years, Exod. 6:16
2. Kohath – 133 years, Exod. 6:18
3. Amram – 137 years, Exod. 6:20

The length of their lives is very similar. Possibly it denoted a "full" life or a "blessed" life.

6:20 "Amram married his father's sister Jochebed" This is later forbidden in Lev. 18:12-13, but it shows the historicity of this account, that it was included here in the important genealogy of the Levites Moses and Aaron. The LXX changes this phrase to "the daughter of his father's brother."

6:21 "Korah" His story will be developed further in the rebellion of Korah (BDB 901) in Numbers 16:1ff.

6:22 Mishael (BDB 567) and Elzaphan (BDB 45) are mentioned in Lev. 10:4-5.

6:25 "Aaron's son Eleazar" The older two boys, Nadab and Abihu, lose their lives in Lev. 10:1-5. Eleazar (BDB 46) will function as Aaron's successor (cf. Num. 20:26-28).

▣ **"Phinehas"** His son, Eleazar, is used by YHWH to punish the people in Num. 25:1-13.

6:26-27 A later editor/scribe/presenter gives this concluding summary.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:28-30

²⁸Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to

you.” ³⁰But Moses said before the LORD, “Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?”

6:28-30 Many have seen this as a duplicate of Exod. 3:10-13 or 6:10-13. However, it seems to be a reaffirmation and not a duplicate. If one is looking for duplicates so as to identify written sources, the mindset determines the text. See a new book on orality in the ANE by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

6:28 Moses is YHWH’s channel of revelation to Pharaoh. It is not his revelation but YHWH’s. Moses is to pass it on just as he received it, all of it!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Is Exodus 6 a repeat of Exodus 3?
2. Why is the term “YHWH” found in the early parts of Genesis if His people never called Him by that name (Gen. 6:3)?
3. How does Exodus 6 reflect God’s covenant promise to Abraham?
4. Why does a genealogy break into the historical context of Exodus 6?

EXODUS 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
"I Will Stretch Out My Hand"	Aaron Is Moses' Spokesman	The Call of Moses and the Appointment of Aaron 6:2-7:7	The Lord's Command to Moses and Aaron 6:28-7:7	The Narrative of Moses' Call Continued 6:28-7:5
7:1-7				7:6-7
Aaron's Rod Becomes a Snake	Aaron's Miraculous Rod	The Ten Plagues 7:8-13	Aaron's Walking Stick 7:8-13	The Staff Turned Into a Snake 7:8-13
7:8-13	7:8-13			
Water Is Turned to Blood	First Plague: Water Becomes Blood		Disasters Strike Egypt	The First Plague: Water Turns to Blood
7:14-19	7:14-18 7:19-25	7:14-19	7:14-18	7:14-18 7:19-25
7:20-25		7:20-24 The Second Plague 7:25-8:15	7:19 7:20-24 7:25	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is the section of Exodus (chapters 7-11) that deals with the ten plagues.
 1. pollution of the Nile, Exod. 7:14-25
 2. swarm of frogs, Exod. 8:1-15

3. abundance of gnats, lice, mosquitos, Exod. 8:16-19
4. swarm of flies, Exod. 8:20-32
5. disease on animals, Exod. 9:1-7
6. disease on humans, Exod. 9:8-12
7. hail, Exod. 9:18-35
8. locusts, Exod. 10:1-20
9. darkness, Exod. 10:21-29
10. death of the firstborn, Exod. 11:1-8

B. These plagues do not form a major theological tenet in the faith of Israel. While the exodus is a major historical event referred to over and over again, the plagues are simply not developed theologically (i.e., Ps. 78:44; 105:29). However, the symbolism of the first plague is used by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 8:8; 11:6; 16:4).

C. The time element for the plagues is uncertain but most scholars postulate a period of six to eighteen months. This is because of the interpretive discrepancy between (1) natural phenomenon in their appropriate season and (2) supernatural phenomenon possibly opposite their appropriate season. The length of time, in my opinion, accentuates the theological truth that YHWH is trying to speak to the Egyptians (i.e., by depreciating Egyptian gods; cf. Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4; see Bernard Ramm, *Let My People Go*), as well as the Hebrews.

The plagues are natural occurrences (see Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Plagues of Egypt" in *New Bible Dictionary*, following Greta Hort; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1056-1059) in Egypt but with supernatural

1. intensity
2. timing
3. location

The plagues targeted Egypt but not the delta settlements of the Hebrews.

D. F. B. Huey, one of my seminary professors, has an interesting note on the purpose(s) of the plagues in his *Study Guide Commentary* (p. 51).

1. to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 7:4)
2. to make Egypt know that Yahweh was truly God (Exod. 7:5,17; 8:22)
3. to punish Egypt for their sins (Exod. 9:27,34)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:1-7

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ²You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. ⁵The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." ⁶So Moses and Aaron did *it*; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

7:1 “See” This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE from the same root (BDB 906) as one of the names/titles for prophets (*ro'eh*, BDB 906, “a seer”; see Special Topic: OT Prophecy).

Here the IMPERATIVE is a way to draw attention to YHWH’s command to speak to Pharaoh.

▣ **“I make you as God to Pharaoh”** This seems to involve one of two things: (1) it is an idiom for Moses’ authority (cf. Exod. 4:16) or (2) as Pharaoh thought himself to be a god, the plagues would show Moses as the true representative of Deity.

▣ **“Aaron shall be your prophet”** The basic meaning of the term Prophet is “to be a spokesman.” See Special Topic: OT Prophecy.

7:2 “You shall speak all that I command you” In Exod. 4:28, Moses spoke “all” of YHWH’s words to Aaron. In Exod. 4:30, Aaron spoke all that he heard from Moses to the people. Here, the text asserts that Moses is to speak “all” of YHWH’s words to Pharaoh. The spokesperson, though unstated, will be Aaron, not Moses.

Also note these words are not from Moses or Aaron. They are YHWH’s words; not one can be overlooked or minimized. This is divine, specific revelation.

▣ **“Let the sons of Israel go out of his land”** This is a recurrent phrase.

1. Exod. 7:2 – *Piel* PERFECT
2. Exod. 7:14 – negated, *Piel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
3. Exod. 7:16 – *Piel* IMPERATIVE
4. Exod. 26 (English 8:1) – *Piel* IMPERATIVE
5. Exod 8:4 (English 8:8) – *Piel* IMPERFECT

The theologically purposeful test of wills continues between a hard-hearted Pharaoh and the only true God (see Special Topic: Monotheism). Pharaoh’s hard heart allows YHWH to demonstrate His power over the nature idols of Egypt.

7:3 “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt” This has caused major theological discussion. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is first mentioned in Exod. 4:21 (see notes there and at 7:14). Several times throughout this passage, it is said that God hardens Pharaoh’s heart. Other times it says that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. One time it says that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened but without the subject being identified (see note at Exod. 4:21). It seems significant that it is always connected with the signs and wonders. The hardening is for a redemptive purpose. Pharaoh refuses to believe in YHWH. I do not think that this one example violates the biblical assertion of the sovereignty of God and the expected human response. It is very similar to the theological problem with Judas. When we see God’s overall plan for the redemption of all humans, the stubbornness (divine or self imposed) of one man really does not set the theology. The exodus, by means of these signs, will be for the purpose of not only delivering Israel, but for building up her faith. It will also have an evangelistic thrust, not only for Pharaoh, Exod. 8:10, the Magicians, Exod. 8:14, but to all of Egypt, Exod. 9:14-15, and to the whole world, Exod. 9:16. The effect of these signs for redemptive purposes can be clearly seen in Exod. 5:20; 11:3.

▣ **“My signs”** This term (BDB 16) is used of several people.

1. a sign to Moses, Exod. 3:12
2. a sign to the Israelites, Exod. 4:8,9,17,28,30; 13:9,16; 31:13,17 (Sabbath); Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19
3. a sign to Pharaoh, the plagues, Exod. 7:3; 8:23; 10:1,2; Deut. 11:3
4. a sign for the Death Angel, Exod. 12:13

▣ **“My wonders”** This term (BDB 68) is also used of miraculous wonders before Pharaoh (cf. Exod. 4:2; 7:3,9; 11:9,10). It would include (1) the staff turning into a snake and (2) the ten plagues.

The terms “signs” and “wonders” are often together and are synonymous for YHWH’s great acts of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. See Special Topic: Wonderful Things.

7:4 “I will lay My hand on Egypt” The “hand” is a Hebraic idiom for God’s judgment. See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel”** Here it is obvious that the term “hosts” (BDB 838) means either a large multitude or an army (BDB 838, cf. Exod. 6:26; 12:41; also note in Exod. 13:18, BDB 332, “in martial array”; and Num. 10:14,18,22,25). This is the term “Sabboath,” which is used in the phrase “the LORD of hosts.” See Special Topic: LORD of Hosts.

▣ **“from the land of Egypt by great judgments”** It is significant that Moses directly confronts the king of Egypt who was believed to be a god (i.e., son of *Ra*), and the gods of Egypt, particularly the Nile River (i.e., *Hapi*) and the animal gods, as well as the priests. God’s judgment is primarily on the religion of Egypt and by judging their gods, He opens the door for belief on the part of the Egyptians. We later learn that a mixed multitude left with Israel (cf. Exod. 12:38). Though they later cause some problems (cf. Num. 11:4), I believe that this is the fulfillment of the merciful purpose of God (cf. Exod. 7:5).

7:5 The theme of the revelation (i.e., knowledge) of YHWH Himself is recurrent (cf. Exod. 7:5,17; 8:19; 10:7). YHWH has a larger redemptive plan. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“I stretch out My hand on Egypt”** This is anthropomorphic language. God does not have physical hands. He is an eternal Spirit. See Special Topic: God Described as Human.

7:7 “Moses was eighty years old” It seems that not only in the Pentateuch but also in Acts 7:23-30 that Moses’ life is divided into three segments of forty years each.

1. he was raised in Pharaoh’s court for forty years
2. he was exiled for forty years to the very desert region where he would later lead the children of Israel
3. he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years (cf. Deut. 34:7)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:8-13

⁸Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ⁹“When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Work a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw *it* down before Pharaoh, *that* it may become a serpent.’” ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh also called for *the* wise men and *the* sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹²For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

7:9 “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Work a miracle’” This first miracle of the staff turning into a serpent was mentioned earlier in Exod. 4:3, where it was meant to encourage Moses. In Exod. 4:30 it was to show the Hebrews that Moses was from God. Pharaoh had possibly heard of this miracle being performed

before the Hebrew people and he had prepared his magicians so that they could duplicate it. The term “serpent,” used in Exod. 7:9,10,12, is the term “*tannin*” (BDB 1072), which could mean

1. reptile (cf. Deut. 32:33)
2. a large sea creature (cf. Gen. 1:21; Ps. 148:7)
3. sea monsters (cf. Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Isa. 27:1; possibly an allusion to *Apopis*, the Egyptian chaos creature who took the form of a snake)

But, because the normal word for serpent (BDB 638) is used in Exod. 4:3 and 7:15, they are obviously synonymous here, so serpent is the intended meaning.

7:11 There are several terms used to describe these wise men.

1. “wise men” – BDB 314, KB 314, would have included men learned in science, math, medicine, astrology, and the occult
 - a. Egypt – Gen. 41:8; Isa. 19:11,12
 - b. Babylon – Isa. 44:25; Jer. 30:35; 51:57
 - c. Persia – Esther 1:13; 6:13

They would typify human wisdom.

There is a rabbinical tradition about their names and number which is recorded in 1 Tim. 3:8. There has been much discussion among commentators as to whether these men truly had the power to mimic the works of God (i.e., the occult) or if they were simply adept at trickery and manipulation (i.e., magicians).

2. “sorcerers” – BDB 506, KB 503, *Piel* PARTICIPLE, means “practice sorcery” which attempts to control or predict future events. The MASCULINE NOUN is used in 2 Kgs. 9:22; Isa. 47:9,12; Mic.5:11; Nah. 3:4. The FEMININE NOUN is used only once, in Exod. 22:18. The VERB is used in 2 Chr. 33:6; Deut. 18:10; Dan. 2:2; Mal. 3:5.
3. “magicians” – BDB 355, KB 352, basically means “to write” (BDB) or “to read” (KB). It denotes a diviner, astrologer, magician, who kept and interpreted Egypt’s sacred texts (i.e., one who read signs or kept sacred texts, cf. Gen. 41:8,24; Exod. 8:14,15; 9:11; Dan. 1:20; 2:2). It is often translated “sooth-sayer priests.”
4. **NASB, NRSV** — “their secret acts” – BDB 532, which basically means “secretly” (cf. Jdgs. 4:2; Ruth 3:7; 1 Sam. 18:22), but here it denotes one who uses “secret” knowledge (cf. Exod. 7:11,22; 8:6,18; 9:11; NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 794). Other possible translations are
 - a. **NKJV** — “their enchantments”
 - b. **TEV** — “the magic they did”
 - c. **NJB, JPSOA, REB** — “their spells”
 - d. **LXX** — “their magical potions”

For a list of these kinds of false wise men see notes at Deuteronomy 18. Also note discussion in Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the OT*, pp. 297-302.

▣ **“did the same”** The duplication of the first three plagues by Egyptian wise men was surely the way YHWH hardened Pharaoh’s heart. YHWH knew what an arrogant eastern king would do when challenged. These implications lowered the impact of the first three “signs” and “wonders.” I think this duplication was the power of the demonic, see Special Topic: Angels and Demons. But, note that it is limited and surpassed!

7:12 “each one of them threw down his staff and they turned into a serpent” Some would see this as a particular way of handling snakes which made them rigid, while others would see it as mimicking or aping the power of God (i.e., the occult). Snake charming is mentioned often in the Bible (i.e., magicians, tricksters, cf. Ps. 58:5; Eccl. 10:11; Jer. 8:17).

▣ **“Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs”** Even when the wise men duplicated the sign, YHWH’s power was demonstrably greater!

The same thing is clearly seen in Exod. 7:22, when the wise men turned a small amount of water red, but YHWH turned all the water in Egypt red.

It should be noted that in Egyptian magic texts, the VERB “to swallow” was used symbolically of incorporating another person/god’s power.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:14-19

¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. ¹⁶You shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.” ¹⁷Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood. ¹⁸The fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.”” ¹⁹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.””

7:14-19 “the Nile. . .it will be turned to blood” We learn from Exod. 7:18 that the fish are going to die, that the water is going to smell, and that the Egyptians would have difficulty drinking from it (Exod. 7:21,24 say it could not be drunk). Again, there has been a disagreement among commentators as to whether the smell came from the fish or from some natural change in the water (algae). We know that the Nile does turn red from time to time due to the red clay of its tributary that runs through Ethiopia (see The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 77, footnote and NET Bible, p. 129, #16). We also know from historical records of this phenomenon in salt water called “the red tide.” But this is a supernatural miracle. Not only is the timing supernatural but also the intensity as well (i.e., all of the water in all of the containers in Egypt being changed at once, cf. Exod. 7:19). However, I do not believe that the water actually changed to human blood. It seems that the color is the significant aspect, but it is more than just color because it killed the fish. Here again, is the seeming mixture of the natural with the supernatural. It is significant that the Nile was one of the chief deities of Egypt (i.e., *Hapi*). Here, at the beginning, Moses confronts Pharaoh, the ruler and the chief deity of Egypt (i.e., son of *Ra*), to show the superiority of YHWH.

7:14 There are several terms used to describe Pharaoh’s heart (see full note at Exod. 4:21) in this context.

1. “harden,” Exod. 7:3 – BDB 904, this also means “to harden,” cf. Deut. 2:30
2. “hardened,” Exod. 7:13,22 – BDB 304, lit. “strong” or “hard,” cf. Exod. 4:21; 8:15; 9:12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17; Jos. 11:20
3. “stubborn,” Exod. 7:14 – BDB 457, lit. “heavy,” cf. Exod. 8:15,32; 9:7,34; 10:1

These terms are used interchangeably here. There seems to be no distinction intended. This may be the result of different oral traditions (see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*).

7:16 “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews” For “LORD” (YHWH) and “God” (*Elohim*) see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

For “Hebrews” see notes at Exod. 1:15.

7:17 “By this you shall know that I am the LORD” Pharaoh claimed a lack of “knowledge” about YHWH in Exod. 5:2. The plagues will clearly reveal YHWH’s power and supremacy over the Egyptian deities/idols (cf. Exod. 8:10,22; 9:14,29).

There is obviously a word play on

1. “know” – BDB 393, KB 390
 - a. information
 - b. personal relationship (see Special Topic: Know)
2. “I am. . .YHWH” – see notes at Exod. 3:14-16

7:18 “became foul” This VERB (BDB 92, KB 107, *Qal* PERFECT) is used three times in Exodus.

1. the Nile smelled bad because of the dead fish, Exod. 7:18
2. the land smelled bad because of the dead frogs, Exod. 8:14
3. manna, if left overnight, smells bad, Exod. 16:20

7:19 This plague affected

1. a chief deity of Egypt (i.e., Pharaoh on his way to bathe/anoint himself in the Nile)
2. the food (i.e., fish) of the Egyptians
3. the drinking water of the Egyptians
 - a. in the river
 - b. in ponds/wells
 - c. in streams
 - d. in containers

Notice in Exod. 7:24 the Egyptians tried to find drinking water.

The IVP *Bible Background Commentary* (p. 83) suggests that the literal Hebrew, “sticks and stones,” was used in Ugaritic literature for “the outlying, barren regions.” If so, it is imagery for all water sources being polluted.

▣ **“both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone”** It was not just the water in the Nile, but all the sources of water in Egypt were affected, even the water being held in containers for immediate use.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:20-25

²⁰So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile was turned to blood. ²¹The fish that *were* in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. ²²But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ²³Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this. ²⁴So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile. ²⁵Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

7:22 As the magicians did with the staff becoming a snake (Exod. 7:11), so too, with the water turning red (7:22). They will do the same with the frogs in Exod. 8:7, but they could not duplicate the “gnats” (7:18).

I think the magicians are using the power of the occult but that their power was limited and weak in comparison to YHWH’s power.

7:24 The plight of the Egyptian populace (i.e., those who did not have access to wine) was severe. Their only hope was to dig new wells close to the Nile and let the sand/dirt function as a filter.

7:25 “seven days” Why this initial plague lasted seven days is uncertain, but it is probably connected to the symbolic meaning of seven to the Hebrews. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

Notice the text never says Moses took away this plague, as it does the other plagues!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Did Pharaoh harden his heart or did God harden his heart?
2. What events caused Pharaoh’s heart to harden to YHWH’s power?
3. What is the purpose of the Exodus?
4. Why is YHWH turning the Nile red so theologically significant?
5. Where did Pharaoh’s wise men get their “secret arts”?

EXODUS 8

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Frogs Over the Land	The Second Plague: Frogs	Second Plague: Frogs (7:25-8:15)	Frogs	(follows MT versing) The Second Plague: the Frogs 7:26-8:3
8:1-7	8:1-4	8:1-7	8:1-4	8:4-11
	8:5-7		8:5-7	
8:8-9	8:8-15	8:8-15	8:8	
			8:9	
8:10-15			8:10a	
			8:10b-15	The Third Plague: the Mosquitoes
The Plague of Insects	The Third Plague: Lice	Third and Fourth Plagues	Gnats	8:12-15
				The Fourth Plague: the Horse Flies
8:16-19	8:16-19	8:16-19		8:16-20
	The Fourth Plague: Flies		Flies	
8:20-24	8:20-24	8:20-24	8:20-24	8:21-28
8:25-29	8:25-32	8:25-29	8:25	
			8:26-27	
			8:28	
			8:29	
8:30-32		8:30-32	8:30-32	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph

3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. English translations start Exodus 8 at the MT's 7:26. The NJB follows the MT's versing.
- B. This chapter records the plague of the
 1. frogs (Exod. 8:1-15)
 2. gnats (Exod. 8:16-19)
 3. insects (Exod. 8:20-32)
- C. Notice the repetitive formulaic way the plagues are presented.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:1-7

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ²But if you refuse to let *them* go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. ³The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. ⁴So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.””” ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.”” ⁶So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷The magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

8:1 This is a repeated formulaic introduction (cf. Exod. 4:23; 5:1; 7:16; 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3). Each plague has this statement as its purpose.

8:2 “I will smite your whole territory with frogs” Egypt, being located on a large river, was familiar with frogs (BDB 862; surprisingly this Hebrew word is used only 13 times, 11 in this context). Again, it is not the presence of frogs that was miraculous but the intensity, timing, and selectivity of their presence (i.e., not in Goshen, cf. Exod. 8:22). There are two particular gods of Egypt who use the frog as a symbol: *Heqt*, a goddess and *Hapi*, a god (god of the annual flooding of the Nile). Again, God is showing His superiority over the gods of Egypt. He wants Egyptians to believe in Him also (cf. Isa. 19:23-25).

8:4 This plague is directed to Pharaoh and his house directly. The people of the land would suffer also but especially Pharaoh's house (cf. VERB, “put” or “placed,” BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Exod. 8:12).

8:5 Notice the same procedure with which YHWH turned the Nile to blood (cf. Exod. 7:19).

8:7 “The magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt” See full notes at Exod. 7:11. This is exactly what the Egyptians needed at this time—more frogs!! The duplication was possibly YHWH's way of hardening Pharaoh's heart. I think this was demonic power (see notes at Exod. 7:11).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:8-9

⁸Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD.”
⁹Moses said to Pharaoh, “The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, *that* they may be left only in the Nile?”

8:8 “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD”” It is interesting that this concession is immediately modified. Through a series of Oriental bargaining sessions Moses and Pharaoh barter back and forth over the stipulations for the Hebrews’ leaving.

1. in Exod. 8:25 Pharaoh says to sacrifice in the land
2. in Exod. 8:28 Pharaoh says to go but not too far
3. in Exod. 8:27-28, like 8:8, he says to go with no stipulations but he later reneges
4. in Exod. 10:8 he says men only
5. in Exod. 10:16-20,24 he says to go but to leave the herds.

Here we see the gradual weakening of Pharaoh’s will but he will not allow the Hebrew slaves to leave.

8:9 “The honor is yours to tell me” This is a Hebrew idiom meaning, “I will give you the advantage; set the time for it.” Again, God is trying to work with Pharaoh. He is using natural means but with supernatural timing, intensity, and locality. Therefore, Pharaoh is to choose the exact time that the plague will leave (cf. Exod. 9:5). This clearly reveals God’s power and control over these events.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:10-15

¹⁰Then he said, “Tomorrow.” So he said, “*May it be* according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. ¹¹The frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile.” ¹²Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. ¹³The LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. ¹⁴So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul. ¹⁵But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

8:10 “*May it be* according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God” Here again, is the theological and redemptive purpose of the plagues. Also, note the emphasis on monotheism (see Special Topic: Monotheism).

8:15 This is a recurrent pattern. Once the plague was removed, Pharaoh returned to his hard heart.

▣ “relief” This term (BDB 926) basically means “to be wide or spacious.” Only here and in Lam. 3:56 does it have the connotation of “relief” or “respite.” Remember, words have meaning only in context!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:16-19

¹⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.’” ¹⁷They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸The magicians tried with their

secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

8:16

NASB, NRSV,

TEV, LXX

“gnats”

NKJV, Peshitta,

Targums

“lice”

NJB

“mosquitoes”

JPSOA

“swarm of insects”

REB

“maggots”

Jer. Tar, JPSOA

footnote

“wild beasts”

There has been much discussion about the identity of these flying insects (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 665). Some say they are mosquitoes (NJB, similar Egyptian root), gnats (Herodotus 2:95), or gad flies. The emphasis is on their number and not their exact identity. The term (BDB 487 IV, KB 483 II) occurs only here in the Hebrew except for Ps.105:31, which describes this incident, and Isa. 51:6.

8:18 “the magicians tried with their secret arts, but they could not” Why they were successful in duplicating the previous plagues and not this one is uncertain, but theologically it shows the superiority of YHWH over the gods and the wisemen of Egypt.

8:19 “Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God’” This, of course, is an anthropomorphic phrase (see Special Topic: God Described as Human) describing God’s (or “a god’s activity”); the term is *Elohim*. See Special Topic: *Elohim* activity in the world. This also shows that the magicians themselves have been moved, if not to believe, at least to some kind of recognition of the power and presence of YHWH, the God of the Hebrews. It may have been their way of deflecting blame for their inability.

▣ **“he did not listen to them”** In context, this probably refers to the Egyptian magicians’ statement in Exod. 8:19.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:20-24

²⁰Now the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ²¹For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians will be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they *dwell*. ²²But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. ²³I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur.’”” ²⁴Then the LORD did so. And there came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was laid waste because of the swarms of flies in all the land of Egypt.

8:20 “the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water”” This was a ritual that Pharaoh went through every morning. Several times God

directs Moses to meet Pharaoh early or at the water (i.e., Exod. 7:15). The Nile, being an Egyptian god, may have been the place of morning ablutions or prayers (cf. Exod. 2:5, where the daughter of Pharaoh comes to the Nile to bathe).

8:21

NASB, JPSOA “swarms of insects”

NKJV, NRSV,

REB “swarms of flies”

TEV “flies”

NJB “house flies”

LXX “stinging flies” or “dog-flies”

This is a separate plague from Exod. 8:16-19. The term (BDB 786) means “swarm,” but does not identify what kind (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 525).

The two Psalms where this term is used seem to see Exod. 8:16-24 as one plague (cf. Ps. 78:45; 105:1). This is surely possibly that two different oral traditions, using two different terms, were combined by a later editor. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*. The Bible never says there were “10” plagues.

8:22 “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land” The “you” is SINGULAR, referring to Pharaoh. This is the first specific mention of the locality limitations of the plagues (cf. Exod. 9:4,26; 10:23; 11:7), but I think it was a feature of all of them. It was just pointed out to Pharaoh here for the first time. It is also significant that the theological thrust of God’s presence with His people is mentioned. This becomes a major theological truth in the term “Emmanuel” (i.e., God with us), not only in the Garden of Eden and the coming of the Messiah but also in the conclusion of the book of Revelation.

8:22 This shows that YHWH was able to spare His people from the plagues. The “land of Goshen” was great cattle and sheep country in the eastern delta region (cf. Gen. 45:10).

▣ **“in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land”** YHWH is continuing to reveal His mercy to Israel and power to the Egyptians.

8:23

NASB, Peshitta “put a division”

NKJV “make a difference”

NRSV, TEV,

NJB, JPSOA,

REB, LXX “make a distinction”

The MT has “redemption” (BDB 804, KB 913). Some get “division” or “distinction” from an emendation.

1. פְּדוּת (KB 913) – ransom
2. פִּלְת (KB 936) – separation
3. פִּרְדַּת (BDB 825) – divide (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 581)

The UBS Text Project (p. 99) gives “ransom/redemption” an “A” rating (i.e., high probability). It just does not make sense in this context. Unless we understand it as “the act of geographical distinction will show YHWH’s special relationship with Israel.” YHWH is her deliverer.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:25-29

²⁵Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.”
²⁶But Moses said, “It is not right to do so, for we will sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us? ²⁷We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us.” ²⁸Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication for me.” ²⁹Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you, and I shall make supplication to the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

8:25 See note at Exod. 8:8.

8:26 “It is not right to do so, for we will sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians” From history we know that the Egyptians did offer some vegetable sacrifices along with pieces of meat. There has been some disagreement among ancient commentators about the type of sacrifice to which Moses was referring. The Targum Onkelos says that it refers to the sacrifice of cattle, while the Jerusalem Targum says it refers to the sacrifice of sheep. We know that these animals were Egyptian gods and sacrificing them would be viewed with some hostility.

▣ **“abomination”** See Special Topic: Abomination (OT).

8:27 “We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us” This refers to God’s command to Moses to bring the people back to Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 3:18). However, the problem is that it was much farther than a three-day journey. Some have speculated

1. Moses is simply lying to Pharaoh here
2. it is an idiom which refers to a longer period of time (cf. Exod. 10:23)
3. we have the wrong site for Mt. Sinai

We must remember that the site of Mt. Sinai is not a major concern to the Hebrews. The Promised Land is the major emphasis for them (i.e., Gen. 15:12-21) and not Mt. Sinai. There is one theory that Mt. Sinai is close to Kadesh Barnea, which would fit this three-day journey, if it is meant to be taken literally. See Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai.

8:28 “only you shall not go very far” The Oriental bargaining continues (cf. Exod. 8:8), but Moses refuses until an unconditional surrender of the Egyptians is made.

The grammatical form of this phrase is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 934, KB 1221), which denotes intensity.

8:29 “only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully” This refers to Pharaoh saying one thing and then when the plague is removed, changing his mind (cf. Exod. 8:15) and he will again (cf. Exod. 8:32).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:30-32

³⁰So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. ³¹The LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people; not one remained. ³²But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How many plagues are there?
2. How did the magicians duplicate the first three plagues?
3. Explain the idiom of Exod. 8:9.
4. How does Exod. 8:11 make the plague directly related to Pharaoh?
5. Why is Exod. 8:27 theologically crucial?
6. Explain Exod. 8:26.

EXODUS 9

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Egyptian Cattle Die 9:1-7	The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased 9:1-7	Fifth and Sixth Plagues 9:1-7	Death of the Animals 9:1-5 9:6-7	The Fifth Plague: Death of the Egyptians' Livestock 9:1-7
The Plague of Boils 9:8-12	The Sixth Plague: Boils 9:8-12	9:8-12	Boils 9:8-12	The Sixth Plague: The Boils 9:8-12
9:13-17	The Seventh Plague: Hail 9:13-21	Seventh Plague 9:13-21	Hail 9:13-21	The Seventh Plague: The Hail 9:13-19
The Plague of Hail 9:18-21				9:20-21
9:22-26	9:22-26	9:22-26	9:22-26	9:22-26
9:27-35	9:27-35	9:27-35	9:27-28 9:29-30 9:31-32 9:33-35	9:27-32 9:33-35

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Exodus 9 records four plagues.
 - 1. disease on animals, Exod. 9:1-7
 - 2,3. disease on animals and humans, Exod. 9:8-12
 - 4. hail, Exod. 9:18-35 (the longest account of any of the plagues)
- B. If it is true that the ability of the Egyptian wise men to duplicate the plagues was the initial reason for Pharaoh to have a hard heart, that is no longer the case (cf. Exod. 9: 12,35). He refuses to believe (cf. 9:30).
- C. Exodus 9:14-16 is a unique feature of this plague. It gives the specific theological purpose of both the plagues and, for that matter, Israel (also note Exod. 9:29; see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).
- D. YHWH revealing His power (cf. Exod. 9:14,16,29) over Egyptian gods is having some effect (cf. 9:20-21).
 - The disease on "livestock" of all kinds would reflect on the Egyptian deities' powerlessness.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:1-7

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ²For if you refuse to let *them* go and continue to hold them, ³behold, the hand of the LORD will come *with* a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. ⁴But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.'" ⁵The LORD set a definite time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land." ⁶So the LORD did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died. ⁷Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

9:1 The literary pattern continues.

9:2 "for if. . ." This chapter records two divine warnings to Pharaoh.

- 1. Exod. 9:2-7
- 2. Exod. 9:13-16

9:3 "the hand of the LORD" See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ "will come" The NET Bible (p. 134, #5) makes the point that this form (i.e., *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, FEMININE, SINGULAR of the VERB "to be," BDB 224, KB 243) occurs only here. It translates it as "will surely bring."

Brevard Childs quotes G. S. Ogden (p. 129), who thinks the PARTICIPIAL form is meant to conform to a pattern in Exodus (i.e., Exod. 7:17,27; 9:3; 10:4).

This is the type of grammatical detail that must not be raised to exegetical significance (i.e., the literalism of the rabbis). Remember, the key to proper interpretation is “authorial intent” at the paragraph level.

▣ **“livestock”** Because of Exod. 9:19 one wonders

1. is this a full list of livestock in Exod. 9:3
2. is this hyperbolic language (cf. Exod. 9:6)
3. does the remaining livestock refer to the ones placed indoors in Exod. 9:19-20

9:4 “the LORD will make a distinction” See note at Exod. 8:22. Note the emphatic statement at the close of Exod. 9:6 and beginning of 9:7.

9:5 “The LORD set a definite time, saying, ‘Tomorrow...’” In Exod. 8:10 Moses allowed Pharaoh to pick the time a plague would cease. Here, YHWH picks the time another plague will start.

Pharaoh just does not see the clear handwriting on the wall (idiom from Daniel 5).

9:7 Pharaoh sent servants to confirm Moses’ prophecy about the Hebrews’ herds/flocks.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:8-12

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. ¹¹The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. ¹²And the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

9:8

NASB, NRSV,

NJB, JPSOA,

REB

“soot”

NKJV, TEV,

Peshitta

“ashes”

The term (BDB 806, KB 925) occurs only here in the OT. Many scholars think it comes from a similar root, “to blow” or “breathe out” (i.e., speak). However, this is speculation

9:9 “boils” This term (BDB 1006, KB 1460, cf. Deut. 28:27) denotes an inflammation, ulcer, or eruption. KB suggests it may refer to leprosy; if so, then this would be connected to one of the first signs shown to Moses in Exod. 4:6-8.

Some scholars think the root is related to an Arabic cognate root for “heat” (i.e., feverish place on the skin).

This same word is used to describe the illness of (1) Hezekiah, from which he almost died (cf. 2 Kgs. 20:7); and (2) Job (cf. Job 2:7).

▣ **“sores”** This term (BDB 101, KB 9) occurs only here (i.e., Exod. 9:9,10). KB says in Akkadian the root means “blisters” or “ulcers.” It is a generally synonymous term with “boils.”

In Exod. 9:15 a more general term, “pestilence” (BDB 184), is used, which refers to the plagues in general (cf. Exod. 5:3; Lev. 26:25; Num. 14:12; Deut. 28:21).

9:11 This verse accentuates the helplessness of Egyptian idolatry!

9:12 “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” See full note at Exod. 4:21.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:13-17

¹³Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ¹⁴For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. ¹⁵For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. ¹⁷Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.

9:14 “I will send all My plagues on you” The term “all” may refer to rain, hail, and lightning, all of which come with a powerful storm (cf. Exod. 9:23-24).

The hail, like the plagues of Exod. 9:8-12, affected humans and animals (Exod. 9:25).

9:14-15 “so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. . .in order to proclaim My name through all the earth” Here, we see the underlying redemptive purposes of the plagues, not only to Israel and Egypt, but unto the entire world. From Gen. 12:3 we know that the call of Abraham was a call to redeem the world; from Exod. 19:5-6, that Israel was meant to be a nation of priests because all the world belonged to Him; and from Isaiah 53, that though Israel failed in her mission to inform the world that the Ideal Israelite, the Messiah, will one day bring together all of the people to the one and only true God (cf. Isaiah 41-42). See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan and Special Topic: Monotheism.

9:16 YHWH’s mercy to Pharaoh (cf. Rom. 9:16) and to Egypt (cf. Exod. 9:15; the most powerful nation of this period in the ANE) was for the purpose of revealing Himself to the whole world (i.e., “*erets*,” see Special Topic: Land). The plagues reveal His power; His sparing Israel, His love (also note the mercy in Exod. 9:20-21).

▣ “My name” See Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH.

9:17 “you exalt yourself” This VERB (BDB 699 I, KB 757, *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE) is used in this sense only here. Normally the VERB refers to building

1. siege works (possibly an Egyptian loan word)
2. highways

The closest parallel usage is Pro. 4:8, where it is used symbolically of “wisdom” being exalted. Pharaoh had built barriers around his own heart.

Notice the connection between YHWH and His people. To exalt oneself against one is to exalt oneself against both (i.e., Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:18-21

¹⁸Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been *seen* in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹Now therefore send, bring your livestock and

whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die.”””²⁰The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses;²¹but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.

9:18 “I will send a very heavy hail” Again, the timing, intensity, and selectivity of location seem to be the theological thrust. There is some discussion among scholars about the rarity of hail in Egypt, but this cannot be documented and is simply speculation at this point. Josephus (*Antiq.* 2.14.4) says the hail was larger than had ever been seen before.

Fire and water were deified by Egyptian mythology (i.e., Temple of *Serapis*). YHWH controls both.

▣ **“such as has not been *seen* in Egypt from the day it was founded until now”** This type of literary hyperbole becomes a standard way of referring to the last days (cf. Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Mark 13:19; Rev. 16:18; also note I Macc. 9:27).

9:19 “Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety” Here is the first plague involving a faith response, which will deliver one from its effects. From Exod. 9:20, we see that some of Pharaoh’s servants believed in the Lord and acted in faith. This should have been a model for Pharaoh to follow!

9:21 “but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD” This VERB (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Hiphil* PERFECT) was used in Exod. 7:23 to describe how Pharaoh treated “God’s word.” Now some of his servants do the same (cf. Exod. 9:34).

This same VERB is used in Deut. 32:46 to encourage and warn Israel to believe and obey God’s word.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:22-26

²²Now the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.”²³Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. ²⁴So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵The hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. ²⁶Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail.

9:23 “fire ran down to the earth” This describes recurrent lightning.

9:24 “and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail” This literally is “fire taking hold of itself” (BDB 542, KB 534, *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE). This is idiomatic for constant lightning flashing back and forth across the sky.

9:25 The hail killed humans and beasts and destroyed most plant life.

9:26 In Goshen, where the Israelites lived, there was no hail (cf. Exod. 8:22).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:27-35

²⁷Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. ²⁸Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” ²⁹Moses said to him, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’S. ³⁰But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” ³¹(Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³²But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they *ripen* late.) ³³So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. ³⁴But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

9:27 This is a surprising statement from the Pharaoh. He admits that his unbelief and hard heart are sins (cf. Exod. 10:16-17). He surely acknowledges YHWH’s supremacy and righteousness (see Special Topic: Righteousness) in the sense that he is legally incorrect and YHWH has shown Himself to be an accurate predictor and fulfiller of the plagues (note Neh. 9:33; Dan. 9:14).

9:28

NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA “God’s thunder”

NKJV, Peshitta “mighty thundering”

TEV, NJB,

REB “this”

LXX “God’s sounds”

The MT has a CONSTRUCT “hail” (BDB 876) and *Elohim* (BDB 43). *Elohim* is interpreted as

1. POSSESSIVE – NASB
2. ADJECTIVE – NKJV
3. DEMONSTRATIVE – NJB

(see UBS *Handbook*, p. 228).

Thunder was often identified with the voice of YHWH (cf. Exod. 19:16,19).

9:29 “I will spread out my hands to the LORD” The normal position of the Jewish prayer was with the hands and eyes lifted toward heaven (cf. Exod. 9:33; 1 Kgs. 8:54; 2 Chr. 6:13; Ezra 9:5; Job 11:13; Ps. 88:9; Isa. 1:15).

▣ **“that you may know that the earth is the LORD’S”** This same theological emphasis is seen in Exod. 19:5; 20:11.

9:30 Pharaoh had seen the hand of God several times but had hardened his heart. Moses knew he would do it again (cf. Exod. 9:34-35).

For “fear” see Special Topic: Fear (OT). For YHWH and *Elohim* see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

9:31-32 This is an editorial comment to explain how the hail ruined some of the crops in January and February and the locusts destroyed other crops in March and April.

9:31 “flax” Normally this crop is called by a MASCULINE NOUN (BDB 833); only here is it FEMININE (BDB 834). BDB suggests it means “young growing flax.”

9:32 “spelt” This (BDB 493, KB 490, cf. Isa. 28:25; Ezek. 4:9) was possibly a type of wheat but of lesser quality. It has been found in Egyptian tombs of the period. See Ezek. 4:9 for a list of the different kinds of grains.

9:34-35 Notice how the author places both free will (Exod. 9:34) and God’s sovereignty (9:35 is a summary type statement) side by side with no sense of a contradiction! See Special Topic: Election/Predestination and the Need for a Theological Balance and Special Topic: Predestination (Calvinism) vs. Human Free Will (Arminianism).

9:34 “he sinned again” This clearly states the responsibility of the hardening on Pharaoh himself.

▣ **“he and his servants”** One wonders who this refers to. The magicians have already publicly stated they think the plagues are the finger of God (or gods) in Exod. 8:19. So, this must refer to Pharaoh’s personal servants who have heard Moses’ words and seen the miraculous signs (cf. Exod. 9:21,30,34; 10:1). Unbelief is contagious!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How does Exodus 9 continue to show the plagues as a direct attack on Egyptian gods?
2. Explain the theological significance of Exod. 9:14-16.
3. Why is Exod. 9:20-21 unique in this section of Exodus?
4. What is the implication of Exod. 9:27? Is it in a theological or legal sense?
5. How is Exod. 9:30 related to 9:34?
6. Is Exod. 9:31-34 an editorial comment? Why?

EXODUS 10

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Plague of Locusts	The Eighth Plague: Locusts	Eighth Plague: Locusts	Locusts	The Eighth Plague: The Locusts
10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-7
10:3-11	10:3-11	10:3-6 10:7-11	10:3-6 10:7 10:8 10:9 10:10-11	10:8-11
10:12-20	10:12-15 10:16-20	10:12-20	10:12-15 10:16-20	10:12-13 10:14-15 10:16-20
Darkness Over the Land	The Ninth Plague: Darkness	Ninth Plague: Dense Darkness	Darkness	The Ninth Plague: The Darkness
10:21-29	10:21-23 10:24-26 10:27-29	10:21-29	10:21-23 10:24 10:25-26 10:27-28 10:29	10:21-23 10:24-26 10:27-29

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:1-2

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, ²and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

10:1 Exodus 10:1 is theologically parallel to Exod. 9:14-16. YHWH uses Pharaoh’s tendencies and stubbornness to reveal Himself!

10:2 F. B. Huey, *A Study Guide Commentary, Exodus* (p. 48), makes a good observation. “Previously God had said that the plagues were brought on Egypt so that the Egyptians would know that He was Lord (7:5), but now He says that the purpose of the plagues is so that the Israelites may know that He is Lord (10:2).”

The term “signs” (BDB 68) is used to demonstrate YHWH’s power and reveal His character

1. to Pharaoh – Exod. 7:3,17
2. to Israel – Exod. 10:2; 31:13; Deut. 4:35
3. to Jews who fled to Egypt – Jer. 44:29
4. to future Bible readers – 1 Cor. 10:6,11

▣ “that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians” This emphasis on the parental, religious training of the children (cf. Exod. 12:26-27; 13:8,14-15) is expanded in the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 4:9; 6:7,20-25; 32:7,46). Parents are to be the major instrument in the theological training of their children.

Notice the basic thrust of this training is “that you may know that I am the LORD” (cf. Exod. 5:2; 7:5,17; 8:19; 10:2,7). The purpose of the plagues was the worldwide revelation (cf. Exod. 9:14) of YHWH.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:3-11

³Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. ⁴For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. ⁵They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They will also eat the rest of what has escaped—what is left to you from the hail—and they will eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. ⁶Then your houses shall be filled and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians, *something* which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day.’” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh. ⁷Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?” ⁸So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?” ⁹Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.” ¹⁰Then he said to them, “Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. ¹¹Not so! Go now, the men *among you*, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire.” So they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

10:3 “the LORD, the God of the Hebrews” See notes at Exod. 1:15 and 9:1.

▣ **“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”** This is a good question. Even the servants of Pharaoh acknowledged the need (cf. Exod. 10:7). Pharaoh’s exalted heart was referred to earlier in Exod. 9:17.

10:4 “locusts” Like the hail, frogs, and gnats, these locusts are common to the land of Egypt, but the timing, intensity, and geographical selectivity show the supernatural element. Also notice that they are brought in by an east wind and removed by a west wind. This shows that God uses natural means to perform His signs, as He will again at the crossing of the Red Sea, where He uses a strong east wind (cf. Exod. 14:20) to separate the water and dry out the bottom of the sea.

10:5 “They will also eat the rest of what has escaped—what is left to you from the hail” This is mentioned in Exod. 10:12,15. The crop that remained was mentioned in Exod. 9:31-32.

With this plague nothing green, no crop, no fruit, nothing green would be left. Now Egypt has lost almost all cattle, herds, and food crops! The seriousness of the situation is seen in Pharaoh’s words at the conclusion of Exod. 10:17.

▣ **“the surface of the land”** This is literally “the eye of the land” (BDB 744, cf. Exod. 10:15; Num. 22:5,11). Every language has these types of idioms which communicate to native speakers but sound strange to outsiders.

10:6 The emphasis on the severity of the locust plague is highlighted here, as the hail was in Exod. 9:18,23. Again, several Egyptian deities were supposed to protect Egypt but they could not!

10:7 One wonders who these “servants” are.

1. the magicians (cf. Exod. 8:19)
2. the court servants whose hearts were previously hardened (cf. Exod. 9:34)
3. the court servants who took YHWH’ warning seriously and sheltered some domestic animals (cf. Exod. 9:20-21)

Pharaoh’s hard heart has passed beyond all logic and counsel. The test of wills continues!

Notice these counselors suggest that only “the men” shall go and sacrifice (cf. Exod. 10:8-9). This reflects the Oriental bargaining. See full note at Exod. 8:8.

10:8-11 This is Oriental bargaining. Please see the notes at Exod. 8:8.

10:10 “Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I” This is a sarcastic oath in the mouth of Pharaoh that he will later have to swallow himself.

▣

NASB “for evil is in your mind”

NKJV “for evil is ahead of you”

NRSV “Plainly, you have some evil purpose in mind”

TEV “it is clear that you are plotting to revolt”

NJB “Plainly, you are up to no good”

JPSOA “Clearly, you are bent on mischief”

REB “You have some sinister purpose in mind”

LXX “wickedness lies before you”

The question is, “who is going to do the evil”?

1. Pharaoh (Cassuto, “do not push me too far”)

2. Moses

Each choice fits the context. Most English translations follow #2.

10:11 “Not so” This (BDB 518 plus BDB 485) is emphatic! I will not let all of you and your herds leave.

☐ **“So they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence”** This same VERB (DB 176, KB 204, *Piel* IMPERFECT) is used in YHWH’s prediction in Exod. 6:1 that Pharaoh will drive the Hebrews out of Egypt and again in Exod. 11:1 (the *Hiphil* in Exod. 12:39).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:12-20

¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, *even* all that the hail has left.” ¹³So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. ¹⁴The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; *they were* very numerous. There had never been so *many* locusts, nor would there be so *many* again. ¹⁵For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁶Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. ¹⁷Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.” ¹⁸He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. ¹⁹So the LORD shifted *the wind* to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. ²⁰But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

10:13 “an east wind” Notice the natural means YHWH used with supernatural timing.

1. east wind, Exod. 10:13 (twice)
2. west wind, Exod. 10:19
3. the plague of darkness in Exod. 10:21-23 may have been a sandstorm brought by desert winds
4. strong east wind divides and riles up the waters and dries the Red Sea bed in Exod. 14:21; the wind apparently ceases in Exod. 14:26 (cf. Exod. 15:10)
5. a wind brought quail to Israel in the wilderness in Num. 11:31

The “east wind” (i.e., hot desert wind) is often used by God in judgment (cf. Ps. 48:7; Isa. 27:8; Jer. 18:17; Ezek. 17:10; 19:12; 27:26; Hos. 13:15; Jon. 4:8).

For other uses of *ruah* (BDB 924) see Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

10:14-15 These verses describe the intensity of this locust plague.

There are many words in Hebrew for locusts (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 491), which show they were common in the lives of ANE people.

10:14

NASB	“numerous”
NKJV	“severe”
NRSV, REB	“dense”
TEV	“large”
NJB, LXX	“great”
JPSOA	“thick”

This is a connotation of the term *kabod* (BDB 458), “glory”; see Special Topic: Glory (OT)

1. used of the plague on livestock in Exod. 9:3
2. used of the plague of hail in Exod. 9:18,24
3. used here of the plague of locusts

The plagues were not just naturally occurring events/things but they had supernatural aspects.

1. intensity
2. locality
3. timing of when they came and when they ceased

10:15

NASB, NKJV,

JPSOA “land was darkened”

NRSV, REB “land was black”

NJB “land was devastated”

LXX, Vulgate “land was ruined”

The MT has “darkened” (BDB 364, KB 361, *The Analytical Key to the OT*, by John Owens, calls it a *Hophal* but *OT Parsing Guide*, by Beall, Banks, and Smith, calls it IMPERFECT). The UBS Text Project gives this a “B” rating (i.e., some doubt). The LXX and NJB are an emendation.

1. darkened, ותחשך
2. ruined, ותשחת

The NOUN “darkness” (BDB 365) occurs in Exod. 10:21,22. However, “ruined” fits this context also. The locusts were so numerous that they not only cut off the light of the sun (affront to *Ra*) but they completely destroyed the land. The concept of a “ruined” Egypt is in Exod. 10:7, but uses a different word (BDB 1).

10:16 This reversal links to Exod. 9:27. It seems Pharaoh’s vacillation from reality to pride is like a yo-yo! What terrible swings this leader experienced, both from his own pride and arrogance, but also from the hand of God.

This is the first time Pharaoh acknowledges his sin against Moses. One wonders if this refers to

1. the previous reversals of his statements about letting the Hebrews depart
2. something from their childhood at court

10:17 “please forgive my sin only this once” This must be idiomatic. Pharaoh asked forgiveness in Exod. 9:27-28. Exactly what this phrase implies is uncertain. Pharaoh surely will not yet let the Hebrews leave.

☐ **“that He would only remove this death from me”** This must refer to the devastating locust plague that destroyed all of Egypt’s spring crops. The cattle and herds were mostly dead already (cf. Exod. 9:19,21).

10:19 “So the LORD shifted *the wind*” This manipulation of the forces of nature is also highlighted in the book of Jonah.

1. a fish
2. a plant
3. a worm
4. a wind

Jesus also demonstrated this power several times!

☐ **“west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea”** The “Red Sea” literally means *yam suph*, which should be translated “sea of reeds.” This can refer to salt water or fresh water reeds.

It is obvious in this account that it was a large body of water into which the locusts were driven. There have been several theories about the location of this body of water:

1. a northern theory along the marshes of the Mediterranean
2. the central theory of the bitter salt lakes around the middle of the land body which is now part of the Suez Canal
3. the upper end of the body of water known as the Red Sea today

See Special Topic: The Red Sea.

▣ **“not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt”** This is the exact opposite of the intense nature of the locust plague. YHWH is in complete control!

10:20 This is amazing! Pharaoh is trapped by his own sin (cf. Rom. 1:24,26,28) and by YHWH’s purposes (cf. Isa. 45:5-7; Amos 3:6).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:21-29

²¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.” ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. ²³They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. ²⁴Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, “Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you.” ²⁵But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice *them* to the Lord our God. ²⁶Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD.” ²⁷But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. ²⁸Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!” ²⁹Moses said, “You are right; I shall never see your face again!”

10:21 “even a darkness which may be felt” Many assume that this may have been a type of sandstorm, which was common (March-May) in Egypt, but again with supernatural timing, intensity (i.e., “thick darkness. . .,” Exod. 10:22), and location (cf. Exod. 10:23). It is ironical that *Ra*, the sun god, one of the chief deities of Egypt, could not keep the land illuminated in the midst of the darkness that YHWH sent. Egypt was dark, like the earth in Gen. 1:2.

10:22 “thick darkness” This is a combination of two Hebrew terms for “darkness” (BDB 365, BDB 66). Darkness and locust are linked in Joel 2:2. Both terms are used in Isa. 8:22 and Zeph. 1:15.

▣ **“for three days”** This gives us the clue that possibly three days was an idiom for a longer period of time (cf. Exod. 8:28).

▣ **“but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings”** Again, a distinction is made between Egypt and Israel (cf. Exod. 8:22; 9:4,6,24; 10:23; 11:7). See full note at Exod. 8:22.

10:24 “only let your flocks and herds be detained” Here again, Pharaoh is trying to bargain in order to save face with his own people. Also, because all of the Egyptian cattle had been killed it would have been a great boon for them to retain the flocks and herds of the land of Goshen. But Moses would have none of this compromise. See full note on the Oriental bargain aspect at Exod. 8:8.

10:26 “for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God” Moses is referring to sacrifice. He does not know how many animals or which kind will be needed.

10:29

NASB, TEV,

REB “You are right”

NKJV “You have spoken well”

NRSV “Just as you say!”

NJB “You yourself have said it”

JPSOA “You have spoken rightly”

LXX “You have spoken”

Pharaoh’s commands (i.e., “Get away from me!” and “Beware,” Exod. 10:28) are to be heeded. Pharaoh will not/cannot chance it. Dialogue and demonstrations are futile. The last terrible plague will come and

1. Pharaoh will send a message to Moses and Aaron after all (cf. Exod. 12:31), even his threat is powerless!
2. The Egyptian people will urge the Hebrews to leave (cf. Exod. 12:33).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How should Exod. 10:2 affect the way parents teach their children about God?
2. What does it mean to “know” God?
3. List the aspects of Pharaoh’s and Moses’ bargaining (see full note at Exod. 8:8).
4. Where is the Red Sea?
5. Does Exod. 19:21 describe a sand storm?
6. How does one explain the seeming contradiction between Exod. 10:28 and 12:31?

EXODUS 11

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Last Plague	Death of the Firstborn Announced	The Announcement of the Final Plague, Death of the Firstborn	Moses Announces the Death of the Firstborn	Announcement of the Death of the Firstborn
11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3
11:4-8	11:4-8	11:4-8	11:4-8	11:4-8
11:9-10	11:9-10	11:9-10	11:9-10	11:9-10

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS – I think my comments on the first paragraph of Exod. 11:5 are theologically significant. I have repeated them below.

The death of the Egyptian firstborn had theological and judicial implication.

1. YHWH is more powerful (i.e., the only true God, see Special Topic: Monotheism). The son of Pharaoh was considered the son of the sun god, *Ra*.
2. As Egypt took the lives of Israel's children (Israel was YHWH's firstborn, cf. Exod. 4:22-23), now YHWH takes her's. I know this is a shocking judicial act of God, but I believe there is an "age of accountability" (see Special Topic: The Age of Accountability). These children were joined with God in the afterlife that would probably never have happened if they had grown up in polytheism. Just as an aside, I feel this same way about David's first child with Bathsheba, who also was taken as a judgment on David's sin. Like all believers, the death of the young; the plight of the retarded; the purposeful killing of children are difficult and painful to understand. I have come to trust in the character of God. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT). Though my mind revolts, my heart is at peace that one day I will understand the terrible consequences of Genesis 3 (see Special Topic: The Fall). A book that has helped me work through this issue is John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God*.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:1-3

¹Now the LORD said to Moses, “One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely. ²Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold.” ³The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses *himself* was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.

11:1 There is no characteristic Hebrew connector (*waw*). This implies that Exodus 11 is beginning a new section.

The PRONOUNS and ANTECEDENTS are ambiguous. This has caused scholars to see Exod. 11:1-3 as an editorial insertion. It is difficult to know who Moses is speaking to in Exod. 11:4. The same problem occurs in 11:8.



NASB “from here completely”

NKJV “of here altogether”

JPSOA “of here one and all”

REB “as a man might dismiss a rejected bride”

LXX “with everything”

At issue is the ADVERB “completely” (BDB 478, כלה), which NEB and REB emend to כללה (“bride,” NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 644-651), who took her dowry with her (Exod. 11:2).

The VERB “drive out” (DB 17, KB 204) is used of sending a wife away in Lev. 21:7,14; 22:13; Num. 30:9; Ezek. 44:22).

▣ **“he will surely drive you out”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 176, KB 204), which denotes intensity.

This strong grammatical feature may be a divine reaction to Pharaoh’s threat against Moses in Exod. 9:28.

This plague is mentioned in Ps. 78:49-51; 105:36; 135:8-9; 136:10. For Israel, the exodus is the supreme example of

1. God fulfilling His promises, Gen. 15:12-21
2. God delivering His people
3. God making a “distinction” between Israel and all others (see note at Exod. 8:22)

11:2 “Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold” The King James Version translates the word “ask” (BDB 981, KB 1371, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) as “borrow” (cf. Jdgs. 8:34; 1 Sam. 1:27, which it can mean). It seems here that they were to ask so as not to return. This spoiling of Egypt was first mentioned in Exod. 3:21-22, accomplished in 12:5, and alluded to in Ps. 105:37. It involved precious metals for the tabernacle. The symbolism is of the Egyptians being militarily defeated and spoils being taken.

11:3 “The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians” This was either the result of God’s supernatural activity (i.e., the plagues) or YHWH affecting their hearts positively as He affected Pharaoh’s heart negatively.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:4-8

⁴Moses said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, ⁵and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. ⁶Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again. ⁷But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.’ ⁸All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, ‘Go out, you and all the people who follow you,’ and after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

11:4 “About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt” As YHWH had used human instrumentality, particularly in the voice of Moses, the staff, or Aaron, this time it will be His own instrumentality in this plague. The death of the firstborn was significant for several reasons.

1. theologically because Rameses II was not succeeded by his oldest son (who was considered to be the son of the sun god, *Ra*) but by a younger son, Merneppah, which seems to confirm the 1290 B.C. date of the exodus, at least for me
2. as far as Egyptian society, the firstborn son’s inheritance was meant to be used to care for the parents in their old age and, therefore, he became the legal guardian of the other children

With this in mind, we can see how devastating this plague was on Egyptian society.

11:5 “all the firstborn” The death of the Egyptian firstborn (see Special Topic: Firstborn) had theological and judicial implication.

1. YHWH is more powerful (i.e., the only true God, see Special Topic: Monotheism). The son of Pharaoh was considered the son of the sun god, *Ra*.
2. As Egypt took the lives of Israel’s children (Israel was YHWH’s firstborn, cf. Exod. 4:22-23), now YHWH takes her’s. I know this is a shocking judicial act of God, but I believe there is an “age of accountability” (see Special Topic: The Age of Accountability). These children were joined with God in the afterlife that would probably never have happened if they had grown up in polytheism. Just as an aside, I feel this same way about David’s first child with Bathsheba, who also was taken as a judgment on David’s sin. Like all believers, the death of the young; the plight of the retarded’ the purposeful killing of children is difficult and painful to understand. I have come to trust in the character of God. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT). Though my mind revolts, my heart is at peace that one day I will understand the terrible consequences of Genesis 3 (see Special Topic: The Fall). A book that has helped me work through this issue is John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God*.

The question remains, “what is the age limit?” Does it include firstborn adults? In Jewish life the age when a man becomes marriageable is 13; this was also true in Egypt. So, only the males below the age of 13 or so were affected. The plague is on children, not married adults, even if they were the oldest child of a family.

▣ “all the firstborn of cattle as well” Earlier it was stated that all the cattle had been killed, so it is obvious that some of the cattle had been saved by the faithful servants (see Exod. 9:20-21). The death of the cattle also shows

1. the Hebrew concept of corporality between a person and his animals
2. it could refer to judging of the animal deities of the Egyptians

11:6 This is hyperbolic language. See note at Exod. 9:18.

The “great cry” in Egypt is the punishment for the great cry in Israel in Exod. 2:23, when their children were killed!

11:7 “against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not *even* bark” This may be

1. an idiom to contrast the concept of no noise in the Hebrew villages with the great weeping throughout the land of Egypt (cf. Exod. 11:6, JPSOA)
2. an idiom for no threat to the Hebrews from any source
3. a reference to another Egyptian god (i.e., *Anubis*, Lord of the afterlife, a jackal-headed god)

▣ **“the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel”** For a note on “distinction” (BDB 811, KB 930, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT), see full note at Exod. 8:22.

The Feast of the Passover and the ownership of the firstborn are amplified in Exodus 12 and 13. As the Egyptians were warned about a plague and how they could remove its effects (cf. Exod. 9:19,20), so now the Hebrews are warned of a plague and how they could ward off the consequences from their own homes. They must act in faith on God’s word. The death angel did come to the land of Goshen to all of the homes which did not have the blood on the lintels and doorposts. But apparently all of the Hebrews and some of the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 9:20-21) did as God had said and were spared the consequences.

11:8 “All these your servants” This could be understood two ways.

1. It refers to Exod 11:2, where Moses speaks to the Israelites. The PRONOUN “me” refers to Moses, not YHWH.
2. It refers to Moses speaking to Pharaoh, which goes against Exod. 10:28-29. The VERB “came down” (BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*) implies Pharaoh, his close counselors, and servants on a raised platform.

However, “bow down” (BDB 1005, KB 299, *Hishtaphel* PERFECT with *waw*) implies that the PRONOUNS refer to YHWH.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:9-10

⁹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

11:9-10 These verses are a summary statement referring to the first plague through the last plague (cf. Exod. 7:3-4).

For Pharaoh’s hardening see note at Exod. 4:21.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How long did the plagues last?
2. What is the theological purpose of the plagues?
3. Can you list the plagues from memory?
4. Describe the Oriental bargaining sessions between Moses and Pharaoh.
5. Were the plagues natural or supernatural? Explain.

EXODUS 12

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Passover Lamb	The Passover Instituted	The Festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread	The Passover	The Passover
12:1-13	12:1-20	12:1-13	12:1-11	12:1-14
Feast of Unleavened Bread			12:12-14	
12:14-20		12:14-20	The Festival of Unleavened Bread	The Feast of Unleavened Bread
			12:15-20	12:15-20
			The First Passover	Injunctions Relating to the Passover
12:21-22	12:21-28	12:21-27	12:21-27a	12:21-28
A Memorial of Redemption				
12:23-27			12:27b-28	
12:28		12:28		
	The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn	Israel's Departure from Egypt	The Death of the Firstborn	The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn
12:29-32	12:29-30	12:29-32	12:29-32	12:29-34
	The Exodus			
Exodus of Israel	12:31-36			
12:33-34		12:33-36	12:33-36	The Egyptians Plundered
12:35-36				12:35-36
			The Israelites Leave Egypt	Israel's Departure
12:37-39	12:37-39	12:37-39	12:37-39	12:37-42
12:40-41	12:40-42	12:40-42	12:40-42	
Ordination of the Passover				
12:42	Passover Regulations		Regulations About Passover	Ordinances for the Passover
12:43-49	12:43-49	12:43-49	12:43-51	12:43-46
				12:47-51
12:50-51	12:50-51	12:50-51		

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. It is possible that these spring festivals (nomadic herdsmen rite, see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 642; see *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 84 and *Jerome Bible Commentary*, p. 52) predate the exodus, but, like circumcision, they now have new meanings attached to an ancient custom.
- B. The Passover is a spring event (at the time of a full moon), corresponding to our March – April. The Babylonian calendar called it *Nisan* (Num. 2:1), while the Canaanite calendar called it *Abib* (Num. 13:4). See Special Topic: Near Eastern Calendars.
The guidelines for this domestic feast are found in
1. Exod. 12:1-28,43-49
 2. Exod. 13:3-10
 3. Exod. 23:15
 4. Lev. 23:5-8
 5. Num. 28:16-25
 6. Deut. 16:1-8
- When these are compared, it seems a later author/editor combined guidelines from the Egypt experience and life in Canaan.
- As for who wrote this, I fully hold to
1. the Mosaic authorship (Exodus – Deuteronomy)
 2. earlier oral traditions (Genesis)
 3. later editors
- See Special Topic: Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch. I would also like to highly recommend a new book on the nature of ANE oral literary societies by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*. The ultimate author of the Bible is the Spirit of God!
- C. The Babylonians celebrated the new year in the spring, while the Canaanites had a fall new year celebration. Jews today celebrate the Passover in the spring and the New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) in the fall.
- D. The VERB “Passover” means
1. “to limp” (BDB 820 II, 1 Kgs. 18:21)
 2. “to be lame” (BDB 820 II, 2 Sam. 4:4)
- but here it seems to convey the idea of “leaping over” (BDB 820, KB 947, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Exod. 12:13,23,27) or “spare” (cf. Isa. 31:5).

- E. It is possible to see Passover as a paradigm for Jesus' sacrifice.
1. Jesus is the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19)
 2. the Lord's Supper is in the context of the Passover meal
 3. as the exodus brought deliverance from Egypt, Jesus brings deliverance to the world (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan)
 4. as the lamb had no bones broken (cf. Exod. 12:46), so too, Jesus (cf. John 19:33)

The NT presents Jesus as

1. the new Moses (i.e., law-giver, i.e., Matthew 5-7)
2. the new Passover (i.e., deliverance/salvation) for all the world (cf. Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21)
3. the new life-giving manna (John 6)
4. Passover Lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7)
5. the new and better High Priest and sacrifice (Hebrews)

The book of Hebrews states clearly the superiority of the Messiah over Moses and the NT over the OT.

- F. Josephus discusses this event and annual memorial in *Antiq.* 3.10.5 and 3.15.1.

- G. See Special Topic: The Passover.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PASSAGE

- A. YHWH's instructions about the Passover, Exod. 12:1-14.
- B. YHWH's instructions about the unleavened bread, Exod. 12:15-20.
- C. Moses' instructions to the people, Exod. 12:21-27 (their response, 12:28).
- D. Historical narrative of the events that night, Exod. 12:29-42.
- E. YHWH's instructions about foreigners, Exod. 12:43-49.
- F. Summary, Exod. 12:50-51.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:1-13

¹Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. ³Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. ⁴Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ⁷Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its

entrails. ¹⁰And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. ¹¹Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD’S Passover. ¹²For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

12:2 “it is to be the first month of the year to you” This is the month *Nisan* (March – April, cf. Lev. 23:5,24-25). See Special Topic: ANE Calendars.

12:3 “the congregation of Israel” There are several words and phrases that denote the assembled/gathered people of God.

1. Exod. 12:1,6,47 – “the congregation of Israel” (BDB 417 II)
2. Exod. 12:6 – “the whole assembly” (BDB 874), see Special Topic: Church (*ekklesia*)
3. Exod. 12:16 (twice) – “a holy assembly” (BDB 896 plus ADJECTIVE BDB 872)
4. Exod. 12:41 – “all the hosts of the LORD” (BDB 481 CONSTRUCT BDB 838; see Special Topic: Lord of Hosts)
5. Exod 12:31,35,37,42,50,51 – “the sons of Israel” (BDB 119 CONSTRUCT BDB 975)

▣ **“on the tenth”** The Egyptians divided their months into three tenths.

12:4 “if the household is too small” God always makes provision for the poor (see Special Topic: Sacrifices in Mesopotamia and Israel and Their Significance). Later Judaism stipulated that ten adults could use one lamb (BDB 961).

12:5 “an unblemished” This is not a reference to color but to the health and physical characteristics of the breed (cf. Exod. 29:1; Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1,6,9; 4:3,23,28,32, etc.). One must give God the best they have. See Special Topic: Blameless, Innocent, Guiltless, Without Reproach.

▣ **“a year old”** The rabbis say the Hebrew means that it was to have been born within a year, not an exact age.

12:6 “You shall keep it” This word “keep” (BDB 1038, cf. Exod. 16:23; Num. 19:9) basically means “to guard,” “to watch.” Each family must choose a healthy lamb or goat and carefully feed it and watch over it for a period of time (i.e., the tenth of the month until the fourteenth).

▣ **“at twilight”** This is literally “the space between the two evenings” (BDB 107 and BDB 787, cf. Exod. 16:12; 29:39,41; 30:8; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3,5,11,35; 28:4,8). Some say this refers to late afternoon (Talmud), while others say it refers to the time between sunset and the appearance of the first star (Samaritans). Remember, twilight is the beginning of a new Jewish day (i.e., Gen. 1:5,8, etc.). see Special Topic: Day (*yom*).

12:7 “take some of the blood” At this time there were no priests. This was a family affair. It demanded a faith response (cf. Heb. 11:28). Each household had to act on God’s word through Moses.

The blood was later the part of the animal that represented life. Life belongs to God (cf. Lev. 17:11,14).

▣ **“two doorposts. . . lintel”** This relates to the ANE belief that the threshold was sacred (cf. Gen. 4:7; Deut. 6:9; 11:20). Our modern custom of carrying a bride over the threshold is an example of this superstition.

It is not by accident that the later mezuzahs (Hebrew for “doorpost,” cf. Deut. 6:9; 11:20) were placed on the right side doorpost. YHWH delivered them by His word but they had to obey and place the blood on the doorposts and lintel. YHWH’s people must continue to obey His word!

▣ **“lintel”** This (BDB 1054) refers to either the top board or a small window above the door.

12:8 “They shall eat the flesh” This shows that it was not a sin offering.

▣ **“roasted”** This was an ancient method of cooking, somewhat like barbequing outside. The whole point is the rapid cooking; no time for normal preparations.

See note about the range of meaning involved in “boiled” (BDB 143) in F. F. Bruce’s, *Answers to Questions*, pp. 211-212. It can mean (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 433-435)

1. cook (cf. Deut. 16:7)
2. bake (cf. 2 Sam. 13:8)
3. boil with water (cf. Exod. 12:9)
4. roast with fire (cf. 2 Chr. 35:13)

Here, “with water,” denotes a prohibition to boiling (#3).

▣ **“unleavened bread”** The unleavened bread and the roasting show the time factor of haste. Leaven is not always a symbol of sin (see Special Topic: Leaven).

▣ **“bitter herbs”** The rabbis believe they are symbolic of the bitter suffering of the Hebrews while in slavery (cf. Exod. 1:14; Deut. 16:3). The term (BDB 601) is used in this sense in Lam. 3:19.

12:11 This verse emphasizes their readiness for travel. Sandals were not usually worn in the house.

▣ **“it is the LORD’s Passover”** This meal was prepared and eaten in haste because the Egyptians would soon drive out Israel from their land. The Lord’s last plague is so devastating against

1. Egyptian families
2. Egyptian gods (cf. Exod. 12:12)
3. Egyptian society

YHWH will see the blood on the door and His agent of death (cf. Exod. 4:24; 2 Sam. 24:16-17; 2 Kgs. 19:35) will spare that home.

▣ **“the LORD’s Passover”** This sacrificial domestic feast goes by several names.

1. Exod. 12:11,27; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16, “the LORD’s Passover,” emphasizing His sparing or protecting the blood-smearred homes
2. Exod. 12:27, “a Passover sacrifice to the LORD,” which focuses on the lamb being dedicated to the Lord.
3. Exod. 34:25, “the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover,” which uses the term as a title for the feast itself

For a definition of “Passover,” see Special Topic: The Passover.

12:12 “For I will” Notice the number of the PERSONAL SINGULAR PRONOUNS in Exod. 12:12-13. YHWH Himself will act. The idols of Egypt cannot act (i.e., in protection).

▣ **“all the firstborn”** This was a selective judgment. Remember that the Egyptians had been killing all of the Hebrew male children for years! Also, Pharaoh’s son was considered to be a god (i.e., son of the sun god, *Ra*), just like his father. We know that Rameses II’s first son did not succeed him. See Special Topic: Firstborn.

The combining of Passover and Unleavened Bread may have occurred because both deal with “firsts.”

1. Passover is related to firstborn of humans and cattle (usually in spring, cf. Exod. 13:1-16).
2. Unleavened Bread is related to the offering of first fruits, probably of the barley harvest (first grain ready for harvest in the spring).

▣ **“man and beast”** This shows the corporality of a man and his property (cf. Jos. 7:24-25). It could also be another way of showing YHWH’s control over Egyptian gods (cf. Num. 33:4).

▣ **“against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment”** Each plague dealt with an Egyptian deity. The firstborn dealt with the concept that Pharaoh is the son of *Ra*, the sun god. This was also the claim of his firstborn son.

▣ **“I am the LORD”** See notes at Exod. 3:14-16.

Notice in this verse that Israel’s Deity is YHWH, while the Egyptian gods are called *elohim* (i.e., “gods”). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

12:13 “The blood shall be a sign for you” It was a sign of their faith and obedience, not so much a sign for the Death Angel’s (i.e., YHWH’s agent) information.

There are several “signs” (BDB 16) in the OT.

1. a sign (or mark) for Cain’s protection – Gen. 4:15
2. a rainbow for no more floods – Gen. 9:12-17
3. the blood on the door – Exod. 12:13
4. the Sabbath – Exod. 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12,20
5. plate made from the censers of Korah – Num. 16:36-40
6. phylacteries and frontlets – Deut. 6:8; 11:18
7. the stones taken from the midst of the Jordan – Jos. 4:6
8. certain words spoken by Philistines to Jonathan – 1 Sam. 14:10
9. agricultural crops over three seasons – 2 Kgs. 19:29-34; Isa. 37:30
10. movement of shadow on the stairs – 2 Kgs. 20:8-11; Isa. 38:5-8
11. birth of a son to Ahaz – Isa. 7:11,14
12. an altar in Egypt – Isa. 19:19-22
13. YHWH made known to the nations – Isa. 66:18-19 (cf. Isa. 11:10,11-16; 19:22)
14. mark on forehead of faithful followers in Jerusalem – Ezek. 9:4 (cf. Rev. 7:3; 14:1)

See NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1224-1228, “Sign and Symbol: Theology of.”

▣ **“I see”** This is anthropomorphic language describing YHWH as if He were a physical person instead of the eternal Spirit. See Special Topic: God Described as Human.

▣ **“no plague will befall you”** The clear distinction between Israel and Egypt continues (see full note at Exod. 8:22).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:14-20

¹⁴Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. ¹⁵Seven days you shall

eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and *another* holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷You shall also observe the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. ¹⁸In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien or a native of the land. ²⁰You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”

12:14 “this day will be a memorial to you” Israel must remember what YHWH did for them (cf. Exod. 13:9). They must teach their children every year about these events and their significance (cf. Deut. 4:9,10; 6:7,20-25; 11:19; 12:26; 31:13; 32:46).

The rabbis later said the annual event involved only the Passover meal but not putting blood on the door.

▣ **“a permanent ordinance”** The word “permanent” is *‘olam* (BDB 761, cf. Exod. 12:17; Lev. 3:17; 7:36; Num. 10:8); see Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*). It must be interpreted in light of its context, both Pentateuch and canon (cf. Acts 15; Galatians 3; Hebrews).

For “ordinance” (BDB 349) see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

This was a one-time historical/theological event but it had truth and consequences for all generations who would be under the Mosaic Covenant. God’s acts reveal God’s character. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

12:15-20 This strophe seems to be a later editorial addition combining the Feast of Passover with the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

12:15 “Seven days” This is a uniquely ANE division of time (cf. Gen. 2:1-2), which probably relates to the phases of the moon.

▣ **“leaven”** Leaven has several purposes in the OT.

1. symbol of haste
2. symbol of sin
3. symbol of permeation
4. a part of regular sacrifices

See Special Topic: Leaven

▣ **“that person shall be cut off from Israel”** This idiom (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 729-731) can refer to

1. death (cf. Exod. 31:14; Lev. 20:2; 23:30)
2. no descendants
3. excommunication from the community (cf. Exod. 12:19)

12:16 “a holy assembly” A “holy assembly” (BDB 896) was a way of referring to a regular festival of Israel (cf. Leviticus 23) and not a Sabbath. Israel used festivals for theological and educational purposes. See Special Topic: Feasts of Israel.

For “holy” (BDB 872) see Special Topic: Holy.

▣ **“no work at all shall be done on them, except. . .”** Notice the practical provision for food preparation. The cessation of work denotes the sacredness of the day, as it does the weekly Sabbath (cf. Exod. 20:9-10; 31:14-15; Jer. 17:22; also the fast day of Lev. 16:29 (i.e., Day of Atonement)).

12:17 “the Feast of Unleavened Bread” Note how an agricultural feast is used for an event memorial (cf. Deut. 16:1-8). See Special Topic: Feasts of Israel.

▣ **“your hosts”** The term “hosts” (BDB 838) has a military connotation (cf. Exod. 7:4; 12:41). Israel will organize herself by tribes and will travel in military order.

▣ **“generations”** It is difficult to know how long a generation was thought to last. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 931, lists several different ways.

1. Gen 15:16 – about one hundred years
2. Num. 1:1-25:18 – about forty years
3. modern scholars (because of the different texts given for the Israelite’s time in Egypt) suggest twenty-five years

12:19 This shows God’s concern for the Gentiles being included and also for the purity of Israel’s rituals. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:21-22

²¹Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover *lamb*. ²²You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.

12:21 “elders” This refers to the older male leaders of the tribes. See Special Topic: Elders.

▣ **“Go and take. . .and slay”** These are three IMPERATIVES. These instructions were not suggestions but the very means of deliverance.

1. go (lit. “draw out”) – BDB 604, KB 645, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. take – BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. slay – BDB 1006, KB 1458, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

▣ **“the Passover *lamb*”** This term (BDB 820) has several connotations. Here it denotes the lamb or goat for each family or group of families.

12:22 “hyssop” This (BDB 23) was a small, common, bushy desert plant with hairy leaves (cf. 1 Kgs. 4:33). See UBS, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, pp. 129-130.

The book *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, by James M. Freeman (p. 223) notes that hyssop was connected to the concept of purification and was even eaten for this purpose.

▣ **“in the basin”** This same word (BDB 706 I) can mean “threshold” (BDB 706 II, cf. the LXX and the Vulgate). If this is the intended meaning, it would refer to the worn place at the door as the receptacle for the blood. F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions* (p. 8), suggests that the “threshold” is implied because then the four parts of the door would be covered (i.e., lintel, both sides and bottom, i.e., threshold).

This book by F. F. Bruce has have been so valuable to me. I highly recommend it to Bible students.

☐ **“none of you shall go outside the door of his house”** The blood was a sign to YHWH’s angel. It was a symbol of protection and care for the faithful Israelites. There was danger in the Egyptian streets that night. God’s judgment apparently could affect more than just the firstborn.

The Passover is a home feast, performed by family members and focused in a local residence (possibly with neighbors).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:23-27

²³For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. ²⁴And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. ²⁵When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. ²⁶And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ ²⁷you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshiped.

12:23 “the LORD will pass over. . .the destroyer” There is a distinction between these two here, but not always (cf. Exod. 4:24). For more information on the “destroying angel,” see Gen. 19:15; 2 Sam. 24:15-17; 2 Kgs. 19:35; 1 Chr. 21:15; 1 Cor. 10:10; Heb. 11:28. YHWH, not a separate evil entity, controls death. There is no grim reaper!

YHWH’s special angel also appears in Exod. 14:19; 23:20-23. Apparently this angelic servant can function as

1. destroyer (Exod. 12:23; 33:2; 1 Chr. 21:12)
2. protector and guide (Exod. 14:19; 23:20,22,23; Num. 20:16; Ps. 78:14)
3. punisher (Exod. 23:21; 32:34; Ps. 78:49; Isa. 63:10)
4. sign of YHWH’s personal presence (cf. Exod. 33:14-16; Deut. 4:37; Isa. 63:9)

This special angel leaves because of Israel’s unfaithfulness in Exod. 33:14-16.

Sometimes destruction is caused by a group of angels (cf. Ps. 78:49; Ezek. 9:1-8).

12:24,26 This educational emphasis is similar to Deut. 4:9; 6:7-9,20-25; 11:29; 32:46. Parental training of the children about religious matters was/is crucial (cf. Ps. 78:5-6).

12:25 “the land which the LORD will give you” This is a reference to Gen. 15:12-21 and refers to the land of Canaan. The initial promise of YHWH to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3) involved

1. a seed (male child)
2. a land (homeland)

The OT focuses on the land, while the NT focuses on the “seed.”

12:27 “it is a Passover sacrifice” This shows that Lev. 17:11 has some connection! The term (BDB 820) can refer to the sacrifice or to the feast.

☐ **“but spared our homes”** See note at Exod. 8:22.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:28

²⁸Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

12:28 This is a crucial theological comment. Obedience is crucial. See Special Topic: Keep.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:29-32

²⁹Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. ³⁰Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. ³¹Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, “Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. ³²Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.”

12:30 “there was a great cry in Egypt” This was predicted in Exod. 11:6. It is meant to parallel the great cry of pain the Hebrews exclaimed when their male children were killed by Pharaoh’s order (cf. Exod. 1:22).

12:31-32 Pharaoh gives Moses and Aaron six commands (i.e., IMPERATIVES), which is surprising in light of Exod. 10:28.

1. rise up – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. get out – BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. go – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. worship (lit. “serve”) – BDB 712, KB 773, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. take – BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
6. go – same as #3

12:32 “and bless me also” This cryptic phrase seems to be

1. an acknowledgment of YHWH’s supreme power and reality
2. sarcastic in the sense of “leave me and Egypt alone” (i.e., by your leaving)
3. he had asked this earlier (cf. Exod. 8:8,28); maybe he thought they would only be gone three days (cf. Exod. 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 8:27). In Exod. 14:5 Pharaoh first realized the Israelites were leaving permanently.
4. either Pharaoh asking Moses to remove any additional plagues or curses (cf. Exod. 8:8,28; 9:28) or it is his growing belief and respect for YHWH

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:33-34

³³The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, “We will all be dead.” ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, *with* their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders.

12:33 Egypt’s actions (i.e., driving them out and giving them treasure) were motivated by fear! Exodus 12:36 attributes their actions to YHWH. He affected the people’s minds, as He did Pharaoh’s.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:35-36

³⁵Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; ³⁶and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

12:35 “they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing” This is a fulfillment of Exod. 3:21-22 and 11:2. They would use these items to build the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31). It is possibly referred to in Gen. 15:14 (but this text could refer to livestock).

Clothing (BDB 971) is included in the list of valuable things (silver, gold). In the ANE there were several ways to store wealth/value.

1. food stores
2. weights of precious metals
3. clothing, often bejeweled and made with gold, silver trim or thread
4. precious stones (i.e., rare and beautiful, cf. Exod. 28:17-20), but these are not mentioned here

12:36 “they let them have their request” The King James Version has “lent” (one possible meaning), but the Hebrew term in this context means “give” (BDB 981, KB 1371, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*). Context determines word meaning.

▣ **“they plundered the Egyptians”** This is a military term (BDB 664, KB 717, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*) for the spoils of war (cf. Exod. 3:22)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:37-39

³⁷Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. ³⁸A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. ³⁹They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

12:37 “Rameses to Succoth” These geographical locations are uncertain. Rameses (BDB 947, cf. Exod. 1:11) was the favorite delta capital of Rameses II and his sons. It was near Goshen in the eastern delta.

Succoth (BDB 697, cf. Exod. 13:20) means “cattle sheds” (cf. Gen. 33:17) or “booths.”

See Special Topic: Route of the Exodus.

▣ **“about six hundred thousand men”** This same number is mentioned in Exod. 38:26 and Num. 11:21. When women and children are added the number swells to 2 to 3 million. This number is so large that scholars have looked for ways to reduce it (see F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 9). One possible way is the term “thousands.” It can mean “clan” or “tribe” (cf. Jdgs. 6:15; 1 Sam. 10:19; Micah 5:2); see Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*).

▣ **“men”** This Hebrew word for males (BDB 149) denotes men of strength and vitality (i.e., men of fighting age, cf. 1 Sam. 16:18; 1 Chr. 12:8,28; 2 Chr. 13:3). Note its usage simply as men of the age of vigorous activity in Exod. 10:11.

12:38 “A mixed multitude also went up with them” This group is the source of the trouble in Num. 11:4. They were possibly made up of

1. Egyptian spouses
2. other Semitic slaves
3. Egyptian undesirables
4. converted Egyptians (cf. Exod. 9:20-21)

12:39 “they were driven out of Egypt” This VERB (BDB 176, KB 204) occurs only twice in the *Pual* stem, here and in Job 30:5.

The *Piel* occurs in YHWH's predictions in Exod. 6:1 and 11:1. They were driven out because of the plagues of YHWH. The Egyptians are no longer fearful of their numbers, but of their God!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:40-41

⁴⁰Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

12:40-41 These are summary verses.

12:41 “four hundred and thirty years” There are several different ways to look at this number.

1. Gen. 15:13 says it was “four hundred years” and in Gen. 15:16 it says “the fourth generation”
2. Acts 7:6 repeats Gen. 15:13
3. Gal. 3:7 agrees with Exod. 12:41
4. the rabbis say it goes from the birth of Isaac to the exodus
5. the LXX says from Israel's sojourn in Egypt and Canaan
6. Calvin says it is just a round number

See Special Topic: The Date of the Exodus

A new book by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, describes how oral cultures of the ANE passed on their literary traditions and information. It has been very helpful to me in understanding some of the divergent details (i.e., here numbers) recorded in different books of the Bible. I recommend it to you!

Also, one of my favorite authors, F. F. Bruce, has a good brief discussion in *Answers to Questions*, pp. 169-170.

▣ **“to the very day”** This serves to emphasize

1. the exact fulfillment of prophecy
2. precise dating of the event (cf. Exod. 12:51)
3. idiomatic way to verify a past act/event (cf. Gen. 7:11,13; 17:23,26; Exod. 12:51; 19:1; Deut. 32:48; Jos. 5:11)

See Special Topic: Day (*yom*).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:42

⁴²It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

12:42 God's word is to be obeyed and perpetuated. It is not to be altered (cf. Exod. 12:28,50; Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

▣ There is a word play between

1. YHWH watching – BDB 1037
2. Israel watching (i.e., “observing”) annually from this day forward – BDB 1037

The same root (BDB 1036) denotes a

1. guarding
2. watching
3. observing

Here it probably denotes a vigil. God acted; Israel watched and awaited the time to depart in haste.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:43-49

⁴³The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; ⁴⁴but every man’s slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. ⁴⁵A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. ⁴⁶It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. ⁴⁷All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. ⁴⁸But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. ⁴⁹The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.”

12:44-45 This is a technical list of three types of non-covenant people.

1. purchased slaves
2. free resident aliens
3. free foreign hired help

12:44 “but every man’s slave purchased with money” Owning a slave was not prohibited (cf. Lev. 22:11; 25:44-45). Slavery was a common experience in the ANE, both

1. by birth
2. by purchase
3. by war

See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, pp. 80-90.

▣ **“circumcised”** This (BDB 557 II and Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, pp. 46-48) goes back to God’s command to Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:9-14). It is described in Lev. 12:3.

Circumcision (BDB 557 II) was not an uncommon rite in the ANE. All of the surrounding people circumcised their children at puberty except possibly the Assyrians, Babylonians, Hivites, or Horites of central Palestine and the Philistines (Aegean people) who invaded the southern coast of Palestine in the 1200’s B.C. (cf. Jer. 9:25-26). However, circumcision had a religious purpose for the Israelites. It was always an outer sign of an inner faith (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11-13).

12:46-48 This lists the guidelines for who/how the Passover is to be observed.

1. eaten in a single house
2. do not bring any of the flesh of the sacrifice outside the house
3. do not break any of its bones (cf. Num. 9:12)
4. it is for everyone who is circumcised of the congregation of Israel (native and sojourners)

12:49 “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” Israel’s laws were to be for all people. They were to be fair and they were to be of a religious nature and focus (cf. Lev. 24:22; Num. 9:14; 15:15,16,29). For “law” (BDB 435) see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:50-51

⁵⁰Then all the sons of Israel did so; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹And on that same day the LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the major truth or symbol of the Passover?
2. What does the lamb represent?
3. Why was the Passover joined to the Feast of the Unleavened Bread?
4. Is leaven here a symbol of sin?
5. What was the purpose or significance of the death of the firstborn?
6. What is the origin of the seven-day week?
7. Who is the destroyer? Is he an evil angel?
8. Why do scholars try to reduce the number of people involved in the exodus?
9. Why is there such a problem with “430 years” in Exod. 12:41?
10. What is the significance of Exod. 12:49?

EXODUS 13

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Consecration of the First-born	The Firstborn Consecrated	The Consecration of the Firstborn	Dedication of the First-born	The First-born
13:1-2	13:1-2	13:1-2	13:1-2	13:1-2
	The Feast of Unleavened Bread		The Festival of Unleavened Bread	The Feast of Unleavened Bread
13:3-10	13:3-10	13:3-10	13:3-10	13:3-10
	The Law of the Firstborn		The First-born	The First-born
13:11-16	13:11-16	13:11-16	13:11-16	13:11-16
God Leads the People	The Wilderness Way	Israel's Deliverance (13:17-14:31)	The Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire	The Departure of the Israelites
13:17-22	13:17-22	13:17-14:4	13:17-22	13:17-20 13:21-22

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Brief Outline
 1. In Exod. 13:1-2 YHWH speaks to Moses.
 2. In Exod. 13:3-16 Moses speaks to the people.
 3. Exod. 13:17-22 is a later summary.
- B. Also note how the subjects change.
 1. Exod. 13:1-2 deals with the firstborn (i.e., Israel was YHWH's firstborn, cf. Exod. 4:22).
 2. Exod. 13:3-10 deals with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

3. Exod. 13:11-16 returns to the subject of #1.
4. Exod. 13:17-22 introduces the route of the exodus and YHWH's special presence in the pillars (cloud and fire).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:1-2

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.”

13:1 “Sanctify to Me” This is a *Piel* IMPERATIVE (BDB 872, KB 1073) of the VERB, *kadosh*. See Special Topic: Holy. It meant something dedicated to God for His purposes. The firstborn (lit. “opens the womb”) belongs to YHWH to signify He is the giver of life!

▣ **“every firstborn”** This was a way of showing ownership. This same imagery is seen in

1. one day a week, the Sabbath showed God's ownership of time; see Special Topic: Sabbath (OT)
2. ten percent (see Special Topic: Tithe) giving showed God's ownership of all material things
3. the first of the harvest given to God means all the harvest belongs to Him
4. the terminology applied to Israel collectively in Exod. 4:22 denotes His special ownership of them (cf. Exod. 19:5-6)

▣ **“Israel”** See Special Topic: Israel (the name).

▣ **“both of man and beast”** This showed God's ownership of Israel and her livestock. Remember, the plague killed the firstborn of Egypt's children and remaining livestock (cf. Exod. 12:12).

Later in Deut. 15:19-23 the instructions on how to deal with the firstborn of the herds is specified. Numbers 18:15-20 describes how the clean firstborn animals became food for the priests. Leviticus 27:26-27 gives the instructions of how to redeem the unclean animals' firstborn.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:3-10

³Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten. ⁴On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. ⁵It shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month. ⁶For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. ⁷Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. ⁸You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ⁹And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

13:3 “Remember” This is a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE functioning as a *Qal* IMPERATIVE. This is a recurrent theme (cf. Deut. 5:15; 7:18; 8:2,18; 9:7,27; 11:2; 15:15; 16:3,12; 24:9,18,22; 25:17; 32:7)!

I like the quote (by Leslie C. Allen) from NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 1103, “the Exodus was not simply an event in history but a window through which to glimpse God’s redemptive will for his people and individual believers in every generation.”

See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“for by a powerful hand”** This anthropomorphic imagery (i.e., Exod. 3:19) is repeated in Exod. 13:9 and 16. See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“LORD”** See Special Topic: Names for Deity, YHWH, D.

▣ **“leavened”** This was a symbol of haste, not evil, in this context. See Special Topic: Leaven.

13:4 “Abib” See Special Topic: ANE Calendars.

13:5 For information on these tribes who inhabited the land of Canaan see Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

These tribes’ judgment was predicted by YHWH in Gen. 15:12-21.

▣ **“which He swore to your fathers to give you”** The promise is repeated several times.

1. Abraham – Gen. 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:18; 17:8
2. Isaac – Gen. 26:3-4
3. Jacob – Gen. 28:4,13-14; 35:12

▣ **“a land flowing with milk and honey”** This was a way to express the land of Canaan’s agricultural blessings (cf. Exod. 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev. 20:24; Num. 13:27; 14:8; 16:13-14; Deut. 6:3; 11:9; 26:9; 27:3; 31:20; Jos. 5:6). It later became the Persian name for the land beyond the river (i.e., Canaan).

▣ **“you shall observe”** Literally this is “serve this service.”

1. VERB – BDB 712, KB 773, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*
2. NOUN – BDB 715

Obedience is crucial (cf. Exod. 13:10; Deuteronomy 27-30; Luke 6:46; James 2:14-20, see Special Topic: Keep; also note Deut. 4:2,6; 16:12; 30:8; YHWH’s covenant was a “conditional covenant”). See Special Topic: Covenant.

13:6-10 These verses describe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as Exodus 12 described the Passover Feast. These two feasts were at some point later combined into one annual feast (cf. Leviticus 23).

13:8 “tell your son” The feast days of Israel (see Special Topic: Feasts of Israel) were meant to inform later generations of YHWH’s great acts (cf. Exod. 12:26-27; 13:14; 10:2; Deut. 4:9-10; 5:29; 6:2,13,20-25; 11:19; 32:46). Parents were to pass on the faith to the next generation at home!

13:9 Israel had three pneumatic devices to help them remember the exodus and YHWH’s love for them.

1. a sign on your hand – Exod. 12:4; 13:9,16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18; the following is from my commentary on Deut. 6:8

Deut. 6:8 “you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead” Originally this phrase seemed to be used as a metaphor (cf. LXX). The context is lifestyle teaching opportunities for God’s word. However, the rabbis took this verse very literally and they began to wrap a leather strap around their left hand with a small box (*tefillin*) attached

which contained selected Scriptures from the Torah. The same kind of box was also strapped to their forehead. These “phylacteries” or “frontals” (BDB 377) are also mentioned in Deut. 11:18 and Matt. 23:5.

2. sign on your forehead (lit. “between the eyes”) – these were called “phylacteries” (cf. Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Matt. 23:5; see James Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 367-377)
3. later a metal box containing several Scriptures (i.e., Exod. 13:1-10,11-16; Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21) was placed on the door frame of the house (i.e., where the blood of the Passover was placed). The following is from my commentary on Deut. 6:9:

Deut. 6:9 “**And you shall write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates**” This again is a symbolic gesture that God is to have a part, not only in our home life, but in our social life (i.e., gate, cf. 21:19; 22:15,24). As the threshold (BDB 265) of the home was often seen as the place of the demonic in the Greek and Roman worlds, in the Jewish world it represented the presence of God (i.e., the place where the blood of the Passover was placed, cf. Exod. 12:7,22,23).

“Your gates” (BDB 1044) may refer to the place of social meeting and justice (i.e., like the city gates). Usually, these small boxes and door markers (*mezuzah*) contained several set passages of Scripture: Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Exod. 13:1-10,11-16.

▣ **“law”** See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

13:10 **“ordinance”** See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:11-16

¹¹“Now when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, ¹²you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. ¹³But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ ¹⁶So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt.”

13:11 Notice that this verse denotes the night of the Passover, while Exod. 13:1-10 was written later.

▣ **“the land of the Canaanite”** There are several tribes listed that inhabited Canaan (see Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine) but two of them served as collective terms for them all.

1. Canaanite – denoting all the tribes but especially those who lived along the coast
2. Amorites – denoting all the tribes but especially those who dwelt in the higher elevations

▣ **“as He swore to you and your father”** This refers to the promise of Gen. 12:12-21. See note at Exod. 13:5.

13:12

NASB

“devote”

NKJV, NRSV,

JPSOA, LXX “set apart”

TEV “offer”

NJB, REB “make over”

This VERB (BDB 716, KB 778, *Hiphil* PERFECT with *waw*) is also used of YHWH “passing over” the blood-marked homes in Exod. 12:12 (*Qal* PERFECT with *waw*). As YHWH “passed over,” so now the firstborn passes over to Him.

The firstborn males died in the last plague, so now the firstborn males of Abraham’s descendants and their beasts belong to YHWH.

13:13 “redeem” This VERB (BDB 804, KB 911) appears three times in this verse. It basically denotes buying someone out of slavery. See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

This involved the payment of a price for the humans and animals or a sacrifice of the animals.

These “firstborn” servants of YHWH will later become the Levitical Priests and Levites.

In Numbers 18:16, the price to redeem a firstborn son was five shekels; see Special Topic: ANE Weights and Measures (meterology).

13:14 See note at Exod. 13:8.

13:15 “stubborn” This is the Hebrew VERB (BDB 904, KB 1151, *Hiphil* PERFECT) “hardened.” See note at Exod. 7:3.

▣ **“the LORD killed”** Notice YHWH Himself (cf. Exod. 11:4; 12:12,29) is the agent, not the angel (cf. Exod. 12:23). However, remember all causality was attributed to God (cf. Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6).

▣ **“I . . . I”** The MT has the PRONOUN “I” (BDB 58) and the implied form of the second VERB.

The PRONOUN is אָנֹכִי, but TEV has the collective sense “we” (אָנֹכִי), which makes sense in this context (see UBS *Handbook*, p. 321).

▣ **“redeem”** See note at Exod. 13:13.

13:16 See note at Exod. 13:9.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:17-22

¹⁷Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.” ¹⁸Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. ¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.” ²⁰Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²²He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

13:17 See Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus.

▣ **“the way of the land of the Philistines”** This would have been the shortest route to Canaan along the Mediterranean coast, but it had many Egyptian forts along its path. The Egyptians called it “the road/way of Horus.”

This verse reveals the reason God did not take them this shorter route (cf. Exod. 14:11-12; Num. 14:1-4; Deut. 17:16).

The term “Philistines” is an anachronism (cf. 1 Chr. 1:12), since this did not appear in Canaan until the time of Rameses III (1187-1156 B.C.).

▣ **“change their minds”** This is the Hebrew VERB “to be sorry” or “to repent” (BDB 636, KB 688, *Niphal* IMPERFECT). The RSV translates the VERB “repent.” NRSV changes it to “change their minds” (cf. NJB). The JPSOA has “may have a change of heart.” See Special Topic: Repentance (OT).

13:18 “the Red Sea” See Special Topic: The Red Sea.

▣ **“the sons of Israel went up in martial array”** This ADJECTIVE (BDB 332) means “battle array” (cf. Jos. 1:14; 4:12-13; Jdgs. 7:11). This is implied in the word “hosts” (cf. Exod. 12:41; see Special Topic: Lord of Hosts).

The LXX translates this as “Now in the fifth generation” (cf. NEB, REB), but this demands an emendation. The UBS Text Project (p. 103) gives the MT a “C” rating (i.e., considerable doubt). It suggests the wording “and in five groups” as a possibility.

The Aramaic Targums, the Vulgate, and Rashi translate it as referring to weapons (“armed with weapons”), which the Israelites would have gotten from the bodies of the dead Egyptian soldiers who drowned in the Red Sea, that floated to the side where Israel camped.

One of my favorite sources for OT information is Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel* (2 vols). He mentions that an Arabic dictionary defines this root as referring to an army on the march with

1. a vanguard
2. a main body
3. a left flank
4. a right flank
5. a rear guard

thereby, the root for “five” (pp. 216, 217).

13:19 “the bones of Joseph” Joseph was embalmed by the Egyptians but he wanted to be buried in the Promised Land (cf. Gen. 50:24,25; Jos. 24:32; Heb. 11:22).

▣ **“solemnly swear”** This is a *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 989, KB 1396), which denotes intensity.

▣ **“surely take care”** This is another INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE (*Qal*) and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 823, KB 955), which denotes intensity.

13:20 “Succoth. . .Etham” See Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus.

▣ **“wilderness”** See Special Topic: The Wildernesses of the Exodus.

13:21-22 “a pillar of cloud. . .a pillar of fire” This refers to the special cloud (“pillar,” BDB 765) representing YHWH’s personal presence that led and protected the Hebrew slaves as they left Egypt and

wandered in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19,24; 33:9,10; Deut. 1:33; Neh. 9:12,19; Ps. 78:14; 105:39). This cloud/pillar disappeared after the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

This was called the “*Shekinah* Cloud of Glory” by the rabbis (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19,24; 33:9-10; Ps. 78:14; 99:7). It accomplished several things for the Israelites.

1. symbol of YHWH’s personal presence (*shekinah* means “to dwell with”)
2. it separated Israel from Pharaoh’s elite troops (cf. Exod. 14:19-20)
3. it led Israel (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; Num. 9:17-23)
4. it covered them and protected them from the heat (cf. Ps. 105:39)
5. it lit up the camp by night, even allowed Israel to travel at night (cf. Exod. 13:21; Neh. 9:12,19)
6. it caused the nations to fear Israel (cf. Exod. 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25; Jos. 2:9)
7. it finally disappeared when Israel crossed the Jordan (cf. Exod. 16:35; Jos. 5:12), but reappeared at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8).

13:21 “fire” Fire often symbolized God’s presence.

1. blazing torah – Gen. 15:17
2. burning bush – Exod. 3:2
3. pillar of fire – here; Ps. 78:14
4. fire and smoke on Mt. Sinai – Exod. 19:18; 20:18; 24:17
5. lightning falling in destruction – Gen. 19:24; Job 1:16
6. come down in fire – Isa. 66:15
7. execute judgment by fire – Lev. 10:2; Num. 11:1-3; Isa. 30:30; 66:16; 2 Thess. 1:7
8. His throne is surrounded by “the burning ones” (cf. Isa. 6:2-3; i.e., *Seraphim*, see Special Topic: *Seraphim*)

See Special Topic: Fire.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why are the regulations mentioned in Exodus 12 repeated in Exodus 13?
2. Why does the firstborn belong to YHWH? What does it symbolize?
3. Why did YHWH give Israel the land of Canaan? Did it not belong to other peoples?
4. Where and to whom did YHWH promise Canaan? Why?
5. How was the firstborn male redeemed?
6. What is the practical significance of Exod. 13:8 and 14?
7. Why is the name “Philistines” unusual in Exod. 13:17?
8. Why did YHWH not take His people to Canaan by the shortest route?
9. Where is the Red Sea?

EXODUS 14

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Pharaoh in Pursuit	The Red Sea Crossing	Israel's Deliverance (13:17-14:31)	Crossing the Red Sea	From Etham to the Red Sea
14:1-4	14:1-4	14:1-4	14:1-4	14:1-4
				The Egyptians Pursue the Israelites
14:5-9	14:5-9	14:5-9	14:5-9	14:5-14
14:10-12	14:10-14	14:10-14	14:10-12	
The Sea Is Divided				
14:13-14			14:13-14	The Miracle of the Sea
14:15-18	14:15-18	14:15-18	14:15-18	14:15-18
14:19-20	14:19-20	14:19-20	14:19-20	14:19-31
14:21-25	14:21-25	14:21-25	14:21-25	
14:26-29	14:26-29	14:26-29	14:26-29	
14:30-31	14:30-31	14:30-31	14:30-31	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Exodus 14 is a prose description of the exodus, while chapter 15 is a poetic description. Also note Judges 4 and 5.

- B. For a good discussion of YHWH as the Divine warrior (i.e., Isa. 59:15c-20), see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 545-549.
- C. There are three main theories of the route of the exodus (see Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus).
1. the northern marshes along the Mediterranean Sea
 2. the central marshes of the Bitter Lakes
 3. the southern route, which took them across the northern tip of the body of water called the Red Sea today

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:1-4

¹Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. ³For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ ⁴Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

14:2 “Tell” This is a *Piel* IMPERATIVE (BDB 180, KB 210). YHWH is in full control.

1. He hardened Pharaoh’s heart, Exod. 14:4,8,17
2. He delivered them, Exod. 14:13
3. He fought for them, Exod. 14:14,25
4. He (His angel) separated the Egyptian army and the Israelites all night, Exod. 14:20
5. He split the Red Sea (by His staff in Moses’ hand), Exod. 14:21
6. He threw the Egyptian army into confusion (as He did the Canaanite armies in the conquest), Exod. 14:24
7. He caused their chariots to swerve (VERB’S meaning uncertain), Exod. 14:25
8. He closed the split in the Red Sea so as to destroy the entire Egyptian force that pursued, Exod. 14:27-28

Notice how Israel responded, Exod. 14:31!

▣ **“turn back and camp”** These are two commands (*Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) to retrace their route. To the Egyptians it looked like aimless wanderings and that the Israelites were trapped by the water.

▣ **“Pi-hahiroth”** F. B. Huey, *A Study Guide Commentary, Exodus*, p. 63, suggests the name is Egyptian and could mean

1. “region of salt marshes”
2. “house of the goddess Hathor”

The Hebrew root (BDB 809, cf. Num. 33:7) means “a place of meadows.” The location of the site is uncertain.

There has been speculation that the phrase means “mouth of the diggings,” and refers to a manmade channel which was dug during this period (i.e., 1290 B.C. by Seti I) passing near Qantara (cf. *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 90).

▣ **“Migdol”** This (BDB 154) means “watch tower.” There were many cities by this name. Its location, as most others in this context, is uncertain. Many current Bible study maps have been influenced by which of the three theories of the route of the exodus their producers hold: northern, central, or southern.

▣ **“Baal-zephon”** This (BDB 128) means “Lord of the north” (cf. Ps. 48:2; Isa. 14:13). This “sea” shows that Canaanite fertility worship had spread to Egypt. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE.

▣ **“by the sea”** The Israelites were trapped between the sea, the desert, and the Egyptian army. This could be the Mediterranean, the Bitter Lakes, or the Red Sea. See Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus.

14:3

NASB, NRSV	“wandering aimlessly”
NKJV	“bewildered”
TEV	“wandering around”
NJB	“wandering to and fro”
JPSOA	“astray in the land”
REB	“in difficult country”
LXX	“wandering in the land”
Peshitta	“strangers in the land”

This VERB (BDB 100, KB 115, *Niphal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is a rare word found only three times in the OT.

1. Exod. 14:3 – of people
2. Esther 3:15 – of people
3. Joel 1:18 – of cattle

The basic idea is “in confusion.”

14:4 “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” This emphasizes that God is sovereign. Several times in Exodus it says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and several times it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (see note at Exod. 4:21). The exact relationship between the two is uncertain. Nevertheless, it is obvious that God used Pharaoh and yet he was still responsible (see Special Topic: Predestination)! This is similar to Judas Iscariot.

▣ **“he will chase after them”** This is the fulfillment of Exod. 4:21. YHWH is in control of time, space, history.

▣ **“I will be honored”** This (BDB 457, cf. Exod. 14:17-18) is the Hebrew word, *kabod*, “glory.” See Special Topic: Glory (*kabod*, OT).

▣ **“and all his army”** The military force that Pharaoh had immediate access to was his royal guard. This was 600 chariots mentioned in Exod. 14:7,23, not the full Egyptian army which would have been spread throughout the Egyptian forts.

▣ **“the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD”** The plagues lasted about eighteen months and each one of them was an embarrassment to an Egyptian deity. YHWH was working with the Egyptians’ faith (cf. Exod. 9:20-21; 10:7) as He was with the Hebrews’ (cf. Exod. 14:18; 7:5,17).

See Special Topic: Know.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:5-9

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” ⁶So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; ⁷and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the *other* chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. ⁹Then the Egyptians chased after them *with all the horses and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

14:5 “What is this we have done” The Hebrews’ freedom made a drastic economic and social disruption to Egyptian culture.

14:6 “chariot” This instrument of war was developed by the Hittites of Asia Minor. They used a two or three-man chariot. At this time Egypt used their chariots for mobility only. See Special Topic: Chariots.

14:7 “select chariots” This (BDB 103, KB 119, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) means that these were the best or newest chariots and soldiers. They made up an elite royal force garrisoned at the delta capital. They were Pharaoh’s bodyguard.

▣ **“officers”** This term (BDB 1026 III) may refer to the second or third man in each chariot. Pictures of Egyptian chariots had only two occupants (see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 122).

14:8

NASB, NRSV	“boldly”
NKJV	“with boldness”
TEV	“triumphantly”
NJB	“confidently”
JPSOA, REV, NET	“defiantly”
LXX	“with a high hand”
Peshitta	“victoriously”

The ADVERB (BDB 926, KB 1202, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) basically means “to be high,” Here of “an uplifted hand.” It can refer to a geographical position, voice, or an attitude. Here it refers to the sense of victory the Israelis had (cf. Num. 33:3). The same form is found in Num. 15:30, translated “who sins defiantly.”

14:9 “chased after them” This VERB (BDB 922, KB 1191, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is a hunting term or military term for an active pursuit (cf. Gen. 31:25).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:10-12

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

14:10 “they became very frightened” In their fear they attacked God’s love and protection and Moses’ leadership (cf. Exod. 14:11-12). This is exactly what YHWH predicted in Exod. 13:17.

14:11-12 This is the first of many complaints from “the mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt (mostly in Exodus 15-17 and Numbers 14-17). They were not yet the covenant people, just a rag-tag bunch!

1. some unfaithful, cf. Exod. 15:25; 16:2; 17:2-3,7; Num. 20:3,13; Ezekiel 16; Hos. 2:16
2. some faithful, cf. Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:14-15,20

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:13-14

¹³But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

14:13 There are more commands in this verse by Moses to the people.

1. do not fear – BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. stand by – BDB 426, KB 427, *Hithpael* IMPERATIVE
3. see the salvation of the LORD – BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE; the VERB “see” is repeated three times in this verse.
 - a. see YHWH’s salvation
 - b-c. never see the Egyptian soldiers again!

▣ **“salvation”** This OT term (BDB 447) means “physical deliverance.” It is from the root “to be spacious” (cf. James 5:15). See Special Topic: Salvation (OT).

The Lord is called “Savior” several times in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 19:20; 43:3,11; 45:15,21; 49:26,60; 60:16; 63:8). This is carried over into the NT (cf. Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10-11; 3:4; Jude v. 25). What a great title and a great God!

▣ **“forever”** See Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*).

14:14 This is the essence of “Holy War.” YHWH acts; Israel watches (cf. Exod. 15:3; Deut. 1:30; 3:22; 20:4).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:15-18

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. ¹⁷As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.”

14:15 “Why are you crying out to Me” There is a time to pray and a time to act!

14:15-16 There are several commands from YHWH to Moses for the people.

1. tell, Exod. 14:15 – BDB 180, KB 210, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. go forward, Exod. 14:15 – BDB 652, KB 704, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. lift up your staff, Exod. 14:16 – BDB 926, KB 1202, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

4. stretch out your hand, Exod. 14:16 – BDB 639, KB 692, *Qal* IMPERATIVE. This is often associated with the plagues (cf. Exod. 6:6; 7:5,19; 8:5,6,16,17; 9:22,23; 10:12,13,21,22).
5. divide it, Exod. 14:16 – BDB 131, KB 149, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. Exod. 14:21; Neh. 9:11; Ps. 78:13; Isa. 63:12
6. go through the midst of the sea, Exod. 14:16 – BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

The staff represented YHWH’s power but Moses had to use it (Exod. 14:21). God chose to use human instrumentality (cf. Exod. 3:7-10)!

14:16 “on dry land” God controls the boundaries of water (cf. Gen. 1:9-10; Nah. 1:4). Here He splits and dries the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 14:16,27,29; 15:19; Jos. 2:10; Neh. 9:11); He split and dried the Jordan River in the conquest (cf. Jos. 3:17; 4:18,22,23; 5:1; Ps. 66:6). He splits and dries a river for Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kgs. 2:8.

14:17 This verse clearly shows YHWH’s sovereignty. See note at Exod. 14:2.

14:18 See note at Exod. 14:4.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:19-20

¹⁹The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. ²⁰So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

14:19 “The angel of God” The angel and the pillar seem to represent one reality—the presence of God (cf. Gen. 16:7-14; 22:15; Exod. 3:2). See Special Topic: The Angel of the Lord.

14:20 “the cloud along with the darkness” Usually the pillar was light at night. Therefore, this phrase

1. denotes the two aspects of the cloud (i.e., shade in daytime, fire at night)
2. shows the distinction between Egypt and Israel (i.e., light to Israel, darkness to the Egyptians (Targums, Symmachus)

☐ **“one did not come near the other”** This cloud kept the Egyptian army from attacking and the Israelites from surrendering. Notice YHWH again used a natural occurrence (i.e., the wind, Exod. 14:21), but with supernatural intensity and timing. It took “all night” for the wind to dry the ground (i.e., sea bed, cf. Exod. 14:16).

Just one more thought, the obvious supernatural aspect of this event is the water piles on both sides (Exod. 14:22,29). One side could be explained by the strong east wind (14:21), but not both sides!

Also note the eyewitness detail!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:21-25

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. ²²The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. ²⁴At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the

army of the Egyptians into confusion. ²⁵He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”

14:21 “Moses stretched out his. . .LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind” Notice the three elements mentioned: God, Moses, and the wind. God often uses natural means in supernatural ways.

▣ **“east wind”** This is *ruah* (BDB 924), which can mean “wind,” “breath,” “spirit.” See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

14:23 “horsemen” This refers to the two or three men in each chariot.

14:24 “morning watch” The Israelites crossed over between 2 and 6 a.m. Notice how precise the eyewitness’ testimony is.

▣ **“the LORD looked down”** This is anthropomorphic language (cf. Exod. 3:7-9). See Special Topic: God Described as Human.

▣ **“the pillar of fire and cloud”** This is the only place the full title appears. Usually they are listed separately, but often both are listed (i.e., “pillar of cloud,” “pillar of fire,” cf. Exod. 13:21,22; Num. 14:14; Deut. 31:15).

▣ **“into confusion”** The VERB (BDB 243, KB 251, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is used several times of YHWH’s acts of defeating Israel’s enemies (cf. Exod. 15:16; 23:27; Deut. 7:23; Jos. 10:10; Jdgs. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Sam. 22:15; 2 Chr. 15:6; Ps. 18:15; 144:6). YHWH fought for them. It was His victory! This is “Holy War” terminology.

14:25 “He caused their chariot wheels to swerve” See note on God’s sovereignty shown in this chapter at Exod. 14:2.

This VERB (BDB 693, KB 747, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) has several connotations.

NASB	“swerve”
NKJV	“took off”
NRSV, NJB, Peshitta	“clogged”
TEV	“get stuck”
JPSOA	“locked”
LXX	“bound together the axles”

The UBS Text Project (p. 105) suggests the MT’s “removed” (ויסר) should be emended to “bound” (ויאסר). It gives it a “B” rating (some doubt).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:26-29

²⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. ²⁹But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

14:26 This is the reverse of Exod. 14:16.

14:27 “overthrew” This same Hebrew root (BDB 654 II, KB 707, *Piel* IMPERFECT, lit. “shook off”) relates to YHWH as warrior (cf. Isa. 59:17).

14:29 Pharaoh was not with his army. He was not drowned.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:30-31

³⁰Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

14:30 “the LORD saved Israel” This is the VERB form (BDB 446, KB 448, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) of the NOUN “salvation,” used in Exod. 14:13. See Special Topic: Salvation (OT).

▣ **“the Egyptians dead on the seashore”** The east wind miraculously blew their bodies (which floated in their armor) onto the shore so that Israel could take their armor and weapons (see Josephus, *Antiq.* 2.14.6).

14:31 “power” This is literally “hand,” cf. Deut. 34:12. See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“feared”** See Special Topic: Fear (OT).

▣ **“believed”** This is the root “amen,” which means “to be firm.” It came to be a metaphor for dependability and trustworthiness. This is the OT term for “faith” (cf. Hab. 2:4; see Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT). In the New Testament it is translated into English by three different terms: faith, trust, and believe (see Special Topic: “Believe” in the NT).

▣ **“His servant Moses”** See Special Topic: My Servant.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What “sea” is referred to in Exod. 14:2? Where is it?
2. Why is Exod. 14:4 so theologically significant?
3. How is Exod. 14:10 related to 13:17?
4. Define OT “salvation.”
5. Define OT “forever.”
6. Who is the “angel of God” (Exod. 14:19)?
How is he related to the cloud?
7. Why does Exod. 14:22 demand
 - a. literary imagery
 - b. a miracle
8. What is the function(s) of the pillar?
9. Where did Israel get her weapons of war?

EXODUS 15

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Song of Moses and Israel	The Song of Moses	The Songs of Praise	The Song of Moses	Song of Victory
15:1-18 (1-18)	15:1a	15:1a	15:1a	15:1-3 (1-3)
	15:1b-5 (1b-5)	15:1b-10 (1b-10)	15:1b-3 (1b-3)	
			15:4-5 (4-5)	15:4-8 (4-8)
	15:6-10 (6-10)		15:6-10 (6-10)	
				15:9-13 (9-13)
	15:11-13 (11-13)	15:11-12 (11-12)	15:11-18 (11-18)	
		15:13-18 (13-18)		
	15:14-17 (14-17)			15:14-18 (14-18)
	15:18 (18)		The Song of Miriam	
15:19	15:19	15:19	15:19	15:19
	The Song of Miriam			
15:20-21 (21)	15:20-21 (21b)	15:20-21 (21)	15:20-21 (21)	15:20-21 (21)
The Lord Provides Water	Bitter Waters Made Sweet	Crisis in the Wilderness (15:22-16:36)	Bitter Water	Marah
15:22-25a	15:22-26	15:22-25a	15:22-25a	15:22-25 (25)
15:25b-26		15:25b-26	15:25b-26	15:26
15:27	15:27	15:27	15:27	15:27

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Exodus 14 and 15, along with Judges 4 and 5, offer an opportunity to see how ANE people record a historical event in prose and poetry.
 Modern western people do not understand ANE historicity (see Special Topic: OT as History and Special Topic: OT Historiography Compared to Near Eastern Cultures) nor poetry (see Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry).
 The book that has helped me see how different the ANE literary categories are from modern literary categories is D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*.
- B. Exodus 15 contains two songs (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1238-1241).
1. song of Moses, Exod. 15:1-18
 - a. Exod. 15:1-5 is about YHWH's acts
 - b. Exod. 15:6-17 is about YHWH Himself (i.e., Exod. 15:18)
 2. song of Miriam, Exod. 15:19-21 (repeats Exod. 15:1b-5; possibly Moses' song was sung by Miriam)
- C. Exodus 15:22-27 describes the Israelites' travel to Mt. Sinai/Horeb. The route is uncertain (see Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus) because the location of Mt. Sinai/Horeb is uncertain (see Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai).
- D. Notice how God is praised.
1. He is highly exalted, Exod. 15:1,21
 2. He is praised and extolled, Exod. 15:2
 3. His right hand is majestic in power, Exod. 15:6
 4. in the greatness of Your excellence, Exod. 15:7
 5. who is like You. . . , Exod. 15:11
 6. terror and dread fall upon Your enemies, Exod. 15:11
 7. He reigns forever, Exod. 15:18
- YHWH is the main character of all Scripture!
- E. The literary nature of Moses' song of victory is comparable to other ANE songs of victory.
1. Tuthmosis III
 2. Amenophis III
 3. Ramesses II
 4. Merenptah
- except in it, YHWH, not a human leader, is magnified.
 (See K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, p. 133, #89).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:1-18

¹Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said,

“I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

²The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father’s God, and I will extol Him.

³The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.

⁴Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵The deeps cover them;
They went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power,
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

⁷And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You;
You send forth Your burning anger, *and* it consumes them as chaff.

⁸At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up,
The flowing waters stood up like a heap;
The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil;
My desire shall be gratified against them;
I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.’

¹⁰You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders?

¹²You stretched out Your right hand,
The earth swallowed them.

¹³In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed;
In Your strength You have guided *them* to Your holy habitation.

¹⁴The peoples have heard, they tremble;
Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them;
By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone;

Until Your people pass over, O LORD,

Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.

¹⁷You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance,

The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling,

The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established.

¹⁸The Lord shall reign forever and ever.”

15:1 “sang this song” Songs were written and sung to commemorate historical events. This is one way ANE peoples passed on their culture.

▣ **“to the LORD”** This is YHWH (BDB 217; see Special Topic: Names for Deity). The full spelling is here and throughout the chapter (i.e., יהוה), but in Exod. 15:2 the abbreviation appears, ה'. It also occurs in Exod. 17:16 and often in the Psalms. The word “hallelujah” has the abbreviated form as part of a compound. Why, is uncertain.

▣ **“for He is highly exalted”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 144, KB 168). This same grammatical form, which expresses emphasis, is used in Exod. 15:21 (i.e., Miriam’s song).

The basic meaning of the Hebrew root is “rise up,” either in a bad (i.e., prideful way) or good way (YHWH’s victory, here).

▣ **“horse and rider”** This refers to the 600 royal chariots (cf. Exod. 14:7)—Egypt’s best!

▣ **“hurled”** This is the first of several VERBS used to describe what YHWH did to the elite Egyptian chariots.

1. “hurled,” Exod. 15:1,21 – BDB 941 I, KB 1239, *Qal* PERFECT
2. “cast,” Exod. 15:4 – BDB 434, KB 436, *Qal* PERFECT
3. “drowned” (lit. “sunk”), Exod. 15:4 – BDB 371, KB 368, *Pual* PERFECT
4. “shatters,” Exod. 15:6 – BDB 950, KB 1271, *Qal* IMPERFECT
5. “overthrows,” Exod. 15:7 – BDB 248, KB 256, *Qal* IMPERFECT
6. “covered,” Exod. 15:10 – BDB 491, KB 487, *Piel* PERFECT (cf. Exod. 14:28)
7. “sank,” Exod. 15:10 – BDB 853 II, KB 1027, *Qal* PERFECT, found only here
8. “swallowed,” Exod. 15:12 – BDB 118, KB 134, *Qal* IMPERFECT (i.e., the earth)
9. “went into the sea,” Exod. 15:19 – BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* PERFECT

The prose account of Exodus 14 used three VERBS.

1. “the sea came back over the Egyptians,” Exod. 14:26 – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
2. “routed” (lit. “shook off”), Exod. 14:27 – BDB 654 II, KB 707, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*
3. “covered,” Exod. 14:28 – BDB 491, KB 487, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw* (cf. Exod. 15:10)

15:2

NASB, NKJV,

NJB “song”

NRSV, JPSOA “might”

TEV, REB,

LXX “strong defender”

Peshitta “glorious”

This is a different word (BDB 274 I) than “song” in Exod. 15:1 (BDB 1010). This phrase is repeated in Ps. 118:14 and Isa. 12:2. It had become liturgy! But, the meaning of the second term, here in Exod. 15:2, is uncertain. The MT has “song” and this fits the context (Vulgate), but a similar root for “strength” may fit better (i.e., from an Arabic root, cf. LXX).

▣ **“He has become my salvation”** See note at Exod. 14:13.

▣ **“God. . . God”** The first “God” is *El* (BDB 42) and the second is *Elohim* (BDB 43). The full title, “the LORD your God” (i.e., YHWH *Elohim*), appears in Exod. 15:26.

Also notice the progressive parallelism of Exod. 15:2.

1. *El* is Moses’ God
2. *Elohim* is Moses’ ancestors’ God (i.e., the Patriarchs, cf. Exod. 3:13)

This Deity (i.e., the only Deity, cf. Exod. 15:11; see Special Topic: Monotheism) is worthy of

1. praise (lit. “beautify,” BDB 627 I, KB 687, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT; VERB only here but ADJECTIVE in Jer. 6:2)
2. exaltation (BDB 926, which is parallel to “exalted,” BDB 144, in Exod. 15:1,21).

▣ **“praise”** This VERB (BDB 627 I, KB 678, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) occurs only here. Its etymology suggests “beautify.” Because of the parallelism of “extol” (BDB 926, KB 1202, cf. Ps. 99:5,9; Isa. 25:1) in line d, it should be understood as “beautify Him in praise.”

15:3 “the LORD is a warrior” This is what the phrase “LORD of hosts” means (cf. Deut. 1:30; Jos. 5:13-15; 1 Chr. 20:29). It reflects the imagery of YHWH as warrior for His people (cf. Deut. 1:30; Ps. 24:8; 76:3-6; Isa. 42:13; 59:17; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 545-549). This is Holy War terminology. Here, YHWH acted, Israel watched (cf. Exod. 14:14).

▣ **“The LORD is His name”** This is “YHWH,” which is from the Hebrew VERB “to be.” It was revealed to Moses in Exod. 3:14-16. From Exod. 6:3, it seems to be a new name. It occurs earlier (i.e., Gen. 4:26), so possibly its full significance was not yet known. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

15:4 “the choicest of his officers” This refers to Exod. 14:7. The 600 chariots and their riders were the best of the Egyptian army, Pharaoh’s honor guard stationed at the palace of the king in the delta.

▣ **“Red Sea”** See Special Topic: The Red Sea.

15:5 “The deeps” There are several terms and phrases used to describe the water. YHWH’s control of water (see Special Topic: Waters) can reflect

1. YHWH as creator (cf. Ps. 104:6-9)
2. YHWH as victor over watery chaos (cf. Ps. 74:12-17)

The different words used:

1. “the deep” (lit. floods), Exod. 15:5 – BDB 1062, cf. Exod. 15:8; Gen. 1:2
2. “the depth,” Exod. 15:5 – BDB 841
3. “the waters” (lit. floods), Exod. 15:8 – BDB 633, KB 683, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE
4. “the deeps,” Exod. 15:8 – BDB 1062, cf. Exod. 15:5
5. “the heart of the sea,” Exod. 15:8 – BDB 523 CONSTRUCT BDB 410
6. “mighty waters,” Exod. 15:11, ADJECTIVE, BDB 523, and NOUN for “sea,” BDB 410

In Exod. 15:22-27, the word for “waters” is BDB 565; in Exod. 15:22,23,25 (twice).

▣ **“like a stone”** The Egyptians wore armor, yet they later miraculously floated to the shore (cf. Exod. 14:30). This is where Israel got her military equipment.

15:6 “right hand” This is one of several anthropomorphic phrases for God’s actions in history. God does not have a body but we speak of Him in human terms. See Special Topic: God Described as Human and Special Topic: Hand.

15:7 “excellence” This NOUN (BDB 144) is used of YHWH several times (cf. Job 37:4; 40:10; Isa. 2:10,19,21; 24:14; Micah 5:4).

▣ **“burning anger”** This is another anthropomorphic phrase (cf. Ps. 78:49,50). See Special Topic: Fire.

▣ **“it consumes them as chaff”** This is a recurrent metaphor of God’s judgment (cf. Isa. 5:24; 33:11; 47:14; Joel 2:5; Mal. 4:1).

15:8 “the blast of Your nostrils” This is another anthropomorphic way to describe the east wind (cf. Exod. 14:21).

▣ **“the waters were piled up”** This refers to Exod. 14:22,29 (cf. Ps. 78:13). The VERB “piled up” (BDB 790, KB 886, *Niphal* PERFECT) occurs only here in the OT. The parallel “stood up in a heap” gives this rare word a possible meaning (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 539).

15:9 This records the arrogant thoughts of the Egyptians. They have not learned yet!

15:10 “blew” This VERB (BDB 676, KB 730) occurs in the *Qal* stem only twice, both as anthropomorphic metaphors of God’s judgment.

1. Pharaoh’s army, here
2. crops of idolaters, Isa. 40:24

There is an obvious play on “wind,” *ruah* (BDB 924), which can mean “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit” (see Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible).

▣ **“Your wind”** This is an allusion to “the east wind” of Exod. 14:21; 15:8 (i.e., “blast of Your nostrils”). Here, it refers to the closing of the piled up water caused by Moses stretching out his staff again (cf. Exod. 14:26-28).

15:11 “Who is like You among the gods” This is a theological emphasis on the uniqueness of YHWH (i.e., the whole song is about YHWH, not Israel or her leaders. YHWH is the main character of the Bible). The phrase “among the gods” refers to the “heavenly council” (cf. Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kgs. 22:19; Neh. 9:6; Job 1:6; 2:1; 16:19; 19:25-27; Ps. 82:1,6; 89:5-8; 97:7; 138:1). See Special Topic: Monotheism.

▣ **“in holiness”** See Special Topic: Holy.

▣

NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA, LXX

NKJV

NJB

REB

“awesome”

“fearful”

“fearsome”

“worthy of awe”

Peshitta **“revered”**

This is a *Niphal* PARTICIPLE (BDB 431, KB 432) whose basic meaning in the *Niphal* stem is “to be feared” or “to be revered.” It is often used of YHWH Himself (cf. Exod. 15:11; Deut. 7:21; 10:17; 1 Chr. 16:25; Neh. 1:5; 4:18; Isa. 64:3; Dan. 9:4 and often in the Psalms). It is also used of His name (cf. Deut. 28:58; Ps. 99:3; 111:9; Mal. 1:14), or even His personal presence (cf. Jdgs. 13:6; Job 37:22; Isa. 64:3).

YHWH’s powerful deeds of deliverance (i.e., Exod. 15:1-12, 14-16) must be balanced with His merciful, faithful character (cf. Exod. 15:12-13, 17-18; also note Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:17). This song is about YHWH, not Israel!

▣ **“working wonders”** See Special Topic: Wonderful Things.

15:12 “earth swallowed them” This is a personification of *Sheol* (cf. Num. 16:32; 26:10; Deut. 11:6; see Special Topic: *Sheol*). Here it was the sea that swallowed them. For a good discussion of the metaphor in the OT see D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks* (pp. 58-74).

15:13 “lovingkindness” This is the word *hesed* (BDB 338). It is a special covenant term which speaks of God’s loyalty and trustworthiness to His promises. See Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*).

▣ **“redeemed”** This VERB (BDB 145, KB 169, *Qal* PERFECT) speaks of God’s love in purchasing them from Egyptian bondage (cf. Exod. 15:16). See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

▣ **“led. . .guided”** These VERBS (BDB 634, KB 685 and BDB 624, KB 675, cf. Ps. 23:2) describe YHWH’s personal presence in leading His people to

1. the promised land of Canaan
2. YHWH’s special worship place (i.e., the place where the central sanctuary would be placed/built)

There are three ways of YHWH leading.

1. His angel (cf. Exod. 14:19; 23:20,23; 32:34; 33:2)
2. His cloud/pillar (cf. Neh. 9:12)
3. His personal presence (cf. Exod. 13:21)

▣ **“Your holy habitation”** In this context this points toward the conquest (Exod. 15:14-17) and the later temple built on Mt. Moriah (see Special Topic: Mt. Moriah) in Jerusalem (cf. Exod. 15:17; Ps. 68:16; 76:2; 132:13-14).

There is also the possibility this refers to the mountain in the north (i.e., Ps. 48:1-3; Isa. 14:13), related to Canaanite mythology, Mt. Zaphon (cf. Exod. 14:1).

▣ **“holy”** See Special Topic: Holy.

15:14-16 These verses refer to the terror (BDB 33) and dread (BDB 808) that YHWH’s great acts of deliverance caused among the Canaanite tribes (see Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine) and the tribes in the trans-Jordan (i.e., Exod. 23:27; Deut. 2:25; Jos. 2:9).

Notice the different ways the fear of YHWH is expressed.

1. they tremble, Exod. 15:14a – BDB 919, KB 1182, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. Deut. 2:25
2. anguish has gripped, Exod. 15:14b – BDB 28, KB 31, *Qal* PERFECT
3. dismayed, Exod. 15:15a – BDB 96, KB 111, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE
4. trembling grips them, Exod. 15:15b – same VERB as #2 but IMPERFECT
5. have melted away, Exod. 15:15c – BDB 556, KB 555, *Niphal* PERFECT
6. terror and dread fall upon them, Exod. 15:16a – BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* IMPERFECT

What a poetic litany of the terror which YHWH's acts of deliverance caused the tribes of Canaan. Note Rahab's comment in Jos. 2:9,11,24.

15:14b This is imagery from childbirth.

▣ **“Philistia”** The Philistines did not inhabit Canaan until after their attempted invasion of Egypt in Rameses III's day. So, to mention them here and Exod. 13:17 is

1. an anachronism
2. possibly there were some Aegean people in southern Canaan earlier

One wonders about the date of the writing of the chapter. Some parts are very old.

1. Miriam's song, Exod. 15:21
2. some lines became liturgy, Exod. 15:2,11
3. many Ugaritic parallels but other parts, like the reference to
 - a. the conquest
 - b. the building of the temple or tabernacle on Mt. Zion

are much later. There has been an editorial process involved.

Studies in Ugaritic poetry have found a similar phrase to Exod. 15:17a. This may confirm an early date for this poem.

15:17b This line of poetry is reflected repeatedly in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 12:14,18,26; 14:25; 16:7,15-16; 17:8,10; 18:6; 31:11).

15:17c “LORD” The NASB, 1970, prints it as “YHWH,” but it could be understood as the Hebrew *Adon*, translated as “Lord” (NASB 1995). The MT has YHWH.

15:18 “The Lord shall reign” This refers to God as King (cf. Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5; Jdgs. 8:23; 1 Kgs. 22:19; 1 Sam. 8:1-22; 10:4-22; 12:11-19; Ps. 10:16; 29:10; Isa. 6:5). It, like Exod. 15:16c, became liturgical.

▣ **“forever and ever”** This is an idiom for eternity (i.e., BDB 761 plus BDB 723 I, cf. Ps. 10:16). For “forever” see Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*).

Notice the different phrases used to convey this concept.

1. Ps. 10:16 – The LORD is King forever and ever
2. Ps. 29:10 – The LORD sits as King forever
3. Ps. 30:2 – Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God
4. Ps. 93:2 – You are from everlasting
5. Ps. 102:24 – Your years are throughout all generations (cf. v. 12; Jdgs. 36:26)
6. Ps. 102:27 – Your years will not come to an end (cf. James 1:17)
7. Jer. 10:10 – He is the Living God and the Everlasting King

See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (NT).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:19

¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.

15:19 Notice the summary nature of the verse, yet the events are reversed from historical order.

▣ **“on dry land”** In the Genesis account, “water” is not recorded as being directly created by God (“He said. . .”) but His bringing “dry land” is a major creative event (cf. Gen. 1:9-10; Ps. 104:7-9). YHWH controls the limits of water (see Special Topic: Waters).

YHWH divides the Red Sea (see Special Topic: The Red Sea) to show His power and destroy the pursuing Egyptian army (cf. Exod. 14:16,21-22,29; 15:19; Neh. 9:11; Ps. 66:6). He also divided the Jordan River.

1. for Israel to cross into Canaan (cf. Jos. 3:7-13,16-17; 4:3,7,18,22-24)
2. once for Elijah and Elisha (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:8,14)

Another issue with water occurs in Exod. 15:24. If YHWH controlled primeval and contemporary water barriers, why would He not be able to provide drinking water? But Israel still doubted Him (cf. Exodus 17; Numbers 20).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:20-21

²⁰Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. ²¹Miriam answered them, “Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.”

15:20 “Miriam the prophetess” This is Moses’ older sister (cf. Exodus 2). There are several women who are spiritual leaders in the OT (cf. Num. 12:2; Micah 6:4). See Special Topic: Women in the Bible.

▣ **“dancing”** These spontaneous dances at military victories were common in the OT (i.e., Jdgs. 11:34; 1 Sam. 18:6; Jer. 31:4).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:22-25a

²²Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” ²⁵Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

15:22-27 This begins the wilderness wandering period that extends for several chapters.

15:22 “the wilderness of Shur” See Special Topic: The Wildernesses of the Exodus.

15:23 “Marah” See the account in Numbers 33.

15:24 “people grumbled” Crisis always brings out our true selves (cf. Exod. 14:10-12; 16:4; 17:3; Num. 14:2; 16:11,41; Deut. 8:2,16).

15:25 This is not a chemical reaction but a miraculous event, like Gen. 30:37-39.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:25b-26

^{25b}There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. ²⁶And He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and

give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.”

15:25b “tested them” God tests all of His people in order to strengthen them (cf. Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16). See Special Topic: God Tests His People (OT).

15:26 “If you will” Notice the conditional element of this covenant (cf. Exodus 23:25-26; Deut. 7:12-15; see Special Topic: Covenant) and all covenant relationships with God (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30), except for God’s ultimate and redemptive purpose. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“you will give earnest heed to”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 1033, KB 1570), which denotes emphasis. Here it is YHWH’s emphasis!

▣ **“commandments. . .statutes”** See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

▣ **“keep”** See Special Topic: Keep.

▣ **“none of these diseases”** This refers to the plagues on Egypt which are usually referred to as “blows,” but here “diseases” (cf. Deut. 28:60).

▣ **“I, the LORD, am your healer”** In this context, Exod. 15:26 is a threat related to Israel’s covenant disobedience. The emphasis of this title is on Israel’s potential sin and YHWH’s conquering, not physical healing! See Special Topic: Healing.

I have included below several of my exegetical notes from Ps. 103:3:

Ps. 103:3 “Who pardons all your iniquities” The term (BDB 699, KB 757) for “pardons” is used in Hebrew only for God’s forgiveness. Psalm 103:11-13 includes three metaphors that describe God’s forgiveness in graphic terms.

▣ Notice the series of PARTICIPLES that describe why YHWH should be blessed (i.e., He gives benefits).

1. He pardons all your iniquities – BDB 699, KB 757, *Qal*
2. He heals all your diseases – BDB 950, KB 1272, *Qal*
3. He redeems your life from the pit – BDB 145, KB 169, *Qal*
4. He crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion – BDB 742, KB 815, *Piel*
5. He satisfies your years with good things – BDB 959, KB 1302, *Hiphil*

This series of five PARTICIPLES covers life on earth and a future life in heaven.

▣ **“Who heals all your diseases”** The Hebrew NOUN, “diseases” (BDB 316), and VERB (BDB 317 I) are used in Deut. 29:21 in the sense of cursing because of Israel’s disobedience to the covenant. Because of this usage, and several OT passages that speak of healing of sin (cf. Ps. 41:4; Isa. 1:6; 6:10; 53:5), it is doubtful that the emphasis of this verse is on physical healing, although it surely includes that (cf. Exod. 15:26; Deut. 32:29; Ps. 147:3). The Jews recognized that sin and disease were related (cf. James 5:13-18). Here, it is parallel to “pardons all your iniquities.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:27

²⁷Then they came to Elim where there *were* twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How do you explain the differences between Exodus 14 and 15?
2. What caused the sea to divide?
3. What was the purpose(s) of dividing the Red Sea?
4. How could the people experience all these signs and still grumble?
5. Is the Mosaic Covenant conditional? If so, and Israel is unfaithful, are YHWH's promises annulled?

EXODUS 16

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The LORD Provides Manna	Bread From Heaven	Crises in the Wilderness (15:22-16:36)	The Manna and the Quails	The Manna and the Quails
16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3
16:4-7	16:4-8	16:4-8	16:4-5	16:4-5
The LORD Provides Meat			16:6-8	16:6-8
16:8-12				
	16:9-12	16:9-12	16:9-12	16:9-12
16:13-21	16:13-21	16:13-21	16:13-15a 16:15b-16 16:17-21	16:13-16 16:17-18
The Sabbath Observed				16:19-21
16:22-26	16:22-31	16:22-26	16:22-26	16:22-30
16:27-30		16:27-30	16:27-30	
16:31-36		16:31-36	16:31-36	16:31
	16:32-36			16:32-34 16:35-36

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Exodus 16 seems to include a later account of the exodus. The tabernacle is obviously referred to in Exod. 16:33-34, as is the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 16:23). Both of these are part of later revelations.
- B. Be careful of trying to make Hebrew historical narrative equal to modern, western, cause-and-effect, chronological history. See the following Special Topics.
 - 1. Special Topic: The OT as History
 - 2. Special Topic: OT Historical Narrative
 - 3. Special Topic: OT Historiography Compared with Near Eastern Cultures

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:1-3

¹Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

16:1 “Then they set out from Elim” We learn from Exod. 15:27 that this was a significant oasis, possibly on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula. Its name means “great tree.” It certainly was not large enough to support the number of people of the exodus, but it was a welcomed respite.

▣ **“came to the wilderness of Sin”** There are several different wildernesses in the Sinai Peninsula (see Special Topic: Wildernesses of the Exodus). Toward the Mediterranean coast is the Wilderness of Shur; on the northeastern side is the Wilderness of Paran; in the middle, just south of Beersheba, is the Wilderness of Zin; and in the southern area is the Wilderness of *Sin*.

“*Sin*” is a non-Semitic term (BDB 695 II); Sinai (BDB 696) is somehow related to the Wilderness of Sin. It seems to be a word which describes either the soil or the type of vegetation found in this dry southern area.

The term, Horeb (BDB 352), used for this same mountain in the Bible, is a Semitic name of uncertain etymology.

▣ **“on the fifteenth day of the second month”** We learn from Exod. 12:6,31 that they left Egypt on the fifteenth day, so it has been exactly two months. Remember that they were going by a lunar calendar which is not quite as precise as our modern solar one. It seems that this dating is important to Moses because of Exod. 19:1, where he mentions that after three months they came to the mountain of Sinai. This is eyewitness, chronological detail.

When we compare the time of Exodus 16 and Numbers 11, both of which record the giving of manna and quail, there seems to be

- 1. two different literary/oral traditions combined
- 2. the wilderness wanderings are not a chronological account
- 3. the same type of issue as the two cleansings of the temple in the Gospel accounts

It seems to me there is one initial giving of manna (Exodus 16), but two special quail events.

For a good discussion of the problem of “doublets” in the OT, see John H. Walton, D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, which discusses the oral cultures of the ANE and how they passed on their traditions.

16:2 “The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness” This becomes the repeated theme of the exodus experience. Moses and Aaron, as God’s representatives, are singled out to be the targets of repeated complaints and rebellions by this mixed group of people (cf. Exod. 12:38; Num. 11:4). As we will see from the context God knows that it is really a complaint against Him (cf. Exod. 16:7-8).

The Masoretic scholars, who standardized the Hebrew texts of the B.C. period, added textual notes, vowels, and offered suggested readings (*Qere*). The VERB “murmur” or “grumbled” (BDB 534, KB 524) in Exod. 16:2,7, is one of those suggestions. The MT has the *Hiphil* stem in Exod. 16:2 and the *Niphal* stem in 16:7, but the Masoretic scholars reversed the stems.

16:3 “Would that we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt” This same type of complaint is recorded in Exod. 14:11. Somehow, though they are complaining to Moses and Aaron, they really believe that God is actually doing these terrible things. We see in Exod. 16:7,8 that this accusation is brought to light. It is amazing to me as I read through the book of Exodus, how bitter and complaining the children of Israel really were throughout this experience. Later in their history, they realized this period of time was “the honeymoon” time between themselves and YHWH. Isn’t it ironical that that which we think is so bad suddenly becomes good with a little perspective?!

▣ **“when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full”** Slaves never ate to their full and they very seldom had meat. This is a good example of “the good old days” mentality. In reality they are not so good as we remember!

▣ **“for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger”** This is a ridiculous statement. Moses (or really YHWH) did not go to all of this trouble just to kill them. It shows the frustration that people experience when their comfort and standard of living are somehow altered.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:4-7

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, “At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; ⁷and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?”

16:4 “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven” Here is the theme of the entire chapter, which is basically the supernatural provision of manna from heaven. Bread was the most important element of their diet. God would provide it on a daily basis. It is uncertain exactly what manna was (cf. Exod. 16:14). Some try to say that it was a secretion of the plant life in the area and others say it was a secretion of the insect life in the area. However, the fact that it came only six days a week, not seven, and that it rotted except on Friday shows that this is a supernatural, not simply natural, occurrence. Besides, the natural means often discussed by commentators would never provide enough food for the number of people involved. See Special Topic: Manna.

▣ **“that I may test them, whether they may walk in My instruction”** Here is the key. God is going to give them guidelines on how to handle this manna (cf. Deut. 8:2-3). The manna was a sign of His love but also a way of testing (see Special Topic: God Tests His People). Much of the biblical witness is God testing human’s faith, not to destroy us but that we might grow stronger. See Special Topic: Testing (*peirazō* and *dokimazō*).

There are two terms in Hebrew for testing: (1) one is used to test metals and (2) the other is used to test by the use of smell. This particular Hebrew word is the one used for testing by smell (BDB 650, cf. Exod. 15:25; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16).

The VERB “walk” (BDB 229, KB 241) is often a metaphor for “living,” either for God, observing His ways, or disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:3; Deut. 8:6; 11:22; 1 Kgs. 2:3; 3:3; 9:4; 11:4,6,38; 2 Chr. 17:4; 21:12-13). Here are some NT examples from Ephesians and Colossians.

1. positive – Eph. 2:10; 4:1; 5:2; Col. 1:10; 2:6
2. negative – Eph. 2:2; 4:17,22; 5:15

▣ **“instruction”** There are several terms in this chapter to describe God’s revealed guidelines.

1. “instruction” (lit. “law”), Exod. 16:4 – BDB 435
2. “commanded,” Exod. 16:16,32,34 – BDB 845, KB 1010, *Piel* PERFECT
3. “commandments,” Exod. 16:28 – BDB 846
4. “instructions,” Exod. 16:28 – same root as #1
5. the testimony (i.e., the ark of the covenant), Exod. 16:34 – BDB 730

See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

16:5 “it will be twice as much as they gather daily” Here is the supernatural element—that on Fridays (i.e., sixth day) they will gather enough for the Sabbath (cf. Gen. 2:1-3), so that they will not have to work on that special day. The term “Sabbath” means “to cease from labor.” See Special Topic: Sabbath (OT).

16:6 “At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt” Evening was the beginning of the next day (cf. Gen. 1:5). The Jews began the day at twilight in the evening and it went to twilight the next evening, based on Genesis 1, where evening and morning were the first day.

This phraseology shows that God was trying to increase their faith in Him in a daily sense. Matthew 6:11 is another theological truth that God wants us to depend on Him day by day and not to rely on our coveted and gathered resources over time.

▣ **“know”** See Special Topic: Know.

16:7 “in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD” It is not certain exactly to what this refers:

1. Some say it was the coming of manna which showed God’s care and provision.
2. Others say it refers to the *Shekinah* Cloud of Glory, which represented God’s presence (cf. Exod. 16:10).

▣ **“glory”** See Special Topic: Glory (OT).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:8-12

⁸Moses said, “*This will happen* when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.” ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.’” ¹⁰It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that

they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²“I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

16:8 “when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening” This is a reference to the quail provided on this particular occasion. We know of another example in the biblical witness where quail was provided and this is found in Num. 11:13. This does not seem to be the same occurrence mentioned twice because the Numbers 11 passage is in a very negative context, while here it is a one-time provision of meat. The Israelites were not accustomed to consuming large amounts of meat. We know from historical records even to this day, that quail do migrate from Europe into this area and after the long flight they are tired and very easy to catch once they land.

16:9 “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumbings’” It is obvious from Exod. 16:7 and 8 that God was the real target of the grumbling. The phrase “come near” (BDB 897, KB 1132, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is used in an ironical sense here. It normally refers to a priest approaching God with a sacrifice, but here there is no tabernacle for them to approach, so it apparently refers to the cloud (cf. Exod. 16:10).

16:10 “the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud” This seems to refer to what the rabbis later called the *shekinah* cloud of glory. The word *shekinah* is from the Hebrew root which means “to dwell.” In this wilderness wandering experience it was a symbol of the personal/physical presence of YHWH (cf. Exod. 16:7; 40:34-38). After the crossing of the Jordan River under Joshua, the ark of the covenant becomes the symbol for the presence of God, not the cloud.

This phrase seems to imply the fiery presence of YHWH in the pillar was more pronounced than usual (cf. Exod. 24:17). Usually it was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

16:12 “at twilight” Literally this means “between the two evenings” (BDB 787). From biblical usage it refers to the time between when the sun sets and the first star appears (cf. Exod. 12:6; 16:12; 29:39,41; 30:8; Num. 9:3,5,11; 28:4,8). In later Judaism it was defined as “after the heat of the day.” Therefore, the evening sacrifice occurred at 3 p.m.

▣ **“and you shall know that I am the LORD your God”** For both “YHWH” and “*Elohim*” see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

Again, the acts of YHWH were meant to confirm the faith of His people (cf. Exod. 16:6). This is paralleled to the acts of Jesus confirming the faith of His disciples.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:13-21

¹³So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷The sons of Israel did so, and *some* gathered much and *some* little. ¹⁸When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should

eat. ¹⁹Moses said to them, “Let no man leave any of it until morning.” ²⁰But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them. ²¹They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt.

16:13 The manna was a daily event but the quail seemed to have been a one-day or brief period (i.e., aviary migration) event.

16:14 “When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground” The rabbis make a big deal about the dew. They say that the manna was sandwiched in between layers of dew and when the top layer melted the manna was revealed. The exact nature of the manna is uncertain (i.e., “flake-like,” BDB 341, cf. Targum). The color is mentioned as being white but the shape is ambiguous. The rabbis say that it was round like the coriander seed (cf. Exod. 16:31). Some say it comes from a word which means “powdery,” like the term “flake-like” in Exod. 16:14. Others say that the flake-likeness refers to scales, which has been the traditional Jewish interpretation through the years. See Special Topic: Manna.

16:15 “What is it?” The Hebrew is “*man hu*” (BDB 577 and BDB 214), which is the basic popular etymology for the use of the term “manna” (cf. Exod. 16:13).

16:16 “omer” This (BDB 771 II) is further defined in Exod. 16:36. See Special Topic: ANE Weights and Volumes.

The amount related to this term changed over time. Originally it was about a cup full but later became about a gallon (cf. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentary, Exodus*, p. 132).



NASB	“apiece”
NKJV	“each one’s”
NRSV, TEV, NJB, JPSOA	“each of you”

This word (BDB 166) is literally “skull,” but is used here and in Exod. 38:26 and Num. 3:47 for “persons.”

16:17-18 These two verses imply another miracle. This has been the traditional interpretation of the rabbis. The fact that some gathered little, when they got home they had just what they needed, or when some gathered a lot, when they got home they had just what they needed. However, Paul’s use of this verse in 2 Cor. 8:14-15 refers not to a miraculous gathering procedure but rather to the sharing of the people with one another.

16:19 “Let no man leave any of it until morning” This is a command (BDB 451, KB 451, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE, cf. Exod. 16:23). This same time element is found with other ritual events (cf. Exod. 12:10; 23:18). Why, is uncertain.

16:20 “But they did not listen to Moses” The testing of God in Exod. 16:4 had again failed. The people were not trusting God and His instruction but were allowing their stomachs to guide them. Another example of disobedience will occur in Exod. 16:27 and 28. This is a repeated theme throughout the wilderness wandering experience. This may be the theme of the entire OT (cf. Galatians 3), that though humans can experience God in His love and provision, even His miracles, there is still the pull toward self and unbelief.

This shows that the old covenant could never provide an adequate means of salvation for God's people (i.e., see Galatians 3 and the book of Hebrews). What was needed was an internal, supernatural change—a new covenant (i.e., new heart, new mind, new spirit, cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36).

▣ **“worms”** This (BDB 1069) refers to the larval stage of flies, possibly beetles (i.e., maggots).

▣ **“became foul”** This VERB (BDB 92, KB 107, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) basically means “to stink” or “become odious.” It is used both literally (cf. Exod. 7:18,21; 8:14; and here) and figuratively (cf. Ps. 78:5; Eccl. 10:1).

16:21 “when the sun grew hot, it would melt” This refers to the manna but the later rabbis say it refers to the layer of dew on top of the manna which kept it fresh.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:22-26

²²Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³then he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” ²⁴So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. ²⁵Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the sabbath*, there will be none.”

16:22 “Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one” The term “omer,” like all ancient measurements, is somewhat difficult to precisely equate into our measurement system. We are told in Exod. 16:36 that an omer is a tenth of an ephah. In Arabic this can simply mean a “cup full.” In later Judaism it was defined as a full gallon. It is obvious that we just do not know. Rashi, Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages, says that an ephah is equal to three selahs; a selah is equal to six kabs; a kab is equal to four logs; and a log has a capacity of six eggs; therefore, an omer would equal 43 1/5 eggs. Great help, huh?! See Special Topic: ANE Weights and Volumes.

▣ **“leaders”** This (BDB 672) refers to family leaders or tribal leaders. They became “the elders” (cf. Exod. 34:31).

16:23 “holy” See Special Topic: Holy.

▣ **“sabbath”** See Special Topic: Sabbath (OT).

16:24 This shows the supernatural element related to the preservation of the manna for the Sabbath. All preparations were to be done on Friday (cf. Exod. 16:23).

16:25-27 Manna did not appear on the Sabbath. Its appearance and disappearance was not a natural event.

16:26 “seventh day” The origins of the Sabbath are lost in antiquity (see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 2, pp. 473-483). It is obvious even in the creation account that significance was placed on a seven-day unit of time. In Egypt there were ten day cycles. Some have said that the origin of the seventh day comes from Babylon, which had a special day on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the month. That seems very convincing until one realizes that they also had two other days in the same category which did not follow a seven-day cycle. It seems that the seven-day week was unique to the people

of God. The term “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word “to cease.” See Special Topic: Sabbath (OT). It was a temporal sign to worship God, and in a theological sense, meant that the whole week belonged to Him. The same truth is seen in the tithe or the firstborn or first fruits.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:27-30

²⁷It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? ²⁹See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” ³⁰So the people rested on the seventh day.

16:29 This verse has several commands related to the seventh day.

1. see – BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE used in the sense of “understand clearly”
2. remain every man in his place (lit. “sit” or “dwell”) – BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. let no man go out of his place – BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

YHWH had specific guidelines about the manna, how to use it and when/who should use it.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:31-36

³¹The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey. ³²Then Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. ³⁵The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶(Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)

16:31 The term “coriander” (BDB 151 I) is found only here and Num. 11:7 (see UBS, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, pp. 110-111). Its seeds are grey but some varieties do have small white flowers. See Special Topic: Manna.

▣ **“honey”** Honey (BDB 185) could be from two sources.

1. bees (cf. Jdgs. 14:8-9,18; 1 Sam. 14:26-27; Pro. 16:24)
2. condensed fruit juices (the normal usage)

16:32 “Then Moses. . . ‘Let an omerfull of it be kept throughout your generations’” Although the name “Moses” is used in the third person, this does not automatically mean another author or a later editor. This could simply be a way of referring to oneself in a written document of this period and culture. Again, we see the miraculous nature of this substance called manna; it decayed after being kept overnight or it would last two days for the Sabbath. This verse shows that some manna that was kept throughout the years.

In Exod. 16:33-34 one wonders if it was kept in the ark of the covenant (cf. Heb. 9:4) or inside of it (“before the Testimony,” Exod. 16:34; 26:33; 27:21; 30:6,26,36). As a matter of fact, at this point there was no ark of the covenant (cf. Exodus 25). It was constructed later. There are many elements in this chapter which seem to assume the existence of the tabernacle.

16:33 “jar” This term (BDB 897, KB 1039) is found only here. The meaning is uncertain. There have been various theories.

1. jar (most translations)
2. basket (Arabic)
3. urn
4. vase (Vulgate)
5. jug
6. little bottle (Targum)
7. pot (NKJV)
8. golden jar/pot (cf. Heb. 9:4)

16:35 “forty years” This refers to a long period of indefinite time and not a precise, forty years. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

16:36 This appears to be a later editorial note. Although I affirm the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, there are editorial additions such as this which were either added by Moses as an afterthought or a later editor, such as Joshua, Jeremiah, or more probably, Ezra. See Special Topic: Additions to Deuteronomy.

A new book by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, discusses the nature of oral cultures and their view of how it was passed from generation to generation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did the children of Israel complain so much?
2. Why did God provide manna for them on a daily basis for over forty years?
3. Is this account of the giving of quail exactly parallel to Numbers 11?
4. How did God test the children of Israel during the wilderness wandering period?

EXODUS 17

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Water in the Rock 17:1-7	Water From the Rock 17:1-7	Other Trying Experiences in the Wilderness 17:1-7	Water From the Rock 17:1-2a 17:2b 17:3 17:4 17:5-6 17:7	The Water From the Rock 17:1-7
Amalek Fought 17:8-13	Victory Over the Amalekites 17:8-13	17:8-13	War with the Amalekites 17:8-13	A Battle Against the Amalekites 17:8-12a 17:12b-16
17:14-16	17:14-16	17:14-16	17:14-16	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:1-7

¹Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried

out to the LORD, saying, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.” ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

17:1 “the wilderness of Sin” See Special Topic: The Wildernesses of the Exodus.



NASB, NRSV,

NJB, JPSOA,

REB

“by stages”

NKJV, LXX

“set out”

TEV

“moving from one place to another”

This word (BDB 652) literally means “pulling up” (i.e., tent pegs).

▣ **“according to the command of the LORD”** The stages of Israel’s camp sites were directed by YHWH (cf. Num. 33:12-14) to test them (see Special Topic: God Tests His People) and strengthen their faith in Him.

▣ **“Rephidim”** This place (BDB 951) is unknown. It is also mentioned in Exod. 19:2; Num. 33:14-15.

▣ **“there was no water”** This was a recurrent problem. A similar event occurs in Num. 20:2-13, but was an act of disobedience on Moses’ part (i.e., struck the rock out of frustration instead of obeying YHWH and speaking to it).

God’s control of water was/is a significant issue for desert people. See Special Topic: Waters.

17:2 “the people quarreled with Moses” This is also a recurrent pattern (i.e., Exod. 14:11-12; 16:2-3, etc.). Many commentators suppose that this is instigated by non-Israelite people who came out of Egypt with Israel (i.e., the mixed multitude, cf. Exodus 12:38; Numbers 11:4). However, the OT is a record of Israel’s disobedience and rebellion. The real problem was Genesis 3 (see Special Topic: The Fall)!

▣ **“Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”** In reality the people were quarreling against YHWH and His promises of provision and care (cf. Exod. 16:7-8,12; Num. 14:27; 17:5). This is an example of “kill the messenger”!

17:3 This is very similar to Exod. 16:3.

17:4 Moses’ frustration surfaces! Those he brought out of slavery now want to stone him (cf. Num. 14:10). Note that Moses calls them “this people”!

17:5 “Pass before the people” This was a way to show Moses’ leadership.

▣ **“your staff”** This shepherd’s staff symbolized the power of YHWH in the hand of Moses (i.e., human instrumentality, cf. Exod. 3:7-10).

17:6 “I will stand before you” Apparently this refers to YHWH in the pillar of cloud.

▣ **“the rock of Horeb”** This mountain of revelation goes by two names.

1. Horeb (Hebrew root)
2. Sinai (non-Semitic root)

However, in this context it might not refer to Sinai (see Special Topic: The Location of Mt. Sinai) because Israel has not yet arrived there (there are two possible locations of Meribah: [1] near Sinai, cf. Exod. 19:1 or [2] near Kadesh, cf. Num. 20:13,14; Ezek. 48:28). Some rabbis and Paul thought this special rock, symbolizing God’s provision (cf. Ps. 18:2), followed Israel throughout the wilderness wandering period (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4).

▣ **“you shall strike the rock”** The VERB (BDB 645, KB 697) is a *Hiphil* PERFECT with *waw* used in an IMPERATIVAL sense.

▣ **“Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel”** Moses acted publicly (cf. Exod. 17:5) so the tribal leaders could clearly see the power of YHWH. Moses’ walking through the camp ahead of the elders was a way to publicly show his leadership to all Israelites.

17:7 “Massah” This is the Hebrew word for “test” (BDB 650 III, cf. Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 95:8).

▣ **“Meribah”** This is the Hebrew word (BDB 937 II) which denotes “strife” (cf. Gen. 13:8; Num. 27:14).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:8-13

⁸Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. ⁹So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” ¹⁰Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. ¹²But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ¹³So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

17:8 “Amalek” This desert tribe came from Esau’s line (cf. Gen. 36:11,12). They are linked to the area that later became Edom (cf. Gen. 36:15,16). They are known only from the OT. They were a fierce, nomadic tribe.

Israel had several encounters with this tribe.

1. here
2. Num. 14:43; 24:20
3. Deut. 25:17-19
4. Jdgs. 3:13; 5:14; 6:3,33; 7:12; 10:12; 12:15
5. 1 Sam. 14:48; 15:6-8,15,18,20,32; 27:8; 28:18; 30:1,13,18
6. 1 Chr. 4:41-43

For their cruelty to YHWH’s covenant people, they would be destroyed completely (cf. INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB, “utterly blot out,” of Exod. 17:14, cf. Deut. 25:19). However, in Exod. 17:13 a Hebrew word is used that means “weakened” (BDB 325, KB 324, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) but does not denote the complete defeat mentioned in 1 Chr. 4:43 (alluded to in Exod. 17:14).

17:9 Moses issues three orders to Joshua (whose name means “the LORD saves” or “the LORD is salvation”; a VERB must be supplied; originally named Hoshea son of Nun, cf. Num. 13:16).

1. choose men – BDB 103, KB 119, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. go out – BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. fight – BDB 535, KB 526, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE

Joshua was Moses’ military commander and successor.

☐ **“the staff of God”** This symbolizes the power of God in the hand of Moses. See note at Exod. 17:5. Moses and the staff, not the Israeli soldiers, were the key to the battle.

17:10 “Hur” This man is mentioned only here and Exod. 24:14; 31:2, but was obviously well known. Jewish traditions say he was Miriam’s husband.

This is another eyewitness detail.

17:11-12 This account is not meant to convey a powerless or weak YHWH (i.e., the staff) but the crucial role that Moses, their true God-called, God-equipped leader, played in their trek to Canaan and its defeat.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:14-16

¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” ¹⁵Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner; ¹⁶and he said, “The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.”

17:14-16 YHWH wants a memorial both in a book and an altar (cf. Gen. 33:20; 35:7; Jos. 22:26-27), commemorating this victory over Amalek.

This is the first mention of a written record in the OT (cf. Exod. 24:4,7; 34:27,28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9,22,24-26). For a good discussion on how oral cultures pass on their history and traditions, see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

17:14 “book” This Hebrew term (BDB 706) can mean “document” (cf. Deut. 24:1,3), “book,” or “scroll” (cf. Jos. 18:9). The NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 285, suggests another root (KB 767 II) meaning “bronze” and gives Job 19:23 and Isa. 30:8 as other possible places where it is used of another kind of writing material.

17:15

NASB	“The LORD is My Banner”
NKJV	“The - LORD - is - My - Banner”
NRSV	“The LORD is my banner”
TEV, REB	“The LORD is my Banner”
NJB	“Yahweh - Nissi”
JPSOA	“Adonai - Nissi”
LXX	“The LORD is a refuge”

This is one of several combination titles with YHWH and another NOUN. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D, #4.

The “banner” (BDB 651) refers to a “standard” or battle flag.

17:16

NASB, NKJV	“The LORD has sworn”
NRSV	“A hand upon the banner of the LORD ”

TEV	“Hold high the banner of the LORD ”
NJB	“Lay hold of Yahweh’s banner!”
JPSOA	“Hand upon the throne of the LORD!”
REB, Peshitta	“My oath upon it”
LXX	“because by a secret hand”

The NRSV is closest to the MT. The UBS Text Project (p. 110) suggests “(for a hand) <has been raised> against the throne of the LORD.” It gives “throne” a “B” rating (some doubt). It is difficult to know if the hand refers to

1. an oath by YHWH (Targums, Rashi)
2. an oath by Moses (NEB)
3. a gesture of contempt by Amalek (AV margin)

Whatever this difficult phrase means, it was a way to affirm Moses’ leadership and YHWH’s kingship! The Jewish Study Bible suggests several possible meanings (p. 343).

1. “throne” (*kes*, BDB 490) may be textual corruption of “banner” (*nes*, BDB 651, i.e., battle standard)
2. possibly an oath formula

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Is Rephidim close to Horeb or Kadesh? Why does this make a difference in how we understand “the Rock” of Exod. 17:6?
2. How many different accounts of Israel’s grumbling over no water to drink are recorded during the exodus and wilderness wanderings?
3. Why did YHWH want to destroy Amalek?
4. Who is Hur?
5. How does one define “book” in an early context such as Exodus?
6. Define the term “banner.”

EXODUS 18

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jethro, Moses' Father-in-Law	Jethro's Advice	Jethro's Visit	Jethro Visits Moses	The Meeting of Jethro and Moses
18:1-4	18:1-12	18:1-9	18:1-12	18:1-4
18:5-12		18:10-12		18:5-11
				18:12
			The Appointment of Judges	The Appointment of Judges
18:13-16	18:13-23	18:13-23	18:13-14	18:13-23
Jethro Counsels Moses			18:15-16	
18:17-23			18:17-23	
18:24-27	18:24-27	18:24-27	18:24-26	18:24-26
			18:27	18:27

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Moses' father-in-law has been the subject of much discussion among both Jewish and Christian theologians for the following reasons.
 1. He is a priest of Midian, yet he offers a sacrifice to God in which Aaron and the elders participated (cf. Exod. 18:12).
 2. Moses greets him with much respect (cf. Exod. 18:7).
 3. He offers a blessing to YHWH (cf. Exod. 18:10).
 4. He makes a strong theological affirmation of YHWH's uniqueness (cf. Exod. 18:11).

5. Although he is possibly a pagan, Moses takes advice from him on how to structure the legal system of Israel (cf. Exod. 18:13-23,24).
6. This man is known by at least four different names.
 - a. Jether, Exod. 4:18
 - b. Reuel, Exod. 2:18 (cf. Num. 10:29)
 - c. Hobab, Num. 10:29; Jdgs. 4:11
 - d. Jethro, Exod. 18:1

B. This is the only chapter where we are introduced to Moses' second son, Eliezer. We know nothing more about him except that his name means "God is my help" (BDB 45). This is a much more encouraging title than the name of the first son, Gershom, which means "sojourner" (BDB 177). The last time we see Zipporah (BDB 862, meaning "little bird"), Moses' wife, she is on the way to Egypt with Moses and, yet, here in Exodus 18, she had apparently been sent home to her father (cf. Exod. 18:2). The exact relationship between Exod. 4:20 and this chapter is uncertain.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:1-4

¹Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. ²Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away, ³and her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." ⁴The other was named Eliezer, for *he said*, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

18:1 "Jethro" See note A. in Contextual Insights.

▣ **"the priest of Midian"** Because Jethro is allowed to offer a sacrifice in Exod. 18:12 and because he is so pleased to hear what God has done for Israel, Exod. 18:9, and also because he uses such YHWHistic terms to speak to God, Exod. 19:10,11, many have assumed that he knew YHWH before he met Moses. Some have even assumed that Moses learned about God from Jethro. This has been called the "Kenite theory" because the Midianites and Kenites are related and this may go back to an earlier group who followed YHWH. However enticing this theory might be, there is just not enough evidence to advocate it.

▣ **"God. . .the LORD"** These are the two major names for God. *Elohim* is usually translated "God" and "YHWH" is usually translated "the LORD" (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.). The JEPD source theory assumes that this comes from two different authors. This chapter is a good example of how ridiculous this theory is when pushed to extremes. Both of the terms, *Elohim* and YHWH, are used repeatedly in this chapter in one obvious literary unit. See Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism (J.E.P.D).

18:2-4 This seems to be a historical flashback giving information about Moses' family. TEV has Exod. 18:3b-4 in parentheses.

18:2 "Zipporah" This name means "a little bird" (BDB 862). Some believe it specifically refers to "a warbler" (cf. Exod. 2:21).

▣ **“after he sent her away”** This term meant “divorce” in rabbinical Judaism (cf. Deut. 24:1). In this context, however, it only meant sending her back to her father for a period of time, probably for safety reasons. The rabbis say that this was at the instigation and encouragement of Aaron. It seems to be related to the very difficult and ambiguous passage in Exod. 4:24-26, but the exact “what” and “why” is uncertain. When we last saw Moses and Zipporah they had only one son and now, two (cf. Exod. 18:4).

18:3 “Gershom. . . Eliezer” Gershom is the first son who we were introduced to earlier in Exodus. His name means “sojourner,” which reflects Moses’ discouraged attitude. The second son, whom we knew nothing about, has a more encouraging name, “God is my help” (cf. Exod. 18:4). The fact that this son is mentioned and not spoken of later is a good evidence for the historicity of this account (see Special Topic: OT Historiography Compared with Near Eastern Cultures). It also shows the selective nature of Hebrew historical narrative (see Special Topic: Hebrew Narrative).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:5-12

⁵Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God. ⁶He sent word to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.” ⁷Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. ⁸Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the LORD had delivered them. ⁹Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰So Jethro said, “Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.” ¹²Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’ father-in-law before God.

18:5 “the mount of God” This sometimes goes by the non-Semitic name of Sinai, which seems to be related to the Wilderness of *Sin* and reflects either the soil, climate, or vegetation. This mountain is also referred to by the Hebrew name Horeb (cf. Exod. 3:1; 4:27; 24:13), but we are uncertain of the etymology.

18:6 Israel would be leery of approaching groups of people.

The LXX and Syriac translations have “Lo!” (cf. RSV, REB, NJB, cf. Gen. 48:2) instead of the MT’s pronoun “I” (JPSOA, NRSV), which would imply Jethro speaking directly to Moses before he arrived at the Israelite campsite. It is possible that this direct speech is from a servant sent ahead to give Moses the message (UBS *Handbook*, p. 430).

18:7 “Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him” Rabbinical Judaism is perplexed by this verse because of the gracious greeting of Moses, the man of God, to Jethro, the unbeliever (in their opinion). However, this seems to be the common Oriental greeting, not some kind of theological gesture.

▣ **“welfare”** This is literally *shalom*. See Special Topic: Peace (OT). They truly seem to care for each other (note same idiom in Gen. 43:27).

18:8 This shows the oral culture of the ANE. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

▣ **“delivered”** This VERB in the *Hiphil* stem (BDB 664, KB 717, cf. Exod. 18:10 [twice]) denotes snatching something out of the hand (i.e., power) of another (cf. Exod. 2:19; 2 Sam. 14:16; 19:9; 22:1; 2 Kgs. 20:6; 2 Chr. 32:11; Ezra 8:31). Notice in the *Piel* stem it is used of Israel “plundering” the Egyptians in the exodus (cf. Exod. 3:22; 12:36).

Notice the emphasis is on the power of YHWH (i.e., Holy War), not Moses nor the Israeli army.

18:9 “Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians” This is a tremendous theological passage which contains many characteristic YHWHistic, covenant terms. I personally believe that Jethro must have known about YHWH before this encounter. The rabbis say that he was converted in this experience, but it seems obvious to me that he is reflecting previous knowledge and is rejoicing in YHWH’s continued goodness and promises.

18:11 “Now I know that God is greater than all the gods” This is either evidence that Jethro received new knowledge about YHWH, which is the assertion of the rabbis, or this is a Hebrew idiom (cf. Ps. 135:5). See Special Topic: Monotheism.

The ending of this verse is unusual. The Jerusalem Bible footnotes (p. 101) assert something has been left out, as does Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 320. It seems to refer to the idols of Egypt specifically. The plagues and the exodus showed the weakness of Egypt’s gods/idols (cf. Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4).

It is hard to know if confessions of YHWH’s power directly relates to personal faith in YHWH.

1. Rahab – Jos. 2:8-11
2. a woman – 1 Kgs. 17:24
3. Naaman – 2 Kgs. 5:15
4. Cyrus II – Isa. 45:3
5. Nebuchadnezzar – Dan. 2:46-47; 3:28-30; 4:2-3,37
6. Darius – Dan. 6:25-27
7. sailors in Jonah – Jonah 1:9,14
8. Nineveh – Jonah 3:5-10

I affirm faith in YHWH has always been wider than Israel (i.e., Melchizedek, cf. Genesis 14; Abimelech, cf. Gen. 20:3-7; Job; Caleb; Uriah; just to mention a few). These “believers” foreshadow YHWH’s desire for all humans made in His image, for fellowship, to have a personal knowledge and awe for Him (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

18:12 The “sacrifice” may be a friendship covenant or peace offering (cf. Gen. 31:54). It seems that Moses is making a covenant with Jethro by means of a sacrifice and by consummating it in a communal meal in the presence of Aaron and the elders. The exact purpose of this sacrifice with Jethro is uncertain, unless it is a gesture of thanksgiving to God (cf. Exod. 18:8-9).

There are two sacrifices mentioned here.

1. a burnt offering, usually totally consumed on the altar by fire
2. a peace offering, where the offerer and his guest eat part of the animal (i.e., in God’s presence)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:13-16

¹³It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. ¹⁴Now when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?” ¹⁵Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a dispute, it comes

to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.”

18:13 “the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening” The terms “sat” and “stood” are legal terms. This procedure involved an extremely long wait for justice. The same thing caused trouble later in David’s reign. Jethro apparently saw the problem, not intentionally but by accident, and offered a very practical suggestion to Moses.

The VERB “judge” (BDB 1047, KB 1622) is used often in this chapter (cf. Exod. 18:13,16,22 [twice], 26 [twice]). See Special Topic: Judge, Judgment, and Justice.

18:15 “because the people come to me to inquire of God” It must be remembered that at this point, there is still no priesthood. The tabernacle and priesthood do not come until later in Israel’s history (cf. Exodus 25-31; 35-40). Currently Moses was standing as a priest for the people (cf. Exod. 18:19). He also teaches the people (cf. Exod. 18:20) and judges the people (cf. Exod. 18:15). The last three of these will later become aspects of the Aaronic priesthood.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:17-23

¹⁷Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, ²⁰then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. ²¹Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²²Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. ²³If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.”

18:18 “You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people” The term “wear out” means “to fade away like a leaf.” This is intensified by the use of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 615, KB 663). This system of justice would hurt Moses and the people. The delegation of authority is good, not only for Moses, but for those who share the leadership and for those whom they serve.

18:20 “teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do” It is very important that Moses was to show the people what they were to do. Teaching the elders to be responsible for different groups is a tremendously practical piece of advice.

For “the statutes,” “the laws,” “the ways” see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation. God’s revelation at Sinai will begin in Exodus 19. The giving of the law which occurs in Exodus 20-24, may reflect this suggestion of Jethro. God reveals to Moses and he passes it on to the covenant people.

The VERB translated “teach” (BDB 264, KB 265, *Hiphil* PERFECT with *waw*) denotes not just information but a warning to obey. In this way it theologically parallels *shema* (cf. Deut. 6:4), which means “hear so as to do.” The covenant with Israel was conditional on obedience (see Special Topic: Covenant).

18:21 “you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain” Here is a fourfold qualification which is similar to the one described concerning the

specially called group in Acts 6:3 and the church leaders of 1 Tim. 3:1ff. In the account of this event in Deut. 1:9-18, Moses asks the tribes to choose the judges (cf. Deut. 1:13).

▣ **“of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens”** This refers to military units (cf. 1 Sam. 29:2; 2 Sam. 18:1). One of the tractates of the Talmud, Sanhedrin 19A, has calculated the number of judges it would take for the number of people mentioned in Exod. 12:37 and have come up with a total of 78,600 judges. See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*).

18:23 “If you do this thing and God so commands you” Jethro is obviously speaking in Oriental politeness but the theological underpinnings are very significant. Also, the teachableness of Moses is quite evident (cf. Exod. 18:24).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:24-27

²⁴So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²⁶They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. ²⁷Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

18:25 “able men” This NOUN (BDB 298) has several meanings (i.e., “strength,” “efficiency,” “wealth,” “army”) but here it denotes a moral and judicial ability.

Notice it does not specify a particular tribe.

18:27 This seems very different from Num. 10:29-32.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Who is Jethro and why has there been so much controversy concerning him?
2. Who is Zipporah and why is the second son only now mentioned?
3. Why does Moses show such respect to Jethro?
4. Is Exod. 18:11 a profession of faith?

EXODUS 19

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Moses On Sinai	Israel at Mount Sinai	The Theophany at Sinai	The Israelites at Mount Sinai	The Israelites Reach Sinai
19:1-6	19:1-9	19:1-6	19:1-3a	19:1-2
				Yahweh Promises the Covenant
				19:3-8
			19:3b-8	
19:7-9		19:7-9a		Preparing for the Covenant
			19:9a	19:9
		19:9b-15	19:9b-13	
19:10-15	19:10-13			19:10-13
	19:14-15		19:14-15	19:14-15
				The Theophany on Sinai
19:16-17	19:16-25	19:16-25	19:16-22	19:16-25
The LORD Visits Sinai				
19:18-25			19:23	
			19:24-25	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is the fulfillment of Exodus 3:12.
- B. This is the beginning of an extended passage of the revelation of YHWH which occurred at Mt. Sinai/Horeb (cf. Exodus 19; Numbers 10).
- C. There are several questions about Exodus 19.
 - 1. How can Israel be called “a kingdom of priests” when there are no priests yet? (also note Exod. 19:22,24)
 - 2. How many times does Moses go up and down the mountain? (cf. Exod. 19:3,7,8,14,20,21,24)
 - 3. Who did Moses take with him?
 - a. Aaron – Exod. 19:24
 - b. several people – Exod. 24:1
 - c. Joshua – Exodus 24:13

We must remember that this is oral tradition, not western history (see Special Topic: Hebrew Narrative). See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:1-6

¹In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. ³Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

19:1 “third month” This is literally “third new moon,” which would be the month of June. Moses often dates these events precisely in Exodus (cf. Exod. 12:6; 16:1; 19:1). The Israelites would stay at Mt. Sinai for about one year (cf. Num. 10:11).

▣ **“wilderness”** The wilderness of Sinai is the same as the wilderness of *Sin*. See Special Topic: The Wildernesses of the Exodus.

▣ **“Sinai”** This mountain is often called “Horeb” (Exod. 3:1). Scholars have suggested that Horeb may refer to the entire range and Sinai to a specific peak. The exact location is unknown. See Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai.

19:2 “Rephidim” This was a site of continued grumbling and rebellion by the children of Israel (cf. Exodus 16-18).

▣ **“camped in front of the mountain”** This is a fulfillment of Exod. 3:12. It is often called “the Mountain of God” (cf. Exod. 3:1; 4:27; 18:5; 24:13).

19:3 “the LORD called to him” Notice YHWH initiated the contact!

▣ **“the house of Jacob. . .the sons of Israel”** These are parallel titles for the descendants of the Patriarchal promise. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel in Gen. 32:28.

For the name “Israel” see Special Topic: Israel (the name).

19:4 “I bore you on eagles’ wings” God is described here as a mother bird (cf. Genesis 1:2; Deuteronomy 32:9-11; Matthew 23:27; Luke 13:34). See video sermon, “The Femininity of God,” online at www.freebiblecommentary.org in “Difficult and Controversial Texts,” #111.

▣ **“brought you to Myself”** The PRONOUN “you,” PLURAL, is repeated three times in this verse for emphasis. YHWH took them out of Egypt to bring them to Himself! YHWH wanted a personal faith relationship with the descendants of Abraham. The covenant is both

1. a proper faith attitude (i.e., Deut. 30:6)
2. a proper lifestyle
 - a. ritual (cf. Deut. 30:1-5)
 - b. daily (cf. Micah 6:8)

The NET Bible (p. 164, #27) suggests that this phrase denotes a bridegroom bringing his bride to his chamber. This marriage metaphor is also seen in Matt. 9:14-15; 25:1-13; John 3:29; Eph. 5:22-24; Rev. 18:23. A godly marriage may be the best earthly analogy of a faith relationship with God through Christ.

19:5 “if you will indeed obey” Notice the conditional element which is just like the Abrahamic covenant. Obedience is emphasized (cf. Luke 6:46; see Special Topic: Keep).

▣ **“will indeed obey”** This is the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (lit. “hear,” BDB 1033, KB 1570).

Notice this emphatic construction is followed by a similar sounding VERB (BDB 1036, KB 1581), “keep,” which is a *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*, denoting continuing obedience.

▣ **“My voice”** These are not Moses’ words or thoughts, but YHWH’s.

▣ **“My covenant”** See Special Topic: Covenant.

▣

NASB	“My own possession”
NKJV	“a special treasure to Me”
NRSV, JPSOA	“my treasured possession”
NJB	“my personal possession”
REB	“my special possession”

This FEMININE SINGULAR NOUN (BDB 688) means “valued property reserved for oneself.” Later it denoted the treasure of kings (cf. 1 Chr. 29:3; Eccl. 2:8; see Jewish Study Bible, p. 146). This phrase is a recurrent allusion (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17; Eph. 1:14; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). Israel, if obedient, had a unique relationship with YHWH. She was to be His means of revealing Himself to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3).

▣ **“for all the earth is Mine”** This implies monotheism (see Special Topic: Monotheism). Notice the universal element even amidst a national covenant (cf. Gen. 12:3; see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

19:6 “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” Israel was to reveal YHWH to all the other nations and people groups. God chose Israel to choose all nations. Also note that these same descriptive phrases used of Israel are now used of the church (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). The church is spiritual Israel (cf. Rom. 2:28,29; 9:6; Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:11-3:13). I know this is hard for some to accept. Please look at Special Topic: Why Do OT Covenant Promises Seem So Different from NT Covenant Promises?

For “holy nation” see Deut. 7:6; 14:2,21; 26:19. YHWH wants a “holy” (see Special Topic: Holy) people to reflect His character (see Special Topic: The Holy One) to the nations (cf. Lev. 11:45; 19:2; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). Holiness is obedience to the covenant in the OT, but for the NT (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 30:22-36), it becomes Christlikeness. The goal of biblical faith is Christlikeness! We dare not separate justification from sanctification.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:7-9

⁷So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. ⁸All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹The LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.” Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

19:8 “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” This is Israel’s first formal acceptance of the covenant (another in Jos. 24:19). The covenant was initiated by God’s grace but Israel had to respond to it (cf. Exod. 24:3,7; Deut. 5:27). See Special Topic: Predestination (Calvinism) vs. Human Free Will (Arminianism).

19:9 “thick cloud” The rabbis called it the *Shekinah* Cloud of Glory (cf. Exod. 19:16; 13:21; 14:19; 33:9-10; 1 Kgs. 8:10,12; Isa. 6:4; Dan.7:13; Acts 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:17). It was a symbol of the personal presence of YHWH. It was to

1. show God’s personal presence
2. show Moses was His spokesman (cf. Exod. 19:9)
3. keep the people from seeing God and thereby dying (cf. Exod. 19:21; Gen. 32:30; Exod. 3:6; 33:20; Jdgs. 6:22-23; 13:22; 1 Kgs. 19:13; Isa. 6:5)

▣ **“and may also believe in you forever”** This is a good example of “forever” (BDB 761) referring to a limited period of time (i.e., Moses’ lifetime). See Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:10-15

¹⁰The LORD also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” ¹⁴So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵He said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”

19:10 “consecrate them” This VERB (BDB 872, KB 1073, *Piel* PERFECT with *waw*) is used as an IMPERATIVE. The text mentions several things this involved.

1. a time element

2. ceremonial washing of their clothes (i.e., Num. 8:7,21)
3. abstinence from sexual relations with one's wife (cf. Lev. 15:18)

Josephus added more (*Antiq.* 3.5.1):

1. specific prayer for Moses
2. plentiful, festival diet
3. ceremonial dressing of wives and children in more "decent clothing than they usually wore"

▣ **"wash their garments"** This was an outward symbol of the people's reverence for God (cf. Gen. 35:2; Num. 8:7; 19:10,19). This is theologically analogous to the symbolism of Christian baptism. See Special Topic: Baptism.

19:11 "the LORD will come down" YHWH did not live on the mountain, as the Greek and Roman gods did. He lives in heaven but He came down (immanence)

1. to investigate the Tower of Babel – Gen. 11:5
2. to investigate Sodom's sins – Gen. 18:21
3. to act on behalf of Israel's cries for help – Exod. 3:8
4. to reveal Himself to Israel – Exod. 19:11,18,20

19:12 "people" The Samaritan text has "mountain." Both could fit the context.

▣ **"set bounds"** One aspect of holiness is that it is separate/set apart (cf. Exod. 19:23). The holiness of a place or thing causes it to be off limits (cf. Exod. 3:5; 40:35; Lev. 16:2; Num. 1:51; 18:22; 2 Sam. 6:7). To view God meant death (i.e., transcendence, cf. Exod. 19:9), so too, getting too close!

▣ **"shall surely be put to death"** This is the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 559, KB 562), which shows emphasis.

19:13 "shall surely be stoned" This is the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 709, KB 768) for emphasis. This was a common form of execution (cf. Exod. 19:13; 21:28,29,32; Lev. 20:2,27; 24:14,16,23; Num. 14:10; 15:35,36; Deut. 21:21; Jos. 7:25; 1 Kgs. 12:18).

▣ **"or shot"** This is another INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 434, KB 436). Apparently it refers to shooting arrows.

Notice the one who (or animal who) touches the mountain becomes "holy" and cannot remain among the people (similar to "under the ban," *herem*, BDB 356, i.e., Deut. 20:16-17; Jos. 6:17-19). His (their) execution must be done in such a way as to not touch the person or animal, so, therefore, stones or arrows.

▣ **"the ram's horn"** Later rabbis use the ram's horn because it was symbolic of the ram which God provided in the place of Isaac (cf. Genesis 22). Also, no horns of the cow or oxen could be used because they said it would remind God of the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32). The ram's horn makes a loud, piercing sound. See Special Topic: Horns Used by Israel.

19:15 "do not go near a woman" This must be interpreted in light of the culture. This is not a proof text for the uncleanness of sex. Sex is a gift from God and a command for mankind (cf. Gen. 1:28,31; 9:1,7). This is based on the view of Semitic cultures regarding the ritual uncleanness of any bodily emissions (cf. Leviticus 13-15; 1 Sam. 21:4-5; 2 Sam. 11:6ff). This may also possibly be an attempt of radical distinction between Israel and the surrounding fertility cults. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:16-17

¹⁶So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. ¹⁷And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

19:16 “thunder and lightning flashes” “Thunder” can refer to God’s voice (cf. 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Sam. 22:14-15; Job 37:2-5; Ps. 29:3-9). This is an attempt to express in language that which is inexpressible (cf. Deut. 4:11-12).

The Creator of the world uses its power and majesty to reveal Himself (i.e., theophany, cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1247-1249). Here, it reflects a powerful thunder storm (i.e., an aspect of the pillar of cloud). This imagery is recurrent of theophanies (cf. Jdgs. 5:4-5; 1 Kgs. 19:11-13; Job 36:24-33; 37:2-5; 38:25-30; Ps. 8:1,3; 18:7-15; 29:3-9; 68:7-9; 144:5-6; 147:8; Isa. 13:2-13; Hag. 2:6).

▣ **“a very loud trumpet sound”** This is a different word for “trumpet” (BDB 1051, cf. Exod. 19:19) than the one in Exod. 19:13 (BDB 385). This possibly refers to God’s trumpet (cf. Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 8:2; 11:15-19).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:18-25

¹⁸Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. ²⁰The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. ²¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. ²²Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.” ²³Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’” ²⁴Then the LORD said to him, “Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them.” ²⁵So Moses went down to the people and told them.

19:18 “the LORD descended upon it in fire” Fire is often associated with

1. God’s presence – Gen. 15:17; Exod. 3:2; 13:21; 19:16,18; 20:18; 24:17; Deut. 5:4
2. God’s holiness – Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29
3. God’s judgment – Gen. 38:24; Lev. 9:24; 20:14; 21:9; 1 Kgs. 18:38; Nah. 1:6
4. cleansing – Num. 31:22-23; Pro. 17:3; Isa. 1:25; 6:6-8; Jer. 6:29; Matt. 2:2-3

There are many other texts about “fire.” See Special Topic: Fire.

▣ **“the whole mountain quaked violently”** The physical effects of this theophany are also recorded in Ps. 68:7,8. The LXX translates this verse so that it is the people who “quake.”

Is this verse a description of a volcano or is it metaphorical of a powerful spiritual event?

19:19 This verse may be the biblical source of the statement that God spoke to Moses face-to-face as a friend (cf. Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10. Moses had unique access to YHWH.

19:21 “to gaze, and many of them perish” See note at Exod. 19:9.

19:22 “the priests” This must refer to the heads of the households who functioned as priests (i.e., Job and Abraham) because as of yet, there were no Levitical priests, only the firstborn servants of Exodus 13. *Rotherhams Emphasized Bible*, p. 103, #a, suggests it refers to “chieftains.” It surely could be an anachronism.

Notice there are consequences for disobedience (even if inadvertent, cf. 2 Samuel 6).

19:24 “Aaron” Why Moses had to go down and then come back up apparently was to also show Aaron’s leadership before the people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is this covenant different from the covenant of Genesis 12?
2. Why did God want to reveal His law at Mt. Sinai?
3. What is monotheism? What is its significance?
4. Why were sexual relations considered unclean? Is this a universal truth or a cultural situation?
5. How could the people know what “a kingdom of priests” meant if there was no priesthood at the time?

EXODUS 20

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Ten Commandments	The Ten Commandments	The Ten Commandments	The Ten Commandments	The Decalogue
20:1	20:1	20:1-3	20:1-2	20:1-2
20:2	20:2-3			
20:3			20:3	20:3
20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4-6	20:4 20:5-6
20:7	20:7	20:7	20:7	20:7
20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11
20:12	20:12	20:12	20:12	20:12
20:13	20:13	20:13	20:13	20:13
20:14	20:14	20:14	20:14	20:14
20:15	20:15	20:15	20:15	20:15
20:16	20:16	20:16	20:16	20:16
20:17	20:17	20:17	20:17	20:17
	The People Afraid of God's Presence	The Conclusion to the Theophany Scene	The People's Fear	
20:18-21	20:18-21	20:18-21	20:18-21	20:18-21
	The Law of the Altar	The Covenant Code (20:22-23:33)	Laws About Altars	Law Concerning the Altar
20:22-26	20:22-26	20:22-26	20:22-26	20:22-23 20:24-26

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

INTRODUCTION TO “THE TEN WORDS”

I. Terms

- A. Literally “the Ten Words” (BDB 796, CONSTRUCT BDB 182, cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4).
- B. It was called “The Decalogue” (*Deka Logous*) by Clement of Alexandria and this was followed by the early church fathers.
- C. In the Bible it is also called:
 - 1. “Covenant” – Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 9:9; see Special Topic: Covenant
 - a. from *barah* – to eat
 - b. from *birtu* – to bind
 - c. from *berit* – between
 - 2. “Testimony” (BDB 730) – Exod. 25:16; see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation

II. Purpose

- A. They reveal the character of God.
 - 1. unique and authoritative
 - 2. ethical, both towards society and the individual and for all citizens
- B. They reveal God’s plan for His covenant people.
 - 1. Honeycutt – for chosen people only (p. 9)
 - 2. Huey – principles that operate in all human societies (p. 84)
“Because they deal with the most basic moral principles that govern human relationships, they are universal in scope and applicable to all peoples of all ages and of whatever cultural background. No individual or society is better off by ignoring them.”
 - 3. *The Bible Commentary*, ed. F. C. Cook, “as the Divine testimony against the sinful tendencies in man in all ages” (p. 52).
 - 4. C. S. Lewis – There is an inner moral sense even among primitive tribes (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15) reflected here.
- C. As all ancient law codes, they were: (see Special Topic: Laws in the ANE)
 - 1. to regulate and control interpersonal relationships
 - 2. to maintain stability of the society
- D. They bound the heterogeneous group of slaves and Egyptian outcasts (cf. Exod. 12:28; Num. 11:4) into a community of faith and law.
B. S. Childs, *OT Library*, “Exodus” – “The eight negative aspects show the outer limits of the covenant boundary. There are no misdemeanors but to break the very fiber of which the divine-human relation consists. The two positive aspects show definition to the life within the covenant. The Decalogue looks both outward and inward; it guards against the way of death and points to the way of life” (p. 398).

III. Parallels

A. Biblical

1. The Ten Words are recorded twice, in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The slight difference in the 4th, 5th, and 10th commandments shows the adaptability of these general principles to different situations.
2. However, their uniformity points toward the preciseness with which they were transmitted.
3. They probably were read and reaffirmed periodically, as Joshua 24 shows.

B. Cultural

1. Other law codes from the Ancient Near East.
 - a. Ur-Naamu (Sumerian, 2050 B.C.) from the city of Ur
 - b. Lipit-Ishtar (Sumerian, 1900 B.C.) from the city of Isin
 - c. Eshnunna (Akkadian, 1875 B.C.) from the city of Eshunna
 - d. Code of Hammurabi (Babylonian, 1690 B.C.) from Babylon but stela were found in Susa
2. Many of the laws in Exod. 20:18-23:37 have much in common with other ANE law codes. However, the Ten Words are in a unique form which implies their authority (2nd person commands – apodictic).
3. The most obvious cultural connection is with the Hittite Suzerainty Treaties of 1450-1200 B.C. See Special Topic: Hittite (Suzerainty) Treaties. Some good examples of this similarity can be seen in:
 - a. The Ten Words
 - b. the book of Deuteronomy
 - c. Joshua 24The elements of these treaties are:
 - (1) identification of the King
 - (2) narration of his great acts
 - (3) covenant obligations
 - (4) instruction for depositing the treaty in the sanctuary for public reading
 - (5) deities of parties invoked as witnesses
 - (6) blessing for fidelity and cursing for violations
4. Some good sources on this subject
 - a. George Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*
 - b. Dewey Beegle, *Moses, The Servant of Yahweh*
 - c. W. Bezzel, *Origin and History*
 - d. D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*

IV. Internal Structure

- A. Alt, in his book, *The Origins of Israelite Law*, was the first to make the distinction between apodictic and casuistic.
 1. casuistic being that common form of ANE Law that contained a condition – “if” — “then”
 2. apodictic being that rare form that expresses a direct command, “Thou shall. . .” or “thou shall not. . .”
 3. Roland deVaux, in *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions*, vol. 1, p. 146, says that the casuistic is primarily used in the secular area and the apodictic in the sacred.

- B. The Ten Words are primarily negative in their expression—8 of 10. The form is SECOND PERSON SINGULAR (i.e., “you”). They are either meant to address the entire covenant community or each individual member or both!
- C. The two tablets of stone (Exod. 24:12; 31:18) are often interpreted as relating to the vertical and horizontal aspects of the Ten Words. Man’s relationship to YHWH is spelled out in four commands and human’s relationship to other humans in the other six commandments. However, in light of Hittite Suzerainty Treaties, they are two copies of the entire list of commands.
- D. The historical numbering of the Ten Words.
 - 1. It is obvious that we have ten regulations. However, the exact distinction is not given.
 - 2. Modern Jews list Exod. 20:2 as the first commandment. In order to keep the number at ten, they make Exod. 20:3-6 the second commandment.
 - 3. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, following Augustine, make Exod. 20:3-6 the first commandment and in order to keep the number at ten, divide Exod. 20:17 into two separate commands.
 - 4. Reform churches, following Origen and the early eastern and western churches, assert that Exod. 20:3 is the first commandment. This was the ancient Jewish view represented by Philo and Joseph.

V. How are Christians to relate to the Ten Words?

- A. Jesus’ high views of Scripture are recorded in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and especially Matt. 5:17-48, which shows us the seriousness of the question. His sermon almost seems to be based on the Ten Words and their proper application (i.e., Jesus is Lord of Scripture).
- B. Theories of relationship
 - 1. for believers
 - a. Roy Honeycutt, *These Ten Words*
 - (1) “We never outgrow the Ten Commandments because we never outgrow God” (p. 7).
 - (2) “Because the Commandments are witnesses to God, however, there is a sense in which their relevance and the relevance of God are so intertwined as to be almost inseparable. Consequently, if God is so relevant for your life, the Commandments will also be deeply relevant for they are written of God’s character and demands” (p. 8).
 - b. Personally, we must see these directives as issuing from a faith relation already established. To divorce them from faith and commitment to God is to destroy them. Therefore, for me, they are universal only in the sense that God wants all men to know Him. It must be stated that they are also related to the inner witness of God to His entire human creation. This is expressed by Paul in Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15. In this sense the Commandments reflect a guiding light that has an indwelling relevance to all mankind.
 - 2. for all men in all societies, for all times
 - a. Elton Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction*
 - “The thesis of this small book is that the recovery of the moral law, as represented by the Hebrew Decalogue, is one of the ways in which an antidote to potential decline can be found” (p. 6).

- b. George Rawlinson, *Pulpit Commentary, Exodus*
“They constitute for all time a condensed summary of human duty which bears divinity upon its face, which is suited for every form of human society, and which, so long as the world endures, cannot become antiquated. The retention of the Decalogue as the best summary of the moral law by Christian communities is justified on these grounds, and itself furnishes emphatic testimony to the excellency of the compendium” (p. 130).
3. It must be stressed that as a means of salvation, they are not, nor ever have been, God’s means for the spiritual redemption of fallen man (see Special Topic: Paul’s View of the Mosaic Law). This is clearly explicated by Paul in Gal. 2:15-4:31 and Rom. 3:21-6:23. They do serve as moral guidelines for humans in society. They point to God and then to our fellow humans. To miss the first element is to miss both! Moral rules, without a changed heart, are a picture of human’s hopeless fallenness (see Special Topic: The Fall). The Ten Words are valid, but only as a preparation to meet God in the midst of our inability; if not, they are guidelines without a guide divorced from redemption!

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Exodus 20:1-3

(A note to the reader. I have written previously on the Ten Words and have used that material here. The form is a little different. There are even thirteen videos/audios of this chapter online at www.freebiblecommentary.org in the first blue box, “OT Studies,” audio and video)

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Context

A. Larger literary unit (Exod. 19:1-23:33)

1. The exodus is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Gen. 15:13-16.
2. The deliverance promised by God was given through Moses and Aaron.
3. Exodus 19 forms a spiritual preparation for the giving of the Torah.
4. The Ten Words are followed by and in further amplification in “the Book of the Covenant” (Exod. 20:18-23:33), which is a detailed presentation of covenant life in: (see Special Topic: Laws in the ANE)
 - a. cultic worship
 - b. civil laws
 - c. moral and religious laws

B. Immediate context

1. The Ten Words seem to be naturally divisible between mankind’s obligations first to God and then to his fellow covenant partners. Exodus 20:1-3 opens the explication of the vertical relationship. They set the foundation on which all else rests—the oneness and uniqueness of YHWH (see Special Topic: Monotheism).

C. Historical form

1. This revelation has cultural affinity to the Hittite Suzerainty Treaties of the second millennium B.C. (see Special Topic: The Hittite Suzerainty Treaties).
2. The SECOND PERSON SINGULAR commands (“you”) are unique to the Decalogue.
3. For a good discussion of the Decalogue in light of ANE culture, see John H. Walton, *ANE Thought and the OT* (pp. 155-161).

II. Word Study of Significant Terms

FIRST

A. *Elohim* = “God” (BDB 43, KB), which is used 2,570 times in the OT (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.)

B. Possible etymology

1. Other related Hebrew terms
 - a. *El* (BDB 42, KB 48) = possibly an Akkadian root meaning “Mighty One” (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, A.)
It can be translated God or god
 - b. *Elah* (Aramaic form)
(mostly in Ezra 4-7 and Daniel 2-6)

- c. *Eloah* (SINGULAR)
(mostly in Job)
- 2. *Elohim* (used 2,570 times throughout the OT, see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.)
 - a. PLURAL (possible translations)
 - (1) rulers, judges as representatives of YHWH
 - (2) divine ones, including God and angels and other gods
 - b. INTENSIVE PLURAL (possible translations)
 - (1) god or goddess
 - (2) godlike one
- C. The rabbis assert that *El* or *Elohim* refers to God as creator, judge, and sustainer of the material order (cf. Genesis 1)—the All Powerful One!

SECOND

- A. YHWH – “LORD” used 5,500 times in the OT (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.)
(abbreviated form in Exod. 15:6; 17:16; Isa. 12:2; 20:4; 38:11; and 35 times in the Psalms)
- B. Possible etymology – the significant passage in Exod. 3:12-15, where it is related to the Hebrew VERB “to be.” This is the popular etymology because the technical etymology is uncertain.
- C. Translation variations (see notes online in Exod. 3:13-16)
 - 1. “I shall be with you” (Exod. 3:12)
 - 2. “I shall be the one who will be” (Exod. 3:14)
 - 3. “He who will be it” (Exod. 3:15)
 - 4. “I am he who I am”
 - 5. “I am who I am”
 - 6. “He who is”
 - 7. “I am that I am”
 - 8. “I am who I am”
 - 9. “I will be what I will be”
 - 10. “LORD” (in small capitals – normal English translation)
 - 11. LXX, “I am the Being”
- D. Often used in combination with *Elohim* – LORD GOD (first used in Gen. 2:4)
- E. The rabbis assert that YHWH is God in His mercy, love, and covenant fidelity. This is His unique name of covenant promise to Israel (cf. Exodus 3).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:1

¹Then God spoke all these words, saying,

20:1 “God spoke all these words” In Hebrew “spoke” is placed first in the MT, along with *Elohim*, in order to emphasize the revelatory aspect of the commands (see Special Topic: Inspiration).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:2

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

20:2 “I am the LORD” This is numbered as the first commandment within Judaism. It is significant that these commandments are given to a believing, responding, faith community (cf. Exod. 6:2), not just mankind in general. They are based on a covenant faith relationship (see Special Topic: Covenant)!

▣ **“who brought you out of the land of Egypt”** YHWH is the God of historical acts of grace (cf. Exod. 13:3). He acts as He said He would (i.e., Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21), redemptively for Israel. God’s grace precedes the Law; see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT). This recitation of God’s acts on Israel’s behalf is typical of Hittite treaties of the same period. They establish the historicity of this Sinaitic event (see Special Topic: Hittite Suzerainty Treaties). It is crucial to understand God as a caring, loving, personal, and involved Deity (cf. Ps. 81:9-11). It sets the stage for all theology.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:3

³“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me” Notice the direct SECOND PERSON SINGULAR NEGATED IMPERFECT used in a strong IMPERATIVAL sense. God is addressing Israel collectively and individually in absolute and simple terms (apodictic law; see Special Topic: Laws in the ANE).

The term “gods” is the same PLURAL term that is used for God (*Elohim* of Gen. 1:1). It can be SINGULAR or PLURAL in translation. When it is used of YHWH, it always has a SINGULAR VERB.

This is obviously an incipient expression of full philosophical monotheism (Isa. 45:5; 46:1-2). The movement from many gods to one God can also be seen in Egypt—Pharaoh Amenophis IV or Akhenaten (cf. Deut. 4:35,39; see Special Topic: Monotheism).



NASB, NKJV,	
NRSV, LXX	“before Me”
NRSV footnote,	
JPSOA, REB	“beside Me”
TEV	“but me”
NJB	“to rival me”
Peshitta	“except me”

This phrase has been found to be used in the ancient world in connection with taking a second wife. This shows the familial, intimate, relationship that YHWH demands from His people. It could, therefore, be related to the often used phrase, “a jealous God” (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:14).

Some see this phrase, which literally means “before my face,” as referring to worship. This verse then means “worship and serve only Me!” Some possible parallels of God’s exclusiveness would be Exod. 22:20; 23:13; 34:14; Deut. 13:2ff.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INSIGHTS

- A. This list of laws is related to its own day, as the Hittite Suzerainty Treaties show (i.e., Deuteronomy and Joshua 24), but also it is unique both in its apodictic forms (SECOND PERSON, SINGULAR commands) and its anti-polytheistic assertions.

- B. This forms the heart of the Mosaic legislation. It was to be adapted, expanded, and applied throughout Israel's history as the slight variation in the Deuteronomic parallel shows (cf. Deuteronomy 5).

DEUTERONOMIC PARALLEL

- A. The introduction in Deut. 5:1-5 is significant because
1. The VERB "hear" in Deut. 5:1 is *shema*, which means "to hear and to do" (cf. Exod. 6:4). Covenant obedience on the part of all Israel in all aspects was expected.
 2. Deut. 5:3 is significant because it shows the dynamic ongoing nature of the covenant. Each generation had to respond to it themselves. It was more a living relationship than a dead letter of law.
 3. Deut. 5:5 emphasizes the intermediatorial work of Moses in receiving the Law, but also the true author of the legislation is seen as YHWH.
 4. Deut. 6:6-9 is also significant in that it shows the responsibility of parents to pass on their faith as well as the requirements of the Law.

MODERN APPLICATION

- A. The theological points related to the Hebrew text are:
1. These commands have the authority of YHWH (cf. Exod. 31:18). They are revelatory as to His nature and purposes for redeemed man and human society.
 2. Verse 2 shows that God called and acted in grace toward Abraham and his seed as He said He would, Genesis 12; 15; 17; and 22.
- B. Application points
1. The Ten Words assume man's religious hunger and needs.
 2. God reveals Himself in personal, moral categories, not philosophical ones.
 3. Man will worship and serve something. Practically speaking, many modern men have gods which they do not recognize. Martin Luther said, "Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly your gods." Many today serve and worship:
 - a. individualism
 - b. nationalism
 - c. denominationalism
 - d. materialism
 - e. pleasure
 - f. secularism/society
 - g. science and technology
 - h. intellectualism

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Exodus 20 related to Deuteronomy 5?
2. How is the Decalogue related to ANE culture? How is it different from ANE culture?
3. Explain the different emphases in the titles for God—*Elohim* and YHWH.
4. Explain the difference between henotheism and monotheism.

EXODUS 20:4-6

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Context

- A. It is obvious that the first eleven verses of Exodus 20 all relate to one's attitude toward God as revealed in one's lifestyle.
- B. Not only one's worship, but one's daily life reflects one's love and devotion, or lack thereof, toward YHWH.
- C. For a good discussion of the genre of "Law" see
 - 1. Richard E. Avenbeck, "Law," pp. 113-138 in *Cracking OT Codes*
 - 2. Douglas Stuart, "The Law(s): Covenant Stipulations for Israel" (pp. 163-180 in *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*)

II. Word Studies of Significant Terms

FIRST

- A. "Idol" or "image" (BDB 820), Exod. 20:4
- B. Possible etymology is "to hew" or "to hew into shape" (from wood or stone)
- C. Translation variations
 - 1. "graven image"
 - 2. "sculptured image"
 - 3. "idol"

SECOND

- A. "Serve" (BDB 712, KB 773, *Hophal* IMPERFECT), Exod. 20:5
- B. Possible etymology
 - 1. "To work" or "to serve" – It came to be used in the sense of serving God by means of offering or worship. This is seen in that the same term can be used for the working of the ground. It is used in three senses of service to man, false gods, and YHWH.
 - 2. The same root can mean "slave," "servant," or "subject."
- C. Translation variations
 - 1. "serve"
 - 2. "worship"
 - 3. LXX – "serve" – In Greek there is a distinction between service to man and service to deity. This is the word for sacred service.

THIRD

- A. "Jealous" or "zealous" (BDB 888), Exod. 20:5

- B. Possible etymology
1. NOUN – “to be red in the face”
 - a. jealousy – Pro. 6:34
 - b. zeal – Num. 25:11; 2 Kgs. 10:16
 - c. rivalry – Eccl. 4:4; 9:6
 - d. zeal in battle (God for His people) – Isa. 42:13; 62:15; Zech. 1:14; 8:2
 - e. zeal in anger – Ezek. 35:11; Ps. 119:139; Job 5:2
 2. VERB – this form is used only of God’s jealousy or zealousness – Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:25; 5:9; 6:15
- C. Translation variations
1. “impassioned”
 2. “zealous”
 3. “zeal”
 4. “very possessive”
 5. LXX – “jealous” or “zeal”
- D. This term, like so many terms used to describe God, comes from intimate family relationships. This jealous love of God can be clearly seen in Hosea 2-3; 11.

FOURTH

- A. “Iniquity” (BDB 730), Exod. 20:5
- B. Possible etymologies
1. “to bend” or “twist”
 2. “to err from the way”
 3. this is the most common term, which is translated “iniquity” in English translations; it has three possible usages
 - a. iniquity
 - b. guilt
 - c. consequence of, or punishment for, iniquity
- C. Translation variations
1. “retributing”
 2. “punishing”
 3. “guilt”
 4. LXX – “recompensing”

FIFTH

- A. *Hesed* – “kindness” or “goodness” (BDB 338), see Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*), Exod. 20:6
- B. Possible etymologies
1. “to be kind” or “to be good”
 - a. kindness of humans toward other humans, usually because of their relationship to God (cf. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 16:17; Ps. 141:4; Pro. 19:22; 20:6); especially given to the lowly, needy, and helpless (cf. Pro. 20:28; Job 6:14)

- b. the kindness and mercy of God toward mankind
 - (1) covenant love
 - (a) in redemption from enemies and troubles, Gen. 19:29; 39:21; Exod. 15:13
 - (b) in preservation of life from death, Ps. 6:5; 86:17; Job 10:12
 - (c) in quickening of spiritual life, Ps. 109:26; 119:41,76,88,124,149,159
 - (d) in redemption from sin, Ps. 25:7; 51:3
 - (e) in covenant keeping, Micah 7:20; Deut. 7:9,12
 - (2) often grouped with other characteristics of YHWH (truth, faithfulness, righteousness, kindness, and fidelity, cf. Genesis 24:17; Psalm 25:20; 40:22; 57:4; 61:8; 85:11; 115:1; 138:2); see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT)
- c. extent of God's kindness
 - (1) abundant, plentiful, Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:5; 103:8; Jon. 4:2
 - (2) great in extent, Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:19; Ps. 145:8
 - (a) even to generations, Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9
 - (b) even to heavens, Ps. 57:11; 107:11
 - (c) earth is full of it, Ps. 33:5; 119:64
 - (3) everlasting, 1 Chr. 16:34,41; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 100:5; 106:1; 118:1,2,3,4,29; 136:26
- d. mercies, deeds of kindness to Israel, Gen. 32:11; Isa. 63:7; Ps. 25:6; 89:2

C. Translation variations

1. "kindness"
2. "mercy"
3. "pity"
4. "favor"
5. "goodness"
6. "lovingkindness"
7. LXX – in 135 passages has "mercy" (Exod. 20:6 is one of them)

- D. Rabbinical insight – This is a special word connected to YHWH's covenant promises to Israel. A human experiences God's covenant faithfulness, kindness, and mercy. They are meant to emulate this to their covenant partners (cf. Micah 6:8; 7:18).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:4-6

⁴"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

20:4a "You shall not make for yourself an idol" The negative is emphasized. Religious humans tend to be both superstitious and manipulative of supposed spiritual forces. YHWH cannot be lowered to animism or manipulated by His human creation. He is to remain above the crude pagan representations of earthly created things! Idols usually represented one of many deities. Each deity usually represented only one aspect of nature. YHWH, the only true God, could not be represented in His fullness by one form, therefore,

no idol was to be created. God is a spiritual being (cf. Deut. 4:12,15-18), not a physical one (John 4:24); see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (NT).

20:4b “or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” In light of Israel's use of *cherubim*, bulls, lilies, and pomegranates in the Tabernacle, and Moses' creation of the bronze serpent, this probably refers to images that directly depict God. This relates to the previous command, thereby meaning no images of other gods beside, before, or connected with, the worship of YHWH. This prohibition was violated by Aaron's creation of the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32).

This phrasing does not teach a three-storied universe. It is simply the language of description. It is not in conflict with modern science. It simply predates it and gives to the physical order a metaphorical designation (i.e., phenomenological language).

20:5a “You shall not worship them or serve them” This is a reference to Exod. 20:3 (i.e., “them”). The two Hebrew terms here translated “worship” (BDB 1005, lit. “bow down”) and “serve” (BDB 712) relate to religious worship practices.

▣ **“for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God”** See the section on etymology for these three major terms: “YHWH,” “*Elohim*,” and “jealous.” This is another family term, “jealous,” used to describe to mankind the intensity of God's love. God is here depicted as a passionate lover (cf. Hosea 1-3). Several parallel passages show the term “jealous” as being connected with the worship of other gods (cf. Exod. 34:14; Deut. 6:14-15; Jos. 24:19). Deuteronomy 4:15-19 seems to explain this commandment in light of the formless revelation at Sinai.

20:5b “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations” This implies that one's children reap the consequences of family sin (particularly in multi-generational homes) and societal sin (cf. Exod. 34:7). This can easily be seen in the Kings of Israel and Judah. We pass on, not only the consequences of sin, but also a lifestyle of sin (cf. Jer. 16:10-12). This passage must be balanced with the OT emphasis on individual responsibility (cf. Deut. 24:16; 2 Kgs. 14:6; Jer. 31:29,30; Ezek. 18:1-4). It is interesting to note the black and white contrast in the closing phrase. One either knows, loves, and follows YHWH or that one is said to hate Him. There is no neutral middle ground when one is dealing with the only true, creator God!

▣ **“of those who hate me”** The term “hate” (BDB 971, KB 1338, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is a Hebrew idiom of comparison (cf. Gen. 29:31-33; Deut. 21:15; Mal. 1:2-3; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). It primarily speaks of “priority.”

20:6 “but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” Compare this to Deut. 5:10; 7:9. See the section on etymology for *hesed*.

▣ **“thousands”** “Thousands” must mean generations because of Hebrew parallelism with the passage in Deut. 7:9; see Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*). What a marvelous promise! This shows the true relationship between God's love and wrath. God's faithfulness is to be reciprocated. Obedience is important (cf. Luke 6:46; see Special Topic: Keep). However, it is not just rule keeping, but our attitude of love that issues in obedience that is required (cf. Deut. 30:6).

▣ **“commandments”** See Special Topic: Terms for God's Revelation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is an idol? Do we have them today?
2. Does this passage imply that art is sinful?
3. Does this passage teach that there is a three-storied universe?
4. How can we call God jealous? What does this imply?
5. What is the relationship between the names for God: (1) YHWH and (2) *Elohim*?

EXODUS 20:7

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Word Studies of Significant Terms

FIRST

- A. “Name” (BDB 1027) – This is the most common term for “name” and is used extensively throughout the OT.
- B. Possible etymologies – root is uncertain
- C. Special usages
 1. This is the general term for
 - a. one’s name (like Noah’s son, Shem)
 - b. one’s reputation, fame, or renown
 2. It was used especially for a designation or circumlocution for God. His name, especially YHWH or combinations thereof, revealed His character and purpose; see Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH (OT). This special covenant name became so holy in later Judaism that it could not even be pronounced. This trend can be seen in Lev. 24:11 and Ps. 75:2.
 3. This term was used occasionally for false gods (cf. Exod. 23:13; Job 23:7; Hos. 2:19; Ps. 16:4).
 4. It was used as a memorial of a person after death (cf. 2 Sam. 8:15; Isa. 55:13).

SECOND

- A. “Emptiness” or “vanity” (BDB 996)
- B. Special usages
 1. emptiness, nothingness, vanity, cf. Ps. 60:13; 108:13 (used 23 times)
 2. emptiness of speech, cf. Pro. 30:8; Ps. 12:3; 41:7; 144:8,11; Isa. 59:4; Ezek. 13:8 (used 14 times)
 3. emptiness of persons, worthless ones, cf. Ps. 26:4; Job 11:11 (used 5 times)
- C. Translation variations
 1. English – “take lightly,” “frivolously,” “to misuse it,” “profanity”
 2. LXX – “vain,” “unprofitable,” or “useless”

THIRD

- A. “To hold guiltless” (BDB 667, KB 720, *Piel* IMPERFECT), Exod. 20:7

B. Special usages

1. *Niphal* IMPERFECT – “to be unpunished”
2. *Niphal* PERFECT
 - a. to be cleaned out; purged – Isa. 3:26
 - b. be clean, free from guilt – Jer. 2:35
 - c. innocent, exempt from punishment – Exod. 21:19
 - d. exempt from obligation – Gen. 24:8,41
3. *Piel* PERFECT
 - a. hold innocent, acquit – Job 9:28
 - b. leave unpunished – 1 Kgs. 2:9

C. Translation variations

1. English – “guiltless,” “unpunished,” “acquit,” “clear one”

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:7

7“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”

20:7a “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” This is obviously connected to the previous two commands. Some see this as referring to oath-taking because “take” (BDB 669, KB 724) means “to lift up” and would connect it to Matt. 5:33-34 (cf. Exod. 23:1; Lev. 19:12). This is the understanding of the rabbis (cf. Targum of Jonathan, Mekilta, the Peshitta, and Rashi).

I think “vain” (BDB 996, see Special Topic: Vain, Empty, Nothingness) refers to treating the Lord Himself in a frivolous, light manner during our lives, both in legal (swearing as a witness, cf. Lev. 19:12) and worship settings (calling on His name), as well as daily conversations or actions.

The name YHWH (see Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH) had unique and holy associations to Israel because it was through His name and acts that He revealed His character and purposes. It became so holy that in later Judaism it was not even pronounced except by the High Priest on *Yom Kippur* (cf. Leviticus 16). This special concept of the name as representing the character, purpose, and holiness of God (cf. Deut. 12:5; 14:24; Matt. 6:9) is the central thrust of this commandment. God was to be revered!

The commentator, Von Rad, following Mowinchel, has asserted that there is a “magical connotation” regarding the commandment. The use of divine names to control nature and spiritual forces was common among Israel’s neighbors. Exegetically this cannot be established but must be assumed to be a cultural option in applying this text to later Israeli idolatrous abuses. This would certainly be applicable to the modern use of YHWH in magic and occultic settings. Also, this commandment’s position in the list connects it uniquely with Exod. 20:4-6 and, thereby reaffirms the above emphasis.

For the majority of civilization today this commandment speaks to perfunctory faith—living life in God’s name without knowing and revering Him! There is today a practical atheism in many western “Christian” nations.

20:7b “for the LORD will not leave him unpunished” The term “unpunished” (“guiltless”) occurs in several passages where God’s forgiveness has been emphasized (cf. Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Nahum 1:3). This shows that YHWH is readily willing to forgive sin, combined with mankind’s trust and commitment to Him (cf. Deut. 30:1-10), but is not willing to simply overlook it. Sin is serious; it cost God His only Son!

20:7c “who takes His name in vain” This refers, in context, to covenant man! Those who know God are more responsible for the inappropriate use of His name. This also involves the lifestyle of those who claim to know Him, which can be a cheapening of His great, holy name! God’s name is important because it reflects His ultimate purpose which is the redemption of all humans (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the name of God so important to Him?
2. What does it mean to take His name in vain? What are some of the ways we could do it in our cultural setting?
3. Does punishment involve spiritual lostness or what?

EXODUS 20:8-11

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Background

- A. This is the first of two positive commands.
- B. This is the first commandment that has significant variation in Deuteronomy 5.
- C. The Deuteronomy parallel is obviously meant to be the same as Exodus 20, as is seen clearly in Deut. 5:1-11.
- D. It is significant that the VERB, *Shema* (BDB 1033), which means “to hear and do,” is in both Deut. 5:1 and 6:4). Also, the aspect of parents passing on their trust in God, found in Deut. 6:6-9, is significant for later generations.
- E. The focus of the Sabbath observance in Exod. 20:8-11 is creation, while in Deut. 5:12-15 it is the exodus. These two aspects of the name of God as *Elohim* (i.e., creator) and YHWH (i.e., savior) are also significant.

II. Word Studies of Significant Terms

FIRST

- A. “Sabbath” (BDB 992), see Special Topic: Sabbath (OT), Exod. 20:8
- B. Possible roots
 1. cease, desist, rest
 2. cessation
- C. Various usages
 1. Sabbath, Exod. 16:25; 20:10; Deut. 5:14
 2. Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:31; 23:32
 3. Sabbath Year, Lev. 25:4; 26:34,43; 2 Chr. 36:21

D. Translation variations

1. "Sabbath"
2. "Seventh" (see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture)

SECOND

A. *Kadosh* = "Holy" = separated for God's use (see Special Topic: Holy), Exod. 20:8

B. Special usages

1. apartness, sacredness, holiness of God (see Special Topic: The Holy One)
2. places set apart as sacred by God's presence
3. things connected to holy places
4. persons holy by their connection to holy places or things
5. times set apart for worship, Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:8,11
6. things and persons which were ceremonially clean

C. Related terms

1. sacred, holy
2. be set apart or consecrated
3. sanctuary
4. sacred (used in Exod. 20:8 only)
5. sacred place
6. set apart (Daniel 4 and 5 only)

D. Translation variations

1. "holy"
2. "hallow"
3. "sanctify it"
4. "withdrawn from common employment and dedicated to God"

THIRD

A. "Sojourner" (BDB 158, Exod. 20:10)

B. Usages

1. temporary dweller with limited rights
2. same as #1 but within covenant community

C. Translation variations

1. "sojourner"
2. "stranger"
3. "alien"
4. "house guest"

FOURTH

A. "Shall not do any work" (BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT)

B. Usages

1. *Qal* stem
 - a. rest, settle down and remain

- b. repose, be quiet, have rest
- 2. *Hiphil* stem
 - a. cause to rest or give rest
 - b. cause to settle down
 - c. deposit
 - d. let remain
 - e. leave
 - f. abandon
 - g. let alone
 - h. permit
- 3. *Hophal* stem
 - a. no rest is granted
 - b. space left open

C. Related to use of Sabbath (cf. Gen. 2:2,3; Exod. 16:30; 23:12; 31:17; 34:32; Lev. 26:34,35)

III. Historical Development

A. The Sabbath

1. It has been proposed that it is related to the Babylonian moon festival, *Shapattu* (“day of full moon”). Yet, in the Bible, a seven-day division is not related to the lunar calendar. Besides, in Babylon, the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, and 28th days were considered unlucky, which caused the populous to abstain from all activities.
2. It has been proposed that it is related to the taboo day of the Kenites. Again, this is an evil day, not like the biblical festival Sabbath. This Kenitic theory has little or no evidence, either to YHWHism or the Sabbath.

B. Seven day week

1. In Egypt the 30-day cycle was divided into three tens.
2. The lunar calendar has roughly 29½ days. A division into sevens is not natural or easy. Although the full moon falls about 15 days into a month, and in Assyria and Babylonia it was called *Shapattu*; for Israel her major feast days were on the 19th or 14th day, not the 15th.
3. The emphasis of Genesis 2 asserts the extreme antiquity of the seven-day division. Unfortunately, it is lost in the past, along with the origins of sacrifice and of circumcision.
4. The concept of a seven-day week was first recorded in Exod. 16:22ff.

IV. Relation to the New Testament

- A. The Jewish trend toward legalistic literalism turned this, as all OT legislation, into hard and fast rules. The very absence of OT specificity militates against this. Jesus, in Mark 2:27 and Matt. 23:8 focuses on man, not on rules!
- B. The church was never commanded to emphasize Sunday over the Sabbath. It seems to have developed along these lines:
 1. the growing division between the Synagogue and the Church
 2. Jesus’ precedent of appearing in the upper room several Sunday evenings in sequence (cf. John 20:19,26)

3. the significance of the resurrection pulled worship to a new theme on a new day (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2)
4. the concept of 1 day in 7 is retained

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:8-11

⁸“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.”

20:8 “Remember the sabbath day” Both VERBS in Exod. 20:8 are INFINITIVES not IMPERATIVES, but they have the force of a strong command. The Sabbath, like “first fruits” or “firstborn,” expressed the truth that all of life belongs to God. One special worship day out of seven has the same thrust!

The Deuteronomic parallel has some additions at this point but they do not change the main truth. Exodus 20 gives the basis as creation (Gen. 2:3), while Deuteronomy 5 gives the basis as the exodus. Jewish tradition says that the exodus was on a Sabbath.

This is the first command which is in a positive form (also Exod. 20:12). It is also the longest. If one surmises that all original commands were short, then they have undergone some expansion. There are some biblical parallels for a shorter form in Exod. 23:12; 31:15; 34:21; Lev. 23:7; Jer. 17:27.

Violations of the Sabbath were capital offenses (cf. Exod. 31:14; Num. 15:32-36). This is serious to God!

20:8a “to keep it holy” We keep it holy by doing what God said to do about it. It was God’s command that made it holy—set apart for His special use and purpose (see Special Topic: Holy).

Holiness is an attribute of God only. Persons, places, things, and times are holy only in their connection to God and His special use of them. In a real sense, all of life and creation is holy because they come from God and are caught up in His redemptive purpose. However, there is a special usage connected to the terms *Kadosh* and *Hagios*, which implies “set apart for specific divine purpose.”

The Sabbath, like circumcision, was a sign of the covenant (cf. Exod. 31:12-27).

20:9 “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” Labor (BDB 712) did not come with the Fall (cf. Genesis 3). Adam was given the task of caring for the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:15). Labor is not the issue (cf. Exod. 34:21; 35:2,3) here but “when.” Only for six days may humanity labor (i.e., as God did in creation) but as God rested on the seventh day, so too, His creatures created in His image. The hard labor of humans is connected to the curse of the ground because of Adam’s rebellion (Gen. 3:17-19). We are periodically relieved of the curse. Notice that it is not until Lev. 23:3 that the Sabbath is specifically designated as a worship day, although the Deuteronomic parallel already points in this direction. Protestants need to be reminded that it is a festival day—not only in the OT context, but even more so in the Christian’s observance of Sunday as a memorial of Resurrection Sunday!

20:10a “but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God” Humans need God more than anything else. They need God in daily fellowship. Weekly worship is a practical aid in prompting personal relationship. Notice the use of the Covenant title, YHWH, and the personal term, “your.” It was this emphasis on weekly worship that helped Israel survive as a religious entity during the exile and up until today. It will do the same for the Church.

▣ **“the LORD your God”** In Exod. 20:1 the name *Elohim* (PLURAL) is used but in Exod. 20:2 “YHWH your God” uses the SINGULAR form of *Elohim* (as in 20:5,7,12, and here).

20:10b-g “in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you” At first glance it is surprising, in light of ANE views of wives as chattel (i.e., personal property, cf. Deut. 5:21), that they are not mentioned in this list. It is possible, since there is a Genesis 1-2 orientation to the seventh day of rest, that the mutuality of Gen. 1:26-27 is being honored.

This concept of no work (or rest) is used as a metaphor for heaven in Hebrews 3 and 4. In the New Testament context “rest” is used in several distinct ways.

1. seven day rest of creation
2. the Promised Land
3. heaven

It, therefore, was a constant reminder of God’s forgiveness and salvation.

Unique is God’s concern for the cattle. They are collectively part of a person’s house (cf. Jos. 7:15,24). God often shows a love and concern for the animals (cf. Gen. 8:1; Jonah 4:11). The Deuteronomy parallel adds “ox and ass” to the phrase concerning “the cattle.”

The phrase “who stays with you” is literally “within your gates.” The phrase was a metaphor for a social community, a legal system, and a religious system.

20:11a “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” It is obvious that this commandment is linked to Genesis 1 and 2—God as Creator and Owner of all things.

Exodus 20 used creation as the backdrop, while Deuteronomy 5 uses the exodus. Also notice that YHWH’s creation of “the sea” is specifically mentioned here, though not in Genesis 1-2.

20:11b “and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy”

The Lord “rested” and “blessed” (see John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 As Ancient Cosmology*) it for our sake, not His own. The Deuteronomic parallel adds to this phrase the emphasis on “therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How old is the division of the month or year into seven-day weeks?
2. What does “holy” mean? How is it related to our actions on this weekly worship/rest day?
3. What is work?
4. Why is Exodus 20 different from Deuteronomy 5 in this command?

EXODUS 20:12

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Background

- A. This is the first of the common divisions of the Ten Words into:
 1. covenant person’s relationship to YHWH (Exod. 20:1-11)
 2. covenant person’s relationship to the believing community (Exod. 20:12-17)

- B. This division is suspect because it reflects western categories, not the holistic concepts of the Hebrews where all of life belonged in a religious context.
- C. The normal interpretation in which the Ten Words were divided into subject matter and that, therefore, the two tablets reflected this division, has been shown to be suspect, based on the Hittite Suzerainty Treaty pattern (see Special Topic: Hittite Suzerainty Treaties).

II. Word Studies of Significant Terms

FIRST

A. “Honor” = “to make heavy” (BDB 457, 455, *Piel* IMPERATIVE, although a *Piel* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE is possible), Exod. 20:12

B. Special usages

1. *Qal* stem
 - a. to be heavy in weight
 - b. to be heavy as a metaphor for insensible or dull
 - c. to be heavy as a metaphor for honored
2. *Niphal* stem
 - a. PASSIVE
 - (1) be made heavy
 - (2) be honored
 - b. get oneself glory
3. *Piel* stem
 - a. make heavy, insensible
 - b. make honorable, Exod. 20:12
4. *Pual* – be made honorable
5. *Hiphil* stem
 - a. make heavy
 - b. make dull or unresponsive
 - c. cause to be honored
6. *Hithpael* stem
 - a. make oneself heavy, dense, or numerous
 - b. honor oneself

C. Translation variations

1. “honor”
2. “regard”
3. “give due weight to”

SECOND

A. “Prolong,” BDB 73 (cf. Gen. 26:8; Exod. 20:12)

B. Related Hebrew terms

1. to delay or be long (cf. Jdgs. 5:28)
2. to be many or much (cf. Deut. 14:25; 19:6; 1 Sam. 7:2)

C. Translation variations

1. “long”

2. “prolong”
3. “long,” “endure”
4. “lifelong”

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:12

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

20:12a “Honor your father and your mother” The term “honor” means “give due weight to.” It is directed to adult children. In Hebrew, that which is heavy is valuable and worthy of honor, like the use of the term “glory,” while that which is light is dishonorable (cf. Deut. 27:16), like the term “vain.” Notice that both parents are to be given respect, not just the father. This shows that even in a patriarchal system, the wife had a place of respect (cf. Proverbs 31).

Covenantal parents stand in the place of God-given authority and responsibility, as Deut. 6:6-9 shows. The parents are responsible for covenant training. Therefore, to honor one’s parents is, in some respects, to honor God. In Lev. 29:3 the term “fear” is used in connection to parents, which is usually reserved for God alone. The aged are to be honored as well as parents, Lev. 19:32. Often teachers are called parents and students are called sons (cf. Gen. 1:24; Proverbs 1-9).

The commandments were not for the children but the parents, parents in a social context of multiple generations living together under one roof! Honor is a lifelong task (cf. 1 Tim. 5:4,8). This does not involve total obedience but an attitude of respect and care.

20:12b “that your days may be prolonged in the land” The other uses of this phrase in Deut. 4:40 and 5:33 show that this is not a personal promise of individual longevity, but a societal promise related to family stability and societal stability. Some quote Eph. 6:2; Deut. 6:2; and the Egyptian sage, Ptahholep, who said, “the son who accepts the words of his father will grow old in consequence of so doing” and “the obedient son will be happy by reason of his obedience; he will grow old; he will come to favor,” as a proof that this is referring to personal longevity. The blessing of personal longevity is the byproduct of a stable, godly society.

The Israelite occupation of the Promised Land was always related to its covenant keeping!

The negative parallel is found in Exod. 21:15,17 and Lev. 20:9. The consequences of disobedience are staggering to the modern mind (cf. Leviticus 26; Deut. 21:18-22). Jesus documents further abuse in His day (cf. Matt. 15:3-9).

20:12c “which the LORD your God gives” The two major aspects of the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12; 15; 17; and 22 were (1) the land and (2) the seed. The land is emphasized in the OT, while the seed is prioritized in the NT. Many commentators notice that the Covenant name for God is mentioned in this verse, as it is in Exod. 20:2,5,7, and 10, which all relate to our relationship with God. The name of God does not appear in the remaining commandments. Some interpret this as meaning this commandment forms a transition between our vertical relationship and our horizontal relationships. However, this verse primarily relates to one’s attitude toward the Covenant God as reflected in one’s treatment of His appointed representatives in one’s life.

It is significant to notice that faith toward God affects all of life! How we act in worship must be duplicated in daily interpersonal relationships. God wanted, and still wants, a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6) to attract, convict, and introduce a lost world to Him. The joy and stability of believing homes is a bright beacon of hope amidst a world in turmoil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to honor one's parents?
2. How would this have been especially important in an extended family system?
3. Is this a personal promise or a societal promise? Why or why not?
4. How is God's grace brought into this verse?

EXODUS 20:13

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:13

¹³“You shall not murder.”

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I. Context

- A. It needs to be remembered that even the commands that seem to be of a social nature are really religious. God's sovereignty over creation and redemption are shadowed in these commands. The command not to murder is, in proper focus, a word about the image of God in every human being (cf. Gen. 1:26,27) and God's care and concern for human life.
- B. It needs to be remembered, too, that each command reflects the community of faith. The prohibition on taking a life in an illegal manner is primarily and originally focused with the believing community. Its implications are as wide as humanity!

II. Word Study of Significant Terms

- A. “Murder” – This is a rare term (*rasah*, BDB 953, KB 1283) for taking a life, used only 46 times in the OT.
- B. The term (*rasah*) seems to have an original limited meaning and an expanded meaning.
 1. Originally it related to taking the life of a covenant partner in a legal, premeditated way, often associated with “the kinsman avenger.” This usage involved premeditation but in a sense of legal revenge (cf. Num. 35:30-34; Lev. 24:13-23). In reality, the *Lex Talionis*, “eye-for-eye” (cf. Gen. 9:5-6) was a way to limit revenge. Later, the cities of refuge (Deut. 4:41; Jos. 20:3) were established so that a covenant member who accidentally or passionately killed another member of the community could flee the wrath of the victim's family.
 2. Later the term came to refer to the motive or attitude behind the taking of a life. The concept of “intentionality” becomes uppermost! (cf. Exod. 21:12-14; Num. 35:11,22; Deut. 28:24).
 3. This distinction becomes very significant in this command. It seems in context to refer only to others within the covenant community. It is related to the kinsman avenger. However, the term is used in later passages which reflect the Decalogue, Hosea 4:2 and Jer. 8:9, to refer to a murderer. This word relates not only to the law but to the motive. It expands from neighbor to fellow human being.

- C. This term certainly does not relate to our modern ethical issue of capital punishment (cf. Exod. 21:12-17) or war (cf. Deut. 20:10-18). The Jews never had a problem with community execution or holy war (or, for that matter, unholy war!).
- D. The best translation for our modern culture would be “premeditated murder.”

III. Contextual Insights

- A. The sixth, seventh, and eighth commands are made up of only two Hebrew words. They are very short and to the point.
- B. Life, like all of life, is related to God. How we treat others reflects our thoughts about God.

IV. New Testament Parallels

- A. Jesus
 - 1. His expansion of this commandment (cf. Matt. 5:21-26) gives us the proper orientation for our modern discussion about how to apply this text to our day.
 - 2. Jesus obviously moved the Decalogue from the realm of actions into the realm of motives. We are what we think! The thought life is much more spiritually relevant and significant than we normally give it credit.
- B. John
 - 1. 1 John 3:5 – This same concept of hate being considered murder is stated.
 - 2. The Greek terms used in Matt. 5:21ff and 1 John 3:5 are different but the meaning is essentially the same.
 - 3. Note the positive aspect in 1 John 4:19-21.

V. Application Truths

- A. Even though an unintentional murderer can escape the blood avenger by fleeing to a city of refuge (cf. Numbers 35; Joshua 20), he has to pay the penalty of confinement in that city until the death of the High Priest. The consequences of his act still remain!
- B. Although this verse does not directly relate to suicide (see Special Topic: Suicide), as the ancients probably never thought of this event, the text still gives a spiritual principle concerning the sanctity of human life and God’s sovereignty and purpose for human life made in His image. This text speaks a strong word to our day in this area.
- C. This text does not, however, speak a decisive word to the modern question of (1) capital punishment or (2) war. For Israel, these were not evil things in themselves. The Israelites were involved in both of these acts. Still, the principle of the significance of life made in God’s image and under His control, is an important truth in this area.
- D. This text does speak a needed word about the dignity and sanctity of human life! We in the believing community are stewards, not only of our own actions, but of our society. The gift of life is both individual and corporate.

We are responsible for the physical, social, and psychological abuse of our own bodies, as we are the physical, social, and psychological abuse of others in our community. This is especially true in a culture like ours where we are allowed to speak to and, thereby change the system. We are our brothers' keeper!

EXODUS 20:14

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:14

¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery.”

I. Context

- A. It is obvious that this commandment is related to one's respect for God which is seen in respect for a neighbor's life, wife, and property (cf. Jer. 5:8). This is verified by the different order of these commands in the Septuagint.
- B. The Deuteronomic parallel shows the appropriateness of adopting this ancient truth to our culture.
- C. As respect for parents was seen as a key to a stable society, so too, is this command.
- D. This command also implies God's ownership and control of our sexual and family lives.

II. Word Study

The major term in this text is “adultery” (זָנָה, BDB 610, KB 658). It is crucial that one understand this term in light of ancient Hebrew culture.

- A. This term is distinct in an OT context from “fornication.” Adultery relates to at least one party in the sexual relationship being married. The term “fornication” implies both parties are not married (cf. Pro. 29:3; 31:3). It often refers to fertility worship (cf. Ezek. 16:15,26,29; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE). The distinction is lost in the NT Greek terms.
- B. This possibility explains the reason for the emphasis on marital status because it relates to the importance of inheritance rights, which were involved in God's promise of “the land” (i.e., Joshua 12-19). Every fifty years (Jubilee) all land was to revert to the original tribal owners (cf. Lev. 25:8-17,23-24; 27:17-24).
- C. Adultery was culturally condemned before the Mosaic legislation (cf. Gen. 12:10ff; 26:7ff; 39:9).
- D. Adultery was seen as a sin against
 - 1. neighbor – Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18
 - 2. marriage – Lev. 18:20
 - 3. God – Gen. 20:2-13; 26:7-11
- E. It was punishable by death for both parties
 - 1. Lev. 20:10
 - 2. Deut. 22:22-24
 - 3. Ezek. 16:40 (metaphor)
 - 4. strict warnings are found in Proverbs 1-9

III. Relation to New Testament

- A. Jesus used Lev. 19:18 as a summary of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 10:27). This confirms the Ten Commandments are related to our treatment of others.
- B. Jesus intensifies the commands in Matt. 5:28. He places the emphasis on motive rather than action. The Jews saw the mind as the seed bed of the soul. What one thought was what one really was (Pro. 23:7). This makes the Ten Words almost impossible to keep—that is the purpose! (cf. Gal. 2:15-3:29).

IV. Modern Application

- A. Marriage is possibly the best modern analogy of a lifelong faith commitment in God's name (i.e., Eph. 5:22-33). It is our best chance to understand the realities of OT covenant concepts (Mal. 2:14). Respect for our mate in all aspects, including human sexuality, helps us comprehend the thrust of this verse.
- B. Marriage stability and loyalty, like respect for parents, is a major pillar of societal strength.
- C. It needs to be emphasized that human sexuality is a gift from God (cf. Gen. 1:27,28; 9:1,7). It was His idea and will for humanity. The guidelines are not meant to thwart mankind's freedom or joy, but to give some godly guidelines for fallen humanity. The boundaries are set for our long-term benefit and happiness. Although mankind has abused sexuality, as they have all of God's gifts, it is still a powerful drive within humankind which must be under God's control and guidance.
- D. Guidelines for sexuality must be guarded so that the sacredness of the human person (female or male) is respected because they are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). Western society's fallen focus on "me" is all too obvious in this area.

EXODUS 20:15

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:15

¹⁵“You shall not steal.”

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Like all other regulations in the Decalogue, our faith, love, and respect for God must be seen in the sacred and secular aspects of our daily lives. It is an abomination to God to claim to know Him and then exploit our covenant partner (cf. 1 John 2:7-11; 4:20-21).
- B. This command is meant to help maintain the fellowship of the covenant community. The quality of this spiritual fellowship will attract a confused and seeking world to our God which is the purpose of Scripture.
- C. As other commandments have focused on God's ownership of all of life, so too, this one! We are stewards, not owners. Our fallen drive toward possessions, without cost, is behind this prohibition (cf. Ps. 50:10-12).

II. WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

- A. This is the third command in the second half of the Decalogue which is made up of only two words in Hebrew (“you shall not steal,” BDB 170, KB 198, *Qal* IMPERFECT).
- B. The object of the prohibition is absent. Kidnapping is usually supported by:
 - 1. The context of the two previous commands relating to capital offenses.
 - 2. The presence of applicable parallel passages, both immediate (Exod. 21:16) and remote (Deut. 24:7). Also see Genesis 37.
 - 3. b. Sanh. 86a reflects Jewish tradition.
- C. However, the short form is also defensible (do not steal things)
 - 1. It is recorded for us by inspiration.
 - 2. It widens the scope of the injunction.
 - 3. There is also a parallel passage in the immediate context which relates to theft – Exodus 22:1 (not kidnapping), but note 20:16.
 - 4. Josephus and Ibn Ezra think it refers to stealing.
 - 5. Jesus apparently quotes this passage in reference to stealing (cf. Matt. 19:18).
- D. Theft is also dealt with in the other ancient Law Codes but usually the penalty is death, mutilation, or 30 times restitution.
- E. There are some significant parallel passages which define and explain this truth:
 - 1. Leviticus 19:1-18 – “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy”
 - a. Our lifestyle must reflect the family characteristics of our Father and our God (cf. Leviticus 19).
 - b. Our faith must impact our lives daily, both in positive actions and negative prohibition, both informed by proper motives (cf. Leviticus 19).
 - c. Compassion for the ostracized and needy, Lev. 19:9-10,13, is as significant as refusal to rip off our neighbors, Lev. 19:11.
 - 2. Amos 8:4-7 – God hates exploitations!
 - 3. Micah 6:6-8 – God wants proper motives in all of our actions. Why we don’t steal is the issue!
 - 4. Exodus 22:1ff – Often the missing truth in our modern discussion of robbery is restitution! Sin always costs!

III. APPLICATION TRUTHS

- A. Joy Davidman, C. S. Lewis’ wife, has written a delightful book on the Decalogue. She translates this command. “Thou shalt not try to get something for nothing.” This assuredly widens the scope beyond possessions. She also says that “property is neither sin nor inalienable right, but a loan, a trust from God.”
- B. Theft, like all other sins of the fallen heart, are dealt with by a new heart (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26; Eph. 4:28). It is amazing how the old nature of “take” turns into the new nature of “share!”

- C. Our respect for God is clearly seen in our respect for other covenant partners! This truth overshadows the Decalogue.
- D. Fallen people steal in many ways!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does modern man practice stealing?
2. How is restitution related to repentance?
3. How does this verse relate to capitalism's view of property?

EXODUS 20:16

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:16

¹⁶“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

20:16 “false witness” This commandment (BDB 772, KB 851, *Qal* IMPERFECT, like “murder,” Exod. 20:13; “adultery,” Exod. 20:14; “steal,” Exod. 20:15; and “covet,” Exod. 20:17) relates to the judicial system of Israel (cf. Exod. 23:1; Deut. 19:15-21; 1 Kgs. 21:8-14). A false testimony usually resulted in the death of the one falsely accused. Therefore, the false witness was executed (cf. Deut. 19:15-21). It was a serious violation of covenant responsibility (cf. Exod. 23:7; Ps. 101:5). Believers are to love their neighbors (i.e., covenant partners) as themselves (cf. Lev. 19:18). God does not lie; His people should not lie!

In the OT it took two witnesses to convict (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15). “He said. . .she said” cases were not part of Israel’s legal system. The “benefit of the doubt” was given unless there were two eye witnesses.

EXODUS 20:17

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:17

¹⁷“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 belongs to your neighbor.”

A. INTRODUCTION

1. It is possible to see the relationship between the last five commandments as follows:
 - a. Number 6, 7, and 8 prohibit the injury of a covenant partner in an overt action.
 - b. Number 9 prohibits the injury of a covenant partner in speech (or in court).
 - c. Number 10 prohibits the injury of a covenant partner in thought.
2. It is true that the act of coveting (BDB 326, KB 325) disrupts the person who is coveting, not the object, the neighbor. However, it is possible that this commandment expects that the thoughts will proceed to actions.
3. Many see this commandment as a unique concept found only in the ancient law code of Israel and which is absent in the other law codes of the Ancient Near East. This new concept would be the prohibition of thought. It is true that Israel perceived the thought life to be the origin of evil deeds (cf. Pro. 23:7; James 1:14-15). Yet, this verse seems to relate to thoughts which issue in actions.

Several passages use the term “covet” in connection with a resulting action (cf. Deut. 7:25; Jos. 7:21; Micah 2:2).

4. If it is true that emphasis is placed on that which is listed first and last, the true significance of this command is seen. Exclusive worship of God is first, but our attitudes and motives toward the things of this world affect our true devotion to God. This twin emphasis is also seen in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 6:33—“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things (cf. vv. 19-32) shall be added to you.”

B. WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

1. Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21, although basically the same, have several significant differences:
 - a. The wife is included in the larger concept of “house” or a man’s property in Exodus 20, while she is placed in a separate, seemingly priority, category in Deuteronomy 5.
 - b. The passage in Exodus 20 has the Hebrew term “covet” which means “desire to acquire,” but Deuteronomy 5 has a second term, “desire” as well as “covet.” “Covet” speaks of desire which is connected to an action to acquire the object of the desire but “desire” seems to focus on the attitude alone.
 - c. Also, Exodus 20, written to the children of Israel during their wilderness wandering period, has no mention of “field” in the list of possessions, while Deuteronomy 5 is restating the same commands for a settled society in the Promised Land.
2. The term “covet” is a neutral term. It can refer to desiring good things (cf. Ps. 19:10; 1 Cor. 12:31).
3. Improper desire is the root cause of the fall of Satan, Adam and Eve, and all of us. Paul stressed his personal struggle with coveting in Romans 7:7-8. Coveting is basically a discontentment and lack of trust in God’s care and provision.
4. Several NT passages relate to coveting:
 - a. Man’s problem is discontentment and greed (cf. Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:8-10).
 - b. Coveting is included in Jesus’ list of defiling sins (cf. Mark 7:17-23; 1 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

C. APPLICATION TRUTHS

1. The answer to lustful greed and discontentment is:
 - a. love – Rom. 13:8-10
 - b. contentment – Heb. 13:5; Phil. 4:11-13 (and sharing, Phil. 4:14)
2. The command says “stop” but only Christ gave us the means to stop! In Him we can control our thought life to some degree.
3. God knows our hearts and minds
 - a. 1 Chronicles 28:9
 - b. Proverbs 20:27
 - c. Psalm 139:1,23
 - d. Jeremiah 17:10
 - e. Romans 8:27
 - f. Revelation 2:23
4. Things are not evil, but when they become priority they become sin. Things are not ultimate or eternal; people made in God’s image are! Coveting affects the Covenant Community in insidious and destructive ways!

ADDITIONAL EXEGETICAL NOTES FROM MY COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY 5:21

Deut. 5:21, “shall not covet. . .shall not desire” uses two VERBS which are synonymous:

- A. “covet” – BDB 326, KB 325, *Qal* IMPERFECT, means “a strong desire” for material things, which can be positive or negative. In this context it is an uncontrollable, selfish desire for something which belongs to a covenant brother (cf. Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-10).
- B. “desire” – BDB 16, KB 20, *Hiphthpael* IMPERFECT, means “desire” (cf. Deut. 14:26) or “lust” (often has a sexual context as in 5:21) for more and more for me at any cost (e.g., Num. 11:4; Ps. 106:14; Pro. 13:4; 21:26; 23:3,6; 24:1).

This relates to one’s inner attitudes and motives. It is capstone to all the other commandments (i.e., Paul’s confession in Rom. 7:7). This is the only commandment that deals with why, not how. This one says not only “don’t do” but “don’t think this.” Jesus taught that we should not only not kill, we should not hate, or display an attitude that might result in murder. Jesus took this last commandment and raised the rest of the commandments to the level of inner motive and attitude as over against outer action (cf. Matt. 5:21-48). There is all the difference in the world in a man who does not steal because it is not pleasing to God and the man who does not steal because he is afraid of getting caught. One is acting on Christian principles and the other is acting on self-interest.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What is coveting?
- 1. How does modern man covet?
- 2. Are our thoughts sin?
- 3. Why are thoughts so significant in the Christian life?
- 4. Why is the commandment in Exod. 20:17 somewhat different from the one in Deut. 5:21?

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:18-21

¹⁸All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” ²⁰Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” ²¹So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*.

20:18 The Israelis had encountered God (cf. Exod. 19:11)

- 1. in sound – thunder (cf. Exod. 19:16,19; and trumpet)
- 2. in sight – lightning (cf. Exod. 19:18 and fire)
- 3. in smell – smoke (cf. Exod. 19:18)
- 4. in feeling unstable (cf. Exod. 19:16,18; Ps. 68:8)

20:18-19 The people were terrified at the display of power which descended on Mt. Sinai. They were afraid lest they see God and die (cf. Gen. 32:30; Exod. 3:6; 19:21; 33:20; Deut. 4:34; Jdgs. 6:22-23; 13:22; 1 Kgs. 19:13; Isa. 6:5). They wanted Moses to relate YHWH’s word to them (cf. Deut. 5:4-5).

20:19 “when the people saw *it*” This represents the mountain. The LXX changes “saw” (ראה, BDB 906, KB 1157, used twice in this verse) to “fear” (ראי, BDB 431). This emendation is included in the NRSV, NJB, and REB.

20:20 “Do not be afraid” This is not an IMPERATIVE, but a *Qal* IMPERFECT used as an IMPERATIVE (note Exod. 20:13,14,15).

The reason for the statement is twofold.

1. YHWH is testing them (see Special Topic: God Tests His People).
2. He wants them to remember this day and these words (cf. Deut. 4:10; 6:24) so that they will not disobey and reap His judgment (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; Jeremiah 32:40).

20:21 Events such as these clearly showed Moses as the Divinely chosen leader and law giver.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:22-26

²²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. ²³You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. ²⁴You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. ²⁶And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.’”

20:22-23:33 This section of Exodus is an amplification of God’s will for Israel. It is usually called “The Book of the Covenant.”

20:22 “I have spoken to you from heaven” This refers to the top of Mt. Sinai (cf. Deut. 4:36; Neh. 9:13). See Special Topic: The Heavens and the Third Heaven.

It is possible that the Decalogue (i.e., Exod. 20:1-17) was inserted here and that this verse refers to a subsequent divine revelation to Moses where “heaven” would have had its normal sense.

20:23 This further amplifies Exod. 20:3. Idolatry was always a temptation to Israel (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE) and it had devastating consequences (cf. Deut. 29:14-21; see Special Topic: Consequences of Idolatry).

20:24-26 These are regulations that refer to places prepared for worshipping YHWH (i.e., altars for sacrifices). They should be simple, using natural items (i.e., earth and uncut stones, cf. Deut. 27:5-6). These simple altars would be very different from Canaanite fertility sites.

20:24 “in every place where I cause My name to be remembered” This is a recurrent phrase in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2,6,11,15; 17:8,10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11). In later times it will culminate in the temple in Jerusalem.

▣ **“I will come to you and bless you”** This is not meant to imply YHWH left them but is imagery for His special presence at worship sites and times. YHWH’s goal was their blessing (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30).

20:26 Israel’s worship, so different from the Canaanite fertility worship, was not to have a sexual aspect (cf. Exod. 28:42-43). Many/most of Israel’s regulations were for the very purpose of distinguishing them from their polytheistic, fertility worshipping neighbors.

I have chosen to include my exegetical notes from my commentary on Deut. 5:6-21.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:6

“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

5:6 “I am the LORD” This may be paraphrased: “I am the ‘I Am.’” I am the ever-living, only-living God. I am the existing One. YHWH is a form of the Hebrew VERB “to be” (cf. Exod. 3:14). See Special Topic: Names for Deity.

▣ **“who brought you out of the land of Egypt”** Notice that YHWH’s grace and elective choice came before the Law was given. God chose Israel, she did not choose him. This choice was made plain to Abraham in the unconditional promise/covenant of Gen. 15:12-21.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:7

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

5:7 “no other gods before Me” “Before” (BDB 818 #7) is literally “before *My Face*,” which is an idiom for “no other in My category” (cf. Exod. 20:3,23). YHWH is alone, unique, ever-existing! This is an assertion of monotheism (cf. Exod. 8:10; 9:14; Deut. 4:35,39; 33:26; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22; 22:32; Isa. 46:9). This first assertion and command is the uniqueness of Israel’s faith in a polytheistic Ancient Near East! See note at Deut. 6:4.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:8-10

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

5:8 “an idol” This is literally “graven image” (BDB 820). This can refer to (1) any physical representation of YHWH (cf. 4:12,15-19,23,25). The golden calf of Exodus 32 was a representation of YHWH; or (2) foreign idols (cf. Lev. 19:4; 26:1).

5:9 “You shall not worship them or serve them” These are two negated VERB forms:

1. “worship” – BDB 1005, KB 295 *Hishtaphel* IMPERFECT or *Hithpael* IMPERFECT, which means “bow down,” “prostrate” (cf. Deut. 4:19; 8:19; 11:16; Exod. 20:5; 23:24)
2. “serve” – BDB 712, KB 773, *Hophal* IMPERFECT, which means “do,” “serve as a slave,” or “perform acts of worship (cf. 13:2; Exod. 20:5; 23:24)

YHWH knew the “religious” and “superstitious” tendency of the fallen human heart and tried to protect the revelation of Himself and His purposes from the destructive influences of Near Eastern idolatry.

▣ **“jealous”** See note at 4:24.

▣ The VERB “visiting” (BDB 823, KB 955, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) has several senses:

1. visit to bless – Gen. 21:1; 50:24,25; Exod. 13:19; Ruth 1:6; Ps. 65:9; 106:4; Jer. 27:22; 29:10; 32:5

- visit to punish – Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Jer. 11:22; 13:21; 21:14; 24:25; Amos 3:2,14; Hosea 1:4; 2:15; 4:14; 12:2

▣ **“the iniquity of the fathers”** The term “iniquity” (BDB 730) may be related to the similar root, “to twist” (e.g., 2 Sam. 19:20; 24:17; 1 Kgs. 8:47; Ps. 106:6). Israel is punished for her disobedience (e.g., Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Lev. 18:25; Num. 14:18; Deut. 19:15; Jer. 25:12; 36:31; Amos 3:2).

▣ **“on the children, and on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me”** Notice the punishment is not arbitrary or indiscriminate, but directed toward those who “hate” YHWH (BDB 971, KB 1338, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE). This implies that unbelief runs through families. The influence of the parents is crucial to the development of faith (see notes at Deut. 4:10). In the Ancient Near East several generations of families lived together. One generation’s unbelief and/or disobedience affected the entire family. This is part of the Hebrew concept of corporality (i.e., one affects the whole—Adam, Achan, David, Jesus).

To this sense of corporality must be added the individual aspect of faith (cf. 24:16; 2 Kgs. 14:6; Jer. 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18)!

5:10 “showing” This VERB (BDB 793, KB 889) is a *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, which matches the ongoing action of the VERB in Deut. 5:9.

▣ **“lovingkindness”** See Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*).

▣ **“to thousands”** These two verses help me see the nature of YHWH. His basic nature is longsuffering love, but He does punish those who willfully reject Him (especially those who have some knowledge of His revelation, i.e., the covenant people). The numbers in these two verses make my point.

- visiting iniquity to the third and fourth generations
- showing covenant love to the thousandth generation (cf. Exod. 7:9)

▣ **“those who love Me and keep My commandments”** It is a characteristic of Deuteronomy to link obedience to YHWH’s covenant to love for YHWH (cf. Deut. 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6,16,20).

YHWH’s love is not capricious, but clearly defined. He shows no partiality. His initiating covenant love is maintained by covenant obedience.

“Keep” (BDB 1036, KB 1581) is the key concept in this chapter (cf. Deut. 5:1,10,12,29,32 and many more times in Deuteronomy). The Old Testament was based on the grace of YHWH and human obedience/performance. YHWH wanted to show that human inability to respond appropriately (cf. Galatians 3). The NT (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38) is based on God’s gracious initiation and redemption in Christ. Believers are still destined to be righteous (cf. Eph. 1:14; 2:10), but they have been accepted and forgiven by grace through faith (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Now they obey/perform out of a sense of gratitude and family love (i.e., “those who love Me”). The goal is the same, a righteous (Christlike) people, but the mechanism has changed from human performance to Christ’s performance (cf. Mark 10:45; II Cor. 5:21).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:11

¹¹“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”

5:11 “You shall not take” The VERB (BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to lift,” “to carry,” or “to take.” It seems to imply an act of speech. The Israelites were called on to speak “the name” in worship (cf. Deut. 6:13; 10:20), but not the name of other gods!

This emphasis begins in Gen. 4:25-26, where the line of Seth “began to call upon the name of the LORD”; Abraham did the same (Gen. 12:8; 21:33); Isaac did the same (Gen. 26:25). This same concept is put in an eschatological setting by Joel 2:28-32. This is continued by the Apostle Peter on Pentecost and asserted to be fulfilled (cf. Acts 2:14-21); the Apostle Paul uses the phrase to offer universal salvation in Rom. 10:9-13.

The name represents the person and character of YHWH. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests to the world (cf. Exod. 19:5-6), but the tragedy is that their covenant disobedience, which caused YHWH to punish them (cf. Deuteronomy 27-29), meant that the message to the world was distorted by:

1. God’s judgment of Israel instead of blessing
2. God’s people turning to idolatry
3. God’s people’s developing arrogance, exclusiveness, and self-righteousness!

▣ **“in vain”** This term (BDB 996) means “empty,” “non-existent,” “vain” (cf. Exod. 20:7; Ps. 139:20). This is the same word used in Deut. 5:20 for a “false” witness. It is possible that this commandment does not refer to taking oaths in YHWH’s name (cf. Deut. 6:13; 10:20), but in using His name in false legal testimony. Israel became a “false” witness to the character and purposes of YHWH because of their recurrent disobedience, which resulted in YHWH’s judgment (cf. Deuteronomy 27-29). See Special Topic: Empty, Vain, False, Nothingness.

▣ **“for the LORD will not leave him unpunished”** The VERB (BDB 667, KB 720, *Piel* IMPERFECT which means “acquit”) is a metaphor for something clean, thereby innocent or free from guilt (cf. Exod. 20:7; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Jer. 30:11; 46:28; Joel 3:21; Nah. 1:3). There are consequences to human sin. To misrepresent YHWH is a most serious sin, especially for those who know Him (cf. Luke 12:48; Heb. 10:26-31)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:12-15

¹²Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

5:12 “Observe” This VERB (BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE) means “keep” and is used repeatedly in Deuteronomy.

▣ **“holy”** See Special Topic: Holy.

▣ **“the sabbath”** See Special Topic: Sabbath (OT).

5:13 “work” Laws like Deut. 5:13-14 caused the development of the Oral Traditions (cf. Matt. 5:21-48) to be written because a question like, “What is work?” became crucial. The rabbis devised a definition so that the faithful Jew would not break the Law. The ambiguity of the written Law caused the legalistic Oral Law to be developed.

5:14 “seventh day is a sabbath” The Sabbath was a day of rest (BDB 992). There are two origins given for the Sabbath: (1) Exodus 20:11 orients it to Genesis 1-2, while Deuteronomy orients it to the Egyptian bondage (cf. Deut. 5:15). It became a covenant marker (like circumcision) of YHWH’s people (cf. Exod. 31:13,17; Ezek. 20:12,20). Obedience was mandated (cf. Isa. 56:2; 58:13; Jer. 17:21-22).

Like the sun and moon (cf. Gen. 1:14), the Sabbath provided a division of time for mankind’s activities (cf. Ecclesiastes 3). The seven day week became a way to mark special days and years (cf. Exodus 23 and Leviticus 23). Specifically, the Sabbath begins on Friday evening and goes through Saturday evening, because Israelites marked the day in Genesis 1 categories (“evening and morning,” cf. Gen. 1:5,8,13,19, 23,31).

5:15 “You shall remember” See note at Deut. 7:18.

▣ **“that you were a slave in the land of Egypt”** Moses uses this experience of slavery to motivate the Israelites to compassionate action toward underprivileged people in their society:

1. to allow servants (and animals) a day of rest – Deut. 5:12-15; 16:12
2. to freely release and empower Hebrew slaves – Deut. 15:12-15
3. to be fair and just with the underprivileged and disenfranchised – Deut. 24:17-18
4. to leave the corners of the field and the second gathering of crops for the poor – Deut. 24:19-22

This phrase is also used numerous times to warn Israel to act appropriately in light of YHWH’s gracious gift of the land (e.g., Deut. 6:10-15) and to obey the covenant (e.g., Deut. 8:1-10) lest serious consequences come (e.g., Deut. 8:11-20)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:16

¹⁶“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

5:16 “Honor” This VERB (BDB 457, KB 455, *Piel* IMPERATIVE) originally meant “to be heavy” and developed a metaphorical meaning of “give due weight to” or “honor.” This honor is not based on agreement, but authority and respect. In a sense it models the relationship between God and mankind. A submissive attitude toward authority is crucial in religious life!

Jesus mentions these commandments several times as well as other portions of Deuteronomy:

1. Deut. 5:16 – Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10
2. Deut. 5:16-20 – Matt. 19:18-19a; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20
4. Deut. 5:17 – Matt. 5:21
5. Deut. 6:4-5 – Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27
6. Deut. 6:13 – Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8
7. Deut. 6:16 – Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12
8. Deut. 19:15 – Matt. 18:16
9. Deut. 19:15 – Matt. 5:38

Paul also quotes Deuteronomy often:

1. Deut. 5:16 – Eph. 6:2-3
2. Deut. 5:21 – Rom. 7:7
3. Deut. 19:15 – 2 Cor. 13:1
4. Deut. 21:23 – Gal. 3:13
5. Deut. 25:4 – 2 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18
6. Deut. 27:26 – Gal. 3:10
7. Deut. 30:12-14 – Rom. 10:6-8

8. Deut. 32:21 – Rom. 11:8
9. Deut. 32:35 – Rom. 12:19-20
10. Deut. 32:43 – Rom. 15:10

(cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, pp. 42-43, 92-95). Apparently the NT writers used the OT extensively, but not legalistically!

▣ **“and your mother”** This shows high regard for motherhood even though in the Oriental society women were legally on the level of chattel or property. A Hebrew mother was honored in her own home. The authority of parents was strictly respected (cf. Exod. 21:17; Deut. 27:16). Both were to be respected and obeyed (cf. Pro. 1:8; 6:20; 15:20; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22-25; 30:11,17).

▣ **“your days may be prolonged”** Deuteronomy 5:33; 4:40; and 11:9 show that this was a promise to a society, not primarily to an individual. If a society is characterized by honor in the home and respect for family life, that society will be stable and last through time. See note at Deut. 4:40.

5:17-21 These are laws that are common to all eastern societies. From archaeological discoveries we know of the Babylonian Law Codes of Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi which predate the Law of Moses by several hundred years. The Code of Hammurabi is similar to the Ten Commandments. This similarity shows (1) that there are some things that are innately wrong in every situation and society and (2) that Moses was a child of his own day and culture as well as a prophet of God.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:17

¹⁷**“You shall not murder.”**

5:17 “murder” The Hebrew VERB “murder” (BDB 953, KB 1283, *Qal IMPERFECT*) originally meant “to violently crush.” Life belongs to God. This does not mean killing of any kind because Israel had both capital punishment (e.g., Num. 35:30) and Holy War (e.g., Deut. 20:13,16-17). The commandment is saying “Thou shalt not violently murder for selfish reasons or revenge” or “do not commit non-legal, premeditated murder.” In my opinion this passage cannot be used as a biblical admonition against military service or capital punishment.

See Special Topic: Peace and War

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:18

¹⁸**“You shall not commit adultery.”**

5:18 “adultery” In the OT adultery (BDB 610, KB 658, *Qal IMPERFECT*) refers to only extra-marital sexual activities. This was a serious crime because of OT views of the afterlife. They believed that in some sense a person lived on through his seed. Also, the importance of tribes inheriting and passing on land allotted to them by YHWH made adultery a significant issue.

Notice, the first law is faithfulness to parents; the second law is faithfulness in not taking your brother’s life; the third idea is faithfulness within the home. Even betrothed women were treated as married (cf. Deut. 22:23ff. Mary was accused of unfaithfulness because she was betrothed to Joseph.

This idea of adultery is often used symbolically for idolatry. Ezekiel and Hosea analogously present God as a husband to Israel, therefore, when Israel went after other gods, it was called “going a whoring” and was considered spiritual adultery or faithlessness.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:19**¹⁹“You shall not steal.”**

5:19 “steal” This is probably a reference to kidnapping and selling (BDB 170, KB 198, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 24:7; Exod. 21:16) because of the context of the surrounding laws. This expresses a faithfulness to one’s covenant brother whose life belongs to God. All of the surrounding laws brought the death penalty. This seems harsh for petty theft.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:20**²⁰“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

5:20 “bear false witness” In ancient societies, when accused of something, it was the responsibility of the accused to prove the accuser wrong rather than our modern American judicial practice of assuming one innocent until proven guilty. If you proved your accuser wrong he had to take the penalty for the crime he accused you of (cf. 19:16-21). Since disobedience to the Ten Words caused death, false witness was a serious crime! Bearing false witness reveals an unfaithfulness within the community of faith. Lies destroy the reputation and take an innocent life of a covenant brother or sister. God takes this lying seriously (cf. Job 17:5; Ps. 101:5; Pro. 11:9; Jer. 9:8-9).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:21**²¹“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

5:21 “shall not covet. . . shall not desire” These two VERBS are synonymous:

1. “covet” – BDB 326, KB 325, *Qal* IMPERFECT, means “a strong desire” for material things, which can be positive or negative. In this context it is an uncontrollable, selfish desire for something which belongs to a covenant brother.
2. “desire” – BDB 16, KB 20, *Hiphthael* IMPERFECT, means “desire” (cf. Deut. 14:26) or “lust” (often has a sexual context as in Deut. 5:21) for more and more for me at any cost (e.g., Num. 11:4; Ps. 106:14; Pro. 13:4; 21:26; 23:3,6; 24:1).

This relates to one’s inner attitudes and motives. It is capstone to all the other commandments. This is the only commandment that deals with why, not how. This one says not only “don’t do” but “don’t think” this. Jesus taught that we should not only not kill, we should not hate, or display an attitude that might result in murder. Jesus took this last commandment and raised the rest of the commandments to the level of inner motive and attitude as over against outer action (cf. Matt. 5:17-48). There is all the difference in the world in a man who does not steal because it is not pleasing to God and the man who does not steal because he is afraid of getting caught. One is acting on Christian principles and the other is acting on self-interest.

EXODUS 21

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Ordinances for the People	The Law Concerning Servants	The Covenant Code (20:22-23:33)	The Treatment of Slaves	Laws Concerning Slaves (follows MT versing)
21:1	21:1-11	21:1-6	21:1-6	21:1-11
21:2-6				
21:7-11		21:7-11	21:7-11	
Personal Injuries	The Law Concerning Violence	Laws Protecting Human Beings	Laws About Violent Acts	Homicide
21:12-14	21:12-13 21:14	21:12-14	21:12-14	21:12-14
21:15	21:15	21:15	21:15	21:15-17
21:16	21:16	21:16	21:16	
21:17	21:17	21:17	21:17	Blows and Words
21:18-21	21:18-19 21:20-21	21:18-19	21:18-19	21:18-19 21:20-21
21:22-25	21:22-25	21:22-25	21:22-25	21:22-25
21:26-27	21:26-27	21:26-27	21:26-27	21:26-27
	Animal Control Laws		The Responsibility of Owners	
21:28-32	21:28-32	21:28-32	21:28-32	21:28-32
		Laws Dealing with Property (21:33-22:17)		
21:33-34	21:33-34	21:33-34	21:33-36	21:33-36 Theft of Animals (21:37-22:3)
21:35-36	21:35-36	21:35-36		

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph

3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. A further revelation of God’s will for His people is called “The Book of the Covenant.” It starts in Exod. 20:22 and goes through Exod. 23:33.

B. God wants His people to be a just society. This has always been His goal (cf. Gen. 18:19). This kind of society in a fallen world of exploitation, greed, and self (see Special Topic: The Fall) will be a powerful magnet to bring the unbeliever to YHWH!

C. There are several emphatic grammatical features (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root) in Exodus 21-23.

1. Exod. 21:5 – “plainly says” (BDB 55, KB 65)
2. Exod. 21:12 – “shall surely be put to death” (BDB 559, KB 562)
3. Exod. 21:15 – same as #2
4. Exod. 21:16 – same as #2
5. Exod. 21:17 – same as #2
6. Exod. 21:19 – “completely healed” (BDB 950, KB 1272)
7. Exod. 21:20 – “shall be punished” (BDB 667, KB 721)
8. Exod. 21:22 – “shall surely be fined” (BDB 778, KB 859)
9. Exod. 21:28 – “shall surely be stoned” (BDB 709, KB 768)
10. Exod. 21:36 – “shall surely pay” (BDB 1022, K 1532)
11. Exod. 22:3 – “shall surely make restitution” (BDB 1022, KB 1532)
12. Exod. 22:4 – “actually found” (BDB 592, KB 619)
13. Exod. 22:6 – “surely make restitution” (same as #11)
14. Exod. 22:12 – “actually stolen” (BDB 170, KB 198)
15. Exod. 22:13 – “all torn to pieces” (BDB 382, KB 380)
16. Exod. 22:14 – “make full restitution,” same as #11
17. Exod. 22:16 – “he must pay a dowry” (BDB 555, KB 554)
18. Exod. 22:17 – “absolutely refuses” (BDB 549, KB 540)
19. Exod. 22:19 – “shall surely be put to death” (BDB 559, KB 562)
20. Exod. 22:23 – “If you afflict him at all” (BDB 776, KB 853)
21. Exod. 22:23 – “he does cry out” (BDB 858, KB 1042)
22. Exod. 22:23 – “I will surely hear” (BDB 1033, KB 1570)
23. Exod. 22:26 – “take. . . as a pledge” (BDB 286, KB 285)
24. Exod. 23:4 – “shall surely return” (BDB 996, KB 1427)
25. Exod. 23:5 – “shall surely release” (BDB 736, KB 806)
26. Exod. 23:22 – “shall truly obey” (BDB 1033, KB 1570)
27. Exod. 23:24 – “utterly overthrow” (BDB 248, KB 256)

Wow! What a string of emphatic forms. God is serious about obedience to His revelations!

D. The “if. . . then” model of these laws (i.e., casuistic, which is characteristic of ANE laws, see Special Topic: The Laws of the ANE) shows the conditional nature of YHWH’s covenant with Israel. His presence and blessings are conditional on their obedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; see Special Topic: Covenant).

- E. *The Tyndale Commentary*, by R. Alan Cole, has a good context outline (pp. 164-170).
1. the Hebrew slave – Exod. 21:1-11
 2. stern desert laws – Exod. 21:12-17
 3. quarrels and injuries – Exod. 21:18-27
 4. injuries by animals – Exod. 21:28-36

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:1

¹“Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them”

21:1 “ordinances” See Special Topic: Terms For God’s Revelation.

John H. Walton, *ANE Thought and the OT*, pp. 292-294, makes a good point about “casuistic” law (i.e., case law, “if this happens. . . then this happens”) as distinct from apodictic law (i.e., Decalogue). On page 292 he makes the suggestion that the case laws of Exodus 21 may be decisions Moses had made as judge (cf. Exod. 18:13-27). Moses may have used one decision as a base line for the same type of issue or conflict. These laws are still from YHWH, as was Exodus 20, but possibly through the agency of Moses as law-giver to Israel (cf. Exod. 20:19).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:2-6

²“If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. ³If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. ⁵But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ ⁶then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.”

21:2 “If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment” Slavery was a common practice in the ancient world. For a good, brief discussion, see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 80-90. The uniqueness of the OT is that it made a distinction between covenant brothers and foreigners in its regulations concerning slaves. The Hebrew slave is discussed in Lev. 25:39-43 and Deut. 15:12-18. These Scriptures are characterized by thoughtful concern and brotherly help. Alien slaves are discussed in Lev. 25:44-46. Hebrew slaves were really indentured servants. They worked six years to pay off their debt. On the seventh year, or if the Year of Jubilee came first, they were to be released (cf. Lev. 25:8-17,23-33). They were not just to be released but with dignity and help in order to begin a new life (cf. Deut. 15:13-14).

▣ **“seventh”** See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“he shall go out as a free man”** The term “free man” refers to a particular class in society (see NET Bible, p. 170, #8).

▣ **“Hebrew”** The term “Hebrew” (BDB 720 I) is an ancient designation for a group of Semitic, nomadic people. Abraham is called a Hebrew in Gen. 14:13. There is some speculation as to whether it relates to the wandering Semitic group known as *Habiru*, which seems to mean “from beyond the river.” If so, the

term “Hebrews” covered a much larger group of people than simply the descendants of Abraham (cf. Deut. 26:5). Some think its origin is from the name of one of Abraham’s ancestors, Eber (cf. Gen. 11:16).

The designation is often found in the recorded words of non-Israelites.

1. Gen. 14:13 – a messenger to Abraham
2. Gen. 39:14,17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32 – Egyptians
3. 1 Sam. 4:6,9; 13:3,7,19; 14:16,21; 29:3 – Philistines
4. Jer. 34:9,14 – Babylonians
5. Jonah 1:9 – to Gentile sailors
6. Acts 6:1 – Greek-speaking Jews

21:3 “If he comes alone, he shall go out alone” The term “alone” occurs only here. Literally this term means “body,” “self” (BDB 172). It means that if he came with only the shirt on his back that is the way he shall leave. This must be compared with Deut. 15:13,14, where the master is requested to be kind and give provisions to his indentured servants when they leave. From Exod. 21:4-11 it becomes obvious that if a man has a family which was given to him by his master, then he might want to remain permanently with his master. This was also provided for by a ritual whereby the ear was pierced, apparently at the home of the slave owner, although it could be the temple, and this made him a permanent slave to this family (cf. Exod. 21:4-6; Deut. 15:16-17).

21:5 If a Hebrew slave wanted to stay permanently with his master, he had the option (cf. Deut. 15:16-18). Slavery was often a much better life than poverty.

21:6

NASB, NRSV,

NJB, JPSOA,

REB

“to God”

NKJV

“to the judges”

TEV

“to the place of worship”

LXX

“to the tribunal of God”

The term in the MT is *Elohim* (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.) Here, 1 Sam. 2:25; and in Ps. 82:6 it refers to Israeli judges (cf. Exod. 18:13-27; 22:8-9,28; LXX, Peshitta, and Targums).

There was no tabernacle yet. Some see the parallel in Deut. 15:17 as referring to the door of the slave owner.

▣ **“permanently”** This is the term *‘olam* (BDB 761); see Special Topic: Forever *‘olam*). It must always be interpreted in context. Here it means for a lifetime.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:7-11

⁷“If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. ⁸If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. ⁹If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. ¹⁰If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. ¹¹If he will not do these *three* things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment* of money.”

21:7-11 One of the uniquenesses of the Hebrew law code is its respect and attempt to give limited rights to women in its society. This section shows the author’s attempt to obtain fair treatment for females in a patriarchal system. See Special Topic: Women in the Bible.

21:8 The textual issue here is discussed in the UBS Text Project (p. 117).

1. MT – “not,” לֹא (*Kethiv*, NEB; *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*)
2. emendation – “to himself,” לוֹ (*Qere*, LXX, Syriac, JPSOA, NASB)

It gives option #2 a “B” rating (some doubt).

▣ **“let her be redeemed”** This VERB (BDB 804, KB 911, *Hiphil* PERFECT with *waw*) occurs only here in the *Hiphil* stem. This term has important theological significance. See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

▣

NASB, NRSV “unfairness to her”
NKJV “deceitfully with her”
NJB, JPSOA “a breach of faith with her”
LXX “has broken faith with her”

This VERB (BDB 93, KB 108, *Qal* ACTIVE INFINITIVE) basically means “to deal treacherously” (cf. Jdgs. 9:23; Isa. 33:1; Jer. 3:8,11; Hab. 1:13; 2:5). Here it denotes the unfairness of the man not marrying the woman because of some undisclosed reason (e.g., Jos. 24:15; Jer. 40:4).

21:10 These ANE arranged marriages are difficult for modern westerners to comprehend. Note how carefully the law protected the woman. This was unique to Israel’s laws.

Here are the options.

1. a man purchasing a woman to be his wife (or concubine)
2. he does not like her but she
 - a. can be sold (i.e., lit. “redeemed”) to another Israelite, but not a foreigner (BDB 648; cf. Exod. 2:22; 18:3; Deut. 14:21; 17:15)
 - b. can be given to his son
 - c. her social status and its benefits cannot be reduced (NET Bible, p. 171, #6, suggests that “food,” “clothing” and “oil” are listed in both Sumerian and Akkadian texts as necessities for life).

▣

NASB, JPSOA,
Peshitta “conjugal rights”
NKJV “marriage rights”
NRSV, NJB,
LXX “marital rights of the first wife”
TEV “the same rights”
JPSOA footnote “ointments”

This FEMININE NOUN (BDB 773, KB 855) occurs only here. Most commentators and translators relate it to sexual intercourse because of KB 852 II.

However, the JPSOA footnote led some to see “oil” or “ointments.” If so, then the term may refer to the three things needed for life in Sumerian and Akkadian texts (i.e., food, clothing, oil).

Young’s Literal Translation sees the word as referring to housing/habitation.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:12-14

¹²“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. ¹³But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. ¹⁴If,

however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.”

21:12 “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death” This is the beginning of a series of seemingly severe desert laws. At first they appear to be very harsh, but in context are really an attempt to limit blood feuds between families. This “eye-for-an-eye” mentality can be seen in Exod. 21:12,14-17,23; 22:18-20. For a complete discussion of this “eye-for-an-eye” or “tooth-for-a-tooth” limited revenge, see Exod. 24:17-22 and Deut. 19:21.

Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel* (p. 158), lists the crimes a person was executed for committing.

- A. against covenant partners and society
 - 1. intentional murder – Exod. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:16-21
 - 2. kidnapping – Exod. 21:16; Deut. 24:7
 - 3. abuse of parents – Exod. 21:15,17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16
 - 4. adultery – Lev. 18:20; 20:10; Deut. 22:22
 - 5. incest – Lev. 20:11,12,14,17
 - 6. sodomy – Lev. 20:13
 - 7. bestiality – Lev. 20:15-16
- B. against God
 - 1. idolatry – Exod. 22:19; Lev. 20:1-5; Num. 25:1-5; Deut. 13:2-19; 17:2-7
 - 2. blasphemy – Lev. 24:15-16
 - 3. Sabbath breaking – Exod. 31:14-15; Num. 15:32-36
 - 4. sorcery – Exod. 22:17; Lev. 20:27; 1 Sam. 28:3,9
 - 5. prostitution of priest’s daughter – Lev. 21:9

21:13 “But if he did not lie in wait for him. . . a man acts presumptuously” This is the beginning of a very important aspect of Hebrew law which takes into account the motivation behind an act (see note at Exod. 21:14). The sacrificial system was meant to deal with mankind’s guilt in areas of passion, ignorance, or accident. It was not designed to deal with premeditated sin. Along with these sacrifices was provided a series of cities called “the cities of refuge,” where a person might flee if he accidentally killed another person (cf. Num. 35:6-32; Deut. 19:1-21; Jos. 20:1-9).

▣ **“but God let him fall into his hand”** It is uncertain whether this is simply a cultural metaphor of the normal activities of life or if it is a theological affirmation that God is in control of all things. The balance of these two emphases has caused much tension in theology. However, both seem to be true (cf. Psalm 139; Romans 9-10; Eph. 1:4,7,11). See Special Topic: Predestination (Calvinism) vs. Human Free Will (Arminianism).

21:14

NASB	“presumptuously”
NKJV, NRSV	“premeditation”
NJB	“deliberate planning”
JPSOA	“by design”
REB	“with intent”
LXX	“unwittingly”

This word (BDB 791) reflects a rare VERB (BDB 841 I, KB 1000, *Qal* PERFECT, lit. “lie in wait,” cf. 1 Sam. 24:11), which denotes an intent/premeditation found in Exod. 21:13 (cf. Num. 35:11,22,23; Deut. 19:4). See the related rare term in Num. 35:20,22. See Special Topic: Unintentional Sins (OT).

Israel’s sacrificial system dealt only with non-premeditated sins!

▣ **“you are to take him *even* from My altar”** There was no portable altar yet. Much of this material is from a later time. This is an allusion to another specific place of refuge. The horns of the sacrificial altar were the most sacred part of that object of worship. A man may flee and grab the horns of the altar for refuge, but this text asserts that if he is guilty he may be taken even from the altar and be put to death (cf. 1 Kgs. 1:50; 2:28).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:15

¹⁵“He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

21:15 “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death” This verse emphasizes respect for the family unit. This same truth is exemplified in Exod. 21:17. Exodus 21:15 speaks of the act of disrespect (possibly even murder, BDB 645, KB 697, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE), while 20:17 speaks of the motive for disrespect (cf. Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21). Strong families make strong societies.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:16

¹⁶“He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.”

21:16 Even if Exod. 20:15 refers to theft, this verse surely refers to kidnapping (cf. Deut. 24:7). It shows (as this whole section does) the dignity and worth of a human person.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:17

¹⁷“He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

21:17 This verse highlights several theological truths.

1. Respect for one’s parents is crucial to a healthy, stable society (cf. Exod. 21:15).
2. The mutuality of men and women, obvious in Genesis 1-2, though damaged by the Fall (cf. Gen. 3:16), is still present in parenting.
3. “Cursing” (BDB 886, KB 1103, *Piel* PARTICIPLE) denotes an attitude of disrespect and dishonor to another person (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 22:28; Lev. 19:14; Jdgs. 9:22; 2 Sam. 16:5,7,10,11,13; Ps. 62:4; 109:28). Therefore, it is the antonym of “honor” (cf. Exod. 20:12). So the offending son commits sin against
 - a. his parents
 - b. his society
 - c. his covenant God

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:18-21

¹⁸“If men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but remains in bed, ¹⁹if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then he who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed. ²⁰If a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished. ²¹If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken; for he is his property.”

21:18-19 “If men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but remains in bed” These verses are an attempt to deal with a man injuring another man, but not with premeditated motives. The term “fist” (LXX) in Exod. 21:18 can be translated as “shovel” (Arabic cognate, cf. Targums, NEB) or, in reality, any ready implement (i.e., weapon). This shows that the blow was not premeditated. However, even though it was an act of passion, the perpetrator is responsible for his act and must make restitution. The perpetrator is responsible for the other’s well being until fully healed (cf. Exod. 21:19).

21:20-21 These verses (and Exod. 20:26-27) are another attempt to spell out the master’s rights and obligations toward his slaves. It seems harsh to us but in its day it was a radical positive statement concerning the master’s responsibility and the slave’s rights (i.e., personhood). For a clearer statement of this truth see Lev. 25:43, where masters are admonished not to be cruel to their slaves (cf. Eph. 6:9).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:22-25

²²“If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman’s husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*. ²³But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

21:22 This deals with the subject of miscarriage. For a good brief discussion of the unborn, see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., pp. 570-572. This text has often been used as a way of downplaying the significance of the death of unborn children. But, in context, this seems to imply a premature birth and not the death of an unborn child. The literal Hebrew has “her children come out.” If the child dies then the “eye-for-an-eye” death penalty becomes operative, unless an agreement for money is reached.

21:24-25 This seems harsh to us but it was a way to limit revenge (cf. Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). Often in later Judaism a fine was imposed instead of maiming (or execution, cf. Exod. 21:30). It is often referred to as “*lex talionis*.” Note Jesus’ comment about this in Matt. 5:38-39.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:26-27

²⁶“If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. ²⁷And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:28-32

²⁸“If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. ²⁹If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. ³⁰If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. ³¹Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. ³²If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his *or her* master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”

21:28-32 This deals with the problem of an animal killing a human being. Notice that it does involve a sin and that the flesh of the animal cannot be eaten (cf. Gen. 9:5). Although this section shows what to do in the case of an accident, it highlights the responsibility of the owner of the animal (cf. Exod. 21:29).

21:32 This shows what will happen if an animal gores a slave. The term “thirty shekels of silver” (see Special Topic: Weights and Volumes in the ANE) becomes a very important prophetic saying because of Zech. 11:12 and Matt. 26:15. Apparently Judas was paid the ransom money for betraying Christ, which was the normal price of a slave.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:33-34

³³“If a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead *animal* shall become his.”

21:33-36 These regulations obviously refer to an agricultural/pastoral setting (i.e., Israel in Canaan). A covenant partner’s acts toward another covenant partner have consequences. Restitution must be part of forgiveness.

21:33 “pit” This term (BDB 92) could refer to

1. a pit for cooking (Arabic root)
2. a pit for rain water (i.e., cistern, cf. Lev. 11:36; Deut. 6:11; 2 Sam. 23:15,16; 2 Kgs. 18:31)
3. a pit for storing grain (1 Sam. 19:22; Neh. 9:25)
4. a pit to trap animals (2 Sam. 23:20)
5. a pit for holding prisoners (Gen. 37:22; 41:14; 2 Kgs. 10:14; Jer. 38:6; 37:16; Zech. 9:11)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:35-36

³⁵“If one man’s ox hurts another’s so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox. ³⁶Or if it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead *animal* shall become his.”

EXODUS 22

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Property Rights	Responsibility for Property	The Covenant Code (20:22-23:33)	Laws About Repayment	Theft of Animals (21:37-22:3)
22:1	22:1-4	22:1	22:1-4	
22:2-4		22:2-3		Offences Requiring Compensation
		22:4		22:4
22:5	22:5	22:5	22:5	22:5
22:6	22:6-8	22:6	22:6	22:6-7
22:7-9		22:7-8	22:7-8	
				22:8
	22:9-13	22:9	22:9	22:9-12
22:10-13		22:10-13	22:10-13	
				22:13-14
22:14-15	22:14-15	22:14-15	22:14-15	Violation of a Virgin
Sundry Laws	Moral and Ceremonial Principles		Moral and Religious Laws	22:15-16
22:16-17	22:16-17	22:16-17	22:16-17	Moral and Religious Laws
		Miscellaneous Social and Cultic Laws		22:17
22:18	22:18	22:18	22:18	22:18
22:19	22:19	22:19	22:19	22:19
22:20	22:20	22:20	22:20	22:20-23
22:21-24	22:21	22:21-24	22:21-24	
	22:22-24			22:24
22:25-27	22:25-27	22:25-27	22:25-27	22:25-26
				22:27
				First-fruits and First-born
22:28	22:28	22:28	22:28	22:28-29
22:29-30	22:29-30	22:29a	22:29a	
		22:29b-30	22:29b-30	
				22:30
22:31	22:31	22:31	22:31	22:31 ?

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. For the larger number of emphatic grammatical forms, see Exodus 21, Contextual Insights, C.
- B. This chapter continues the context of “the Book of the Covenant,” Exodus 21-23. The knowledge and responsibility of ownership continues from Exod. 21:33-22:14.
- C. The “if . . . then” format of casuistic laws (see Special Topic: Laws in the ANE) continues (i.e., Exod. 22:1-17). These are known as “case” laws, while the ten commandments are general negative prohibitions, as are Exod. 22:18-24 (i.e., apodictic laws).
- D. The main point of the first part of this chapter is the respect due a covenant partner. If wronged, restitution must be made, so that God's people will have a just and peaceable society.
 1. rights of property owners
 2. rights of violators

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:1

¹“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”

22:1 “If a man steals” These verses show that the right of private ownership must be respected. Restitution (cf. Exod. 22:1,3,5,6,7,9,11,12,13,14,15,16) was required for a premeditated act of stealing, kidnapping, or other kinds of civil abuses. It is interesting that Exod. 22:3 offers some degree of protection for the criminal.

▣ **“he shall pay for five oxen”** The restitution price was very high apparently for a “trained” oxen. Why it was higher than for a sheep is uncertain.

The high price of restitution was meant to be a deterrent to theft.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:2-4

²“If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. ³But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. ⁴If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.”

22:2 “breaking in” The Jewish Study Bible (p. 155) interprets the use of hyphens in the JPSOA translation as an insertion related to a separate law (i.e., Exod. 22:2-3a is not related to Exod. 22:1 and 3b), which deals with stealing animals (cf. RSV, NJB; see F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 10).

This NOUN (BDB 369) is found only here and Jer. 2:34. It is from the VERB “to dig.” Most houses in the ANE were made from dried clay bricks. Thieves would dig through a wall to gain access.



NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA “bloodguiltiness”

NKJV “no guilt for his bloodshed”

TEV “not guilty of murder”

NJB “his blood may not be avenged”

REB “it is not murder”

LXX “it is not a homicide”

The MT has “blood” (BDB 196) PLURAL. In this context it refers to illegal premeditated murder. The home owner has a right to protect himself, his family, and his property during the night. However, if it is light, then the criminal should be captured and punished (i.e., make restitution), not killed (cf. Exod. 22:3).

22:3 “if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft” Restitution is predominate in this chapter. The rights of the owners supercede the rights of the perpetrators. However, in Israel’s laws, the thief must make restitution. In the Code of Hammurabi the poor thief is executed.

The selling into slavery lasted for six years.

22:4 “he shall pay double” There was a price to be paid for illegal, selfish actions toward a covenant partner. The justice and fairness of society were crucial.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:5

⁵“If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed *bare* and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.”

22:5 “grazed *bare*” This root (BDB 129) means “grazed over” or “to burn” (cf. NET Bible, p. 173, #12), and it is uncertain from the context which of these potential etymologies fits this verse best. This verse shows that a person is responsible even for the acts of his animals (i.e., Hebrew corporality).



NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, REB,

LXX “from the best of his own field”

TEV “from his own field”

NJB “in proportion to the best crop of the field”
JPSOA “for the impairment of the field”

There is some disagreement about the ADJECTIVE (BDB 29). JPSOA mentions the literal meaning, “excellence.” The point is that restitution must be

1. equivalent
2. even better
3. give a new field (i.e., Jewish Study Bible, p. 156)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:6

“If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field *itself* is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution.”

22:6 “thorn bushes” This seems to refer to the type of fences (BDB 881 I) which were used to keep animals in and humans out of a field.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:7-9

⁷“If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep *for him* and it is stolen from the man’s house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. ⁸If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, *to* determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor’s property. ⁹For every breach of trust, *whether it is* for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, *or* for any lost thing about which one says, ‘This is it,’ the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.”

22:7-9 This paragraph deals with the issue of “breach of trust” (Exod. 22:9, BDB 833, denotes an intentional transgression between people, cf. Gen. 31:36; 50:17; 1 Sam. 24:11; 25:28; Pro. 10:19; 17:19; 28:24; 29:6,16,22). But even if the loss was unintentional, there is still economic responsibility.

▣ **“the judges”** This is literally “before the *elohim*” (used three times). Here, “*elohim*” refers to “judges,” as in Exod. 21:6; Ps. 82:1,6.

However, Exod. 22:11 implies that some official act before YHWH is the contextual setting of Exod. 22:7-13.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:10-13

¹⁰“If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep *for him*, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, ¹¹an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor’s property; and its owner shall accept *it*, and he shall not make restitution. ¹²But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner. ¹³If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces.”

22:10-13 This deals with the day-to-day actions of neighbors. If they treat each other in unfair ways, they must take an oath before the Lord to find out who is telling the truth. To lie in God’s name meant death and, therefore, it was a sure way to obtain the truth. See Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH.

22:11 “an oath before the LORD” This seems to involve an oath in YHWH’s name of one’s innocence. If one lies, then he has cursed himself by taking God’s name in vain and judgment will issue from God.

The name YHWH is rare in Exodus 21-23 (i.e., “The Book of the Covenant”); why is uncertain.

22:13 If it is claimed an animal died or was killed by wild animals, evidence, not just an oath, was required (cf. Gen. 31:39; Amos 3:12).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:14-15

¹⁴“If a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution. ¹⁵If its owner is with it, he shall not make restitution; if it is hired, it came for its hire.”

22:14-15 “If a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor” The term “borrow” (BDB 981, KB 1371, *Qal* IMPERFECT) has two possible meanings. One is “to ask so as to return” (cf. 2 Kgs. 4:3; 6:5) or “to ask so as to keep” (cf. Exod. 3:22; 11:22). This is the same lexical issue as Exod. 12:35.

This paragraph (Exod. 22:14-15) is a summary of Exod. 22:7-13.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:16-17

¹⁶“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife. ¹⁷If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.”

22:16-17 “If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife” Women were viewed as the property of the father. Engagement was as binding as marriage (cf. Deut. 22:23,24). It was not really an actual buying of the wife, but restitution for her economic value to her family (cf. Deut. 22:28-29). This economic compensation usually involved fifty shekels of silver. Although this cultural dowry is assumed, it is not spoken of often in the Bible.

The VERB “seduces” (BDB 834, KB 984, *Piel* IMPERFECT) means “entice” or “deceive.” The *Piel* stem can denote

1. trickery or deception – 2 Sam. 3:25; Pro. 1:10; 16:29; 24:28; Jer. 20:7
2. sexual allurements – Hos. 2:14 (see UBS *Handbook*, p. 529)
3. persuasion – Jdgs. 14:15; 16:5

It is not clear how the woman was lured or wooed, but that it negated her engagement to another man!

Notice that Exod. 22:17 is a case where if the girl’s father refused to give her in marriage to the seducer, the seducer still had to pay the “*mohar*” (i.e., money paid to the father, cf. Gen. 34:12; 1 Sam. 18:25). This was because the violated girl (i.e., not raped) would find it difficult to marry because she was no longer a virgin (BDB 143).

If the girl was betrothed, she was already legally married and a different standard was applied (cf. Deut. 22:23-39).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:18

¹⁸“You shall not allow a sorceress to live.”

22:18 “You shall not allow a sorceress to live” This is apodictic law (Exod. 22:18-24). It is similar to Deut. 18:9-13. The term “sorceress” (BDB 506, FEMININE) seems to refer to witchcraft and is condemned in Lev. 19:31; 20:27; Jer. 27:19; and Mal. 3:5. This is mankind’s attempt to control his circumstances by the use of the powers of the spiritual realm.

The term, sorcerer (BDB 506, KB 503), basically means “to cut up” (1) as in the shredding of ingredients for a magical potion or (2) cutting oneself as a way of getting the deity’s attention (i.e., Syrian usage, cf. 1 Kgs. 18:28). This term was used to describe Pharaoh’s wise men in Exod. 7:11 and Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men in Dan. 2:2.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:19

¹⁹“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.”

22:19 “Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death” This refers to the ANE’s pagan worship rites. Often, intercourse with an animal that symbolized a deity was seen as a way to unite with that god. All pagan practices are condemned in the Mosaic legislation (cf. Lev. 18:23; 20:15,16; Deut. 27:21). Much that we do not understand in Pentateuch texts is related to these pagan worship practices (see Herodotus 2.46).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:20

²⁰“He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed.”

22:20 “He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone” This phrase could be viewed as

1. an affirmation of YHWH’s uniqueness (i.e., monotheism)
2. an effective limit to the polytheism of the ANE

It is hard to know when Israel viewed YHWH as the highest of other gods, or the only God (see Special Topic: Monotheism).

Other “gods” (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, “*elohim*,” D.) are acknowledged in the OT.

1. angels of the heavenly court
2. demons (see Special Topic: Angels and Demons)
3. pagan pantheons (gods named but their reality not acknowledged)

Their worship is strictly forbidden to Israel (cf. Exod. 20:2-6; 22:20; 23:13,32-33; 34:11-17; Deut. 4:19-24; 7:1-5).

▣ **“shall be utterly destroyed”** “Utterly destroyed” (BDB 355, KB 353, *Hophal* IMPERFECT) means “under the ban.” It is a reference to an ancient type of military warfare where the enemy is totally destroyed. It literally means that everything that had breath died (cf. Deut. 20:16-18; Jos. 6:18-19,21; 1 Sam. 15:3) because it/they belong exclusively to God. One must not judge this in light of our own culture, but in light of its own day.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:21-24

²¹“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²²You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. ²³If you afflict him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; ²⁴and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”

22:21-24 This section shows God’s care for the ostracized and underprivileged in society. This same theme is often repeated in the book of Deuteronomy (i.e., Deut. 1:16-17; 10:18-19; 24:17; 27:19). God will be the advocate for the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the alienated, the sojourner, and the underprivileged (cf. esp. Exod. 22:23,27).

22:24 “and I will kill you with the sword” This is a reference to military defeat and exile from Canaan (i.e., Assyrian, Babylonian exiles, as well as many defeats of Israel by the surrounding nations). The consequences of covenant disobedience are serious (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; Gal. 6:7-8)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:25-27

²⁵“If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. ²⁶If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, ²⁷for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear *him*, for I am gracious.”

22:25-27 This deals with lending money. A distinction is made between lending to a covenant brother and lending to an alien. An Israelite could not charge another covenant partner interest (cf. Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:19-20).

22:26 “cloak as a pledge” The cloak was an outer robe often used as cover for sleeping (cf. Deut. 24:12-13). It could be taken as a physical pledge of the payment of a loan, but a gracious covenant partner would/should return it at night (cf. Exod. 22:27). Often this pledge was kept until a day laborer (“hire,” Exod. 22:15 may refer to a day laborer, cf. Exod. 12:45) was paid in the evening and could repay the loan.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:28

²⁸“You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”

22:28 “You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people” It is obvious that this use of the term “god,” which is really the word “*elohim*,” refers to a judge and should not be capitalized to make it a title for a deity (cf. Exod. 22:8-9; Jdgs. 22:8,9; 21:6; Ps. 82:1 for other places where the term “*elohim*” can refer to a judge and does not always imply the supreme Deity, cf. Peshitta and TEV footnote). This verse does speak to the fact that our attitude toward authority is crucial. This very verse was quoted to Paul in Acts 23:5 when he was on trial.

Who does “a ruler” (BDB 672 I) refer to? It literally means “one lifted up.” In Exod. 16:22 (cf. Jos. 9:15,18; 22:30) it referred to “leaders of the congregation” (i.e., tribal leaders, cf. Num. 1:16,44). It often referred to royal leaders (i.e., 2 Kgs. 11:34), but there is no royalty (monarchy) in Israel at this point.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:29-30

²⁹“You shall not delay *the offering from your harvest and your vintage*. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. ³⁰You shall do the same with your oxen *and* with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.”

22:29 “You shall not delay *the offering from your harvest and your vintage*” Exodus 22:28 and 29 both deal with attitude and motive on the part of the people. First fruits, firstborn, and tithing were ancient ways of supporting the theocratic kingdom of Israel. There seem to be three different tithes which were required at different times in the normal life of the agricultural people of the Promised Land. See Special Topic: Tithing in the Mosaic Legislation.

This verse refers to the first part of the grain and orchard harvests, but the terms

1. “your harvest” (literally, “fullness,” BDB 571)
 - a. of the field – Exod. 22:29
 - b. of the winepress – Num. 18:27
 - c. of the seed – Deut. 22:9
2. “your vintage” (literally, “tears,” BDB 199, found only here in the OT), which could denote
 - a. wine
 - b. olive oil

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:31

³¹“You shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat *any* flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.”

22:31 “You shall be holy men to Me” Exodus 22:31 shows the goals of these laws. God’s people are to exhibit the family characteristics of God. All covenant members were seen as priests unto God (cf. Lev. 19:5,6). Every aspect of their lives must be different and unique and should point others to God. These verses speak of a different kind of eating practice because of the sanctity and holiness of life, which is seen and symbolized in blood. Israel was to be separate (see Special Topic: Holy) from the pagan practices of Canaan (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE).

▣ **“flesh torn to pieces in the field”** This would refer to edible animals (i.e., clean) killed by other animals (cf. Lev. 7:24; 17:15; 22:8). These carcasses would still have the blood in the meat. It was a hygienic and cultic issue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why do some scholars think the first four verses are out of order?
2. How does this chapter show the right of private property?
3. How does this chapter show the responsibility of the owner?
4. Why did restitution involve paying extra?
5. Do Exod. 22:8,9, and 28 refer to God or judges? Why?
6. Why is Exod. 22:16-17 a rape case?
7. What do humans seek from sorcerers?
8. How are food laws related to “holiness”?

EXODUS 23

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Sundry Laws	Justice for All	Miscellaneous Social and Cultic Laws (22:18-23:9)	Justice and Fairness	Justice: Duties toward Enemies
23:1-3	23:1-3	23:1-3	23:1-3	23:1-3
23:4-5	23:4-5	23:4	23:4-5	23:4-5
		23:5		
23:6-7	23:6-9	23:6-8	23:6-8	23:6-8
23:8				
23:9		23:9	23:9	23:9
The Sabbath and Land	The Law of Sabbaths	A Cultic Calendar	The Seventh Year and the Seventh Day	The Sabbatical Year and the Sabbath
23:10-11	23:10-13	23:10-11	23:10-11	23:10-11
23:12-13		23:12-13	23:12	23:12
			23:13	23:13
Three National Feasts	Three Annual Feasts		The Three Great Festivals	The Great Feasts
23:14-17	23:14-19	23:14-15a	23:14-15	23:14-17
		23:15b		
		23:16-17	23:16a	
			23:16b-17	
23:18		23:18	23:18	23:18
23:19a		23:19a	23:19a	23:19a
23:19b		23:19b	23:19b	23:19b
Conquest of the Land	The Angel and the Promises	The Conclusion of the Covenant Code	Promises and Instructions	Promises and Instructions for the Entry into Canaan
23:20-33	23:20-26	23:20-21	23:20-26	23:20-26
		23:22		
		23:23-33		
	23:27-33		23:27-33	23:27-33

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter, like 21 and 22, have several emphatic grammatical features (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERATIVE VERB). See full list in Contextual Insights at Exodus 21.
- B. Exod 23:1-9 deals with societal duties toward covenant partners who one may be in conflict with.
- C. Exodus 23:10-13 deals with the “rest” of both land and people based on the “rest” of God in Gen. 2:2 and the Sabbath law of Exod. 20:8-11.
It is interesting that the stated reason for a weekly rest in Exodus (i.e., rest for humans and animals) is altered in Deuteronomy 5 (i.e., YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage).
- D. Exodus 23:14-19 deals with the three major annual feast days.
 1. Passover
 2. Pentecost
 3. Booths
- E. Exodus. 23:20-33 deals with YHWH's special angelic representative in the conquest.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:1-3

¹“You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. ²You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert *justice*; ³nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.”

23:1-3 This paragraph deals with testimony in a court. Notice the different legal terms used referring to testimony (cf. Exod. 20:16; Deut. 19:15-21).

1. false report, Exod. 23:1 – BDB 1034 CONSTRUCT BDB 996
2. malicious witness, Exod. 23:1 – BDB 729 CONSTRUCT BDB 329 (cf. Deut. 19:15-21)
3. testify (lit. “answer”), Exod. 23:2 – BDB 772 I, KB 851, *Qal* IMPERFECT
4. in a dispute, Exod. 23:2 – BDB 936
5. in order to pervert (lit. “to bend”) *justice*, Exod. 23:2 – BDB 639, #3, B 692, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
6. be partial (lit. “honor”), Exod. 23:3 – BDB 213, KB 239, *Qal* IMPERFECT
7. in his dispute, Exod. 23:3 – BDB 936

Of the five VERBS, the second is a *Qal* JUSSIVE, which implies that the four *Qal* IMPERFECTS are used in a JUSSIVE sense.

Israel was to be a just and fair society for all. Most ANE law codes benefit the rich and powerful but not Israel's. Both were to be dealt with fairly (cf. Lev. 19:15).

23:1 “shall not bear” This VERB (BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to take up” or “to carry.” It is used in Exod. 20:7 for not taking the Lord's name in vain. The setting of Exod. 23:1-9 is a court and this is legal terminology.

▣ **“false report”** This involves malicious gossiping to purposefully damage another person. What we speak in private about others has consequences (cf. Deut. 19:16-21).

23:2 “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil” This verse addresses “mob mentality” or possibly showing favoritism to the wealthy and powerful (i.e., JPSOA, cf. Lev. 19:15). This is the false assumption that because others are doing something wrong, then I can too.

Notice again there is a specific reference to false testimony against another based on “popular opinion.”

▣ **“in a dispute”** This is the Hebrew word “rib” (BDB 936), which means “law suit.”

▣ **“dispute”** This term (BDB 936, cf. Exod. 23:2,3,6) refers to a legal dispute to be decided before judges or priests (cf. Deut. 19:17; 21:5; 25:1).

▣ **“turn aside. . .pervert”** These are both INFINITIVE CONSTRUCTS from the same root (BDB 639, KB 692).

23:3 “nor shall you be partial” The issue of “impartiality” was crucial to Israel's legal system (cf. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 10:17-18). As YHWH is impartial (cf. Deut. 10:17-18; 2 Chr. 19:6-7), so too, must Israel's judges (cf. Deut. 1:17; 16:19; 24:17; Lev. 19:15).

In this verse “impartial” (BDB 213, KB 239) is literally “honor” or “pay honor to someone for some reason.” Normally this legal concept uses “lift the face” as the idiom of not showing partiality.

This same theme is continued in Exod. 23:6-8.

▣ **“poor man”** This is לָרֵעַ (BDB 195) but this seems to be repeated in Exod. 23:6, where the common word for a poor man is used (BDB 2). Some scholars suggest it be emended to לָרֵעַ (BDB 152), which would be “the strong man” or “powerful man,” which seems to make more sense of human tendencies (see R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentaries*, p. 177; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 450).

Surely “reverse discrimination” is the possible subject (cf. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:4-5

**4“If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.
5If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.”**

23:4-5 This is an illustration of how a fair society should work. One covenant partner should help another, even if they are personally at odds with each other (Exod. 23:4).

Exodus 23:5 expands the concern from the enemy to his animals. God cares for fairness among His people and compassion for animals (cf. Jon. 4:11). Animals will be a part of the new age (cf. Isa. 11:6-9), as they were of initial creation (Genesis 1).

Notice God's apparent care for animals (i.e., Babylonian Talmud, Tractate, Bava Metzia, 32 a-b; cf. Jonah 3:8; 4:11).

Contextually, Exod. 23:4-5 seems to break into a context on court procedures. Possibly "the enemy" is a legal adversary. Possibly this occurs on the way to or from court.

23:4 "you shall surely return it to him" This is one of several emphatic forms (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB) found in Exodus 21-23 (cf. Exod. 23:2,4,5,22,24). See list in Contextual Insights of Exodus 21.

23:5 "you shall surely release it with him" This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE with an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 736, KB 806), which denotes emphasis.

The UBS Text Project (p. 122) has a helpful note about the word "release" (BDB 736, KB 806), which has two possible meanings.

1. Exod. 23:5b, "to abandon," "to leave"
2. Exod. 23:5c, "to fortify," "to strengthen" (cf. Neh. 3:8,34)

Also note that you were to loose the animal with the help of its owner, and your enemy. Hopefully after this he would no longer be your enemy!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:6-7

"You shall not pervert the justice *due* to your needy *brother* in his dispute. ⁷Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty."

23:6-8 This section, like Exod. 23:1-3, deals with a fair legal system. Bribery is singled out as a major cause of injustice (cf. Deut. 16:19; Pro. 17:23). In Isa. 5:22-23 injustice is linked to both bribery and drunkenness.

23:6 This is related to Exod. 23:3. Exodus 23:6-9 may be directed towards Israel's judges.

The VERB (BDB 639, KB 692, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT), "do not pervert" or "turn aside" justice is a repeated theme (cf. Deut. 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; 1 Sam. 8:3; Pro. 17:23; Lam. 3:35; Amos 2:7)! YHWH is just; His people must be also!

23:7 False charges could, and often did, result in the death penalty. Judges must take special care so that the

1. innocent person
2. righteous person

was not punished (i.e., Deut. 25:1).

God will deal harshly with evil judges! Exodus 23:8 deals specifically with judicial bribery (cf. Deut. 16:18-19; 27:25).

Bribes (BDB 1005) (1) blind clear eyes and (2) twist, distort, and subvert justice.

☐ **"for I will not acquit the guilty"** YHWH is a holy and righteous God, so too, must be His people (cf. Exod. 34:7). Sin always has consequences, both in time and eternity!

In this context "the guilty" would be either

1. a false witness
2. those who tried to influence the witness
3. a judge who knew and still accepted a false witness
4. those involved in bribery

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:8

⁸“You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.”

23:8 “bribe” For a good brief discussion, see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 286-287.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:9

⁹“You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

23:9 Israel is to have compassion on sojourners because they were once sojourners in Egypt (cf. Exod. 22:21; Lev. 19:33-34). YHWH had mercy on Israel; she should have mercy on the weak and powerless in society (cf. Deut. 1:16-17; 27:19). Israel is meant to model and display YHWH’s character. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

▣ **“strangers”** Israel’s beginning as a slave people made them uniquely aware of the plight of “strangers” (BDB 158, used three times). Israel must remember and treat others in the same condition with fairness (cf. Exod. 22:21; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 16:19; 24:18,22).

The term “strangers” (BDB 158) was used of

1. Abraham – Gen. 23:4
2. Moses – Exod. 2:22; 18:3
3. Ruth’s family – Ruth 1:1
4. Israelites in Egypt – Exod. 22:20; 23:9; Deut. 10:19

In this context this verse probably relates to a legal case or law suit (“rib,” BDB 936, cf. Exod. 23:2).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:10-11

¹⁰“You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, ¹¹but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.”

23:10-11 These verses deal with an agricultural concept which increased fertility. The land needed to rest. In that seventh year whatever came up on its own was to be left for the area poor and needy.

Also notice God again cares for the animals (cf. Exod. 23:11,12).

1. makes a covenant with them – Gen. 9:10; Hos. 2:18
2. hears their cry – Job 38:41 (cf. Luke 12:24); Ps. 104:21
3. gives food – Ps. 104:21; 136:25; 147:7; Joel 1:20; Matt. 10:29
4. remembers in mercy – Gen. 8:1; Jon. 4:11
5. will be part of the eschaton – Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25

23:10 This was a general principle in Israel, one in seven. Here it is related to land; in Exod. 23:12 to weekly work schedules.

23:11 One wonders if this schedule related to different fields/vineyards at different times (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 229). The seventh year was a way to provide food for the poor, but if all fields were chronologically synchronized, then there would be too much food one year and none the other six years.

This showed God's ownership of the land and His concern for the poor and the animals (cf. Exod. 23:5).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:12-13

¹²“Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves. ¹³Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth.”

23:12 The same way the land needed rest in order to be productive, so too, human beings and animals. This became the practical aspect of a Sabbath's rest, which was religious and to set a pattern of regular worship (cf. Exod. 20:9-11; 31:12-17).

This reflects the pattern of Gen. 2:2. God rested and so should His creation.

1. owners
2. their children
3. their servants
4. their livestock (Exod. 23:5)
5. also the stranger in their midst (cf. Exod. 20:8-11)

The NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 613, has an interesting list that shows God's concern with animals.

1. made a covenant with them – Gen. 9:10; Hos. 2:18
2. cares for animals on the Sabbath – Exod. 23:12
3. animals in distress cry to God – Job 38:41; Ps. 104:21
4. He feeds them – Ps. 147:9; 136:25
5. animals receive mercy along with human beings – Gen. 8:1; Jon. 3:8; 4:11



NASB, REB “refresh themselves”

NKJV, NRSV,
JPSOA, LXX “may be refreshed”

TEV “can rest”

NJB “have a breathing space”

This is a rare word (BDB 661, KB 711). It is found only here and Exod. 31:17; 2 Sam. 16:14.

The NJB translation shows its relationship to *nephesh* (BDB 659), referring to animals (cf. Gen. 1:24; 2:19) and humans (cf. Gen. 2:7) who breathe air.

This term (BDB 661) refers to “air breathing” animals, but when referring to humans is usually translated “soul” (cf. Gen. 2:7). In this context “refresh” is best (cf. Exod. 31:17; 2 Sam. 16:14).

23:13 This is a summary verse (cf. TEV, NJB) which relates to the prohibition to idolatry in Exod. 20:3-5,23. It is an IMPERFECT stem but used in an IMPERITIVAL sense. Idolatry is strictly forbidden and Israel must remember (cf. Deut. 4:9,23; 8:11-20). God's blessings and presence were conditional on Israel's faith and obedience (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; Joshua 23:6-13).

23:13a “Now concerning everything which I have said to you” One wonders how far back this summary extends.

1. all of the book of the covenant – Exod. 21:1-23:13
2. part of it – Exod. 22:17-23:12 (Jewish Study Bible, p. 159)
3. just Exod. 23:1-12
4. the ten words plus the book of the covenant – Exodus 20:1-23:13

Notice the words of YHWH provide blessings but they also are a warning. Disobedience has severe consequences (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30)!

23:13b This is a repeated warning going back to Exod. 20:3-5. Idolatry is a recurrent temptation to fallen mankind (cf. Rom. 1:21-25). Fertility worship was the ANE standard model. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship in the ANE.

Israel is warned (lit. “be on guard,” BDB 1030, KB 1581, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) often to avoid making and worshiping idols (cf. Exod. 23:24,32; 34:13-16; Deut. 7:4-5,25; 12:1-3,30-31; 20:17-18).

▣ **“do not mention the name of other gods”** The negated VERB (BDB 269, KB 269, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) is literally “remember,” but in the *Hiphil* stem it can mean “to mention in speech” (i.e., worship acts). It refers to the worship of false gods; their names could imply their reality.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:14-17

¹⁴“Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. ¹⁵You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. ¹⁶Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. ¹⁷Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.”

23:14-17 This paragraph discusses the three major annual feast days.

1. the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also designated as Passover, see Special Topic: The Feasts of Israel, I. D. 1. It is mentioned in Exod. 12:1-14,21-28; Lev. 23:4-14; Num. 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8,16
2. the Feast of the Harvest; this feast goes by several names (i.e., Feasts of Weeks and Pentecost, cf. Exod. 31:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31); see Special Topic: The Feasts of Israel, I. D. 2.

The first fruits would have become ripe at different times.

- a. grapes – Num. 13:20
- b. grain – Exod. 23:16
- c. wheat – Exod. 34:22
- d. figs – Nah. 3:12

As these later became food for the priest and his family (cf. Deut. 18:4; Neh. 10:38), this varied availability provided a source of food over a period of time. This same concept might be true for a variety in the ways different fields were allowed to be fallow each six years.

3. the Feast of the Ingathering; this feast also has several designations (i.e., Tabernacles, Booths). #2 was for the first fruits of the wheat harvest; this one is for the general harvest (cf. Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:34-44; Deut. 16:13-17). See Special Topic: The Feasts of Israel, I. D. 3.

Each of the major annual corporate worship events (i.e., three feasts plus Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16) were meant to highlight an aspect of God’s merciful character, especially toward His covenant people. These annual events, like the weekly Sabbath (also other events related to “seven”: Year of Release, Year of Jubilee) were designed to be teaching moments, as well as worship events. They were to keep God’s mercy, provision, and care before the people.

23:14 “three times” This is a NOUN CONSTRUCT from

1. three – BDB 1625

2. foot/feet – BDB 919

It denotes a place one must travel to (i.e., a live metaphor for the central sanctuary). In Num. 22:28,32,33, it just means “three times” (i.e., a dead metaphor).

23:15 “unleavened bread” Israel left Egypt quickly. Later leaven became

1. a symbol of sin and corruption (cf. Exod. 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 6:16-17; Matt. 16:6,12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1)
2. but not always (cf. Lev. 2:11)
3. an idiom of permeation (cf. Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21; in a negative sense in 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9)

See Special Topic: Leaven.

▣ **“the month of Abib”** See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars.

▣ **“none shall appear before Me empty-handed”** This is mentioned seven times (cf. Exod. 22:29-30; 34:20). It refers to bringing offerings of the field and herds to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and recognition of His ownership of all things.

God was gracious and Israel was to be grateful. See Special Topic: Sacrifices in Mesopotamia and Israel and Their Significance.

The MT scholars were nervous about the anthropomorphism in the OT. It is possible that this phrase should be “see my face” (cf. Exod 23:17; 34:20,23,24; Deut. 16:16; 31:1; 1 Sam. 1:22; Ps. 42:2; Isa. 1:12; there is an Akkadian parallel). The MT makes it a *Niphal* stem but it is better a *Qal* stem VERB (cf. *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, p. 107; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 451; G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, pp. 73-75; even Jewish Study Bible, p. 160 suggest this).

23:17 “the Lord GOD” This is a combination of names.

1. here, *Adon* (BDB 10) and YHWH (BDB 217)
2. often, *Elohim* YHWH, as in Gen. 2:4

See Special Topic: Names for Deity.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:18

¹⁸“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:19a

^{19a}“You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:19b

^{19b}“You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.”

23:18-19 This is a series of loosely related laws about sacrifice.

1. no leaven with a blood sacrifice, cf. Exod. 34:25
2. no fat of a sacrificial animal can remain overnight; the fat was a symbol of the health and vitality of the offered animal; it uniquely belonged to God (i.e., as did the blood)
3. the choice first-fruits were given to God at the central sanctuary to show God’s ownership of all the crop (cf. Exod. 29:12-13; Lev. 3:16-17; 7:23-25)
4. do not boil a kid in the milk of its mother

The *Ras Shamra* (see Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook*, p. 174) texts show that this was done in other cultures as a symbol of fertility. Judaism developed strict dietary rules (separate cooking vessels and plates for meat and dairy products) based on this verse. However, the thrust seems to relate to Canaanites' sacrificial worship (cf. Exod. 34:26; Deut. 14:21). It has little or nothing to do with disease or hygiene.

23:18 “leaven” See Special Topic: Leaven

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:20-33

²⁰“Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. ²²But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³For My angel will go before you and bring you in to *the* land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them. ²⁴You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces. ²⁵But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. ²⁶There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. ²⁷I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you. ²⁸I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. ²⁹I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. ³⁰I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. ³¹I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. ³²You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. ³³They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

23:20-23 These verses deal with “the Angel” who led the children of Israel (cf. Exod. 14:19; 32:34; 33:2). I assume He is the same as “the Angel of YHWH.” See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD.

Notice His function.

1. He guards them
2. He will guide them to Canaan
3. He will direct them (also warning against disobedience)
4. He has YHWH's own name (see Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH)
5. If they are obedient, He will defeat their enemies

This is like an alternate ego for God Himself (compare Exod. 23:22, “I” with Exod. 23:23, “My Angel”). See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD. Possibly this is the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. Isa. 63:7-10, where YHWH, the Angel, and the Spirit appear in a unified context; see Special Topic: The Trinity). Also notice the conditional nature of the promises (i.e., Exod. 23:21-22). See Special Topic: Covenant.

23:20 “the place which I have prepared” This is an allusion to Canaan (cf. Exod. 23:23) and relates to the unconditional prophecy of Gen. 15:12-21.

23:21

NASB “do not be rebellious”
NKJV “do not provoke”

NRSV, TEV “do not rebel”

NJB, JPSOA,

REB “do not defy”

LXX “do not disobey”

There are two possible Hebrew roots.

1. מרר – MT, “bitter” (BDB 600, KB 633, cf. Exod. 12:8)
2. מרה – LXX, “rebel” (KB 632, cf. Num. 20:10,24; 27:14)

As the angel “guards” (BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* ACTIVE INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) Israel, so too, must Israel “guard” (BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE) herself. The covenant has reciprocal responsibilities; that is what makes it a covenant (see Special Topic: Covenant).

Israel owes YHWH respect, service, and obedience! See Special Topic: Predestination (Calvinism) vs. Human Free Will (Arminianism).

23:22 “if you truly obey his voice” This is another emphatic form in this chapter (cf. Exod. 23:2,4,5,22,24 [twice]). Obedience is crucial! See Special Topic: Keep. “Truly obey” is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 1033, KB 1570, lit. “hear”) for emphasis. Obedience is crucial (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30).

23:23 “the land of. . .” See Special Topic: The Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

The aspects of covenant obedience.

1. positive, Exod. 23:25-26
2. Holy War, Exod. 23:27-28,31
3. time factor of victory, Exod. 23:29-30

▣ **“I will bring you into the land”** This clearly reflects YHWH’s promise to Abraham in Gen. 15:12-21.

▣ **“I will completely destroy them”** This VERB (BDB 470, KB 469) normally means “to hide,” but here a *Hiphil* stem means “destroy” (2 Chr. 32:21; Ps. 83:4; possibly Zech. 11:8).

It is interesting that here YHWH’s angel will completely destroy the Canaanites but, in reality, the Israelites had to do it themselves. God’s will was thwarted by human disobedience, with terrible consequences (i.e., two exiles of Abraham’s descendants from Canaan).

23:24 “utterly overthrow. . .break in pieces” These are both INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERBS of the same root for emphasis.

If Israel did not completely destroy the Canaanites and totally reject their fertility worship, she would be polluted by them (and it). The same command is in Num. 33:50-56!

▣ This verse reiterates the emphasis of Exod. 20:3-5,23. Idolatry was a major prohibition (cf. Exod. 23:13,33). It must be “destroyed,” 23:23; “utterly overthrow,” 23:24; “utterly destroy,” Deut. 7:2; “obliterate their name,” Deut. 12:3. This is serious!

▣ **“your shall utterly overthrow them”** The Canaan tribes were to be placed under YHWH’s ban (i.e., *herem*) and completely destroyed (cf. Exod. 23:32-33; 34:12; Deut. 7:2,16; 13:8; Jos. 23:13). This is “holy war”! As Jericho was under the ban (*herem*, cf. Lev. 27:28-29) and every breathing thing/person was killed (Joshua 6).

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 161, mentions that Maimonides, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 6.5, says the Israelites gave the Canaanites three choices:

1. fight
2. emigrate

3. become forced laborers

providing they agreed to the seven Noahide laws of Gen. 9:8-17.

This is one of the intensified grammatical forms. See list in Contextual Insights at Exodus 21.

▣ **“sacred pillars”** See Special Topic: Israel’s Mandated Response to Canaanite Fertility Worship.

23:25-26 Notice the specific promises.

1. good crops (i.e., bread, cf. Lev. 26:4-6,26; Deut. 28:5-6)
2. rain (i.e., water, cf. Lev. 26:4)
3. no plagues like Egypt (i.e., remove sickness, cf. Exod. 15:26; lev. 26:16)
4. healthy population of humans and herds (i.e., no miscarriages or barrenness, cf. Deut. 28:4,8)
5. long life span (i.e., full number of days)

These agricultural and health promises are related to their obedience (cf. Deut. 7:12-15); no obedience, no blessing and even the presence of curses! The Mosaic Covenant was a performance-based covenant!

23:25 There is a textual option in this verse (see UBS Text Project, p. 125) between

1. He will bless (i.e., the angel of Exod. 23:20-23)
2. I will bless (i.e., YHWH)

The UBS Text Project gives option #1 a “B” rating (some doubt). See my discussion at Exod. 23:20-23.

▣ This verse relates to the blessings for covenant obedience (cf. Lev. 26:3-10; Deut. 28:1-13). It later became known as “the two ways” (cf. Deut. 30:15,19; Psalm 1).

▣ **“He will bless your bread and your water”** The UBS *Handbook*, p. 559, has two possible meanings.

1. YHWH will provide food and water (TEV)
2. YHWH will make these things healthy (NJB)

The LXX adds “wine” to the list. The UBS *Handbook* supports option #2 because it fits the next phrase better.

▣ **“I will remove sickness from your midst”** This is often used as a proof-text for those who claim “no illness” is God’s will for believers (see Special Topic: Healing; and Gordon Fee’s book, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*).

This phrase relates to Exod. 15:26 and Deut. 7:15, which refer to the plagues on Egypt. But also notice Lev. 26:16.

23:26 This verse, like Exod. 23:25, relates to YHWH’s covenant blessings (cf. Deut. 7:14; 28:4). But the second part of the verse acknowledges that people will die at some point (i.e., in their old age).

23:27-28 This is Holy War terminology. YHWH will fight for His people.

1. He will make Israel’s enemies afraid (cf. Exod. 15:16; 23:27; Jos. 2:9)
2. He will use natural means to defeat Israel’s enemies (hornets, hail, floods)
3. He will cause confusion (cf. Exod. 14:24; Deut. 7:23; Jos. 10:10 Jdgs. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Chr. 15:6)

23:27 The victory was YHWH’s, not Israel’s military (i.e., the plagues, the Red Sea, the conquest).

“Terror” (BDB 33) refers to the fear of YHWH, brought on by His great acts (cf. Gen. 35:5; Exod. 15:16; Jos. 2:9-11; 1 Sam. 14:15). YHWH uses

1. rumor – 2 Kgs. 7:6; 19:7; Isa. 37:7; Ezek. 7:26
2. sounds – Isa. 30:31

3. hail – Isa. 28:2,17
4. hornets (BDB 864, NRSV, “pestilence”; JPSOA, “plagues”) – Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Jos. 24:12
5. panaic/confusion – Exod. 14:24; Deut. 7:23; Jos. 10:10; Jdgs. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Chr. 15:6; Esther 9:24

It could refer to His majesty (cf. Isa. 2:10,19,21).

▣ **“turn *their* backs to you”** This military idiom of retreat also occurs in Jos. 7:8,12; 2 Sam. 22:41; Ps. 18:40; Jer. 48:39. It is even used of Israel turning her back on YHWH in 2 Chr. 29:6. It denotes a complete rout.

23:29-31 These verses discuss how Israel will possess the land of Canaan slowly (cf. Deut. 7:22). From Joshua we know that God defeated the main military powers of Canaan (i.e., city state kings and their armies), but that each tribe must possess their own land and remove the remaining Canaanite population (which they did not).

Notice how Divine sovereignty is linked to individual actions. Human obedience and human choices have consequences!

23:30 “little by little” The conquest will take a long time (cf. Deut. 7:27). Each tribe must clear its own land of Canaanites.

23:31 The geographical extent of the land is described.

1. from *Yam Suph* (Sea of Reeds/Weeds; see Special Topic: The Red Sea); most commentators assume this refers to the Gulf of Aqaba and not the Nile
2. the sea of the Philistines (of the Mediterranean)
3. the wilderness to the River Euphrates (i.e., the head waters of the Euphrates in Syria to the Arabah)

The only time this full geography was realized was the reign of Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs. 5:1).

For this promise to be realized, Israel must be obedient to the Mosaic Covenant! These promises do not/cannot apply to a non-obedient, secular, modern Israeli state!

▣ **“the Philistines”** There are parts of the book of Exodus that reflect a later editor. This may be one of them. However, Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 94-96) offers an educated opinion that it is not anachronistic.

23:32-33 The warning is reaffirmed! Israel must drive out the Canaanites! If they do not, they will be corrupted (cf. Deut. 7:4; 20:18). They did not and they were! The exile of disobedient Israel was prophesied in Lev. 26:33; Deut. 4:27; 28:36-37,64; 29:28; Ps. 106:27.

But there is always hope of repentance and obedience (cf. Jer. 31:10-20)!

YHWH’s covenant with Israel involved several aspects.

1. fear Him – Deut. 10:12; 13:3-4
2. honor Him by not worshiping idols – Exod. 20:2-6; 22:20; 23:32-33; 34:11-17; Deut. 4:19-24
3. walking in His ways – Deut. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16; Jos. 22:5; 1 Kgs. 3:3
4. keeping His laws – Exod. 20:6; Deut. 6:2-9; 7:9; 10:12-13; 11:1,13; 30:10,16; Jos. 22:5; 23:6
5. love Him with a whole heart – Deut. 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 30:6
6. cleave to Him – Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:3; 30:20; Jos. 22:5; 23:8; 2 Kgs. 18:6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why was lying such a heinous sin?
2. How does Exodus 23 show God's care for animals?
3. Does the "sixth year" of Exod. 23:10-13 occur all in the same year?
4. How is the reason for the Sabbath different in Exodus than in Deuteronomy?
5. What purpose do the Sabbath and annual feasts serve?
6. How has Exod. 23:19 been misapplied?
7. Who is "the Angel of the LORD"?
8. Why did a gracious God mandate the complete destruction of the Canaanite population?
9. Explain Exod. 23:29-30 in light of the book of Joshua.

EXODUS 24

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
People Affirm their Covenant with God	Israel Affirms the Covenant	The Ceremony of Covenant Ratification	The Covenant is Sealed	The Ratification of the Covenant
24:1-8	24:1-8	24:1-2 24:3-8	24:1-2 24:3-7	24:1-2 24:3-8
	On the Mountain with God		24:8	
24:9-11	24:9-11	24:9-11	24:9 Moses on Mt. Sinai	24:9 Moses on the Mountain
			24:10-11	24:10-11
24:12-18	24:12-18	24:12-14 24:15-18	24:12-14 24:15-18	24:12-15a 24:15b-18

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter is not in sequential, chronological order. There are "doublets." Notice how many times Moses is told to come up and how many times the text says he went up (cf. Exod. 19:3,4,20,21,28 [twice]).

TOLD
Exod. 24:1 – imperative

Exod. 24:12 – imperative

WENT
Exod. 24:2
Exod. 24:9

Exod. 24:13
Exod. 24:15
Exod. 24:18

The UBS *Handbook* (p. 565) suggests that this chapter is a composite of an account combining two or three different sources. Although I disagree with J.E.D.P. Pentateuchal Source Criticism (see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism), I do believe that much of it was oral, passed down by different sources. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.

- B. Part of the literary confusion is the fact that there are two revelatory events recorded.
 - 1. the inauguration of “the book of the covenant,” Exod. 24:1-8
 - 2. the receiving of the two tablets written by God, Exod. 24:9-18
- C. This is the great inauguration ceremony of God’s Covenant with Israel.
- D. Notice the emphasis on a sacred written text (cf. Exod. 24:4, i.e., canonization of texts).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:1-8

¹Then He said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. ²Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.” ³Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!” ⁴Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” ⁸So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

24:1 “Come up to the LORD” In Exodus 19 (the first giving of the ten words and its acceptance by Israel) Moses went up and down the mountain several times. This is also true of Exodus 24 (cf. Exod. 24:1,9,12). This implies

- 1. eyewitness detail of several up and down events
- 2. the combination of different sources (see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism)
- 3. a technique of oral tradition (see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*)

For me, #3 seems best.

Notice this is a command from Moses, not YHWH. It is directed towards the leadership of the tribes and the soon-to-be priesthood.

- 1. Aaron and his two oldest sons (cf. Exod. 19:22)
 - a. Nadab
 - b. Abihu
- 2. the 70 tribal elders (in Exodus 19 they did not go up the mountain, cf. Exod. 19:7); for “70” see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture

▣ **“you shall worship at a distance”** There is no consecration period mentioned, as in Exod. 19:10-11. This group of leaders will approach God and experience Him in a powerful, unique way (cf. Exod. 24:10-11), but still Moses’ exalted position of mediator is emphasized (cf. Exod. 24:12).

The spacial limits placed on Israel’s leaders and populations set the stage for the separation of the Tabernacle and later temple. Only the main leader or a High Priest could approach YHWH. Others must stay at prescribed distances.

24:3-8 It seems that Exod. 24:1-2 links up with Exod. 24:9-11, while 24:3-8 forms an independent literary unit which describes the covenant affirmation and commitment event.

24:3 “the ordinances” This is literally “judgments” (BDB 1048, see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation). Notice Exod. 24:12 has two more terms.

▣ **“and all the people answered with one voice. . .”** This is the second account of the covenant inauguration (cf. Exod. 19:8). There is even a third in Exod. 24:7. The first ten words written by the finger of God on stone tablets will be broken by Moses because of the sin of Aaron and Israel with the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32), which will require another inauguration event.

▣ **“all the words”** Israel accepts the privileges and responsibilities of the Covenant (cf. Exod. 24:7; 19:8; see Special Topic: Covenant). This was a promise of complete obedience. However, history would prove that the Fall of Genesis 3 affected mankind so deeply that Israel could never do this (see Rom. 3:9-18,23).

24:4 “Moses wrote down” This idea that Moses wrote down God’s commands forms the basis for our understanding of “canon.” These were not Moses’ thoughts or words but YHWH’s. They are, therefore, holy and revelatory and need to be preserved for all generations. For the concept of canon see Special Topic: Canon; and NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 460-464.

See exegetical notes at Exod. 17:14 on Moses’ writing.

▣ This is a literary way of denoting canonical texts. The law of God was

1. revealed, Exod. 24:3
2. recited, Exod. 24:3
3. written down, Exod. 24:4
4. orally affirmed by oath, Exod. 24:4
5. must be obeyed, Exod. 24:7

▣ **“built an altar at the foot of the mountain”** Notice the altar was separate from twelve (see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture) stone pillars which were symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel (this is not related to the prohibition of pagan pillars in Deut. 16:22, which represented *Ba’al*, the male fertility god of Canaan), minus Levi.

Note also that although this altar was not at the top (where Moses met God), it was in a place where the people of Israel had access; possibly in the idiomatic sense of “foot hills” (cf. Deut. 4:11).

The altar represented YHWH and the twelve pillars represented Israel. It is possible that the blood of Exod. 24:8 was sprinkled on the “pillars” instead of the crowd.

▣ **“pillars”** Sacred pillars were originally set up as memorials.

1. by Moses in Exod. 24:4, as a way to commemorate the establishment of the covenant of Sinai (e.g., Jos. 4:3,9,20)
2. to some great event or to an appearance of God
 - a. Shechem (cf. Jos. 24:26)

- b. Bethel (cf. Gen. 28:18)
- c. Gilead (cf. Gen. 31:45)
- d. Gilgal (cf. Jos. 4:5)
- e. Mizpah (cf. 1 Sam. 7:12)
- f. Gibeon (cf. 2 Sam 20:8)
- g. En-Rogel (cf. 1 Kgs. 9:9)

They came to be connected to the idolatrous sins of *Ba'al* worship and are condemned in Exod. 34:13; Deut. 12:3; 16:22; Micah 5:13. This demonstrates how the same practice or items or place can be accepted in an older part of the OT, but condemned in other parts.

24:5 “burnt offerings. . . peace offerings” This verse is an eyewitness detail. These young men were not part of the seventy elders. They may have been “firstborns” (Exodus 13; see Targum Onkelos) who served God before the establishment of the priesthood.

There are two sacrifices mentioned (see Special Topic: Sacrifices in Mesopotamia and Israel and Their Significance).

1. a burnt offering which was totally consumed in the fire (usually a sign of commitment, but here of a covenant ratification)
2. peace offering which was the main part of a covenant meal where God symbolically was present with the offerer; here, God was uniquely present visibly (cf. Exod. 24:9-11)

Some scholars see Exod. 24:1-3,9-11 as separate from Exod. 24:3-8, but the peace offering of Exod. 24:5 links to the covenant meal in 24:11.

▣ **“sacrificed”** This is literally “and sacrificed sacrifices” (BDB 256, NOUN and VERB).

24:6,8 The blood of the sacrifices of Exod. 24:5 was collected and used to ratify the covenant in Exod. 24:8 (cf. Heb. 9:18-21). For the use of blood in covenant making see Special Topic: Covenant.

Remember, this event was before the sacrificial system was begun. The phrase, “blood of the covenant” (Exod. 24:8) is mentioned in the eschatological Messianic passage of Zech. 9:11. It is also mentioned by Jesus at the last supper in Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20 and referenced by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:25. Jesus was starting a new covenant.

The blood symbolized the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38)!

1. the seriousness of their pledge
2. a life given to accomplish it (cf. Mark 14:24)
3. a family unity between YHWH and Israel
4. but unlike Heb. 9:19-21, it did not specifically deal with forgiveness (cf. Mark 10:45)

There is similarity between this use of sacrificial blood and the consecration of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29. Therefore, the procedure may have been a way to consecrate all Israel as a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod. 19:5-6).

There is similarity between this use of sacrificial blood and the consecration of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29. Therefore, this procedure may have been a way to consecrate all Israel as a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod 19:5-6).

24:7 “the book of the covenant” Moses read all the words of this covenant agreement to all the people.

One wonders what Moses read.

1. the Decalog
2. the added laws of Exod. 21:1-23:13

▣ **“we will do and we will be obedient”** This phrase has two *Qal* IMPERFECT VERBS.

1. do – BDB 793, KB 889

2. be obedient – BDB 1033, KB 1570 (*shema* means “to hear so as to do,” cf. Deut. 1:16; 4:1; 5:1; 6:3,4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:10; 33:7)

It seems there are several times Israel said something like this (i.e., Exod. 19:8; 24:3,7; and again is implied in Exodus 34; also note Jos. 24:21-22).

24:8 “sprinkled it on the people” This has no ANE parallels. The best guess of its significance is seen when the High Priest and his family have blood put on them in Exod. 29:19-25. As the family of priests was dedicated to God’s service, so too, Israel, the family of priests (cf. Exod. 19:5-6), was dedicated to God.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:9-11

⁹Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

24:9-11 Although the reading of the covenant, the acceptance of it by the people, and the sprinkling with blood was done at the bottom of the mountain, the communal meal (Exod. 24:11; Gen. 26:30; 31:54) to seal the covenant was done high up on the mountain. It was restricted to the leaders.

Exodus 24:10 has always bothered Bible readers because of Exod. 33:20. This visual encounter is similar to Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1; 10. See full note at Exod. 33:20.

24:10-11 “His feet. . .His hand” These are anthropomorphic ways (see Special Topic: God Described as Human) of describing the invisible YHWH, see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (NT). But in this context YHWH manifested Himself physically. Note the two different VERBS “to see”

1. Exod. 24:10 – BDB 906, KB 1157
2. Exod. 24:11 – BDB 302, KB 301

and the specific statement that He allowed this in Exod. 24:11a.

24:10 “a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself” See notes at Ezek. 1:26 which describe the portable chariot of YHWH. It seems they viewed God (*Elohim*) from below through this pavement.

The sapphire (BDB 705), possibly lapis lazuli (cf. Ezek. 1:26), may reflect the dome of the sky in Gen. 1:6-8. Heaven’s floor is the earth’s blue sky (TEV).

The UBS *Handbook* (p. 573) says the second phrase is literally “and like bones of the heavens for purity.” “Bones” (BDB 782), which can mean “substance” or “essence” and “purity” (BDB 372, NJB, JPSOA), is spelled similarly to “clearness” (BDB 372, RSV). The clearness is called “ice” (BDB 901) in Ezek. 1:22.

These two phrases may be an idiomatic way of describing the dome/vault of the earth which forms the floor of God’s throne.



NASB, Peshitta	“as clear as”
NKJV	“its clarity”
NRSV	“clearness”
NJB	“pure”
JPSOA, LXX	“purity”
REB	“clear blue”

The Hebrew root (BDB 372, found only 3 times) can denote

1. clearness (cf. Ezek. 1:22)

2. luster (“splendor,” Ps. 89:44)
 3. color (Ugaritic)
 4. purity (Exod. 25:11; 30:35; Lev. 12:4,6)
- The VERB denotes “to be clear” or “to be pure.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:12-18

¹²Now the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.” ¹³So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ¹⁴But to the elders he said, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them.” ¹⁵Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. ¹⁸Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

24:12-18 This seems like a summary account of Moses receiving the ten words. This records a 40 day time period for Moses’ personal encounter with God on the mountain. A second 40 days is recorded in Exod. 34:28 after the golden calf event of Exodus 32.

24:12 “the law and the commandment” This may refer to not only the ten words (Exodus 20), but also the book of the covenant (Exod. 21:1-23:13; note Deut. 5:31). This is because of the ambiguity of the Hebrew *waw* PREPOSITION.

See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

▣ **“which I have written”** YHWH wrote the “ten commandments” Himself (cf. Exod. 31:18). YHWH did not write “the book of the covenant,” Moses did (cf. Exod. 24:4). YHWH certainly was the source of Exodus 21-23.

If this is true, then Exod. 24:12 refers only to the “tablets of stone” and not chapters 21-23 (i.e., book of the covenant, Exod. 24:7). Possibly Moses received not only the “ten commandments,” but a fuller oral explanation. I think this chapter seems so repetitive because two or three oral sources have been combined.

1. the revelation at Mt. Sinai
2. the revealing of the book of the covenant (Exod. 24:7-8)
3. the inauguration of the covenant with YHWH

24:13-24 One wonders how this relates to Exod. 24:9-11. It seems to be a flash back.

24:13 “the mountain of God” See note at Exod. 3:1.

24:14 This verse implies that Moses will be on the mountain a long time (i.e., Aaron and Hur would act as supreme judges in his absence, cf. Exod. 18:16). Apparently this is a chronological flashback.

▣ **“Hur”** Obviously Aaron and Hur (cf. Exod. 17:12) were left in charge as Moses went to meet God. They had Moses’ authority to judge during the 40 days.



NASB, JPSOA	“a legal matter”
NKJV	“a difficulty”
NRSV, TEV, REB	“a dispute”
NJB	“any matter to settle”
LXX	“a case”
Peshitta	“a problem”

This is the common NOUN (BDB 182) “word” or “speech,” but here and in Exod. 18:16,19 it denotes a legal dispute that had to be settled by a judge (cf. Deut. 17:9) or priest (of which there were none yet).

In Deut. 22:14,17 (also a legal context) it is translated “a charge” or “accusation.”

24:15-18 This is parallel to Exodus 19. See exegetical notes there.

24:15 “the cloud covered the mountain” This cloud (BDB 777) was a symbol of the personal presence of YHWH (cf. Exod. 19:9). He was veiled to protect the people (cf. Exod. 24:10).

24:16 “The glory” See Special Topic: Glory (*kabod*, OT).

Notice how Exod. 24:16 is a reflection of Genesis 1-2.

24:17 “like a consuming fire” YHWH’s presence is described in this imagery in Deut. 4:24; 9:3 and Heb. 12:29.

The NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 534, has a good list of how God revealed Himself and His will using “fire” imagery.

1. God as a flaming torch – Gen. 15:17
2. God appeared in a burning bush – Exod. 3:2
3. pillar of fire – Exod. 13:21,22; 14:24; Num. 9:15; 14:14; Ps. 78:14; 105:39
4. spoke revelation from the midst of the fire – Deut. 4:12,15,33,36; 5:4,22,24,26; 9:10; 10:4
5. connected to His descent on Mt Sinai – Exod. 19:18; 24:17
6. in lightning – Isa. 29:6; 30:27,30; Ps. 50:3
7. cleaning fire of judgment – see Special Topic: Fire
8. personal presence comes in fire – Isa. 66:15-16

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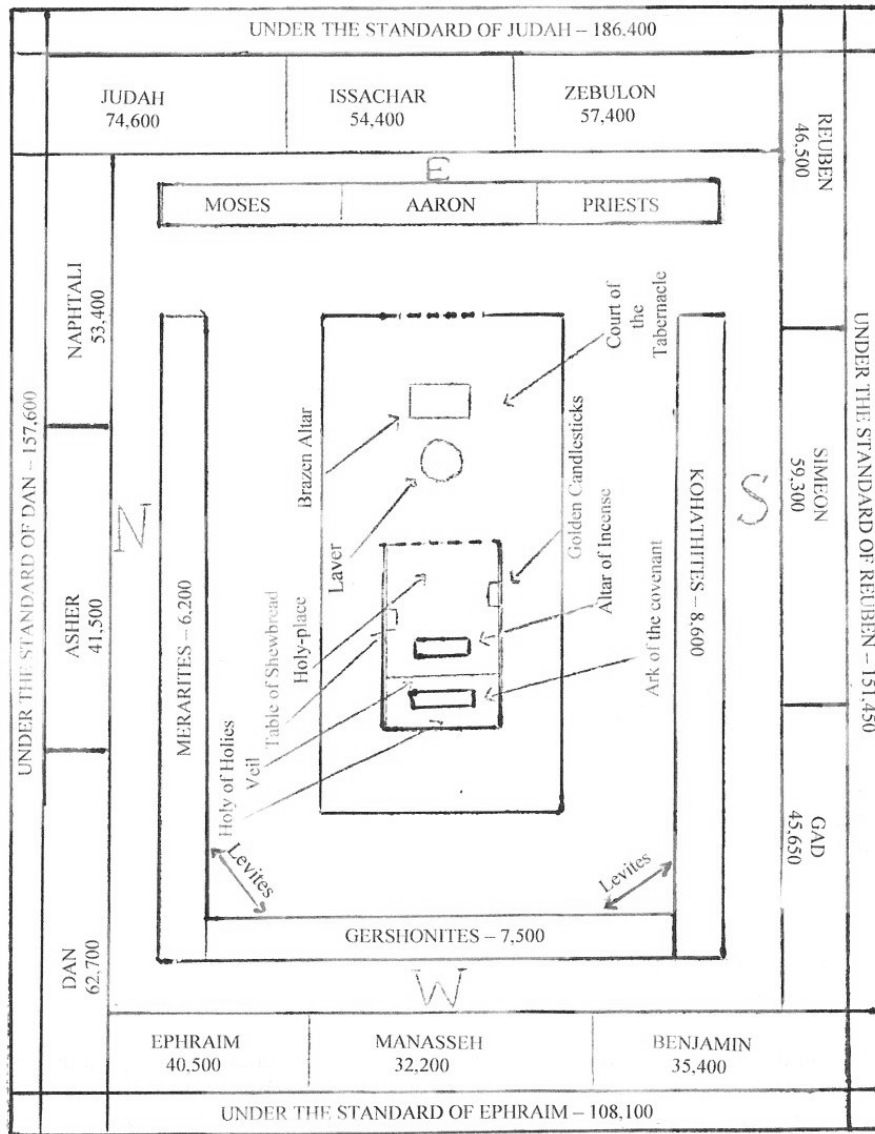
1. Is Exodus 24 an editorial composite document? If so, does that affect inspiration?
2. How are Exod. 24:3 and 7 different from Exod. 19:8? Why three covenant ratification statements?
3. Why are the “pillars” in Exod. 24:4 allowed here but not later?
4. Why does the account of the sprinkling in Exodus 24 differ from the account in Hebrews 9?
5. What is the significance of “the blood of the covenant”?
6. Does Exod. 24:9-11 imply that these men saw God? Why is that a problem (cf. Exod. 33:20)?
7. How is Exod. 24:12-18 parallel to Exodus 19?

EXODUS 25-31

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. I have chosen not to do a detailed verse-by-verse exegesis of these chapters. I am theologically wary of trying to make the tabernacle applicable to the Christian life.
- B. This is interesting in understanding Israel's worship practices and procedures. The tabernacle was a physical way to express the transcendence and immanence of God (see Outline V).
- C. Most of the details of the tabernacle are not meant to convey theological truth. Jesus is the new tabernacle/temple! He, not Israel or her sacrificial system, is the focus of NT revelation. God used them to reveal Himself but now Jesus is the full revelation.
- D. I have done a Special Topic on each of the following vocabulary and concept words in alphabetical order. Check a Bible Dictionary.
 - 1. Aaron's Sons
 - 2. Acacia Wood
 - 3. Altar of Incense
 - 4. Altar of Sacrifices
 - 5. ANE Colors
 - 6. ANE Weights and Volumes
 - 7. The Ark of the Covenant
 - 8. The Breastplate of the High Priest
 - 9. *Cherubim*
 - 10. Cubit
 - 11. Ephod
 - 12. The Lampstand (Menorah)
 - 13. The Laver of Bronze
 - 14. The Mercy Seat
 - 15. Porpoise Skins (cf. Exod. 25:5)
 - 16. The Show Bread of the Presence
 - 17. The Tabernacle (see chart)
 - 18. Urim and Thummim
- E. I have included a chart of the marching order of the Israeli camp and the layout of the tabernacle. I received this in a seminary class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, but I do not remember which class or who drew it.

Diagram showing the arrangement of Israel and the Tabernacle



EXODUS 25-31

GENERAL OUTLINE

- I. Building materials needed, Exod. 25:1-9
 - A. Metals
 1. Gold (BDB 262)
 2. Silver (BDB 494)
 3. Bronze (BDB 638)
 - B. Cloth materials
 1. Blue (BDB 1067)
 2. Purple (BDB 71)
 3. Scarlet (BDB 2069)
 4. Fine linen (BDB 1058 II)
 - C. Building materials
 1. Goat hair (BDB 777)
 2. Ram's skin, dyed red (BDB 736 CONSTRUCT BDB 17)
 3. Porpoise skins (NASB)
 4. Acacia wood (BDB 781 CONSTRUCT BDB 1008)
 - D. Assorted materials
 1. Oil (BDB 1032)
 2. Spices (BDB 141)
 3. Incense (BDB 882 CONSTRUCT 702)
 4. Precious stones (BDB 571)
- II. Design of the Ark, Exod. 25:10-22 (see Special Topic: The Ark of the Covenant)
 - A. Acacia wood
 - B. 1½ cubits by 1½ cubits by 1½ cubits (see Special Topic: Cubit)
 - C. Covered with gold inside and out
 - D. Molding for outside
 - E. Four gold rings so as to carry it with golden poles of acacia wood permanently attached to the four gold legs
 - F. Special lid for the Ark called “Mercy Seat” (see Special Topic: Mercy Seat)
 1. two gold *cherubim* facing each other with wings meeting in the center (see Special Topic: *Cherubim*)
 2. each *cherubim* was made of one piece, overlaid with gold
 - G. Ark is the place where God meets man

III. Design of Table of the Bread of the Presence, Exod. 25:23-20

- A. Acacia wood
- B. 2 cubits by 1 cubit by $\frac{1}{2}$ cubit
- C. Overlaid with gold
- D. Wide golden rim
- E. Four gold rings so as to carry it with golden poles of acacia wood attached to the four gold legs
- F. Utensils of gold
 - 1. dishes or platters
 - 2. pans
 - 3. jars
 - 4. bowls
- G. Bread of the Presence placed on the table (12 loaves)

IV. Design of the Lampstand, Exod. 25:31-30; 27:20-21

- A. Of gold
- B. One main shaft with three branches on each side
- C. The end of each of the seven shafts had three cups like an almond blossom and the central shaft had four cups
- D. Utensils of gold
- E. Clean oil from olives

V. Details of the Curtains, Exod. 26:1-14

- A. Of twisted linen
 - 1. ten in number
 - 2. blue, purple, and scarlet
 - 3. had picture of cherub on them
 - 4. length of each was 28 cubits and width was 4 cubits
 - 5. they were joined with gold clasps in two sets of five curtains each
 - 6. they were attached by 100 blue loops
- B. Of goats' hair
 - 1. for covering of the inner tent
 - 2. eleven in number
 - 3. length of 30 cubits and width of 4 cubits

4. the eleven curtains in two sets of five and the extra to lap over the front of the tent ($\frac{1}{2}$ of another for the back)
 5. held in place by 100 blue loops made of bronze
- C. Of ram's skins dyed red and porpoise skins
1. this is another covering
 2. possibly the material for the roof
 3. possibly leather bags with which to carry the tent

VI. Details of Inner Structure, Exod. 26:15-20

- A. The boards
1. of acacia wood overlaid with gold
 2. length was 10 cubits and width was $1\frac{1}{2}$ cubits
 3. two tenons (bottom fasteners)
 4. 20 boards on each of two long sides and 6 on back with double on the corners
 5. fitted into silver sockets
- B. The bars to hold the boards in place
1. of acacia wood overlaid with gold
 2. five on each side
 3. attached by using gold rings at the middle of the boards

VII. Details of the Inner Veil, Exod. 26:31-35

- A. Of twisted linen of blue, purple, and scarlet
- B. Had picture of a cherub (see Special Topic: *Cherubim*)
- C. Hung on four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold and golden hooks placed in silver sockets
- D. Form the partition of the inner tent into Holy of Holies and Holy Place
- E. Ark behind veil; all other furniture in front
1. Table of the Bread of the Presence towards the north
 2. Lampstand toward the south

VIII. Details of the Outer Veil, Exod. 26:36-37

- A. Made of blue, purple, and scarlet
- B. Hung on five pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold and golden hooks placed into sockets of bronze

IX. Details of the Altar of Sacrifice, Exod. 27:1-8 (see Special Topic: Sacrificial Systems of the ANE)

- A. Of acacia wood

- B. Length of 5 cubits by 5 cubits by 3 cubits
 - C. Raised corners called horns
 - D. Overlaid with gold
 - E. Utensils of bronze
 - F. Grating of bronze connected by bronze rings
 - G. Carried by acacia poles overlaid with gold
- X. Details of the Courtyard of the Tabernacle, Exod. 27:9-19
- A. On the south and north
 1. hangings of fine twisted linen 100 cubits long and 5 cubits high
 2. hung on 20 pillars with sockets of bronze
 3. the connectors of the curtains shall be silver
 - B. On the west side
 1. hangings of fine twisted linen 50 cubits long and 5 cubits high
 2. hung on 10 pillars with sockets of bronze
 3. the connectors of the curtain shall be silver
 - C. On the east side
 1. two sets of hangings 15 cubits by 5 cubits of fine twisted linen
 2. hung on 3 pillars with sockets of bronze
 3. the connectors of the curtain shall be silver
 - D. The gate
 1. a screen of 20 cubits
 2. of blue, purple, and scarlet material and fine twisted linen
 3. hung on 4 pillars with sockets of bronze
 4. connectors of silver
- XI. Details of Aaron's Priestly Garments, Exod. 28:1-7 (summary of items, Exod. 28:4 and materials, Exod. 28:5)
- A. The ephod, Exod. 28:6-13
 1. of gold and blue, purple, and scarlet material and fine twisted linen
 2. two shoulder pieces to attach it
 3. two onyx stones
 - a. names of the sons of Jacob
 - b. set in gold
 - c. placed on shoulders
 - d. stones for a memorial
 4. attached by two intricate gold chains

- B. The breastplate of judgment, Exod. 28:15-30
1. same material as ephod (cf. Exod. 28:6)
 2. a square on one span in length and width, folded double
 3. four rows of three stones representing each tribe, set in gold filigree
 - a. ruby
 - b. topaz
 - c. emerald
 - d. turquoise
 - e. sapphire
 - f. diamond
 - g. jacinth
 - h. agate
 - i. amethyst
 - k. beryl
 - l. jasper
 4. connected securely by 4 gold rings and a blue cord
 5. stones as a memorial over Aaron's heart
 6. breastplate contained the Urim and Thummim (a way of determining the will of God, possibly like dice)
- C. The robe of the ephod, Exod. 28:31-35
1. all of blue
 2. special heavy weaving around the neck opening
 3. the hem of blue, purple, and scarlet pomegranates interspersed with golden bells
- D. The turban, Exod. 28:36-39
1. the gold plate
 - a. engraved "Holy to the LORD"
 - b. fastened by a blue cord to the front
 - c. it is related to the holiness of the sacrifices
 2. turban
 - a. of fine linen
 - b. to be anointed along with tunics, caps, and sashes

XII. Details of the consecration of the Priests, Exod. 29:1-16

- A. Sacrifices and procedures
1. one young bull, Exod. 29:1,10-14
 2. two rams, Exod. 29:2,15-28,31-34
 3. unleavened bread of wheat flour
 4. unleavened cakes mixed with oil
 5. unleavened wafers spread with oil
- B. Wash Aaron and sons at the door of the tent
- C. Dress Aaron and sons in priestly garments
- D. Anoint Aaron and sons with oil

E. Special offerings for seven days, Exod. 29:35-36

XIII. Details of the Altar of Incense, Exod. 30:1-10

A. Of acacia wood overlaid with gold

B. Length of 1 cubit width of 1 cubit and height of 2 cubits

C. Like the altar of sacrifice it shall have four horns at the corners

D. Four rings of gold to carry it, attached to the legs

E. To be placed in front of the veil before the Holy of Holies (cf. Heb. 9:4)

F. Incense to be placed on it every morning as the priest trims the lamps

G. Not for sacrifice of any kind (coals only to be taken from the sacrificial altar)

H. Used in special way on the Day of Atonement

XIV. Details of How to Support the Tabernacle, Exod. 30:11-16

A. Take a census of males 20 years and older

B. Each to give $\frac{1}{2}$ shekel for ransom against plagues (cf. Exod. 30:12,15)

XV. Details of the Laver, Exod. 30:17-21

A. Made of bronze (size is uncertain)

B. Placed between inner tent and sacrificial altar

C. Filled with water for washing the priests' hands and feet before they entered the inner tent

XVI. Details of Holy Anointing Oil, Exod. 30:22-33 (see Special Topic: Anointing in the Bible)

A. From the finest spices

1. myrrh, 500 shekels
2. fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels
3. fragrant cane, 250 shekels
4. cassia, 500 shekels
5. olive oil, one hin

B. Used to anoint the furniture of the Holy Place and the Altar of Sacrifice and their utensils

C. Used to anoint Aaron and his sons (the priests; see Special Topic: Anointing in the Bible)

D. Warning against duplicating the ingredients for a profane purpose or person

XVII. Details of the Incense, Exod. 30:34-38

- A. Contents of spices (equal parts)
 - 1. stacte
 - 2. onycha
 - 3. galbanum
 - 4. frankincense
- B. For incense altar in the Holy Place
- C. Warning against duplication

XVIII. Artisans for the Tabernacle, Exod. 31:1-18

- A. Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah
 - 1. filled with the Spirit
 - 2. special talents
 - a. wisdom
 - b. understanding
 - c. knowledge
 - d. craftsmanship
 - (1) in metal
 - (2) in stone
 - (3) in wood
 - (4) in assorted crafts
- B. Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan
 - 1. also filled with the Spirit
 - 2. helper of Bezalel
- C. The two gifted craftsmen are to make or supervise the construction of
 - 1. tent of meeting
 - 2. the ark of testimony
 - 3. the mercy seat
 - 4. all furniture of the tent
 - a. the Table of the Bread of the Presence (see Special Topic: Bread of the Presence)
 - b. the lampstand (see Special Topic: Lampstand)
 - c. the altar of incense (see Special Topic: Altar of Incense)
 - d. the altar of burnt offerings (see Special Topic: Altar of Burnt Offerings)
 - e. the laver (see Special Topic: Laver)
 - f. the priestly garments
 - g. the anointing oil
 - h. the fragrant incense

RECURRENT THEMES

- I. Metals
 - A. gold

- B. silver
- C. bronze
- D. Those metals seem to be used in a select pattern. The gold is for those items closest to the Holy of Holies and bronze for those parts of the tent farthest away.

II. God reveals to Moses the exact pattern

- A. Exodus 25:9,40
- B. Exodus 26:30
- C. Exodus 27:8
- D. Exodus 31:11

III. The Tabernacle is portable

- A. Ark of Testimony, Exod. 25:12-15
- B. Memorial, Exod. 28:29
- C. Statute forever, Exod. 28:43
- D. Perpetual statute, Exod. 29:9
- E. Perpetual covenant, Exod. 31:16
- F. Daily sacrifice of lamb, Exod. 29:42
- G. Perpetual incense, Exod. 30:8
- H. Incense altar used in ritual of Day of Atonement, Exod. 30:10
- I. Atonement money from every male 20 years and older, Exod. 30:16
- J. Priests shall wash their hands and feet before entering inner shrine, Exod. 30:21
- K. Anointing of priests, Exod. 30:31
- L. Observe Sabbath, Exod. 31:13,16

IV. YHWH, their covenant God, is with them (see Special Topic: Covenant)

- A. Dwell among them
 - 1. Exod. 25:8
 - 2. Exod. 29:45-46

- B. Meet with them
 - 1. Exod. 25:22
 - 2. Exod. 29:43
 - 3. Exod. 30:6,36

AARON'S SON

Aaron, being the first High Priest of Israel, was to be succeeded by his oldest son. His sons are listed in Exod. 6:23.

- 1. Nadab – BDB 621, from Arabic root, “capable” or “fine,” KB 671
- 2. Abihu – BDB 4, KB 4, “he is father”
- 3. Eleazar – BDB 46, “God has helped”
- 4. Ithamar – BDB 16, KB 44, meaning unknown

The first two were part of a group of leaders who worshiped YHWH on Mt. Sinai “at a distance” (cf. Exod. 24:1). Later they were involved in either

- 1. drunkenness at the altar (cf. Lev. 10:8-11)
- 2. flagrant violations of YHWH’s altar procedures (cf. Lev. 10:1)

They were killed by YHWH (cf. Lev. 10:2). Aaron and his family were commanded by Moses not to grieve (cf. Lev. 10:6-7). They were replaced by Eleazar (cf. Num. 3:4; 20:25-29).

ACACIA WOOD

According to UBS *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* (pp. 87-88), this was a common, desert evergreen tree. It normally grew in dry conditions (i.e., wadis), which made its growth slow and its wood hard. Therefore, it was good for building furniture or, in this case, the tabernacle structure and furniture. Its wood was a brownish orange (BDB 1005).

ALTAR OF INCENSE

This was an altar-shaped piece of furniture where incense was placed in large quantities on the Day of Atonement to produce thick smoke which concealed YHWH’s presence over the ark. Our author seems to place it inside the Holy of Holies. This has caused commentators to take this phrase to refer to a “censer” because this is how the Septuagint translates this term (cf. Lev. 16:12; 2 Chr. 26:19; Ezek. 8:11; IV Mac. 7:11). However, Philo and Josephus use the same Greek word for the incense altar. In the OT the altar is closely identified with the Holy of Holies (cf. Exod.30:1-10, 37; but especially 1 Kgs. 6:22).

Coals were taken from the great sacrificial altar at the door of the tabernacle and placed on this small stand. Incense was then placed on the coals to produce a large amount of smoke. This wonderful smelling smoke obscured the high priest’s eyes from seeing YHWH, who dwelt over the ark of the covenant between the wings of the *cherubim*, in the Holy of Holies.

ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

This was the place of sacrifice for the tabernacle. It was an acacia wood structure overlaid with bronze (cf. Exod. 27:1-2). It was a square, 5 cubits (about 18" x 5"; see Special Topic: Cubit) by 3 cubits tall. It had its own utensils (cf. Exod. 27:3) and was portable (cf. Exod. 27:6-7).

The special feature of this altar was its four horns, probably mimicking animal horns, which were a symbol of power for the Israelites. The blood of the animal was drawn out and part of it smeared on these horns, possibly a symbol of lifting the sacrifice to God.

Like all of the tabernacle furniture, this altar was expanded in Solomon's temple (cf. 1 Kings 6).

For specific procedures see Special Topic: Sacrificial Systems of the ANE.

ANE SACRED COLORS

It is difficult to be precise about the exact shades of colors in the ANE. Terminology changed from language to language and period to period. In Exod. 25:4, several special colors are mentioned to decorate the tabernacle and High Priest's clothing.

1. "blue" – BDB 1067, KB 1732-3, denotes a blue, violet, or purple color. This color comes from mollusks and was developed by the Phoenicians.
2. "purple" – BDB 71, KB 84, denotes a reddish purple. It is possibly from an Akkadian root.
3. "scarlet" – BDB 1040, KB 1603, the etymology and color are uncertain, possibly crimson. The root seems to mean "dyed," "plunged" from a certain insect (IDB, p. 233), possibly also from Phoenicia

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

(Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9)

I. Its Design (Exod. 25:10-22)

- A. Wood box overlaid with gold (Exod. 25:20-11)
- B. 2½ cubits by 1½ cubits by ½ cubit (cf. Exod. 25:10; for "cubit" see Special Topic: Cubit)
- C. Portable with rings and poles (Exod. 25:12-16)
- D. The lid of the ark was separate (Exod. 25:17-21)
 1. made of gold and fits the top of the wooden box (Exod. 25:10,21)
 2. had two *cherubim* on its lid, facing each other (Exod. 25:18-20)

II. Its place and purpose

- A. the place to meet with Israel (Exod. 25:22)
- B. the place where YHWH dwelt (i.e., His footstool, cf. 1 Chr. 28:2; Ps. 132:7; Isa. 66:1) with His people, on the ark of the covenant between the wings of the *cherubim* (see Special Topic: *Cherubim*) on the ark of the covenant

- C. the place of forgiveness of sin (i.e., the mercy seat), for all peoples (cf. Israel, Leviticus 16 and 1 Kgs. 8:27-30; foreigners, 1 Kgs. 8:41,43,60)
- D. the only piece of furniture in the Holy of Holies, inside the veil

III. Its contents

- A. rabbinical tradition
 - 1. the two tablets of stone on which YHWH wrote the decalog (cf. Exod. 31:18; 32:15-16)
 - 2. the two silver columns which hold the tablets (no biblical references)
 - 3. the fragments of the original two tablets which were broken by Moses because of Israel's (Aaron) making and worshiping the golden calf (cf. Exod. 32:19; Deut. 9:17; 10:2)
 - 4. a copy of the entire Torah (cf. Exod. 25:16)
 - 5. the names of God (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:29) developed in *Kabalah*, Jewish mysticism
- B. biblical references as to the contents (it is uncertain if these refer to things inside the ark or beside it)
 - 1. a jar of manna (cf. Exod. 16:31-36)
 - 2. Aaron's rod that budded (cf. Num. 17:4,10; Heb. 9:4)
 - 3. the guilt offerings of the Philistines (5 golden mice and golden hemorrhoids, cf. 1 Sam. 6:3-4,8)
 - 4. a copy of the Decalog (cf. Exod. 25:16,21; Deut. 10:4-5; 31:26)
- C. at the dedication of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kings 8 the Ark is said to have only contained the two tablets of stone (i.e., the Ten Words, cf. 1 Kgs. 8:9)

IV. Where is it now?

- A. historical options
 - 1. taken to Egypt by Shishak (935-914 B.C.) when he invaded Judah in the fifth year (926 B.C.) of Rehoboam's (son of Solomon) reign (cf. 1 Kgs. 14:25-26; 2 Chr. 12:9)
 - 2. taken to Egypt (Zoan, Tanis, Avaris—different names for the delta capital of Seti I) by Pharaoh Necco II, who also exiled the Davidic seed Jehoahaz (Josiah's son) in 597 B.C. (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:31-35; 2 Chr. 36:1-4)
 - 3. taken to Babylon to the temple of *Marduk* by Nebuchadnezzar II when Zedekiah was exiled (586 B.C.) and the Temple burned (cf. 2 Kgs. 25:9,13-17; 2 Chr. 36:18)
- B. Jewish traditions
 - 1. hidden on Mt. Nebo/Pisgah by Jeremiah before the fall of Jerusalem (2 Macc. 2:4-5)
 - 2. the apocryphal book of II Baruch says an angel hid it
 - 3. hidden by unknown means, but will be returned by Elijah just before the Messiah comes (cf. Mal. 4:5)
 - 4. hidden on Mt. Gerizim (Shechem) where the Samaritans built their temple to YHWH
 - 5. buried under the Temple (i.e., Mt. Moriah) before Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem

BREASTPLATE OF THE HIGH PRIEST

This decorative piece is first mentioned in Exod. 25:7, then 28:4, but described in detail in Exod. 28:15-30 and repeated in Exod. 39:8-21.

It functioned as a symbol of the preciousness of the twelve tribes to God. Their names were on the precious stones of the Breastplate, located over Aaron's heart, Exod. 28:29. It is called "the breastplate of judgment" (BDB 365 CONSTRUCT BDB 1048) in Exod. 28:15,29,30. This probably referred to the Urim and Thummim, as a way to discern God's will.

In design

1. same colors as ephod, Exod. 28:15
2. it folded into a double square – span (space from little finger tip to thumb tip with palm outstretched) by span, Exod. 28:16
3. four rows of three stones with the name of a tribe engraved on each, Exod. 28:17-21
4. had two gold chains that connected it to the shoulder stones of the High Priest's vest, Exod. 28:22-28
5. a pouch containing the Urim and Thummim was behind the breastplate and over the High Priest's heart, Exod. 28:30

One good example of this is the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), where he and he alone entered the Holy of Holies on behalf of corporate Israel's sin.

CHERUBIM

BDB 500, KB 497

- A. One of several types of angelic beings mentioned in the OT (i.e., *Cherubim*, *Seraphim*, Archangels, messenger angels). This particular type guarded sacred areas (cf. Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18-22; 1 Kgs. 8:6-7).
- B. Etymology is uncertain.
 1. from Akkadian "intercessor" or "mediator" between God and mankind
 2. from Hebrew there is a possible word play between "chariot" and "cherub" (cf. Ezekiel 1; 10)
 3. some scholars say it means "brilliant appearance"
- C. Physical form – This has been difficult to ascertain because of varying descriptions within the Bible and varying animal-human forms found in the Ancient Near East. Some link them to
 1. winged bull of Mesopotamia
 2. winged eagle – lions of Egypt called "griffins"
 3. winged creatures on Hiram's (King of Tyre) throne
 4. sphinx of Egypt and similar forms found in King Ahab's ivory palace in Samaria
- D. Physical Description
 1. The form of the *Cherubim* is linked with the form of the *Seraphim* of Isaiah 6.
 2. Examples of different forms
 - a. Number of faces
 - (1) two – Ezek. 41:18
 - (2) four – Ezek. 1:6,10; 10:14,21
 - (3) one – Rev. 4:7

- b. Number of wings
 - (1) two – 1 Kgs. 6:24
 - (2) four – Ezek. 1:6,11; 10:7,8-21
 - (3) six (like Seraphim of Isa. 6:2) – Rev. 4:8
 - 3. Other features (also called “The Living Creatures”)
 - a. Human hands – Ezek. 1:8; 10:8,21
 - b. Legs
 - (1) Straight, no knee – Ezek. 1:7
 - (2) Calf feet – Ezek. 1:7
 - 4. Flavius Josephus admits that no one knew what a cherub looked like (cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII.3.3).
- E. Places and purpose found in the Bible
 - 1. Guardian of the tree of life, Gen. 3:24 (possibly used metaphorically in Ezek. 28:14,16)
 - 2. Guardian of the Tabernacle
 - a. Over the Ark of the Covenant; Exod. 25:18-20; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; Heb. 9:5
 - b. Depicted on veil and curtains of the tabernacle; Exod. 26:1,31; 36:8,35
 - 3. Guardian of Solomon’s Temple
 - a. Two large carved cherubs in Holy of Holies; 1 Kgs. 6:23-28; 8:6-7; 2 Chr. 3:10-14; 5:7-9
 - b. On walls of inner shrine; 1 Kgs. 6:29,35; 2 Chr. 3:7
 - c. On panels that were associated with the several lavers; 1 Kgs. 7:27-39
 - 4. Guardian of Ezekiel’s Temple – Carved on walls and doors; Ezek. 41:18-20, 25
 - 5. Connected with transportation of deity
 - a. possibly a metaphor for wind; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3-4; Isa. 19:1
 - b. guardian of God’s throne; Ps.80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16
 - c. guardian of God’s portable throne chariot; Ezek. 1:4-28; 10:3-22; 1 Chr. 28:18
 - 6. Herod’s Temple – Painted on walls (i.e., guardian, cf. Talmud “Yoma” 54a)
 - 7. Revelation throne scene (i.e., guardian, cf. Revelation 4-5)

CUBIT

There are two cubits (BDB 52, KB 61) in the Bible. The regular cubit is the distance between an average man’s longest finger and his elbow, usually around 18 inches (e.g., Gen. 6:15; Exod. 25:10,17,23; 26:2,8,13,16; 27:1,9,12,13,14,16,18; Num. 35:4,5; Deut. 3:11). There is also a longer cubit (royal cubit) used in construction (i.e., Solomon’s temple), which was common in Egypt (i.e., 21 fingers), Palestine (i.e., 24 fingers), and sometimes Babylon (i.e., 30 fingers). It was 21 inches long (cf. 2 Chr. 3:3; Ezek. 40:5; 43:13).

The ancients used parts of the human body for measurement. The people of the Ancient Near East used:

- 1. out stretched arms
- 2. length from elbow to middle finger (cubit)
- 3. width from outstretched thumb to little finger (span, cf. Exod. 28:16; 39:9; 1 Sam. 17:4)
- 4. length between all four fingers of a closed hand (handbreadth, cf. Exod. 25:25; 37:12; 1 Kgs. 7:26; 2 Chr. 4:5)
- 5. length of middle joint of finger (fingerbreadth, Jer. 52:21)

EPHOD

Ephod (BDB 65, KB 77) originally referred to a tight fitting, linen, priestly garment (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:18; 22:18). A special one was worn by the High Priest (e.g., Exod. 25:7; 28:6-35). The Urim and Thummim were kept in a pouch behind the breastpiece, which was attached to the front of the ephod (cf. Exod. 28:30).

The ephod was a visual sign of YHWH's priests. It was used in an attempt to legitimize unlawful shrines, sanctuaries, and priests (e.g., Jdgs. 8:27; 17:5; 18:14,17,18,20). Possibly a life-sized idol was draped with an elaborate cloak. This, then, would imply the person of divine revelation (an oracle or Urim and Thummim).

LAMPSTAND

This ("menorah," BDB 633, KB 600) is a sacred object for providing light in the Holy Place (cf. Exod. 25:37; 27:20-21). It is described in Exod. 25:31-40; 37:17-24.

1. made of gold
2. six branches on a central shaft, three on each side
3. at the top of each branch three cups, shaped like almond blossoms with a bulb and flower
4. at the top of the central shaft are four cups, like #3
5. all parts were made of one piece of hammered gold (one talent, cf. Exod. 25:39)
6. the exact pattern was revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 25:40)
7. the pattern in Exodus is part of the vision of Zechariah in Zech. 4:1-6; this seems to reflect the post-exilic, second temple

Solomon changed it into ten separate lampstands (cf. 1 Kgs. 7:49; 2 Chr. 4:7) in his temple.

One wonders if the menorah is somehow connected to the concept of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," from Gen. 2:17, which was supposed to give light/knowledge (cf. Gen. 3:5).

It is possible that John's presentation of Jesus as "the light of the world" in John 8:12 is related to this concept. I have enclosed my notes from John.

John 8:12 "I am the Light" John 6, 7, and 8 seem to be related to the "wilderness wanderings" period of Israel's history, the source of the metaphors that Jesus uses of Himself.

1. John 6 uses "manna" and "the bread of life."
2. John 7 uses "water" and "living water."
3. John 8 uses "light" and "*shekinah* glory."

This metaphor of light is repeated throughout John (cf. John 1:4-5, 8-9; 3:19-21; 9:5; 12:46).

There has been some debate as to exactly what this refers.

1. the ancient fear of darkness
2. a title for God in the OT (cf. Ps. 27:1; Isa. 62:20; I John 1:5)
3. the background of the Feast of the Tabernacles, lighting of the candelabra in the Court of the Women
4. an allusion to the *shekinah* cloud of glory in the wilderness wandering period that symbolized the presence of God
5. the Messianic titles in the OT (cf. Isa. 42:6, 49:6; Luke 2:32)

The rabbis also used "light" as a title for the Messiah. The lighting of the huge lamps in the Court of the Women during the Feast of Tabernacle is the obvious setting for Jesus' statement. The Messianic implications of light and the special references in John 1:4,8 coincide with the ceremony in the Temple for Jesus to continue to reveal His true origin.

This is one of the seven “I am” statements in John (followed by a PREDICATE)

1. I am the Bread of life (John 6:35,41,46,51)
2. I am the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9: 5; cf. 1:4,9; 12:46)
3. I am the door of the sheepfold (John 10:7,9)
4. I am the good shepherd (John 10:11,14)
5. I am the resurrection, and the life (John 11:25)
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
7. I am the true vine (John 15:1,5)

These unique statements, found only in John, point toward the person of Jesus. John focuses on these personal aspects of salvation. We must trust Him!

LAVER

This was a large, bronze bowl set in the court of the tabernacle for priests to do ceremonial washings (cf. Exod. 30:20-21; Num. 8:7). It is described in Exod. 30:17-21; 38:8. Its placement was between the tabernacle’s tent/shrine and the altar of sacrifice (cf. Exod. 40:7,30).

The Laver of the Tabernacle was made more elaborate by the builders of Solomon’s temple. It is called “the sea of cast metal” in 1 Kgs. 7:39. It is described in 1 Kgs. 7:44. One wonders if 1 Kgs. 7:38 is also referring to the Laver.

MERCY SEAT

This refers to the golden lid of the wooden box called “the ark of the covenant” (cf. Exod. 25:17-22; 37:6-9). It was a special place for “covering” sins (i.e., Leviticus 16). The symbolism seems to be

1. YHWH dwelt between the wings of the two angelic creatures (the rabbis said this was His footstool, cf. 1 Chr. 28:2; Ps. 132:7)
2. the ark contained the “ten words” (decalog)
3. the high priest, on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16), went into the Holy of Holies twice to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat, once for his own sin and once for the non-premeditated sins of the nation as a whole (cf. Heb. 9:7)

For the NT usage of this platform for forgiveness, I have included my notes from Rom. 3:25.

Rom. 3:25

NASB

“as a propitiation in His blood”

NKJV

“to be a propitiation by His blood”

NRSV

“as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood”

TEV

“so that by his blood he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven”

NJB

“to sacrifice his life so as to win reconciliation”

In the Greco-Roman world this word carried the concept of a restoration of fellowship with an estranged deity by means of a price being paid. However, it is not used in this sense in the Septuagint. It was used in the Septuagint and in Heb. 9:5 to translate “mercy seat” (cf. Exod. 25:21-22; Lev. 16:12-15), which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant located in the Holy of Holies, the place where atonement was procured on behalf of the nation on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16). Obviously Paul is using sacrificial metaphors from Israel’s sacrificial system (i.e., Leviticus 1-7). These metaphors (i.e., propitiation, ransom, sacrifice) are understood only in connection with the OT oracles of God. Paul then must

explain their relevance to all mankind. YHWH revealed Himself to Abraham/Israel to reveal Himself to all; all are in His image; all have rebelled; all can be saved through faith in Christ (Jewish Messiah).

This term must be dealt with in a way that does not lessen God's revulsion to sin, but affirms His positive, redemptive attitude toward sinners. A good discussion is found in James Stewart's *A Man in Christ*, pp. 214-224. One way to accomplish this is to translate the term so that it reflects God's work in Christ; "a propitiatory sacrifice"; or "with propitiatory power."

"In His blood" is an Hebraic way of referring to the substitutionary sacrifice of the innocent lamb of God (cf. John 1:29). To fully understand this concept Leviticus 1-7 is crucial, as well as the Day of Atonement in chapter 16. Blood refers to a sinless life given on behalf of the guilty (cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12).

One died for all (cf. 5:12-21)!

▣ **"through faith"** Here again is the mechanism (cf. 1:17; 3:22,25,26,27,28,30) for anyone's and everyone's personal benefit available in Jesus' substitutionary death.

This phrase is omitted in the ancient uncial manuscript A from the 5th century (also the Greek text used by Chrysostom) and a 12th century uncial MS (2127). It is included in all other ancient Greek manuscripts. Some have the DEFINITE ARTICLE (cf. MSS P⁴⁰, B, C³, D³) with "faith" and some do not (cf. MSS κ , C*, D*, F, G), however, this does not affect the meaning. The UBS³ rates its inclusion as B (almost certain).

▣ **"to demonstrate His righteousness"** God must be true to His character and His word (cf. Mal. 3:6). In the OT the soul that sins must die (cf. Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4,20). God said He would not acquit the guilty (cf. Exod. 23:7). God's love for fallen mankind is so great He was willing to become a man, fulfill the Law, and die in fallen humanity's place (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). God's love and justice meet in Jesus (cf. Rom. 5:26).

NASB – "PORPOISE SKINS"

The meaning of this root (BDB 1065 I, KB 1720 I) is uncertain. The traditional interpretation of the skin of a marine mammal comes from the Arabic root for "dolphin."

However, the root may come from an Egyptian root for fine leather. This fits its usage in Ezek. 16:10, where it is used of sandal leather. This leather of animal skins was used to cover parts of the tabernacle when it was moved.

The previous phrase in Exod. 25:5, "ram skins dyed red," also denotes a process of tanning hides, whereby they become reddish in color.

It seems God chose common, readily accessible items to construct the tabernacle (i.e., acacia wood), so it just makes sense that this word does not refer to marine mammal skins.

SHOW BREAD or BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

This item of furniture, on which the bread rested, is described in Exod. 25:23-30; 37:10-16. It was located in the Holy Place.

The bread itself was twelve large loaves (\pm 2-3 lbs, cf. Lev. 24:5-9). They symbolized God's provisions of Israel's physical food needs. They were replaced every week and the priests were allowed to eat the old loaves (cf. Lev. 24:9).

As the tabernacle faced east, when one entered the Holy Place (first room of the inner tent/shrine), the table of Show Bread was on the right, the Menorah on the left, the altar of incense straight ahead, before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, a perfect cube containing the ark of the covenant.

URIM AND THUMMIM

These two words first appear in Exod. 28:30, where they refer to a physical means of determining the will of God for the nation, later Kings, through the High Priest (cf. Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65).

There has been no consensus about the Semitic roots from which they originate. Traditionally they are associated with

1. light – BDB 22, KB 25
2. perfection – BDB 1070, KB 1743

They were kept in a pouch behind the High Priest's breastplate. They probably were some type of lot oracle (i.e., stones engraved with "yes" or "no," cf. LXX 1 Sam. 14:41).

EXODUS 32

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Golden Calf	The Gold Calf	The Breaking of the Covenant	The Gold Bull-Calf	The Golden Calf
32:1-6	32:1-6	32:1-6	32:1 32:2-4 32:5-6	32:1-5 32:6 Moses Forewarned by Yahweh
32:7-10	32:7-10	32:7-10	32:7-10	32:7-10 The Prayer of Moses
Moses' Entreaty				
32:11-14	32:11-14	32:11-14	32:11-14	32:11-14 Moses Breaks the Tablets of the Law
32:15-18 (18)	32:15-18 (18)	32:15-20 (18)	32:15-16 32:17 32:18	32:15-16 32:17-18 (18)
Moses' Anger				
32:19-20	32:19-24		32:19-21	32:19-24
32:21-24		32:21-24		
			32:22-24	The Zeal of the Levites
32:25-29	32:25-29	32:25-29	32:25-29	32:25-29 Moses Prays Again
32:30-35	32:30-34	32:30-34	32:30-32 32:33-34	32:30-35
	32:35	32:35	32:35	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter shows the fragile condition of Israel’s early faith. They had been deeply influenced by Egyptian idolatry over hundreds of years (cf. Ezek. 20:6-8).
- B. If YHWH was faithful and forgiving to them, He will surely will be to us!
- C. Exodus 32 also shows the tragedy of weak leadership (i.e., Aaron) and its consequences.
- D. Moses’ great faith and powerful intercession are clearly demonstrated in Exod. 32:30-33. Also note that sin and rebellion have consequences (Exod. 32:34-35).
- E. Exodus 32:33 is a reminder of individual responsibility, foreshadowing Deut. 24:6; Ezek. 18:1-32; 33:10-20; and Jer. 31:29-30. We reap what we sow (cf. Job 34:11,25; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 12:14; 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Lifestyle choices reveal the heart!

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:1-6

¹Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” ²Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.” ³Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” ⁵Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the LORD.” ⁶So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

32:1 “Moses delayed” “Delayed” is literally “saw” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*), used in the sense of “understand” or “recognized.” In Exod. 24:18 (cf. Deut. 9:11) we learn that Moses had been on the mountain 40 days. This seems to be a round number to describe a long period of time, longer than one lunar cycle. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“the mountain”** This refers to Mt. Sinai/Horeb. See Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai.

▣ **“make us a god who will go before us”** This word “god” is *elohim*. Whether this should be translated “gods” or “god” is debatable but the PLURAL VERB is also used, which denotes a pagan deity. Yet, Exod.

32:4-5 implies that the young bull was meant to represent YHWH. It violated Exod. 20:4, not 20:3. If the young bull was meant to represent Osiris/Apis or the Mneuis bull of Hierapolis, then it did violate Exod. 20:3.

The people direct two commands to Aaron.

1. arise – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. make – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

▣ **“who will go before us”** The angel of the Lord will do this (Exod. 32:34), not the golden calf!

▣ **“this Moses”** This is a Hebrew idiom of disrespect (cf. Exod. 32:9). How quickly sinful humans forget!

▣ **“the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt”** This shows a lack of understanding on the part of the people about who it was who delivered them (cf. Exod. 32:4; 14:11). It was YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:8)!

32:2 “gold rings which are in the ears” This refers to gifts which were taken from the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:36). The men wore jewelry (cf. Gen. 54:4; Exod. 11:2; 33:5-6). Nose rings were not common in Egypt.

32:4 “He took. . .and fashioned it” The VERB “fashioned” (צור, BDB 849 IV, KB 1015, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is a rare VERB.

1. 1 Kgs. 7:15 – NASB, “cast”
2. Ezek. 43:11 – NASB, “form”
3. suggested similar root in Jer. 1:5 (יצר, BDB 427, KB 428, *Qal* IMPERFECT) – translated “formed”

In this context “cast” is best guess.

The word “a graving tool” (BDB 354) is also rare. It is used only here and in Isa. 8:1, where it is translated “stylus.” So, did Aaron make a wooden image with a wood carving tool of some kind and then overlay it with gold? NRSV, TEV, NJB, and JPSOA translate this word as “mold.” Compare other texts about how idols were made (i.e., Isa. 30:22; 40:19; Hab. 2:18). The rabbis say that he did this personally so that the guilt would be on himself only. The rabbis try every way possible to excuse Aaron’s actions. They often quote Exod. 32:24 as true instead of a lie by Aaron.

▣ **“calf”** This is better translated “young bull” (BDB 722), which was a symbol of strength and fertility in Egypt. It is possible that this was a stand or pedestal (i.e., Canaanite origin) on which YHWH would dwell instead of the ark.

▣ **“your god, O Israel”** The rabbis say that these were the words of the Egyptian minority who were traveling with Israel (cf. Exod. 12:38; Num. 11:4). The term *elohim* could be translated “gods” (cf. Exod. 12:12; 23:24; Lev. 19:4), but here the single image of a young bull implies one deity.

32:5 “he built an altar. . .Tomorrow” The rabbis say that Aaron did these things to give Moses more time to return from the mountain. They try to make Aaron look good.

32:6 “to play” “Play” (BDB 850) has sexual connotations in Gen. 26:8; 39:14, therefore, this seems to refer to a fertility orgy involving an Egyptian deity! Paul uses this verse in 1 Cor. 10:7; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:7-10

⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*. ⁸They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”
⁹The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. ¹⁰Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

32:7 “your people” God speaks to Moses about his people; Moses turns this around in Exod. 32:11.



NASB, NKJV,

NJB “corrupted”

NRSV “acted perversely”

TEV “rejected Me”

JPSOA “acted basely”

REB “committed a monstrous act”

LXX “acted lawlessly”

The VERB (BDB 1007, KB 1469, *Piel* PERFECT) in *Piel* stem is used for

1. destroyed eye – Exod. 21:26
2. destruction of a nation – Hos. 11:9; 13:9
3. in Exod. 12:23 the root is used of “the destroyer angel”

but here and in Deut. 9:12; 32:5 it has a moral sense. The *Hiphil* stem is also used in this sense (cf. Deut. 4:16; 31:29). Israel committed fertility worship in front of the golden bull.

32:8 “from the way” The “way” is an idiom for God’s covenant (cf. Jdgs. 2:17; Mal. 3:7). They did not stay on the clearly marked way of Exodus 20-23.

32:9 “an obstinate people” This is literally “stiff necked” (BDB 766 I CONSTRUCT BDB 904 and 791, cf. Exod. 33:3,5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6,13; 31:27; Ezek. 2:4; Acts 7:51) and is used of domestic animals that will not respond to a bridle or yoke.

This description (by YHWH) of Israel is very important. YHWH did not choose them because of their morality, number, or character (cf. Deut. 9:6; 10:16; 31:27; Ezek. 2:4). As a matter of fact, His character is fully revealed in light of their character. If He was patient with them; He will be patient with us!

32:10 “let Me alone” The rabbis say that this was directed to Moses because YHWH knew his personal prayers would be effective. I think YHWH was testing Moses.

▣ **“burn”** See Special Topic: Fire.

▣ **“I will make of you a great nation”** These were YHWH’s very words to

1. Abraham – Gen. 12:2; 18:18
2. Jacob – Gen. 46:3
3. Moses – here and Num. 14:12

God was testing Moses with the same promise He made to Abraham in Gen. 12:2.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:11-14

¹¹Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’” ¹⁴So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

32:11 “with great power and with a mighty hand” This refers to the plagues (cf. Exod. 3:20; 6:1). It becomes a recurrent, idiomatic phrase of God’s actions in the exodus (cf. Exod. 13:3,9; 32:11; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8,19; 9:26; 26:8; Ps. 136:12; Jer. 32:21; Dan. 9:15). See Special Topic: Hand.

32:12 Moses bases his plea for mercy, not on Israel’s merits, but on God’s name and reputation (and in Exod. 32:13, on His covenant promises, cf. Lev. 26:42; Ps. 105:8).

There are three IMPERATIVES OF ENTREATY in this verse.

1. “turn from” – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal*, Exod. 32:12; this term is often associated with “repent”; see Special Topic: Repentance (OT)
2. “change your mind” – BDB 636, KB 688, lit. “be sorry,” *Niphal*, Exod. 32:12, cf. Gen. 6:6; 2 Sam. 24:16; Ps. 106:45; Jer. 18:7-10; Amos 7:1-6
3. “remember” – BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal*, Exod. 32:13

Notice Moses calls Israel “Your people,” which is covenant terminology.

▣ **“land”** This term has several connotations depending on the context. See Special Topic: Land, Country Earth (*erets*).

32:13 Moses refers to YHWH’s ancient covenant promises to the Patriarchs (cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:3; Deut. 1:35-36; 9:27).

▣ **“Your servants”** See Special Topic: My Servant.

▣ **“I will multiply your descendants, as the stars of heaven”** YHWH’s promise of descendants started in Gen. 12:2. This promise uses three metaphors.

1. as the stars of heaven – Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; Exod. 32:13; Deut. 1:10; 10:22; 28:62
2. like the sand of the seashore – Gen. 22:17; 32:12
3. like the dust of the earth – Gen. 13:16; 28:14; Num. 23:10

Also note Gen. 16:10!

▣ **“they shall inherit *it* forever”** God’s promises are surely from His side (i.e., Jos. 1:6), but conditional on Israel’s side (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; Jos. 24:19-28). The two exiles of Abraham’s descendants from Canaan demonstrate this. See Special Topic: Covenant.

The word “forever” (see Special Topic: Forever) must be interpreted in context.

32:14 “the LORD changed His mind” This seems to be a strange phrase when connected to the God who does not change (cf. Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). This is an anthropomorphic idiom (see Special Topic: God

Described as Human). There are several places in the OT where God changes His mind (cf. 1 Sam. 15:11; Ps. 106:45; Jer. 18:7-10; 26:3,13,19; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:10).

God's sovereignty can be affected by circumstances and prayer (see Special Topic: Intercessory Prayer). God has an eternal redemptive plan for humanity made in His image (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan). He wants to change His mind when His people repent and seek Him!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:15-18

¹⁵Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one *side* and the other. ¹⁶The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. ¹⁷Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." ¹⁸But he said,

**"It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,
Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;
But the sound of singing I hear."**

32:15 "the testimony" See Special Topic: Terms for God's Revelation.

▣ **"written on both sides"** This was highly unusual. It denotes a full and complete message. This is surely eyewitness detail. The rabbis say that the words were cut clear through the stone.

32:16 This emphatically states that the Law was not of human origin or ingenuity (cf. Exod. 31:18).

▣ **"engraved"** This VERB (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) occurs only here. It describes how YHWH wrote (cf. Exod. 31:18) the ten words.

32:17 "Joshua" He was not a part of this sin, but had waited for Moses somewhere on or between the mount and the camp. Joshua thought it was the sound of battle! Moses knew better (cf. Exod. 32:18).

32:18 This verse is a poem or song. The Hebrew VERB "sing" (BDB 777, KB 854) occurs three times. The first two are *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCTS and the third the intensified *Peil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT (LXX implies "drunkenness"). This may imply that the last form refers to the fertility chant/dancing/music/sound.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:19-20

¹⁹It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰He took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

32:19 "Moses' anger burned" This term (BDB 354, KB 351) is used four times in Exodus 32.

1. Exod. 32:1 – VERB, *Qal* JUSSIVE (of YHWH's anger, cf. Exod. 4:14; 22:24)
2. Exod. 32:11 – VERB, *Qal* IMPERFECT
3. Exod. 32:19 – VERB, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw* (of Moses' anger, cf. Num. 16:15)
4. Exod. 32:22 – same as #1 but here Aaron's plea to Moses

▣ **"he threw the tablets"** This was a symbol of the covenant being broken. Some see the PLURAL for tablet as a reference to the two aspects of the Ten Words; toward God and toward fellow Israelites. However,

archaeology (i.e., Hittite Treaties) seems to imply two separate copies, one for the temple and one for the king. Both of these were in Israel's future.

32:20 Notice the number of things Moses did to this idol (cf. Deut. 9:21).

1. "burned it with fire" – BDB 976, KB 1358, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
2. "ground it" – BDB 377, KB 374, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
3. "to powder" – this is another VERB – BDB 200, KB 229, "to crush," *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*
4. "scattered it over the surface of the water" – BDB 279, KB 280, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
5. "made the sons of Israel drink it" – BDB 1052, KB 1639, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*, see Num. 5:18-22

The *waw* denotes a series of actions. It occurs often in this chapter. See Special Topic: Hebrew Grammar.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:21-24

²¹Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin upon them?" ²²Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. ²³For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ²⁴I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

32:21 "What did this people do to you" The rabbis again see this as Moses' sympathy, not anger toward Aaron, but the context does not support this. Aaron sinned!

▣ **"great sin"** Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 37, says this was a phrase (cf. Exod. 32:21,30,31) used for "adultery"; In this text "spiritual adultery" (i.e., going after other gods, cf. 2 Kgs. 17:21). This is the imagery of YHWH as husband and Israel as wife.

32:22 "lord" This is the Hebrew word *adon* (BDB 10, see Special Topic: Lord), which was a title of respect and leadership (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 259).

1. to Moses from Aaron – Exod. 32:22; Num. 12:11
2. to Moses from Joshua – Num. 11:28
3. to Moses by the sons of God and Reuben – Num. 32:25,27
4. to Moses by the sons of Gilead, Machir, Manasseh, Joseph – Num. 36:2

▣ **"they are prone to evil"** Aaron tries to pass the buck of responsibility. He is trying to shift blame just as Adam did (i.e., Gen. 3:12) and as Moses will do later (cf. Num. 20:12; Deut 1:37; 3:26,27). However, his charge against Israel was true (cf. Num. 14:22-23; Deut. 9:7,21).

32:23 This is a repeat of Exod. 32:1-4.

32:24 "I threw it into the fire and out came this calf" To us, this seems a ridiculous excuse but the rabbis relate it to Ps. 106:19-20, and say that the calf came to life by means of the Egyptian magicians who were with Israel.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:25-29

²⁵Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—²⁶then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said,

“Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. ²⁷He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” ²⁸So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. ²⁹Then Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”

32:25

NASB, JPSOA,

REB “out of control”
NKJV “unrestrained”
NRSV “running wild”
TEV “get out of control”
NJB “out of hand”
LXX “that it had scattered”
Peshitta “had sinned”

The MT has the VERB, “let go” or “let alone” (BDB 828 III, KB 970). It appears twice in this verse.

1. *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE
2. *Qal* PERFECT

The BDB says “remove restraint from them” (cf. 2 Chr. 28:19; same root in Pro. 29:18). The restraint was God’s leader’s presence. When he was gone, they showed their basic tendencies to idolatry. This context implies a fertility festival in YHWH’s name!

▣

NASB, NRSV,

NJB “a derision”
NKJV “shame”
TEV “make fools of themselves”
JPSOA “a menace”
NJB “the secret malice”
LXX “an object of gloating”

This FEMININE NOUN (BDB 1036, KB 1580) is found only here. Here are the suggestions (KB).

1. LXX – gloating, mockery, ridicule
2. Vulgate, Peshitta, Targums – disgrace, dishonor, bad reputation

32:26 “all the sons of Levi gathered” This sets the stage for this tribe becoming priests. They had a priority zeal for the Lord, even over family (cf. Matt. 10:34-39).

32:27 Moses gives the tribe of Levi four commands.

1. “put his sword upon his thigh” – BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
- 2-3. “go back and forth” (i.e., idiom)
 - a. BDB 716, KB 778, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
 - b. BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. “kill” – BDB 246, KB 255, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (Deut. 33:9 implies not all of the tribe of Levi responded to Moses’ call; some were executed!)
 - a. his brother (BDB 26)
 - b. his friend (BDB 945)

c. his neighbor (BDB 898)

Later another priest, Phinehas, shows the same zeal (cf. Num. 25:7-13).

Wow! What a difficult task (cf. Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26)! Rebellion is serious and has fatal consequences. About 3,000 died (cf. Exod. 32:28).

32:28 One wonders how those who were killed were chosen. Possibly they were caught in the act of fertility worship, as in Numbers 25. This is only my speculation.

▣ **“three thousand”** The Vulgate has 23,000. Paul mentions this same number but probably refers to Numbers 25, not here.

Numbers were very tricky to copy and translate. There are many variants, especially between Kings and Chronicles. See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*.

32:29

NASB, JPSOA

“dedicate yourselves”

NKJV

“consecrate yourselves”

NRSV, LXX,

Vulgate, Targums “you have ordained yourselves”

TEV, NJB

“you have consecrated yourselves”

REB

“be installed as priests”

This is a Hebrew idiom, “fill your hands” (*Qal* IMPERATIVE and NOUN). Exodus 32:29 is Moses’ affirmation of the tribe of Levi.

The UBS Text Project (p. 145) suggests that the VERB be viewed, not as an IMPERATIVE denoting the men of the tribe of Levi, but a PERFECT stem

1. describing God’s actions of consecrating them
2. NET Bible (p. 201) suggests it means the tribe of Levi had been faithful to God even though it turned them against family and friends

The same idiom is used of the ordination of Aaron and his sons in Exod. 28:41; 29:9,29,33,35.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:30-35

³⁰On the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” ³¹Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. ³²But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” ³³The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. ³⁴But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” ³⁵Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

32:30 “You yourselves” This is an emphatic statement.

▣ **“perhaps”** This reflects Moses’ hope and doubt that his intercession (i.e., asking as priest for the assembly) would be effective once again.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, LXX “make atonement”

TEV

“obtain forgiveness”

NJB “secure expiation”
JPSOA “win forgiveness”
REB “secure pardon”

The VERB (BDB 497, KB 493, *Piel* COHORTATIVE) means “to cover.” It is the term used in “Day of Atonement” in Leviticus 16. Here, it refers to Moses’ intercessory prayer (cf. Exod. 32:30-35; see Special Topic: Intercessory Prayer).

32:34 “lead the people where I told You” This refers to Exod. 3:17, which refers to Gen. 15:12-21.

▣ **“My angel”** In many passages this seems to refer to the pre-Incarnate Messiah (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16; Exod. 3:2-4; 13:21; 14:19; Jdgs. 2:1; 6:22-23; 13:3-22; Zech. 3:1-2). However, in other passages the angel seems to refer to a typical angelic servant (cf. Gen. 24:7,40; Exod. 23:20-23; Num. 22:22; Jdgs. 5:33; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chr. 21:15ff; Zech. 1:12-13). See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD.

▣ **“nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin”** In the OT God’s visit (i.e., personal presence) could be for blessing or judgment. Israel will be spared immediate judgment but the terrible consequences of their propensity toward idolatry remained and would reappear again and again in Israel’s history, with severe consequences.

32:35 The people would bear their own sin and be judged for their acts. Moses could not act as a substitute for them. But One will come who can and did! (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isaiah 53; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21). It is difficult to know if this verse refers to

1. Exod. 32:20 (caused illness)
2. Exod. 32:28 (caused death)
3. some future judgment, such as this whole generation dying in the wilderness (cf. Num. 14:26-35; 26:64-65; Deut. 2:14; Jos. 5:4)

The word “smote” (BDB 619, KB 669, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is used in Exodus 12 of people hitting or striking another person. In Exod. 8:2 it is used of YHWH sending the plagues on Egypt (cf. Num. 11:33).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How could this have happened? They had seen the Lord’s power and mercy.
2. Was the golden calf meant to be an idol of a foreign pagan god?
3. Why is Exod. 32:10 a test of Moses?
4. What does Exod. 32:32-35 say to us about intercessory prayer?

EXODUS 33

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Journey Resumed	The Command to Leave Sinai	The LORD'S Guidance	The LORD Orders Israel to Leave Mount Sinai	The Israelites Ordered to Depart
33:1-3	33:1-6	33:1-3	33:1-3	33:1-4
33:4-6		33:4-6	33:4-6	
	Moses Meets With the LORD		The Tent of the LORD'S Presence	33:5-6
				The Tent
33:7-11	33:7-11	33:7-11	33:7-11	33:7-11
Moses Intercedes	The Promise of God's Presence		The LORD Promises to be With His People	Moses Prays
33:12-16	33:12-16	33:12-16	33:12-13	33:12-17
			33:14-16	
33:17-23	33:17-23	33:17-23	33:17	Moses on the Mountain
			33:18	33:18-23
			33:19-23	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter begins Israel's movement from Mt. Sinai to Canaan.
- B. Moses' special relationship with YHWH is highlighted.

- C. Because Israel is obstinate, YHWH struggles how to remain with them personally. Again Moses' intercession is crucial and YHWH remains.
YHWH remaining set the literary stage for the renewal of the covenant (i.e., rewriting and re-giving of the Ten Commandments (i.e., Exod. 34:1-9).
- D. Moses' request to behold YHWH physically shows the ongoing need of humans to visualize Deity! YHWH again grants Moses' request in a limited fashion.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:1-3

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’ ²I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. ³Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.”

33:1 “Depart, go up from here” This phrase has two IMPERATIVES.

1. “depart” (lit. “go” or “walk”) – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “go up” – BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERATIVE; this VERB is used several times in this chapter
 - a. “brought” – *Hiphil* PERFECT, Exod. 33:1
 - b. “go up” – *Qal* IMPERFECT, Exod. 33:3
 - c. “go up” – *Qal* IMPERFECT, Exod. 33:5
 - d. “bring up” – *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, Exod. 33:12
 - e. “go” – *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, Exod. 33:15

☐ **“from here”** They had been on Mt. Sinai for an extended period of time (compare Exod. 19:1 with Num. 10:11-12). Now they were to begin their trek to Canaan (i.e., Gen. 15:12-21).

☐ **“the people whom you have brought”** This is not meant to imply that YHWH was not the impetus or power behind the exodus (cf. Exod. 32:7).

☐ **“to the land I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”** This is a recurrent theme (cf. Gen. 15:18-21; 17:8; 26:3; 28:4,13; 35:12; 48:6,16,21-22; Exod. 3:6,7; 6:8; 13:5; 23:23,28-33; 31:1-3; 34:11; Num. 34:29; Deut. 1:17-18; 3:21; 7:16,19; 9:1-3; 11:23-25; 31:3-8; Jos. 1:2-5). See Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs.

33:2 “I will send an angel before you” This personal representative of YHWH (see Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD) appears several times.

1. at the burning bush – Exod. 3:2
2. at the Red Sea – Exod. 14:19
3. as a protector and guide – Exod. 23:20,23; 32:34; 33:2

This angel may be the pre-incarnate Christ. See Special Topic: The Trinity for the places in the OT where the Spirit and the Angel seem to be divine but separate from YHWH.

☐ **“I will drive out”** This VERB (BDB 176, KB 204, *Piel* PERFECT with *waw*) is mentioned in Exod. 23:27-33. This is predicted in Gen. 15:12-21. YHWH gave these people time to repent but they did not/could not.

When Israel also becomes involved in fertility worship, she is removed from God's land (i.e., Assyrian and Babylonian exiles). The covenant promise of a land is conditional (see Special Topic: Covenant).

▣ **“the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite”** See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

33:3 “a land flowing with milk and honey” See note at Exod. 3:8.

▣ **“for I will not go up in your midst”** This was a shocking statement. It becomes the focus of Moses' intercession in Exod. 33:12-16. YHWH still cares for them (“you” is a COLLECTIVE SINGULAR, cf. Exod. 33:5), but because of their faithlessness (i.e., Exodus 32) He will send His angel.

The exodus, wilderness wandering period, and the conquest were tests of the true character of both YHWH and Israel. They were faithless; He was faithful. God's character (cf. Exod. 34:6-7) is sure and unchanging (cf. Mal. 3:6); see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT).

▣ **“an obstinate people”** See note at Exod. 32:9.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:4-6

⁴When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. ⁵For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the sons of Israel, ‘You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.’” ⁶So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

33:4 The people were sad because of

1. YHWH's judgment on their rebellion with the calf (note Num. 14:39, related to another lack of faith)
2. YHWH's statement that He Himself would no longer be in their midst and travel with them

33:5-6 This removal of ornaments was a sign of repentance and contrition.

It is in vogue today, in some quarters, to take the last part of this verse as a theological statement about God's decision-making process. He does not foreknow or predestine (i.e., “Process Thought,” or “Open Theism”). These theologians take questions, such as Gen. 3:9, and turn the imagery (i.e., anthropomorphism) into theology or use Gen. 22:12 as a proof that God does not know the future choices of human creatures. I prefer “classical theism,” where the omniscience of Deity is affirmed (see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., pp. 304-308).

Exodus 33:6 looks like an editorial comment, which denotes the 38 years of wilderness wanderings. The ear rings of gold must not remind YHWH of the golden calf!

33:6 “Mount Horeb” This is another name for Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 3:1). Horeb (BDB 352, KB 350) is a Semitic word for “desert,” “waste land.” Some scholars think it refers to a dry mountain range, while Sinai (BDB 696, cf. Exod. 16:1; 19:1) is the highest peak. This is speculation.

Sinai is related to a desert bush. There is a wilderness in the southern area called “The Wilderness of *Sin*” (BDB 695 II, cf. Exod. 16:1; 17:1; Num. 33:11,12). See Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:7-11

⁷Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. ⁸And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. ¹⁰When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. ¹¹Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

33:7-11 “the tent” This is separate from the tabernacle described in Exodus 25-30, which is in the midst of the camp (cf. Num. 2:2; see chart of the tabernacle). Later in this verse it is called by the fuller title “the tent of meeting” (this becomes the name of the tabernacle in Exod. 27:21; Num. 4:3). It was the place where YHWH and Moses communicated “face to face” (Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10) after Mt. Sinai (cf. Num. 11:16,24-26; 12:4). It may have originally been Moses’ personal tent, but no longer.

Its position outside the camp was because of its holiness and Israel’s sin with the golden calf. Access was limited to Moses alone at this point (i.e., no priest). Joshua guarded it (Exod. 33:11).

If anyone of the people had a question or issue they could approach the tent and seek Moses’ counsel (cf. Exod. 33:7).

The people honored its presence by these actions:

1. “arise” – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERFECT, Exod. 33:8,10
2. “stand” – BDB 662, KB 714, *Niphal* PERFECT with *waw*, Exod. 33:8
3. “worship” – BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hithpalel* PERFECT with *waw*, Exod. 33:10

33:7 “everyone who sought the LORD” Notice the inclusive term “everyone.” What a wonderful aspect of Israel’s theocracy (i.e., availability; see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

The VERB “seek” (BDB 134, KB 152, *Piel* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) could denote two things (possibly both).

1. seek fellowship with YHWH (cf. Deut. 4:29; 1 Chr. 16:10; 2 Chr. 11:16; Isa. 51:1; Jer. 50:4; Hos. 3:5; Zech. 8:21-22)
2. seek information (cf. Pro. 28:5; Zeph. 1:6). The exodus contexts (Exod. 33:13) fit Moses as judge (i.e., oracle of YHWH). Often in the Psalms (with different phrasing) worshipers ask for God to teach them His ways, truth, will (cf. Ps. 16:11; 25:4; 119:66; 142:8).

33:9 “the pillar of cloud” See notes at Exod. 13:21. It was a physical symbol of the personal presence of YHWH.

It is difficult to distinguish between the tabernacle one, where the pillar stands over the holy of holies (cf. Exod. 40:34-38) and the tent outside the camp, where the pillar comes and goes (cf. Exod. 33:9-11).

I think, although the terminology is not distinct, that their locations and symbolism denote two tents.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:12-16

¹²Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ ¹³Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” ¹⁴And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and

I will give you rest.” ¹⁵Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. ¹⁶For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?”

33:12-16 Moses is trying to convince YHWH to personally travel with His covenant people, even though they are rebellious.

He approaches this request by:

1. You told me to bring this people from Egypt to this mountain (cf. Exod. 3:12).
2. You have not clarified if You (Exod. 3:17) or Your angel (Exod. 32:34) will accompany us.
3. You have claimed to know me by name (Exod. 3:4-6).
4. You have said, “I have found favor in Your sight.” This is a recurrent prayer (cf. Gen. 18:3; 47:29; 50:4; Exod. 33:13,17).

33:13 “let me know Your ways that I may know You” Notice the VERB “know” occurs twice (BDB 393, KB 390); see Special Topic: Know (OT).

1. *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

Moses wants to know YHWH as YHWH knows him. YHWH can be understood and known by His ways (cf. Ps. 25:4; 27:22; 51:13; 86:11; 119:33; see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation). YHWH has revealed Himself through

1. personal encounter (i.e., the burning bush of Exodus 3)
2. the plagues and exodus
3. the ten words and the book of the covenant (Exodus 20-23)

Moses realizes that to find “favor” or “grace” (BDB 336, i.e., Noah, cf. Gen. 6:8; Abraham, cf. Gen. 18:3; 19:19; Moses, cf. Exod. 33:13,17) one must seek YHWH.

▣ **“consider”** This VERB (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE OF ENTREATY) is literally “see” in the sense of recognize (cf. Exod. 3:7,9; 4:31; *Qal* IMPERATIVE in Exod. 33:12,13).

▣ **“this nation Your people”** This is covenant language (cf. Exod. 6:7; 19:5-6; Lev. 26:12).

33:14 YHWH heeds Moses’ request. He will personally (i.e., His face, BDB 815, cf. Deut. 4:37; Isa. 63:9; Lam. 4:16) accompany Israel on their journey to Canaan.

The phrase “I will give you rest,” refers to entering and dwelling in Canaan (cf. Exod. 3:20; 12:10; Jos. 1:13,15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). In the NT book of Hebrews 3-4, this word “rest” has several connotations.

1. God’s rest – Gen. 2:2; Exod. 20:11; 31:17; Heb. 4:4,10
2. Promised Land – Ps. 95:11; Heb. 3:11; 4:3,5
3. heaven – Heb. 4:1,8-11 (the rest was still available in David’s day, i.e., Psalm 95)

The land of Canaan has taken on a larger significance. This is true of all OT prophecy. See Special Topic: Why Do OT Covenant Promises Seem So Different from NT Covenant Promises?

The land without God’s personal presence (lit. “face”) was not the goal. The theological goal is fellowship with God, our Creator. The name in Isa. 7:14, “Immanuel” (BDB 769) embodies this concept —“God with us”!

33:15-16 If YHWH will not go with them, they should not leave Mt. Sinai! YHWH’s personal presence (i.e., the Hebrew idiom, “face,” see Exod. 33:14) is what made Israel distinct (cf. Exod. 19:5-6; Lev. 20:24,26).

33:16 “from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth” This last phrase can refer to

1. a field
2. a country
3. a land
4. the whole earth

Only context can determine. The term for “earth” is *adamah* (BDB 9). It is often synonymous with *erets* (BDB 75, KB 90), which also has several meanings. See Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth (*erets*).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:17-23

¹⁷The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.” ¹⁸Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” ¹⁹And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” ²⁰But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” ²¹Then the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”

33:17-23 Moses wants to visibly see YHWH. Already he has a unique, intimate relationship (cf. Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10), but he wants more. Apparently Moses

1. did not think seeing YHWH meant death
2. did not fully grasp Exod. 20:4
3. wanted another experience like Exod. 24:10,11, but this time just for him

There is uncertainty about the fear of seeing God, which was thought to cause death because of God’s holiness.

1. some did see God (in the Angel of the Lord) and live
 - a. Gen. 16:13 – Hagar, as the Angel of the LORD
 - b. Gen. 32:30 – Jacob in a vision
 - c. Exod. 24:10-11 – 70 elders and Moses in a theophany
 - d. Deut. 5:24 – Israel sees the glory of YHWH as the Angel of the LORD
 - e. Jdgs. 6:22-23 – Gideon
 - f. Jdgs. 13:21-22 – Samson’s parents as the Angel of the LORD
 - g. Isa. 6:1,5 (cf. John 12:41) – Isaiah in a vision,
 - h. Ezek. 1:26-27 – Ezekiel in a vision of YHWH’s chariot/throne
 - i. Dan. 7:9-14 – Daniel in a vision as the Ancient of Days
2. no one has seen God and lived
 - a. Exod. 3:6; 19:21; 33:20,23
 - b. Lev. 16:2
 - c. Num. 4:20
 - d. 1 Kgs. 19:13
 - e. even angels hid their faces, Isa. 6:2
 - f. John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46
 - g. 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16
 - h. 1 John 4:12,20
3. no one has heard God and lived
 - a. Exod. 20:19
 - b. Deut. 4:33; 5:24-26; 18:16

- c. 2 Cor. 12:1-4
- 4. believers can see God in Jesus – John 12:45; 14:9
- 5. one day believers will see God
 - a. Matt. 5:8
 - b. 1 Cor. 13:12
 - c. Heb. 12:14
 - d. Rev. 22:4
 - e. note Job 42:5; Ps. 17:15; 42:2

33:18 “Your glory” There are three, possibly four, images used to denote a visible aspect to Deity.

- 1. “Your glory,” Exod. 33:18,22 – BDB 458, cf. Exod. 16:7; see Special Topic: Glory (*kabod*, OT)
- 2. “All My goodness,” Exod. 33:19 – BDB 375 CONSTRUCT BDB 481
- 3. also note “My hand,” Exod. 33:22,23; see Special Topic: God Described as Human
- 4. “My back,” Exod. 33:23 – BDB 30, KB 35

This sets the theological stage for the theophany of Exod. 34:5-9, where

- 1. #3 above is fulfilled
- 2. the revelation of “the name,” cf. Exod. 33:19; see
 - a. Special Topic: The Name of the Lord
 - b. Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT)

33:19 “I Myself. . .” YHWH will do two things before Moses to reveal Himself.

- 1. All His goodness (i.e., character, both mercy and judgment, cf. Exod. 34:6-7) will pass before Moses.
- 2. He will pronounce His covenant name, Yahweh, to Moses (cf. Exod. 3:13-16). To know a deity’s name was very important in the ANE.

▣ **“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. . .”** This is quoted by Paul in Rom. 9:15 to assert the sovereignty of YHWH. He is free but chooses to act in compassion and mercy (cf. Hos. 11:9). However, remember here it is sinful, idolatrous, rebellious, impatient Israel! There is mystery here, as Romans 9-11 demonstrates, but also always purposeful mercy (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

33:22 “the cleft of the rock” One wonders if this (BDB 849) is “the” cave of 1 Kgs. 19:9-14. In Isa. 2:19-21. Several parallel terms for a hiding place are used.

- 1. caves of the rocks, Exod. 33:19 – BDB 849
- 2. holes of the ground, Exod. 33:19 – BDB 320
- 3. caverns of the rocks, Exod. 33:21 – BDB 669
- 4. clefts of the cliffs, Exod. 33:21 – BDB 703

33:23 “My hand. . .My back” This is anthropomorphic imagery. See Special Topic: God Described as Human. Remember, God is an eternal spirit (i.e., John 4:24), present through creation and time.

There is a word play on “face” (see note at Exod. 33:15-16; also note stark contrast between Exod. 33:11 and 20) and “form.” No one can see God’s face (i.e., full personal revelation) but humans can see His glory, majesty, and power. Moses is allowed to see a part of YHWH’s glory, but not His “face,” as He “passes by” (DB 716, KB 778, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. 1 Kgs. 19:11-13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Exodus 32 related to Exodus 33?
2. How do Exodus 32 and 33 set the stage for Exodus 34?
3. How does Israel's faithlessness highlight the character of YHWH?
4. List the different uses of "face." (BDB 815)
5. Is the land or YHWH's personal presence the goal?
6. How are "the Angel of the Lord" and "the Lord" different yet the same?
7. What did "the ornaments" of Exod. 33:4 represent?
8. What "tent" is referred to in Exod. 33:7? How is it related to the tabernacle?
9. What did Moses want God to show him? What did he see?

EXODUS 34

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Two Tablets Replaced	Moses Makes New Tablets	The Renewal of the Covenant	The Second Set of Stone Tablets	The Covenant Renewed; the Tablets of the Law
34:1-9	34:1-3 34:4-9	34:1-9 (6-7)	34:1-4 34:5-7 34:8-9	34:1-5 God Appears 34:6-9
The Covenant Renewed	The Covenant Renewed		The Covenant Renewed	The Covenant
34:10	34:10-17	34:10	34:10-13	34:10-16
34:11-17		34:11-16	34:14-16	
		34:17	34:17	34:17
34:18	34:18-20	34:18	34:18	34:18
34:19-20		34:19-20a 34:20b	34:19-20a 34:20b	34:19-20a 34:20b
34:21-24	34:21-24	34:21-24	34:21 34:22 34:23-24	34:21 34:22 34:23-24
34:25	34:25-26	34:25	34:25	34:25
34:26a		34:26a	34:26	34:26
34:26b		34:26b		
34:27-28	34:27-28	34:27-28	34:27-28	34:27 34:28
Moses' Face Shines	The Shining Face of Moses		Moses Goes Down from Mount Sinai	Moses Comes Down from the Mountain
34:29-35	34:29-35	34:29-35	34:29-35	34:29-35

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section)
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is the first renewal ceremony of the covenant (later in Jos. 24:19; 2 Chr. 29:10). The first covenant of Exodus 20-24 was made null and void because of Israel's rebellion with the golden calf (Exodus 32). The breaking of the two tablets was a visible sign of its nullification.
- Notice disobedience breaks the covenant. Israel was continually unfaithful in the future, but this special renewal was a way of assuring faithless Israel of YHWH's faithful presence.
1. for Moses' sake (Exod. 32:27-23)
 2. for YHWH's promise to the Patriarchs (cf. Exod. 34:11)
 3. for YHWH's eternal redemptive purposes (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan)
- B. This chapter also renews some of the commands from the book of the covenant (i.e., Exodus 21-23).
1. make no covenant with the people of Canaan, Exod. 34:12 – cf. Exod. 23:32-33
 2. no sacrifice to other gods, Exod. 34:14-16 – cf. Exod. 22:20
 3. no idols, Exod. 34:17 – cf. Exod. 20:23
 4. offering of the
 - a. firstborn, Exod. 34:19-20 – cf. Exod. 22:29
 - b. first fruits, Exod. 34:26 – cf. Exod. 23:19
 5. three mandatory annual feast days, Exod. 34:23 – cf. Exod. 23:14-17 (cf. Lev. 23:5-8; Deut. 16:1-8; see Special Topic: The Feasts of Israel)
 - a. Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover)
 - b. Feast of Weeks, Exod. 34:22 – cf. Exod. 23:16
 - c. Feast of Ingathering
 6. no sacrifice with leavened bread, Exod. 34:25 – cf. Exod. 23:18
- C. The new tablets and the second forty days on the mountain, Exod. 34:27-35

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:1-9

¹Now the LORD said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. ²So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. ³No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain.” ⁴So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. ⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who

forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”
8Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. 9He said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession.”

34:1-2 “Cut out” In Exod. 32:15-16 the two tablets are described as “God’s work” (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 4:13; 9:10). The VERB “cut out” (BDB 820, KB 949) does not appear. How Moses hewed out/chiseled (Exod. 34:1,4) these tablets so quickly (i.e., one night) is unknown. Deuteronomy 10 repeats this account.

There are four commands.

1. cut out for yourself two stone tablets – BDB 820, KB 949, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. be ready by morning – BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. come up – BDB 748, KB 826, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw* used as an IMPERATIVE
4. present yourself – BDB 662, KB 714, *Niphal* PERFECT with *waw* used as an IMPERATIVE; one wonders if this involved some kind of “spiritual” preparation, as in Exod. 19:11,15

34:2 “I will write on the tablets” The revelation itself is always YHWH’s work (cf. Exod. 32:16; 34:1; Deut. 10:2,4).

34:3 These restrictions are the same as Exod. 19:12,13 (i.e., the first covenant ceremony).

34:5 “The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him” This refers to the “pillar of cloud” (cf. Exod. 13:21 and many other times during this period).

▣ **“he called. . .”** The JPSOA, like most English versions, translates this as if YHWH was speaking (cf. Exod. 34:6). It is this “name” that represents YHWH’s character which is extolled in Exod. 34:6-7 (and repeated often throughout the OT). See Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH.

34:6-7 For a composite list of the revealed characteristics/name of Israel’s God, see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT). Notice He is both gracious and just! These must not be separated.

This list of YHWH’s characteristics/names is alluded to many times.

1. Num. 14:18
2. Deut. 4:31
3. 2 Chr. 30:9
4. Neh. 9:17
5. Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 112:4; 116:5
6. Joel 2:13
7. Jonah 4:2
8. Nahum 1:3

34:6 “the LORD passed by in front of him” This VERB (BDB 716, KB 778) links to Exod. 33:19,22. There is purposeful parallelism between

1. My goodness, Exod. 32:19
2. My glory, Exod. 32:22
3. My name

▣ **“The LORD, the LORD God”** There are several titles/names/characteristics stated in this chapter.

1. The LORD, Exod. 34:6 – YHWH (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.)

2. The LORD God, Exod. 34:6 – lit. YHWH, YHWH, *El* (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, A)
3. The Lord GOD, Exod. 34:23 – *Adon*, see Special Topic: Lord (kurios) and YHWH
4. The God of Israel, Exod. 34:23 – *Eloah*, SINGULAR form of *Elohim* (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.)
5. The LORD, your God – YHWH, your *Elohim*

In this context the variety is literary, not theological.

▣ **“lovingkindness”** This is a key aspect of God’s character (cf. Psalm 136)! See Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*).

▣ **“slow to anger”** In Hebrew anger is often expressed idiomatically in relationship to one’s “nose.” This phrase is literally, “long of nostrils” (UBS *Handbook*, p. 800).

1. ADJECTIVE, “long” – BDB 74
2. NOUN, “nose” – BDB 60, here dual form, “two nostrils”

34:7 “iniquity. . .transgression. . .sin” These are the three main terms for covenant violations (BDB 730, BDB 833, BDB 308). They occur together in six other texts (cf. Lev. 16:21; Job 13:23; Ps. 32:5; Isa. 59:12; Ezek. 21:24; Dan. 9:24). Humans are morally broken (see Special Topic: The Fall)!

▣ **“yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished”** It should be noted that YHWH is merciful and forgives sin, but there is still justice (cf. Num. 14:18; Nah. 1:3).

1. for forgiveness the person must repent, see Special Topic: Repentance (OT)
2. must approach and worship YHWH (cf. Deut. 6:4-6; 30:6)
3. if no repentance or worship, then judgment surely follows
4. sin has consequences (even forgiven sin, cf. Psalm 32; 51)

The mystery of YHWH’s mercy and justice often collide – Jer. 3:12-14; Hos. 11:8-9. The question is highlighted by

1. punishment for sin over generations – Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10; Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Jer. 31:29
2. individual responsibility only – Deut. 24:16 quoted in 2 Kgs. 14:6 and 2 Chr. 25:4; as well as the powerful statements of Ezekiel 18

▣ **“visiting the iniquity of fathers. . .”** Acts of disobedience quickly become lifestyle patterns and family traditions that are passed on to future generations. Remember, several generations lived together (cf. Exod. 20:5-6).

However, the great promise of God to faithful families is that faithfulness also has consequences which move through time (cf. Deut. 7:9)!

The rabbis interpret this phrase as referring to YHWH’s mercy.

1. not allowing the full judgment to fall immediately (i.e., 1 Kgs. 21:29-30)
2. as aspect of “long suffering” in allowing time for repentance (cf. Rom. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:20)

34:8 The only proper response to this kind of God is respect and worship.

34:9 “If” This hypothetical PARTICLE (BDB 49) also occurs in Exod. 32:32; 33:13,15. This verse relates to Exod. 33:13-15. For Israel to be a distinct, special nation (cf. Exod. 19:5-6), YHWH must accompany them personally.

▣ **“the people are so obstinate”** See note at Exod. 32:9. God’s faithful character is highlighted in His relationship with a “stiff-necked” people.

▣ **“take us as Your possession”** This NOUN (BDB 635), translated by NASB as “possession,” literally means “inheritance.” It is used in two senses.

1. Israel as God’s unique people – Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 9:26,29; 32:9; 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kgs. 8:51,53; 2 Kgs. 21:14; Ps. 28:9; 33:12; 78:71; 106:5,40; Isa. 19:25; Jer. 10:16; Mic. 7:18
2. Israel receiving the land of Canaan as a gift from YHWH – Deut. 4:21; 15:4; 19:10; 20:16; 21:28; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1

This is family imagery. This imagery is expanded.

1. Gentiles given as inheritance to the Davidic Messiah, Ps. 2:8
2. the Messiah/Jesus as heir of all things, Heb. 2:2; Matt. 28:18
3. believers are co-heirs through Jesus – Rom. 8:17

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:10

¹⁰Then God said, “Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.

34:10 This seems to refer to the divine conquest of Canaan (cf. Exod. 23:27; 15:16; Deut. 2:25; 11:25; Jos. 2:9; 24:31; Jdgs. 2:7, as earlier in the humbling of Egypt, cf. Exod. 15:11). The victories were YHWH’s, not Israel’s military (cf. Exod. 34:11; 23:27-31; 33:2).

Notice there is no “if” here. YHWH has a redemptive plan that includes faithless Israel. A plan for the world (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

▣ **“covenant”** See Special Topic: Covenant.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:11-17

¹¹“Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. ¹²Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—¹⁵otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods. ¹⁷You shall make for yourself no molten gods.

34:11 **“Be sure to observe”** Obedience is crucial (BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* IMPERATIVE; see Special Topic: Keep). The covenant is conditional (see Special Topic: Covenant).

34:12 **“Watch yourself”** This is another IMPERATIVE using the same VERB as the previous verse (here, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE). Here the command relates specifically to Canaanite fertility worship (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the ANE).

If Israel does not obey, the Canaanite worship will corrupt them (cf. Exod. 23:32-33; Num. 33:55; Deut. 7:1-5,16; Jos. 23:13).

34:13 See Special Topic: Israel’s Mandated Response to Canaanite Fertility Worship.

▣ **“their”** The NASB change is COLLECTIVE SINGULAR of the MT (i.e., Exod. 34:13-16). UBS Text Project (p. 148) gives the SINGULAR a “B” rating (some doubt).

34:14 “for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” The NRSV and NJB have this phrase in parentheses.

This ADJECTIVE (BDB 888, twice) is used only of YHWH (cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). This anthropomorphic word, denoting strong human emotions, can be understood as

1. jealous, a love word, familial imagery
2. jealous (i.e., for no rivals)

Number 1 fits this context best. Idolatry was viewed as “spiritual adultery” (cf. Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Num. 15:39; Deut. 31:16; Jdgs. 2:17; 8:27,33; 1 Chr.5:25; Ezek. 20:30). YHWH as husband; Israel as wife (cf. Exod. 34:15-16; Hosea 1-3).

The VERB “harlotry” (BDB 275, KB 275) is used three times in Exod. 34:15-16.

34:15-16 This ban on religious and social contact is repeated in Deut. 7:3-4. This intermarriage corrupted the purity of YHWH’s covenant people! This is exactly the problem found in

1. the reign of Solomon, cf. 1 Kgs. 11:1-8,9-11
2. the post-exilic period (Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi).

Many of the “strange” laws found in Exodus – Deuteronomy refer to Canaanite customs, by providing them, the Israelites were protected from Canaanite influence. Obviously this attempt failed. Israel became as corrupt as her neighbors, especially in idolatry and fertility worship.

34:17 This reflects

1. Exod. 20:4 – no graven image
2. Exod. 32:4 – Aaron’s graven image

This would incite YHWH’s jealousy!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:18

¹⁸“You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.”

34:18-26 See Contextual Insights, B. and the Special Topic: Feasts of Israel.

34:18 “Abib” See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Calendars.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:19-20

¹⁹“The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. ²⁰You shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed.”

34:19 The MT’s VERB (תזכר, BDB 269, KB 269, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) does not fit this context, so scholars suggest another root (הזכר), which means “male,” and this fits (see JPSOA, following the Targums and Vulgate).

34:20 “redeem” See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:21-24

²¹“You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. ²²You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. ²³Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. ²⁴For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.

34:21 This reflects Exod. 20:8-11, esp. 20:9, cf. Exod. 35:2-3. The Sabbath was a major weekly time of worship. It was not optional. It was crucial for covenant people to stay in fellowship with their God. See Special Topic: Sabbath (OT). Also see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1157-1162, for a good brief overview.

34:23 This is a repeat of Exod. 23:17. All English translations have the VERB “appear” from the NOUN (BDB 909), but the MT has “see” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Niphal* IMPERFECT). The context is referring to the three main annual feast days at the central shrine. However, because of the contextual aspect of “seeing” God (see notes at Exod. 33:11,20), this may simply be imagery of approaching God with a sacrifice.

34:24 This is if Israel is obedient to YHWH’s covenant, but they never were! This verse could be understood in two senses.

1. there will be no invasions (TEV, NJB)
2. covenant partners will not “covet” (same word as Exod. 20:17; NEB, REB)

This verse implies the need to travel a long distance to a central shrine, if so, then there must be a later addition reflecting life in Canaan.

See Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism (J.E.D.P.).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:25

²⁵“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.

34:25 “nor is the sacrifice. . .to be left over until morning” This is first mentioned in Exod. 12:10. It is repeated in Exod. 23:18, and mentioned again in Deut. 16:4.

The meat had a special sacred aspect. It could not become just another meal (i.e., leftovers). However, like many of these cultic regulations, one wonders if they are

1. hygienic
2. again Canaanite customs

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:26a

²⁶“You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.

34:26a “the very first of the first fruits” This is first mentioned in Exod. 23:19 (also note Lev. 2:12,14). By offering “these first of the first,” Israel recognized that all the harvest belonged to God. Same imagery as the “firstborn” and “tithing,” as well as the Sabbath. God is the owner of all things because He is the creator of all things!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:26b

^{26b}“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

34:26b “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk” See note at Exod. 23:19.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:27-28

²⁷Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” ²⁸So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

34:27 “Write down” This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. Exod. 17:14; 24:4. Moses obviously is commanded to write something, but what? Did YHWH write the ten words on the stone tablets (cf. Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1,18) and Moses wrote the other laws connected to “the Book of the Covenant) (i.e., Exodus 21-23, cf. Exod. 24:4,7)?

34:28 Israel’s patience is tested a second time.

There is an obvious connection between Moses and Jesus (cf. Matt. 4:2). The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the new law.

☐ **“forty days and forty nights”** See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:29-35

²⁹It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. ³⁰So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. ³²Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, ³⁵the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

34:29 “the skin of his face shone” This is a new element not found in Exodus 20-24. It served as a way to affirm YHWH’s direct communication with Moses (i.e., “face to face,” cf. Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10).

Paul, in 2 Cor. 3:1-11, interprets this as a covering to hide the fact that the “shine” did not last. He is using this imagery as a way to compare the revelation of Moses to the NT gospel revelation in Christ! This does not seem to be the intent of Exodus 34 (see Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, pp. 620-624)!

The VERB “shone” (BDB 902, KB 1144, *Qal* PERFECT, used three times) is basically the word used of “horns” spreading, but here it must denote rays extending (i.e., BDB 901). LXX, Peshitta, Targums all have “shine.” Some scholars emend it from רָקַק (BDB 902) to יָקַר (BDB 429), which denotes splendor or glory (possibly NJB and JPSOA).

As Jesus is the new lawgiver, the transfiguration of Matthew 17 is the superior “shining” of Moses’ face.

34:33 “veil” The NOUN (BDB 691, KB 605) occurs only here. From context it must denote some type of face covering. Another Hebrew root (BDB 712) in Job 24:15 also means a face covering. How the terms are to be distinguished or described is uncertain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Did YHWH write the ten words on the tablets or did Moses?
2. Why is Exod. 34:6-7 so theologically significant?
3. What exactly did Moses want YHWH to do in Exod. 34:9?
4. How would the Canaanites become “a snare to Israel”?
5. Is Exodus 34 an exact repeat of Exodus 20-23?
6. Why did Moses’ face shine? Why did he cover it?

EXODUS 35-40

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Sabbath Emphasized	Sabbath Regulations	The Establishment of the Cult (35-40)	Regulations for the Sabbath	The Sabbath Rest
35:1	35:1-3	35:1	35:1-3	35:1-3
35:2-3	Offerings for the Tabernacle	35:2-3	Offerings for the Sacred Tent	The Materials are Collected
35:4-9	35:4-9	35:4-9	35:4-9	35:4-19
Tabernacle Workmen	Articles of the Tabernacle		Articles for the Tent of the Presence	
35:10-19	35:10-19	35:10-19	35:10-19	
Gifts Received	The Tabernacle Offerings Presented		The People Bring Their Offerings	
35:20-29	35:20-29	35:20-29	35:20-29	35:20-29
	The Artisans Called by God		Workers to Make the Tent of the Lord's Presence	The Craftsmen for the Sanctuary
35:30-35	35:30-36:1	35:30-36:1	35:30-36:1	35:30-36:1

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The Tabernacle was the place where YHWH dwelt with Israel during the wilderness wandering period. It functioned as
 1. a place of revelation
 2. a place of sacrifice to maintain fellowship
 3. a symbol of YHWH's presence, guidance, and holiness

The Tabernacle is the place where the guidelines in Leviticus are carried out. The Priests and Levites take the place of “the firstborns” (i.e., Exodus 13) as YHWH’s servants.

- B. There is a detailed description found in Exodus 25-31.
1. materials to be used, Exod. 25:2-6
 2. the details of the ark, Exod. 25:10-22
 3. the details of the table of showbread, Exod. 25:23-31
 4. the details of the lampstand, Exod. 25:31-40
 5. the details of the curtains, Exod. 26:1-14
 6. the details of the inner structure, Exod. 26:1-14
 7. the details of the inner veil, Exod. 26:31-35
 8. the details of the outer veil, Exod. 26:36-37
 9. the details of the altar of burnt offerings, Exod. 27:1-8
 10. the details of the courtyard, Exod. 27:9-19
 11. the details of the holy garments of Aaron, Exod. 28:1-5
 - a. the details of the ephod in Exod. 28:6-14
 - b. the details of the breastplate in Exod. 28:31-35
 - c. the details of the ephod’s robe in Exod. 28:31-35
 - d. the turban in Exod. 28:36-43
 12. the details of consecration, Exod. 29:1-46
 13. the details of the altar of incense, Exod. 30:1-10
 14. the details of support of the Tabernacle, Exod. 30:11-16
 15. the details of the laver, Exod. 30:17-21
 16. the details of the anointing oil, Exod. 30:22-23
 17. the details of the incense, Exod. 30:34-38
- C. Although there is great detail, there is still ambivalence about the exact design of this particular portable worship center. The *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* has a good picture of the basic floor plan (see *ZPBE*, vol. 5, p. 573).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:1

¹Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do:

35:1 “assembled” This (BDB 874, KB 1078, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is the VERB form of a NOUN which is often used of Israel, *Qahol*. It forms the basis for NT “*ekklesia*” from LXX. See Special Topic: Church (*ekklesia*).

▣ **“the LORD has commanded”** This VERB (BDB 845, KB 1010, *Piel* PERFECT) occurs several times (cf. Exod. 35:1,4,10).

▣ **“These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do”** This phrase seems to relate to more than just the laws of the Sabbath (i.e., note the same VERB in Exod. 35:4 and 10).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:2-3

²“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. ³You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day.”

35:2 “For the six days work may be done, but on the seventh day” This same description of the laws of the Sabbath goes back to Gen. 2:1-3, but it is repeated in theological significance in the Ten Commandments found in Exod. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15. It is also repeated in Exod. 31:12-17 and Num. 15:32-36.

▣ Notice how the weekly day of rest is characterized.

1. a holy day
2. a sabbath of complete rest to the Lord
3. violators put to death (cf. Num. 15:32-36)

This is a serious commandment.

35:3 This verse is an additional piece of information that is unique to Exodus 35, although it is implied in Exod. 16:23. It forms the basis of much rabbinical discussion on exactly how the term “work” is to be defined. It seems to me that Exod. 35:2 and 3 are simply a representative sample of all of the Ten Commandments and their qualifications, found earlier in the book of Exodus.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:4-9

⁴Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, ⁵“Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD’S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁶and blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goats’ *hair*, ⁷and rams’ skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, ⁸and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, ⁹and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece.”

35:5 “Take from among you a contribution to the LORD” Notice that there are two elements here. The ornaments mentioned are the ones that had been taken from the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:36). They were the source of the great sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32), but here of the great benefit of the Tabernacle. This may reflect a theology of the neutrality of things. It is how we use things that make them evil or good. Here the ornaments would be used for the will of God.

▣ **“whoever is of a willing heart”** Note that it was to be a voluntary contribution (cf. Exod. 35:5,21-22,26,29). We learn from Exod. 36:2-7 that the generosity of the Hebrews had to be stopped by a command from Moses. This shows that they wanted to participate in the Tabernacle, which was a physical key to the relationship between YHWH (holy) and His people (unholy).

▣ **“contributions of gold, silver, and bronze”** This was a way of listing the superior to inferior metals. Bronze was a combination of copper and zinc.

35:6 “blue, purple and scarlet” It is very difficult to be precise about these colors, or any colors of the ancient world (see Special Topic: ANE Sacred Colors).

1. The term “blue” (BDB 1067) seems to be an Akkadian word which means “violet blue.”
2. The term “purple” (BDB 71) seems to be a Sanskrit word that means “reddish-purple.”
3. The term “scarlet” (BDB 1040) comes from a dye made from the crushed bodies of insects.

So, all of these colors would basically be a reddish purple. How much of a distinction is found between them or how much they are synonymous is uncertain. This same ambiguity can be found in the color of gems.

35:7 “ram skins dyed red and porpoise skins, and acacia wood” It is interesting that God told them to use acacia wood (see Special Topic: Acacia Wood), which is a hard, aromatic wood found in a common desert plant. If it is true that this is a common plant then why would something so exotic as porpoise skins be required? It seems that the ram’s skin being dyed red may, in reality, be simply the tanning process which made them look red and that “porpoise skins” (see Special Topic: Porpoise Skins) may, in reality, be an Egyptian term for leather goods in general. It is not that God called for strange and unique materials but that the common materials at hand be used. It is also possible that these leather materials were not an outer layer but special leather bags to carry the black goat hair tent and its inner curtains.

35:9 “the ephod” This again is a rather difficult word to pin down. In some parts of the OT it can refer to an idol (cf. Jdgs. 8:27). In other parts it is used for a way to determine the will of God (cf. 1 Sam. 23:9-11) and here it is a woven vest. This vest was unique in the sense that it would have two stones on the shoulders, each containing the names of six tribes, while on the front there were gold chains that would hold the unique piece of equipment called “the breastplate of judgment” (see Special Topic: The Breastplate of the High Priest), which would have a special stone for each tribe. Behind the breastplate would be a pocket that held the Urim and Thummim (see Special Topic: Urim and Thummim), which was the Israeli way of determining the will of God during this period (cf. Exod. 28:6-30 for a detailed description). See Special Topic: Ephod.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:10-19

¹⁰“Let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the LORD has commanded: ¹¹the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; ¹²the ark and its poles, the mercy seat, and the curtain of the screen; ¹³the table and its poles, and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; ¹⁴the lampstand also for the light and its utensils and its lamps and the oil for the light; ¹⁵and the altar of incense and its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the doorway at the entrance of the tabernacle; ¹⁶the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; ¹⁷the hangings of the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; ¹⁸the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court and their cords; ¹⁹the woven garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.”

35:10 “Let every skilled man among you come” Everyone was encouraged to contribute to the Tabernacle; every man was encouraged to lend his labor to the construction. However, in Exod. 35:30,34, there would be specially gifted construction foremen to guide the process.

35:11 “the tabernacle” The English term, tabernacle, comes from the Latin Vulgate translation. In Hebrew it simply means “the tent of reunion” or “the tent of meeting” (BDB 1015). From this point on the discussion of the most inner and holy part of the tabernacle, “the Holy of Holies,” will be described and then move outward to describe the other furnishings.

▣ **“its tent and its covering”** It was made up of ten curtains. This inner tent was about forty-five by fifteen feet. It had an inside layer of goat’s wool, an intermediate layer, discussed in Exod. 27:6-11, and an outer layer made of leather (cf. Exod. 26:12-13). This inner tent was divided into a perfect cube, the Holy of

Holies, where the ark of the covenant would sit, and an outer, rectangular-shaped enclosure called the Holy Place, in which three items of sacred furniture would reside.

35:12 “the ark” This is a different Hebrew term from the term “ark” used of Noah’s ark or the basket in which Moses was placed as a child. This term would better be translated “chest.” There was some discrepancy in the exact size of this ark because of the ambiguity of the term “cubit.” However, it seems to be about four feet by two and a half feet by two and a half feet. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It became the very holy container for some of the most sacred objects of Israel, including the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod that budded, and a jar of manna. See Special Topic: Ark of the Covenant.

▣ **“its poles”** The ark was to have permanent poles to be carried by the Levites when the people of God moved from one place to another. The ark became the symbol of the presence of God after the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

▣ **“the mercy seat”** This comes from a Hebrew term (see Special Topic: The Mercy Seat), which means “to cover.” It came to mean that especially holy place where the High Priest sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats on the national day of repentance, the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16). There were two small angelic creatures whose wings met in the middle and God symbolically dwelt between the wings of these *cherubim*. The term “cherub” (see Special Topic: *Cherubim*) comes from the Hebrew term for “intercessor.” They are described in slightly different ways in Ezekiel 1 and 10 and Revelation 4. The Hebrews viewed heaven as the place where God lived with the ark as His footstool (cf. Ps. 99:5).

▣ **“the curtain of the screen”** This refers to that curtain directly in front of the ark which closed off the end-third of this inner tent and made it the Holy of Holies (i.e., a perfect cube, cf. Exod. 26:31-37).

35:13 “the table and its poles” This refers to the table on which the bread of the presence was placed (see Special Topic: The Bread of the Presence, cf. Exod. 25:23ff). These loaves of bread weighed about two and a half to three pounds (cf. Lev. 24:5). There is some debate as to whether they were replaced weekly. The twelve of them, one for each of the twelve tribes, symbolized God’s provision. This table seems to be on the north side and the special seven-pointed lampstand on the south (cf. Exod. 26:35). A man would traditionally face east and the other directions were determined by his right hand, his left hand, and his back.

35:14 “the lampstand” The Hebrew term is “Menorah”; see Special Topic: The Lampstand (menorah), which is described in detail in Exod. 25:33ff. This particular lampstand had seven light positions, while the one in Solomon’s Temple would have ten. The arrangement seemed to be three on each side of a central shaft. On the six side shafts there were three almond flower buds and on the central shaft, four (Exod. 25:33-34).

The almond tree was the first tree of the season to bloom. It is uncertain whether the lamp was lit twenty-four hours a day or just at night. It provided light for the part of the tent called the Holy Place.

35:15 “the altar of incense” This was a small incense altar just before the inner veil and is described in Exod. 30:10 (see Special Topic: The Altar of Incense). This is the altar on which different kinds of spices were placed daily to make the inner tent smell aromatic. On the Day of Atonement, large amounts of spices were placed on this altar so that smoke would fill the Holy of Holies so that the High Priest might not see God and die. The coals of this altar were taken from the larger sacrificial altar.

▣ **“and the screen for the doorway of the entrance of the tabernacle”** This is the outer screen which divided the Holy Place from the outer courtyard. It contained no pictures of *cherubim*, as the inner one did, and is described in Exod. 26:36-37.

35:16 “the altar of burnt offering” This was just in front of the opening of the tabernacle, which faced east. It is described in Exod. 27:1-18 (see Special Topic: The Altar of Sacrifice). It was about a seven and a half foot square at this point, although later in Solomon’s Temple, it would be made much larger, 2 Chr. 3:1. It had four horns which became the most holy part (cf. Exod. 30:10; Lev. 4:7,18,25,30). This is where the animal sacrifices would be made and the coals for the altar of incense procured.

35:17 “the screen for the gate of the court” This seems to be the screen for the very outer part of the court. It is interesting to note that the laver, described in detail in Exod. 30:17-21, is not mentioned here.

35:19 “the woven garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests” These are described in detail in Exod. 28:1-3,31-39. Here, it is simply a kind of summary statement. The robe, the turban, and the sash are not mentioned.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:20-29

²⁰Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses’ presence. ²¹Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came *and* brought the LORD’S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. ²²Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came *and* brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so *did* every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. ²³Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine linen and goats’ *hair* and rams’ skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. ²⁴Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD’S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. ²⁵All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, *in* blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and *in* fine linen. ²⁶All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ *hair*. ²⁷The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; ²⁸and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring *material* for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD.

35:21 “Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came” This shows the voluntary nature of this enterprise, but also the supernatural drawing power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Exod. 35:5,21-22,26,29).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:30-35

³⁰Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³¹And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; ³²to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, ³³and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. ³⁴He also has put in his heart to teach, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple *and* in scarlet *material*, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.

35:30 “the LORD has called by name Bezalel” This man and the man named Oholiab, mentioned in Exod. 35:34, are especially gifted and called artisans who will be in charge of putting the entire tent together. Notice that one of them is from the tribe of Judah and one from the tribe of Dan.

35:35 “He has filled them with skill to perform every work” This is the basic thrust of our wisdom saying that God never calls us to do anything that He does not equip us to do. He called every man to help, but He called two unique men to guide their efforts and trained them in a unique way. God usually uses human instrumentality and tries to balance the participation of the whole through the expertise of the few.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is there such a repetition in description in Exodus 25-31 and then again in 35-40?
2. Why is there such a detailed description of the tabernacle?
3. Do we know exactly how this tabernacle looked?
4. What is the significance of the different types of precious metal and the different colors?
5. Can you mentally picture these different items of furniture? If not, look at a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia to help you.