

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied

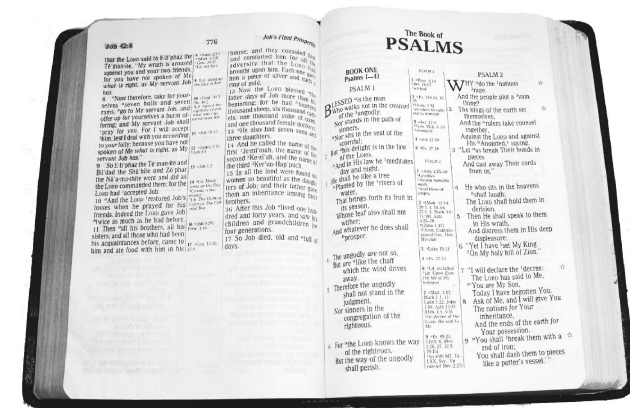
A Red Sea Place

*Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?
Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene
Till the night of your fear is gone;
He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,
When He says to your soul "Go on."*

*And His hand will lead you through - clear through -
Ere the watery walls roll down,
No foe can reach you, no wave can touch,
No mightiest sea can drown;
The tossing billows may rear their crests,
Their foam at your feet may break,
But over their bed you shall walk dryshod
In the path that your Lord will make.*

*In the morning watch, 'neath the lifted cloud,
You shall see but the Lord alone,
When He leads you on from the place of the sea,
To a land that you have not known;
And your fears shall pass as your foes have passed,
You shall no more be afraid;
You shall sing His praise in a better place,
A place that His hand has made.*

Annie Johnson Flint



August 2021

**Gospel of Luke chapters 23 and 24
Exodus chapters 1 to 14**

Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD

The Israelites were making good their escape from Egypt when the Lord told Moses to give the order to turn and to encamp with their backs to the sea (1–2). This would leave them very vulnerable to the pursuing Egyptians, but the Lord was drawing Pharaoh and his army into a trap, as we shall be seeing later in this chapter.

The Lord told Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that the Egyptians would pursue them and the Egyptian people began to question why they had allowed the Israelites to leave their land (3–5). Pharaoh then led his army in hot pursuit of the Israelites (8–9). Humanly speaking the Hebrews were in an impossible situation. The Red Sea was ahead of them, the Egyptian army behind them, to the one side rocky crags, to the other, Egyptian fortresses. They were well and truly hemmed in. They panicked and cried out, complaining bitterly against the Lord and against Moses (10–12). How soon they had forgotten the great displays of God's almighty power! When faith gives way to fear, we turn our eyes away from the Lord; we then look at our troubles and problems as if God doesn't care for us, or as if he does not exist.

One man was calm in the crisis – Moses. He encouraged the people, *'Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will accomplish for you today ... For the Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace'* (13–14). The Lord instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to advance toward the sea and then he should lift up his rod over the sea and divide it. The children of Israel would walk on dry ground through the parted waters but disaster would overtake the Egyptians who would know that he is *the LORD* when he had destroyed their mighty army (15–18). **The Red Sea, which they saw as the great obstacle to any hope of escape, was God's instrument to destroy the pursuing Egyptians.** Do you have problems or troubles that threaten to overwhelm you? Is your faith in God failing? *'Stand still* (that is, *'Stand firm, don't panic') and see the salvation of the LORD.'*

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The LORD went before them

Joseph had a solemn oath placed upon the people of Israel before he died; they were to take his bones to be buried in Canaan. Moses remembered this oath and those bones were taken to the promised land as directed (19; cp. Genesis 50:24–25; cp. Joshua 24:32).

The Lord graciously provided a pillar of cloud and of fire for the Israelites. It was a token of:

- God's leading (21). The most direct way to the promised land was through the land of the Philistines. The Lord knew all about the weaknesses of the Israelites. The Philistines were a fierce, warring nation, and God did not want his people so discouraged that they would want to return to Egypt (17). He could, of course, have given a miraculous victory over the Philistines, but he chose not to do so. He is sovereign and wise in all his ways. The Lord guided the Hebrews to go south-east towards the Red Sea (18).
- God's presence with them day and night. *The LORD went before them* (21). They were protected by his presence, the cloud sheltering them by day (Psalm 105:39) and coming between them and their enemies (14:19–20). **It is a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement to know that God is with us** (cp. 33:14; Joshua 1:5,9; Hebrews 13:5–6). *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me* (Psalm 23:4). We have no cloud today, but God graciously leads us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). The Lord goes ahead of us; we have no need to fear.

*Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine
Nor ever murmur nor repine;
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me.*

*He leadeth me! he leadeth me!
By his own hand he leadeth me;
His faithful follower I would be,
For by his hand he leadeth me.*

(Joseph H. Gilmore)

He delivered Jesus to their will

Jesus was sent back to Pilate who summoned the chief priests, the leaders and the people to announce his verdict on Jesus. He again told them that he could find no fault in him and that Herod had also found nothing in him worthy of death. There was a custom of releasing a prisoner at the feast, and Pilate, who had little time for the Jews, sought to embarrass them by offering to release Barabbas as the alternative choice to Jesus. He said that he would have Jesus chastened (beaten) and then released (13–16; cp Matthew 27:15–20).

Pilate expected the crowd to ask for the release of Jesus but his plan failed. The wicked chief priests and elders were so determined to have our Saviour killed that they persuaded the crowd to press for the release of Barabbas who was guilty of insurrection and murder (19). *They denied the Holy One and the Just*, and asked for the release of a murderer (Acts 3:14) and *he delivered Jesus to their will* (25).

The guilty man was set free and Christ the innocent was condemned. This points us to what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for guilty sinners. *For he* (God the Father) *made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). We do not understand the gospel of Christ if we do not realise that the sin of every Christian has been put to Christ's account and that he, the holy one, was punished for their sins. The just one died for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). Our sin is imputed to him (put to his account). What a wonderful blessing that our sins no longer count against us if we belong to Christ (cp. Psalm 32:1–2). The righteousness of Christ is also imputed to every believer (Romans 4:4–6,22–25). As far as God is concerned, we are accepted as righteous. Let us be determined always to lead a righteous life!

God's grace is amazing and we have a wonderful Saviour! Do you love the Lord Jesus? Have you come to him for the forgiveness of your sins?

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do

The Lord Jesus was then led out of Jerusalem, carrying his cross, but he was soon unable to carry it further owing to the terrible injuries Roman inflicted on by the soldiers (Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20) and sheer exhaustion. Simon, from Cyrene (north coast of Africa, Libya), was compelled to bear the cross of Jesus (26). This was possibly a great turning point in his life. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus, who appear to have been Christians well known to the first readers of Mark's Gospel (Mark 15:21).

The weeping women ('*Daughters of Jerusalem*') were not the women who had faithfully followed Jesus (eg. Mary Magdalene). They were inhabitants of Jerusalem who had perhaps heard him teaching that very week and who recognised that he was the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice. Jesus turned to them and told them not to weep for him but for themselves and for their children. Jerusalem was to be destroyed and there would be great terror and slaughter (27–30). This prophecy was fulfilled forty years later when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem following Jewish rebellion against their rule. The siege brought famine, starvation and terrible suffering and then the slaughter of a million people. Verse 31 was a common proverb which may have meant, 'If men (in this case, the Romans) do this to someone who is innocent, what will they do to those who are guilty?'

They crucified the Lord Jesus with two criminals, Jesus hanging between them. How wonderful is our Saviour! He was full of pity for the weeping women and he prayed for those who condemned and crucified him, and for those who mocked him. '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*' (34). His prayer was soon answered with the repentance of the dying robber, and the many conversions that were to follow on the day of Pentecost and in the months to follow (Acts 2:41; 6:7). **Do you pray for those who have wronged you (Matthew 5:44–45)? Do you really want them to repent of their sin and to be reconciled to you and to God?**

Because of what the LORD did for me

No foreigner was permitted to eat the Passover except for a slave who had been circumcised and was part of a household. Temporary visitors and hired servants were only allowed to eat the Passover if they became circumcised (12:43–51). The Lord commanded Moses that the first-born of man and animal must be set apart to him ('*sanctify*'; 1–2). Further instruction concerning the first-born is given in verses 11 to 16. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be kept by the Israelites each year (3–9) and the practice of sacrificing a lamb to redeem the first-born was also to continue (13–15). The first-born had escaped divine judgment because a lamb had died in his place. God said of the first-born, '*It is mine*' (2). Christian, *you are not your own, for you were bought at a price* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19) and we are to live for him (Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 5:15).

The importance of instructing our children is again emphasised: '*And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, "This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt"*' (8,14; cp. Deuteronomy 4:9–10; 6:6–7; see notes on Exodus 2:1–10.). All parents have a God-given responsibility to instruct their children and both parents must be involved in teaching their children about the Lord (cp. Proverbs 1:8). Timothy's father was a Gentile (Acts 16:1) but he was taught the Scriptures by his Jewish mother and grandmother and this had a lasting effect upon him (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

Our children are daily under the strident and persuasive influence of a godless world. Our example and instruction should convince them of the wisdom of following Christ. The instruction of a biblical ministry will confirm the teaching of Christian parents. We have an obligation before God to be in a church where God's Word is loved, taught and obeyed. How foolish to belong to a church where vital Christian truths are denied and where confusion abounds! Our children will suffer much spiritual harm if we neglect our responsibilities.

Go, serve the LORD as you have said

The judgment of God upon the Egyptians was so great that there was a death in every household (29–30). Pharaoh was truly humbled. He had banished Moses and Aaron from his palace (10:28) and now he sent for them to come to the palace during the night. He said, *‘Rise and go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said’* (31). Pharaoh actually asked Moses to bless him (32) but he was not sincere. As soon as he got over the shock of the deaths at the Passover, he pursued the Israelites, aiming to destroy them. The distraught Egyptians had had enough and wanted the Israelites to leave their land immediately, even though it was not yet daybreak (33).

Six hundred thousand men plus women and children left Egypt that night (37). *A mixed multitude* who were not Hebrews had been so convinced by the greatness and power of God that they joined the Israelites in leaving Egypt (38). **God keeps his promises as well as his threats.** He gave the Hebrews favour in the eyes of the Egyptians exactly as he had promised (35–36; cp. 3:21–22; 11:3). They left Egypt with great wealth. Justice was done, for the Egyptians had oppressed and exploited them for many years. The Lord also kept his promise to bring his people out of Egypt *‘with great judgments’* (6:6; 7:4).

The Lord had told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in a foreign land for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13); this is a generic term meaning at least four hundred years. This prophecy was now fulfilled. The Israelites had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years and they left Egypt at the very time that the four hundred and thirty years was completed (40–42).

Pharaoh had despised *the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering* of God (cp. Romans 2:4), and the consequences for him and his people were terrible. Many people still scoff at the thought of God’s wrath and divine judgment but there have been scoffers in every age. God delays judgment because he is merciful (cp. 2 Peter 3:1–9).

He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ

The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus because he claimed to be the promised Messiah (‘the Christ’) and the Son of God. To the Jews this was a terrible form of blasphemy (cp. Matthew 26:63–65; John 5:18) and it would have been were not Jesus the Son of God. Muslims also hate and vigorously oppose the truth that Jesus is the holy Son of God.

The Lord Jesus was now hanging from the cross and his enemies gloated over the apparent helplessness of the one who said that he was the Son of God and the Messiah King. They taunted him, saying, *‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God’* (35; cp Matthew 27:40–43). Those words had a far deeper significance than his enemies realised. He could have saved himself and come down from the cross, but he would not! It was not the nails that bound him to the cross, but his great love for sinners like you and me. Had Jesus chosen to come down from the cross and to destroy his enemies, we would have no way of being saved from our sins. He obeyed the will of the Father (Philippians 2:8; Acts 2:23) to fulfil his plan to save sinners. *By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). **Are you having problems with obedience to God? Meditate upon Christ’s great love and obedience to save us. If you love him, surely you will want to obey him.**

One of the murderers crucified with Jesus challenged him to save himself and them also if he were truly the Christ. The other criminal rebuked him, becoming aware of the fear of God, of his own guilt, and of the power of Jesus to save him (39–42). He trusted in Jesus who was then dying in great weakness. What faith! He was wonderfully saved even as he hung dying on a cross. He may have never prayed in his life, but his simple prayer was all that was needed: *‘Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’* Jesus assured him that he would be with him in heaven that very day (43; ‘paradise’ = ‘heaven;’ cp. 2 Corinthians 12:2–4). **No one is beyond the reach of the grace of God, even when they are dying!**

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit

A supernatural darkness lasting three hours came down on the land at the sixth hour (12 noon). Jesus then commended himself into the hands of God the Father saying with a loud voice, *‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’* (44–46). We must remember that he is divine as well as human; he chose the moment of his departure from this life (John 10:17,18). He willingly died so that those who trust in him would have eternal life (John 3:16). When Jesus died, the curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of holies in the temple (Exodus 26:31–33; cp. Hebrews 9:3) was torn in two (45). Only the high priest was permitted to go through the veil into the Holy of holies, when he made atonement for the sin of the people. Jesus died to allow access to God for all who trust in him and come to the Father through him (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19–22).

The Roman centurion was profoundly affected by the darkness and the death of Christ. He glorified God, confessing the righteousness of Jesus who had been condemned as a criminal. He exclaimed, *‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’* (47). The watching crowd beat their breasts (a sign of grief). R.C. Lenski writes, ‘They came to witness a show; they left with feelings of woe.’ J.C. Ryle comments, ‘The Roman officer felt convinced that he had been superintending an unrighteous action, and crucifying an innocent person. The gazing crowd were pricked to the heart by a sense of having aided, countenanced, and abetted a grievous wrong. Both Jew and Gentile left Calvary that evening heavy-hearted, self-condemned, and ill at ease’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 2, page 481).

*Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Lovingkindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom,
Shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven’s eternal days.* (William Rees)

When I see the blood, I will pass over you

The first Passover feast was to be for the Israelites, the *beginning of months* (2) when God brought them out of bondage (13:3). On the tenth day of the month, a male lamb without blemish was killed for each household, and its blood sprinkled on the lintels and door posts of the house (7, 21–23). The lamb was to be roasted in fire and then eaten in haste with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The people were to be prepared for a quick departure from Egypt (8–12). The sprinkled blood was to protect Israel’s first-born against the judgment of the Lord. God said, *‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’* (13).

The Feast of the Passover was to be observed every year (14) and it continues to be an important day in the Jewish calendar. God told the Israelites to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the fourteenth to the twenty-first day of the month. They were forbidden to have any leaven (yeast) in their homes or to eat anything leavened during this seven days (15–20).

At a Passover feast almost 2000 years ago, the Lord Jesus was crucified at Calvary. We read in the New Testament that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). He is the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). **Just as a lamb was a substitute for the first-born of each Hebrew household, so the Lord Jesus died as a substitute for sinners** (Isaiah 53:4–6; 1 Peter 3:18).

Our sin provokes the righteous anger of God (Romans 1:18) but God has given his beloved Son to shed his blood on the cross as a propitiation for sin (Romans 3:25). A ‘propitiation’ is a sacrifice which turns aside wrath, appeasing the offended party. When we come to faith in Christ, God the Father sees the blood shed for us and his wrath is turned away from us. Even more wonderful, we are accepted into his family and enjoy his smile upon us instead of his frown. God says, *‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you.’* Is it any wonder that we rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ with great joy and gratitude?

The LORD gave the people favour

The first three verses of Exodus 11 appear to come in time after verses 4 to 8 where we find Moses still speaking to Pharaoh. John Currid takes the view that God spoke to Moses during his audience with Pharaoh, writing that the Hebrew appears to indicate that this was the case (COMMENTARY, volume 1, page 231). Moses warned Pharaoh that God would destroy the firstborn in every Egyptian family and the firstborn of all their animals (5–6). He then left Pharaoh *in great anger* (8). There is a righteous anger that burns for the glory of God (cp. Mark 3:5). We must always be very careful that our anger does not come from sinful attitudes, arising from pride or from feelings of resentment (Ephesians 4:26,31). Righteous anger comes from a tender, anguished heart that loves the Lord and desires his glory.

The promise given to Moses at the burning bush (3:21–22) was about to be fulfilled, as *the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians* (11:2–3; 12:35–36). **God's sovereignty is truly wonderful!** He so worked in the hearts of the Egyptians that they freely gave their gold and silver to the Israelites. Pharaoh's daughter had paid for Moses' princely upbringing (2:9), and now the Egyptians were to sponsor the Israelites' journey into freedom. Moreover, Moses, the leader of a despised and cruelly treated people, became very great in the land and was respected by Pharaoh's servants and subjects (3). God is wonderful in all his ways (Romans 11:33–35)!

The sovereign Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites but made the Egyptian population favourably disposed towards them. Is there someone who bears a resentful attitude toward you? Commit your way to the Lord and pray for them (Matthew 5:44). God often brings blessing out of trials and he works all things together for good.

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

(William Cowper)

A man named Joseph

There was a man named Joseph (30). Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council (Sanhedrin), had been a secret believer (John 19:38). Mark informs us that he was *a prominent council member ... coming and taking courage, went into Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*. Pilate would have recognised Joseph as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He sent for the centurion to confirm that Jesus was dead before granting Joseph's request (Mark 15:42–45). William Hendriksen points out that according to Roman law, those condemned to death lost the right to be buried (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, page 1043). God's hand was in all this for under normal circumstances Pilate would not have granted Joseph's request. Joseph's action meant that Jesus had an honourable burial and that Scripture was fulfilled (Isaiah 53:9; Acts 13:35–37).

Joseph was aided by Nicodemus. They may have had servants to help them as they extracted the nails that bound the corpse of Jesus to the cross and lifted him down. They acted speedily, and would have washed the body and then bound it with strips of linen and embalmed it with spices (see John 19:38–42). It would seem that Joseph and Nicodemus had begun their preparations when Jesus was condemned to death. Joseph laid Jesus in his unused family tomb, in a garden at Calvary (50–53; cp. Matthew 27:60; John 19:41–42). The women who had followed Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1) went into the tomb to see how the body of Jesus was laid (55). When they entered the tomb after the resurrection they would see the grave clothes lying in place but no body (24:3).

Joseph paid a price for his confession of Jesus. He knew that he would be cast out of the synagogue and from the council once his secret was out (cp. John 12:42). We hear no more of him after the Gospels; both he and Nicodemus would have been content to serve the Lord without seeking prominence in the infant church. **Are you a secret disciple?** Why are you fearful? The Lord can make the most timid person bold. If you confess Christ, you will be greatly blessed and strengthened.

Their words seemed to them like idle tales

The women who followed the Lord Jesus were faithful to the very end. They observed the burial of Jesus before going away to prepare spices and oils with which to anoint his body (23:49,55–56). The Sabbath ran from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday and the women waited until early Sunday morning before returning to the tomb. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb and that the body of Jesus was missing (1–3).

The perplexed women had a further surprise as two angels appeared to them. They were filled with fear and bowed their faces to the earth. The angels asked them, ‘*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*’ They told the women that Jesus had risen and reminded them of his words when he was in Galilee – that he would *be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again* (4–7; cp. 18:31–34). They then remembered his words and hurried to tell the good news to the eleven disciples; *and their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them* (8–11). Peter rushed to the tomb to check out the women’s story and found the cloths that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus. He went away marvelling at what had happened (12).

Many people still consider the death and resurrection of Christ to be ‘*idle tales*’ but those of us whom God has graciously saved know differently. The resurrection of Jesus is good news. Christ’s resurrection declares him *to be the Son of God with power* (Romans 1:4). Death could not hold him (Acts 2:24). He triumphed over the grave and his resurrection is a guarantee that all who belong to him will be raised at his coming to have new bodies which will be immune from weakness, pain, ageing and suffering (John 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3). **Let us persevere in proclaiming the wonderful gospel news to those around us, even though some will dismiss it as ‘idle tales’.**

I will never see your face again

John Currid writes, ‘We need constantly to keep in mind the truth that the exodus event is not merely a confrontation between Israel and Egypt. There is much more to it than that. We are witnessing a contest and conflict between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt. The gods of Egypt include Pharaoh himself (as the incarnation of Ra and Horus). ... The plagues are Yahweh’s means of bringing Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt to their knees. ... The Lord, however, has the ultimate goal of bringing glory and honour to himself through the plagues’ (STUDY COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, page 213).

Moses and Aaron had asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites go three days’ journey into the desert to sacrifice to God (5:1–3). The king had refused this request until after the fourth plague. He then suggested that they should remain in Egypt to sacrifice, a compromise which Moses turned down. Pharaoh again said that they could go, but not very far away (8:25–28); he again back on his promises (8:32; 9:28,35). When Moses warned him of the plague of locusts and his own servants asked him to be more flexible regarding the demands of Moses (4–7), Pharaoh suggested another compromise – that only the men of Israel go on the three-day journey to sacrifice. He then drove Moses and Aaron from his presence (8–11). The plague of locusts followed (12–20).

After the ninth plague (of darkness) Pharaoh gave permission for the Israelites to go, but on condition that they left behind all their livestock (24). Moses refused this compromise and demanded that Pharaoh should also provide the sacrifices and burnt offerings (25). The Egyptian king, angry and irritated, warned Moses that he never wanted to see his face again (28–29). Moses retorted, ‘*I will never see your face again*’ (29). **The Egyptian king had despised many God-given opportunities to repent, and this, his last chance, was also wasted.** If your heart is not right with God, let Pharaoh be a warning to you. God’s Spirit will not always strive with us (Genesis 6:3). Now is the time to repent and to seek the Lord (Isaiah 55:6–7).

I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God

God is very patient with sinners (cp. 2 Peter 3:9). Pharaoh had many opportunities to obey God but he continued to harden his heart. The Lord now sent Moses early in the morning with the message, ‘*Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: “Let my people go, that they may serve me, for at this time I will send all my plagues to your very heart, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth”*’ (13–14). Notice that God would send the plagues to the very heart that was hardening itself against him. Pharaoh had defiantly said, ‘*Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?*’ (5:2). He was finding out that God is sovereign over all things and wonderful in all his power (14; cp. 8:10). God’s message to him was, ‘*I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name (character) may be declared in all the earth*’ (16).

Moses warned Pharaoh that the next plague of very heavy hail would be more severe than anything ever seen in Egypt. He told the king the precise time of the plague – ‘*tomorrow about this time*’ (18). God would destroy what was left of the Egyptian livestock unless the animals were taken indoors for protection. The word of God spoken through Moses was now inspiring fear among some of the Egyptians and those of them who believed the warning of God’s word took the appropriate action and thus their animals were spared (18–20). The foolish ones disregarded God’s word and suffered the consequences (21–25). There was no hail in Goshen, where the Hebrews lived (26).

Pharaoh seemed to repent when he acknowledged his sin and the righteousness of God (27), but he grew more defiant in his sin (34). Moses was not deceived by his fine sounding words and he declared, ‘*I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God*’ (30). **It is not enough to profess Christ with our mouths. Our lives must match our lips (cp. Matthew 15:7–9).**

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe

Two downcast followers of Jesus were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day that he rose from the dead. As they discussed the events of the past few days, they were joined by the risen Lord but were restrained from recognising him. He asked them what they were talking about and why they were so sad (13–17). One of them, Cleopas, expressed surprise that he had not heard how Jesus of Nazareth had been condemned by the chief priests and rulers and had been crucified. They had entertained high hopes that he would have redeemed Israel. Like many Jews they had been mistaken in looking for the Christ (the Messiah) to rule over a visible and political kingdom. They had not been convinced by the report of the women that Jesus had risen from the dead (18–24).

Jesus said to them, ‘*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*’ He then opened up the Scriptures to prove that the Messiah had to suffer and to die before entering his glory (25–27). As they approached Emmaus, they persuaded the stranger to stay with them. When he prayed before the meal, their eyes were opened to recognise Jesus and he vanished from their sight. They then remembered how their hearts had burned within them when he opened the Scriptures to them (28–32).

Many Christians have had their faith shaken through listening to the useless ideas and theories of those who scorn the Bible. They have become slow of heart to believe in all that the Bible teaches. Does this describe you? Has your Bible been closed except for a few rushed moments each day? Have you lost the delight of heartfelt praise and worship? Has prayer become a cold and barren exercise, rather than a believing and joyful privilege when you bring your requests to God? Is it any wonder that your mind is in turmoil like the two on the Emmaus road? Come now to your risen Saviour. Confess your sin and unbelief, and ask him to strengthen your faith. **He will hear you and restore to you the joy of your salvation.**

It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead

After the risen Lord had revealed himself to the two at Emmaus, they were so excited that they immediately returned to Jerusalem to share their good news. They found a rejoicing company of the disciples and others who told them that the Lord had appeared to Simon Peter. The Emmaus pair told them of their encounter with Jesus and how they had recognised him in the breaking of bread (31–35). While they were speaking, Jesus appeared and stood among them. He greeted them with the words, ‘Peace to you’ (36). He said this to those who had forsaken him three days earlier when he was arrested, one of them denying him. No words of condemnation fell from his lips. How gracious and how kind is our blessed Lord!

They were terrified, thinking that they had seen a ghost. The risen Lord Jesus asked them why they were troubled and doubting. He reminded them that a spirit does not have flesh and bones and he invited them to touch him and to feel him; he further proved his bodily resurrection by eating with them (37–43). Jesus then reminded them of the things that he had taught them when he was still with them. He opened their understanding to comprehend all that the Old Testament Scriptures taught concerning himself (44–45).

He then told them that *it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations* (46–47). **It is just as important to preach the necessity of repentance as it is to preach the death and resurrection of Christ for sinners, yet it is a neglected teaching among many professing Christians.** Without repentance there can be no remission of sins, no salvation. The apostles were witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, but before they spread the good news they were to wait in Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father when they would be *endued with power from on high* (48–49).

The LORD will make a difference

If Pharaoh had entertained any lingering doubts about the supremacy of Jehovah (*‘the LORD God’*) over his gods, they were quickly dispelled with the next three plagues. Moses told him, *‘The LORD will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt’* (4). God sent a plague upon the livestock of the Egyptians which killed many of the animals. The expression, *‘all the livestock of Egypt’* means ‘all types of livestock’ not every single animal. Some livestock was left at the time of the seventh plague (verse 19). Pharaoh sent to Goshen (where the Hebrews lived) and found that their livestock had been protected from the plague which had devastated the Egyptian livestock (7). Goshen had also been free of the previous plague (8:22).

The Lord then instructed Moses to take ashes from a furnace and to scatter it upwards in the presence of Pharaoh. The oppressed Hebrews toiled to bake bricks in such a furnace. The ashes resulting from their suffering would now be used to make their oppressors suffer through a plague of boils. **There is a grim humour in the judgment of God as he vindicates his people.** Pharaoh saw the humiliation of his magicians, when they were so affected by boils that they were unable to stand before Moses (11). The Egyptian king was able to see and experience the difference that the Lord had made between the Egyptians and Moses, who was unaffected by the plague. He still hardened his heart however, and refused to listen to the Lord’s word. When men are hardened in their sin, they will refuse to repent even when confronted by miracles. We know, however, that God is able to humble the hardest sinner and bring him to repentance.

When the day of death or judgment comes, God will also *make a difference* between those whose sins have been forgiven through Christ and those who have rejected the gospel (Matthew 25:31–46). If you are not a Christian, I plead with you to make your peace with God by turning from your sinful ways. Ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you and to save you. There will be no second chance after death.

The LORD did according to the word of Moses

God brought the third plague on Egypt without giving any warning to Pharaoh. The Lord instructed Moses to tell Aaron to *strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt* (16). The magicians knew that they were beaten when they failed to produce lice with their enchantments. They acknowledged *'the finger of God'* in the plagues, but Pharaoh would not admit defeat (17–19). He would have needed his early morning dip in the Nile to give him some relief from the lice (20).

The Lord again instructed Moses to go to Pharaoh repeating his demand to let his people go, that they may serve him (20; cp. verse 1). If he refused this demand, God would send swarms of flies throughout Egypt, but Goshen, where the Israelites dwelled, would be spared. The Lord's message for Pharaoh was that he would do all these things *'that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the land'* (21–22).

When God plagued Egypt with flies, Pharaoh promised to allow the Israelites to go to sacrifice to God as Moses had demanded (20–28). He went back on his promises after Moses prayed for the removal of the flies (31–32). He wanted to be rid of the plagues which were causing so much physical discomfort, but he was not willing to see the plague of his own sinful rebellion removed, and he hardened his heart (32).

Moses, who had been so reluctant to lead Israel and to confront Pharaoh, had greatly grown in his confidence in God (10, 29). It is as we obey the Lord, that we will prove him, and see our faith strengthened. Moses and Aaron had done *just as the LORD commanded them* (7:6,20). God blesses and honours those who obey his will. It is significant that *the LORD did according to the word of Moses* (13,31). **Obedience to God may be costly, but it is the only way to real joy in the Christian life.** Surely, if we love the Lord Jesus, who died to save us, we will gladly obey him (John 14:15).

And they worshipped him

The Lord Jesus appeared to the apostles and to others and taught them over a period of forty days before he ascended into heaven (cp. Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3–7). He then led the disciples out to Bethany which is on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. As he lifted up his hands and blessed them, he ascended into heaven (50–51; see Acts 1:9–11). What a wonderful memory those disciples had of their Master when he left them! He was in the act of blessing them and they would continue to know countless blessings heaped upon them from heaven. The same is true of every believer. We have an abundance of spiritual blessings and the smile of God upon our lives (cp. Ephesians 1:3).

The disciples no longer had any doubts about the resurrection of their beloved Master. They were quite clear in their understanding that Jesus is God. *And they worshipped him* (52). It would be blasphemous to worship Jesus if he were not God. The Gospel of Luke begins with a description of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, in the temple (1:5–23). It ends with the disciples continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Their sorrow had given way to *great joy* (52–53).

The Lord Jesus now sits *at the right hand of the Majesty on high*. From that exalted position *he ever lives to make intercession* for all who come to God through him (Hebrews 1:3; 7:25). One day he will return as King in great power and glory when everyone shall see him and when every believer will be taken to be with him for ever (Matthew 25:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; Revelation 1:7). We serve a risen, ascended Saviour. **Let us persevere in our work for the Lord, whatever the disappointments and obstacles. Our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).**

EXODUS

21 AUGUST

Exodus 8:1–15

There is no one like the LORD our God

‘The book of Exodus is the book of redemption. The Greek name ‘Exodus’ (lit. ‘going out’) here describes how God brought the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. By redemption we understand that the Redeemer not only delivers his people out of bondage but also brings them into a special relationship with himself, making them his own purchased possession, his “peculiar treasure” (19:5).’ – NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY, 1958, page 106).

The Old Testament Scriptures testify of Christ (John 5:39; cp. Luke 24:27). In the book of Exodus Christ is foreshadowed as our passover Lamb (12:5, 21–27; cp. 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19). The blood of the covenant (24:8) foreshadows the blood of the Lord Jesus in the new covenant (cp. Matthew 26:28). The worship and sacrifices of the tabernacle were *a shadow of the good things to come* (Hebrews 10:1).

The Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years, from the time of Jacob’s emigration (Genesis ch. 46) until they left after the first Passover (12:40). Moses lived for 120 years (Deuteronomy 34:7). The first 40 years of his life were spent as a prince in Egypt; the second 40 as a fugitive in the land of Midian. He was 80 years of age when he led the people of Israel out of Egypt (7:7; cp. Acts 7:23, 30, 36). The birth of Moses was therefore some 350 years after Jacob, his sons and their families had moved to Egypt.

Outline of Exodus

The Exodus — The Power of God (chapters 1 to 18)

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| a. Israel’s Bondage in Egypt | 1:1–22 |
| b. Birth and Preparation of Moses | 2:1 to 4:31 |
| c. Pharaoh’s Hardening and the Plagues | 5:1 to 11:10 |
| d. The Passover and the Exodus of Israel | 12:1 to 15:27 |
| e. The Journey to Mount Sinai | 16:1 to 18:27 |

The Lord told Moses to go to Pharaoh repeating his demand to let his people go that they might serve him (1; cp. 7:16). He was to warn the king that if he refused this demand, God would send a plague of frogs throughout Egypt (1–4).

The Egyptian gods were connected with the forces of nature. They had a Nile god and they also believed that frogs were a symbol of divine power which represented fertility. One of the important Egyptian goddesses was Hekhet, who was pictured as a human female with a frog’s head. She was supposed to control the multiplication of the frogs in Egypt but was rendered powerless when the Lord brought the plague of frogs upon the land. The plagues were a judgment upon the gods of Egypt (cp. 12:12). The River Nile became so polluted in the first plague that the Egyptians loathed its water (7:18). The frogs invaded every part of the Egyptians’ homes, getting into their food and into their beds (2–4).

Pharaoh was driven to send for Moses and Aaron to ask them to pray that God would remove the frogs. He also promised that he would *let the people go, that they might sacrifice to the LORD* (8). Moses wanted the king to know that the removal of the frogs would be no coincidence, but an answer to prayer. He gave Pharaoh the option of saying just when the frogs should be removed (9). Pharaoh had defiantly said, ‘*Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?*’ (5:2). He was now finding out *that there is no one like the LORD our God* (10). The frogs died following Moses’ prayer *and the land stank* because of the rotting heaps of frogs’ corpses. Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, however (12–15).

There is no one like the LORD our God. Think about the great power, the unsearchable wisdom and the majestic holiness of God. Worship him with adoration and with joy and encourage yourself in the face of trials and difficulties. Happy are the people whose God is the LORD! (Psalm 144:15).

They also did in like manner with their enchantments

The power of Satan lies behind all false religion (cp. Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17). The Egyptians worshipped a number of gods and their religion was not lacking in miracles. When Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh, it became a serpent. The sorcerers and magicians were able to imitate the miracle. *They also did in like manner with their enchantments* (11). The overwhelming power of Jehovah was seen when Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods (12). They were also able to imitate the next two miracles that God worked through Moses and Aaron. They turned water into blood (20–22) and brought on a plague of frogs (8:6–7).

We must always remember however that Satan is limited in what he is able to do. The Egyptian magicians were confronted by a far greater power. They were unable to turn their serpents back into rods, or blood back into water, or to get rid of the frogs. They were unable to imitate any of the remaining plagues or to reverse them. They acknowledged, *'This is the finger of God'* (8:19).

Satan still deceives millions with *signs and lying wonders* (2 Thessalonians 2:9; cp. Acts 8:9–11) through false religion. We have seen an explosion of occult activities in Britain in recent years. Spiritist mediums and astrologers have become television celebrities and most newspapers have horoscopes. Psychic fairs are common and new age occult shops are found in almost every town throughout the land.

We must never forget that like Moses, we too are engaged in spiritual warfare (cp. 2 Corinthians 10:3–5). We must not neglect our communion with God and our times of prayer and Bible reading. We need to be strong in the Lord and to put on the Christian armour (Ephesians 6:10–18). The gospel has a far greater power than that of Satan. Let us pray much for the advance of God's kingdom and seek to make our good news known to needy sinners.

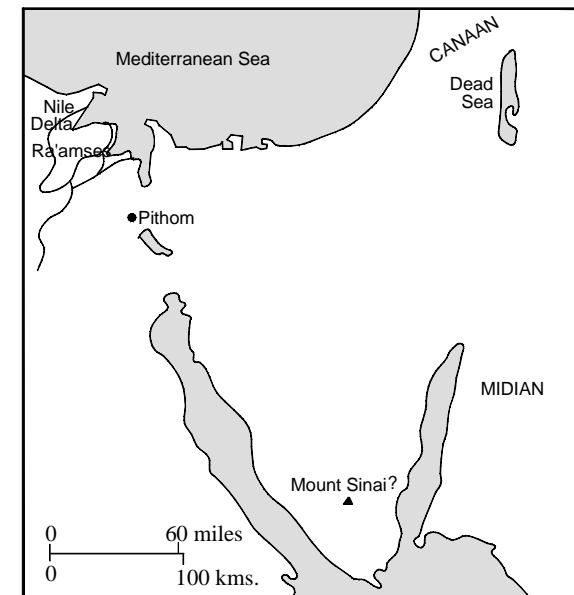
The Law — The Precepts of God (chapters 19 to 24)

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|----|------------------------------------|----------------|
| a. | Arrival of Israel at Sinai | 19:1–19 |
| b. | God meets Moses on Summit of Sinai | 19:20–25 |
| c. | The Ten Commandments | 20:1–17 |
| d. | Various Laws | 20:18 to 23:33 |
| e. | The Covenant ratified | 24:1–8 |
| f. | Moses again ascends Sinai | 24:9–18 |

The Tabernacle — The Presence of God (chapters 25 to 40)

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|----|--|---------------|
| a. | Design of Tabernacle and its Furniture | 25:1 to 27:21 |
| b. | The Garments and Service of the Priests | 28:1 to 30:38 |
| c. | The Craftsmen for building the Tabernacle | 31:1–11 |
| d. | The Sabbath | 31:12–18 |
| e. | Israel's Idolatry and Moses' Intercession | 32:1 to 33:23 |
| f. | The Renewal of the Covenant | 34:1–35 |
| g. | The Construction of the Tabernacle | 35:1 to 40:33 |
| h. | The Glory of the Lord fills the Tabernacle | 40:34–38 |

Sketch-map of Goshen, Midian and Sinai



But the midwives feared God

The names of the eleven brothers of Joseph who came to Egypt with Jacob are listed in verses 1 to 4. The population of the Hebrews who went to Egypt during the famine greatly increased in the years following the death of Joseph. They prospered and the Egyptians began to feel threatened by their presence (7–10; cp. Genesis 46:8–27). The new king over Egypt was possibly the first of a new dynasty of Pharaohs who had no sense of gratitude to the Hebrews for saving his nation from famine under Joseph’s leadership. Pharaoh was determined to halt the population explosion among the Israelites so he enslaved them and forced them to toil on his building projects (9–11).

The Egyptians made the lives of the Israelites *bitter with hard bondage* (14) but the more they afflicted them the more the Israelites increased in number (12). Pharaoh then ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child at birth (16). By doing this, he knew that the Hebrew race would die out as the remaining women would be absorbed by marriage into Egyptian families. *But the midwives feared God* (17). That ‘but’ changed everything, and the tyrant’s cruel plans were frustrated. The Lord honoured those brave women who feared him more than the king of Egypt (20–21). They had saved families and God rewarded them with families of their own.

The answer to the fear of man is to have a healthy fear of God (Psalm 34:9; Proverbs 29:25). Such godly fear produces boldness and an obedience to God’s Word that is undaunted by the threats of men (cp. Acts 5:28–29). We must have that same fear of God if we are to know blessing and usefulness in our Christian lives (Hebrews 12:28–29). Pharaoh was determined to destroy the Hebrews and he ordered his own people to massacre the male babies born to the Israelite women (22). Let us remember that the promised Saviour was to come through the Hebrews and Satan was determined to destroy them. The devil was behind the persecution of the Israelites, but he was unable to thwart the purposes of almighty God.

I will harden Pharaoh’s heart

Moses was not convinced that Pharaoh would listen to him (6:30). The Lord then told him that he had made him ‘*as God*’ to Pharaoh, with Aaron as his prophet, doing the speaking to Pharaoh (7:1–2). There was a contest to be fought with Moses representing God and Pharaoh representing Satan. The Egyptian king would refuse to heed Moses but in God’s time he would have to release the Israelites. The Egyptians would have to acknowledge the Lord (3–5). Moses and Aaron were old men, but age did not keep them from obedience to God (6–7).

What are we to make of the statement, ‘*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart*’? (3). The book of Exodus demonstrates the truth of God’s absolute sovereignty again and again, and this can be seen in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (3; cp. 4:21; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). God sovereignly controls kings (Deuteronomy 2:30; Proverbs 21:1) and nations (Joshua 11:19–20; Psalm 105:25). Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart? The answer is found in Exodus 9:16 and Romans 9:17–18. God did so for his own glory, to make known his power and his name (i.e. his character) in overthrowing the tyrant. It is important to notice that Pharaoh was not an unwilling puppet in the hands of God. Though God hardened his heart, we also read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34–35). The Lord is very patient with stubborn sinners (Romans 9:22), but they still refuse to repent (cp. Revelation 16:9,11).

Remember, we are all answerable to God, but he is answerable to no one. The truth of God’s sovereignty brings great comfort to the believer (Psalm 97:10). **When we meditate on the unsearchable judgments of our all-wise and sovereign God, let us not speculate on why he acts in certain ways, but bow in humble worship and adoration (Romans 11:33–36).**

*The Lord is King! who then shall dare
Resist his will, distrust his care,
Or murmur at his wise decrees,
Or doubt his royal promises?*

(Josiah Conder)

Now you shall see what I will do

This chapter contains a genealogy of the Levites (verses 14–27) but we will restrict our comments to the narrative in the other verses. God graciously reassured his discouraged servant with precious promises, reminding Moses of his covenant commitment to Israel (3–5). He said, ‘*Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh*’ (1). God repeated to Moses, ‘*I am the LORD*’ (2,6,7,8). The one making these promises was the Lord. Wicked Pharaoh was daring to fight the Lord. God reinforced his promise to Moses seven times with the words ‘*I will*’ (6–8). **There is no hint of possible failure in the promises of God. They are certain and reliable.** ‘*I am the LORD ... I will ... I will.*’ Never forget that even the most hopeless circumstances make no difference whatever to the promises of God. God promised Moses that he would take the Israelites to himself for a people and that he would be their God (7). Matthew Henry comments, ‘More than this we need not ask, we cannot have, to make us happy.’

The people of Israel, broken in spirit and weary from toil, would not listen to Moses (9). The Lord told him to go to Pharaoh with the same message as before, but Moses was still full of apprehension and doubt. If the enslaved Israelites would not listen to him why should the Egyptian king? (11–13,28–30). There was to be no change in the method or the message because of setbacks. There is a vital lesson for us here because we live in times when many crave quick results in God’s work. We must not abandon the preaching of God’s Word or the unremitting toil of faithful service because we lack success. **We need grace from God to persevere. We will then see what he will be pleased to do.**

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

So she had compassion on him

The Hebrews were suffering fierce persecution but God was preparing a deliverer to bring them out of their slavery. The parents of Moses were both Levites (1); their names are given in chapter 6:18–20; 1 Chronicles 6:1–3). Amram was a grandson of Levi and he married his aunt Jochebed who was a daughter of Levi. The Lord later set apart the tribe of Levi for the work and service of the tabernacle; the priests were taken from the Kohathite branch of the tribe to which Moses and his brother Aaron belonged.

Moses’ parents, like the midwives, were fearless in the face of the command of wicked Pharaoh that all male Hebrew babies should be thrown into the river to drown (1:22); God richly rewarded their faith (cp. Hebrews 11:23). When they could no longer hide their baby at home, his mother hid him inside an ark of bulrushes among the reeds by the bank of the River Nile (3). Pharaoh’s daughter found the baby in the river where babies were being drowned and *she had compassion on him* (6); she too defied her father’s command.

God arranged events so that the tyrant’s daughter paid Moses’ mother to nurse her own son (9). Moses was later brought to the palace as a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He was given the finest education in Egypt and prepared for leadership – all at Pharaoh’s expense. Our sovereign God laughs at the puny efforts of the wicked in their opposition to him (Psalm 2:4).

There is a daring element in God’s sovereignty. The Lord, having preserved Moses from death, kept him from all the evil influences of the court of Pharaoh when he was taken there (10). We must not overlook the influence of a godly mother upon Moses in his early years. What a challenge and an encouragement this is to Christian parents. **We must never underestimate the influence of a godly home as we seek to train our children in a hostile, godless world.** *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

God heard ... God remembered

Moses was forty years old (Acts 7:23) when *he went out to his brethren* (11). He had been brought up as a prince, but he renounced his status and all his comforts, *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin* (Hebrews 11:24–26). He made himself aware of the wretched condition of his own people and was not indifferent to the cruel actions of an Egyptian whom he saw beating a Hebrew. He killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand to cover up what he had done (11–12).

The following day he intervened in a fight between two Hebrew men. The man who was in the wrong challenged Moses, *‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’* Moses realised that though he had hidden the body of the Egyptian in the sand the previous day, his secret was out. His worst fears were realised when Pharaoh heard of the incident and sought to kill him (13–14). He fled to the land of Midian where his protection of the daughters of Reuel from bullying shepherds led to his marriage to one of those daughters (15–17).

God is not hasty in the training and preparation of his servants. Moses’ training was to continue for a further forty years in the obscurity of Midian. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by Keturah (Genesis 25:1–2). Reuel (Jethro) was a religious man who confessed his faith in the God of Israel. He was also a wise man (18:10–24).

The bitter suffering of the Israelites continued year after year, but God had not forgotten his people or his promises. *So God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant* (24). Though not obvious to human eyes, God was working all the time, overruling the wickedness of Pharaoh and preparing a deliverer (Moses) to bring his people out of their bondage. We often become discouraged when evil seems to prevail and the cause of Christ languishes. **Let us persevere and look to the Lord who is working out his sovereign purposes. He does hear us and he remembers his covenant commitment to us.**

Why is it that you have sent me?

The trial of strength between Moses and Pharaoh was more than a battle between two men. It was a conflict between God and Satan, between light and darkness. As Moses acted in obedience to God, the dark powers of Satan and the forces of hell were ranged against him. Pharaoh dismissed the request of Moses and Aaron with arrogant defiance, *‘Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD’* (2). The proud tyrant was soon to discover the greatness of our sovereign God. He was soon to find that there is nothing false about God’s word (9; cp. 7:5).

The pathway of obedience to God is rarely smooth. Satan sees to that. Pharaoh accused the Israelites of laziness and made impossible demands upon them. He was obviously determined to teach Moses and Aaron a lesson. He summoned his taskmasters and the Hebrew officers (or ‘foremen’) the very same day. He commanded that they were not only to produce the same quota of bricks, but also to gather the straw which was necessary to bind together the mud used in their manufacture. When the quotas were not met, the officers were beaten. They went to Pharaoh to beg an easing of the burden, but he refused to change his conditions and dismissed them. They left the palace and turned on Moses and Aaron, blaming them for the trouble that had befallen them (6–19). Moses now had his own people against him as well as Pharaoh (19–21). He did the right thing, the thing the officers had failed to do – he went to God in prayer (22–23). Do you first pray to the Lord when you are in trouble, before you complain to others?

Many a servant of God has asked, *‘Why is it that you have sent me?’* (22). **Satan knew the answer and was doing all in his power to keep Moses from pursuing the path of obedience to God.** Moses’ faith was to be sorely tried in his leadership of God’s people. We must never be surprised at seeming setbacks as we seek to serve God. He will bring us through and we will be all the stronger in faith and in our knowledge of him (1 Peter 1:6–7; 4:12–14).

Then they bowed their heads and worshipped

The call of God did not mean that Moses could disregard his family responsibilities. Moses asked Jethro to let him return to Egypt to see how his people were faring and it was given (18). The Hebrew expression translated ‘*are still alive*’ is used with reference to their welfare. When God calls us, he also prepares the way for us. The Lord assured Moses that his enemies in Egypt were dead but warned him that he would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Moses returned. He then returned to Egypt with his wife and sons *with the rod of God in his hand* (19–20). The king of Egypt would not let the people go despite the wonders that he would see Moses perform with the rod (21). Moses was to give Pharaoh a stern warning. Israel was God’s *son*, his *firstborn*. If Pharaoh refused to release Israel, then God would kill Pharaoh’s son, his first-born (22–23).

What are we to make of verse 24? John Currid argues convincingly from the Hebrew that it was Moses’ first-born son Gershom whom the Lord sought to kill (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, page 117). Moses had sinned by failing to circumcise Gershom. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and his people (Genesis 17:7–14). Moses may have neglected the Lord’s command because of his wife’s opposition. God took drastic action to bring him to obedience, only sparing Gershom after he had been circumcised by Zipporah (25–26).

The Lord sent Aaron into the wilderness to meet his brother. They gathered together the leaders of their people and did the signs described in verses 3 to 9 in their sight (27–30). Moses’ fears (1) were unfounded. **We too may be fearful about the future and burdened by anxious thoughts.** If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness we will not worry about the future which we know is under his wise and loving control (Matthew 6:33–34). *The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel ... then they bowed their heads and worshipped* (31).

Holy ground

Moses had been in the royal court of Egypt but he was now a shepherd, working for his father-in-law (1). This was a lowly occupation which Egyptians despised (Genesis 46:34). He was leading his flock at Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai) when *the Angel of the LORD* appeared to him. ‘*The Angel of the LORD*’ is more than an angel – he is God! He is identified with God in today’s reading (2,4). Many Bible commentators believe that ‘*the Angel of the LORD*’ describes the Lord Jesus when he appeared to men before he came to earth at Bethlehem.

Moses was fascinated by the strange phenomenon of a burning bush which was not consumed by the fire and he turned aside for a closer look. The Bible describes God as *a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:29). Fire is a symbol of his blazing purity and of his glorious holiness. God told Moses that he was standing on *holy ground* (5). In such a place he was overwhelmed with awe and fear (5–6).

A sense of the majesty and awesomeness of God is often missing from our worship. A. W. Tozer describes worship as ‘a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love’ (WORSHIP – THE MISSING JEWEL OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH). What do you know about true worship? When someone has a true experience of God, they are never the same again. Samson’s parents were awestruck in the presence of God (Judges 13:20–21); Isaiah was woebegone as he felt his own wretchedness and sin (Isaiah 6:5); the apostle John fell at his feet as dead (Revelation 1:17). **Let us always worship God with joyful reverence and godly fear.**

*Lo, God is here! Let us adore,
And own how holy is this place!
Let all within us feel his power,
And silent bow before his face;
Who know his power, his grace who prove,
Serve him with awe, with reverence love.*

(Gerhard Tersteegen, translated by John Wesley)

I AM WHO I AM

The Lord assured Moses that he had seen the oppression of his people and that he had heard their cry. He promised that he would deliver them from the Egyptians and bring them into a good fertile land, rich in pasture. Though God told him that he was to lead the people out of Egypt, to take them to a good land (7–10). Moses felt very much his own inadequacy. He responded by asking, ‘*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?*’ (11). His attitude displayed a lack of confidence in God who then promised, ‘*I will certainly be with you,*’ and said that when Moses had brought the people out of Egypt, he would *serve God on this mountain* (12). **The Lord did not give Moses a crash course to improve his self-esteem. What he needed to have was a higher esteem of God.**

Do you feel inadequate to serve God? You are quite correct. You are inadequate. You cannot do anything without his grace and strength to help you (cp. John 15:5). You must learn to depend on him at all times. and learn more of our great God and of his faithfulness. This was the lesson that Moses had to learn. When he asked God his name (13), he was requesting that God would reveal to him something of his character. God said to Moses, ‘*I AM WHO I AM*’ (14). Dale Ralph Davis writes with reference to verses 12 and 14: ‘God does not here stress his being or existence so much as his presence and “Yahweh” captures and summarises that thought – **he is the God who will be present to be all that his people need him to be**’ (THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE MUCK OF LIFE – PSALMS 1–12, page 8).

The Lord told Moses what to tell the people and to assure them that he would bring them out of Egypt. They would face many problems because Pharaoh would refuse to let them go, but would eventually yield to their demands after God had struck Egypt with his wonders (15–21). The Lord promised Moses more than he would have dared expect (21–22; cp. 12:35–36). **For those who will trust and obey him, the Lord still does great and wondrous things for his own glory in the church (cp. Ephesians 3:20–21).**

Please send by the hand of whomever else you may send

Moses, despite his privileged upbringing, was painfully aware of the greatness of the task to which God was calling him (3:11). He was unbelieving and reluctant, wanting God to send someone else (13). Look at his excuses:

- ‘*But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, “The LORD has not appeared to you”*’ (1). God had already told him that the people would heed his voice (3:18). Moses dared to contradict God, such is the evil of an unbelieving heart. The Lord equipped him with the ability to perform certain miracles, so that the people would believe him. This is the first mention of the staff with which Moses and Aaron would perform many miracles in Egypt (2–9).
- ‘*I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue*’ (10). God promised Moses that he would take care of this problem (11–12), but he still asked God to send someone else. ‘*O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send*’ (13 – ‘*O my Lord, please send someone else*’; English Standard Version). Is it any wonder that the Lord was angry with him (14)? The Lord then told Moses that Aaron would be his spokesman to the people (14–17).

Is God speaking to your heart, challenging you to some avenue of service, at home within the church, somewhere else in Britain, or abroad? Are there obvious needs in your church which you know you could meet? Dare you leave all the work in the church to ‘the faithful few’? If you really love the Lord, your love will be seen in willing, joyful and sacrificial service for him. **Do not make excuses or suggest that God send someone else.** Whom God calls he equips!

*Saviour! Thy dying love
Thou gavest me;
Nor should I aught withhold,
My Lord from thee;
In love my soul would bow,
My heart fulfil its vow,
Some offering bring thee now,
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps)