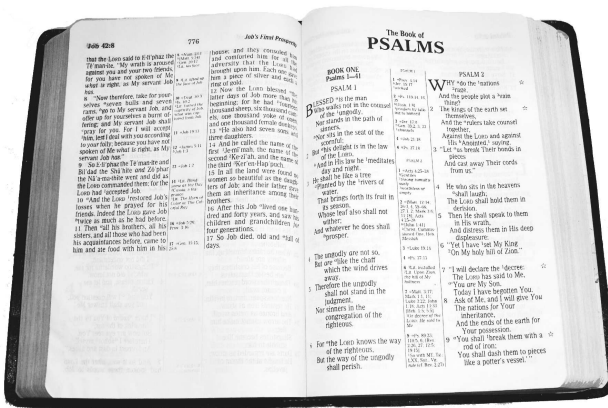


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



August 2021

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

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He delivered Jesus to their will

Jesus was sent back to Pilate who summoned the chief priests and the people to announce his verdict on Jesus. He said three times that he found no fault in Jesus and that Herod had also found nothing in him worthy of death (4,14–15,22). There was a custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover feast, and Pilate sought to embarrass the chief priests by offering to release Barabbas, a notorious criminal, who was a murderer, or Jesus. He said that he would have Jesus chastened (beaten) and then released. He was prepared to have a man whom he had said was not guilty beaten; this would have been a great injustice but worse was to follow (13–16; Matthew 27:15–20).

Pilate expected the crowd to ask for the release of Jesus but the wicked chief priests and elders were so determined to have Jesus crucified that they and the mob with them shouted, *‘Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas’* (18). The irony is that they had accused Jesus of being a troublemaker (2,5), but Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and also murder (19). Pilate again told them that he wanted to release Jesus, but they shouted, *‘Crucify him, crucify him’* (20–21). Pilate asked them the third time, *‘Why, what evil has he done? I will therefore chastise him and let him go’* but his question was not answered (22). *They denied the Holy One and the Just* (Acts 3:14) and asked for the release of a murderer, and *he delivered Jesus to their will* (23–25). **The guilty man was set free and Christ the innocent was condemned. The Lord Jesus died to save guilty sinners, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).**

*Give me a sight, O Saviour,
Of thy wondrous love for me,
Of the love that brought thee down to earth,
To die at Calvary.*

*O make me understand it,
Help me to take it in,
What it meant to thee, the Holy One,
To bear away my sin.*

(Katharine A.M. Kelly)

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

The Lord Jesus was led out of Jerusalem bearing his cross (John 19:16–17), but he was soon unable to bear it because of exhaustion and the terrible injuries inflicted on him by the Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20). Simon, from Cyrene (north coast of Africa, Libya), was compelled to bear the cross of Jesus to Calvary (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 '*Daughters of Jerusalem*' were not the women who had faithfully followed Jesus (eg. Mary Magdalene). They were inhabitants of Jerusalem who may have heard him teaching that very week, and who recognised that he was the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice. Jesus was full of pity for these women and he turned to them and told them not to weep for him but for themselves and for their children. Childless women (whom some considered to be cursed) would be blessed because they would be spared the anguish of seeing their children killed at the destruction of Jerusalem, when there would be great terror and slaughter (27–30).

This prophecy was fulfilled forty years later when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem following the Jewish rebellion against their rule. The siege led to famine, starvation and terrible suffering and the slaughter of a million people. Verse 31 was a common proverb which may have meant here, 'If they (the Romans) do this to someone (Jesus) who is innocent, what will they do to those who are guilty?'

They crucified the Lord Jesus between two criminals *and they divided his garments and cast lots* (34; a fulfilment of Psalm 22:18). Jesus prayed for those who mocked him, condemned and crucified him. His prayer, '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*' (34) was soon answered with the repentance of the dying robber (39–43), and seemingly, the Roman centurion (47). **Do you pray for those who have wronged you (Matthew 5:44–45)?**

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

The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees rejected the claim of Jesus to be the promised Messiah (*'the Christ'*) and they hated him because he said that he is 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 if it were not true. Muslims also hate and vigorously oppose the truth that Jesus is the Son of God.

As the Lord Jesus hung the cross, his enemies gloated over the apparent helplessness of the One who said that he was the Son of God, 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 greater 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 us.

Had Jesus chosen to come down from the cross, there would be no way of salvation from sin. He obeyed the will of God the Father to fulfil his plan to save sinners (Philippians 2:8; Acts 2:23). *By one Man's obedience many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). **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 robbers 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 had great faith, trusting in Jesus who was then dying in great weakness and crowned with thorns. The thief 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). This was not an eclipse of the moon (the Passover is celebrated at full moon). At 3.00 pm Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*’ (44–46). He chose exactly when he should die (John 10:17,18).

The curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy in the temple (Exodus 26:31–33; cp. Hebrews 9:3) was torn in two (45). This double curtain was 90 feet (14.4 metres) high; it could not have been torn by human hands. Only the high priest was permitted to go through this veil into the Most Holy when he made atonement for the sin of the people. Jesus died to allow access to God the Father for all who trust in 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 who had been condemned as a criminal. He glorified God, exclaiming, ‘*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)

A man named Joseph

There was a man named Joseph, a good and a just man (30) who had been a secret believer (John 19:38). Mark informs us that he was a *prominent council member* who plucked up courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (Mark 15:42–43). The Roman governor would have recognised Joseph of Arimathea as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He sent for the centurion to confirm that Jesus was dead before granting Joseph's request (Mark 15:44–45). 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 who was a Pharisee and respected Jewish teacher (John 3:1,10). They may have had servants to help them as they extracted the nails that bound the body of Jesus to the cross, and lifted him down. They would have washed his body and then wrapped it in a linen cloth 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. They laid Jesus in Joseph's unused family tomb, in a garden at Calvary (50–53; cp. Matthew 27:59–60; 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).

Joseph and Nicodemus knew that they would pay a price for their confession of Jesus. They would be cast out of the synagogue and lose their friends on the Sanhedrin and among the scribes and Pharisees (cp. John 12:42). We hear no more of them after the Gospel accounts, but they would have the joy of seeing priests and Pharisees being saved (Acts 6:7; 23:6). **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 his burial before leaving to prepare spices and oils with which to anoint his body (23:49,55–56). The Sabbath was observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset and the women returned to the tomb early on Sunday morning. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb, and when they went in, they did not find the body of Jesus (1–3).

The perplexed women had a further surprise when two angels appeared to them. *They were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth.* The angels asked them, *‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!’* They reminded the women that Jesus had told them 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 remembered his words* and went to tell the good news to the eleven disciples and others; *and their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them* (8–11). Peter ran to the tomb to check out the women’s story and saw the linen 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 which declares him *to be the Son of God with power* (Romans 1:4). Death could not hold him (Acts 2:24). He triumphed over death and his resurrection guarantees 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*’.**

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe

Two downcast followers of the Lord Jesus were walking the seven miles (11 kilometres) from Jerusalem to Emmaus discussing the events of the past few days (13–14). As they were talking and reasoning, *Jesus himself drew near* but they were restrained from recognising him. It is encouraging to know that he is near his people in times of despair and sadness! 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 that Jesus of Nazareth who was a mighty Prophet, had been condemned by the chief priests and rulers, and had been crucified. They had hoped that he would have redeemed Israel but that hope was now crushed. Their gloom was not lifted by the report of the women who said 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 and broke the bread, their eyes were opened to recognise Jesus. Perhaps they also seen the nail-prints in his hands? He vanished from their sight and they remembered how their hearts had burned within them when he talked with them on the road and opened the Scriptures to them (28–32).

Many Christians have had their faith shaken through listening to the useless ideas and theories concerning Jesus 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 left unread 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? If this is true of you, 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 forgive you. **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 the disciples and others were with them, who said, *'The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon Peter'*. The Emmaus pair told them of their meeting with Jesus and how they had recognised him in the breaking of bread (33–35). 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 Lord Jesus asked them, *'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'* They had to be convinced that he was the same Jesus who had been crucified to dispel any lingering doubts that they had concerning his resurrection, which they were to proclaim with certainty and boldness. He further proved his bodily resurrection by eating with them (37–43).

Jesus then reminded them of the things that he had taught them during his ministry. He opened their understanding to comprehend the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures 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, yet it is a neglected teaching among some professing Christians.** Without repentance there can be no remission of sins, no salvation. Jesus told the apostles and those with them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father when they would be *endued with power from on high* (48–49; Acts 1:4).

And they worshipped him

The Lord Jesus appeared to the apostles and many others and taught them over a period of forty days before he ascended into heaven (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, where *he lifted up his hands and blessed them* (50). William Hendriksen comments, **‘This act of blessing is more than mere well-wishing. It is an effective impartation of welfare, peace, and power’** (COMMENTARY ON LUKE, page 1076). Think about this when you pray for God’s blessing on someone (see Numbers 6:24–26).

As Jesus blessed them, he ascended into heaven (50–51; see Acts 1:9–11). They would continue to know blessings heaped upon them from heaven. The same is true of everyone who is trusting in Christ and obeying his Word. They have the blessing and the smile of God upon their lives (cp. Ephesians 1:3).

The disciples no longer had any doubts about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. 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 trials and difficulties we face. Our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).**

EXODUS

‘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).

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).

A recommended Commentary on the Book of Exodus

For further study of the Book of Exodus, I warmly recommend John Currid’s Commentary, published by Evangelical Press in two volumes.

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 |

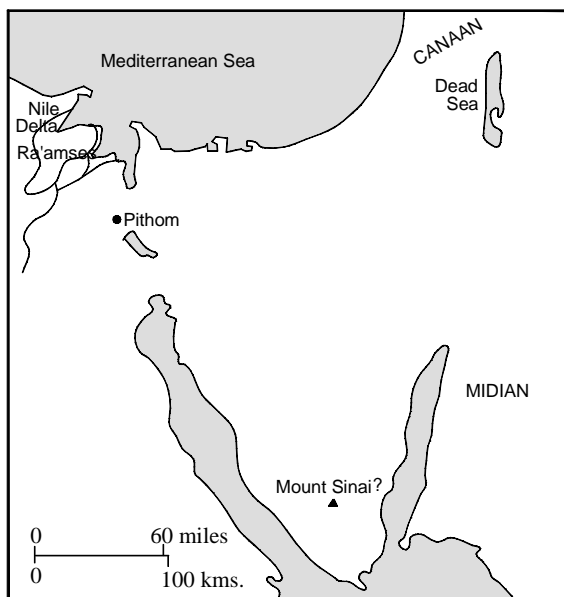
The Law — The Precepts of God (chapters 19 to 24)

- 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)

- 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 greatly increased in the years following the death of Joseph and they filled the land (Goshen in the eastern delta of the Nile where the Israelites had settled – Genesis 45:10, 46:28). The Egyptians began to feel threatened by a ‘state within a state’ on their north-eastern border (5–10) and a new Pharaoh was determined to halt this population growth. He enslaved the Israelites and forced them to toil on his building projects (9–11).

The more the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites, the more they increased in number *and they were in dread of the children of Israel* (12). They made the lives of the Israelites *bitter with hard bondage* (13–14) but worse was to follow. Pharaoh ordered Shiphrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child at birth (15–16). By doing this, he knew that the Hebrew race would die 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 they feared the king of Egypt and he rewarded them with families of their own (20–21).

The answer to the fear of man is to have a healthy fear of God (Psalm 34:9; Proverbs 29:25). Godly fear produces obedience to his Word and a boldness 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 children born to the Israelite women (22). Let us remember that the promised Saviour was to come through the Hebrews but 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.

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); Amram was a grandson of Levi and he married his aunt, Jochebed, who was a daughter of Levi (6:18–20; 1 Chronicles 6:1–3). 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 (Hebrews 11:23). When they could no longer hide their infant boy 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, going to bathe in the river, found the baby and *she had compassion on him* (6); she too defied her father's command.

God so arranged events that the tyrant's daughter paid the boy's mother to nurse her own son (9). He was later brought to the palace as a son of Pharaoh's daughter who called him '*Moses*' (10). 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 the evil influences of the court of Pharaoh. 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 next day he intervened in a fight between two Hebrew men. The man who was in the wrong challenged Moses saying, *‘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, 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. Reuel (Jethro) was a religious man who confessed his faith in the God of Israel and he was wise man in his counsel (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; cp. Genesis 15:13–14). Though not obvious to human eyes, God was 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.**

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 the Egyptians despised (Genesis 46:34). He was with 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 verses 2 and 4. Many Bible commentators believe that ‘*the Angel of the LORD*’ describes the Lord Jesus when he appeared to men in Old Testament times.

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. Moses was overwhelmed with awe and fear as God told him that he was standing on *holy ground* (5–6).

A sense of the majesty and awesomeness of God is often missing in 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). 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); when the apostle John saw the glorified Lord Jesus in his majesty, he fell at his feet as dead (Revelation 1:17). **Let us always seek to 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 and spacious land, flowing with milk and honey (7–10). Moses felt very much his own inadequacy when God told him that he was to lead the people out of Egypt. 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). God 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).

When Moses asked God his name (13), he was asking God to reveal to him something of his character. God told him that his name is ‘*YHWH*’ — ‘*I AM WHO I AM*’ (14). This name was considered by Jews to be so holy that they would not say it; they replaced it with ‘Adonai’ (‘Lord’) in their speech. ‘*YHWH*’ is now written as ‘Yahweh’ (translated ‘the LORD’ in most of our Bibles).

John Currid points out that YHWH ‘is derived from the simple Hebrew verb, “to be”. God’s name means, “Being, I am who I am” . He goes on to say that God is self-existent and unchanging, the same yesterday, today and for ever. He has always been and he always will be (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, page 91). When Jesus said, ‘Before Abraham was, I AM’ the Jews recognised that he was claiming to be God (John 8:58–59).

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 (15–20). The Lord promised Moses more than he would have dared expect (21–22; cp. 12:35–36). **The Lord still does great and wondrous things for his own glory in the church (Ephesians 3:20–21).**

Please send by the hand of whomever else you may send

Moses had received a privileged upbringing but he was painfully aware of the greatness of the task to which God was calling him (3:11). He was very reluctant to return to Egypt to face Pharaoh, 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). The Lord gave him two miraculous signs (2–7). There is here the first mention of the staff with which Moses and Aaron would perform many miracles in (7:8–12). God then gave Moses a third sign, telling him that if the people did not believe the two signs, he should take some water from the River Nile and pour it on the ground where it would become blood (8–9).

- *‘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, saying *‘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 his brother Aaron was coming to meet him. Aaron would be his spokesman to the people with Moses being as God to him, giving him the words to say (14–17).

It is easy to criticise Moses for his reluctance to return to Egypt where he was wanted for the murder of an Egyptian, but would we have reacted any differently in such dangerous circumstances? We are facing increasing hostility as we seek to obey the Lord, but he will honour us and bless us as we remain faithful to him. Is God calling you to some avenue of service in your church or overseas? Are there obvious needs in your church which you know you could meet? If you really love the Lord, your love will be seen in joyful and sacrificial service for him. **Do not make excuses or suggest that God send someone else.** The Lord wants you, and whom he calls he equips!

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 permission was given (18). The Hebrew expression translated ‘*are still alive*’ is used with reference to their welfare. The Lord assured Moses that those in Egypt who sought his life were dead, but warned him that he would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Moses returned to Egypt with his wife and sons and *with the rod of God in his hand* (19–20). The Lord told Moses that Pharaoh 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 *Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did all the signs in the sight of the people* (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 sovereign control (Matthew 6:33–34). *The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that he had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped* (31).

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 power of Satan and the forces of hell were ranged against him. Pharaoh dismissed the request of Moses and Aaron with arrogant defiance, saying, *'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 the Lord (Yahweh) and that his words are not false (9; cp. 7:5). Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron, *'Get back to your labour'* (4).

The path 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 (who were Egyptian) 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 Hebrew foremen were beaten (6–14). They were very servile and *cried out to Pharaoh*, begging him to ease the burden, but he refused, saying, *'You are idle! You are idle!'* (15–19). Had they known the Lord, they would have cried out to him.

They left Pharaoh and turned on Moses and Aaron, blaming them for the trouble that had befallen them. Moses now had his own people against him as well as Pharaoh (20–21). He went to God in prayer (22–23). 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 following the path of obedience to God.** Moses was to have his faith sorely tried in his leadership of God's people.

We must never be surprised at seeming setbacks as we seek to serve the Lord. 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).

Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh

This chapter contains a genealogy of the Levites, which shows that Amram the father of Moses was a grandson of Levi, who married his aunt, Jochebed (verses 14–27).

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 Yahweh whom he had met at Mount Horeb (3:1–14). Wicked Pharaoh was daring to fight *the LORD*. God reinforced his promise to Moses seven times with the words *‘I will’* (6–8):

- *‘I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’*
- *‘I will rescue you from their bondage.’*
- *‘I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.’*
- *‘I will take you as my people.’*
- *‘I will be your God.’*
- *‘I will bring you into the land ...’*
- *‘I will give it to you as a heritage (possession).’*

God’s promises are certain and reliable and can be trusted. Never forget that even the most hopeless circumstances make no difference whatever to the promises of God. He 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 slave labour, 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).

We too must persevere. *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).

I will harden Pharaoh's heart

Moses was not convinced that Pharaoh would listen to him, since he had uncircumcised (faltering) lips (6:30). The Lord then told him that he had made him *'as God'* to Pharaoh, with Aaron speaking as his prophet (1–2). The Lord said, *'I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt'* (3). Pharaoh would refuse to heed Moses but God would bring his people out of Egypt and the Egyptians would have to acknowledge Yahweh (*'the LORD'*) (4–5). Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old at this time. They obeyed God with renewed confidence (6–7).

What are we to make of the statement, *'I will harden Pharaoh's heart'* (3)? The book of Exodus repeatedly demonstrates the truth of God's absolute sovereignty; this can be seen in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (3; 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? He did this for his own glory, to make known his power and his name (that is his character) in overthrowing Pharaoh (9:16; Romans 9:17–18). 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 but they will perish if they refuse to repent of their sin (Romans 2:4–5).

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 works of the Lord, 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)

They also did in like manner with their enchantments

The Lord told Moses and Aaron that Pharaoh would challenge them to perform a miracle. Aaron was then to take his rod and cast it to the ground and it would become a serpent (8–10). When Aaron did this, the Egyptian sorcerers were able to imitate the miracle. *They also did in like manner with their enchantments* (11). The overwhelming power of Yahweh was seen when Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods (12). John Currid points out, 'When Aaron's rod devoured the staffs of the magicians it was destroying the authority and power that those rods symbolized' (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, page 162).

Pharaoh had asked to see a miracle but when he saw one, his heart grew hard and he refused the request of Moses and Aaron (13–14). The Lord told Moses to go down to the Nile the next morning and tell Pharaoh that Yahweh had said, '*Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness*' (15–16). Moses was then to tell Pharaoh that when Aaron stretched out his rod over the waters of Egypt, they would become blood. When Aaron did this, the fish in the river died and there was a dreadful odour. The Egyptians searched frantically for water without success (17–21). Pharaoh's magicians were also able to copy this miracle but this only intensified the plague against their own people; they were unable to reverse the plague. Despite all that had happened, Pharaoh hardened his heart (22–23).

The power of Satan lies behind all false religion (Deuteronomy 32:17). He still deceives millions with *signs and lying wonders* (Acts 8:9–11; 2 Thessalonians 2:9). **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). Let us pray much for the advance of God's kingdom and seek to make known the good news of the gospel to those who are lost.

There is no one like the LORD our God

The Lord told Moses to go to Pharaoh and repeat 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, God would send a plague of frogs throughout Egypt (1–4). When Aaron stretched out his rod over the Nile, the streams and ponds, the land was covered with frogs (5–6). The Egyptian magicians were able to do the same, but they were unable to get rid of the frogs (7). They were unable to imitate any of the plagues that followed.

John Currid points out that an important Egyptian goddess was Hekhet, who was pictured as a human female with a frog's head. They believed that frogs were a symbol of divine power under the control of Hekhet but she was rendered powerless when the Lord brought the plague of frogs upon the land (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, page 173). The plagues were a judgment upon the gods of Egypt (cp. 12:12). The frogs invaded every part of the Egyptians' homes, getting into their food and into their beds (2–4).

Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron to ask them to pray that the LORD (Yahweh) would remove the frogs. He also promised that he would *let the people go, that they might sacrifice to the LORD* (8). Moses wanted Pharaoh to know that the removal of the frogs would be an answer to prayer. He gave him the option of choosing when the plague should end (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 in answer to Moses' prayer *and the land stank* because of the rotting heaps of dead frogs. Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, however, after the frogs were removed (12–15).

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

That you may know that I am the LORD ('Yahweh')

God brought the third plague on Egypt without giving any warning. He instructed Moses to tell Aaron to *strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice* (or 'gnats') *throughout all the land of Egypt* (16). The magicians knew that they were beaten when they failed to produce lice with their enchantments. They said to Pharaoh, *'This is the finger of God.'* They did not acknowledge 'Yahweh' but 'Elohim' which can be used as a general name for deity. *But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them just as the LORD had said* (17–19).

The Lord told Moses to meet Pharaoh early in the morning as he came up from bathing in the river. He was to say, *'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me"'* (20; cp. verse 1). If he refused this demand, the Lord would send swarms of flies the next day throughout Egypt, except Goshen. God said, *'I will make a difference between my people and your people that you may know that I am the LORD ('Yahweh') in the midst of the land'* (21–23). John Currid points out that 'Goshen' is not an Egyptian word, but the Hebrew name for the eastern delta of the Nile where the Israelites had settled (Genesis 45:10, 46:28). – (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, pages 185–6).

When God plagued Egypt with swarms of flies, Pharaoh called for Moses and promised to allow the Israelites to go to sacrifice to God ('Elohim') in the land, but Moses insisted that they would have to go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to Yahweh as he had commanded them (24–27). Pharaoh then agreed that Moses could lead the Israelites into the wilderness to sacrifice to *the LORD* his God ('Yahweh') and asked Moses to pray for him. Pharaoh now saw that he was not opposing any god or gods ('Elohim') but Yahweh.

Pharaoh went back on his promise after the Lord removed the flies. **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 (31–32).**

The LORD will make a difference

The Lord told Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him, ‘*Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go that they may serve me”*’ (1). He was to warn Pharaoh if he refused to let them go, that *the hand of the LORD* would plague all his livestock, killing them, but *‘the LORD will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all that belongs to the children of Israel’* (3–4) The Egyptian magicians had spoken of the finger of God (‘Elohim’; 8:19) but this was *the hand of the LORD* (‘Yahweh’).

God allowed Pharaoh a day to change his mind before he sent this plague upon the livestock of the Egyptians. Pharaoh refused to take any notice and many of the animals were killed (5–7). The expression, *‘all the livestock of Egypt’* means ‘all types of livestock’ not every single animal. Some livestock were left at the time of the sixth and seventh plagues (10,19). Pharaoh sent to Goshen and found that the livestock of the Hebrews had been protected from the devastating plague but he still hardened his heart and refused to let the people go (7).

The Lord then instructed Moses to take ashes from a furnace and scatter them into the air 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 which broke out in sores on both man and beast. **There is a grim humour in the judgment of God as he vindicates his people.** Pharaoh’s magicians were so afflicted by boils that they were unable to stand before Moses (10–11). Their master was able to see and feel the difference that the Lord had made between the Egyptians, and Moses who was protected from the plague.

Pharaoh still hardened his heart however, and refused to listen to the Lord’s word even when confronted by miracles. The plagues poured out on Egypt were a foretaste the terrifying plagues to be visited on the ungodly before the return of the Lord Jesus (eg. Revelation 16:2).

I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God

The Lord gave Pharaoh many opportunities to obey his word through Moses but he continued to harden his heart. God now sent Moses to stand before him early in the morning with this 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, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth”’* (13–14). **Notice that Yahweh was sending the plagues to the 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 Yahweh 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 with thunder and fire would be more severe than anything ever seen in Egypt. He told the Egyptian 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 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).

John Currid points out that the Egyptians believed that their goddesses Nut, Shu and Tefnut controlled the sky and moisture (COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, Volume 1, pages 203–4). This plague demonstrated that they were completely and utterly powerless against Yahweh. Pharaoh seemed to repent when he acknowledged that he had sinned and that Yahweh was righteous (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).

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).

The Lord reminded Moses that he had hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants in order to perform his signs (the plagues) before him. The Hebrews would tell future generations of the mighty acts of God in Egypt that they may know that he is Yahweh (1–2; cp, 18:8–11). Moses and Aaron again went to Pharaoh and said, ‘*Thus says the LORD God (Yahweh) of the Hebrews, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go that they may serve me”*’ (3). They warned Pharaoh that if he refused, the Lord would bring the greatest plague of locusts that Egypt had ever known (4–6). Pharaoh’s own servants asked him to be more flexible regarding the demands of Moses (7). He sent for Moses, but imposed unacceptable conditions on their request to go and serve the Lord. He then drove Moses and Aaron from his presence (8–11). The plague of locusts followed (12–20).

The Lord then sent the ninth plague. Thick darkness blanketed Egypt for three days again but the Hebrews had light in their dwellings (21–23). The Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra every morning but he failed to give them light to remove the darkness. Pharaoh gave permission for the Israelites to go, but on condition that they left behind all their livestock. Moses refused this compromise (24–25). Pharaoh sent him away, warning that he never again wanted to see his face (28–29). Moses retorted, ‘*You have spoken well. I will never see your face again*’ (29). **Pharaoh had despised many God-given opportunities to repent, and this, his last chance, was also wasted.**

The LORD gave the people favour

Moses had said to Pharaoh, *'I will never see your face again'* (11:29) but here we find him addressing Pharaoh (4–8). These verses appear to refer to his audience with Pharaoh recorded at the end of chapter 10. Moses warned Pharaoh that God would destroy the firstborn in every Egyptian family and the firstborn of all their animals. He warned, *'There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt'* (4–6). The Egyptians would cry to their gods who were unable to hear them or to help them, When the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance from their suffering, he heard them (2:23–25). Moses told Pharaoh that none of the Israelites would be harmed so that he *'may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel'* (7). He then left Pharaoh *in great anger* (8).

The first three verses of this chapter of Exodus appear to come in time after verses 4 to 8. The Lord told Moses that he would bring one more plague on Pharaoh, who would then let the Israelites leave Egypt (1).. 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* (2–3; 12:35–36). He worked in the hearts of the Egyptians so 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 the enslaved Hebrews, became very great in the land of Egypt and was respected by Pharaoh's servants and by the people (3). **God's sovereignty is truly wonderful!**

The sovereign Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites but he made the Egyptian population favourably disposed towards them. The Lord often brings blessing out of trials and *we know that all things work together for good for those who love God* (Romans 8:28).

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

(William Cowper)

When I see the blood, I will pass over you

The 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 taken for each household; it was kept until the fourteenth day, when it was killed and its blood was 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 with bitter herbs, which symbolised the bitterness of their slavery in Egypt. They were to eat all of the lamb; any remains were to be burned the following morning. The people were to be prepared for a quick departure from Egypt (8–11).

Yahweh said, *‘Against the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD’* (12). The sprinkled blood was a sign to protect Israel’s first-born against the judgment of the Lord who said, *‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’* (13). He would not allow the destroying angel to strike them (23).

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). The Feast of the Passover was to be observed every year (14) and it continues to be an important day in the Jewish calendar. The Israelites were to teach their children the significance of the Passover feast (25–27). *The people bowed their heads and worshipped* (27). They had seen the mighty acts of Yahweh and were about to see their deliverance from their oppressors.

At a Passover feast almost 2000 years ago, the Lord Jesus was crucified at Calvary. *Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us* (1 Corinthians 5:7). He is the Lamb of God, *without blemish and without spot*, whose blood was shed to save sinners (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). **We remember this with great gratitude and joy when we eat the bread and drink from the cup at the communion service (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).**

Go, serve the LORD as you have said

The judgment of God upon the Egyptians was so severe that there was a death in every household and Pharaoh lost the heir to his throne. The first-born of the animals were also destroyed as Moses had prophesied (29–30; 11:4–5). Pharaoh was truly humbled. He had banished Moses and Aaron from his palace (10:28) and now he sent for them 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). He asked Moses to bless him (32) but he was not really sincere; he later pursued the Israelites, aiming to destroy them. The distraught Egyptians had suffered 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 with their flocks and herds (37–38). *A mixed multitude*, who were not Hebrews, had seen the greatness and power of Yahweh and they left Egypt with the Israelites. 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). **God keeps his promises, though they are not always fulfilled immediately!**

The Lord had told Abraham that his descendants would serve and be afflicted in a foreign land for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13–14); 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 (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 warnings of God's wrath and divine judgment but the Lord delays judgment because he is merciful (cp. 2 Peter 3:1–9).

Because of what the LORD did for me

No foreigner or hired servant was permitted to eat the Passover but a slave who had been circumcised and was part of a household was permitted. Foreigners living among the Israelites were allowed to eat the Passover if all their males became circumcised (12:43–51). The end of verse 46 is quoted in John 19:36. The Lord Jesus is the perfect Passover lamb and not one of his bones were broken when he died.

The Lord commanded Moses that the first-born of man and animals must be consecrated to him (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 every year (3–9) and the practice of sacrificing a lamb to redeem the first-born was also to continue (13–15). The first-born escaped divine judgment because a lamb had died in his place. God said of the first-born, *‘It is mine’* (2). Christian, you have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). *You are not your own, for you were bought at a price* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). We are to live for him (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The importance of instructing our children is again emphasised: *‘And you shall tell your son in that day (the Passover day), saying, “This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt”’* (8,14; see comments on Exodus 2:1–10). Parents have a God-given responsibility to instruct their children about the Lord. Both parents must be involved in teaching their children (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 assailed by 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 also 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.

The LORD went before them

Joseph made the Israelites take an oath before he died: when they left Egypt, they were to take his bones with them to be buried in Canaan. Moses remembered this oath and Joseph's bones were taken to the promised land (19; cp. Genesis 50:24–25; Joshua 24:32).

The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light (21). This was a manifestation of God's glory which encouraged the Israelites:

- God's presence was 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).
- God's leading (21). The most direct way to the promised land was on the Mediterranean coastal road through the land of the Philistines who were a nation with a strong army. Yahweh did not want his people to be so discouraged that they would want to return to Egypt (17). He Lord guided them to go south-east towards the Red Sea (18). See map, page 13.

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). We have no cloudy pillar today, but God graciously leads us by his Word and by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). The Lord goes before 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)

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 by the sea *and they did so* (1–2, 5). This would leave them very vulnerable to the pursuing Egyptians, but the Lord was drawing Pharaoh and his army into a trap. The Lord told Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that the Egyptians would question why they had allowed the Israelites, a source of cheap labour, to leave, and would then pursue them (3–5).

Pharaoh led his army in hot pursuit of the Israelites, who, humanly speaking, were in an inescapable situation (8–9). The Red Sea was ahead of them, the Egyptian army behind them. There were rocky crags on one side and Egyptian fortresses on the other. They were well and truly hemmed in! They panicked and cried out to Yahweh (10) but complained bitterly to Moses, saying that they would have been better remaining in Egypt than to die in the wilderness (11–12). How soon they had forgotten the great displays of God's almighty power on their behalf! When faith gives way to fear, we can easily 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.

Moses was calm in the crisis. 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 Red 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 Yahweh is the only true God (15–18). **The Red Sea, which the Israelites had seen as a 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.'*

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