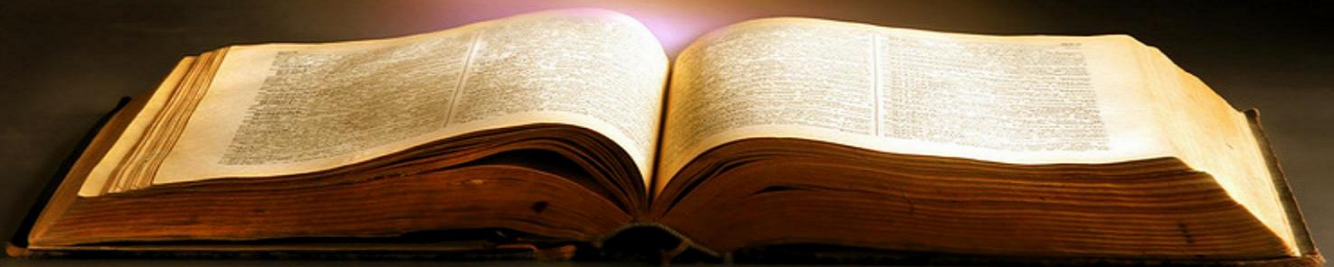


Exodus

Bible Study



Fall 2016

Winter 2017

Lutheran Church of the Cross

Laguna Woods & Aliso Viejo California

Laguna Woods – Tues. 6am – Wed. 10am Thur. 6:30pm

Aliso Viejo – Sun. 8:45am – Wed. 6:30pm

Introducing Exodus

Exodus is the second book written by Moses as a part of the Pentateuch, the name given to the first five books of the Bible. Genesis ends with the resettling of patriarch Jacob and his family in the land of Egypt and with the death of his son Joseph. It was through Joseph's help during a time of famine that this move had been arranged.

Exodus takes up the story of Jacob's descendants where Genesis leaves off. Jacob's descendants are now called the Israelites. In the opening verses of Exodus, the sons of Jacob are again mentioned. This is followed by the words, "Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them" (1:6, 7). While these verses supply a bridge between the first two books of the Bible, at the same time they cover a span of several hundred years and present us with an entirely new situation in the salvation history of God's people. Exodus presents the important events that follow the Israelites' long stay in Egypt, a sojourn that lasted 430 years in all, as 12:40 tells us.

The title *Exodus* comes from the translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language, a translation known as the Septuagint, which goes back to the year 285 B.C. *Exodus* means "departure" or "going out." Although the book deals with Israel's departure from Egypt so that they could return to the promised land of Canaan, the title *Exodus* does not indicate the book's primary significance in the overall picture of God's salvation history.¹ Rather, it records the unique demonstration of God's power on behalf of his people, who were then working under conditions of forced labor for the Egyptians. They had become slaves. Slaves to the Egyptians and slaves to their situation in life. Perhaps not all that different from how we sometimes feel in our lives today. But the heart of Exodus is the promise of freedom and redemption and a life that is best lived to the full in a relationship with the living God. For the very heart of Exodus is nothing less than God's redemptive action, rescuing His people through the exodus and atoning for their sins through the sacrifices.² It's the story of God in action and it points to God in action again for His people as He would later send his Son in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem his people and fully atone for their sins – forever. In fact, so dramatic were the circumstances in which the exodus occurred that they were mentioned frequently in subsequent OT periods. When the Hebrews were oppressed, they looked back to that great historical event and trusted God for their future liberation.³ In the same way we too look to the reality of God's redemptive action for us – yesterday, today and tomorrow. It is this certainty and this promise of the new life we have been given in Jesus that is the foundation for our daily walk with Jesus in faith.

Indeed, all this and more is bound up in the book of Exodus. Serious students will find a gold mine of insight and practical values that relate to living today. This is history with a punch. Allow yourself the benefit of careful reflection. Take time to cross 3,500 years and think about both victories and defeats among God's people. Thrill to Moses' encounters with Pharaoh, with his own rebellious people and with God at Mount Sinai. Grasp the significance of the Ten Commandments and the worship of the true and living God. Meditate on new ideas about the meaning of worship, music, and the consecration of one's possessions and talents to the glory of God.

Exodus begins with Moses' account of cruel bondage in Egypt, moves through the bitter struggle with Pharaoh for deliverance, continues on to Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments, and climaxes with the building of a place of worship and the establishment of a priesthood. It covers a period of close to one hundred years.

Major themes include the name and glory of God, the covenants (agreements) between God and Israel, the law and the tabernacle. The institution of the Passover points to salvation through the death of Christ. The tabernacle and the priesthood speak and point us toward the God-given principles of how we worship God, how God acts for us in worship, and the privileges we have to praise and glorify him.

The questions are also designed to help you discover the facts and to reflect on their significance for your life. The apostle Paul wrote that these ancient accounts were given to teach and warn us (1 Cor. 10:11). May God help you to grasp life-changing truth as you grow in your ability to trust him and to respond to his grace in love for God and love for each other.

¹ Wendland, E. H. (2000). *Exodus* (2nd ed., pp. vi–2). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.

² Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 95). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

³ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (p. 742). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

September 13-15

Part 1: Liberating God's People Exodus 1-19

1 Israel's Oppression: Evil Plans, Courageous Resistance Exodus 1

Oppression is a nasty word, but it grabs the headlines because it's the reason for much conflict today. Scenes out of this chapter fit totalitarian societies. Only the methods of oppression change. God's people were not spared in 1700 B.C., and they are not always spared now. But in this study you will find a bright spot of courageous resistance.

1. To you, what is the most obvious example of oppression in the world today, and why?
2. Read Exodus 1. How did "the sons of Israel" (Jacob's descendants) fare in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-7)?
3. What was their situation under a king who had forgotten Joseph's role (Genesis 41) in saving the country (Exodus 1:8-14)?
4. How do oppressors today usually justify their actions?
5. Why did Pharaoh's strategy backfire (Exodus 1:12)?
6. The old privileged status of the Hebrews had faded into abject slavery. How would you have felt as a Hebrew youth doing backbreaking labor under a burning sun?
7. What new population control plans did Pharaoh devise (Exodus 1:15-22)?
8. How were his plans thwarted?
9. Imagine the emotions of the king and the midwives when he summoned them (Exodus 1:18). What was the secret of the women's self-control and wisdom (Exodus 1:17, 21)?

10. How does your fear of God motivate right moral conduct and give you the courage to withstand the temptation to do evil?

11. The tougher Pharaoh's pressure, the greater Israel's increase (Exodus 1:20-21). How do you account for this?

12. In what circumstances have you felt oppressed by unreasonable demands?
How did you find God's help?

Sept. 20-22

2 The Birth and Escape of Moses: A Mother's Faith, a Son's Brashness Exodus 2

Working downtown on an engineering maintenance project, the man knew that his friend's wife lay dying in a hospital only four blocks away. But he didn't go to see the woman. Lack of appropriate dress demolished his courage to do something bold in Christ's name. Few of us can brag about how bravely we have responded in crisis. Faith, for us, is a comfortable intellectual exercise, not something that demands bold action. That definition becomes even more attractive when we're not sure how to distinguish between faith and foolishness. This study contrasts a privileged kid's brashness with a woman's courageous faith in action.

1. How has God confronted you recently with a demand for courageous faith?

2. Read Exodus 2. How did God plan for the infant Moses to survive Pharaoh's murderous edict (Exodus 2:1-10)?

3. What did Moses' survival cost his mother?

His sister?

4. Why do you think Pharaoh's daughter defied her father's order?

5. What has been the most costly thing you have had to do for God?

6. Why did Moses flee to Midian (Exodus 2:11-15)? (He was 40 years old at the time.)

7. What motivated him to kill the Egyptian?
To settle a fight between two Hebrews?

8. Who did Moses challenge next, and why (Exodus 2:16-22)?

9. What kind of a person does Moses show himself to be in this chapter?

10. If you had to describe your personality in two or three words, how would you compare it to Moses'?

11. Meanwhile, what was happening to the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 2:23)?

12. How did their condition affect God, and why (Exodus 2:24-25)?

13. God hears the cries of his people today. What difference does that make when you are confronted by circumstances you are powerless to change?

Sept. 27-29

3 The Call of Moses: Stubborn Reluctance Overcome Exodus 3-4

The milestones of history are marked by people who have met impossible demands. Battlefield monuments utter mute testimony to these events. Modern Turkey owes its existence to Kemal Ataturk, who rallied his troops with the impossible demand that they drive back the enemy from Gallipoli. Your most impossible demand may seem small in comparison-but not at the time the challenge presented itself. Perhaps it was writing an academic paper without adequate time or expertise. Or maybe it was the time when your church group decided to talk to people on the beach about Jesus Christ. This study shows how God put an impossible demand on Moses and propelled him into national leadership.

1. How do you respond when you see a vacuum in leadership in your community and in your church?

2. Read Exodus 3. Imagine that you are Moses on the mountain of God. As you look around you, describe everything you see, hear and feel (Exodus 3:1-6).
3. What motivates God to act on behalf of his people (Exodus 3:7-10)?
What plan does he have in mind?
4. Why do you think God chose an aged desert shepherd to lead such an auspicious venture?
5. How does Moses respond to God's assignment, and why (Exodus 3:11-13)?
6. When have you felt inadequate to do something God wanted you to do?
7. What reassurance does God give Moses (Exodus 3:12-22)?
8. Read Exodus 4. What other doubts and fears does Moses have (Exodus 4:1, 10)?
9. How does God deal with these inadequacies (Exodus 4:2-9, 11-12)?
10. Why do you think Moses' final objection angers the Lord (Exodus 4:13-17)?
11. What reasons can you give for Moses' stubbornness in the face of God's call?
12. When you are sure God is speaking to you, and a specific "Yes, Lord" is expected of you, what things influence your answer?
13. How do the events in Exodus 4:27-31 confirm the Lord's promises to Moses?

14. What have you learned about God in this study that would encourage you to trust him in the face of seemingly impossible demands or difficulties?

Oct. 4-6

4 The Difficulties of Moses and Aaron: Rebuff and Resolution Exodus 5:1-7:7

The Christian student group discovered a sure-fire winner for its reachout meeting. Here was a famous businessman who was sure to attract a crowd. Confidently, the Christians plugged away at inviting their friends, and their work was rewarded with a packed room. An hour or so later they fled the room in defeat. They had tried to obey God but their venture failed. In a word, their hero speaker bombed. Discouragement enveloped the group like a dense fog. No doubt, Moses felt the same way, except the stakes were higher. In this study, he and Aaron are soundly rebuffed, though they doggedly pursue God's will with obedient courage.

1. What various qualities of leadership are required to overcome adversity?

2. Read Exodus 5. What were the major outcomes of the first encounter between Moses and Aaron and Pharaoh?

How did Pharaoh interpret their demand (Exodus 5:8, 17)?

3. From his actions, what kind of a person do you think Pharaoh was?

4. From a human perspective, why do you think Pharaoh rejected the word of God given through his messengers?

5. What things in your life might obscure an authentic word from the Lord?

6. Describe Moses' feelings and the logic of his cry to God (Exodus 5:22-23)?

7. When your path of obedience to God seems blocked, how do you react? Explain.

8. Read Exodus 6:1-27. The statement "I am the LORD" is repeated four times in Exodus 6:1-8. What does God emphasize about himself in response to Moses complaint (Exodus 6:1-5)?

9. What does the Lord's message to Israel emphasize about his plans for them (Exodus 6:6-8)?
10. How does Israel's response to Moses (Exodus 6:9) contrast with their initial response (Exodus 4:31)?
11. Give an example from your life when discouragement blurred the clarity of God's power and promises.
12. Read Exodus 6:28-7:7. Moses is concerned that Pharaoh won't listen to him (Exodus 6:30). Yet how will Pharaoh's stubbornness help to fulfill God's plans for Egypt (Exodus 7:3-5)?
13. In spite of defeat and discouragement (Exodus 5:2; Exodus 6:9, 12, 30) Moses "did just as the LORD commanded" (Exodus 7:6). What do you think brought him to this decisive obedience?
14. What definitive spiritual decisions have you made during your life as a Christian?
Thank God for the people and circumstances he used.

Oct. 11-13

5 The Plagues: God's Power on the Line against Pharaoh Exodus 7:8-10:29

God's authority is on the line anytime a world leader like Pharaoh decides to take charge. It's also on the line when his children decide to play the game their own way. We have the benefit of looking at a historical book like Exodus to tell us the futility of resisting God. But somehow we find ourselves engaged in a recurring battle in our lives, not too dissimilar to Pharaoh's. Pharaoh opposed God, with devastating consequences. God will also challenge your right to do as you please. This lesson shows that it's futile to resist.

1. In what circumstances have you recently been in a tug-of-war with God?
2. Read Exodus 7:8-25. What was the sign of God's supremacy (Exodus 7:8-13)?
What would this have done for Moses and Aaron?
3. What was the condition of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:13-14, 22)?
How would such a spirit be manifested today?

4. Read Exodus 8. How did Pharaoh react to these "mighty acts of judgment," as God called them (Exodus 7:4; Exodus 8:8, 25-32)?

5. What was the basic issue between God and Pharaoh (Exodus 7:5, 17; Exodus 8:10, 22)?

6. What new disclosure does God make to Pharaoh about his power (Exodus 8:22-23)?

7. In what matters is God in conflict with earthly powers today?

8. Read Exodus 9. Some of the Egyptians responded positively to this outbreak of judgments (Exodus 9:20). How do people interpret natural disasters today?

9. What pattern of behavior has by this time become well established in Pharaoh (Exodus 8:15, 30-32; Exodus 9:34-35)?

10. Read Exodus 10. Pharaoh tried to make deals with God (Exodus 10:11, 24). How have you tried to offer God less than full surrender to the totality of his demands?

11. When you are humbled by God, how can you regain your self-confidence and your trust in God?

Think of someone you know who has been humbled by God. How might you lift him or her up to Christ?

Oct. 18-20

6 The Passover: Night of Death and Deliverance Exodus 11:1-12:28

Death is a powerful, painful lesson. It gets our attention as nothing else does. It's also unavoidable. It was God's final recourse in showing both his supremacy to Pharaoh and his power to liberate his people. When Pharaoh refused God's ultimatum, thousands perished; when Israel heeded his way of deliverance, thousands lived. The

final act of judgment is thus a stark portrayal of how every person's fate hinges on either believing or disbelieving the one true and living God in heaven.

1. Why do people avoid facing the issue of possible alternatives after death?
2. Read Exodus 11. What is God's promise and instruction to Moses (Exodus 11:1-2)?
3. How do you account for the Egyptians' change in attitude toward God's people and Moses (Exodus 11:3)?
4. What is to be the nature, scope and result of God's final judgment on Egypt (Exodus 11:4-7)?
5. In what sense could Moses' anger either be justifiable or not (Exodus 11:8)?
6. From the human standpoint, why do you think Pharaoh was so obstinate that even this impending judgment failed to move him (Exodus 11:9-10)?
7. Like Moses, how can we continue to trust God in the face of seemingly irresistible unbelief among friends, family or relatives?
8. Read Exodus 12:1-28. What steps are the Israelites to take to be spared (Exodus 12:1-13)?
9. Why were they to eat the meal "in haste" (Exodus 12:11)?
10. Describe the memorial Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:14-20).

How effective do you think it would be as a perpetual commemoration? Why?

11. Imagine yourself as a family head in Israel. How would you explain the meaning of the Lord's Passover to your children (Exodus 12:26-27)?

12. To make deliverance possible, the people had to believe and obey Moses. Why or why wouldn't you have done so? (See Hebrews 11:28.)

13. The apostle Paul says Christ is our Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). What is required of a person for Jesus to be his or her Passover?

14. The shield against the "destroyer" (Exodus 12:23) in Egypt was the blood of a perfect lamb. Christ's blood secures the Christian's deliverance from eternal death (John 1:29; Hebrews 9:14; Rev. 5:13). As you reflect on the powerful imagery of the Lord's Passover, and also on Christ's sacrifice, what response and deeds would be appropriate?

Oct. 25-27

7 The Exodus: Freedom and Its Cost Exodus 12:29-13:16

Freedom has a high price. For some political refugees today it means a perilous sea journey along the coast of Southeast Asia. For others, a dangerous trek over Central American mountains. In Europe it often costs job and even family. In this study we find what Israel's freedom cost—both the losers and the winners. God secured the liberation of his people, but this in turn cost them the rights to their most precious possessions.

1. In what ways are we accountable to God for the freedom he gives us?

2. Read Exodus 12:29-51. What contrasts do you observe between Pharaoh's attitude and behavior now and his earlier encounters with Moses and Aaron (Exodus 12:29-32)?

3. How would you describe the emotional intensity of Egyptians (Exodus 12:29-36)? Why were the Israelites "driven out" of Egypt (Exodus 12:39)?

4. God fulfilled his warnings and promises (see Exodus 3:20-22; Exodus 4:23). What significance would this have for Israel's understanding of God's nature and character?

5. In what ways have you found God's warnings and promises to be true?
6. How would the Passover restrictions (Exodus 12:43-49) encourage foreigners and others to worship God and, at the same time, preserve Israel from religious compromise and contamination?
7. What message is God sending to the Israelites by these rules at the outset of their independence?
8. How can we guard the essential elements of our faith in Jesus Christ and, at the same time, extend his offer of salvation to all people?
9. Read Exodus 13:1-16. God calls Israel to dedicate to him that which he has just delivered-the whole nation, not just the firstborn of man and beast. What plan does God have for perpetuating this ordinance (Exodus 13:8-10, 14-15)?
10. To keep the ritual from becoming sterile, what was required of the worshiper?
11. How do you maintain fresh impressions of your own deliverance from the guilt and enslavement of sin?
12. What was the basis of God's authority to claim the first-born as his own?
13. On what basis does he claim Christians as living sacrifices (see Romans 12:1-2)?
14. In what ways have you responded to his claim on your life?

Nov. 1-3

8 Crossing the Red Sea: From Crisis to Triumph Exodus 13:17-14:31

Impossible jams converge on us at the most unlikely moments. One minute we're cruising down the freeway at 60 m.p.h., and the next instant we jam on the brakes. For the next two hours we're stuck. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could wave a magic wand and unclog the whole mess? Life is like that. God leads us in and out

of jams to test our mettle. In this study, Israel's moment of glorious freedom was shattered by an advancing army. Seemingly, disaster loomed. But God had some things to prove to Egypt, Israel and Moses. Painful lessons indeed.

1. What recent crisis has brought you to your wit's end, and why?

2. Read Exodus 13:17-22. Why did God not take Israel the shortest route to Palestine? Of what possible benefit are God's "detours" in our lives?

3. God provided clear guidance for the journey through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21-22). How does God guide Christians today?

4. Faith operates both long-range (Joseph) and short-range (following the pillar). What areas of your life require long-range or short-range trust in God?

5. Read Exodus 14:1-14. What plan does God reveal to Moses (Exodus 14:1-4)?

What is God's ultimate purpose (Exodus 14:4; see Exodus 7:5)

6. How did the Israelites react to the onslaught of the Egyptians, and why (Exodus 14:10-12)?

7. What did this test reveal about their hearts?

8. In what circumstances have you caved in to fear and second-guessed God?

9. Compare each part of Moses' commands (Exodus 14:13-14) with the Israelites' conditions and attitudes (Exodus 14:10-12)

10. What did God's plan for escape require of Moses and the people (Exodus 14:15-18)?

11. Read Exodus 14:15-31. What was the outcome of this hair-raising experience for the Egyptians, Moses and Israel (Exodus 14:17-18, 30-31)?

12. Think about times when you have felt like Israel, trapped between the Egyptians and the Red Sea. What did you do and why?

13. How can this passage help you in threatening experiences you face in following God, now or in the future?

14. God allowed the Israelites to cross safely on dry ground. Reflect on similar "dry ground" experiences in your life. In what ways have you thanked God for them?

Oct. 8-9

9 The Songs of Moses and Miriam: Praise for the Past and Hope for the Future

Exodus 15:1-21

Music plays a vital role in Christian worship. Sometimes, however, music causes contention: the old favorites versus the new gospel tunes; organs versus guitars. Overlooked is the fact that God gave us music and singing to praise and glorify his name. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the thrilling song service that broke out on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. Moses the statesman, Moses the voice of God became Israel's song leader. Praise and honor to God marked the final triumph over Egypt. How much more Christians need to sing to God for his victory in Christ.

1. What part does music play in your worship of God?

2. Read Exodus 15:1-21. What inspired this song of victory (Exodus 15:1)?

3. In what terms do Moses and the people express their personal relationship with God and their duty to God (Exodus 15:2)?

4. What is the value of reciting God's victories in public singing?

5. On what occasions have you been inspired to break out in song to God?

6. What conclusions about God do the people draw from the Red Sea victory (Exodus 15:3-11)?

7. In what ways do these facts reveal God's purposes for delivering Israel from Egypt?
8. Against what adversaries do you need to see a demonstration of God's power, majesty and holiness?
9. After rehearsing the past, the people look to the future. What enemies lie ahead (Exodus 15:14-15)?
10. What will be the effect of the exodus on these nations (Exodus 15:14-16)?
11. On what basis do the people exude confidence for their future (Exodus 15:13-18)?
12. How does the knowledge of God's character and past faithfulness encourage you in anticipation of the future?
13. Why would it be important for the people to sing about overcoming the enemies yet to be faced?
14. What role did Miriam and the other women play in the victory celebration, and why (Exodus 15:20-21)?
15. In some ways our praise to God should be planned, and in some ways it should be spontaneous. What is the value of both kinds of worship?

Nov. 15-17

10 Adversities of the Desert: Thirst, Hunger and Attack—God Overcomes Them All **Exodus 15:22-17:16**

One of the premier sports events in America is the Super Bowl, a football game played each January for the championship of the National Football League. Contending teams get two weeks to prepare. Players and coaches get the best of everything in order to win. Suppose the teams ran out of water and food. Suppose the players mutinied. If that happened, suppose you were the coach. Could you possibly concentrate on your game plans? Of course not. But that's what confronted Moses as he led team Israel. This study chronicles not only defection in the ranks, but also attack from outside. Not a pretty picture, really, until we see how God intervened.

1. Describe a time of great team disappointment and why it hurt you.
2. Read Exodus 15:22-27. Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite three days into the desert with no water. How would you feel and why?
3. God provided water for his people (Exodus 15:25, 27). Why do you think he led them to bitter water first?
4. When you have reached the end of the rope, what do you say to God and to those whom you think are to blame? Why?
5. Read Exodus 16:1-34. Faced with starvation, the Israelites attacked Moses and Aaron (Exodus 16:1-3). In what sense were they groaning against God (Exodus 16:7-8)?
6. What does this reveal about the true nature of complaining about our circumstances?
7. Why and how did God respond to Israel's complaints (Exodus 16:9-15)?
8. In what ways did Israel violate God's commands, and why (Exodus 16:16-30)?
9. Reflect on God's meeting your needs in emergencies. How might you be able to keep such events as a testimony to future generations?
10. Read Exodus 17:1-16. Lack of water creates another crisis. How did Moses sum up the people's failure (Exodus 17:7)?

How do you account for their short memory?
11. Israel's next hurdle is an enemy attack (Exodus 17:8-16). What was God's plan for victory over the Amalekites?
What part did Moses, Aaron, Hur and Joshua and the men of Israel play in the victory?

12. As you look around at the unbelief and opposition to God, how might you better organize yourself and your friends to do something about it?

13. Reflect on how Moses summarized the day. What did he do, what did he emphasize, and why (Exodus 17:15-16)?

Nov. 29-Dec. 1

11 Jethro's Counsel: Enlist Helpers to Carry the Load Exodus 18

In-laws are the favorite butt of jokes. Rarely are they portrayed in a positive light. But God places us in extended families to give us added wisdom and to shave off our rough edges. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' wife and sons back to him. He also brought praise and worship to God. But he didn't stop there. This study shows how he made Moses face up to a weak link in his command. Jethro could be accused of meddling, but he was God's deliverer for Moses and Israel, just as much as Joshua and his soldiers were (Exodus 17:8-16). Jethro forces us to examine our motives in doing Christian service.

1. How do you anticipate family reunions, and why?

2. Read Exodus 18:1-12. What facts do we learn about Jethro and Moses' family (Exodus 18:1-4)?

3. What do the names of Moses' sons recall for him and his family (Exodus 18:3-4)?

4. Of what value is it to have a friend to whom you can tell everything?
Why would Moses have needed such a friend now?

5. Why was worship the appropriate response to Moses' report (Exodus 18:9-12)?

6. In what ways can you draw your family closer to God?

7. Read Exodus 18:13-27. What did Jethro observe about Moses' daily routine and the toll this was taking on Moses and the people (Exodus 18:13-18)?

8. How did Moses respond to Jethro's counsel (Exodus 18:19-26)? Why might this have been hard for him to do (Exodus 18:15-16)?

9. What impressions do you have of Moses' ego at this time in his life?

10. Why could it have been easy to overlook God's hand at work in this family reunion, compared to his provision of water, food and victories over the Egyptians and the Amalekites?

11. How open are you to seeing God's counsel through your parents, friends, wife or husband and in-laws? Explain.

12. Why is it ego-building to be sought after for your counsel and to have authority and responsibility over others (Exodus 18:15-16)?

13. For some, what ego needs are being met by their overworking themselves for God?

14. If you are in a leadership position, think about planning to share the load. What will this do for you, for others and especially for younger leaders coming along?

Dec. 6-8

12 The Encampment at Mount Sinai: Preparation for God's Laws Exodus 19

Do you tune in or tune out when the pastor stands to read the Scripture? You've heard it before? Probably. How then can Christians who have heard the Bible so often recapture the expectancy of hearing for the first time? A very practical problem indeed. When God spoke to his people the first time, a thunderstorm erupted. We can't expect that every Sunday, so perhaps we have to look within. How eager are we to hear God speak? To listen and obey? In this study we find not only thunder and lightning but a prepared, excited—even fearful—people. The New Testament reminds us that God is still a consuming fire.

1. In what practical ways can we prepare for Sunday-morning worship?

2. Read Exodus 19:1-9. After three months on the road, what prospect did God hold out for his people (Exodus 19:1-6)?
3. Why would the Israelites be inclined to believe God's promise and obey his commands (Exodus 19:7-8)?
4. What evidence do you have to trust and obey him?
5. Read Exodus 19:10-15. What preparations did the people have to make for God's appearance, and why?
6. What message was God conveying about himself and about his words (Exodus 19:6, 23)?
7. Moses "consecrated" the people so they could meet God (Exodus 19:14). What is required of you to meet him? Why?
8. Read Exodus 19:16-25. How and why did the people react to the signs of God's presence on the mountain (Exodus 19:16-19)?
9. Why would the Israelites be tempted to "force their way through to see the Lord" (Exodus 19:21)?
10. Moses acts as mediator between God and his people. In what sense is Jesus our mediator now (1 Tim. 2:5-6)?
11. What impressions do you have of Moses, of God and of the Israelites in this scene?
12. Why would the events of the three days predispose people to hear and obey God's words?
13. How can we hold God's Word in holy awe?

14. Read Hebrews 12:18-28. In light of Christians' far greater spiritual privileges, what warnings and encouragements does the writer give?

15. How can you be sure not to "refuse him who speaks" (Hebrews 12:25)?

Part 2: Teaching God's People

Exodus 20-40

Dec. 13-15

13 The Ten Commandments: Keys to God's Character and Human Welfare Exodus 20:1-21

The most convincing orders are those issues in simple words: Stop! Go! No misunderstanding them. In military training, soldiers learn split-second obedience to concise commands. Their survival depends on it! In Exodus 20, God speaks ten words—the most majestic moral commands ever spoken, the clearest rules for humanity's welfare. They are the foundation of personal and national life. They also reveal God's character. In this passage Israel learns that God is much more than the God of food, water, military victories and natural calamities.

1. When you were a child, how did your parents teach you to obey simple commands like, "Don't cross the street"?

2. Read Exodus 20:1-11. What right did God have to issue these commands (Exodus 20:2)?

3. Put the first command into your own words (Exodus 20:3).

Why are God's supremacy and the necessity of absolute loyalty the foundation for the Ten Commandments?

4. What reasons does God give for prohibiting idolatry (Exodus 20:4)?

5. What "other gods" or idols compete for your allegiance?

6. Give examples of "misusing" God's name (Exodus 20:7).

7. In today's world, how can we observe God's sabbath principle (Exodus 20:8-11)?
8. Read Exodus 20:12-21. How would you interpret the promise given to those who honor their parents (Exodus 20:12)?
9. What does "honor" include?
10. Murder and adultery (Exodus 20:13-14) are not just external acts; they are matters of the heart (see Matthew 5:21-30). What, then, does it mean to obey these commands?
11. Give examples of stealing, other than burglary and armed robbery (Exodus 20:15).
12. In what way is stealing a violation of the sanctity of human relations?
13. What might be some of the consequences of "false testimony" (Exodus 20:16)?
14. In what way is coveting (Exodus 20:17) not only a wrong against our neighbor but also against God?
15. Reflect on all the commands and, as needed, follow the promise of 1 John 1:9.

Jan. 10-12

14 Laws for Israel: God's Concern for a Well-Ordered Society Exodus 20:22-23:19

"Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." That law seems to have about as much relevance as the 55-mph-speed limit. But long before Congress got into the act, God gave laws to his nation that addressed serious social ills that still plague us today. Not goat's milk stew or speed limits—but what about murder, robbery and rape? What about justice and bribery? Who cares for the helpless? In this study Moses conveys God's plan for a newly born nation, whose fundamental credo was "You are to be my holy people" (Exodus 22:31). Holiness is never outdated.

1. What kinds of laws do people generally like? Dislike? Why?

2. Read Exodus 20:22-26. How would you summarize God's rules for idols and altars?

What reasons does he give for these rules?

3. Read Exodus 21:1-11. These laws were intended to improve the conditions of slaves. Why do you think slavery of any kind was permitted?

How does your concern for poor and exploited people express itself today?

4. Read Exodus 21:12-36. What crimes are subject to capital punishment, and why (Exodus 21:12-17)?

5. What legal principle underlies punishment of those guilty of causing personal injuries (Exodus 21:23-25)?

6. How was the welfare of society preserved and promoted by these laws?

7. Read Exodus 22:1-15. Restitution had to be made in certain cases. How does being liable for restitution contribute to the protection of property?

8. Read Exodus 22:16-31. In these miscellaneous laws, what do you sense is God's prime concern? Why?

9. What aspects of God's character stand out in this section?

10. How would you explain your social responsibilities based on the principles here?

11. Read Exodus 23:1-9. How does God's concern for justice and mercy stand out here?

12. Of these laws, which do you think are most appropriate to social needs in your community? Why?

13. Read Exodus 23:10-19. Compared to what Israel's religious festivals might cost the average Israelite, what does your worship of God cost you?

Jan.17-19

15 Ratifying the Covenant: God's Call to His People Confirmed Exodus 23:20-24:18

Peace treaties and home mortgages are ratified by signatures of the parties involved. Marriages are ratified by vows spoken before witnesses. The point is the same: promises are made and solemnly sealed. God called forth such an agreement at the birth of Israel. A written document was agreed to. Public vows were made. The blood of sacrificial animals sealed the covenant—a landmark in Israel's history. A marriage, as it were, was begun between God and his people. As this study reveals, our commitments to God carry awesome responsibilities.

1. What commitments do you now have that you have agreed to keep?

2. Read Exodus 23:20-33. What perils and temptations lie ahead for the Israelites?

3. In light of these, what commands and promises does God give?

4. On what basis would you think an Israelite could trust God for the unknown?

5. What perils or temptations are you facing?
How does God help you to meet them?

6. Read Exodus 24:1-8. After Israel's response (Exodus 24:3) and Moses' steps to ensure that a public record of the laws would be kept (Exodus 24:4), why was sacrifice appropriate (Exodus 24:5)?

7. How would you summarize the basic points of this agreement (covenant) between God and his people?

8. What is God's basic agreement with you (Hebrews 8:8-13)?
How was it ratified (Matthew 26:28)?

9. What kind of commitment have you made "to do everything the Lord has said"?

10. Read Exodus 24:9-18. What is the purpose of this mountain-top meeting with God?

11. God showed his glory to Israel (Exodus 24:15-18). In what ways have you seen God display his glory in your life?

12. What is the key to your most deeply moving meetings with God?
How does your time with God help you to keep your commitments to him?

Jan. 24-26

16 Instructions for the Tabernacle: God's Blueprint for Worship Exodus 25-27

Church buildings today appear to be designed primarily for functional purposes. We don't build Gothic cathedrals anymore. We struggle to find God's presence in our sanctuaries. For some, architecture is unimportant. For others, it's a prime source of inspiration. Moses and the Israelites didn't have to debate the matter. God gave them his plan for their sanctuary. Beyond the plans, however, were important spiritual lessons. Fortunately for us, the New Testament gives us the fulfillment of these plans in Christ and his church.

1. In what ways has a particular church building helped or hindered your worship of God?

2. Read Exodus 25:1-9. Why would an Israelite feel prompted to give building materials for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:2)?

3. What kinds of offerings does God expect from us (Romans 12:1; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Hebrews 13:15-16)?

4. What was the purpose of the sanctuary (Exodus 25:8)?
Since God does not dwell in a building now (Ephes. 2:19-22), why should we have church sanctuaries?

5. Read Exodus 25:10-22. The wooden chest called the ark held God's law ("the Testimony"). God promised to meet his people there and teach them his commands (Exodus 25:16, 22). As Christians, how is our access to God and his commands superior to what is described here?

6. Read Exodus 25:23-40. The bread of the Presence (Exodus 25:30) symbolized that the fruit of our labors come from and belong to God. Why would Israel need this daily reminder?

In what ways can we acknowledge this today?

7. Read Exodus 26:1-37. What does the value of the materials that went into the tabernacle suggest about the message God was trying to convey to his people?

8. Israel's tabernacle "was only a copy of the true one . . . heaven itself" (Hebrews 9:24). How does this fact enhance your appreciation of what Jesus has done and is doing for you (Hebrews 9:1-5, 23-28)?

9. Read Exodus 27:1-8. The altar was the place of sacrifice, which was to be central to Israel's worship. How has Christ fulfilled the purpose of these sacrifices (Hebrews 9:11-15)?

How do you express appreciation to Jesus for what he has done for you?

10. Read Exodus 27:9-21. Pretend you are standing in the courtyard of the tabernacle. Visualize the scene around you, including the burning lamps. Pick a few simple adjectives to describe what you see.

11. How has this tabernacle plan added to your ability to praise and worship God in relation to his character, majesty and saving deeds?

Jan. 31-Feb 2

17 Instituting the Priesthood: God's Holiness Demonstrated Exodus 28:1-29:37

Depending on your religious background, priests may be either venerated, despised or just tolerated. Regardless of our church affiliation and the various names we give our leaders, we recognize their role in corporate worship. Too often we see the man or woman in leadership and fail to focus on God himself. The focal point of worship is, after all, God and not the priest or pastor. God's plan for Israel's priesthood pointed to his own holiness and to human sin. Priests and worshipers alike needed atonement for their sins. This study will help you examine your own motives in worship.

1. When you hear the word *priest*, what one-word responses come to mind?

2. Read Exodus 28:1-30. How and why did God give special status to the sons of Aaron?

3. What sets you apart as special to God?

4. What would the precious stones mean to the Israelites in their relationship with God (Exodus 28:9-12, 21, 29)?

5. Jesus is our "continuing memorial before the Lord" (Hebrews 7:25). What does he mean to your self-image?

6. Read Exodus 28:31-43. What facts about God's nature are emphasized by these garments (Exodus 28:35-36, 38, 43)?

What do they teach about our spiritual condition and its consequences?

7. How can we develop an appreciation of our own sin and God's holiness in our worship?

8. Read Exodus 29:1-37. What offerings were made for the priests (Exodus 29:1-3)?

What was the underlying purpose of the offerings (Exodus 29:33)?

9. If you had been one of Aaron's sons, what would have been your major feelings and impressions about God and about your ministry?

10. Why do you think God went to such elaborate measures for his priests' garments and for their ordination?

11. In your life, what would compare to the priestly garments?

12. Jesus is our great high priest. What benefits do we receive from him (Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 5:1-3, 7-10; Hebrews 9:11-15; Hebrews 10:19-25)?

13. How does your life show your appreciation for these resources in Christ and your desire to use them?

Feb. 7-9

18 Planning the Tabernacle: God's Revelation in People and Things Exodus 29:38-31:18

"Back to the drawing board" is often said after a failed experiment or project. Sometimes Christians behave as though the worship of God is a do-it-yourself project. Some lack a sense of responding to God himself. Church leaders experiment and fiddle with changes in the order of worship. But God is a God of economy and order. No wasted, botched plans or experiments with him. Moses and the Israelites received a specific plan, precise in every detail and dimension. Each part of the plan said something about God. Careful study of the plan pays off in new insights about God and about worship.

1. When you start for church on Sunday morning, what goals for yourself do you have in mind?
2. Read Exodus 29:38-46. How does God summarize the purposes of worship (Exodus 29:42-46)?
3. Under what circumstances do you best meet God, know his fellowship and learn who he is?
4. Read Exodus 30:1-10. Incense speaks of the prayers of God's people (Rev. 5:8). Why would Israel need such a reminder?
5. How can you become more faithful in daily prayer?
6. Read Exodus 30:11-16. What aspect of worship would be inspired by paying atonement money?
7. Why do you think it was important that rich and poor gave the same small amount (Exodus 30:15)?
8. Read Exodus 30:17-21. When the priests washed, what would they remember about God and about themselves?
9. The Bible speaks of the cleansing effect of Scripture (Psalm 119:9; John 15:3). Why is it important to be washed daily by God's Word?
10. Read Exodus 30:22-38. The sacred anointing oil signified holiness (Exodus 30:29). In what ways are Christians set apart for holy uses by God?

11. Read Exodus 31:1-11. The shepherds of Israel had neither artistic skills nor craftsmanship. What does God's plan to remedy this reveal about his concern for beauty?

12. What has God uniquely gifted you to do?

13. Read Exodus 31:12-18. This is the third instruction and warning regarding the Sabbath (see Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 23:10-13). What new emphasis is added here regarding the purpose of the Sabbath and the punishment of those who disregard it?

14. From these forty days' instructions (Exodus 25-31) by God, what major impressions do you receive about him and about worshiping him?

How do these impressions affect your own worship?

Feb. 14-16

19 The Golden Calf: Idolatry Takes a Fearful Toll Exodus 32

Probably nothing shocks us as much as defection. Selling out to the enemy is hard to understand. Loyalty rightly stands near the top of qualities we admire. When traitors are exposed, we smugly assume that we would never do such a thing. But who knows where we are the most vulnerable? On the heels of glorious triumph, Israel plunged into idolatry on the flimsiest of excuses. God's nation flunked the loyalty test, with disastrous consequences.

1. It's been said that every person has a price. In what areas might you be most susceptible to betraying God, and why?

2. Read Exodus 32:1-6. Who instigated the idolatry, and why (Exodus 32:1)?

3. Why do you think Aaron went along with it (Exodus 32:2-6)?

4. Read Exodus 32:7-14. What impresses you about the dialog between God and Moses (Exodus 32:9-14)?

5. In what ways can we emulate Moses in our relation to God and in our care for sinning people?
6. Read Exodus 32:15-24. How did Moses react when he saw the Israelites' idolatrous worship (Exodus 32:19-24)?
7. Why do you think Aaron lied to Moses (Exodus 32:22-24)?
8. What positive and negative examples of spiritual leadership do you see here?
9. In what situations have you exercised, or failed to exercise, a strong stand against clear-cut violations of God's commands? Explain.
10. Read Exodus 32:25-35. How was God's judgment against idolatry carried out (Exodus 32:27-28, 35)?
11. What did it cost the Levites to take a public stand for God?
12. Moses offered his life to atone for Israel's sin (Exodus 32:30-32). What did God promise instead (Exodus 32:33-34)?
13. What character qualities does Moses demonstrate in this incident?
- How do you account for them?
14. What spiritual disciplines could help you maintain faithfulness to God?

Feb. 21-23

20 God's Presence and Glory: Essential Requirement and Goal Exodus 33

I remember taking my son to school the first time. I dragged him all the way. My presence was not enough to enable him to face this terrible prospect. The command to go was clear, but that wasn't enough for him. God

commanded Israel to go to the good land he had promised to give them. God's leader asked for God's presence before he would move out. In this study we see more of God's loving patience with Moses and Israel, and how this speaks to our own basic spiritual goals.

1. In what circumstances have you felt a special need of God's presence, and why?
2. Read Exodus 33:1-6. What commands, promises and warning did God give Israel?
3. What does it mean to be a "stiff-necked people" (Exodus 33:3, 5)?
How would such a person be described today?
4. What can we do to avoid this condition?
5. Read Exodus 33:7-11. What occurred at the tent of meeting, and why?
6. What do these verses reveal about Moses' relationship with God and the effect it had on others?
7. What would it take for you to develop such a relationship?
What would it do for you and for God?
8. Read Exodus 33:12-23. Look at the development of Moses' requests (Exodus 33:13, 15, 18). How do they increase in spiritual wisdom and depth and reveal Moses' deepest desire?
9. God allowed Moses to hear his name proclaimed (Exodus 33:19). What did this add to their relationship?
10. In God's answer to Moses (Exodus 33:19-23), what do you learn about his nature and character?
11. How has the Lord demonstrated these qualities in Exodus?
12. Moses could not see God's face. What is our privilege and responsibility in light of John 14:8-14 and Hebrews 1:1-4?
13. In what ways do you demonstrate a desire to know God and to see his glory?

How has God honored your requests?

March 7-9

21 Renewing the Covenant: God Reveals His Nature and Laws—Again Exodus 34

The cynical statement of some historians is that treaties are made to be broken. Sadly, that's often been the case. Man's record of keeping treaties is abysmal, but nations keep on making treaties, hoping for a more secure future. Israel fell into idolatry and soon broke faith with God (Exodus 19:8; Exodus 24:3). Likewise, we can recall solemn vows and promises shattered by expediency, fear and unfaithfulness. But God doesn't quit on us. That's not his nature. In this study, he calls Moses to the mountain a second time and reaffirms principles of holy living.

1. Think of an experience in which you were given a second chance. How did it make you feel? Why?

2. Read Exodus 34:1-9. In order to meet God, what was required of Moses, and why (Exodus 34:1-3)?

3. How would you describe God, based on what he proclaimed to Moses (Exodus 34:6-7)?

Why did Moses need this reminder?

4. How can you develop an appreciation for each aspect of God's nature?

5. What request did Moses make, and why (Exodus 34:8-9)?

6. Read Exodus 34:10-28. How would you summarize the covenant God made with Israel?

7. Of all the laws previously given, why do you think these are emphasized at this time?

8. God calls us to live among those who do not honor his name. In what ways can they be a "snare" for us (Exodus 34:12)?

9. What principles of godly living in the New Testament would correspond to God's concern for Israel here (Galatians 5:16-26; Ephes. 4:20-32)?

10. Read Exodus 34:29-35. What effect did this meeting with God have on Moses, the leaders and the people (Exodus 34:29-32)?

11. What practice was then established, and why (Exodus 34:33-35)?

12. What greater privilege is ours in Christ (2 Cor. 3:18)?

13. What is required of us if we are to reflect God's glory?

14. God gave Israel a second chance, so to speak. What is there in this experience to encourage you to keep on in faith and obedience to God?

March 14-16

22 Building the Tabernacle: More Than Enough to Do the Job Exodus 35-36

Hardly a day passes that we aren't asked to contribute to some worthy cause, or implored to work on a needed project. The avalanche of appeals dulls our senses and makes it hard to sort out priorities. It's tempting to do nothing. In this study, God launches a tabernacle building project. He asks for money (donated goods) and services (labor). Israel was called a "stiff-necked people"—not the best prospects for a building fund drive—but their response to God is surprising.

1. To what needs are you giving time or money, and why?

2. Read Exodus 35:1-29. What was God's plan for the provision of materials (Exodus 35:4-9)?

3. What factors would an Israelite weigh in deciding whether or not to give?

4. Of what value and importance would it be for the Israelites to give their own possessions and to build the tabernacle themselves (Exodus 35:10)?

5. The Israelites responded to God's call for an offering (Exodus 35:20-29). How do you account for this outpouring of goods and materials (see Exodus 36:3-7)?

6. In God's plan, how was it possible for everyone to give something (see Exodus 3:21-22; Exodus 12:35-36)?

7. Read Exodus 35:30-36:7. How did the nomadic Israelites—shepherds in Egypt for more than four centuries—suddenly develop skills in design, building and craftsmanship (Exodus 35:30-35)?

8. Who came to do the work (Exodus 36:1-2)?

What problem did they encounter (Exodus 36:3-7)?

9. Read Exodus 36:8-38. What impressions of the design and beauty of the tabernacle do you gain from this description?

10. What possessions and abilities do you have for God to use?

What has he shown you about how to use them for his service?

11. What keeps God's people today from giving willingly, sacrificially and generously?

12. What would it take in your church to produce an outpouring of goods and services for God's use, like that of the Israelites (see 2 Cor. 8:1-5)?

March 21-23

23 Making Furnishings and Garments: God Speaks Powerfully in Wood, Gold, Silver, Linen and Wool Exodus 37:1-39:31

How important is the furniture in your church? What about the clothes people wear? What do they say to you and others? In God's plan for Israel's worship, he spoke powerfully through furniture and clothing. God has also

given us spiritual dress—both inner qualities and outward deeds—to help people know and understand him. He also speaks to us in the beauty of the sanctuary. This study looks at outward things, so look for their hidden meaning and significance. The medium is the message in this case.

1. How could a cabinetmaker and a seamstress glorify God in their work?
2. Read Exodus 37-38. How would the ark, table, lampstand, altar of incense and altar of burnt offering assist the Israelites in their worship of God?
3. What aspect of God's nature and character does each article depict?
4. How does each article illustrate some aspect of our own relation to God?
5. What advantages do we have in knowing and worshiping God that the Israelites did not have (Hebrews 9:1-15)?
6. Read Exodus 39. What message was God trying to convey about himself and worship through the ephod, breastpiece, robe and tunic of the priests?
7. The New Testament refers to Christians as priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9). What is our function as priests?
8. What priestly garments are we called to wear (Col. 3:12-14)?
9. How would these qualities help us in our role as priests?
10. Fine linen (Exodus 38:9; Exodus 39:3, 5, 8, 27) appears again at the consummation of God's plan for his people. It will be the clothing of Christ's bride, the church. What does it represent (Rev. 19:8)?

As one of God's saints, what does the significance of fine linen inspire you to do and to anticipate?

March 28-30

24 Dedicating the Tabernacle: Time for Praise and Reflection *Exodus 39:32-40:38*

Dedications of new churches are special. Such services evoke pride and appreciation. But with every privilege and blessing from God comes new responsibilities. Our church buildings, in a sense, call us to faithful worship, witness and obedience to God's will. Although God's glory may not be visible, it is present in our hearts. Join with Moses and the Israelites in this study and celebrate God's goodness to them and to us.

1. In what circumstances have you especially felt God's presence, and why?

2. Read Exodus 39:32-43. What feelings do you think the Israelites had in working "just as the Lord had commanded" and in showing their work to Moses?

3. As you invest your life for God, what satisfaction have you gained from following his blueprint?

4. Read Exodus 40:1-33. Why was it necessary to anoint everything, to burn incense and make offerings (Exodus 40:9-10, 26-29)?

5. Buildings and furnishings today are not holy, as the tabernacle and its furnishings were. What are the components of God's dwelling place today (Ephes. 2:19-22)?

6. What care are we to take in constructing God's dwelling place, and why (1 Cor. 3:9-17)?

7. Read Exodus 40:34-38. How did God reveal his presence?

8. What do you think "the glory of the Lord" resembled?

9. How does God reveal his glory and presence in our midst today?

10. Imagine the feelings of the Israelites on this day. What reasons would they have had for these feelings?

11. Thirteen chapters of Exodus deal with the tabernacle and the priesthood. What important lessons did God intend for his people to learn through them?

12. What major lessons has God taught you about your life with him through studying Exodus?

Notes for 1:9,10 Pharaoh was afraid the Israelites were becoming so numerous that they would organize and threaten his kingdom, so he made them slaves and oppressed them to kill their spirit and stop their growth. Slavery was an ancient practice used by almost all nations to employ conquered people and other captives. Most likely, the great pyramids of Egypt were built with slave labor. Although Israel was not a conquered nation, the people were foreigners and thus lacked the rights of native Egyptians.

Notes for 1:11 There were levels of slavery in Egypt. Some slaves worked long hours in mud pits while others were skilled carpenters, jewelers, and craftsmen. Regardless of their skill or level, all slaves were watched closely by ruthless slave masters, supervisors whose assignment was to keep the slaves working as fast as possible. They were specialists at making a slave's life miserable.

1:11 Ancient records indicate that these cities were built in 1290 B.C., which is why some scholars believe the exodus occurred early in the 13th century. Looking at other evidence, however, other scholars believe the Hebrews left Egypt in 1446 B.C. How could they build two cities 150 years after they left? These scholars suggest that Rameses II, the pharaoh in 1290 B.C., did not build the cities of Pithom and Rameses. Instead, he renamed two cities that actually had been built 150 years previously. It was a common practice for an Egyptian ruler to make improvements on a city and then take credit for building it, thus wiping out all records of previous founders. Also see the second note on Ex 13:17,18.

Notes for 1:12 The Egyptians tried to wear down the Hebrew people by forcing them into slavery and mistreating them. Instead, the Hebrews multiplied and grew stronger. When we are burdened or mistreated, we may feel defeated. But our burdens can make us stronger and develop qualities in us that will prepare us for the future. We cannot be overcomers without troubles to overcome. Be true to God in the hard times because even the worst situations can make us better people.

Notes for 1:15-17 Shiphras and Puah may have been supervisors over the midwives, or else these two were given special mention. Hebrew midwives helped women give birth and cared for the baby until the mother was stronger. When Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill the Hebrew baby boys, he was asking the wrong group of people. Midwives were committed to helping babies be born, not to killing them. These women showed great courage and love for God by risking their lives to disobey Pharaoh's command. Note: A delivery stool was the stool upon which a woman crouched when delivering her baby.

Notes for 1:17-21 Against Pharaoh's orders, the midwives spared the Hebrew babies. Their faith in God gave them the courage to take a stand for what they knew was right. In this situation, disobeying the authority was proper. God does not expect us to obey those in authority when they ask us to disobey him or his Word. The Bible is filled with examples of those who were willing to sacrifice their very lives in order to obey God or save others. Esther and Mordecai (Esther 3:2; 4:13-16) and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18) are some of the people who took a bold stand for what was right. Whole nations can be caught up in immorality (racial hatred, slavery, prison cruelty); thus following the majority or the authority is not always right. Whenever we are ordered to disobey God's Word, we must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Notes for 1:19-21 Did God bless the Hebrew midwives for lying to Pharaoh? God blessed them not because they lied, but because they saved the lives of innocent children. This doesn't mean that a lie was necessarily the best way to answer Pharaoh. The midwives were blessed, however, for not violating the higher law of God that forbids the senseless slaughter of innocent lives.

Notes for 2:1,2 Although a name is not mentioned yet, the baby in this story was Moses. Moses' mother and father were named Jochebed and Amram. His brother was Aaron and his sister, Miriam.

Notes for 2:3 This tiny boat made of papyrus reeds was fashioned by a woman who knew what she was doing. Egyptian river boats were made with these same reeds and waterproofed with tar. The reeds, which grew as tall as sixteen feet, could be gathered in swampy areas along the Nile. Thus a small basket hidden among the reeds would be well insulated from the weather and difficult to see.

2:3ff Moses' mother knew how wrong it would be to destroy her child. But there was little she could do to change Pharaoh's new law. Her only alternative was to hide the child and later place him in a tiny papyrus basket on the river. God used her courageous act to place her son, the Hebrew of his choice, in the house of Pharaoh. Do you sometimes feel surrounded by evil and frustrated by how little you can do about it? When faced with evil, look for ways to act against it. Then trust God to use your effort, however small it seems, in his war against evil.

Notes for 2:5 Who was Pharaoh's daughter? There are two popular explanations. (1) Some think that Hatshepsut was the woman who pulled Moses from the river. Her husband was Pharaoh Thutmose II. (This would match the earlier exodus date.) Apparently Hatshepsut could not have children, so Thutmose had a son by another woman, and this son became heir to the throne. Hatshepsut would have considered Moses a gift from the gods because now she had her own son who would be the legal heir to the throne. (2) Some think the princess who rescued baby Moses was the daughter of Rameses II, an especially cruel Pharaoh who would have made life miserable for the Hebrew slaves. (This would match the later exodus date.)

Notes for 2:7,8 Miriam, the baby's sister, saw that Pharaoh's daughter had discovered Moses. Quickly she took the initiative to suggest a nurse (her mother) who might care for the baby. The Bible doesn't say if Miriam was afraid to approach the Egyptian princess, or if the princess was suspicious of the Hebrew girl. But Miriam did approach her, and the princess bought the services of Miriam and her mother. Their family was reunited. Special opportunities may come our way unexpectedly. Don't let the fear of what might happen cause you to miss an opportunity. Be alert for the opportunities God gives you, and take full advantage of them.

Notes for 2:9 Moses' mother was reunited with her baby! God used her courageous act of saving and hiding her baby to begin his plan to rescue his people from Egypt. God doesn't need much from us to accomplish his plan for our lives. Focusing on our human predicament may paralyze us because the situation may appear humanly impossible. But concentrating on God and his power will help us see the way out. Right now you may feel unable to see through your troubles. Focus instead on God, and trust him for the way out. That is all he needs to begin his work in you.

Notes for 2:12-14 Moses tried to make sure no one was watching before he killed the Egyptian. But as it turned out, someone did see, and Moses had to flee the country. Sometimes we mistakenly think we can get away with doing wrong if no one sees or catches us. Sooner or later, however, doing wrong will catch up with us as it did with Moses. Even if we are not caught in this life, we will still have to face God and his evaluation of our actions.

Notes for 2:15 To escape punishment for killing the Egyptian, Moses ran away to Midian. He became a stranger in a strange land, separated from his home and family. It took many years after this incident for Moses to be ready to serve God. But he trusted God instead of fearing the king (Hebrews 11:27). We may feel abandoned or isolated because of something we have done. But though we feel afraid and separated, we should not give up. Moses didn't. He trusted God to deliver him, no matter how dark his past or bleak his future. After murdering an Egyptian, Moses escaped into Midian. There he married Zipporah and became a shepherd.

Notes for 2:17 How did Moses handle these shepherds so easily? As an Egyptian prince, Moses would have been well trained in the Egyptian military, the most advanced army in the world. Even a large group of shepherds would have been no match for the sophisticated fighting techniques of this trained warrior.

Notes for 2:18 Reuel is also called Jethro in Ex 3:1.

Notes for 2:23-25 God's rescue doesn't always come the moment we want it. God had promised to bring the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt (Genesis 15:16; 46:3,4). The people had waited a long time for that promise to be kept, but God rescued them when he knew the right time had come. God knows the best time to act. When you feel that God has forgotten you in your troubles, remember that God has a time schedule we can't see.

Notes for 3:1 What a contrast between Moses' life as an Egyptian prince and his life as a Midianite shepherd! As a prince he had everything done for him; he was the famous son of an Egyptian princess. As a shepherd he had to do everything for himself; he was holding the very job he had been taught to despise (Genesis 43:32; 46:32-34), and he lived as an unknown foreigner. What a humbling experience this must have been for Moses! But God was preparing him for leadership. Living the life of a shepherd and nomad, Moses learned about the ways of the people he would be leading

and also about life in the desert. Moses couldn't appreciate this lesson, but God was getting him ready to free Israel from Pharaoh's grasp.

3:1 Mount Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God would give the people his revealed law (Ex 3:12).

Notes for 3:2 God spoke to Moses from an unexpected source: a burning bush. When Moses saw it, he went to investigate. God may use unexpected sources when communicating to us too, whether people, thoughts, or experiences. Be willing to investigate, and be open to God's surprises.

3:2-4 Moses saw a burning bush and spoke with God. Many people in the Bible experienced God in visible (not necessarily human) form. Abraham saw the smoking firepot and blazing torch (Genesis 15:17); Jacob wrestled with a man (Genesis 32:24-29). When the slaves were freed from Egypt, God led them by pillars of cloud and fire (Ex 13:17-22). God made such appearances to encourage his new nation, to guide them, and to prove the reliability of his verbal message.

Notes for 3:5,6 At God's command, Moses removed his sandals and covered his face. Taking off his shoes was an act of reverence, conveying his own unworthiness before God. God is our friend, but he is also our sovereign Lord. To approach him frivolously shows a lack of respect and sincerity. When you come to God in worship, do you approach him casually, or do you come as though you were an invited guest before a king? If necessary, adjust your attitude so it is suitable for approaching a holy God.

Notes for 3:8 "The home of the Canaanites" is the land of Israel and Jordan today. Canaanites was a term for all the various tribes living in that land.

Notes for 3:10 Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate for the job God asked him to do. It was natural for him to feel that way. He was inadequate all by himself. But God wasn't asking Moses to work alone. He offered other resources to help (God himself, Aaron, and the ability to do miracles). God often calls us to tasks that seem too difficult, but he doesn't ask us to do them alone. God offers us his resources, just as he did to Moses. We should not hide behind our inadequacies, as Moses did, but look beyond ourselves to the great resources available. Then we can allow God to use our unique contributions.

Notes for 3:13-15 The Egyptians had many gods by many different names. Moses wanted to know God's name so the Hebrew people would know exactly who had sent him to them. God called himself, I AM, a name describing his eternal power and unchangeable character. In a world where values, morals, and laws change constantly, we can find stability and security in our unchanging God. The God who appeared to Moses is the same God who can live in us today. Hebrews 13:8 says God is the same "yesterday and today and forever." Because God's nature is stable and trustworthy, we are free to follow and enjoy him rather than spend our time trying to figure him out.

Notes for 3:14,15 Yahweh is derived from the Hebrew word for "I AM." God reminded Moses of his covenant promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Gen 15,17), Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5), and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15), and used the name I AM to show his unchanging nature. What God promised to the great patriarchs hundreds of years earlier he would fulfill through Moses.

Notes for 3:16,17 God told Moses to tell the people what he saw and heard at the burning bush. Our God is a God who acts and speaks. One of the most convincing ways to tell others about him is to describe what he has done and how he has spoken to his people. If you are trying to explain God to others, talk about what he has done for you, for people you know, or for people whose stories are told in the Bible.

Notes for 3:17 "A land flowing with milk and honey" is a poetic word picture expressing the beauty and productivity of the promised land.

Notes for 3:18-20 The leaders of Israel would accept God's message, and the leaders of Egypt would reject it. God knew what both reactions would be before they happened. This is more than good psychology — God knows the future. Any believer can trust his or her future to God because God already knows what is going to happen.

Notes for 3:22 The jewels and clothing were not merely borrowed — they were asked for and easily received. The Egyptians were so glad to see the Israelites go that they sent them out with gifts. These items were used later in building the tabernacle (Ex 35:5,22). The promise of being able to plunder the Egyptians seemed impossible to Moses at this time.

Notes for 4:1 Moses' reluctance and fear were caused by overanticipation. He was worried about how the people might respond to him. We often build up events in our minds and then panic over what might go wrong. God does not ask us to go where he has not provided the means to help. Go where he leads, trusting him to supply courage, confidence, and resources at the right moment.

Notes for 4:2-4 A shepherd's staff was commonly a three- to six-foot wooden rod with a curved hook at the top. The shepherd used it for walking, guiding his sheep, killing snakes, and many other tasks. Still, it was just a stick. But God used the simple shepherd's staff Moses carried as a sign to teach him an important lesson. God sometimes takes joy in using ordinary things for extraordinary purposes. What are the ordinary things in your life — your voice, a pen, a hammer, a broom, a musical instrument? While it is easy to assume God can use only special skills, you must not hinder his use of the everyday contributions you can make. Little did Moses imagine the power his simple staff would wield when it became the staff of God.

Notes for 4:6,7 Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases of this time. There was no cure, and a great deal of suffering preceded eventual death. Through this experience, Moses learned that God could cause or cure any kind of problem. He saw that God indeed had all power and was commissioning him to exercise that power to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt.

Notes for 4:10-13 Moses pleaded with God to let him out of his mission. After all, he was not a good speaker and would probably embarrass both himself and God. But God looked at Moses' problem quite differently. All Moses needed was some help, and who better than God could help him say and do the right things. God made his mouth and would give him the words to say. It is easy for us to focus on our weaknesses, but if God asks us to do something, then he will help us get the job done. If the job involves some of our weak areas, then we can trust that he will provide words, strength, courage, and ability where needed.

Notes for 4:14 God finally agreed to let Aaron speak for Moses. Moses' feelings of inadequacy were so strong that he could not trust even God's ability to help him. Moses had to deal with his deep sense of inadequacy many times. When we face difficult or frightening situations, we must be willing to let God help us.

Notes for 4:16 The phrase, "as if you were God to him," means that Moses would tell Aaron what to say as God was telling him.

Notes for 4:17-20 Moses clung tightly to the shepherd's staff as he left for Egypt to face the greatest challenge of his life. The staff was his assurance of God's presence and power. When feeling uncertain, some people need something to stabilize and reassure them. For assurance when facing great trials, God has given promises from his Word and examples from great heroes of faith. Any Christian may cling tightly to these.

Notes for 4:24-26 God was about to kill Moses because Moses had not circumcised his son. Why hadn't Moses done this? Remember that Moses had spent half his life in Pharaoh's palace and half his life in the Midianite desert. He might not have been too familiar with God's laws, especially since all the requirements of God's covenant with Israel (Genesis 17) had not been actively carried out for over 400 years. In addition, Moses' wife, due to her Midianite background, may have opposed circumcision. But Moses could not effectively serve as deliverer of God's people until he had fulfilled the conditions of God's covenant, and one of those conditions was circumcision. Before they could go any farther, Moses and his family had to follow God's commands completely. Under Old Testament law, failing to circumcise your son was to remove yourself and your family from God's blessings. Moses learned that disobeying God was even more dangerous than tangling with an Egyptian pharaoh.

Notes for 4:25,26 Why did Zipporah perform the circumcision? It may have been Zipporah who, as a Midianite unfamiliar with the circumcision requirement, had persuaded Moses not to circumcise their son. If she prevented the action, now she would have to perform it. It is also possible that Moses became ill as a result of permitting disobedience, and so Zipporah had to perform the circumcision herself to save both her husband and son. This would not have made her happy — hence, her unflattering comment to Moses. God appeared to Moses in a mysterious burning bush on Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb). Later Aaron met Moses at the mountain and together they returned to Egypt, a 200-mile trip.

Notes for 5:1,2 Pharaoh was familiar with many gods (Egypt was filled with them), but he had never heard of the God of Israel. Pharaoh assumed that the God of the Hebrew slaves couldn't be very powerful. At first, Pharaoh was not at all worried about Moses' message, for he had not yet seen any evidence of the Lord's power.

Notes for 5:3 Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and Aaron because he did not know or respect God. People who do not know God may not listen to his word or his messengers. Like Moses and Aaron, we need to persist. When others reject you or your faith, don't be surprised or discouraged. Continue to tell them about God, trusting him to open minds and soften stubborn hearts.

Notes for 5:4-9 Moses and Aaron took their message to Pharaoh just as God directed. The unhappy result was harder work and more oppression for the Hebrews. Sometimes hardship comes as a result of obeying God. Are you following

God but still suffering — or suffering even worse than before? If your life is miserable, don't assume you have fallen out of God's favor. You may be suffering for doing good in an evil world.

Notes for 5:7,8 Mixing straw with mud made bricks stronger and more durable. Pharaoh had supplied the slaves with straw, but now he made them find their own straw and keep up their production quota as well.

Notes for 5:15-21 The foremen were caught in the middle. First they tried to get the people to produce the same amount, then they complained to Pharaoh, finally they turned on Moses. Perhaps you have felt caught in the middle at work, or in relationships in your family or church. Complaining or turning on the leadership does not solve the problem. In the case of these supervisors, God had a larger purpose in mind, just as he might in your situation. So rather than turning on the leadership when you feel pressured by both sides, turn to God to see what else he might be doing in this situation.

Notes for 5:22,23 Pharaoh had just increased the Hebrews' workload, and Moses protested that God had not rescued his people. Moses expected faster results and fewer problems. When God is at work, suffering, setbacks, and hardship may still occur. In James 1:2-4, we are encouraged to be happy when difficulties come our way. Problems develop our patience and character by teaching us to (1) trust God to do what is best for us, (2) look for ways to honor God in our present situation, (3) remember that God will not abandon us, and (4) watch for God's plan for us.

Notes for 6:6 Small problems need only small answers. But when we face great problems, God has an opportunity to exercise his great power. As the Hebrews' troubles grew steadily worse, God planned to intervene with his mighty power and perform great miracles to deliver them. How big are your problems? Big problems put you in a perfect position to watch God give big answers.

6:6-8 God's promises in these verses were fulfilled to the letter when the Hebrews left Egypt. He freed them from slavery, became their God, and accepted them as his people. Then he led them toward the land he had promised. When the Hebrews were rescued from slavery, they portrayed the drama of salvation for all of us. When God redeems us from sin he delivers us, accepts us, and becomes our God. Then he leads us to a new life as we follow him.

Notes for 6:9-12 When Moses gave God's message to the people, they were too discouraged to listen. The Hebrews didn't want to hear any more about God and his promises because the last time they listened to Moses, all they got was more work and greater suffering. Sometimes a clear message from God is followed by a period when no change in the situation is apparent. During that time, seeming setbacks may turn people away from wanting to hear more about God. If you are a leader, don't give up. Keep bringing people God's message as Moses did. By focusing on God who must be obeyed rather than on the results to be achieved, good leaders see beyond temporary setbacks and reversals.

Notes for 6:10-12 Think how hard it must have been for Moses to bring God's message to Pharaoh when his own people had trouble believing it. Eventually the Hebrews believed that God had sent Moses, but for a time he must have felt very alone. Moses obeyed God, however, and what a difference it made! When the chances for success appear slim, remember that anyone can obey God when the task is easy and everyone is behind it. Only those with persistent faith can obey when the task seems impossible.

Notes for 6:14-25 This genealogy or family tree was placed here to identify more firmly Moses and Aaron. Genealogies were used to establish credentials and authority as well as outlining the history of a family.

Notes for 6:26 To bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions means that they would be brought out in tribes, clans, or family groups.

Notes for 7:1 God made Moses "like God to Pharaoh" — in other words, a powerful person who deserved to be listened to. Pharaoh himself was considered a god, so he recognized Moses as one of his peers. His refusal to give in to Moses shows, however, that he did not feel inferior to Moses.

Notes for 7:11 How were these sorcerers and magicians able to duplicate Moses' miracles? Some of their feats involved trickery or illusion, and some may have used satanic power since worshiping gods of the underworld was part of their religion. Ironically, whenever the sorcerers duplicated one of Moses' plagues, it only made matters worse. If the magicians had been as powerful as God, they would have reversed the plagues, not added to them.

Notes for 7:12 God performed a miracle by turning Aaron's staff into a snake, and Pharaoh's magicians did the same through trickery or sorcery. Although miracles can help us believe, it is dangerous to rely on them alone. Satan can imitate some parts of God's work and lead people astray. Pharaoh focused on the miracle rather than the message. We can avoid this error by letting the Word of God be the basis of our faith. No miracle from God would endorse any message that is contrary to the teachings of his Word.

Notes for 7:17 God dramatically turned the waters of the Nile into blood to show Pharaoh who he was. Do you sometimes wish for miraculous signs so you can be sure about God? God has given you the miracle of eternal life through your faith in him, something Pharaoh never obtained. This is a quiet miracle and, though less evident right now, just as extraordinary as water turned to blood. The desire for spectacular signs may cause us to ignore the more subtle miracles God is working every day.

Notes for 7:20 Egypt was a large country, but most of the population lived along the banks of the Nile River. This 3,000-mile waterway was truly a river of life for the Egyptians. It made life possible in a land that was mostly desert by providing water for drinking, farming, bathing, and fishing. Egyptian society was a ribbon of civilization lining the banks of this life source, rarely reaching very far into the surrounding desert. Without the Nile's water, Egypt could not have existed. Imagine Pharaoh's dismay when Moses turned this sacred river to blood!

Notes for 8:3 Moses predicted that every house in Egypt would be infested with frogs. The poor of Egypt lived in small, mud-brick houses of one or two rooms with palm-trunk roofs. The homes of the rich, however, were often two or three stories high, surrounded by landscaped gardens and enclosed by a high wall. Servants lived and worked on the first floor while the family occupied the upper floors. Thus if the frogs got into the royal bedrooms, they had infiltrated even the upper floors. No place in Egypt would be safe from them.

Notes for 8:15 After repeated warnings, Pharaoh still refused to obey God. He hardened his heart every time there was a break in the plagues. His stubborn disobedience brought suffering upon himself and his entire country. While persistence is good, stubbornness is usually self-centered. Stubbornness toward God is always disobedience. Avoid disobedience because the consequences may spill onto others.

Notes for 8:19 Some people think, "If only I could see a miracle, I could believe in God." God gave Pharaoh just such an opportunity. When gnats infested Egypt, even the magicians agreed that this was God's work ("the finger of God") — but still Pharaoh refused to believe. He was stubborn, and stubbornness can blind a person to the truth. When you rid yourself of stubbornness, you may be surprised by abundant evidence of God's work in your life.

Notes for 8:25-29 Pharaoh wanted a compromise. He would allow the Hebrews to sacrifice, but only if they would do it nearby. God's requirement, however, was firm: The Hebrews had to leave Egypt. Sometimes people urge believers to compromise and give only partial obedience to God's commands. But commitment and obedience to God cannot be negotiated. When it comes to obeying God, half measures won't do.

Notes for 8:26 The Israelites would be sacrificing animals that the Egyptians regarded as sacred, and this would be offensive to them. Moses was concerned about a violent reaction to sacrificing these animals near the Egyptians.

Notes for 9:1 This was the fifth time God sent Moses back to Pharaoh with the demand, "Let my people go!" By this time, Moses may have been tired and discouraged, but he continued to obey. Is there a difficult conflict you must face again and again? Don't give up when you know what is right to do. As Moses discovered, persistence is rewarded.

Chart: The Plagues Ex 7:14-24

The Plagues	Reference	Plague	What Happened	Result
Blood	Fish die, the river smells, the people are without water - Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle by "secret arts" and Pharaoh is unmoved Ex 8:1-15			
Frogs	Frogs come up from the water and completely cover the land - Again Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle by sorcery and Pharaoh is unmoved Ex 8:16-19			
Gnats	All the dust of Egypt becomes a massive swarm of gnats - Magicians are unable to duplicate this, they say it is the "finger of God," but Pharaoh's heart remains hard Ex 8:20-32			
Flies	Swarms of flies cover the land - Pharaoh promises to let the Hebrews go, but then hardens his heart and refuses Ex 9:1-7			
Livestock	All the Egyptian livestock dies-but none of Israel's is even sick - Pharaoh still refuses to let the people go Ex 9:8-12			
Boils	Horrible boils break out on everyone in Egypt - Magicians cannot respond because they are struck down with boils as well-Pharaoh refuses to listen Ex 9:13-35			
Hail	Hailstorms kill all the slaves and animals left out or unprotected and strip or destroy almost every plant - Pharaoh admits his sin, but then changes his mind and refuses to let Israel go Ex 10:1-20			
Locusts	Locusts cover Egypt and eat everything left after the hail - Everyone advises Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go, but God hardens Pharaoh's heart and he refuses Ex 10:21-29			

Darkness Total darkness covers Egypt for three days so no one can even move-except the Hebrews, who have light at usual - Pharaoh again promises to let Israel go, but again changes his mind Ex 11:1-12:33

Death of Firstborn The firstborn of all the people and cattle of Egypt die-but Israel is spared - Pharaoh and the Egyptians urge Israel to leave quickly; after they are gone, Pharaoh again changes his mind and chases after them

Notes for 9:12 God gave Pharaoh many opportunities to heed Moses' warnings. But finally God seemed to say, "All right, Pharaoh, have it your way," and Pharaoh's heart became permanently hardened. Did God intentionally harden Pharaoh's heart and overrule his free will? No, he simply confirmed that Pharaoh freely chose a life of resisting God. Similarly, after a lifetime of resisting God, you may find it impossible to turn to him. Don't wait until just the right time before turning to God. Do it now while you still have the chance. If you continually ignore God's voice, eventually you will be unable to hear it at all.

Notes for 9:20,21 If all the Egyptian livestock were killed in the earlier plague (Ex 9:6), how could the slaves of Pharaoh put their cattle inside? The answer is probably that the earlier plague killed all the animals in the fields (Ex 9:3), but not those in the shelters.

Notes for 9:27-34 After promising to let the Hebrews go, Pharaoh immediately broke his promise and brought even more trouble upon the land. His actions reveal that his repentance was not real. We do damage to ourselves and to others if we pretend to change but don't mean it.

Notes for 10:2 God told Moses that his miraculous experiences with Pharaoh should be retold to his descendants. What stories Moses had to tell! Living out one of the greatest dramas in Biblical history, he witnessed events few people would ever see. It is important to tell our children about God's work in our past and to help them see what he is doing right now. What are the turning points in your life where God intervened? What is God doing for you now? Your stories will form the foundations of your children's belief in God.

Notes for 10:22 As each gloomy plague descended upon the land, the Egyptian people realized how powerless their own gods were to stop it. Hapi, the god of the Nile River, could not prevent the waters from turning to blood (Ex 7:20). Hathor, the crafty cow-goddess, was helpless as Egyptian livestock died in droves (Ex 9:6). Amon-Re, the sun-god and chief of the Egyptian gods, could not stop an eerie darkness from covering the land for three full days (Ex 10:21,22). The Egyptian gods were (1) nonpersonal, centering around images like the sun or the river; (2) numerous; (3) nonexclusive. By contrast, the God of the Hebrews was (1) a living personal Being, (2) the only true God, and (3) the only God who should be worshiped. God was proving to both the Hebrews and the Egyptians that he alone is the living and all-powerful God.

Notes for 10:27,28 Why was Pharaoh so reluctant to let the people go? The Hebrews were Egypt's free labor — the builders of their great cities. As Egypt's leader, Pharaoh would not easily let such a great resource go.

Notes for 11:7 Moses told Pharaoh that God made a distinction between Egypt and Israel. At this time the distinction was very clear in God's mind: He knew the Hebrews would become his chosen people. The distinction was taking shape in Moses' mind also. But the Hebrews still saw the distinction only in terms of slave and free. Later, when they were in the desert, God would teach them the laws, principles, and values that would make them distinct as his people. Remember that God sees us in terms of what we will become and not just what we are right now.

Notes for 11:9,10 You may wonder how Pharaoh could be so foolish as to see God's miraculous power and still not listen to Moses. But Pharaoh had his mind made up long before the plagues began. He couldn't believe that someone was greater than he. This stubborn unbelief led to a heart so hard that even a major catastrophe couldn't soften him. Finally, it took the greatest of all calamities, the loss of his son, to force him to recognize God's authority. But even then he wanted God to leave, not to rule his country. We must not wait for great calamities to drive us to God, but must open our hearts and minds to his direction now.

Notes for 11:10 Did God really harden Pharaoh's heart and force him to do wrong? Before the ten plagues began, Moses and Aaron announced what God would do if Pharaoh didn't let the people go. But their message only made Pharaoh stubborn — he was hardening his own heart. In so doing, he defied both God and his messengers. Through the first six plagues, Pharaoh's heart grew even more stubborn. After the sixth plague, God passed judgment. Sooner or later, evil people will be punished for their sins. When it became evident that Pharaoh wouldn't change, God confirmed Pharaoh's prideful decision and set the painful consequences of his actions in motion. God didn't force Pharaoh to reject him;

rather, he gave him every opportunity to change his mind. In Ezekiel 33:11, God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

Notes for 12:1-3 Certain holidays were instituted by God himself. Passover was a holiday designed to celebrate Israel's deliverance from Egypt and to remind the people of what God had done. Holidays can be important today, too, as annual reminders of what God has done for us. Develop traditions in your family to highlight the religious significance of certain holidays. These serve as reminders to the older people and learning experiences for the younger ones. A Hebrew month began in the middle of a month on our calendar today. Crops are planted in November and December and harvested in March and April.

Notes for 12:3 For the Israelites to be spared from the plague of death, a lamb with no defects had to be killed and its blood placed on the doorframes of each home. What was the significance of the lamb? In killing the lamb, the Israelites shed innocent blood. The lamb was a sacrifice, a substitute for the person who would have died in the plague. From this point on, the Hebrew people would clearly understand that for them to be spared from death, an innocent life had to be sacrificed in their place.

Notes for 12:6-11 The Feast of the Passover was to be an annual holiday in honor of the night when the Lord "passed over" the homes of the Israelites. The Hebrews followed God's instructions by placing the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their homes. That night the firstborn son of every family who did not have blood on the doorframes was killed. The lamb had to be killed in order to get the blood that would protect them. (This foreshadowed the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who gave his blood for the sins of all people.) Inside their homes, the Israelites ate a meal of roast lamb, bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Unleavened bread could be made quickly because the dough did not have to rise. Thus they could leave at any time. Bitter herbs signified the bitterness of slavery.

Notes for 12:11 Eating the Passover feast while dressed for travel was a sign of the Hebrews' faith. Although they were not yet free, they were to prepare themselves, for God had said he would lead them out of Egypt. Their preparation was an act of faith. Preparing ourselves for the fulfillment of God's promises, however unlikely they may seem, demonstrates our faith.

Notes for 12:17,23 Passover became an annual remembrance of how God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt. Each year the people would pause to remember the day when the destroyer (God's angel of death) passed over their homes. They gave thanks to God for saving them from death and bringing them out of a land of slavery and sin. Believers today have experienced a day of deliverance as well — the day we were delivered from spiritual death and slavery to sin. The Lord's Supper is our Passover remembrance of our new life and freedom from sin. The next time struggles and trials come, remember how God has delivered you in the past and focus on his promise of new life with him.

Notes for 12:29,30 Every firstborn child of the Egyptians died, but the Israelite children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been placed on their doorframes. So begins the story of redemption, the central theme of the Bible.

Redemption means "to buy back" or "to save from captivity by paying a ransom." One way to buy back a slave was to offer an equivalent or superior slave in exchange. That is the way God chose to buy us back — he offered his Son in exchange for us.

In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner. When Jesus came, he substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and restored us to God. Jesus' sacrifice made animal sacrifice no longer necessary.

We must recognize that if we want to be freed from the deadly consequences of our sins, a tremendous price must be paid. But we don't have to pay it. Jesus Christ, our substitute, has already redeemed us by his death on the cross. Our part is to trust him and accept his gift of eternal life. Our sins have been paid for, and the way has been cleared for us to begin a relationship with God (Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:13-15,23-26).

Notes for 12:34 A kneading trough was a large bowl made of wood, bronze, or pottery and used for kneading dough. Bread was made by mixing water and flour in the trough with a small piece of leavened dough saved from the previous day's batch. Bread was the primary food in the Hebrews' diet, and thus it was vital to bring the trough along. It could be easily carried on the shoulder.

Israel in the Wilderness (12:37—18:27) As Egypt buried its dead, the Hebrew slaves left the country, a free people at last. Pharaoh made one last attempt to bring them back, but the people escaped when God miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea. But on the other side, the people soon became dissatisfied and complained bitterly to Moses and

Aaron about their trek through the wilderness. Through these experiences of the Hebrews, we learn that the Christian life is not always trouble-free. We still have struggles and often complain bitterly to God about conditions in our lives.

Notes for 12:37,38 The total number of people leaving Egypt is estimated to have been about two million. The "many other people" may have been Egyptians and others who were drawn to the Hebrews by God's mighty works and who decided to leave Egypt with them.

Notes for 13:2 Consecrate means to sacrifice or to consider something as belonging to God. This dedication practice described in Ex 13:11-16 was to remind the people of their deliverance through God.

Notes for 13:4 "In the month of Abib" corresponds to late March and early April on our calendar.

Notes for 13:6-9 The Feast of Unleavened Bread marked the Hebrews as a unique people — as though they were branded on their hands and foreheads. What do you do that marks you as a follower of God? The way you raise your children, demonstrate love for others, show concern for the poor, and live in devotion to God — these actions will leave visible marks for all to see. While national groups are marked by customs and traditions, Christians are marked by loving one another (John 13:34,35).

Notes for 13:12-14 What did it mean to give over "redeem every firstborn among your sons"? During the night the Israelites escaped from Egypt, God spared the oldest son of every house marked with blood on the doorframes. Because God saved the lives of the firstborn, he had a rightful claim to them. But God commanded the Israelites to buy their sons back from him. This ritual served three main purposes: (1) it was a reminder to the people of how God had spared their sons from death and freed them all from slavery; (2) it showed God's high respect for human life in contrast to the pagan gods who, their worshipers believed, demanded human sacrifice; (3) it looked forward to the day when Jesus Christ would buy us back by paying the price for our sin once and for all.

Notes for 13:17,18 God doesn't always work in the way that seems best to us. Instead of guiding the Israelites along the direct route from Egypt to the promised land, he took them by a longer route to avoid fighting with the Philistines. If God does not lead you along the shortest path to your goal, don't complain or resist. Follow him willingly and trust him to lead you safely around unseen obstacles. He can see the end of your journey from the beginning, and he knows the safest and best route. The Israelites left Succoth and camped first at Etham before going toward Baal Zephon to camp by the sea (Ex 14:2). God miraculously brought them across the sea, into the desert of Shur (Ex 15:22). After stopping at the oasis of Elim, the people moved into the Desert of Sin (Ex 16:1).

13:17,18 When did the Hebrews leave Egypt? There are two theories. The early theory says the exodus occurred around 1446-1445 B.C. The late theory suggests the exodus happened between 1300 and 1200 B.C. Those who hold to the earlier date point to 1Kings 6:1, where the Bible clearly states that Solomon began building the temple 480 years after the Hebrews left Egypt. Since almost all scholars agree that Solomon began building the temple in 966, this puts the exodus in the year 1446. But those who hold to the later date suggest that the 480 years cannot be taken literally. They point to Exodus 1:11, which says that the Hebrews built the store cities of Pithom and Rameses, named after Pharaoh Rameses II, who reigned around 1290 B.C. Regardless of which date is correct, the fact is that God led the Hebrews out of Egypt, just as he had promised. This showed his great power and his great love for his people.

Notes for 13:21,22 God gave the Hebrews a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire so they would know day and night that God was with them on their journey to the promised land. What has God given us so that we can have the same assurance? The Bible — something the Israelites did not have. Look to God's Word for reassurance of his presence. As the Hebrews looked to the pillars of cloud and fire, we can look to God's Word day and night to know he is with us, helping us on our journey.

13:21,22 The pillars of fire and cloud were examples of theophany — God appearing in a physical form. In this form, God lighted Israel's path, protected them from their enemies, provided reassurance, controlled their movements, and inspired the burning zeal that Israel should have for their God.

Notes for 14:6-9 Six hundred Egyptian war chariots were bearing down on the helpless Israelites, who were trapped between the mountains and the sea. The war chariots each carried two people — one to drive and one to fight. These chariots were made of a wood or leather cab placed over two wheels, and they were pulled by horses. These were the armored tanks of Bible times. But even their power was no match for God, who destroyed both the chariots and their soldiers.

Profile: For Moses

Some people can't stay out of trouble. When conflict breaks out, they always manage to be nearby. Reaction is their favorite action. This was Moses. He seemed drawn to what needed to be righted. Throughout his life, he was at his

finest and his worst responding to the conflicts around him. Even the burning bush experience was an illustration of his character. Having spotted the fire and seen that the bush did not burn, he had to investigate. Whether jumping into a fight to defend a Hebrew slave or trying to referee a struggle between two kinsmen, when Moses saw conflict, he reacted.

Over the years, however, an amazing thing happened to Moses' character. He didn't stop reacting, but rather learned to react correctly. The kaleidoscopic action of each day of leading two million people in the desert was more than enough challenge for Moses' reacting ability. Much of the time he served as a buffer between God and the people. At one moment he had to respond to God's anger at the people's stubbornness and forgetfulness. At another moment he had to react to the people's bickering and complaining. At still another moment he had to react to their unjustified attacks on his character.

Leadership often involves reaction. If we want to react with instincts consistent with God's will, we must develop habits of obedience to God. Consistent obedience to God is best developed in times of less stress. Then when stress comes, our natural reaction will be to obey God.

In our age of lowering moral standards, we find it almost impossible to believe that God would punish Moses for the one time he disobeyed outright. What we fail to see, however, is that God did not reject Moses; Moses simply disqualified himself to enter the promised land. Personal greatness does not make a person immune to error or its consequences.

In Moses we see an outstanding personality shaped by God. But we must not misunderstand what God did. He did not change who or what Moses was; he did not give Moses new abilities and strengths. Instead, he took Moses' characteristics and molded them until they were suited to his purposes. Does knowing this make a difference in your understanding of God's purpose in your life? He is trying to take what he created in the first place and use it for its intended purposes. The next time you talk with God, don't ask, "What should I change into?" but "How should I use my own abilities and strengths to do your will?"

Strengths and accomplishments:

Egyptian education; desert training

Greatest Jewish leader; set the exodus in motion

Prophet and lawgiver; recorder of the Ten Commandments

Author of the Pentateuch

Weaknesses and mistakes:

Failed to enter the promised land because of disobedience to God

Did not always recognize and use the talents of others

Lessons from his life:

God prepares, then uses. His timetable is life-sized

God does his greatest work through frail people

Vital statistics:

Where: Egypt, Midian, Desert of Sinai

Occupations: Prince, shepherd, leader of the Israelites

Relatives: Sister: Miriam. Brother: Aaron. Wife: Zipporah. Sons: Gershom and Eliezer.

Key verses:

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Hebrews 11:24). Moses' story is told in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. He is also mentioned in Acts 7:20-44.

Notes for 14:10,11 Trapped against the sea, the Israelites faced the Egyptian army sweeping in for the kill. The Israelites thought they were doomed. After watching God's powerful hand deliver them from Egypt, their only response was fear, whining, and despair. Where was their trust in God? Israel had to learn from repeated experience that God was able to provide for them. God has preserved these examples in the Bible so that we can learn to trust him the first time. By focusing on God's faithfulness in the past we can face crises with confidence rather than with fear and complaining.

Notes for 14:11,12 This is the first instance of grumbling and complaining by the Israelites. Their lack of faith in God is startling. Yet how often do we find ourselves doing the same thing — complaining over inconveniences or discomforts? The Israelites were about to learn some tough lessons. Had they trusted God, they would have been spared much grief.

Notes for 14:13,14 The people were hostile and despairing, but Moses encouraged them to watch the wonderful way God would rescue them. Moses had a positive attitude! When it looked as if they were trapped, Moses called upon God to intervene. We may not be chased by an army, but we may still feel trapped. Instead of giving in to despair, we should adopt Moses' attitude to "stand firm and . . . see the deliverance the Lord will bring."

Notes for 14:15 The Lord told Moses to stop praying and get moving! Prayer must have a vital place in our lives, but there is also a place for action. Sometimes we know what to do, but we pray for more guidance as an excuse to postpone doing it. If we know what we should do, then it is time to get moving.

Notes for 14:21 There was no apparent way of escape, but the Lord opened up a dry path through the sea. Sometimes we find ourselves caught in a problem and see no way out. Don't panic; God can open up a way.

14:21,22 Some scholars believe the Israelites did not cross the main body of the Red Sea but one of the shallow lakes or marshes north of it that dry up at certain times of the year, or perhaps a smaller branch of the Red Sea where the water would have been shallow enough to wade across. But the Bible clearly states that the Lord "drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land" (Ex 14:21; see also Joshua 3:15,16; and 2Kings 2:13,14). Also, the water was deep enough to cover the chariots (Ex 14:28). The God who created the earth and water performed a mighty miracle at exactly the right time to demonstrate his great power and love for his people.

Notes for 14:27,28 No evidence of this great exodus has been discovered in Egyptian historical records. This was because it was a common practice for Egyptian pharaohs not to record their defeats. They even went so far as to take existing records and delete the names of traitors and political adversaries. Pharaoh would have been especially anxious not to record that his great army was destroyed chasing a band of runaway slaves. Since either the Egyptians failed to record the exodus or the record has not yet been found, it is impossible to place a precise date on the event.

Songs to the Lord

Notes for 15:1 Music played an important part in Israel's worship and celebration. Singing was an expression of love and thanks, and it was a creative way to pass down oral traditions. Some say this song of Moses is the oldest recorded song in the world. It was a festive epic poem celebrating God's victory, lifting the hearts and voices of the people outward and upward. After having been delivered from great danger, they sang with joy! Psalms and hymns can be great ways to express relief, praise, and thanks when you have been through trouble.

Famous Songs in the Bible

Where

Purpose of Song

Exodus 15:1-21 Moses' song of victory and praise after God led Israel out of Egypt and saved them by parting the Red Sea; Miriam joined in the singing too

Numbers 21:17 Israel's song of praise to God for giving them water in the desert

Deuteronomy 32:1-43 Moses' song of Israel's history with thanksgiving and praise as the Hebrews were about to enter the promised land

Judges 5:2-31 Deborah and Barak's song of praise thanking God for Israel's victory over King Jabin's army at Mount Tabor

2 Samuel 22:2-51 David's song of thanks and praise to God for rescuing him from Saul and his other enemies

Song of Songs - Solomon's song of love celebrating the union of husband and wife

Isaiah 26:1 - Isaiah's prophetic song about how the redeemed will sing in the new Jerusalem

Ezra 3:11 - Israel's song of praise at the completion of the temple's foundation

Luke 1:46-55 - Mary's song of praise to God for the conception of Jesus

Luke 1:68-79 - Zechariah's song of praise for the promise of a son

Acts 16:25 - Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison

Revelation 5:9,10 - The "new song" of the 24 elders acclaiming Christ as worthy to break the seven seals of God's scroll

Revelation 14:3 - The song of the 144,000 redeemed from the earth

Revelation 15:3,4 - The song of all the redeemed in praise of the Lamb who redeemed them

Notes for 15:8 The phrase, "the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea" means that the waters became like hard walls for them to walk between.

Notes for 15:20 Miriam was called a prophetess not only because she received revelations from God (Numbers 12:1,2; Micah 6:4) but also for her musical skill. Prophecy and music were often closely related in the Bible (1Samuel 10:5; 1Chronicles 25:1).

Notes for 15:23,27 The waters of Marah are contrasted with the springs of Elim. Marah stood for the unbelieving, grumbling attitude of the people who would not trust God. Elim stands for God's bountiful provision. How easy it is to grumble and complain too quickly, only to be embarrassed by God's help!

Notes for 15:26 God promised that if the people obeyed him they would be free from the diseases that plagued the Egyptians. Little did they know that many of the moral laws he later gave them were designed to keep them free from sickness. For example, following God's law against prostitution would keep them free of venereal disease. God's laws for us are often designed to keep us from harm. Men and women are complex beings. Our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives are intertwined. Modern medicine is now acknowledging what these laws assumed. If we want God to care for us, we need to submit to his directions for living.

Notes for 16:1 The Desert of Sin was a vast and hostile environment of sand and stone. Its barren surroundings provided the perfect place for God to test and shape the character of his people.

Notes for 16:2 It happened again. As the Israelites encountered danger, shortages, and inconvenience, they complained bitterly and longed to be back in Egypt. But as always, God provided for their needs. Difficult circumstances often lead to stress, and complaining is a natural response. The Israelites didn't really want to be back in Egypt; they just wanted life to get a little easier. In the pressure of the moment, they could not focus on the cause of their stress (in this case, lack of trust in God); they could only think about the quickest way of escape. When pressure comes your way, resist the temptation to make a quick escape. Instead, focus on God's power and wisdom to help you deal with the cause of your stress.

Notes for 16:4,5 God promised to meet the Hebrews' need for food in the desert, but he decided to test their obedience. God wanted to see if they would obey his detailed instructions. We can learn to trust him as our Lord only by following. We can learn to obey by taking small steps of obedience.

Notes for 16:14-16 Manna (Ex 16:31) appeared on the ground each day as thin flakes like frost. The people gathered it, ground it like grain, and made it into honey-tasting pancakes. For the Israelites the manna was a gift — it came every day and was just what they needed. It satisfied their temporary physical need. In John 6:48-51 Jesus compares himself to manna. Christ is our daily bread who satisfies our eternal, spiritual need.

Notes for 16:23 The Israelites were not to work on the Sabbath — not even to cook food. Why? God knew that the busy routine of daily living could distract people from worshiping him. It is so easy to let work, family responsibilities, and recreation crowd our schedules so tightly that we don't take time to worship. Carefully guard your time with God.

Notes for 16:32 The Hebrews put some manna in a special jar as a reminder of the way God provided for them in the desert. Symbols have always been an important part of Christian worship also. We use special objects as symbols to remind us of God's work. Such symbols can be valuable aids to our worship as long as we are careful to keep them from becoming objects of worship.

Notes for 16:36 "An omer is one tenth of an ephah" — this is about two quarts or one tenth of a bushel.

Notes for 17:2 Again the people complained about their problem instead of praying. Some problems can be solved by careful thought or by rearranging our priorities. Some can be solved by discussion and good counsel. But some problems can be solved only by prayer. We should make a determined effort to pray when we feel like complaining, because complaining only raises our level of stress. Prayer quiets our thoughts and emotions and prepares us to listen. God miraculously supplied food and water in the desert for the Israelites. In the Desert of Sin, he provided manna (Ex 16). At Rephidim, he provided water from a rock (Ex 17:1-7). Finally God brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai, where he gave them his holy laws.

Notes for 17:8 The Amalekites were descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau. They were a fierce nomadic tribe that lived in the desert region of the Dead Sea. They made part of their livelihood by conducting frequent raids on other settlements and carrying off booty. They killed for pleasure. One of the greatest insults in Israelite culture was to call someone "a friend of Amalek." When the Israelites entered the region, the Amalekites saw this as a perfect opportunity for both pleasure and profit. But this hostile tribe was moving in on the wrong group — a people led by God. For the Israelite slaves to defeat such a warlike nation was more than enough proof that God was with them as he had promised to be.

Notes for 17:9 Here we meet Joshua for the first time. Later he would become the great leader who brought God's people into the promised land. As a general of the Israelite army, he was gaining valuable experience for the greater battles to come.

Notes for 17:10-13 Aaron and Hur stood by Moses' side and held up his arms to ensure victory against Amalek. We need to "lift up the hands" of our spiritual leaders as well. Shouldering some responsibility, lending a word of encouragement, or offering a prayer are ways of refreshing spiritual leaders in their work.

Notes for 18:7 Jethro entered Moses' tent where the two talked. Tents were the homes of shepherds. In shape and design, they resembled the tents of today, but they were very large and made of a thick cloth woven from goat or camel hair. This fabric breathed in warm weather and contracted in stormy weather to offer protection from the winter winds and rains. The floor was often covered with animal-skin rugs, while curtains divided the inside space into rooms.

Profile: For Jethro

People such as Jethro and Melchizedek -- not Israelites, but nevertheless worshipers of the true God -- play an important role in the Old Testament. They remind us of God's commitment to the world. God chose one nation through which to work, but his love and concern are for all nations!

Jethro's religious background prepared him for, rather than prevented him from, responding in faith to God. When he saw and heard what God had done for the Israelites, he worshiped God wholeheartedly. We can guess that for 40 years as Moses' father-in-law, Jethro had been watching God at work, molding a leader. Moses' and Jethro's relationship must have been close, for Moses readily accepted his father-in-law's advice. Each benefited from knowing the other. Jethro met God through Moses, and Moses received hospitality, his wife, and wisdom from Jethro.

The greatest gift one person can give another is an introduction to God. But that gift is hindered if the believer's attitude is, "I have the greatest gift to pass on to you, while you have nothing to give me in return." Real friends give to and receive from each other. The importance of introducing a friend to God does not make the friend's gifts to us insignificant. Rather, the believer is doubly blessed -- first by receiving the gifts the friend wishes to give; then by growing in knowledge of the Lord. For we discover that in introducing another person to God, we increase our own awareness of God. As we give God away, he gives himself even more to us.

Is all you know about God a miscellaneous collection of trivia, or do you have a living relationship with him? Only with a vital relationship can you pass on to others the excitement of allowing God to guide your life. Have you reached the point of saying, with Jethro, "I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods" (Exodus 18:11)?

Strengths and accomplishments:

As father-in-law to Moses, he came to recognize the one true God

He was a practical troubleshooter and organizer

Lessons from his life:

Supervision and administration are team efforts

God's plan includes all nations

Vital statistics:

Where: The land of Midian and the Desert of Sinai

Occupations: Shepherd, priest

Relatives: Daughter: Zipporah. Son-in-law: Moses. Son: Hobab

Key verse:

"Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 18:9).

Jethro's story is told in Exodus 2:15.

Notes for 18:8-11 Moses told his father-in-law all that God had done, convincing him that the Lord was greater than any other god. Our relatives are often the hardest people to tell about God. Yet we should look for opportunities to tell them what God is doing in our lives because we can have an important influence on them.

Notes for 18:12 This reunion turned into a large celebration. The Israelites frequently shared a sacrificial meal among themselves. A burnt offering was sacrificed to God, and then the meal taken from the sacrifice was dedicated to God and eaten ceremonially as a fellowship dinner.

Notes for 18:13-26 Moses was spending so much time and energy hearing the Hebrews' complaints that he could not get to other important work. Jethro suggested that Moses delegate most of this work to others and focus his efforts on jobs only he could do. People in positions of responsibility sometimes feel they are the only ones who can do necessary tasks; but others are capable of handling part of the load. Delegation relieved Moses' stress and improved the quality of the government. It helped prepare them for the system of government set up in Canaan. Proper delegation can multiply your effectiveness while giving others a chance to grow.

Notes for 18:16 Moses not only decided these cases, he also taught the people God's laws. Whenever we help others settle disputes or resolve conflicts, we should also look for opportunities to teach about God. After escaping through the Red Sea, the Hebrews traveled through the wilderness and arrived at Sinai, God's holy mountain. There they received the Ten Commandments, as well as instructions for building a Tabernacle as a center of worship. Through Israel's experiences at Mount Sinai, we learn about the importance of obedience in our relationship with God. His laws help expose sin, and they give standards for righteous living.

Notes for 19:2,3 Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb) is one of the most sacred locations in Israel's history. Located in the south-central Sinai peninsula, this mountain is where Moses met God in a burning bush, God made his covenant with Israel, and Elijah heard God in the gentle whisper. Here God gave his people the laws and guidelines for right living. They learned the potential blessings of obedience (Ex 34:4-28) and the tragic consequences of disobedience (Ex 34:32).

Notes for 19:4-6 God had a reason for rescuing the Israelites from slavery. Now he was ready to tell them what it was: Israel was to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation where anyone could approach God freely. It didn't take long, however, for the people to corrupt God's plan. God then established Aaron's descendants from the tribe of Levi as priests, representing what the entire nation should have been (Leviticus 8,9). But with the coming of Jesus Christ, God has once again extended his plan to all believers. We are to become holy, a "royal priesthood" (1Peter 2:9). The death and resurrection of Christ has allowed each of us to approach God freely.

Notes for 19:5 Why did God choose Israel as his nation? God knew that no nation on earth was good enough to deserve to be called his people, his "treasured possession." He chose Israel, not because of anything they had done, but in his love and mercy he chose Israel in spite of the wrong the nation had done and would do. Why did he want to have a special nation on earth? To represent his way of life, to teach his Word, and to be an agent of salvation to the world. "All nations on earth" would be blessed through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 18:18). Gentiles and kings would come to the Lord through Israel, predicted Isaiah (Isaiah 60:3). Through the nation of Israel, the Messiah, God's chosen Son, would be born. God chose one nation and put it through a rigorous training program, so that one day it could be a channel for his blessings to the whole world.

19:5-8 In Genesis 15 and 17, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising to make his descendants into a great nation. Now that promise was being realized as God restated his agreement with the Israelite nation, the descendants of Abraham. God promised to bless and care for them. The people promised to obey him. The covenant was thus sealed. But the good intentions of the people quickly wore off. Have you made a commitment to God? How are you holding up your end of the bargain?

Notes for 19:9-11 Moses was told to consecrate the people. This meant getting them physically and spiritually ready to meet God. The people were to set themselves apart from sin and even ordinary daily routine in order to dedicate themselves to God. The act of washing and preparing served to get their minds and hearts ready. When we meet God for worship, we should set aside the cares and preoccupations of everyday life. Use your time of physical preparation to get your mind ready to meet God.

Notes for 19:22 By stating that he "will break out against them," the Lord was saying that he would destroy anyone who was not fully consecrated and ready to meet him.

Notes for 20:1 Why were the Ten Commandments necessary for God's new nation? At the foot of Mount Sinai, God showed his people the true function and beauty of his laws. The commandments were designed to lead Israel to a life of practical holiness. In them, people could see the nature of God and his plan for how they should live. The commands and guidelines were intended to direct the community to meet the needs of each individual in a loving and responsible manner. By Jesus' time, however, most people looked at the law the wrong way. They saw it as a means to prosperity in both this world and the next. And they thought that to obey every law was the way to earn God's protection from foreign invasion and natural disaster. Lawkeeping became an end in itself, not the means to fulfill God's ultimate law of love.

Chart: Jesus and the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments said...

Jesus said...

"You shall have no other gods before me" Exodus 20:3

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" Matthew 4:10

"You shall not make for yourself an idol" Exodus 20:4

"No servant can serve two masters" Luke 16:13

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God" Exodus 20:7

"Do not swear at all; either by heaven, for it is God's throne..." Matthew 5:34

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" Exodus 20:8

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" Mark 2:27,28

"Honor your father and your mother" Exodus 20:12

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10:37

"You shall not murder" Exodus 20:13

"Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" Matthew 5:22

"You shall not commit adultery" Exodus 20:14

"Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" Matthew 5:28

"You shall not steal" Exodus 20:15

"If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well" Matthew 5:40

"You shall not give false testimony" Exodus 20:16

"Men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" Matthew 12:36

"You shall not covet" Exodus 20:17

"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed" Luke 12:15

20:1-6 The Israelites had just come from Egypt, a land of many idols and many gods. Because each god represented a different aspect of life, it was common to worship many gods in order to get the maximum number of blessings. When God told his people to worship and believe in him, that wasn't so hard for them — he was just one more god to add to the list. But when he said, "You shall have no other gods before me," that was difficult for the people to accept. But if they didn't learn that the God who led them out of Egypt was the only true God, they could not be his people — no matter how faithfully they kept the other nine commandments. Thus, God made this his first commandment and emphasized it more than the others. Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity, meaning, and security. No one sets out with the intention of worshiping these things. But by the amount of time we devote to them, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts and energies. Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods.

Notes for 20:7 God's name is special because it carries his personal identity. Using it frivolously or in a curse is so common today that we may fail to realize how serious it is. The way we use God's name conveys how we really feel about him. We should respect his name and use it appropriately, speaking it in praise or worship rather than in curse or jest. We should not take lightly the abuse or dishonor of his name.

Notes for 20:8-11 The Sabbath was a day set aside for rest and worship. God commanded a Sabbath because human beings need to spend unhurried time in worship and rest each week. A God who is concerned enough to provide a day each week for us to rest is indeed wonderful. To observe a regular time of rest and worship in our fast-paced world demonstrates how important God is to us, and it gives us the extra benefit of refreshing our spirits. Don't neglect God's provision.

Notes for 20:12 This is the first commandment with a promise attached. To live in peace for generations in the promised land, the Israelites would need to respect authority and build strong families. But what does it mean to "honor" parents? Partly, it means speaking well of them and politely to them. It also means acting in a way that shows them courtesy and respect (but not to obey them if this means disobedience to God). It means following their teaching and example of putting God first. Parents have a special place in God's sight. Even those who find it difficult to get along with their parents are still commanded to honor them.

Notes for 20:16 Giving false testimony means lying in court. God knew that Israel could not survive unless its system of justice was incorruptible. We should be honest in our private dealings as well as in our public statements. In either situation, we "give false testimony" by leaving something out of a story, telling a half-truth, twisting the facts, or inventing a falsehood. God warns us against deception. Even though deception is a way of life for many people, God's people must not give in to it!

Notes for 20:17 To covet is to wish to have the possessions of others. It goes beyond simply admiring someone else's possessions or thinking, "I'd like to have one of those." Coveting includes envy — resenting the fact that others have what you don't. God knows, however, that possessions never make anyone happy for long. Since only God can supply all our needs, true contentment is found only in him. When you begin to covet, try to determine if a more basic need is leading you to envy. For example, you may covet someone's success, not because you want to take it away from him, but because you would like to feel as appreciated by others as he is. If this is the case, pray that God will help you deal with your resentment and meet your basic needs.

Notes for 20:18 Sometimes God speaks to his people with a majestic display of power; at other times he speaks quietly. Why the difference? God speaks in the way that best accomplishes his purposes. At Sinai, the awesome display of light and sound was necessary to show Israel God's great power and authority. Only then would they listen to Moses and Aaron.

Notes for 20:20 Throughout the Bible we find this phrase, "Do not be afraid." God wasn't trying to scare the people. He was showing his mighty power so the Israelites would know he was the true God and would therefore obey him. If they would do this, he would make his power available to them. God wants us to follow him out of love rather than fear. To overcome fear, we must think more about his love. 1 John 4:18 says, "Perfect love drives out fear."

Notes for 20:24-26 Why were specific directions given for building altars? God's people had no Bible and few religious traditions to learn from. God had to start from scratch and teach them how to worship him. God gave specific instructions about building altars because he wanted to control the way sacrifices were offered. To prevent idolatry from creeping into worship, God did not allow the altar stones to be cut or shaped into any form. Nor did God let the people build an altar just anywhere. This was designed to prevent them from starting their own religions or making changes in the way God wanted things done. God is not against creativity, but he is against us creating our own religion.

Notes for 21:1 These laws were given because everything we do has consequences. It is vital to think before acting, to consider the effects of our choices. Think of your plans for today and consider what their long-range results will be. As we deal with others, we should keep the principles of these laws in mind. We should act responsibly and justly with all people — friends and enemies alike.

Notes for 21:2 The Hebrews, though freed from slavery, had slaves (or servants) themselves. A person could become a slave because of poverty, debt, or even crime. But Hebrew slaves were treated as humans, not property, and were allowed to work their way to freedom. The Bible acknowledges the existence of slavery but never encourages it.

Notes for 21:24,25 The "eye for eye" rule was instituted as a guide for judges, not as a rule for personal relationships or to justify revenge. This rule made the punishment fit the crime, thereby preventing the cruel and barbaric punishments that characterized many ancient countries. Jesus used this principle to teach us not to retaliate (Matthew 5:38-48). Judges, parents, teachers, and others who work with people must make wise decisions in order for discipline to be effective. A punishment too harsh is unfair, and one too lenient is powerless to teach. Ask God for wisdom before you judge.

Notes for 22:1 These are not a collection of picky laws but are case studies of God's principles in action. God was taking potential situations and showing how his laws would work in the Israelites' everyday lives. These case studies had several objectives: (1) to protect the nation, (2) to organize the nation, and (3) to focus the nation's attention on God. The laws listed here do not cover every possible situation but give practical examples that make it easier to decide what God wants.

Notes for 22:3 Throughout chapter 22 we find examples of the principle of restitution — making wrongs right. For example, if a man stole an animal, he had to repay double the beast's market value. If you have done someone wrong, perhaps you should go beyond what is expected to make things right. This will (1) help ease any pain you've caused, (2) help the other person be more forgiving, and (3) make you more likely to think before you do it again.

Notes for 22:18 Why did God's laws speak so strongly against sorcery (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12)? Sorcery was punishable by death because it was a crime against God himself. To invoke evil powers violated the first

commandment to "have no other gods." Sorcery was rebellion against God and his authority. In essence, it was teaming up with Satan instead of with God.

Notes for 22:21 God warned the Israelites not to treat aliens unfairly because they themselves were once strangers in Egypt. It is not easy coming into a new environment where you feel alone and out of place. Are there strangers in your corner of the world? Refugees? New arrivals at school? Immigrants from another country? Be sensitive to their struggles, and express God's love by your kindness and generosity.

Notes for 22:22-27 The Hebrew law code is noted for its fairness and social responsibility toward the poor. God insisted that the poor and powerless be well treated and given the chance to restore their fortunes. We should reflect God's concern for the poor by helping those less fortunate than ourselves.

Notes for 22:26 Why did the law insist on returning a person's cloak by evening? The cloak was one of an Israelite's most valuable possessions. Making clothing was difficult and time-consuming. As a result, cloaks were expensive, and most people owned only one. The cloak was used as a blanket, a sack to carry things in, a place to sit, a pledge for a debt, and, of course, clothing.

Notes for 22:29 The Israelites were to be prompt in giving God their offerings. The first of the harvest was to be dedicated to him. Since God doesn't send payment overdue notices, it is easy to take care of other financial responsibilities while letting our gifts to him slide. Giving to God first out of what he has allowed you to have demonstrates that he has first priority in your life.

Notes for 23:1 Making up or spreading false reports was strictly forbidden by God. Gossip, slander, and false witnessing undermined families, strained neighborhood cooperation, and made chaos of the justice system. Destructive gossip still causes problems. Even if you do not initiate a lie, you become responsible if you pass it along. Don't circulate rumors; squelch them.

Notes for 23:2,3 Justice is often perverted in favor of the rich. Here the people are warned against twisting justice in favor of the poor. Justice should be impartial, treating rich and poor alike. Giving special privileges to either rich or poor only makes justice for everyone more unlikely. Withstand the pressure of the crowd to sway your decision about a person. Let the fairness God shows to each of us guide your judgment.

Notes for 23:4,5 The thought of being kind to enemies was new and startling in a world where revenge was the common form of justice. God not only introduced this idea to the Israelites, he made it law! If a man found a lost animal owned by his enemy, he was to return it at once, even if his enemy might use it to harm him. Jesus clearly taught in Luke 10:30-37 to reach out to all people in need, even our enemies. Following the laws of right living is hard enough with friends. When we apply God's laws of fairness and kindness to our enemies, we show how different we are from the world.

Notes for 23:20,21 Who was this angel that went with the Israelites? Most likely the angel was a manifestation of God. God was in the angel in the same way he was present in the pillars of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21,22). "My Name is in him" means the essential nature and power of God were made known in this angel.

Notes for 23:24,25 If you're in the furnace, it's easy to catch on fire. God warned the Israelites about their neighbors whose beliefs and actions could turn them away from him. We also live with neighbors whose values may be completely different from ours. We are called to maintain a life-style that shows our faith. This can be a struggle, especially if our Christian life-style differs from the norm. Our lives should show that we put obeying God before doing what is praised and accepted by society.

Notes for 23:29 Not all of God's solutions are instantaneous. Nor does delay justify inaction. In this case, God's cause would require constant cooperation, persistence, and effort by the Israelites. Success would come step by step.

Notes for 23:32,33 God continually warned the people to avoid false religions and false gods. In Egypt they had been surrounded by idols and sorcerers, but leaving that land did not mean they were free from pagan religious influences. The land of Canaan was just as infested with idol worship. God knew his people needed extra strength, so he continually emphasized guarding against the influence of pagan religions.

Notes for 24:6-8 To understand this unusual covenant ratification ceremony, we need to understand the Bible's view of sin and forgiveness. God is the sovereign judge of the universe. He is also absolutely holy. As the holy judge of all, he condemns sin and judges it worthy of death. In the Old Testament God accepted the death of an animal as a substitute for the sinner. The animal's shed blood was proof that one life had been given for another. So on the one hand, blood symbolized the death of the animal, but it also symbolized the life that was spared as a result. Of course the death of the animal that brought forgiveness in the Old Testament was only a temporary provision, looking forward to the death of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:9 — 10:24).

In this ceremony described here, Moses sprinkled half the blood from the sacrificed animals on the altar to show that the sinner could once again approach God because something had died in his place. He sprinkled the other half of the blood on the people to show that the penalty for their sin had been paid and they could be reunited with God. Through this symbolic act God's promises to Israel were reaffirmed and lessons are taught to us about the future sacrificial death (or atonement) of Jesus Christ.

Notes for 25:1 Chapters 25 through 31 record God's directions for building the tabernacle. Chapters 35 through 39 tell how these instructions were carried out. But what can all these ancient, complicated construction details show us today? First, the high quality of the precious materials making up the tabernacle shows God's greatness and transcendence. Second, the curtain surrounding the Most Holy Place shows God's moral perfection as symbolized by his separation from the common and unclean. Third, the portable nature of the tabernacle shows God's desire to be with his people as they traveled.

Notes for 25:10 Much of the tabernacle and its furniture was made of acacia wood. Acacia trees flourished in barren regions and were fairly common in Old Testament times. The wood was brownish-orange and very hard, making it an excellent material for furniture. Acacia wood is still used in furniture-making today. A cubit is about 1 1/2 feet or .43 meter.

Notes for 25:17 The cover of the ark of the Testimony was called the atonement cover. This is where, between the two golden cherubim (mighty angels), the presence of God would dwell in a cloud above their outstretched wings. The atonement cover was where the highest and most perfect act of atonement would be made when the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement to atone for the sins of all the people (Ex 30:10).

Notes for 26:31-33 This curtain separated the two sacred rooms in the tabernacle — the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The priest entered the Holy Place each day to commune with God and to tend to the altar of incense, the lampstand, and the table with the bread of the Presence. The Most Holy Place was where God himself dwelt, his presence resting on the atonement cover, which covered the ark of the Testimony. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place. Even he could do so only once a year (on the Day of Atonement) to make atonement for the sins of the nation as a whole. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the temple (which had replaced the tabernacle) tore from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), symbolizing our free access to God because of Jesus' death. No longer did people have to approach God through priests and sacrifices.

Notes for 27:1 The altar of burnt offering was the first thing the Israelites saw as they entered the tabernacle courtyard. Here sacrifices were constantly made. Its vivid presence constantly reminded the people that they could only come to God by means of the sacrifice. It was the only way their sins could be forgiven and taken away. In Hebrews 10:1-18, Jesus Christ is portrayed as the ultimate sacrifice.

Notes for 28:1 God was teaching his people how to worship him. To do so, he needed ministers to oversee the operations of the tabernacle and to help the people maintain their relationship with God. These men were called priests and Levites, and they could only be members of the tribe of Levi. Chapters 28 and 29 give some details about priests. Not only was a priest from the tribe of Levi, but he also was a descendant of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Priests had more responsibilities than Levites. As high priest, Aaron was in charge of all the priests and Levites. The priests performed the daily sacrifices, maintained the tabernacle, and counseled the people on how to follow God. They were the people's representatives before God and thus were required to live worthy of their office. Jesus is now our high priest (Hebrews 8). Daily sacrifices are no longer required because he sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins. Today ministers no longer sacrifice animals. Instead they lead us in prayer and teach us about both the benefits and the commandments that characterize our new life as Christians.

AARON Effective teamwork happens when each team member uses his or her special skills. Ideally, each member's strengths will contribute something important to the team effort. In this way, members make up for one another's weaknesses. Aaron made a good team with Moses. He provided Moses with one skill Moses lacked -- effective public speaking. But while Aaron was necessary to Moses, he needed Moses as well. Without a guide, Aaron had little direction of his own. There was never any doubt as to who God's chosen and trained leader was. The pliability that made Aaron a good follower made him a weak leader. His major failures were caused by his inability to stand alone. His yielding to public pressure and making an idol was a good example of this weakness.

Most of us have more of the follower than the leader in us. We may even be good followers, following a good leader. But no leader is perfect, and no human deserves our complete allegiance. Only God deserves our complete loyalty and

obedience. We need to be effective team members in using the skills and abilities God has given us. But if the team or the leader goes against God's Word, we must be willing to stand alone.

Notes for 28:3 The tailors who made Aaron's garments were given wisdom by God in order to do their task. All of us have special skills. God wants to fill us with his Spirit so we will use them for his glory. Think about your special talents and abilities and the ways you could use them for God's work in the world. A talent must be used or it will diminish.

Notes for 28:6-13 The ephod was a kind of apron elaborately embroidered with two pieces, back and front, joined at the shoulder with a band at the waist. On each shoulder strap was a stone with six of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on it. The priest symbolically carried the burden of the whole nation on his shoulders as he represented them before God.

Notes for 28:30 -The Urim and the Thummim were used by the priest to make decisions. These names mean "Curses" and "Perfections" and refer to the nature of God whose will they revealed. They were kept in a pouch and taken out or shaken out to get either a yes or no decision.

Notes for 29:1 Why did God set up the priesthood? God had originally intended that his chosen people be a "kingdom of priests" with both the nation as a whole and each individual dealing directly with God. But the people's sin prevented this from happening because a sinful person is not worthy to approach a perfect God. God then appointed priests from the tribe of Levi and set up the system of sacrifices to help the people approach him. He promised to forgive the people's sins if they would offer certain sacrifices administered by the priests on behalf of the people. Through these priests and their work, God wished to prepare all people for the coming of Jesus Christ, who would once again offer a direct relationship with God for anyone who would come to him. But until Christ came, the priests were the people's representatives before God. Through this Old Testament system, we can better understand the significance of what Christ did for us (see Hebrews 10:1-14).

Notes for 29:10-41 Why were there such detailed rituals in connection with these sacrifices? Partly, it was for quality control. A centralized, standardized form of worship prevented problems of belief which could arise from individuals creating their own worship. Also, it differentiated the Hebrews from the pagan Canaanites they would meet in the promised land. By closely following God's instructions, the Hebrews could not possibly join the Canaanites in their immoral religious practices. Finally, it showed Israel that God was serious about his relationship with them.

Notes for 29:37 Notice the overwhelming emphasis on the holiness of God. The priests, the clothes, the tabernacle, and the sacrifice had to be clean and consecrated, prepared to meet God. In contrast, today we tend to take God for granted, rushing into worship and treating him with almost casual disregard. But we worship the almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Remember that profound truth when you pray or worship, and come before him with reverence and repentance.

Notes for 29:45,46 God's action in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt showed his great desire to be with them and protect them. Throughout the Bible, God shows that he is not an absentee landlord. He wants to live among us, even in our hearts. Don't exclude God from your life. Allow him to be your God as you obey his Word and communicate with him in prayer. Let him be your resident landlord.

Notes for 30:10 This once-a-year ceremony was called the Day of Atonement. On this day a sacrifice was made for the sins of the entire Israelite nation. This was the only day the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, the innermost room of the tabernacle. Here he asked God to forgive the people. The Day of Atonement served as a reminder that the daily, weekly, and monthly sacrifices could cover sins only temporarily. It pointed toward Jesus Christ, the perfect atonement, who could remove sins forever.

Notes for 30:11-16 The atonement money was like a census tax. It continued the principle that all the people belonged to God and therefore needed to be redeemed by a sacrifice. Whenever a census took place, everyone, both rich and poor, was required to pay a ransom. God does not discriminate between people (see Acts 10:34; Galatians 3:28). All of us need mercy and forgiveness because of our sinful thoughts and actions. There is no way the rich person can buy off God, and no way the poor can avoid paying. God's demand is that all of us come humbly before him to be forgiven and brought into his family.

Notes for 30:34-38 The Israelites often burned incense, but this holy incense could be burned only in the tabernacle. Here God gave the recipe for this special incense. The sweet-smelling incense was burned in shallow dishes called censers and was used to show honor and reverence to God. It was like prayer lifting up to God. It was also a vital part of the sacred ceremony on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest carried his smoking censer into the Most Holy Place. This incense, like the sacred anointing oil, was so holy that the people were strictly forbidden to copy it for personal use.

Notes for 31:1-11 God regards all the skills of his people, not merely those with theological or ministerial abilities. Our tendency is to regard only those who are up front and in leadership roles. God gave Bezalel and Oholiab Spirit-filled abilities in artistic craftsmanship. Take notice of all the abilities God gives his people. Don't diminish your skills if they are not like Moses' and Aaron's.

Notes for 31:12-17 The Sabbath had two purposes: It was a time to rest and a time to remember what God had done. We need rest. Without time out from the bustle, life loses its meaning. In our day, as in Moses' day, taking time out is not easy. But God reminds us that without Sabbaths we will forget the purpose for all of our activity and lose the balance crucial to a faithful life. Make sure your Sabbath provides a time of both refreshment and remembrance of God.

Notes for 31:18 The two tablets of the Testimony contained the Ten Commandments. These were not the only code of laws in the ancient world. Other law codes had come into existence when cities or nations decided that there must be standards of judgment, ways to correct specific wrongs. But God's laws for Israel were unique in that: (1) they alleviated the harsh judgments typical of the day; (2) they were egalitarian — the poor and the powerful received the same punishment; (3) they did not separate religious and social law. All law rested on God's authority.

Notes for 32:1-10 Idols again! Even though Israel had seen the invisible God in action, they still wanted the familiar gods they could see and shape into whatever image they desired. How much like them we are! Our great temptation is still to shape God to our liking, to make him convenient to obey or ignore. God responds in great anger when his mercy is trampled on. The gods we create blind us to the love our loving God wants to shower on us. God cannot work in us when we elevate anyone or anything above him. What false gods in your life are preventing the true God from living in you?

Notes for 32:4,5 Two popular Egyptian gods, Hapi (Apis) and Hathor, were thought of as a bull and a heifer. The Canaanites around them worshiped Baal, thought of as a bull. Baal was their sacred symbol of power and fertility and was closely connected to immoral sexual practices. No doubt the Israelites, fresh from Egypt, found it quite natural to make a golden calf to represent the God that had just delivered them from their oppressors. They were weary of a god without a face. But in doing so, they were ignoring the command he had just given them: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex 20:4). They may even have thought they were worshiping God. Their apparent sincerity was no substitute for obedience or excuse for disobedience.

Even if we do not make idols, we are often guilty of trying to make God in our image, molding him to fit our expectations, desires, and circumstances. When we do this, we end up worshiping ourselves rather than the God who created us — and self-worship, today as in the Israelites' time, leads to all kinds of immorality. What is your favorite image of God? Is it Biblical? Is it adequate? Do you need to destroy it in order to worship the immeasurably powerful God who delivered you from bondage to sin?

Notes for 32:9-14 God was ready to destroy the whole nation because of their sin. But Moses pleaded for mercy, and God spared them. This is one of the countless examples in the Bible of God's mercy. Although we deserve his anger, he is willing to forgive and restore us to himself. We can receive God's forgiveness from sin by asking him. Like Moses, we can pray that he will forgive others and use us to bring them the message of his mercy.

Notes for 32:14 How could God relent? God did not change his mind in the same way that a parent decides not to discipline a child. Instead, God changed his behavior to remain consistent with his nature. When God first wanted to destroy the people, he was acting consistently with his justice. When Moses interceded for the people, God relented in order to act consistently with his mercy. God had often told the people that if they changed their ways, he would not condemn them. They changed, and God did as he promised.

Notes for 32:19,20 Overwhelmed by the actual sight of the blatant idolatry and revelry, Moses broke the tablets containing the commandments which had already been broken in the hearts and actions of the people. There is a place for righteous anger. However angry Moses might have been, God was angrier still — he wanted to kill all the people. Anger at sin is a sign of spiritual vitality. Don't squelch this kind of anger. But when you are justifiably angry at sin, be careful not to do anything that you will regret later.

Notes for 32:21-24 Aaron's decision nearly cost him his life. His absurd excuse shows the spiritual decline in his leadership and in the people. Those who function as spokespersons and assistants need to be doubly sure their theology and morality are in tune with God so they will not be influenced by pressure from people. For more information on Aaron, see his Profile in chapter 32.

Notes for 33:5,6 This ban on ornaments was not a permanent ban on all jewelry. It was a temporary sign of repentance and mourning. In Ex 35:22 we read that the people had jewelry.

Notes for 33:11 God and Moses talked face to face in the Tent of Meeting, just as friends do. Why did Moses find such favor with God? It certainly was not because he was perfect, gifted, or powerful. Rather, it was because God chose Moses, and Moses in turn relied wholeheartedly on God's wisdom and direction. Friendship with God was a true privilege for Moses, out of reach for the other Hebrews. But it is not out of reach for us today. Jesus called his disciples — and, by extension, all of his followers — his friends (John 15:15). He has called you to be his friend. Will you trust him as Moses did?

33:11 Joshua, Moses' aide, did not leave the tent, probably because he was guarding it. No doubt there were curious people who would have dared to go inside.

Notes for 33:18-23 Moses' prayer was to see the manifest glory of God. He wanted assurance of God's presence with him, Aaron, and Joshua, and also he desired to know that presence experientially. Because we are finite and morally imperfect, we cannot exist and see God as he is. To see God's back means we can only see where God has passed by. We can only know him by what he does and how he acts. We cannot comprehend God as he really is apart from Jesus Christ (John 14:9). Jesus promised to show himself to those who believe (John 14:21).

Chapter 34 The Ten Commandments written again

Notes for 34:6,7 Moses had asked to see God's glory (Ex 33:18), and this was God's response. What is God's glory? It is his character, his nature, his way of relating to his creatures. Notice that God did not give Moses a vision of his power and majesty, but rather of his love. God's glory is revealed in his mercy, grace, compassion, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. God's love and mercy are truly wonderful, and we benefit from them. We can respond and give glory to God when our characters resemble his.

Notes for 34:7 Why would sins affect grandchildren and great-grandchildren? This is no arbitrary punishment. Children still suffer for the sins of their parents. Consider child abuse or alcoholism, for example. While these sins are obvious, sins like selfishness and greed can be passed along as well. The dire consequences of sin are not limited to the individual family member. Be careful not to treat sin casually, but repent and turn from it. The sin may cause you little pain now, but it could sting in a most tender area of your life later — your children and grandchildren.

Notes for 34:12-14 God told the Israelites not to join in religious rites with the sinful people around them, but to give their absolute loyalty and exclusive devotion to him. Pagan worship simply cannot be mixed with the worship of the holy God. As Jesus pointed out, "No servant can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13). Love of money is the god of this age, and many Christians attempt to make a treaty with this enslaving god. Are you trying to worship two gods at once? Where is your first allegiance?

Notes for 34:13 Asherah poles were wooden poles that stood by Baal's altar (see Judges 6:25). Asherah was the goddess who was the consort (wife) of Baal. She represented good luck in agriculture and fertility.

Notes for 34:18 The month of Abib corresponds to the end of March and the beginning of April.

Notes for 34:28-35 Moses' face was radiant after he spent time with God. The people could clearly see God's presence in him. How often do you spend time alone with God? Although your face may not light up a room, time spent in prayer, reading the Bible, and meditating should have such an effect on your life that people will know you have been with God.

Notes for 35:5-21 God did not require these special offerings, but he appealed to people with generous hearts. Only those who were willing to give were invited to participate. God loves cheerful givers (2Corinthians 9:7). Our giving should be from love and generosity, not from a guilty conscience.

Notes for 35:10-19 Moses asked people with various abilities to help with the tabernacle. Every one of God's people has been given special abilities. We are responsible to develop these abilities — even the ones not considered religious — and to use them for God's glory. We can become skilled through study, by watching others, and through practice. Work on your skills or abilities that could help your church or community.

Notes for 35:20-24 Where did the Israelites, who were once Egyptian slaves, get all this gold and jewelry? When the Hebrews left Egypt, they took with them the spoils from the land — all the booty they could carry (Ex 12:35,36). This included gold, silver, jewels, linen, skins, and other valuables.

Notes for 35:21 Those whose hearts were stirred gave cheerfully to the Tent of Meeting (also called the tabernacle). With great enthusiasm they gave because they knew how important their giving was to the completion of God's house. Airline pilots and computer operators can push test buttons to see if their equipment is functioning properly. God has a

quick test button he can push to see the level of our commitment — our pocketbooks. Generous people aren't necessarily faithful to God. But faithful people are always generous.

Notes for 35:26 - Those who spun cloth made a beautiful contribution to the tabernacle. Good workers take pride in the quality and beauty of their work. God is concerned with the quality and beauty of what you do. Whether you are a corporate executive or a drugstore cashier, your work should reflect the creative abilities God has given you.

Notes for 36:8,9 Making cloth (spinning and weaving) took a great deal of time in Moses' day. To own more than two or three changes of clothes was a sign of wealth. The effort involved in making enough cloth for the tabernacle was staggering. The tabernacle would never have been built without tremendous community involvement. Today, churches and neighborhoods often require this same kind of pulling together. Without it, many essential services wouldn't get done.

Key Tabernacle Pieces

Ark of the Covenant - A golden rectangular box that contained the Ten Commandments - Symbolized God's covenant with Israel's people - Located in the Most Holy Place

Atonement Cover - The lid to the ark of the covenant - Symbolized the presence of God among his people

Curtain The curtain that divided the two sacred rooms of the tabernacle—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place - Symbolized how the people were separated from God because of sin

Table - A wooded table located in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The bread of the Presence and various utensils were kept on this table

Bread of the Presence Twelve loaves of baked bread, one for each tribe of Israel - Symbolized the spiritual nourishment God offers his people

Lampstands and Lamps - A golden lampstand located in the Holy Place, which held seven burning oil lamps. The lampstand lighted the Holy Place for the priests.

Altar of Incense - An altar in the Holy Place in front of the curtain used for burning God's special incense and symbolic of acceptable prayer

Anointing Oil - A special oil used to anoint the priests and all the pieces in the tabernacle - A sign of being set apart for God

Altar of Burnt Offering - The bronze altar outside the tabernacle used for the sacrifices symbolized how sacrifice restored one's relationship with God

Basin - A large wash basin outside the tabernacle used by the priests to cleanse themselves before performing their duties - Symbolized the need for spiritual cleansing

Notes for 36:35 Cherubim are mighty angels.

Notes for 37:1 The ark (also called the ark of the Testimony or ark of the covenant) was built to hold the Ten Commandments. It symbolized God's covenant with his people. Two gold angels called cherubim were placed on its top. The ark was Israel's most sacred object and was kept in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. Only once each year, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the top of the ark (called the atonement cover) to atone for the sins of the entire nation.

Notes for 38:21 In building the tabernacle, Moses laid out the steps, but Ithamar supervised the project. We all have different talents and abilities. God didn't ask Moses to build the tabernacle but to motivate the experts to do it. Look for the areas where God has gifted you and then seek opportunities to allow God to use your gifts.

Notes for 39:1-21 The priests wore a uniform to the tabernacle each day. Some of the pieces of their uniform were not only beautiful but also significant. Two parts of the high priest's uniform were the ephod and breastpiece. The ephod looked like a vest and was worn over the outer clothing. The breastpiece was fitted to the ephod (and sometimes was called the ephod). The breastpiece was made of colored linens about nine inches square. On its front were attached 12 precious stones, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. This symbolized how the high priest represented all the people before God. The breastpiece also contained pockets that held two stones or plates called the Urim and Thummim. The high priest could determine God's will for the nation by consulting the Urim and Thummim. (See the note on Ex 28:30.)

Notes for 39:32 The tabernacle was finally complete to the last detail. God was keenly interested in every minute part. The Creator of the universe was concerned about even the little things. Matthew 10:30 says that God knows the number of hairs on our heads. This shows that God is greatly interested in you. Don't be afraid to talk with him about any of your concerns — no matter how small or unimportant they might seem.

Notes for 39:42 Moses had learned his management lesson well. He gave important responsibilities to others and then trusted them to do the job. Great leaders, like Moses, give plans and direction while letting others participate on the team. If you are a leader, trust your assistants with key responsibilities.

Notes for 39:43 Moses inspected the finished work, saw that it was done the way God wanted, and then blessed the people. A good leader follows up on assigned tasks and gives rewards for good work. In whatever responsible position you find yourself, follow up to make sure that tasks are completed as intended, and show your appreciation to the people who have helped.

Notes for 40:1 Moses was careful to obey God's instructions in the smallest detail. Notice that he didn't make a reasonable facsimile of God's description, but an exact copy. We should follow Moses' example and be fastidious about our obedience. If God has told you to do something, do it, do it right, and do it completely.

Notes for 40:16 God told Moses how to build the tabernacle, and Moses delegated jobs in order to do it. God allows people to participate with him in carrying out his will. Your task is not just to sit and watch God work, but to give your best effort when work needs to be done.

Notes for 40:17-33 The physical care of the tabernacle required a long list of tasks, and each was important to the work of God's house. This principle is important to remember today when God's house is the church. There are many seemingly unimportant tasks that must be done to keep your church building maintained. Washing dishes, painting walls, or shoveling snow may not seem very spiritual. But they are vital to the ministry of the church and have an important role in our worship of God.

Notes for 40:34 The tabernacle was God's home on earth. He filled it with his glory — the overpowering sense of his presence. Almost 500 years later, Solomon built the temple, which replaced the tabernacle as the central place of worship. God also filled the temple with his glory (2Chronicles 5:13,14). But when Israel turned from God, his glory and presence departed from the temple and it was destroyed by invading armies (2Kings 25). The temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. God's glory returned in even greater splendor nearly five centuries later when Jesus Christ, God's Son, entered it and taught. When Jesus was crucified, God's glory again left the temple. However, God no longer needed a physical building after Jesus rose from the dead. God's temple now is his church, the body of believers.

Notes for 40:38 The Israelites were once Egyptian slaves making bricks without straw. Here they were following the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, carrying the tabernacle they had built for God. Exodus begins in gloom and ends in glory. This parallels our progress through the Christian life. We begin as slaves to sin, are redeemed by God, and end our pilgrimage living with God forever. The lessons the Israelites learned along the way we also need to learn.