

Exodus– by Nathan White

Chapter 1

The narrative of Exodus opens immediately on the heels of Genesis which ended with Joseph's death as a respected leader in the land of Egypt, but many years have now passed. In the time since Joseph's death, the Hebrew people have grown and "there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph." (v.8). This king viewed such a large presence of non-Egyptians in Egypt as a threat to his power and after attempting to systematically oppress them, finally decided to enslave them and murder their baby boys in order to prevent any future uprising. At great risk to themselves, Egyptian midwives break this command and save the Hebrew children, but there is still a sense of great fear in this chapter. Not only does this set the stage for the rest of Exodus, it should call readers back to the promises of Genesis. Every promise since Genesis 3 seems to now be in peril. How can a redeemer come to crush the head of the serpent? How will God grow Abraham's family into many nations? How can Israel eventually take Canaan if they are eradicated or enslaved. Careful readers should feel this sense of hopelessness from the outset of the book.

Chapter 2

No doubt with the help of Egyptian midwives, an Israelite woman gives birth to a son who she managed to hide for three months. As he grew, the situation became more dangerous, so she hides him where she knows he'll be found. By God's providence, Pharaoh's daughter finds him, affording him protection, and pays the child's mother to nurse him. Pharaoh's daughter names him Moses and, as I'm sure many of you are aware, he's something of a big deal. After the hopelessness of the first chapter, readers might feel that things are looking up. Some boys are being protected. Moses is now in a position of some power. Maybe this is their way out! But after an incident involving a little bit of murder (v.11-15), Moses ran away to Midian where he got married, started a family, and presumably intended to live the rest of his life quietly. It appears as though Israel is back to square one again: enslaved and without hope. God, however, had other plans, and being the faithful, Covenant-keeping God he is, heard the cries of his people. After a roller coaster of hope and hopelessness, the chapter ends with a line that is equal parts chilling and comforting – a line in which his anger toward this injustice is almost palpable: "God saw the people of Israel – and God knew." (v.25).

Chapter 3

Entire books have been written about this chapter of the Bible. It is nearly impossible to overstate its importance or run out of fascinating things to say. Every detail seems to force us to ask more questions than it answers. Why exactly was the bush burning but not consumed? Why is that detail necessary? Does that communicate something about

who God is? Why does Moses hide his face now in fear but later have the boldness to ask to see God's face? Why does Moses feel the need to ask for God's name when he could have simply said the command came from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? A lot of ink has been spilled on these questions and often the answers are tricky and hard to nail down. But the most significant questions that we face when we read this chapter are questions like how gracious must God be to let Moses hear his voice? To see such a picture of who he is? To tell Moses his name? How faithful must he be to remember his promises and keep them for people hundreds of years later? The answers to these questions are, as his name suggests, that he is *eternally and infinitely* faithful and gracious. And that grace and faithfulness – the condescension to our level – are most clearly seen later in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God.

Chapter 4

After experiencing an absolutely astonishing work of God in his encounter with the burning bush, Moses immediately begins trying to convince God that he got the wrong guy. The situation borders on comical. Moses hears the voice of God during a genuinely miraculous experience that lines up entirely with what he would have known of God through the oral tradition of the Hebrew people and rather than buying in, he tries to weasel his way out. Graciously, God gives Moses signs and continuously counters his objections, eventually forcing Moses to go along with the plan. We could follow this scene and laugh about Moses' silly attempt to argue God out of his eternal plan, but if we're honest with ourselves, we are not that different. Whether it is due to fear, laziness, hard-headedness, or one of any number of sins and weaknesses, we often find ourselves trying to argue our way out of what God calls us to. We don't want to mortify our sin. We don't want to proclaim the gospel to friends. We don't want to engage in corporate worship. We try to convince God he's got the wrong person, that we aren't who he needs, but in reality, he doesn't need any of us. He calls us to faith because he chooses to love us and to conform us to Christ's likeness. And like Moses, if we belong to him, he graciously refuses to let us weasel out of it.

Chapter 5

Moses, along with his brother, Aaron, begrudgingly obeys God. They walk into Pharaoh's throne room and demand that he frees the people of God. But Pharaoh responds with unmitigated rebellion. Not only does he refuse to let the people of Israel go, but he actually makes their work even harder. He doubles down on his cruelty. He asks a question that will define the remainder of his life: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?" (v.2). He goes so far as to invoke God's covenant name, Yahweh, in his opposition. Of course, we know how Pharaoh's story ends. He will go to war with Yahweh and it will cost him a child, his army, and his life. Who is Yahweh that Pharaoh should obey him? He is the only God who will prove Pharaoh's idols to be powerless. Moses ends this chapter in desperation, not yet knowing how the

story ends, but we do. No matter how unlikely it seems, no matter what they seem to get away with now, every Pharaoh, every Ahab, every Nebuchadnezzar, every Herod, and ever Pontius Pilate will ultimately find themselves in subjugation to the one true Ruler of the universe – Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

Moses ends the last chapter with a cry of desperation, even going so far as to blame God for the heightened oppression of the Israelites. But God responds with great patience and grace. Rather than scolding Moses for his lack of faith, God reminds Moses of the promises he has made and assures Moses that he will keep them. He calls Moses to remember. The comfort God offers Moses is not found in the ability of Moses, Aaron, and the people of Israel to politically maneuver their way out of their slavery or overthrow their enslavers in war. Rather, God offers Moses comfort on the basis of who he is. So often, we feel that the doctrine of God being unchangeable makes him seem distant or disconnected. But the reality is that God's unchangeability is a great comfort to his people because if God is unchanging, and he has promised to love us and to finish the work he started in those of us who are united to Christ, then he will not and cannot revoke that promise. Against all perceived odds, God will ultimately bring us into glory, delivering us forever from all of the power of the sin and death that enslave humanity.

Chapter 7

Readers might wonder why God waited until we are this far into Exodus, but I suspect that the people of Israel, who had spent generations in slavery, felt that same tension in ways that we cannot imagine. But God does not and will not remain silent in the face of injustice forever. For the sake of his people, he begins executing judgements on Egypt and all of their gods. This is certainly a comfort. As we see in Revelation as well, God will eventually avenge the blood of his saints. For those outside of Christ, the reality that God will eventually begin executing justice should be frightening. What is fascinating is that even now, God still allows room for Egypt to repent. In his judgement, he still actually shows some mercy to Egypt by calling them to repent. They don't do it, but he continues to offer. But even for those of us who belong to Christ, we should be aware that God will not allow our own false gods to stand forever. Similar to his undoing of Egypt's idols in judgment and his calls to repentance for their good and the good of his people, he will sometimes do the same for us in love, destroying our idols and calling us again to repentance for our own good.

Chapter 8

Three more plagues all intended to mock Egypt's gods. We might also notice that the plagues seem to grow in intensity. When we move into the next chapter, the plagues even begin to carry dire economic consequences as well as spiritual truths. We also see that Pharaoh's heart continues to grow hard, even as he begins to make promises that he will release the Israelites. Already, in the second plague, Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to "plead with the Lord to take away the frogs" (v.8), proving that he clearly has no real control, but still acts as if the freedom of Israel is something he does not have to give. He hides behind the illusion of his own power. He promises to release Israel as a bargaining chip, but as soon as the frogs receded, he revoked his promise. If we are careful to examine our own hearts, we might find that at times, like Pharaoh, we find that we too believe ourselves to have much more control than we actually do. But, like Pharaoh, God is calling us to repent of our delusions of grandeur. We have seen where Pharaoh's hard heart took him. May we learn from his foolishness and repent instead.

Chapter 9

This chapter carries three more plagues, three more chances for Pharaoh to repent, and three more times that he refuses. It is remarkable, once again, to stop and consider just how merciful and slow to anger God is actually being with an enemy who is absolutely opposed to him. Although these plagues do once again increase in intensity and begin striking at Egypt's economy in powerful ways, the human toll is still surprisingly low for a nation that is so oppressive and so opposed to God. For as often as critics act as if God is fickle and cruel in the Old Testament, most of us would probably have been much harsher with Egypt much more quickly. In addition to the obvious kindness toward his people that we see in his judgments on Egypt, we also cannot help but see his patience with his enemies. Though Egypt ultimately does not repent, it is this very patience that allows the enemies we might destroy to instead repent and become God's sons and daughters.

Chapter 10

The pace of the plagues begins to slow down, which is a good literary indication that we are moving toward the climax of this part of the Exodus narrative. And, once again, the plagues grow in their intensity. In addition to the assault on Egypt's gods, the economic repercussions grow as well. It is hard for us in our context to understand just how devastating such a plague of locusts would be to a society which relies heavily upon agriculture, especially after the previous death of the livestock. It is not so hard for us to understand just how difficult and devastating three days of absolute, total darkness would be. No one can go to work. No one can get food. No one can go to a physician. No one can do anything. Because everyone is effectively completely blind. Their sun

god failed. He could not protect them from the God of Israel because only the God of Israel was real. Egypt, in all of its imperial might, was clearly losing its war with Yahweh and Israel never had to lift a sword.

Chapter 11

Nine plagues in, and although Pharaoh has promised to release Israel several times, he still refuses to follow through. This is what full, unmitigated hard heartedness looks like when it is fleshed out. He knows what God can do. He knows God is real. He just doesn't care. So, God promises one more plague. Just one more. And this one will do more than just work. It will make Pharaoh drive them away completely (v.1). The fear of the Lord would have granted Pharaoh a great deal of wisdom here, but he simply did not have it. Rather, he expected everyone to fear him. It would be easy for us to remember only chapter twelve, when the Passover will take place, and think that the severity of this final plague came as something of a surprise. But that is not the case. Moses lays out for Pharaoh, in no uncertain terms, exactly what is about to happen. Pharaoh is promised that every single firstborn in Egypt will die, including his own, and even after nine plagues proving that Yahweh can do what he says he will do, Pharaoh will not back down. Pharaoh's sin, as all sin eventually does, will ultimately have disastrous, irrevocable consequences not only for himself, but for everyone around him. No sin is never truly private. Others will always be hurt.

Chapter 12

This is it. This is the final plague and with it, the escape of Israel from Egypt and the institution of Passover. God does exactly what he said he would do and kills the firstborn of everything person and animal in Egypt with the exception of those who follow his instructions to put the blood of a lamb without blemish on the doorposts of their homes. By doing so, they were set apart as protected by God. Nothing else would spare a household. Of course, this becomes a major feast for the people of Israel and will be celebrated to remember this momentous event. But the feast they institute will not just point back in time. It will also point forward to Jesus Christ, who John the Baptist will proclaim as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29). This Passover – this Exodus – was not just done for the people of Israel in slavery. It was done to preach the promises of the gospel long before Christ would ever come to free us from slavery to sin and let death pass over us by the shedding of his blood.

Chapter 13

Unexpectedly, God does not take Israel out of Egypt by the simplest route. Rather than taking them past the Philistines where they might be frightened by the threat of war, God leads them toward the Red Sea. This was incredibly counterintuitive. The path by which God led them backed them up against a seemingly insurmountable barrier. If

Pharaoh decided to go back on his word as he had before, then they would be trapped. But it was actually this unexpected path that would prove to be their ultimate deliverance. In his mercy, God protected Israel from their own faithlessness by leading them away from the Philistines who might scare into going back to slavery, and will protect them from their enemies by using the very barrier that now seems to trap them. Further, there was never a moment when God lets them forget he is with them as they take this strange journey. The pillar of cloud and fire “did not depart from the people.” (v.22).

Chapter 14

This is, almost inarguably, one of the most famous scenes in the Bible. God graciously and powerfully parts the Red Sea, allowing the people of Israel to pass on completely dry ground. As Pharaoh attempts to pursue, his chariots get caught in the no-longer-so-dry ground, trapping him. And ultimately, God closes the sea on the Egyptians as they attempt to flee. God’s redemption of his people and conquering of his enemies was so complete that “not one of [the Egyptians] remained.” (v.28). God even gave them the benefit of turning around to see their pursuers dead on the seashore. The enemy that the Israelites could never have conquered on their own had been swallowed up by the judgment of God and the freedom that they never could have attained in their own power had been handed to them. And even in this, we see a picture of Christ, in whom we are free to pass safely out of our slavery to sin and through the judgment of God unharmed. We’ll see even more clearly in the next chapter that God always intended this to be a picture of Christ’s saving work.

Chapter 15

It should come as no surprise that immediately upon being delivered, the people of Israel sing a song of praise to God. It is a deeply moving song of triumph declaring the goodness of God to save them from certain destruction. The horse and rider that would have been their end were tossed into the sea (v.1-5), the nations who oppose Israel now have reason to fear (v.14-15), and Israel is absolutely confident that God alone will reign forever (v.18). There seems to be little, if any, subtext here. They sing about what happened. But it might surprise you to find that the song of Moses appears in the New Testament as well at the edge of a different sea after a greater deliverance. In Revelation 15, we read, “And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire – and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name standing beside the sea...and they sing the song of Moses the servant of God.” (v.2-3). Here we again see that because of Christ, while God’s people stand on the safe side of a sea of judgment, their greatest threats have been conquered, God’s enemies have great reason to fear, and God alone will reign forever.

Chapter 16

One chapter after songs of praise and great deliverance, the people of Israel are already complaining about their circumstances. They even go so far as to yearn for the horrible slavery from which they had escaped after generations of servitude. We can very likely relate to their short memory. How many times do we give into fear or bitterness or anger in spite of the many times God has been merciful to us? Still, even in the face of their remarkable ungratefulness, God provides for them. His patience is not contingent on their being worthy of it. It is based on his own goodness. He is good just because he is good, not because they deserved it. In this case, his goodness takes the form of the miraculous provision of bread from heaven. Once again, as beautiful as this gift was, it was also a sign that pointed forward to Jesus. In John 6, as the people demand a sign, Jesus tells them, "It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life." (v.32-33, 35)

Chapter 17

You are surely noticing that grumbling is becoming a consistent theme in this book. Israel has been delivered from slavery through powerful signs, brought safely across the Red Sea, saved from their enemies, and eaten bread from heaven. Still, they doubt God's provision and blame Moses for their thirst. God, yet again, provides a solution. Moses will stand in the sight of all the people, God will stand before him on the rock at Horeb, and Moses will strike the rock. (v.5-6). Moses does exactly what God says and water pours out of the rock he struck. But there is something fascinating about the set-up to this miracle. God specifically tells Moses that he will stand before him on the rock which is to be struck. It is almost as if God himself is the one who takes the blow and gives life-giving water. Which, as you have likely put together by now, points us directly to Christ, the God-man, who is stricken for his people, from whom we receive living water.

Chapter 18

Like the chapters about temple architecture and furnishings, we might consider this chapter to be little more than a necessary pragmatic solution or logistical information that has no bearing on us now. But like all Scripture, it is important to us. At the time of writing this, you have recently elected and re-elected officers who will soon be ordained and installed. Of course, by the time you read this, it will be past tense. Some of those men were elected to the office of Elder. We see the beginnings of that office here, all the way back in Exodus. Moses, though he was capable and wise, was unable to carry the burden of governing and caring for all the people on his own, so other capable, wise

men who feared God and had integrity were tasked with sharing that burden. Far from simply being a practical but interchangeable solution, this was how God was pleased to set up the government of his Church. A commitment to finding capable elders is clearly repeated throughout the New Testament and remains a necessary part of the life of the Church today.

Chapter 19

This chapter represents a major turn in the narrative of Exodus. Until now, the focus has been on God's judgment on Egypt, the Israelites' escape from slavery, and the events immediately following the Red Sea crossing. The remainder of the book, however, will be about God's covenant with Israel. There will still be narrative, but the overwhelming majority of what is left is comprised of various laws and instructions pertaining to the tabernacle. It's important for us to remember that even in the giving of the Mosaic Law, grace preceded this call to obedience. God saved them from slavery first, keeping his promises to them, and then teaches them what it means to live as his people. Specifically, this obedience is meant to make them "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God saves them so that they can share the blessings of God's promises with the nations around them. Peter has this very same mission in mind when he applies this language to believers (1 Peter 2:9). Our obedience should stem from gratitude for how Christ has saved us and should point our unbelieving neighbors to him for God's glory.

Chapter 20

Before giving them the Ten Commandments, God reminds Israel of who he is. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (v. 2). Again, God reminds them that his grace has preceded their obedience. In fact, though we rarely think of it, the very act of giving the Law is a gracious one. God is showing Israel what it means to live as a free people. They've been enslaved by murderous pagans for hundreds of years. They have only seen the violence and cruelty that accompanied the folk religions of their day. The notion that they should live before the face of God, always acting honestly, compassionately, and patiently toward one another was, culturally speaking, unlike anything they had previously experienced. We often think of God's moral law as constricting, but in reality, it is liberating. Under these laws, Israel did not have to fear being taken advantage of by someone stronger or more powerful. They could live in peace with God and one another.

Chapter 21

It seems strange to see laws pertaining to slavery immediately after considering how God's law actually brings freedom. Culturally, this is very different from the chattel slavery that we now think of from the 17th and 18th centuries. This is more in line with indentured servitude. If a man could not pay his debts, he would pay for them by

working for his lender. In the case of verses 7-11, poor families who cannot afford a wedding might instead be paid to offer daughters as wives. This seems barbaric to us, but the heart behind these laws was to protect poor women from exploitation. They were to be cared for and honored by their husbands and if their husbands would not do so, the women could be redeemed by their family. All of these slavery laws revolve around protecting the vulnerable – women, poor families, debtors – from being mistreated by their powerful neighbors. In fact, it was this very notion, this heart behind these laws, that ultimately led to the dissolution of the institution of slavery in the Roman empire and later, in the modern world.

Chapter 22

When we read the laws of restitution, many people view them as harsh. Much like with the laws pertaining to slavery, this is typically because we don't entirely grasp the cultural context of these laws. For instance, in the previous chapter, we read the now famous verse that dictates the price for a life is a life, an eye is an eye, and a tooth is a tooth (21:23). What we might miss is that the goal of these restitution laws was not only to curb sin and prevent intentional harm in the first place, but also to prevent disproportionate retaliation. For example, if a man lets his livestock graze in another man's field, he has to repay what was lost, but he cannot be put to death. These laws seek to prevent unjust revenge as much as they seek to prevent the original crime. The goal is justice, not bloodlust. This is actually a picture of mercy in the ancient world where laws could be purposefully heavy-handed and those who enforced them were capricious in their judgments. The laws were meant to cultivate a heart of wisdom, compassion, and carefully considered justice among God's people.

Chapter 23

Centuries after the first promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's ancestors, the iniquity of the Canaanites is apparently complete (Gen. 15:16). Before confirming the covenant they've made, God gives them instructions regarding the conquest of Canaan. They are to devote absolutely everything to destruction. This is, after all, a judgment on Canaan and God is using Israel to execute it. God promises to Israel that if they will do what he is calling them to do, he will make sure they are successful in their conquest. He will even drive them out little by little so that the land doesn't grow wild while Israel tries to settle. They just have to be sure not to make covenants with Canaanites or their gods. Even now, God warns them that if they make deals with their pagan neighbors, it will lead to apostasy. However, as we know, it doesn't take long at all for Israel to ignore this command. They seem to think they can control the terms of these deals, that they can tame just a little bit of sin. But, as God is warning them, that is never the way sin works.

Chapter 24

God now confirms his covenant with Israel. There is much worth considering here about the hearts of the Israelites that so quickly turn away from God when circumstances change and the way that mirrors our own hearts, but what I want us to focus on is exactly how God confirms this covenant. After saving his people, calling them to obedience, and then hearing their agreement, he engages in a covenant meal with their mediators. We often consider how Passover foreshadows Communion, but we see it here as well. The difference is that we have a better mediator in Christ. Rather than this covenant meal belonging only to our mediator, it is distributed freely to all of God's people because we are granted access to God through the person and work of Christ. Jesus even uses the same words that we read in verse 8 when he institutes Communion. Every time we go to the Lord's Table, we get to remember God's covenant faithfulness and celebrate the great blessing of having access to him through our perfect mediator, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 25

Instructions like these can feel tedious to us, but it is important for us to understand just how incredible this would have been for the people of Israel. Since Genesis, the biggest problem plaguing humanity has been how exactly they are supposed to be with God. God has consistently made the promise to be their God and promised that they will be his people, but that's awfully difficult given their current situation. No one can actually go near God. In fact, as we've read in recent chapters, Israel is scared to even try! They are rightfully terrified of his holiness. But what we're beginning to see is God slowly revealing a way back to him. One of the things you'll notice about the ark of the covenant, and later the tabernacle, is that it has Eden imagery. For instance, the angels on top of the ark are reminiscent of the angels tasked with guarding Eden after God removed Adam and Eve. But this imagery points back to our fall because it is also meant to point forward to Christ, who will finally reconcile us to God and be the ultimate meeting place between God and man. He brings us back to the garden.

Chapter 26

The tabernacle was the precursor to the temple that Solomon would later build. This tabernacle would be a portable place of worship. This would be where the ark of the covenant would reside when the people settled in a camp. This is where they would make their sacrifices. This was the place where God's presence would dwell. Again, you should notice the inclusion of cherubim on the curtains of the tabernacle. Just as was the case with the ark of the covenant, this is meant to recall Eden. Here, the mediators of the people of God will pass between the angels meant to guard the garden in order to enter the presence of God. It would be a constant reminder of God's graciousness to let

them draw near. And, again, as with the ark of the covenant, it points us explicitly to Christ. This portable presence of God dwelling among the people and travelling through the wilderness with them foreshadows Jesus, the Word who dwelt among us (John 1:14).

Chapter 27

In this chapter, God gives instructions for the altar on which priests will offer their sacrifices. Such specificity for one piece of the tabernacle might seem tedious to us, but we have to remember just how important this altar was. Even if we do not entirely understand what the purpose of every particular detail was, the simple fact that God mandated those details should indicate that he wanted his people to pay attention to this altar. Imagine what it must have been like for the people of Israel to receive these instructions or even to be part of building it. They would have known that living things would die here because of their sin. And it would not just happen once. It would happen day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year for the rest of their lives. This was where blood would be spilled so that their lives would be spared. Can you imagine the weight of that? Against that historical backdrop, we might gain a fuller understanding of the beauty “that Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins.” (Heb. 10:12).

Chapter 28

Again, it would be incredibly easy for us to quickly grow tired of reading a chapter like this one. There is no narrative. There is no command for us to follow. The instructions are not even for all of Israel. They only pertain the priests. However, if we read carefully, we’ll find God is teaching his people something in this. First, you might recognize the names of some of the stones that are used as representatives of the people of Israel. They reappear elsewhere in Scripture. In Revelation 21, similar stones are found in the New Jerusalem. This is not just a coincidence. After all, these stones were actually worn by the priest. He literally carried his people on his shoulders and on his chest into the presence of God. It was deeply personal. In the same way, our great high priest, Jesus Christ, unites us to himself and brings us safely into God’s presence. That is why these stones appear in Revelation. It’s meant to call to mind the stones that represented Israel. Our high priest has fully and finally reconciled all of his people to God.

Chapter 29

This chapter introduces us to the ordination rituals of priests. You’ll notice that they revolve heavily around the notion of being clean (v. 4) and sacrifices to deal with the sin of the priest being ordained (v. 14). Neither of these should be surprising to us. Being ceremonially clean and dealing with sin were two of the main duties of priests. What might confuse us is why the priest had to apply the blood of a sacrificed ram to himself

(v. 19-21). Here, the priests are literally being made holy, set apart, by the blood of this sacrifice. The application of the sacrifice's blood marks them as members of the priesthood. If we are to understand Christ as our priest, we might wonder why he didn't go through these same rituals. There are two explanations. The first is that the author of Hebrews says he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:15-17), and priesthood which predates and, evidently, extends beyond the temporary Levitical priesthood described here. The other explanation is that Christ was already clean and sinless, so this perfect high priest did not need a sacrifice. Rather, he was the sacrifice, whose blood applied to us sets us apart as a "royal priesthood." (1 Pet. 2:9).

Chapter 30

Soon this stretch of laws will give way to more narrative, but before we get there, we read more about the blueprints for the tabernacle. You have surely noticed at this point that God takes his worship seriously, and that is displayed here as well. In this particular chapter, we find details about the altar of incense and the incense which should be burned there. These laws will one day carry a very personal sting for Aaron and Moses. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, will eventually be killed for offering unauthorized incense to God (Lev. 10). These commands, which seems trivial and which we might quickly forget, will cost two priests their lives. On the surface, we can understand this as a reminder that God decides how he is worshiped. But at the heart of that reminder is the fact that God is holy. Just like the incense meant only for the altar, that which is set apart as his should not be used in a profane way. And like the incense that will cost Nadab and Abihu their lives, we should not presume to bring to God that which does not honor him. This is true not only for worship, but for ourselves. We should not presume to enter God's presence unless we have been cleansed and set apart as his. Ultimately, this need is met by Jesus Christ, in whom we are set apart as God's (Heb. 10).

Chapter 31

God specifically sets apart Bezalel and Oholiab, proclaiming that he has gifted them for this task. We might assume that Moses, having received a world-class education from the Egyptians, or Aaron, being the high priest, would build the tabernacle. But they do not. Rather, God uses two otherwise unimportant craftsmen to build the place where he will dwell among his people. God purposefully gifted different people to accomplish the tasks that he set before the people of Israel. We think of Moses as being the leader of the Israelites, and he was, but it was never a one-man show. We saw this in chapter 18 when Moses picked men to help him make judgments. We saw it in chapter 4 when God called Aaron to help Moses speak to Pharaoh and then later when Aaron was appointed the high priest. Similarly, God has gifted his people today with various talents, temperaments, and skills, all for the sake of his glory and each other's good. "For we

are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10).

Chapter 32

You could find countless sermons, essays, articles, and books written about the golden calf incident. In fact, this sin will hang over the heads of the Israelites for generations. Many years from this point, Jeroboam, king over the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the nation splits, will institute worship of golden calves at Dan and Bethel so that the people won't travel to Jerusalem in the south. This sin is not just a one-time indiscretion. It shows something about the hearts of the Israelites. They are quick to forget God's promises and they will fall to this sin, and similar sins, over and over again. This is probably a habit familiar to many of us. We also forget God's promises and fall back into the same sins time and again. But where Israel's sin is rooted in forgetting God's promises, Moses' intercession is rooted in remembering them. He asks God to spare Israel, not because they deserve it, but because he had made a promise to their forefathers. They were saved from destruction by a mediator who pleaded with God on the basis of God's own character, not on the basis of Israel's worthiness. The fulfillment of these promises is ultimately Jesus Christ, who is also our final mediator, pleading on our behalf on the basis of God's promises which he brought to fruition.

Chapter 33

We begin to see tension between God and his people. He did not destroy them for the golden calf, but now he says that he won't go with them from Sinai. Instead, he promises to send an angel. Many of us would probably consider taking that deal. After all, it was an angel who wiped out the firstborn in Egypt. An angel will later lay waste to the Assyrian army. It seems like a fair tradeoff for the golden calf debacle. But Moses is not satisfied by the promise of an angel. He wants God to go with them or he does not want to go. Moses understood that being God's people is about more than just getting the things God can give. It is about the hope of dwelling with God. This was his promise. This was what his work was moving toward. God was making a way for his people to dwell with him again. Even before God incarnate dwelt among us (Jn. 1), and before the Spirit of God actually dwelt in us a seal of the redemption purchased by Christ (Eph. 1), Moses knew that just having some military victories and their land would be hollow if God would not be with them. Moses did not just want the stuff God could give him. He wanted God. And now, in Christ, we have the gift of full reconciliation to God and the ability to go to his throne boldly (Heb. 4). May we, with Moses, not be satisfied by anything else.

Chapter 34

After making new tablets, Moses ascends the mountain once more. You'll notice that he is to go alone. Flocks can't even graze near Sinai to prevent those tending them from seeing what is about to occur. What follows is one of the most powerful scenes in Exodus. God passes before Moses, proclaiming his name and attributes. It is the first formal, at-length self-description of God's character in the Bible and it gets repeated consistently, in some form or another, across every section of the Old Testament. It shows up again in historical narratives, in poetry and wisdom literature, and in the prophets. What's fascinating is that even now, God makes clear that his grace is greater than the sin which he punishes. He visits iniquity on children to the third and fourth generation, but his blessings go to thousands of generations (compare to Deut. 7:9) of those who love him. We also might notice that he professes to never let the guilty go unpunished, while simultaneously promising to be merciful. This seems, at first, to be a difficult tension until we realize that it is resolved in Jesus Christ. In him, God deals with our sin, not letting it go unpunished, but is still merciful and gracious toward us.

Chapters 35-36

The overwhelming majority of these two chapters deal with contributions to and construction of the tabernacle. Finally, there will be a place where God will dwell among his people. Of course, only certain people can actually go in, but this would have been a step toward fulfilling a grand promise. And, as we've noted before, the ultimate fulfillment of that promise is found in Jesus Christ, God with us. But that's not all that happens in these chapters. You'll also notice a few verses, right at the beginning of chapter 35, reminding the people one more time about the Sabbath. Here, tucked between a narrative of Moses' face shining after being in the presence of a holy God and the meticulous construction of a tabernacle that would make a way for this holy God to dwell among his people, is a reminder of Sabbath regulations. This reminder works with the exact same theme of the sections which surround it. The way Israel will treat the Sabbath is in direct correlation to what they understand of God's holiness. As God is holy, as he makes his people holy, so is this day to be holy – to be set apart from the other days.

Chapters 37-38

The construction of all the contents of the tabernacle are meticulously described in these chapters. As we've mentioned in the past, you might notice that parts of the tabernacle are reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. The angels on top of the ark, as well as those on the curtain, would be reminders of the angels set outside the garden to keep Adam and Eve from reentering. Here, in this tabernacle, man met with God, but there was still great danger in approaching him. The people of Israel understood this,

which is why they were so careful to follow the instructions listed here and why Moses was committed to recording that act of obedience. We should not take lightly the great privilege purchased for us by Christ to approach God freely. These records, tedious though they might seem to us, would remind future generations of Israel just how precious God's covenant blessings are. Similarly, as we read these records, and are tempted to be bored by dimensions and types of wood, we should be filled with gratitude, that in Christ, we have something even greater than what Oholiab and Bezalel labored so faithfully to build.

Chapter 39

Everything, down to the priestly garments, has now been crafted exactly “as the Lord had commanded.” (43). Moses even checks all of the work that we've read about in the last few chapters personally. Finally, he blesses the workers. It is time for the tabernacle to be erected. But before we get there, you might notice that while many of the sections detailing the crafting of these items was relatively short, this section regarding the priestly garments takes up more space than anything other than the construction of the tabernacle itself. The priestly garments were important, meant to communicate a great deal about priest's role. For instance, we've mentioned previously that they illustrate how the priest is carrying the people of God into his presence. You might also notice that they are beautiful, elaborate garments, and while their splendor should certainly remind the wearer to live in a way becoming of his calling, they are not intended to bring glory to the priest himself. Rather, they point to the glory of the God that priest serves. After all, the garments are made specifically for “ministering in the holy place.”

Chapter 40

This tabernacle is the fulfillment of countless hours of labor and a physical symbol of the blessing of being God's people. Every look at the tabernacle would be a reminder of God's presence among them as they traveled through the wilderness. In fact, they would physically see the presence of God filling the tent. We might initially see this as a happy ending to the story, and while it is certainly better than where Israel began in this book, we know that they go on to wander in the wilderness for 40 years as this entire generation dies because of disobedience. Even seeing the presence of God was not enough to inspire them to faithfulness. Further, Moses, the man with whom God spoke face to face, as a man speaks with a friend (Ex. 33:11), can't even go into the tabernacle. The tabernacle still came with restrictions, and without changing the hearts of the Israelites, it was not enough to draw them to obedience. What they needed was a new mediator who could boldly enter the presence of God and new hearts that wanted to obey. Only in Christ do we find what neither Moses nor the tabernacle could do.

Reflecting on Exodus-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Exodus. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Exodus before we move forward?

"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." James 1.18