

Moses

A Man for God's Testimony

Titus Chu

Moses:
A Man for God's Testimony
by Titus Chu

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1

The Corporate Testimony of God

Living a Meaningful Life

People are not caught by the Lord simply because they followed someone else who followed the Lord, because they enjoyed a Christian meeting, or because following the Lord fit their personality. People are caught by the Lord only by receiving revelation from Him. That revelation then governs their living and labor. By fighting and struggling according to this controlling vision, they live a meaningful life. Only those who have received such a vision pursue the Lord and fight for His interest. Therefore, if we want to follow the Lord, we need to see something and then be faithful to what we have seen. To live this way is to live a meaningful life.

Most people, however, have no thought of whether or not their lives are meaningful. Instead, they think about what to do for fun today. I was this way when I was young, simply enjoying the things going on among the young people. But when I was seventeen, the Lord Himself touched me, caught me, and unveiled Himself to me. I began to love the Lord, and I gave myself totally to Him. For over fifty years, at the end of every year, I have considered before the Lord what I have learned, what I have done in fulfilling my ministry, how I have stood before Him, and how I have fought for His interest. I can testify that there has not been one wasted year in my life.

By the Lord's mercy, I still have the strength to continue struggling for the Lord's interest, just as Moses did in his advanced age. For this, I am thankful. Sadly, however, even after being saved for years, many believers cannot say they have lived one entire day before the Lord. They are preoccupied with life's concerns and pleasures. Even their participation in Christian events is for the hope of some personal enjoyment.

We must realize, however, that the only thing of value in the human life is Christ Himself. When the Lord becomes real and subjective to us, everything we do has value. Christ Himself becomes the meaning of our life. The only thing that matters is that we gain the Lord. Two believers with similar circumstances can have very different experiences depending upon whether or not they are seeking to know Christ. Is our heart captivated by the Lord? Do we come to the Lord when we are making large and small decisions in our lives? Apart from Christ, nothing has value.

Two Men and Two Stages

In the Old Testament, there were two special men called by God. The first was Abraham. God blessed him and told him, "I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17). He also said that "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation" (18:18). This was not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime. In fact, at the end of Genesis, seventy of his descendants moved to Egypt (46:27). Rather than being a mighty nation, they lived under Pharaoh's administration.

After Abraham, the second great person was Moses, who represents a further stage of development. Through Moses, God was able to raise up His people as His corporate testimony, forming them into a great nation. The children of Israel followed Moses out of Egypt, became a nation, and received

the law of God from Moses' hand. This was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Compare this to the growth and establishment of the United States. Initially, many individuals came to North America to flee religious persecution. After arriving in this land, they struggled and gradually grew to the point they were able to become an independent nation. George Washington was the leader of the army fighting for independence. Once the American colonies separated from England and joined together as a nation, they established the Constitution as their defining law, with its Bill of Rights and amendments.

This is similar to the process by which the children of Israel were formed as a nation. God used Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and through the wilderness, forming them as His living testimony on the earth. Moses was set apart for this. The Lord used him to go beyond the calling of individuals to the further stage of establishing God's corporate testimony.

A Great Man with a Great God

To study Moses, we need some preliminary understanding. Moses was not just a great man; he was a great man because he had a great God. This is not a small thing. Do you think you are great? Let me assure you, if you have a great God, you can become a great person. Because Moses knew God's greatness, God was able to manifest His greatness on the earth.

I used to travel with a Taiwanese passport. When I arrived in other countries, sometimes I was treated rudely because they didn't have to worry about Taiwan doing anything about it. When I obtained an American passport, however, all that changed. Once I was accosted by the local authorities for taking a picture. When I told them I was an American, however, they became much more polite and even printed all my pictures for me! My American passport gave me a new status. What passport a traveler holds makes a big difference.

Do we know how to appreciate the rights and status which is ours as citizens of God's kingdom? Do we know how to apply them? If we know how great our God is, we too will be great people.

Abraham and Moses

When God appeared to Abraham and called him, Abraham had little realization of why God called him. God kept unveiling Himself to Abraham step by step until Abraham was clear about God's desire. This continual unveiling was a process of growth. It was not so with Moses, however. Even before he was called by God, Moses was raised to understand God's desire. God had arranged everything from his birth onward, making it plain to Moses who he was, and what he was being raised up to be.

Four Possibilities for Our Lives

We have been chosen by God in the same way. Yet, why is it that so many cannot be for the Lord's testimony? Why is every step in their lives so geared only to themselves?

It seems most people only consider three possible ways to live their lives: to be for Satan, to be for themselves, or to be for their own spirituality. I doubt any reading this book would declare their lives are for Satan or for themselves, but many people fit into these categories. However, most Christians are for their own spirituality. Though this is good, we should also be for the Lord's testimony, which is the fourth and highest way to live. When we give our lives for the Lord's interest, our lives are the most meaningful. For a Christian to declare this is a precious thing. I am concerned, however, that most of us are occupied with other things. This is a very sober a matter.

The Bible indicates that before Christ returns, He will gain His corporate testimony as a Bride prepared for her Bridegroom (Rev. 19:7). Today, as we are watching and waiting for the Lord's return, many believers are still in bondage in Egypt. Since so few have a heart for the Lord's testimony, I question whether the Lord will come back in my lifetime. I pray that some today would rise up to care for the Lord's testimony and prepare the way for His return.

The Four Sections of Exodus

The book of Exodus can be divided into four sections. The first section, chapters 1–4, is the preparation of Moses from his birth until God first appeared to him at the burning bush and directed him to deliver His people from Egypt. This time of Moses' preparation included forty years in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness.

Due to the situation of the children of Israel and Moses' own condition, what God wanted him to do seemed impossible. Moses was eighty years old, yet he was asked by God to lead over two million people. He was to free them from enslavement in Egypt, yet he had no army. Nothing was prepared for their journey, and they had no land to grow food to support themselves. The formation of a nation requires a people, land, and a constitution. They only had the people. When God asked Moses to carry out this "mission impossible," Moses wanted to excuse himself, feeling completely unqualified for the task. Yet eventually the Lord had a way to work with Moses. How marvelous it is that the Lord has a way to work with us even in the things we are not prepared for.

The second section, chapters 5–15, is Israel's deliverance from Egypt. God brought Moses back to Egypt and used powerful means to deliver the children of Israel out from under Pharaoh's hand. God brought plague after plague upon

Egypt. His final blow was to strike down all the firstborn in Egypt while sparing the firstborn of Israel through the Passover. This section ends with God bringing Israel out with a strong hand, allowing them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground, and causing the Egyptian army to be swallowed up in the sea behind them.

In the third section, chapters 16–18, God's goal was to reveal His all-sufficiency to His people by meeting all their needs. The Lord helped the children of Israel to trust Him by making the bitter water sweet at Marah, giving them rest at Elim, providing meat and manna to eat, and causing water to flow from the smitten rock. By this, God was teaching the children of Israel that He is trustworthy and able to satisfy.

God not only terminates everything of the old creation, but He brings us into a full satisfaction in Christ. He proves to us again and again that He is trustworthy and able to meet all our needs.

The final section of Exodus, chapters 19–40, describes the establishing of the testimony of God. It is the most crucial section. Moses went to meet with God on the mountain and returned with God's revelation for His people, conveying to them the means by which they would become God's testimony.

These four sections of Exodus describe how God prepared Moses as a vessel useful to Him in His goal of forming Israel into His corporate testimony on the earth.

2

The Preparation of Moses: God's Sovereign Arrangement

Chosen by God

We should live a buoyant life with the realization that although we are nothing, the One who calls, supports, and sustains us is God. Sometimes I am asked how I can sleep at night with all the troubling situations that surround me. I can testify I sleep well because I know that God is sustaining me. As Paul said, "I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Even before the foundation of the earth was laid, Moses was chosen. He became great and did great things because the God who backed him up was great. I once wrote a song with these words based on Ephesians 1:3–4:

*I am blessed with every blessing
In Christ in the heavenlies;
Chosen e're the earth's foundation,
Holy I am saved to be. (Martin, 198)*

God has already arranged everything for each one of us so that we might accomplish great things for Him (Rom. 8:28–30).

Born in Pharaoh's Egypt

Even before Moses was born, God supported him in a marvelous way. He arranged Moses' birth during a terrible situation. Pharaoh had commanded that all the Israelites' male children be killed at birth (Exo. 1:15–16). Yet God's sovereign hand preserved Moses and even arranged for him to be raised in Pharaoh's own household.

Pharaoh ruled Egypt. "Egypt" means "that troubles or oppresses; anguish" (Hitchcock). Egypt typifies the world, which is marked by troubles, oppression, and anguish. This is the result whenever we seek to gain anything in the world. For instance, those who try to get into law school will have to endure much trouble, oppression, and anguish to get there, and once there, they will have even more of the same. This is the world.

Pharaoh's name means "that disperses; that spoils" (Hitchcock). Pharaoh typifies Satan. He rules and controls people by taking them as spoil and by dispersing whatever they have. We live in an age in which the world and Satan are working to carry us off as spoil. So many young people are occupied with computers, smartphones, and electronic gadgets. All these boxes can bring trouble, oppression, and anxiety. The world uses what it has to cheat people and take them captive.

Moses was born into a troubling and oppressive situation that the Lord allowed. For Moses and the children of Israel to be God's testimony, they needed to know to whom they belonged. Seemingly, Pharaoh was in control, but in fact, God was in control of everything. We were all born into such a situation. We are surrounded by what is oppressive, troubling, and causing anxiety. All that we are and all that we have is dispersed as spoil.

Lao Tse, a Chinese philosopher, thought that the best life is one in which nothing develops. He taught that if a country is governed wisely, even though the neighboring country is

so close that people can hear its roosters crowing and its dogs barking, the people are content to die of old age without ever having gone to see it. It is true that in such a life, there are fewer opportunities to be troubled or anxious, but God cannot gain His testimony if we live this way. His testimony is produced only as we live in the midst of the world which is doing its best to frustrate His work.

Being Strong for the Lord's Testimony

At the time of Moses' birth, the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. Pharaoh was afraid because the children of Israel were multiplying so quickly and now outnumbered the Egyptians, so he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every son born to a Hebrew woman (Exo. 1:8–16).

Satan does the same by trying to make sure any "sons" are stopped before they can get started. According to Peter, the female is weaker than the male (1 Pet. 3:7). Even though all believers are sons of God, some behave as sons and some as weaker daughters. If we are weaker, Satan is very happy because we will give him no trouble.

According to my observation, the church is almost totally filled with daughters today. Nearly no one stands up to say, "Let's fight for the Lord!" Nearly no one cares for the Lord's testimony. When we rise up for the Lord's interest, however, Satan will do his best to put us down. The churches need sons today. Even our Christian sisters need to become such sons. Don't allow yourself to be taken as spoil by the world (Col. 2:8). Many have never even had the thought of giving their lives to the Lord for the sake of His testimony. Satan will do his best to terminate you even before you have a chance to rise up. Stand up for the Lord's testimony and fight for His interest!

We are in the world, which is represented by Egypt, an environment of troubles, oppression, and anguish. In this

world, Satan, who is represented by Pharaoh, is attempting to take us for his spoil. So many brilliant people have ended up as his spoil. One day they will realize they have wasted their lives. Though they live normal and even successful lives, their lives are worthless to God. However, it is God who is actually in control, no matter what. We all need to tell the Lord, "I am here for Your testimony, and I will have no rest until it is established!"

Hidden and Nameless

After Moses was born, his mother hid him for three months (Exo. 2:2; Heb. 11:23). When she could no longer hide him, she "got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch" (Exo. 2:3). Then she put Moses into it and placed it in the Nile while his sister stood at a distance to see what would happen.

Up to this point, Exodus doesn't give the names of anyone. We can infer that Moses' sister is Miriam, but we are not told this. We are not given any names in this story because no one yet deserves a name.

Some young Christians ask, "When will I have a chance to make a name for myself?" They should grow and be trained first. Then they will be ready to have such a name. They need a time of being hidden.

Rescued by Pharaoh's Daughter

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river with her maids, where she saw his little basket in the water and had him taken out. Then the Bible says, "And behold, the boy was crying" (Exo. 2:6). He cried just at the right time because it caused Pharaoh's daughter to be drawn to him. God is so

much in control. Instead of being killed, Moses was saved by the daughter of the very one who ordered him killed.

At this point, Moses' sister approached Pharaoh's daughter and offered to find a Hebrew nurse for him. Pharaoh's daughter agreed, instructing her to go and get someone. She said she would compensate that person for caring for Moses. Moses' sister got his own mother to be his nurse. In other words, this Hebrew mother would be paid to raise her own son. Therefore, Moses, who should have been killed right after birth, was instead raised with the best possible care. This was all arranged by God.

Moses was still unnamed because he was not yet ready to receive a name. He was raised by his mother but he still had not been given a name. Once the child was beyond the age of nursing, his mother "brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, 'Because I drew him out of the water'" (2:10).

Raised under God's Control

In all of this, we can see how God was in control, even in the midst of a dark and cruel environment. God was able to raise up this boy through His own arrangement. Because Moses was nursed by his own mother, he grew up knowing he was one of God's people, a Levite, and that Jehovah was his God. Then he was raised as part of Pharaoh's household and acquired the highest knowledge of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). Egypt at this time possessed the most advanced culture on earth.

The two most highly educated servants of the Lord in the Bible were Moses and Paul, and these two were the most used by God in their service. I encourage all young people to get as much education as possible because education is crucial. It will be useful in developing their ability to serve the Lord.

Killing an Egyptian

Moses lived as part of Pharaoh's household for forty years (Acts 7:23). He was considered the son of Pharaoh's daughter, meaning he may have been in line to become Pharaoh himself one day (Heb. 11:24).

By the time he was forty, Moses had developed into quite a man. Then one day, "he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Exo. 2:11–12). He was probably quite pleased that he had finally struck a blow for God's testimony.

Moses looked around before he acted. Many of us look around too much. People may be for God's testimony, but often not uniquely so. They are for Christ and His testimony, but they love and pursue so many other things as well. It is hard to find people who give themselves to the Lord regardless of the consequences.

Moses acted strongly. He surely realized he was special. Among all of God's people, only he had been so saved, elevated, and educated. He felt it was time to finally act and do something for his people. He killed the Egyptian but first made sure that no one would see it. We also may hesitate in giving ourselves to the Lord until certain conditions are met. May the Lord gain us absolutely!

Fleeing to the Wilderness

Perhaps after killing the Egyptian, Moses felt thankful that the Lord had raised him up and had given him such strength to carry out what he thought was the Lord's will. The following day, however, Moses came upon two Israelites fighting and rebuked them for it. One of them replied, "Who

made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exo. 2:14). When Moses heard these words, he must have broken out in a cold sweat. He realized the deed was known and fled for his life. This ended a forty-year period of being trained and equipped in Pharaoh's household and began another forty-year period of being set aside to shepherd sheep in the wilderness.

God needs us for the establishing of His corporate testimony. We think we are ready to carry out His will, but in fact, the Lord doesn't want us to do anything for Him. It is hard to handle being set aside after being trained and equipped to become a servant of the Lord. After we have been trained, we think we are ready to serve the Lord. However, all our strengths are not for us to do something with, but for the Lord to do something with. Learning this requires a long process in which we seem to lose everything we have.

We may dream of being heroes like Moses, living a life of luxury and sophistication as God's secret agent in Pharaoh's household. But after Moses decided to exercise his fist for God, he discovered his foolish act had totally destroyed his dream of being God's hero for Israel. Moses found he had acted too quickly and had ruined everything. He must have hated that fist of his.

When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he sought to slay him, so Moses fled to the wilderness. He could no longer be with any of the people he had grown up with. He lost all the opportunities and resources he once had as a member of Pharaoh's household. He had no way to fulfill all the desire he had for God's people. He must have felt like he had spoiled everything, including God's plan to free His people.

After Moses was born, he was allowed to live when he should have been killed; he was miraculously accepted into Pharaoh's household and yet retained his Hebrew identity while living as an heir to the mightiest kingdom on earth. God had arranged so much for him. He was in the right

place to do something great for God. In one brief act, he had apparently betrayed it all, totally letting God and the people of Israel down.

Living in Midian

When Moses fled to the wilderness, he settled in Midian (Exo. 2:15). The priest of Midian had seven daughters. While Moses sat by a well, these daughters came by to water their sheep. When some local shepherds drove away the daughters, Moses, bearing an aura of authority, easily drove them off and helped the daughters water their father's flock.

The Midianites were the descendants of Midian, one of Abraham's sons through Keturah, his second wife (Gen. 25:1–2). Although Midian and Isaac were step-brothers, all the inheritance from Abraham went to Isaac. Because the Midianites were descended from Abraham, they likely knew God and worshiped Him, but their knowledge of Him would have been very basic. The priest of Midian was probably a priest of the one true God, but the Midianites never became part of God's corporate testimony. In fact, they later opposed Israel during the time of Balaam (Num. 22:2–7) and Gideon (Judg. 8:1–21).

A Sojourner in a Foreign Land

The daughters of this priest told their father that they were able to return early because they had been helped by an Egyptian (Exo. 2:19). The Egyptians no longer recognized Moses as one of them, but to the Midianites, he still looked Egyptian.

Moses was content to stay with this family and even married Zipporah, one of the daughters. Eventually, he had a son named Gershom for, he said, "I have been a sojourner

in a foreign land” (v. 22). Even though his people were in bondage in Egypt, Moses felt his home was there with the children of Israel. He was well situated in Midian and even had a son. That should have been the happiest moment in his life, but instead, he felt like a sojourner in a foreign land. He was no longer considering the plight of the Israelites from the perspective of a powerful prince but from the perspective of a man living far from home. To his realization, he was utterly powerless to do anything. All hope of delivering the children of Israel was over.

Standing as God's People

Eventually, the Pharaoh who sought to kill Moses died, and the cry of the Israelites came up to God (Exo. 2:23). The children of Israel realized they were God's people even though they were being held in bondage. They knew that they, as heirs of Abraham's promise, should not remain in that situation. God had told Abraham, “Your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions” (Gen. 15:13–14). God heard their groaning and their cry for deliverance. He remembered His covenant with Israel and acknowledged them (Exo. 2:24–25). They had been there long enough, and it was time to do something.

Just as the children of Israel retained their identity as inheritors of God's promises to Abraham in spite of their miserable condition in Egypt, we also should never forget our inheritance in Christ regardless of the hardships we face as a church in the world today. Whether our church is prevailing or discouraging, fruitful or dying, it should not change our confidence that this is where we belong. Only those who have such an attitude will stand firm. When the church is

prevailing, they rejoice. When the church is discouraged, they pray to God for mercy. They identify as part of the Lord's testimony rather than as outside observers.

Emptied of Everything

Moses' prayer at this time can be found in Psalm 90: "For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away" (Psa. 90:9–10). When Moses wrote this, I believe he was nearly at the end of his second stage of forty years in the wilderness. Being a strong man, he had lived for eighty years. His conclusion was that in these eighty years there was just labor and sorrow, then "soon it is gone and we fly away." Eventually, there is nothing left. How sad Moses sounded at that moment. He was emptied of everything and supposed his life was about over. He was ready to die. I believe it was soon after he wrote this psalm that the Lord appeared to him at the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Exo. 3:1–2).

Moses' life was in three stages of forty years each. For the first forty years, he was trained and raised in Pharaoh's household in Egypt (Acts 7:23). God did so much to prepare Moses. His birth, survival, upbringing, and education were all carried out under God's control. As soon as Moses tried to do something for God, however, God rejected it. He then sent Moses into the wilderness of Midian to be emptied of everything. This was the second stage (Exo. 7:7). After Moses shepherded sheep in the wilderness for forty years, he was emptied out of everything and ready to enter into the third and final stage of his service.

3

The Preparation of Moses: God's Calling

Moses had passed through two stages of his life—forty years of training in Pharaoh's household in Egypt and forty years of shepherding in Midian. Now he was ready to be called by God into the third and final stage of his life.

The Burning Bush

“Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God” (Exo. 3:1). Horeb was the mountain of God because Moses met God there. As Moses was shepherding, he saw a bush on fire, but the bush was not consumed. In such a desert, vegetation is extremely dry. If something catches fire, it burns up quickly. This bush, however, held the flame. Therefore, Moses turned aside to see this great miracle.

That was the first sign God revealed directly to him. The bush which was aflame was a thornbush, for the Hebrew word used here is *seneh*, meaning “thorny bush” (Young, 131). Such thornbushes are so common, yet God chose to use one for His purpose. Thorns are associated with God's curse due to man's failure (Gen. 3:17–18). The thornbush implied that Moses was simply a fallen and cursed human being. Yet

it also indicated that Moses would hold the flame of God, though he himself was not its source.

Often people tell me they were blessed by something I ministered. I, however, am merely a fallen human being within whom God has placed His holy fire. I am a common earthen vessel containing the fiery treasure of God (2 Cor. 4:7). The thornbush is not the source.

Having attracted Moses' attention, God called him from the midst of the bush and told him to take off his sandals, for God Himself was present there, making it holy ground. This surely reminded Moses that he was not qualified to enter into God's presence. This is why he hid his face and was afraid to look at God (Exo. 3:6). He had known of God all his life, but once he was before Him, he dared not look upon Him. When we sense God's presence, it is normal to experience such shamefulness. The more we touch the Lord, the more we sense how low, defiled, and unworthy we are.

God Revealed as Jehovah

In the previous chapters of Exodus, God was referred to as Elohim, which is used for "God the Creator...the supreme Deity" (Morrish, 321). Now He came to Moses as Jehovah (Exo. 3:2), which is His "name of relationship with men" (Morrish, 321). As Moses' mother raised him up for Pharaoh's daughter, she must have taught him who God is, so Moses would have known Him as the Creator, the powerful One to be worshiped. Now, however, he personally encountered God as Jehovah, the One so close to man who would be intimately involved with him, and he was afraid.

When God comes to us, it is a fearful thing. Once we know Him as Jehovah, He becomes so close to us, and we realize how inadequate, poor, and sinful we are. Yet God is merciful to us. We need to pray and confess our sin. As we confess to the Lord and tell Him how unworthy we are of

Him, yet how much we love Him, we will see His face and learn to fear Him.

God's Faithfulness

God then said to Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo. 3:6). It seems God was being repetitious, but this repetition indicates just how serious God was about His promise. God cannot lie; what He promises He is faithful to fulfill (Titus 1:2). He was the God who made promises to Moses' forefathers, and now through Moses, He was about to fulfill these promises. It was for this purpose He had prepared Moses through his Hebrew mother, his Egyptian training and education, and his time in the wilderness as a shepherd. God had been in full control.

It may seem that the Lord had forsaken the Israelites. Consider what a long period of time that they had been in Egypt. It seems God had forsaken them for four hundred years, nearly twice the age of the United States. Surely many of the Israelites would have begun to wonder whether the promise God had made to their forefathers was real. Perhaps at that time, a few godly people stirred the children of Israel up to cry out to God, reminding Him what He had promised them. Now God finally acted.

The Lord means what He says. When He makes a promise, He will remember it and fulfill it. When we tell Him something or pray something, we may forget it, but He never forgets. He remembers our consecration, our prayer, our tears. He remembers the times we are before Him with joy and rejoicing, and He also remembers our sad and discouraging times. I can testify I have not always been so firm in following the Lord, and at times I have even run from Him. But the Lord has always had a way to bring me back. No one is as faithful as He is. No one is more in control than He is. He is

the Lord, and all things are in His hands. We must worship Him. This should become our rest. He remembers all, and His promises are ever before Him.

This is why God appeared to Moses in such a way. He was indicating that He knew exactly what He was doing. To some, it may seem like the Israelites had wasted four hundred years, but to God, not one year in Egypt was a waste. He did not carry out His promise during Abraham's lifetime, nor in Isaac's, nor even in Jacob's. From generation to generation, however, He was working out the fulfillment of His promise.

We may have prayed many things according to the Lord's promises and, not yet seeing the desired result, wonder if they will ever come to pass. There is time yet for the Lord to answer. Time is in His hands, not ours. We can be restful because God is so faithful to His word.

God's Response to Israel's Cry

The Lord told Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings....Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them" (Exo. 3:7, 9). In response to the cry of the children of Israel, the Lord said, "I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite" (v. 8). I hope we all might learn from this to pray always, having confidence that the Lord hears us and cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

A Good and Spacious Land

The Lord wanted to bring the children of Israel into “a good and spacious land.” What a great thing this is! Can you believe the Lord has something so great in store for you? The problem, however, is that we don’t like to leave our present “land,” regardless of what God has spoken to us. Are we willing to be brought out of whatever our land is? The Lord wants to deliver us from the power that holds us back and to bring us out of where we are into a good and spacious land. But we are so small, feeling satisfied with the little things we have or experience.

For most of my life, I have lived in Cleveland, Ohio, but my heart is greater than just Cleveland. I have allowed the Lord to enlarge my heart to include the entire globe. I often travel to Asia, Africa, and North America to carry out the Lord’s work. The Lord wants to carry us upon His wings to a wide, broad, open, and spacious land!

Our problem is that we like to stay in our small situation. The Lord wants us to be committed to Him and His work, but we only take Him as a hobby. It is true that we serve, but our service lacks grandness. We may deceive ourselves into thinking our service is more than a hobby due to the respect others give us, but the Lord wants so much more. He wants to deliver us from our confinement. There is a great land waiting for us to explore! Let us drop our excuses and go out to discover this broad, spacious land the Lord has prepared!

When the Lord called some to follow Him, they made excuses to delay. One said he needed to bury his father first, and another said he wanted to say goodbye to those at home first (Luke 9:59–62). Instead of making excuses, let us come out of the confined domain we are in and come into the land the Lord desires to show us. How great and broad this land is! So much can be done here! Let’s commit ourselves to answer the Lord’s call to labor for His testimony.

Prevailing in a Land of Enemies

God also described this land as the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite (Exo. 3:8). He was bringing them out of Egypt, where they were oppressed by enemies and was bringing them into a land where they were to conquer enemies and bear the Lord's testimony. God was not after the land of Egypt; He was after the good land. Both were enemy domains, but He had only promised that one was to become the children of Israel's land. It was a land of milk and honey, but it would be a fight to occupy it.

The Lord then told Moses, "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (3:10). He referred to His people as the sons of Israel. Jacob's name had been changed to Israel because he had striven with God and man and had prevailed (Gen. 32:28). Jacob's change of name indicates that a transformation work is needed to become God's testimony, and his prevailing indicates that this testimony should prevail. We should have the heart to declare, "Wherever I am, I will see a prevailing testimony raised up for the Lord!"

Moses' Response

God was sending Moses to deliver His people out of bondage in Egypt. Isn't that what Moses wanted forty years earlier when he killed the Egyptian? Surely he should have said, "Now I understand. I have been in Midian these forty years so God could prepare me for this moment. I will go!"

We may pray, "God, use me! I have already read the Bible more than once and have even gotten one person saved!" We have no idea what we are praying for. God may greatly use us, but it will only be after He has first worked on us. When we are actually ready to be used by Him, we may no longer

feel we are qualified. When Moses was called by the Lord at the burning bush, instead of declaring he was ready to go, he raised a number of issues.

Five Levels of Resistance

1. *Who Am I?*

Moses' first response to God was, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exo. 3:11). He did not feel deserving. He had made a big mistake in the past and spent the last forty years as a simple shepherd. Now he did not see how God could commit such a great matter to him. In other words, he told God he was not qualified. God answered that He would be with Moses (v. 12). That was all the qualification he needed.

2. *Who Are You?*

Moses' second response was, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" (Exo. 3:13). So the first problem he had in accepting God's commitment was, "Who am I?" and his second was, "Who are You?"

Have we ever asked God, "What is Your name?" Like Moses, we may have heard about God all our lives, but have we ever asked Him, "Who are You, really?" It wasn't until Moses had a firsthand experience with God that he truly knew who He was. I always knew that my parents loved me, but after I held my first child, my attitude toward my parents totally changed because for the first time I really understood who my parents were.

God answered Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; ...Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (3:14).

3. What About the People?

Moses raised a third question: "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, "The Lord has not appeared to you" (Exo. 4:1). In other words, "What about the people? Will they really believe me?" This time, God answered him by giving him three signs: his staff turning into a serpent, his hand becoming leprous like snow, and the water poured upon the ground turning into blood (vv. 2–9). These signs were for the people to recognize that God had sent Moses to be their deliverer.

4. I Am Not Gifted

Moses protested a fourth time, saying, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent...for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exo. 4:10). Moses told God that he was not a fluent, gifted speaker. God was patient, so He responded, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (vv. 11–12).

5. Please Send Someone Else

God had answered all of Moses' objections: he was qualified, he knew who God was, the people would listen, and God would be with his speaking. That was all settled. Yet Moses still resisted: "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will" (4:13). After all his objections had been answered with the utmost assurance from the Lord, Moses' word was, "Please send someone else!"

We might think God should have been more upset at this point. He had answered all of Moses' objections, and yet Moses still resisted. Isn't that discouraging? Moses was thinking that he was eighty years old and ready to die (Psa. 90:10), so why

was God telling him He would use him now? No wonder he wanted God to send somebody else. If we were in his position, perhaps we would also have found reasons not to obey. Yet God would not let Moses go. What mercy!

May none of us remain bound in our small, limiting world. Let us become the Lord's companions and coworkers, available to fight together with Him for His great plan!

4

The Preparation of Moses: Needful Realizations

“I Can,” “I Can’t,” and “God Can”

The three forty-year stages in Moses life can be labeled “I can,” “I can’t,” and “God can.” In the first stage, Moses was in Pharaoh’s household, enjoying all the riches of Egypt. It was in his heart to deliver the Israelites from bondage. When he was forty, he thought it was the right time to act. He had the training and the position and felt self-assured. This was the stage of “I can.” But when he stretched out his hand to do something, he discovered he was totally off. Moses fled to Midian and began to shepherd sheep in the wilderness. He lost his self-confidence, so his forty years of “I can” were followed by another forty years of “I can’t.” Then, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning thornbush. At this point, Moses realized that the desire he had in Egypt forty years prior was about to be fulfilled. God would send him back to Egypt to learn that “God can.”

After Moses fled from Egypt, he married, had a family, and settled in Midian. He no longer dreamed of becoming the great Hebrew deliverer. I can understand this because my view today is very different from when I was young. For instance, the Lord is doing so much in Uganda these days. I am very clear that I should go there next year to hold a one-week training, but just thinking about going to Africa makes me tired. Thirty

years ago I used to go to Africa two or three times a year for a month at a time, and it didn't bother me at all. But now, even thinking about such things makes me tired.

The way Moses was preserved and then brought up, educated, and trained with all the wisdom of Egypt must have made him a grand person with a broad perspective. Also, he knew the Lord had prepared him to be the savior of the Israelites (Acts 7:25). With such clarity, he must have wondered how long he would have to remain in exile after fleeing to Midian. For the first few years, no doubt he waited for something to happen, but as the years passed, he got used to his life there and learned to forget who he was. When Moses looked back over his life while he was in Midian, he must have had a great sigh of disappointment. It seemed the Lord should have used him. This is why he wrote Psalm 90, which I believe he wrote a short time before his meeting with God at the burning bush. In this psalm, Moses recognized that God was God from everlasting to everlasting (v. 2), but he felt he had reached the final days of his life (v. 10). In his mind, he was preparing to die.

Then suddenly God appeared and said, "I have come down to deliver [My people] from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land.... Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exo. 3:8, 10). It is hard to imagine how Moses felt when he heard this. He was ready to save the children of Israel when he was forty, but now he felt it just wasn't possible. So he said, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (v. 11). Even after God reassured him that He would be with him, Moses still didn't want to go.

All who desire to serve the Lord will experience these stages of "I can," "I can't," and "God can." Then, as they join themselves to this able God, He will have a way to accomplish His desire.

The Sign

The turn from the second stage of “I can’t” to the third stage of “God can” was when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush and said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Exo. 3:12). The sign to Moses that God was with him would be that the children of Israel would worship God at the same mountain where God appeared to Moses.

Our serving is based on the mountain where God is appearing to us. How do we know that we are proper and that God is with us? The secret is this: we are able to bring others to the same place that God has brought us. If God has only appeared to us as the gospel, we should be able to bring others to this mountain by getting them saved. If we are consecrated to the Lord, we should be able to help others become consecrated. The way they see the Lord will be the way we have seen Him.

I AM WHO I AM

When Moses asked God what he should say His name was, God answered, “I AM WHO I AM....Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exo. 3:14). There is only One in the universe who is able to say “I AM WHO I AM” because only He is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Everything and everyone else changes. For instance, how I did things forty years ago and how I do things today are not the same, for I am an old man now. Every day I am changing. My mind changes, my ways change, and even my cells change. I am not the I AM WHO I AM, and neither are you. We are always changing, but there is One in this universe who never changes. Everything about

Him is eternal. He is the only One who can say, "I AM WHO I AM from eternity past to eternity future." With Him "there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17) because He is the I AM WHO I AM.

A Memorial Name

For Moses to tell the people I AM had sent him was very meaningful. Whatever we need, He is. This I AM was also "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Why does He give such a name as His "memorial unto all generations" (Exo. 3:15)? This name denotes the triune God, His marvelous purpose, and the means of achieving His purpose, including His rich provision and transforming work. When He can be such a God to a group of people, He is totally satisfied.

Nourished and Strengthened to Fight

God then told Moses to tell the children of Israel, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt" (Exo. 3:16). When things seem unreasonable, we should learn to pray and ask the Lord, "Do You see what is going on?" Then He will answer that He has been with us and is coming to do something about it.

He further said, "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey" (3:17). This was His promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–20). He said this to prepare them for the fighting that would come, but He also promised that it was a land filled with milk and honey.

Milk and honey represent all the riches of this land. The

land itself represents Christ. It is a land that we must fight to possess, but to do so, we must have the rich enjoyment of what is typified by milk and honey. Both are produced by something of the vegetable life going through the animal life, whether the cow or the bee. Milk is mainly for nourishment, while honey is mainly for strength. Milk and honey indicate that as we follow the Lord we will never be short of nourishment and strength. As we fellowship with the Lord and with other believers, we receive nourishment. As we serve others in the gospel and in raising up younger believers, we experience divine strengthening. In all of our busy serving, we must remember that the Lord is our milk and honey, our nourishment and strength. As we enjoy the nourishment, it strengthens us to fight for this land. Let us go to preach the gospel, for this land even produces the strength enabling us to fight for it.

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

God told Moses to tell Pharaoh, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God" (Exo. 3:18). However, God also told Moses, "I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go" (vv. 19–20). God exercised His government over Egypt in punishment for how they had mistreated His people (Gen. 15:14). Pharaoh's heart was hardened so God could judge them.

Many who desire to break free from everything to follow the Lord experience some form of opposition. In principle, when we decide to serve the Lord, those around us will say, "Don't you have anything better to do?"

Three Signs

Moses asked God, “What if [the children of Israel] will not believe me or listen to what I say?” (Exo. 4:1). God was patient with Moses and gave him three signs that would convince the children of Israel that He had appeared to Moses.

1. Moses' Staff Becoming a Serpent

God asked Moses what was in his hand. Moses said it was a staff (v. 2). As a shepherd, Moses would have used his staff both to care for the flock and to support himself as he walked along. A staff represents something we rely upon and which supports us. Scientists use their knowledge as their staff. Those skilled in carpentry use their building skills as their staff.

God told Moses to cast his staff on the ground, and it became a serpent. What Moses had been using and leaning on was actually a serpent. Then God told him to pick it up by the tail. When he did so, it became a staff again.

Moses relied upon the authority he had by being sovereignly preserved by God and being trained and educated in Pharaoh's household. He had been successful and powerful. That was a boast—a staff he relied on—so it was a serpent. But now he was able to use it by picking it up by the tail.

Those with a college degree may trust it to support them when they seek a position. One day, they realize it is actually a serpent. But then they pick it up by the tail—in other words, they recognize it is just a degree—and it becomes a rod again, no longer a serpent but merely a tool to serve them.

I love to read. I enjoy books on history, psychology, philosophy and so on. Such books enrich us with a certain kind of knowledge. However, such education is a serpent if we put our trust in it. When we see that what we have trusted is actually a serpent, we may flee from it like Moses did (Exo. 4:3). If we hold it our way, it is a serpent, but if we hold it God's way, it becomes useful for God.

Eventually, after the Lord helps us to use what we have gained as a support, it becomes our ruling power (7:20; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16). God can use what we have depended upon and trusted, but only if we hold it God's way. This first sign is related to God, for the staff is for His carrying out His purpose through us.

2. Moses' Hand Becoming Leprous

The second sign has to do with a realization of what kind of person we are. The Lord told Moses to put his hand into his bosom (Exo. 4:6). When he took it out, it was leprous. God told him to do it once more, and it returned to normal. To put our hand into our bosom is to touch our real being. Do we know who we really are? We may think we are attractive, pleasant, and smart. If God would expose what is really in us just a little, what would be seen? We are lepers! Do we dare to put our hand into our bosom, exposing who we really are? There is nothing in us that would cause others to listen to us. We are all leprous and under a curse.

This exposure is not for self-condemnation but for our realization of who we are. We should not live a life lamenting, "I am terrible, sinful, and leprous!" God does not want this. He wants us to realize that, yes, we are leprous. In fact, every human being is leprous. No one is holy. Yet He can use such leprous people to serve Him and bring His word to others.

When we see ourselves in this light, realizing we are nothing but leprous people, we are unable to be proud when others appreciate our service, for we realize what we are. Yet at the same time, we realize God can still work with us. When things go so well when we serve, we must realize there is still something within us that is not so healthy. Even our tears of repentance need the Lord's blood because something impure is still present. Our repentance is often mixed with self-pity.

We must know ourselves. Those who don't know themselves can never be respected. If we are either too timid or are always

overly assertive, who is going to respect us? To gain others' respect, we must first recognize our own real condition. Do we know we are leprous? Dare we allow anyone to see into our heart? Once we know who we are, we can never be proud for we realize we are merely sinners saved by grace.

Moses had to realize he was leprous. He had to realize how decayed and decrepit his condition was. If we have even a little hope in ourselves, our service to God will be limited. As sons of God, we should be able to present ourselves in a very dignified and authoritative manner, yet without any feeling of pride.

3. Water Becoming Blood

If the children of Israel did not believe these two signs or listen to Moses, God told him he was to take water out of the Nile, pour it out on the dry land, and it would turn to blood (Exo. 4:9). The Nile was the life supply of Egypt. Since Egypt represents the world, the Nile represents that which sustains and supplies the world. This sign was to show Moses and the children of Israel that the true nature of what sustained the worldly system was nothing but blood.

Success in the world is supplied and sustained by the blood and sweat of many people. The Chinese poet Ts'ao Sung wrote, "A single general's reputation is made out of ten thousand corpses" (Waley, 316). General MacArthur was treated like a god by the Japanese after World War II, but only after so much blood was shed. A billionaire becomes wealthy upon the blood and sweat of many other people. The typical university campus outwardly appears beautiful, but its inner workings are bloody. The world is sustained only by blood. Until we see this, we will not appreciate the real situation in the world.

In the world, whatever is produced is produced through blood. Many become poor so others can become rich. I heard about one person who became so rich he bought his nation's

currency, manipulated it, and ruined its economy, affecting many other countries. After bankrupting so many families, he set up a foundation for the poor! He built his happiness with others' blood. That is the world's principle: either I live and you die, or you live and I die. We take each other's blood.

The successful people of the world we once looked up to no longer attract us. The worldly system they are a part of is built on blood. Until we see this, we cannot serve the Lord properly, because we cannot handle the world properly. Once we see the world is sustained by blood, then we know we do not belong to it. The Lord said we don't belong to the world, but He hasn't taken us out of it (John 17:14–16). We still attend school and work at jobs, but these no longer attract us as they once did, for we realize that only serving God has value.

Through these three signs, Moses became a genuinely spiritual man. First, he had authority represented by his staff. Second, he realized that he was a leprous person. Third, his view of the world became so clear. He had no more admiration for it.

Slow of Speech and Not Eloquent

Moses' next objection was that he was not eloquent but slow of speech (Exo. 4:10). After forty years of shepherding in Midian, he had lost all his confidence. Eventually, however, he was able to speak with boldness in front of Pharaoh because his trust was no longer in his own eloquence but in God.

Moses asked God to get someone else (v. 13). As far as Moses was concerned, he was finished. He didn't realize God intentionally waited until he had the experience of Psalm 90 before He called him. Now God came to Moses as the One who could raise him out of his dying state.

At this point, "the anger of the Lord burned against Moses" (v. 14). But instead of giving up on Moses, God said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks

fluently...You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people” (vv. 14–16). The Bible says God’s wrath was kindled against Moses, but all He did in His anger was to give Moses’ brother Aaron as a helper. Even in His anger, God is gracious.

Released to Release

Then Moses went to his father-in-law and said, “Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt” (Exo. 4:18). If we do not get ourselves released, we can never lead others to get released.

Dealing with the Flesh

While Moses and his family were journeying to Egypt, “the Lord met [Moses] and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He let him alone” (4:24–26). This is hard to believe. Moses was very spiritual at this point. After two stages of forty years, he was ready to be used by God, yet God had to nearly beg him to go. Moses almost backed out. After Moses was finally on his way, God sought to kill him even though it was not Moses who was the problem, but his son who had not been circumcised. For some reason, it was Zipporah and not Moses who recognized this. After Moses’ son was circumcised, God was satisfied, for He now saw a spiritual man working together in a spiritual family.

We may be right, but our fruit may not be. The Lord demands that everything done for His testimony be done in spirit and be spiritual. Circumcision means to abandon the

flesh, the fleshly life (Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). God will not accept our service if its source is the flesh. It is not a matter of what we do but of whether it is spiritual or fleshly. He may overlook many things, but He never tolerates the flesh.

This story is very sobering because it tells us that we are responsible before the Lord not only for ourselves but for those spiritually begotten by us who are under our care. We must make sure they do not live a fleshly life or serve according to the flesh. Everything of their life and service must be according to the leading of Christ. We may know how to be before the Lord, but what about those with us? We are a team, a family, in which we must all be purely following the Lord for His testimony's sake. We must serve the Lord in spirit and in truth, not according to anything of the flesh.

God was finally satisfied when Moses' son was circumcised. Moses was now ready to confront Pharaoh and bring God's people out of Egypt.

5

Deliverance from Egypt

The second section of Exodus begins with chapter 5 and describes the deliverance of the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt.

While returning to Egypt, Moses met Aaron and conveyed to him all that God had spoken to him. Afterward, the two of them gathered the elders of the people together, and “Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed” (Exo. 4:30–31).

Then Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness’” (Exo. 5:1). Pharaoh must have been amused as he dismissed their demand to simply allow his slaves to leave. Moses did not respond in anger, even though he had with him the serpent-rod, for he was no longer the man so prone to strike out as he once was. Instead, Moses and Aaron simply said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword” (v. 3).

Jehovah, the God of Israel, and the God of the Hebrews

Pharaoh thus heard that the children of Israel had a God called the Lord, or Jehovah (Exo. 5:1), and He was called both the God of Israel (v. 1) and God of the Hebrews (v. 3). Knowing God according to these three titles is crucial to our being sanctified by being separated from the world and worldly things. The experience of each of these titles requires the previous one to be fully applied. Once we come to know God as Jehovah individually, He becomes to us the God of Israel, which in turn enables us to experience God as the God of the Hebrews corporately.

1. Jehovah—The Life-giving God

Some scholars indicate that the name Jehovah means “the one bringing into being, life-giver” (Brown, 218). The life He gives is a restoring life and a reviving life. When we meet with this God as Jehovah, as Moses had, we meet with the God of life.

The Egyptians had no such God. At that time, they were using the children of Israel as slaves to build two store cities named Pithom and Raamses (Exo. 1:11). The name “Pithom” comes from the name of the Egyptian god Tum or Atum (Davis, 646). The Egyptians believed Atum was “the ‘self-engendered one’ who created the first gods” (Wilkinson, 99). Our God, however, is ever-existing. He is forever God—He had no need to create Himself.

Jehovah wanted His people to hold a feast to Him in the wilderness (Exo. 5:1). They were to go to their life-giving God and enjoy being revived and restored.

2. The God of Israel—The Transforming God

As we meet with Jehovah, the life-giving God, in our

experience He becomes to us the God of Israel, the God who transforms His people. Israel is the name God gave to Jacob at Peniel after many long years of experiencing the Lord's transforming work (Gen. 32:28). God is able to conform us to His own image through His transforming work (Rom. 8:29). Since we have such a God, there should be a noticeable difference between us and our unsaved friends, because God is gradually transforming and reconstituting us. If we are not undergoing such a change, something is wrong. As we meet with the Lord and behold Him, we are being transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18) and will eventually even become as He is (1 John 3:2).

3. The God of the Hebrews—the God of the River Crossers

The more we know Jehovah as the God of Israel, the more we will be able to know Him as the God of the Hebrews. The word "Hebrew" means "one from beyond, from the other side" (Brown, 720). The God of the Hebrews implies that He is the God of those like Abraham who are from the other side, having crossed the river. God is the God of river crossers. In the Bible, crossing a river from one region into another is very significant. The God of Israel is transforming and constituting us into someone we have never been before. The God of the Hebrews is always leading us to cross river after river into ever-higher realms. He is leading us collectively as His testimony to continually cross out of one realm into another. This is the pathway of the church. This is marvelous!

Our Need to Know God

God used Pharaoh to demonstrate His power and to judge the land of Egypt for mistreating His people (Exo. 7:4). He sent many great and terrible plagues upon Egypt, culminating

in the death of all the firstborn in Egypt (Exo. 7–11). Pharaoh and all the Egyptians finally bowed to Moses' demands and urged the children of Israel to leave Egypt, lest they should all die (12:31–33).

Although there is no physical Pharaoh ruling over us today, we still need to be led out of our "Egypt." For this to happen, we must first know God as Jehovah. Once we know Jehovah, we discover that God is life and that He gives Himself as life to revive and restore us. Therefore, every morning we must touch Him and every day we must enjoy Him. When we experience this God in such a rich way, there is no Pharaoh as far as we are concerned.

Second, we need to know God as the God of Israel, the transforming God. We cannot expect much from many young believers. If the Lord would simply breathe a little too hard on them, they would feel as though their life was over. They need to realize that God wants to transform and reconstitute them. I have loved the Lord for as long as I have known Him, yet the way I love the Lord now is different than when I first met Him because a transformation and reconstitution has been taking place within me.

Third, God is also the God of the Hebrews. He is leading His people as His testimony. Through Moses, God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, crossing over the Red Sea into the wilderness. They entered a new realm, where they were dependent upon God's leading and daily supply. As we follow the Lord, we will also cross over into ever higher realms where we become increasingly dependent upon Him.

Journeying to God

Where was Moses to lead the people when they left Egypt? In Psalm 43, the psalmist wrote, "O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places" (v. 3). Moses was to lead

the children of Israel to the good land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this Psalm, the good land is portrayed as being the Lord's holy hill, where His dwelling places would be found. By bringing them to His dwelling places, He was bringing them to Himself. The writer continues, "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (v. 4). Whenever we truly consecrate ourselves to God, signified by going to the altar, He becomes our exceeding joy. God is the focus of our journey. We are journeying to God, who is our exceeding joy!

The Beginning of Months

As the children of Israel were preparing to leave Egypt, God reset their calendar, saying to Moses and Aaron, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you" (12:2). If we wish to follow the Lord, we must realize that He desires to bring us to Himself so that He can be our God and we can be His people (Exo. 6:7). This is truly a new beginning.

The children of Israel left Egypt in the month of Abib (Exo. 13:4). This was in our March or April, but God reset their calendar. It is as if He said, "No. This shall be your new January!" It became their beginning of months.

We all need a beginning of months in our Christian life. Sooner or later, we will have to leave everything that is old and enter into something new. When we make such a departure, it becomes the beginning of months in our life.

Everyone's first month may be different, but everyone must have such a beginning. Although some people are saved, they have not yet experienced a beginning of months. They have never consecrated themselves to the Lord and still live a worldly life. Their life of following Christ has not yet begun.

My beginning of months was not the day of my salvation but over a year later when I began to know the Lord and to

love Him. That was when I began my exodus from the world and began to follow Christ. That was my real beginning.

An Amazing Exodus

The children of Israel rose up and followed Moses from Rameses to Succoth (Exo. 12:37–39). The total number of people involved must have been over two million. It would have been as if the entire city of Chicago rose up and began to move out in the same direction along the same road. In addition, they took whatever they possessed of flocks and herds. Such an exodus was a miracle in itself. Among them must have been newborn babies and small toddlers, as well as the old and infirm. I don't believe anyone raised in a comfortable society like we have today could have survived it. Yet they all were able to follow Moses from Rameses to Succoth. This was the beginning of the children of Israel's journey from Egypt to the good land promised by God.

Sanctifying the Firstborn

At this point God said to Moses, "Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me" (Exo. 13:2). On the night of the Passover, God struck all the firstborn of Egypt (12:29). However, when He came to the houses of the children of Israel and saw the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel and two doorposts, He did not allow the destroyer to enter their homes (v. 23). Now the Lord required of Israel that they sanctify their firstborn to Him.

When we follow the Lord, He will require of us our firstborn. Whatever we treasure must be offered to God. This is not an easy journey. However, God redeemed us with the precious blood of His Son, whom He offered as the spotless

Passover Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18–19; John 1:29). Therefore, all that we are, have, and can do belongs to Him.

A Continuing Salvation

When we are saved, we are saved once and for all. But after we have received Christ, we need to walk in Him (Col. 2:6). We have been through the Passover—that is the beginning. Now, for the rest of our lives, we have to continue to experience the Lord’s salvation.

The Lord has saved us, is saving us, and will continue to save us. We are saved—we have been through the Passover—and this salvation will continue to be our lifelong experience, even until the Lord returns. This is why it is called “so great a salvation” (Heb. 2:3). Once we are saved, we need to continue to be saved. We need to be saved from the way we dress, what we love to read, our temper and pride, and so many other things. We must be saved from whatever occupies us and keeps us from Christ.

For our continuing salvation, we need to come forward to God, who is our “exceeding joy,” by consecrating ourselves to Him at “the altar of God” (Psa. 43:4). All who are consecrated to God have laid themselves on the altar to be His satisfaction and have found Him as their exceeding joy. This must be our story. Our focus and goal cannot be a ministry, a work, or anything that is merely of God. It must be God Himself.

Led by the Pillar

The children of Israel then traveled “from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that

they might travel by day and by night” (Exo. 13:20–21). This was the people’s first glimpse of the glory of God. No number of policemen could have directed this great crowd of over two million people. But God was able to do so through the pillar of cloud and fire. It could probably be seen for many miles.

As we endeavor to follow Christ, time and time again we lose our way. So many things are going on around us, much of which does not make sense to us. When we are in spirit, however, we are able to see the Lord even in the midst of so much confusion and commotion. As things are getting darker, the pillar of cloud becomes the pillar of fire. The Lord is leading. As long as we follow His presence, there is no problem. When everything seems most discouraging, the light of the pillar of fire is still here.

I once attended a conference where some came to intentionally manipulate people to follow them, even to the extent of getting them to move across the country. One of those they hoped to persuade told them, “Everyone can go, but the Lord has led me here; I cannot move.” To this day, I appreciate that. Because this one was following Christ alone, the church was able to stand. After going out for a walk at that time, I became very clear that the Lord was still leading His people as the pillar of cloud and fire. I returned and stood with that brother. We should not manipulate others, telling them where to move and what to do. As we follow the Lord, there will be the pillar of cloud and fire.

Protected by the Pillar

When the Israelites were encamped before Pi-hahiroth and in front of Baal-zephon, between Migdol and the Red Sea (Exo. 14:2), “the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly” (v. 8). The pillar of fire and cloud then moved to stand between Pharaoh’s army and the

children of Israel so that “the one did not come near the other all night” (v. 20). The children of Israel now began to see who their Lord was.

No matter what our situation is, the Lord’s presence as the pillar of cloud and fire never leaves us. It even protects us, becoming a heavenly light that stands between us and the world forces of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph. 6:12).

Seeing God’s Greatness

The children of Israel had been confined under the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt. Though Pharaoh was in pursuit of the children of Israel, they were now free of his control because the pillar of cloud and fire stood between them. God brought them to a place between Migdol and the Red Sea. Migdol means “a tower; greatness” (Potts, 173). This was the place where they would see the greatness of God in His overthrow of Pharaoh and his army. Here they could begin to be enlarged from the confinement of slavery to the freedom of serving God with exceeding joy.

In front of their encampment was Baal-zephon, a name indicating a place of idols. On the one hand, we have been set free; on the other hand, we are faced with numerous idols. Different things become idols to different people. To one person, it is technological gadgets. To another, it is a certain pursuit. To continue in the way of freedom and not become entangled with idols, we need to see the greatness of God.

We were all once enslaved, confined, and held by the world and its idols. The latest fashion, technology, or TV show could easily ensnare us. Like the children of Israel, we have been delivered out of our Egypt by the Lord’s mighty hand. Here we can be enlarged from “I am the center” to “Christ is the center.” Once we see the greatness of the God who delivers us, we are no longer enthralled by the world’s idols. Satan’s

control over us through the things of the world is truly over. We are now free to follow the Lord.

Basic Life

Their encampment between Migdol and the Red Sea was before Pi-hahiroth and in front of Baal-zephon. Pi-hahiroth means "place where grass grows" (Potts, 196), indicating something with basic life, but not advanced in life. There is something of life, but it is lacking in expression. In other words, the people leaving Egypt were experiencing God's salvation but were only at the beginning stage. They could not yet fully appreciate all that God would bring them into.

Young believers just saved out of the world know that God is rich but are unable to describe the full salvation God wants us to experience. They can only exclaim, "He is so rich! He is so great!" This is an example of a basic realization of life. It takes time for life to develop. In young believers, we can see signs of life, but that life lacks expression.

Passing through the Red Sea

When the children of Israel saw the army of Pharaoh marching toward them, they became fearful. Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea as God had commanded, and the waters divided so that the people might pass through on dry land (Exo. 14:10, 21). Would we have dared to do it? Including all the flocks and herds, perhaps ten million living creatures passed through the divided sea.

It should have been easy for Pharaoh and his army to overtake the children of Israel and recapture them, but the pillar of cloud and fire intervened, separating Israel and the Egyptians. After Israel had crossed through the Red Sea, the Egyptians pursued them, going into the midst of the sea. The

Lord did not hold back the water for them, and they drowned (Exo. 14:23–28). The children of Israel had crossed over safely to the other side. They had left one region and had passed into another. They were separated unto God through their baptism in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1–2).

Beginning to Know God

After the crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptian army, the children of Israel gained their freedom, but they had no idea what this freedom was for. To them, Jehovah seemed very remote—the knowledge they had of Him was secondhand, having been passed down from generation to generation. They still practiced circumcision as God had commanded Abraham their father, but they had little knowledge of who God was.

After so many generations of slavery in Egypt, God was finally bringing the children of Israel out. He first appeared to them as a powerful worker of miracles, performing signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Then He appeared as an avenger of what Pharaoh had done against them, slaying the firstborn of Egypt yet saving the firstborn of Israel through the blood of the Passover lamb. As they left Egypt, God appeared to them as the pillar of cloud and fire to lead them. He indicated He wanted to bring them out into a land that flowed with milk and honey, but they had no idea what that was. This was the extent of their knowledge of God up to this point.

By crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel terminated all their old relationships and past history with Egypt and had a new beginning. Even though the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, their experience there could not have been all bad. Their taskmasters may have been cruel, but their Egyptian neighbors were even willing to lend them articles of silver and gold plus clothing (Exo. 12:35–36). This shows that

in some ways, life in Egypt was not entirely bad. They had friends there. By crossing the Red Sea, they cut off all these old relationships. This corresponds to our New Testament baptism (1 Cor. 10:2; Rom. 6:3–4). By this baptism, they became available to God to do His will. They were now in a place where they could learn who their God was and what He was after.

6

The All-sufficiency of God

When the children of Israel arrived on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, they rejoiced. Moses and his sister Miriam led all the people in song (Exo. 15:1–21). They were happy, having been freed from their long years of bondage. They may have expected that since they were now following the Lord, everything would be rosy. Soon, however, they discovered they were short of water and then food. Through these basic necessities, they confronted God and experienced His all-sufficiency. This begins the third section of Exodus.

God isn't just a miracle-worker. He is able to be everything to us. This is marvelous! The problem is, however, that most of us seem to think that our IQ is higher than God's. Unlike ours, His wisdom is limitless, yet we still trust our own understanding and judgment more than we trust Him. Though we love God, we don't actually trust Him because we think He doesn't really know us. Though we know in theory that all things are in His capable hands, we don't entrust ourselves to Him. It seems nearly no Christian is able to fully trust the Lord. God wants to reveal His all-sufficiency to us by meeting all our need.

A Wall of Separation

The Israelites did not yet know how real or dependable

their God was. After crossing the Red Sea, they entered the wilderness of Shur (Exo. 15:22). Shur means “a wall” (Potts, 226). In order to bring us forward into His purpose, God first calls us to be walled off or separated from all our old relationships. Through our baptism into Christ, we have died to all our old friends and have become followers of Jesus (Rom. 6:3–4). They can still be our friends as long as they can accept us as Jesus-lovers.

Bitter Waters Made Sweet

As the children of Israel journeyed three days into the wilderness, they found no water (Exo. 15:22). For two million people, with all their young and their old, having no water was a serious matter. On the one hand, they had escaped Egypt and were separated unto God, but on the other hand, they also encountered much suffering in the wilderness. Many must have considered returning to Egypt.

When they came to Marah, they finally found water, but it was bitter and not fit to drink. Marah means bitter (Exo. 15:23). The people grumbled at Moses, and he cried out to Jehovah. Jehovah showed him a tree, which Moses threw into the bitter waters, making them sweet (v. 25).

The Lord showed Moses a living tree, but it needed to pass through death before being thrown into the waters. This tree represents the cross of Christ. He died for us so He could enter into all our bitter situations and make them sweet.

Once we cut off our old relationships and separate ourselves unto the Lord, we may feel we lack spiritual water, and even when we do find it, it seems bitter. When we experience the crucified Christ, all the things around us become sweet. Otherwise, the bitter things we encounter leave us thirsting. If we desire to satisfy our thirst, we must have a crucified Christ. By bringing Christ into our daily situations, they all become sweet, and we drink of Christ as our living water.

A Statute

There at Marah, the Lord tested the children of Israel and made a statute for them, saying, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight,...I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer” (Exo. 15:26). It wasn’t until He had supplied them with sweet water and satisfied their thirst that He sought to bring them into a committed relationship with Himself.

Rather than using force, the Lord supplies us with sufficient strength so that we might go on further with Him (Phil. 4:13). He may be leading us to go to a certain place for Him, yet we are not prepared to go. Once He makes us so happy by satisfying our thirst, however, we are ready for whatever He wants. That is grace. After we enjoy Him, He reveals something further to us and makes a statute, a deal, with us. After the cross of Christ makes the waters sweet, we are strengthened to enter into a deeper commitment with Him. He does not force us in this matter. He is so gracious and merciful.

Supplied at Elim

The children of Israel’s experience at Marah opened the door to Elim, a place of “twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters” (Exo. 15:27). Of course, twelve springs of water and seventy date palms may not seem like much for over two million people, but Elim was a place of supply.

Numbers in the Bible have meaning (see Nee, 133–135). For instance, both the twelve springs and seventy date palms at Elim signify something perfect, for the numbers twelve and seven both signify perfection. Twelve and seven are each made from three, the number of the triune God, and four, the

number of God's creation, especially man. Twelve represents perfection in eternity, while seven speaks of perfection in this age. Therefore, the record of seventy palms signifies that God will shade, cover, and protect us in this age. Since twelve is composed of three (God) times four (man), the twelve springs indicate that the Spirit of God, as the living springs of water we drink (John 7:37–39), is now in our spirit and will continue to flow throughout all eternity (4:14).

At some point, the Lord brings us to an Elim where we would be happy to remain permanently. God, however, always calls us forward to be enlarged yet more. We cannot say no. The pillar of cloud and fire has lifted up and is moving on, and we move with it.

Moving on in the Wilderness

Thus the children of Israel left Elim, the place of supply, and were brought to the wilderness of Sin (Exo. 16:1). This was on the way to Sinai, which means "thorny" (Smith, 634). Are we willing to leave the comfort of our oasis (Elim) to follow the Lord into a thorny wilderness? How we answer this question is the most important matter in our Christian life. This is the way of the cross.

Once we come to a place where we have a little enjoyment from the Lord, we are often content to remain there. We may be satisfied with the Christ we receive by attending Christian meetings or conferences. We do not anticipate anything further. Yet when the Lord points us to the way of the cross, we must be willing to follow Him.

Taking the Way of the Cross

It seems the Lord takes us on too quickly. He is always urging us forward, promising us sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9).

After He brings us to a place of satisfaction, He leads us from that experience to something not so pleasant. We feel like lingering and have no inclination to move forward to any challenge that lies ahead. We may feel that we cannot be expected to consecrate ourselves like those who have gone before us. We want to take God on our own terms. The Lord, however, is leading us to take the way of the cross, a way of thorns, where there seems to be nothing encouraging. Here God appears to us since we have been stripped of anything that might compete with Him.

We may feel we have our future planned, but the Lord turns us around to face Sinai, a place seemingly cursed by God—thorns were part of God’s curse at the time of Adam’s fall (Gen. 3:18). Though the way the Lord is leading seems to have nothing for our encouragement, yet we are strengthened to say, “I’ll follow Christ!”

Contending with Hunger

After the children of Israel arrived at the wilderness of Sin, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron saying, “Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exo. 16:3). Sitting by pots of meat implies a life of abundance. In Egypt, there was no shortage of food, and they were able to eat bread to the full. But by this time in the wilderness, any bread they had brought with them from Egypt was long gone. They accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to starve them to death.

First they experienced thirst at Marah, and now hunger. In human life, we are always thirsty for things to make us happy and satisfied. But we also hunger for what we need, like marriage, education, and a career that fits us. We may desire recognition among peers in our field. Such things

drive people in their human life. They hunger to satisfy their need for fulfillment and to realize their potential. Most people take the way of the Egyptian “pots of meat,” that is, they take what the world provides. When we take God’s way, however, we forfeit the means people use to achieve their goals. Therefore, we feel like we are being killed and that our life will come to nothing.

Moses told the Israelites to come before the Lord, for the Lord had heard their grumblings. The Lord’s glory appeared to them in the cloud (Exo. 16:10), and God spoke to Moses saying, “I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God’” (v. 12). God was not angry with them. He understood their need and promised to give them food. He wanted them to know that He was their God and that they could trust in Him to take care of them.

Quails

Thus in the evening, God sent quails into the camp (Exo. 16:13). There must have been millions of quails in order to feed all the people. Did God prepare them all ahead of time and keep them nearby until the Israelites arrived? Or did He instantly create them? We don’t know. Many times when God leads us, we discover things which cause us to wonder: was this a coincidence, or was it a divine intervention? Any way you look at it, it was a miracle. The quail covered the camp.

Manna: What Is It?

In the morning, after the dew evaporated, “on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said

to one another, ‘What is it?’” (Exo. 16:14–15). Later they called it manna (v. 31), which means “what is it?” (Brown, 577). God satisfied their hunger with this daily manna for the next forty years. They ate manna until they entered the good land (Josh. 5:12).

Every day God provides us with manna, if we know how to recognize it. Sometimes things happen to us that we cannot figure out. We wonder, “What is this?” We should learn to recognize that this is what God has prepared for us to “eat.” In every day of our life, God arranges fresh manna for us. This has been my experience for as long as I have known the Lord. Every day, God provides fresh manna, but do we recognize it and enjoy it? If so, we will worship the Lord for His rich provision. Things happen to us every day which cause us to say, “What is this?” We may say it with joy, or we may say it in agony. Whether it is with encouragement or discouragement, whether it pleases us or saddens us, we take it as from the Lord. By this, we gain spiritual strength.

Tested Again by Thirst

As the children of Israel followed God in the wilderness, they came to Rephidim where there was no water (Exo. 17:1). Rephidim means “beds; places of rest” (Potts, 204). By this time, they had some history with the Lord in the wilderness. He had made the bitter water sweet and made a statute for them at Marah. Then He led them to Elim where they enjoyed the twelve springs and seventy date palms. When they needed food in the wilderness of Sin, He provided quails and manna. From that time, they ate manna every day, which assured them that their God is trustworthy. Through all these experiences, they began to know the Lord and became restful. Yet once again they were tested by thirst.

Why is it that so many love the Lord when they are first saved but then grow cold? Even though we may have been

brought to rest in the Lord, something can still draw us away from Him. We may love the Lord, experience His supply, and even consecrate ourselves to Him, but then, without even realizing it is happening, we may get involved with things having nothing to do with Christ. When we truly follow the Lord, at times we will experience such a thirst, a yearning. At these times, we need to be enlarged and experience something deeper.

Many become distracted from the Lord by their thirsts. While they are resting in the Lord, they have some thirst within them—the desire to drive a certain kind of car or own a certain type of house—and without realizing what is happening, they are distracted from Christ.

Even mature believers have yearnings for things other than Christ. When I heard China had opened a railway to Tibet, I confess that I experienced some thirst for that. From my youth, I have desired to go to Tibet. As I am called to serve in more and more places, I realize it means less opportunity for me to go to Tibet. I am in Rephidim, the place of rest, but I have a thirst. Though I have visited so many countries and experienced so many cultures, I still long to go to Tibet. Yet whether I ever have the opportunity to go to Tibet or not does not affect my following the Lord in the way He has arranged for me.

Striking the Rock at Horeb

Due to the lack of water, the children of Israel grumbled against Moses. When Moses cried out to the Lord, He told Moses to take the elders with him to the rock at Horeb, the very place where He had met with Moses at the burning bush (3:1). He said to Moses, “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink” (Exo. 17:5–6). Moses struck the rock as God commanded, and water came forth.

We will all be attracted to opportunities in our lives that will make it difficult for us to love the Lord with all our heart. If we try to ignore this thirst, it will still be present. The rock that Moses struck is a picture of Christ, who was smitten for us on the cross (1 Cor. 10:4; 11:24). If we do not come to know Christ in His death, we will be caught by that thing we thirst for. We may know Christ as our daily manna that satisfies, but we must also know Him as the One who delivers us from the yearnings that have a hold on us. The Lord may even agree that our desire is reasonable, but He will bring us to the rock at Horeb. Horeb means “solitude; destruction” (Hitchcock). At this rock, there is destruction because Christ died for us, and there is solitude because when we abide in Him, all the things of the world lose their hold on us.

I once had a good job at a university. Then on two different occasions, the Lord told me to quit my job to serve Him. When I told my boss I was going to quit, he said that it broke his heart, because I was being groomed for management. The next day he presented me with a paperweight that said, “THINK.” At that moment, I needed to abide in the death of Christ. A few days later I received a phone call from another university offering me a very good position. Though I was just a young man, I would hold the number two position. I replied that I had just quit my job to serve the Lord. That person asked, “If I had called you just a few days earlier, before you took this step, would you have come?”

When things like this happen, are we able to abide in the death of Christ? Can we tell the Lord, “You died for me. I died with You. You were never enticed by anything of the world, and neither am I when I abide in Your cross.”

Paul called this rock the “spiritual rock which followed them” (1 Cor. 10:4). When we are tempted by some particular matter, such as a prestigious job that draws us away from Christ, we must remember there is a Rock following us that is able to satisfy our thirst and guard our hearts.

Many tell the Lord that they love Him but then turn their backs on Him to pursue their actual desire. When true followers of the Lord see this, will they be tempted to give up and do likewise? If we do not know Christ as the spiritual Rock, we will have no way to fully follow Him. The other things that tempt us are simply too powerful. Christ as our smitten Rock is our only hope for salvation.

Consider a Christian young man who is in medical school. When he becomes a doctor, will he still follow the Lord? Or will he be swallowed up by other considerations, such as the temptation of money? When we receive opportunities for advancement in our job which will bring an improved lifestyle, will we still be able to reject them if they compromise our stand for Christ and the church? Or will we be able to use our job for the gospel and for the Lord's testimony? Though the temptations will be many, there is a Rock that is following us. Whenever we turn to Christ and call upon Him, all our thirst for other things disappears, and whatever is tempting us loses its power. The more we follow Him, the more we find that nothing is more attractive or meaningful than a life that is absolutely for Christ.

Drinking from the Smitten Rock

Moses first met God at the burning bush on Horeb, the mountain of God (Exo. 3:1). Later, when the children of Israel came to Horeb, there was a rock there (Exo. 17:6). The life-relationship Moses shared with God, which began at the burning bush, became the means for God to accompany Moses as a Rock. Moses had only to strike this Rock for water to flow forth. This is a picture of Christ dying for us by being smitten on the cross. This has been accomplished once and for all (Heb. 9:26, 28). There is nothing more for us to do. Christ has been smitten already for us and is always ready to flow out the water to meet whatever our need is, wherever

we are, for He follows us. There may be endless temptations, but the Rock which follows us has a limitless supply. How we worship Him! The unlimited supply swallows up the endless temptations. As His people, we can abide in Christ and take Him as everything because the Rock is smitten. All that is left for us to do is to drink from the water that flows from the Rock.

The Testimony of God: Meeting God at the Mountain

Moses' Failure in Heeding Jethro

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, suddenly appears in Exodus 18. What follows is the first serious failure in Moses' serving life. Moses allowed his father-in-law to convince him to set judges over the people (Exo. 18:17–26). Surely God also saw that there were able men among them, yet He never instructed Moses to do this. Jethro's suggestion that Moses set judges over God's people according to their ranks may appear logical, but to God, this was very offensive because these people were His, not Moses' or Jethro's. God wanted the nation to be under Himself. All governmental arrangements should have been left to Him. He had His own way, which was first, to have the leader come to His presence to receive His word then bring this word to the people, and second, to appear to the congregation Himself. In this manner, the leaders of the congregation were brought to God. This was God's way. Moses, however, carried out Jethro's suggestions without coming to God.

The Focus of Exodus

Chapter 19 begins the fourth and final section of Exodus, in which God establishes Israel as His testimony. In the

previous three sections, God had proven Himself and done so much for the children of Israel. Now it was time for them to turn their thoughts to God Himself. They should have been asking, "God, what is Your purpose and desire?"

This final section of Exodus is the most crucial section. Everything up to this point has been like an appetizer to prepare us for the main course. We may be impressed by the plagues in Egypt and the miracles in the wilderness, but these should not be our focus. We should focus on Moses' spending time with God on the mountain and returning to the people with His revelation. These events are the real treasures in Exodus. God prepared Moses, punished Pharaoh, led His people into the wilderness, and sustained them there so that He could speak to them at Mount Sinai.

In the third month after the children of Israel left Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai (Exo. 19:1). God told His people, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (v. 4). The reason He bore them on eagles' wings was to bring them to Himself. He wasn't bringing them to a place of prosperity or good fortune but to Himself.

Some Christians preach that God wants us to be prosperous and will bless us with wealth. Those who pray for this are probably always looking for a good investment. They think God wants them to be rich, so they are bold to invest. While some Christians seek to gain prosperity, we should seek to gain Christ. God's desire is that we would love Him for Himself rather than for the things He gives us. All of God's work is to bring us to Himself.

For many young people, the time of real testing comes when they graduate from high school and consider what to do next. They consider what college they should go to and what career path to follow without ever seeking God's will. They may care about what college they attend and what career they choose, but God's desire is that they come to Him in all these things. We shouldn't live our lives as those

in the world. We can live a life of serving God. The way God leads us is not only according to our needs but also according to His need.

God's People as His Treasure

It is sad when people marry for money. Many wealthy couples even sign a prenuptial agreement. From the very beginning of their marriage, something is wrong, for they are already planning their divorce. A couple should marry because they are attracted to one another.

This is how it was with God and the children of Israel at Sinai. God had brought them out of Egypt to Himself. He only cared for them and hoped they would only care for Him. He was ready to give Himself to them and hoped they would be willing to give themselves to Him. At Sinai He told them, "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples" (Exo. 19:5). In this verse, the Hebrew word for "possession" means "valued property, peculiar treasure, which [Jehovah] has chosen and taken to himself" (Brown, 688). God had brought this people out of everything else because He wanted them as His valued personal treasure. This indicates how much He loved them. It doesn't mean they were better than other people but that they were special to Him.

It is like me with my granddaughter. Even though there are many three-year-old girls in the world, one is very special to me—my granddaughter. Even though she may make a big mess, she is the one I want to sit next to, because I love her.

God's heart was caught up with this particular people. Everything He did in Exodus was because He treasured them to such a degree. For this, He carried them out of Egypt unto Himself. He couldn't stand the thought of not possessing them. Being kept at a distance from them any longer was intolerable.

God could not be satisfied until He had established a very personal and specific relationship with the children of Israel. They were His unique treasure.

God's Kingdom, Nation, and Possession

God further told them that they would be to Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo. 19:6). A kingdom or nation always has a testimony, so “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” touches God's testimony. The people of a kingdom or nation are a testimony of that nation. They are a testimony of their nation's food, culture, education, etc. As the nation of God, we testify the holiness of God Himself. People should be able to see in us a holy nation.

God called the children of Israel “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and said they were His “own possession.” Peter applied these same terms to New Testament believers, saying that we are “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9). Today, all regenerated believers are such a priestly company to God. We are a kingdom of priests (Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). Therefore, we should equip ourselves to serve God together as priests. Then wherever we are—on our job, at school, at home, in our everyday life—we will be a testimony to our God and become a blessing to our local church.

Becoming the Lord's Treasure

God told Moses that “on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (Exo. 19:11). In preparation for this, the people were to purify themselves by being consecrated and by washing their clothes (v. 10). In this way, they began the process of becoming the testimony God was seeking.

If the children of Israel were going to be God's special possession, serve Him, and bear His testimony as His kingdom and nation, they needed to know Him. So when the third day arrived, God began to show Himself to them in thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, and the sound of a trumpet. Though the people were frightened and trembling, Moses brought them out of the camp to the foot of the mountain to meet God (vv. 16–17).

If we don't know God, we may easily tell Him, "God, I love You. Isn't that an honor to You? I'm so wonderful, yet I still love You." I prayed like that. When I was young, I prayed more than once, "God, it must be truly satisfying to You that a young man like me would give his whole life to You." This was because I didn't really know God.

Many Christians only know the Lord as a kind of Santa Claus who answers their cry when they are experiencing bondage, thirst, or hunger. In order to become the Lord's treasure, we must learn who He is through personal encounters with Him.

God as a Consuming Fire

When the morning of the third day came, "there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled" (Exo. 19:16). This is how the children of Israel encountered their God at Mount Sinai. They could only approach to the foot of the mountain.

The Lord came down upon the top of the mountain in fire, and the whole mountain was in smoke (Exo. 19:18). Then He called Moses up to Himself (v. 20). Our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). If we have never experienced Him as a consuming fire, we may live a seemingly happy life. When we encounter such a God, we will be consumed. We may have plans for our life, but once God becomes our God, we

find He has His own plans for us. Everything gets turned upside-down. He will close some doors and open others. Our realization will be that God is consuming everything so we might be for Him alone.

More than once I have touched the Lord to the point I had to prostrate myself before Him, weeping, confessing, and praising. Afterward, I felt so clean because the Lord in fire consumed.

The smoke that ascended at Mount Sinai on that day was as the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain quaked (Exo. 19:18). How threatening that must have seemed! In the midst of this terrifying environment, God called Moses to come up to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up (v. 20). Though Moses knew there was fire there, he also knew that the Lord would preserve him.

Becoming God's Testimony

The Lord warned Moses, saying, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish" (Exo. 19:21). Moses had set a boundary around the mountain and consecrated it, as the Lord had commanded (v. 23). God desired to be with His people, yet they had no realization how far off from His holiness they were. He wanted them to be His treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. He even wanted to dwell in their midst. Therefore, He had to begin revealing Himself to them. In their present state, they could not be a testimony of who He is. This is why there had to be a boundary set around the mountain, lest they be consumed by God in His holiness. They were not yet ready to bear His glory. That time would come when the glory of the Lord descended into their midst, filling the tabernacle (Exo. 40:34). But at this point, they were still inexperienced and did not realize their true condition.

The people witnessed God's power—the fire and smoke, the thunder and lightning, the trumpet blast and earthquake. They did not really see God Himself; they only perceived His power. They still had a long way to go, but God had claimed them and would bring them to the goal of becoming His testimony.

8

The Testimony of God: The Law and the Feasts

God's desire is unique and higher than every other desire in the universe. When we live according to His desire, we live the highest life. Through Moses, God sought to bring the children of Israel into His desire, His heart. Exodus covers less than two years of their forty-year journey before reaching the good land (compare Exo. 19:1 with Num. 10:11). All that follows in the rest of the Books of Moses (Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) is based on what God revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai concerning the means by which the children of Israel would become the Lord's testimony. That is why this section of Exodus on the testimony of God is so crucial.

Moses on the Mount of God

God is the focus and purpose of our pursuing. Moses was a seeker after God and sought to know His heart. This is why he spent time with God on Mount Sinai six or seven times, beginning in Exodus 19.

The first time Moses went up Mount Sinai, God revealed what kind of heart He had for the children of Israel (Exo. 19:3–6). He bore them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself. He told Moses He wanted them as His treasure to

be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation to Him. This must have made the Israelites quite happy.

The second time Moses went up, God gave him instructions so the people could prepare themselves since He was about to reveal Himself to them in power (vv. 8–13). Once the people were ready, God appeared to them with smoke, fire, thunder, lightning, trumpet blasts, and an earthquake (vv. 16–19).

When God appears, it is far beyond anything we could imagine! His presence is not just a sweet mood, even though He does take care of His people's need sweetly, as indicated at Marah (15:23–25). When we know who the Lord is, we fear Him, and this fear becomes the base of our life. Many things we will dare not touch because we realize our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29).

The third time Moses went up, God told him to warn the people not to come up to Him lest He break forth upon them (Exo. 19:20–25). Moses went down to the people, and God spoke the words of the ten commandments (20:1–17).

The fourth time Moses went up, God told him that the children of Israel were to celebrate days of feasting unto the Lord three times a year (20:21–23:33). Knowing God is a matter of feasting.

Human feasts end with emptiness. This is why Jesus stood up on the last day of a feast and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). People eagerly look forward to feasts. Worldly feasts come and go, but if we have God, we can enjoy Him as our continual feast. This will bring enjoyment into our church life.

The fifth time Moses went up, he was accompanied by Aaron, Aaron's two sons, and seventy elders of Israel (Exo. 24:9–11). They saw God and ate and drank together on the mount.

After this, God called Moses to come up to Him (24:12–32:19). This is either a continuation of the fifth time up the mountain, or it is the sixth time. Either way, this is when God gave Moses the plans for the tabernacle and gave him the two tablets with the ten commandments.

While Moses was up on the mountain with God for forty days, Israel was busy worshipping a golden calf. God told Moses He would destroy Israel and raise up seed to Moses instead. Moses pleaded for Israel before God, reminding Him of His testimony before the nations and His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (32:12–13). Later, Moses asked God to “forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (v. 32). Moses joined himself to the people to the extent that he could talk with God in such a way.

When Moses came down from the mountain and saw Israel worshipping the golden calf, his anger burned, and he shattered the tablets of the law (32:19).

The last time Moses went up the mount of God, which is either the sixth or seventh time, God wrote the ten commandments on two new tablets of stone. Moses spent another forty days with God on the mountain (34:1–28).

“No Other Gods Before Me”

Through Moses, God gave Israel ten commandments. We will only consider three of them here. The first commandment is, “I am the Lord your God....You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exo. 20:2–3). This indicates even though people may have God, they may have other gods as well. For instance, young people may have a university, a boyfriend, or a girlfriend as another god before the true God. A parent or grandparent might have their children or grandchildren as another god. These gods capture our hearts.

God says, “I am the Lord your God.” He is not only our God but also our Lord. We belong to Him, for He is the Lord our God. Nothing else should be as important to us as He is. This, however, is often not the case. It is too easy to accumulate many other gods. We may quickly drop some in favor of others—they don’t last long—but still, we may have

many other gods in our life, putting God in second place. He wants to be our unique God. He alone should be our Lord. We shouldn't have any other gods that challenge His place as Lord. We should drop all our idols and love Christ.

"Remember the Sabbath Day"

The second commandment we will consider is the keeping of the Sabbath (Exo. 20:8). On the seventh day, God rested because He had accomplished everything (Gen. 2:1–3). We should learn to rest in what He has accomplished, especially in Christ's completed work of salvation. In Hebrews we are told, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:9–11). Even in our struggle to be overcoming Christians, we need to learn to rest in Christ and in His accomplished work.

It is right to be concerned that Christians have divided themselves from one another over various doctrines and teachings, yet we also need to rest in Christ's promise, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). The church is the body of Christ. If we see that we are all organically members one of another in Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12–27), we need not fear division. We may rest in the fact that we are organically one in Christ. Yes, we are concerned, but we are restful because we trust the One who is building the church.

Those who are spiritual must endure persecution (2 Tim. 3:12), but we should still be restful. Who can force you not to love the Lord, your church, or your fellow believers? As long as no one can force you to forget about Christ, you should not be troubled. Whenever anything leaves us feeling weary, we should heed the Lord's word: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

“Honor Your Father and Mother”

The third commandments we will consider is to honor our father and mother (Exo. 20:12). This is to remember our source, which is an important thing.

The Chinese pay attention to honoring their source even to the point of it becoming a performance, which is not so good. But the principle of honoring our parents is right. We should appreciate them.

As a parent, I told one of my children, “Do not let the older generation frustrate your life.” But it is not good for children to tell their parents, “Who are you? I have my own life. Do not frustrate me!” Anyone with such an attitude will have trouble loving God, for He is our unique source. Those who love and appreciate God must honor their parents because this is His commandment.

Though we may cause our parents to become upset and sad at times, our attitude should be to honor them. Even if our parents do not understand us as we follow the Lord, we must still honor them, but without compromising our faith and stand. I was a teenager when I received the Lord, and my unbelieving parents could not understand my new faith. I never surrendered my stand as a Christian, but I also never told my parents they had no right to judge me. Though my father got mad at me for attending Christian meetings and banned me from the dinner table, I knew he loved me, and I waited respectfully to be received back again. I never declared, “God will judge you for persecuting me!”

We should show honor and render love to our parents. This is a top virtue in human life. Those who honor their parents are able to love the Lord in a real way.

The principle of honoring our parents also applies spiritually. Paul told the Thessalonians that he was like a mother and father to them (1 Thess. 2:7, 11). I can give a long account of all those who helped me, and to this day I appreciate them regardless of what happened in their lives

afterward. I do not honor them because they are perfect—they all made mistakes—but because they are my source.

Through these three commandments we see three important principles: Firstly, nothing can be allowed to challenge or replace the lordship of God in our lives; secondly, we should be so restful, for God has accomplished His work; thirdly, we should always honor our source.

The Feasts

The Lord told the children of Israel to celebrate three feasts to Him a year: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Harvest, and the Feast of the Ingathering (Exo. 23:14–17). All the males were to appear before the Lord at these times. When we have God, our life is a life of feasting.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread includes the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of the First Fruits. The Passover occurs first, on the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev. 23:5). The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the following day, the fifteenth of the first month, which is a Sabbath day, and it lasts seven days (vv. 6–8). The Feast of the First Fruits is celebrated on “the day after the Sabbath,” that is, the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins (v. 11).

This Feast of Unleavened Bread is a picture of our experience of Christ. There were three days between the Lord's death and resurrection. The first day He died, corresponding to the Feast of the Passover. The second day He rested in the grave, corresponding to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The third day He resurrected from the grave, corresponding to the Feast of the Firstfruits, when the firstfruit of the barley was harvested. In the Bible, barley signifies resurrection.

These three days relate to our Christian growth. As Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–4). First, we enjoy Christ’s death. He died so that we don’t have to. Second, we enjoy His rest. Third, we enjoy His resurrection.

Our experience of Christ relates to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (1 Cor. 5:7–8). The focus of a feast is enjoyment. We are to enjoy what Christ has accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection. Because the Lord died, we are redeemed and brought back to God. Because the Lord rested in the grave, we can enjoy Him as our unleavened bread. As we are delivered from the world’s leaven, we become pure, resting in God. Because the Lord resurrected, we can become “first fruits to God and to the Lamb” out of our enjoyment (Rev. 14:4).

In 1953, I experienced the Passover, the redeeming power of Christ’s death. In 1954, I began to love the Lord, and for these fifty-two years, the Lord has always led me to live a life of feasting on Him as my unleavened bread. We are in the world, but we do not belong to it (John 17:15–16). Today while everything is so messy and degraded, God is calling some to be first fruits of the barley to have the first taste of resurrection. Concerning Christ, Paul desired to both “know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

In our experience of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, our church life becomes a feasting life. When we see such a church life, we know that all the members have experienced Christ as their Passover and are enjoying Him as their unleavened bread to live an unleavened life. We live in this world, but we are different from those around us. The difference is, when we make any decision, Christ is involved, making it unleavened.

Some people buy expensive name-brand clothing to show off to others. Such leaven will ferment us, making us useless to the Lord. If the Lord provides something for us, we should enjoy it, but we should not seek things that leaven. Since we have this heavenly Christ, let us live an unleavened life. The unleavened life is produced by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In this feast, we experience the growth in life. Firstly, we die with Christ, secondly, we rest in Christ, and thirdly, we enjoy the resurrection of Christ as the first fruit of the barley. How good that is! This is the first feast.

The Feast of the Harvest

The second feast is the Feast of the Harvest. The Lord desires that each of us would be the good soil that “yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matt. 13:8). We should experience a fruitful harvest wherever He has placed us. This is not just true of full-time Christian workers but of each of us.

The Feast of the Harvest is also called Pentecost because it takes place fifty days—“the day after the seventh sabbath”—after the Feast of the First Fruits (Lev. 23:15–16). This fifty is composed of seven weeks plus one day. The “day after the seventh sabbath” is the first day of the week, which represents the day of resurrection (Mark 16:9). Seven is the number for completion. So after seven weeks—completion upon completion—we arrive at a grand resurrection.

When we first touched the Lord, we experienced the resurrection of the Feast of the First Fruits. With the Feast of the Harvest, we also experience resurrection, but what a difference! When we first experienced resurrection, perhaps it just got us out of a bad mood. But each time we experience resurrection, the Lord takes us higher. He wants to bring us to a grand resurrection. Do we think something is too hard? Do we think we have no future? Do we think it is finally over?

Remember, there is resurrection! God is bringing us from one level of resurrection to another unto its completion, to the highest, grandest resurrection.

Where do we experience this resurrection? It is in a church life. If we think we can grow by ourselves, we should know it is not possible. Only in a church life are we able to grow. Even if others don't like us, we should refuse to leave, because this is where we can grow and experience resurrection.

The Feast of the Ingathering

Finally, we come to the Feast of the Ingathering, which is also the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. Concerning this feast, Moses told the children of Israel, "You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat" (Deut. 16:13). It was a joyful time because their year's work was done. It was also called the Feast of Tabernacles because the people were to abide in tents for seven days, celebrating before the Lord.

The sequence of these three feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Harvest, and the Feast of the Ingathering—is a picture of our growth unto maturity in Christ. Since the Feast of the Ingathering celebrated the completion of the year's harvest, it represents the accomplishment of God's will through those who have grown to maturity. Those who are young in the Lord can enjoy the Feast of Unleavened Bread and participate in the Feast of the Harvest. As they grow, eventually they are ushered into the Feast of the Ingathering, in which God's purpose is accomplished.

The Feast of the Ingathering includes three feasts: the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of the Ingathering. It begins with a day of blowing of trumpets, sounding the victory of Christ. It also includes the Feast

of Atonement. The Lord came to redeem us with His own precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18–19). It ends with the Feast of Tabernacles. The New Jerusalem will be the ultimate Feast of Tabernacles, in which we will abide with God forever (Rev. 21:2–3). This is the completion in eternity.

Worshipping at a Distance

In Exodus 24, Moses came up to God a fifth time. God said to him, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance” (v. 1). Nadab means “liberal” (Strong, H5070), and Abihu means “father (i.e. worshipper) of Him (i.e. God)” (Strong, H30). Concerning our worship of God, we should be very liberal. A common saying among Christians for centuries has been, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” Concerning essential things—the triune God, Christ, the salvation of Christ, the oneness of the believers—we have to be together. We must allow for the freedom of the spirit and not insist on things that are not essential to the faith. The Lord would be displeased if our unity were based on uniformity of practice. Such unification is against the principle of life. We all must eat, but one should be free to eat meat and another should be free to eat only vegetables (Rom. 14:2–3). We should be very free to read the Bible, sing a song, or pray in some manner. When we come together, any means of worshipping God that is not sinful or worldly should be allowed and appreciated.

When Moses went up the mountain, it was not to “worship at a distance” like Aaron, his sons, and the elders of Israel (Exo. 24:1), but it was “to come near to the Lord” (v. 2). The Lord reveals Himself to us according to our maturity in His life. If He reveals too much, we may not be able to take it and may become proud.

A Pavement of Sapphire

When Moses, Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders went up the mountain together and saw the God of Israel, under His feet was “a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself” (Exo. 24:10). In the Bible, precious stones represent the transforming work of the Spirit in God’s people. Here, the sapphire pavement represents the transformed believers who provide God a place to stand on the earth. Some believers have been so carefully worked upon by the Spirit that they have become a pavement of sapphire. These are the ones who support God, giving Him a place to stand. Oh, how I wish to become part of God’s sapphire pavement, regardless of what price I must pay!

The clarity of the sapphire represents the transparency in the relationship between God and His people. Nothing was opaque; everything was transparent. Few today, however, are willing to be completely transparent with Him. Most go to the Lord hiding something they don’t want the Lord to touch. They dare not even tell the Lord what it is, for they fear that if He should touch it, they could not survive. We need to be transformed by the Spirit to become willing to be transparent with God.

“They saw God, and they ate and drank” (v. 11). It was not a somber scene, but one that was so wonderfully pleasant. This was the fifth time Moses appeared before God on Mount Sinai. What a beautiful picture! God had shown who He is, what He desires, and what His people should do. Now He indicated that they should live a life of feasting in His presence. God is here! Enjoy Him!

9

The Testimony of God: The Pattern Given to Moses

A Seemingly Unreasonable Request

Moses, Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders were on Mount Sinai enjoying eating and drinking in the Lord's presence (Exo. 24:10–11). Everything was so heavenly. Then the Lord called to Moses, saying, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there" (v. 12). He had climbed that mountain five times already, and he was eighty years old! Now God called him to come higher up the mountain to be with Him. How long he would remain there was up to the Lord.

The Lord told Moses to go up the mountain and simply remain there. Moses went, along with Joshua. Before leaving, he told the elders to wait there until he returned (v. 14). Therefore, they were all on trial, for no one knew when Moses would return. He disappeared into the cloud covering the mountain, where the glory of the Lord was, and remained on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

The clear sky and enjoyable atmosphere disappeared, and "the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top" (v. 17). Moses had made what seemed to be an unreasonable request of them—that they wait on the mountain for him. All the elders of Israel were on the spot. They had gone up for one meal. What were they to eat while they waited? The whole situation seemed unreasonable.

At some point, Aaron, his two sons, and the elders must have considered whether they should continue to wait for Moses on the mountain, for it was not clear to them that Moses would ever return. They saw God's glory as a consuming fire, and Moses had disappeared into the cloud. Rather than obeying Moses, they probably all went back to the camp. That is why Israel got into such trouble later when they made a golden calf, saying, "As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exo. 32:1).

As we labor for the church's development and growth, unreasonable things will happen. In fact, whatever makes sense to us will probably not cause us to grow as much as the things that do not make sense. When God works with us for our growth in life unto the building up of the church, everything will go against our concept.

The Pattern of the Tabernacle and Its Furniture

While Moses and Joshua were on the mountain, "the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud" (Exo. 24:16). Moses was a great man to be able to wait for those six days. He might have been able to tell Joshua not to worry for the first few days, but by the fourth day, they may both have been wondering whether they were in the right spot.

After Moses went into the midst of the cloud on the mountain, God said to him, "Let [the children of Israel] construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it" (Exo. 25:8-9). What God wanted was a sanctuary, a place where He could dwell together with His people. This would be His abode and testimony. In principle,

each local church should be a sanctuary, presenting every aspect of the Lord's heart's desire.

The Ark of the Testimony

The first piece of furniture God told Moses to make was the ark of the testimony (Exo. 25:10–22). This ark was to have a cover, called the mercy seat. God said, “There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel” (v. 22). It was upon this ark that His glory would rest and His desire would be made known so His people might know what kind of God they had. It was there that God and man would speak with one another.

This ark of the testimony was the focus of the entire tabernacle. It was the only furniture in the holy of holies, the innermost part of the tabernacle. This ark is a picture of Christ, and the tabernacle is a picture of the church. Christ is the unique center in the church life. Besides Him, nothing else counts and nothing else has value. Thus the first thing God revealed was the ark of the testimony, revealing that His desire is to be with us and that our need is to come to Him.

The Table of Showbread

The second piece of furniture was the table of showbread (Exo. 25:23–30). Both the ark and the table of showbread were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold (vv. 10–11, 23–24). Gold represents divinity, and acacia wood represents humanity. God, the gold, covers us, the acacia wood.

Since the acacia tree grows in the desert, it has to be tough. Nothing of fragile beauty could survive in that climate. An acacia tree is covered with thorns. It is very tough and has

the ability to withstand its extremely harsh environment. The dryness of the desert frustrates life, yet the acacia tree has the ability to grow there.

At times we may find ourselves at events where improper things are going on. We should give others the sense that we are resistant to such things, as though we have thorns. The things others are influenced by cannot touch us. In the church life, we need a humanity with the ability to withstand whatever opposes God.

Twelve loaves of bread were to be placed on this table (Lev. 24:5–6). These loaves represent God the Son, who will forever be our satisfaction. No one can find and know God apart from Christ. If we desire to follow God, the first thing we must know is how to partake of Christ as our showbread.

The Lampstand

When it comes to the lampstand, however, everything is golden (Exo. 25:31–40). God told Moses, “You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand and its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be of one piece with it....all of it shall be one piece of hammered work of pure gold” (vv. 31, 36).

The lampstand is a picture of the particular way God comes to us. Within every believer is a piece of gold—the divine life. All of His work on us is based on this. Over time, He hammers this gold into a lampstand. Nothing of us is involved in this work, for the whole lampstand is a hammered work of pure gold produced by an artful hand. It is entirely the Spirit's work.

The features of the lampstand are in threes—there are three branches on each side, and on each branch, there are three cups, three bulbs, and three flowers. Three is the number of the triune God. He is working on us in three steps. Firstly, He hammers out the cup, then the bulb, and finally

the blossom. These are the three stages of the lampstand's workmanship.

Christ is the showbread for us to eat and enjoy, strengthening us for the Spirit's hammering work. We may love the church life, but when the triune God begins to work upon us, it may not be so pleasant. Therefore, the Lord brings us back to the showbread table to enjoy Him some more. Once we are nourished, strengthened, and satisfied, the Spirit begins the hammering work again.

First, He hammers a cup, then a bulb, then a flower. The cup stage empties us. The bulb stage makes us ready. The flower stage makes us effective. When we are first saved, we just have a piece of gold. It has no shape yet. Eventually, through the triune God's work, it becomes a cup. Yet the cup is empty. This emptiness causes us to cry out for the Lord's mercy. This allows the Lord to do a further work in us until a bulb and eventually a flower is produced in us. Though the hammering is difficult, it produces a lampstand able to shine in the darkness.

The Four Coverings

Next, God told Moses, "Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen....Then you shall make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle....You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red and a covering of porpoise skins above" (Exo. 26:1, 7, 14).

The work of the Spirit also produces four coverings. The first is a curtain of fine linen representing the humanity of Jesus. By nature, our humanity is so rough, just being interested in self. God desires a church life filled with believers living out the fine humanity of Jesus.

The second and third coverings are a curtain of goats' hair and a covering of rams' skins dyed red. Goats represent sinful

men (Matt. 25:32–33, 41). Sheep are pleasing to God, but goats are not, for they are the sinful ones. They are here, but they are covered by the rams' skin dyed red, representing the precious redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when people see the church, they should see so many redeemed sinners living the fine humanity of Christ.

We may have expected those in the church life to behave like saints. We thought they had no problems until we began to serve the Lord together with them. Then we discovered what goats they were! Many think I am saintly and spiritual, but if they were with me, they would find I am also a sinful goat. Goat hair covers the church life, but over it all is ram's skin dyed red. We are all sinners, but Christ died for us. We would all be disqualified were it not for the fact the Lord's blood cleanses us.

The final covering, which is over everything as the topmost layer, is porpoise skin. This was the only layer visible from the outside, and it was probably quite ugly. We may or may not meet in a beautiful building, but those within have been made beautiful through the blood and humanity of Jesus.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

God instructed Moses, saying, "You shall make the altar of acacia wood...and you shall overlay it with bronze" (Exo. 27:1–2). This was the altar of burnt offering (30:28). In our experience, it represents consecration. The more we experience the Lord and the Spirit's work upon us, the more we willingly give ourselves to Him.

Four Offerings

When the Lord told Moses how to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests, He mentioned four major offerings: the

sin offering (Exo. 29:14), the burnt offering (v. 18), the peace offering (v. 28), and the grain or meal offering (v. 41). No mention of a trespass offering is made, for the Israelites had not yet failed. The trespass offering appears later in Leviticus.

First was the sin offering. We must first realize that we are sinners having nothing to boast in.

The burnt offering was second. A whole ram was to be burnt upon the altar for a sweet smelling savor to the Lord. God also spoke of wave and heave offerings as part of the burnt offering. These represent the Lord's resurrection and ascension. As our consecration advances, we realize that not only are we sinners but we are also a burnt offering ready to be burnt to ashes for the Lord. What satisfies the Lord is not religious people but burnt offerings. Once we are burnt to ashes, we have no future in the world or in religion. We no longer have our own agenda. We just love the Lord and give ourselves fully to Him. We pray, "Lord, consume me with fire."

When we take the Lord as our sin offering and offer ourselves as a burnt offering, then we enjoy the peace offering, for we have peace with God and with man. After this, we live a life in the humanity of Jesus, portrayed by the grain offering.

We are sinners, but we are consecrated, having set ourselves apart unto God. Once we are consecrated, we have peace with God and man. Therefore, we can bear the Lord's testimony and preach the gospel. We become a grain offering, for we become saturated with the humanity of Jesus.

The Golden Incense Altar

After speaking of the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, the Lord told Moses how to make the incense altar (Exo. 30:1-5). The smoke from the sweet-smelling incense rising from the golden altar represents our prayer. In the Old Testament, the incense altar was outside the Holy

of Holies (v. 6; 40:26), but in the New Testament it belongs to the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:3–4), for by then the veil has been taken away (Matt. 27:51). After we are consecrated to the Lord, our prayer life is no longer self-centered but focuses on the Lord with His desire and purpose.

The Bronze Laver

God told Moses, “You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it” (Exo. 30:18–19).

The laver is the final item the Lord describes for the preparation of the tabernacle. This indicates that even at our most pure, spiritual, and prevailing times, we are still in need of the Lord’s washing.

God’s desire is that we become to Him His specific treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (19:5–6). He wants us to know who He is in His holiness, what is in His heart, and to be with Him in a full enjoyment. Therefore, we must grow in the church life, growing in life, step by step.

We see the vision of the ark of the testimony, we eat Christ as our showbread which strengthens us for the work of the Spirit, we appreciate the coverings, and we are ready to consecrate ourselves at the altar. We tell the Lord, “We are Yours! We are ready to be consumed for Your purpose.” So the Lord tells us we need the sin offering, the burnt offering, the peace offering and the grain offering. Now we walk with Him—our prayer and living are one with Him for His purpose. We are at the incense altar, so close to the ark of the testimony. But though we are that spiritual, we still need the laver. No matter how pure or prevailing we become, we will always need the Lord’s cleansing.

The Glory of the Lord

One year after the children of Israel left Egypt, they completed the construction of the tabernacle according to the pattern God gave Moses and raised it up (Exo. 40:17). We know God was very satisfied, for “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exo. 40:34). This was the Lord’s declaration that He now had what He wanted.

The Testimony of God: Taking a Stand

Remember the Sabbath

After the Lord spoke to Moses extensively about the tabernacle, He said, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you’” (Exo. 31:13). At the conclusion, God’s word is very simple: for your entire life, remember the Sabbath.

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a day of the week. In the New Testament, it is a spiritual reality. For our entire Christian life, we should be restful, for Christ is in resurrection as the Lord of the Sabbath. When we are with Him, we are restful. But when our focus is on our Christian work rather than on Him, we have lost the Lord’s presence and are no longer enjoying His Sabbath.

Then God gave Moses “the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Exo. 31:18).

A Time of Trial

The Bible often uses the number forty to indicate a time of trial. The forty days that Moses was on the mountain

with God became a trial to the children of Israel and to Aaron. When the people saw that Moses delayed, they went to Aaron and said, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exo. 32:1).

What a cold word that was! Moses had risked his life for them repeatedly in Pharaoh's presence and had poured himself out for them. He had led them out and was with them in such a loving way. What did he receive in return from them? They gave up waiting for his return and abandoned their God.

Golden Earrings

Aaron was subdued by the people and told them to bring to him the golden earrings their wives and children were wearing. These earrings were given to them by the Egyptians just before they left Egypt. The Lord had caused the Egyptians to supply the children of Israel these riches with the intent that they would be used to serve Him. All the gold was to be used for producing God's testimony. The building of the tabernacle required much gold. However, the people used these riches He provided to beautify themselves.

Many of us have received an excellent education in Egypt, that is, in the world. If we use this education to boast in ourselves, we are using God's provision for our own beautification. Such bragging will eventually destroy us. The riches God has provided us from Egypt are for God, not for ourselves.

In the wilderness, even when the children of Israel did not have food or water, they had earrings! This multitude ate the manna supplied by God, yet they ate it with these great rings of gold hanging from their ears.

The Golden Calf

Aaron told everyone to bring their earrings to him. The people, suddenly generous, did so. Aaron took all this gold the people broke off their ears and fashioned it with an engraving tool into a golden calf. All the earrings, which they had used to beautify themselves, were now their idol.

Thus the children of Israel replaced their God with a golden calf, declaring, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Exo. 32:4). The children of Israel wanted a golden calf because they wanted a god they could see, not a God who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15).

Aaron then built an altar before the golden calf and proclaimed a feast. On the following day, the children of Israel presented offerings to it, feasted, and rose up to play in its presence (Exo. 32:5–6). They do all the holy things—they have an altar, a burnt offering, and a peace offering. But the altar was built before the calf. People like to participate in religious practices without having to touch the living God. This makes them feel everything is fine.

The golden calf was not merely a statue. It was an idol that replaced the presence of God. Therefore, God hated this abomination. Whenever anything outside of the Lord Himself replaces Him in our life, we no longer feel the need to come to Him. He desires us to seek Him and follow Him. For this, we need to come into His presence.

God’s Reaction to Israel’s Idolatry

At this point, the Lord told Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it” (Exo. 32:7–8). God put the responsibility for the people squarely upon

Moses. Then the Lord told Moses, "Let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation" (v. 10).

Thus God told Moses that the people of Israel were Moses' people, that they were terrible, that He was about to consume them, and that He would raise up the descendants of Moses to be His new people. Some people would have been glad to hear this, but "Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?'" (v. 11). Moses thus firmly placed the Israelites back into God's possession and pretended God had never said He would make of him a great nation.

Moses' Sweet Entreaty

The text of Exodus says that "Moses entreated the Lord." The literal meaning of the Hebrew word for "entreat" here is to "make the face of any one sweet or pleasant" (Brown, 318). Moses' way with God was sweet and pleasant. God had just spoken of the children of Israel as Moses' people and was even ready to pour out His wrath upon them. But Moses' response was so sweet, pleading with the Lord not to be angry with the children of Israel because they were His people whom He delivered out of Egypt. Moses surely was a sweet person who knew how to make God smile.

Furthermore, Moses told God, "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?'" (Exo. 32:12). Did God really want to remove His people from the face of the earth? This was certainly not what was in His heart. He was waiting for Moses to remind Him of His testimony. On the one hand, God was severe and stern. On the other hand, He wanted Moses to appease Him

so that He might carry out what was in His heart concerning His testimony.

Because Moses knew God's heart, he had the ground to tell Him, "Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people" (v. 12). He reminded God of His pledge to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to multiply their descendants as the stars of the heavens, and to provide to their children the land He promised them (v. 13). Surely by this time, God was smiling. How many people can say they have caused God to smile by speaking out what is exactly in His heart?

Suppose Moses had said, "God, I never dreamed I would be honored in such a way. This is a great thing You have spoken concerning my descendants. I am nothing, yet You have, for Your sake, determined to terminate and replace this great people with my own. I don't deserve it, but I humbly thank and worship You." If he had done so, wouldn't God have been forced to follow through? Could He have swallowed His words? But God knew what kind of man Moses was. The Bible even refers to them as friends who spoke face to face (33:11). Moses knew what to say to God so He could act according to His purpose.

After Moses' response, "the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exo. 32:14). He repented of what He said He would do.

Broken Commandments

Moses then went down to the people with the two tablets that God Himself had given him. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they came down, he said, "There is a sound of war in the camp" (Exo. 32:17). Yet Moses, even though he was over eighty years of age, heard better and said, "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; but the sound of singing I hear" (v. 18).

As they came close to the camp and saw what was going on, Moses became angry and threw down the two tablets of God's law, smashing them to pieces. God had told Moses the people had sinned, but Moses did not realize how ugly that sin was until he saw it. The children of Israel were living a loose life publicly and had brought the name of the Lord into shame.

Think about what Moses did—he cast down and destroyed the two tablets, the very product of God's own hand! Shouldn't Moses have feared being struck down by God for doing such a thing? At least he and Joshua could have demonstrated that they valued the work of God's hand by carefully wrapping the tablets and putting them in a secure place. Yet Moses knew God so well that he realized nothing of the physical realm counted as much as the testimony God desired. God could rewrite them. In fact, today He is writing them on our hearts (Heb. 8:10)! God's commandments can only be fulfilled by God Himself. In the Old Testament age, God's people had no way to fulfill His commandments, but in the New Testament age, "the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Moses took the golden calf, "ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it" (Exo. 32:20). All the people, from the elders on down, were forced to swallow the bitter fruit of their actions. Whenever we usurp what God has provided us for His own testimony, we will taste the bitter consequences. In worshipping that idol, the people were guilty of every part of the Law (James 2:10).

Aaron, who was to become the high priest, was unable to deal with the people. Instead, he led them into idolatry by worshiping the idol he made. When Moses asked Aaron why he did such a thing, Aaron blamed the people, saying that "they are prone to evil" (Exo. 32:22). Next, he blamed Moses, repeating the people's complaint about him being gone so

long. Then he lied about it to Moses, saying, “I threw [the gold] into the fire, and out came this calf” (Exo. 32:24).

We see a clear contrast between these two leaders. Moses was absolutely for the people’s profit, whereas Aaron merely tried to please them and took no responsibility. God could have intervened. For example, He could have sobered the people by no longer providing manna. Yet He allowed the situation to develop so that Aaron and Moses’ character would be brought to light. Moses was shown to be both a mother and a father to the people. He loved them, yet he was able to do what was difficult to meet their real need.

The Testimony of God: Becoming One with Him

Who Is on the Lord's Side?

After Moses came down from the mountain and saw the children of Israel dancing before the golden calf, he cried out, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!" (Exo. 32:26). When the situation is degraded, don't bemoan it or look for who to blame. Instead, find out who is on the Lord's side. Many things may be going on against the Lord's interest, but who is on the His side? In the midst of a degraded situation, we desire to see people rise up and declare that they are for the Lord.

When the Levites responded to Moses' call, he told them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, '...Go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor'" (v. 27). This was the same Moses who interceded for the people and defended them before God when God was ready to destroy them (vv. 9–14). In both instances, he fully stood for the Lord's interest. The Lord's camp is not a loose camp, a place where people can do whatever they want. It is not a camp for enjoyment where people can simply be free. The children of Israel were to do everything according to God. When people became loose and out of control, publicly doing sinful things right in the midst of the camp and putting the

testimony of the Lord to shame in the sight of their enemies, God said, "Kill every man his brother."

When I was a young believer in Taiwan, I saw an older Christian sister I knew standing drunk in the middle of the street, so I helped her out of the traffic. A few weeks later, as I was speaking with a church elder, this sister came in. The elder told her sternly, "Do not come here anymore. You borrow money and waste it on wine to get drunk." When she began to protest, he took her by the arm and led her out the door, saying, "Do not come here anymore."

This was like Paul when he heard that one among the Corinthians was behaving in a publicly immoral way which even the worldly people viewed as shameful. Paul took an absolute stand for the Lord's interest by putting this sinful one out of the church (1 Cor. 5:1-8). We should take the church life seriously. Concerning Christ, we must follow Him, and concerning His church, we must forsake everything. We must take a stand to be on the Lord's side.

Absolute for the Lord

The Levites were told to "kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor" (Exo. 32:27). They did so, and afterward Moses said, "Every man has been against his son and against his brother" (v. 29). In their absoluteness for the Lord, the Levites killed four categories of people: sons, brothers, friends, and neighbors.

When ministering from this passage, T. Austin-Sparks said, "For the Levites the Word of the Lord took a place above all natural relationships, affections, and considerations, so that everything which was in the realm of the natural life was subjected to the known will of God, and was not allowed in any way to influence where the question of the full thought of God was concerned. Were we to consider this thing purely on the human level we should say that these Levites slew

their own hearts, in so far as their hearts were apart from the revealed will of God. They smote themselves in the realm of all their natural affections and interests, dominated by the full thought of God's will...You might have had reputation and influence had you gone the way of nature, but God in His full desire and purpose and thought has become dominant, and you have cut this other thing off; you have repudiated it. And now from this world's standpoint, and from your own estimate of your natural state from your position in Christ, you know that you are a fool, that you are a weakling, that you are nothing, of no account at all, but you are for God. Christ is now your wisdom. Christ is the only strength you are ever going to count upon. Christ is everything" (Austin-Sparks, 176, 181).

To kill our son means to kill our self-life; to kill our brothers is to kill our natural ability; to kill our friends is to kill our flesh; to kill our neighbors is to kill the world. These four items become our enemies our entire life. Wherever we go, they follow. Just as a father can never abandon his son, we can never get away from our self-life. We also lean on our natural ability like a brother. We rely upon it to make a name for ourselves. Our flesh is also with us all the time, like a friend who always walks by our side. The world surrounds us like our neighbors. Yet in the church life, we cannot allow any of these things to remain. Therefore the Lord tells us to kill them all.

Young women often look in the mirror. Each one of them believes she is the most lovely person in the world and is waiting to be admired. Young men also think they are really something, strutting about like roosters or peacocks. We all have our self-life, natural ability, flesh, and the world continually drawing us.

I am an old gentleman, but don't irritate me or I might lose my temper. If I get annoyed at a waitress, these four—my self-life, natural ability, flesh, and the world—will make sure my ugliness comes forth. On the one hand, I am a fine gentleman. On the other hand, these four are with me all the time.

We have to continually put these things to death. Our self-life may be filled with dignity, and our natural life may seek to accomplish great things. However, we must tell the Lord that we want to live for Him. To be absolutely for the Lord, we must put to death our self-life, our natural ability, our flesh, and the world.

God's Purifying Work

Moses told the children of Israel, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (Exo. 32:30). When Moses appealed to God on their behalf, however, God answered him, "I will punish them for their sin" (v. 34), and He smote the people. Later, the Lord said, "I will send an angel before you...for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way" (33:2-3). The Lord determined to remain distant from His people at this point.

God had Moses tell the people to "put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you" (v. 5). The congregation obeyed and "stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward" (v. 6). Their living was no longer an exhibition of their self-life, symbolized by the ornaments. All these things were gone. Their living was simply before God. There was now a purity in their living. They no longer exhibited their self-life but lived before God.

Meeting Outside the Camp

"Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp" (Exo. 33:7).

In this tent, God and man met together. It was here, outside the camp, that Moses would meet with God.

The purpose of going to the tent outside the camp was to meet with God. Moses realized that the people had to separate themselves from the camp to be blessed by God. Without this separation, their absoluteness for Him would have been compromised. Only when they were separated unto God Himself could they gain His top blessing.

In the New Testament, we are told to go outside the camp (Heb. 13:13). If we have not separated ourselves from the camp unto God, we will miss the top thing He has for us. Whenever we insist upon our way, we miss what God has prepared for us. We must be absolutely for Him if we are to be fully blessed. We may wish God would simply do whatever we ask of Him, but if He were to do this, we would miss His top blessing. Thus we must go outside the camp to meet with God.

Not Forsaking the Camp

Even as Moses met with God outside the camp, he lived among the Israelites within the camp. He lived among those who once worshiped the golden calf. The Lord's tent was outside the camp, but Moses' tent was not. Moses went outside the camp to meet with God, but he never forsook the camp. We should not forsake the church life just because some standard is not being met. We should never lower God's standard, but neither should we forsake God's people. To bring God's people into His desire, we must be among them.

Face to Face

Through all these experiences, Moses became a man of God, and God spoke to him "face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exo. 33:11). The Hebrew word for "face" here

is *paneḥ*, which can also mean person (Brown, 816). Indeed, our face shows our person. When we are sad or happy, our face reflects it. A restful person has a restful face. By meeting face to face with God, Moses came to know God's person.

Seeking God's Presence

God had told Moses to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, even though He Himself would not go with them in their midst (Exo. 33:1–3). Moses began to intercede with the Lord, saying, “You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me....If I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You” (vv. 12–13). In other words, Moses asked God to reveal to him His operating principles. The Israelites were familiar with God's deeds. They had seen how He dealt with the Egyptians and how He brought them out with a mighty hand. They had witnessed miracle after miracle. Now Moses wanted to know what it was that guided God's actions.

The Lord answered, “My presence shall go with you” (v. 14). The Hebrew word for “presence” here is the same as for “face” in verse 11. If we want to know God's ways, we first have to know Him. His going with us is not just a sensation; it is a person. Consider the difference between having corresponded with someone you love, and finally seeing that person face to face.

Moses responded, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here” (v. 15). Now Moses was asking not just to see God's deeds or to know His ways but for God Himself, His presence. This was a high prayer.

Seeking God's Glory

Moses then went even further: he asked God to show him

His glory (v. 18). Moses' requests indicated he was seeking God in a deeper way. The children of Israel knew God's deeds. They had seen what He was able to do. Moses went beyond this, knowing to some extent His ways. But he was seeking to know God even more deeply. In effect, he was asking God to open Himself up and to unveil what was within Him. Moses knew that God's glory was beyond description, and this is what he asked God to reveal.

God's response was, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you" (v. 19). But there was a limit to how much God could reveal to Moses. He had to tell Moses, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (v. 20). God had been speaking to Moses as a friend "face-to-face" and had just told Moses His presence, or face, would go with the children of Israel. What God meant here was that Moses could not see His face of glory. Moses could not see all that God was. God's face of glory is something no human can be exposed to and live. Even though Moses was a great spiritual man, he was still a fallen man. Yet God told him, "It will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen" (vv. 22–23).

Seeing God's Back

What does it mean to see only God's back? God's glory, His fullness, is unsearchable. This is why the Bible tells us, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18). Moses, however, was allowed to see God's back only after God placed him in the cleft and covered him with His hand, which He removed after He passed by. No one can see all of God.

Today, “we see in a mirror dimly” and “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:12). The Lord may reveal something extremely high to us, yet we must realize that every age has its high revelations. As long as the Lord has not yet returned, we have to say along with the hymn writer:

*We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial, and confined.
Now let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred:
The Lord has yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. (Martin, 378)*

We must treasure and honor what we have received, yet we must realize that it is only a part of God's full revelation. God could not reveal everything to Moses because he was an imperfect and fallen man. No fallen man is capable of receiving all that God has to reveal. Even those who are spiritual are fallen and bound by limitations. Though Moses couldn't see all of God due to his limitations, what God revealed to him was sufficient.

Those believers who have gone before us received heavenly revelation that opened a great door for us to experience the Lord richly, yet there remains much more for us to see and experience. This is what we should fight for. We must ask the Lord to show us more. May He use some among us to apply and experience what was seen by those who have gone before us, and even open up the Bible further. We must fight on for the Lord's interest.

Alone with God

The Lord said to Moses, “Be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there

to Me on the top of the mountain. No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain” (Exo. 34:2–3). So early the next morning, Moses went up the mountain. He was by himself. Neither Joshua nor Aaron were with him. The more spiritual we are, the fewer people there will be who are able to stand with us. As young believers, we may have many companions, but as we mature, we become very lonely. Moses was all alone.

“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth’” (vv. 5–6). As Moses ascended, the Lord descended to stand with him and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The picture is one of an old man wondering what would happen. At this point, God came in, and they began speaking together.

What a glorious event this was! Moses was not taken up like Elijah, but rather God came down to him. To be raptured is much easier than to stand alone, one with God.

One with God

While God and Moses were speaking, no one was there to hear them. Yet they were happy to be speaking together, proclaiming the Lord’s name. The fact that no one heard them indicates that their declaration was not just for Israel but for all creation.

God and man were speaking as one on earth, declaring God’s name to the universe. Moses was speaking exactly what God desired to say, and God was speaking exactly what Moses desired to say. In spite of his weaknesses, Moses had matured to the extent that he became one with God. How spiritual he was, even though he was still a fallen man. He knew what was in God’s heart, and God knew what was in

his heart. What a great oneness can be seen here between God and man!

This is different from our concept. We uplift spiritual people as infallible. And yet those who are spiritual, being mindful of their own weaknesses, are able to declare together with God His compassion and lovingkindness.

God's Covenant

Moses asked the Lord, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession" (Exo. 34:9). Moses, who knew God's heart, must have realized that He wanted a special relationship with His people so that they would become His own possession. God's reply was that He would make a covenant with them (vv. 10–27). Not only did He agree, but He bound Himself by means of a covenant to drive out their enemies before them and bring them into the good land.

A Tabernacle Filled with God's Glory

At its conclusion, Exodus says, "Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected" (Exo. 40:17). God desired to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Thus He prepared Moses as His vessel, punished Egypt, performed miracles, and brought the children of Israel to Himself with the raising of the tabernacle.

Once Moses finished the work of raising the tabernacle, "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (v. 34). Moses had become so one with God. What he did was also God's doing. The record in

Exodus concludes with a person so one with God that His glory was brought to earth. Due to Moses' work, the children of Israel became the testimony of God among all the nations.

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