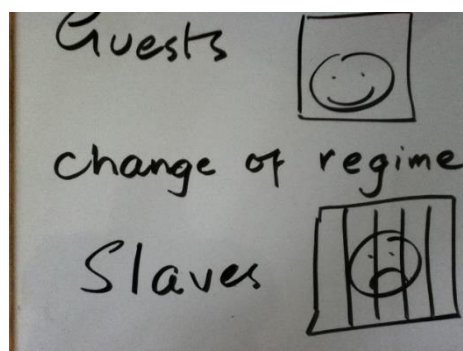


Excerpts from Exodus

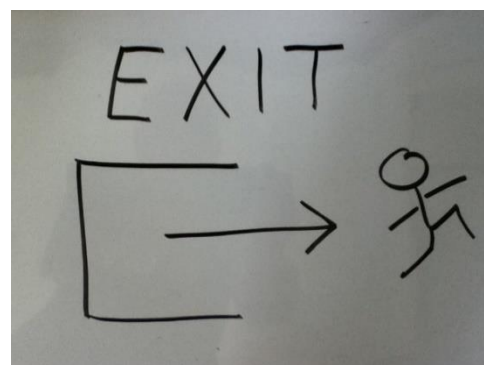
Genesis finishes with a lovely picture of the Children of Israel safely ensconced in Egypt, enjoying the best of the land, and being favourably looked after by Pharaoh. After all the family trauma and famine, life was wonderful.

Yet the next book – Exodus – is about an exit, an emergency escape from that land. Why? What went wrong?

It took centuries, but the reality is that *“there arose a king that knew not Joseph”*. The heady days of the interpreted dreams and the divinely inspired strategy that saved Egypt have gone and the original guests have found themselves to be slaves, in severe bondage to a ‘new king’.

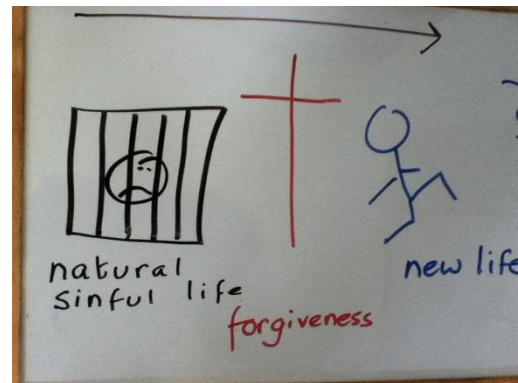


Appreciating that anomaly – the contradiction between the stories they had heard of the promises given to Abraham and repeated to the Patriarchs about being a blessed people with the Lord as their God and the awful conditions they were being subjected to - made them cry. And that is what they did, for 400 years or so; longing for release from such tyranny. And that is exactly what God did, as recorded in the Book of Exodus and embellished by detail from the other three books in the Pentateuch: He enabled them to escape.



Before going on to that story it is worth pausing a while to see how this represents the gospel message. The Bible states quite clearly that God's intention was to provide mankind with a wonderful home – in Eden. However, by listening to the voice of the serpent (the devil), our forefathers elected for a life of bondage under Satan. That is the natural state of everyone born into the world. Jesus was enticed by Satan to submit in order to receive the 'kingdom' for which he had come to earth. He not only refused but neither did he refute Satan's claim. Another Scripture (1 John 5: 19) states that the

"whole world is in the control of the evil one". And Ephesians 2 xx describes how we are *"the children of wrath"* and used to *"live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in*

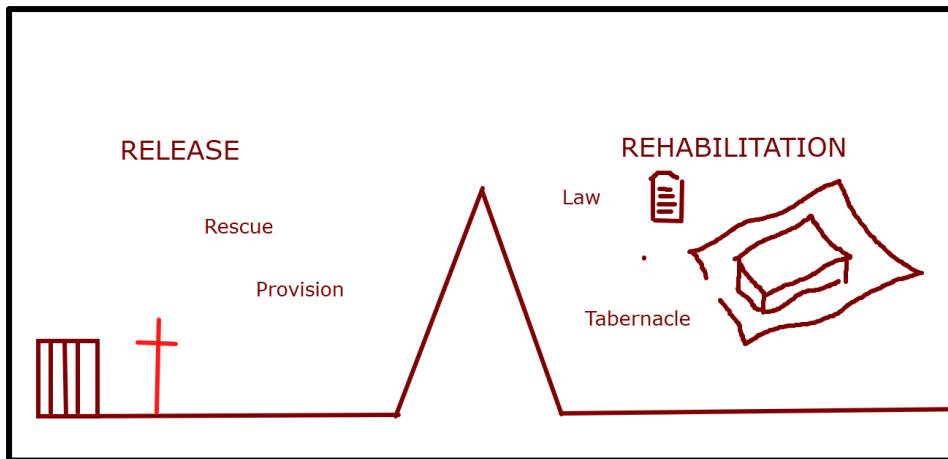


those who are disobedient. It is through the gospel of God's grace that we are offered the chance to be freed from that bondage because *"Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us"*. (1 Cor. 5: 7)

But, it is more than 'rescue the perishing': it also emphasises the way ahead as one that represents a new way of living. So, Exodus can be pictured as representing two distinct phases in salvation:

release from bondage (Exodus 1 – 19) and

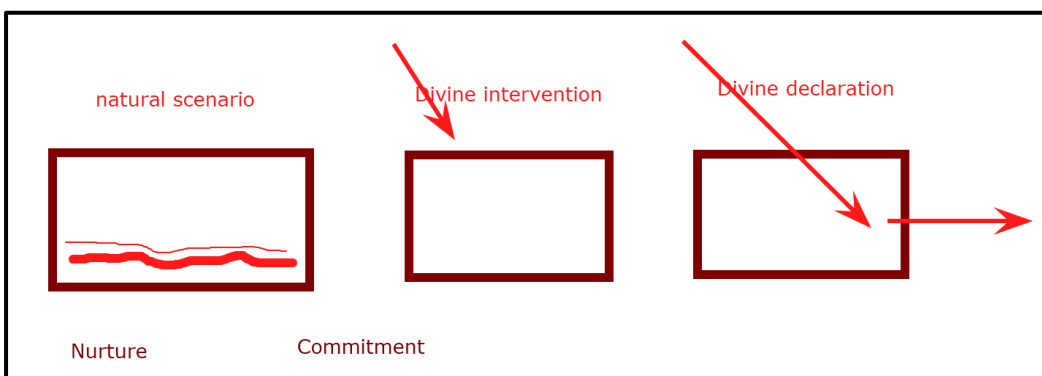
rehabilitation (Exodus 20 – 40) – learning the demands and requirements of the new life in preparation for 'Canaan'.



While that is the overall picture we will look more closely at aspects of the whole operation starting with the introduction and launch in chapters 1 – 6.

Chapters 1 – 6 God’s Intervention

This section of six chapters divides itself neatly into three sets of two: 1,2; 3,4; 5,6.



The first two chapters contain most of the stories related in Sunday School as being memorable and appealing. They represent ‘natural’ events that have a simple explanation. The demise of the original privileged family, the growth of the succeeding descendants, the fear generated in the national leaders that this sub-population might become a threat in time of war, the desire to reduce the problem by killing male babies, are all understandable as to why they happened; just as is the reluctance of the midwives to participate in this

genocide. The events of chapter 2, though of a slightly different nature, are also easy to understand: the maternal instincts motivating the protection of the Hebrew baby, Moses; his surrogate upbringing in the palace; his decision to abandon the luxurious existence to identify with the despised Hebrews; his active political conscience and self-motivated attempts to solve the problems; can all be explained. However, there is no explicit reference to God deliberately directing any of these actions: they were ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’. Yet, throughout, there is clear evidence that Providence was at work. God was *“working out his purpose”*.

The next section – Chapters 3 and 4 – does contain clear evidence of divine intervention. While contemplating in the desert, Moses sees the burning bush, turns his attention to it, and encounters God commissioning him to be instrumental in securing the release of the chosen nation from the clutches of Pharaoh. Years of agonising cries had been heeded: now, action commences.

Moses, however, is reluctant and unsure until it is revealed to him that the One commissioning him is none other than the LORD – Yahweh – the redeemer God; not just a powerful being but an intelligent one, a God who has a purpose, a God who has a will that needs to be *“done on earth as it is in heaven”*. In order to overcome the reluctance (not something that the LORD was pleased with). Moses is provided with Aaron as his spokesman (an Aaron who later led the people astray in the matter of the Golden Calf - Exodus 32)) and powerful miracle working powers that would provide proof.

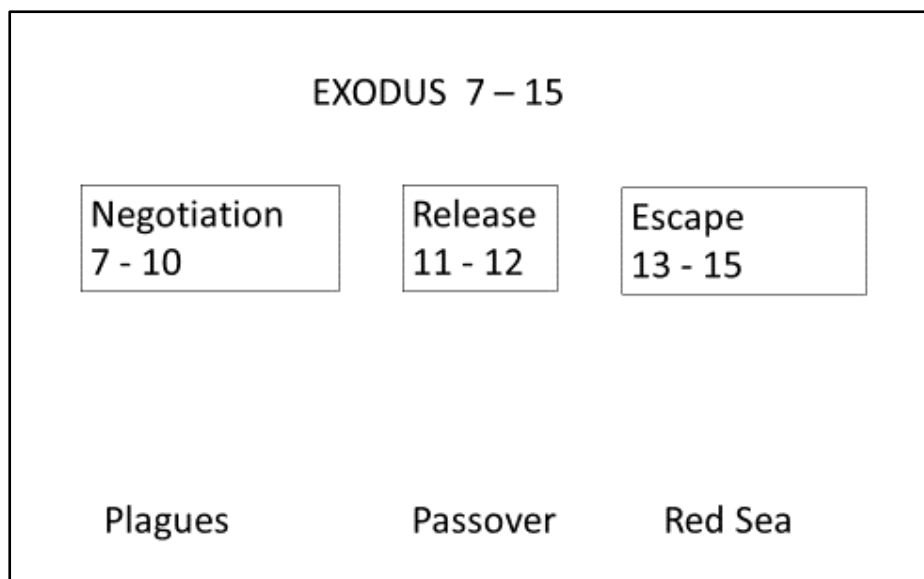
Armed with these accompaniments, Moses returns to Egypt, approaches Pharaoh with the request to be allowed to leave Egypt for three days to worship God only to be rebuffed by deteriorating work conditions when the Hebrews – still slaves – were required to

'make bricks without straw'. That, in itself was almost a 'last straw' for Moses but chapter 6 returns to the positive with God declaring that he will free the people, will lead them out, will honour his promise to such an extent that there can be no doubt. In Providential terms he has been working this all the way and will continue to do so. Moses and Aaron are just links in the train of fulfilment of the covenant made with obedient Abraham.

Interestingly enough, there are two citations in Hebrews 11 covering this period. The first commends the faith of Moses' parents in 'hiding' him thus ensuring the subsequent fulfilment of God's promise. Though small, but instinctive and governed by an awareness of the promise, these spontaneous actions are crucial. The second is Moses' conscious decision to *'cast in his lot with the people of God'* – something that we need to do if we are to share in seeing the purposes of God being fulfilled in our generation. It often may involve a broken self-image and a sense of total unworthiness but God *"looks for a man"* to carry out his intentions. If none emerges, such is his sovereignty, he will call on someone else to fulfil that role. That role was given to Moses and Aaron as they confronted Pharaoh with a request to allow the Children of Israel to be released so that they could worship unhindered.

Chapters 7 – 15 The Plan of Salvation

These chapters cover three phases in the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt.



Negotiation

The truth is that the Children of Israel were captives. They were under Pharaoh's command. Similarly, the reality is that humanity is under the control of Satan. Several scriptures confirm this. For example, Jesus, at his temptation, was offered the *'kingdoms of the world'* by Satan but he did not refute the devil's claim. John speaks of the world being *'under the control of Satan'*. And Paul says that the *'god of this world has blinded the minds of those that believe not'*. *While Ephesians declares that we are the children of wrath governed by the prince of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience'*.

Just as the children of Israel could only be released if Pharaoh gave permission, so humanity can only experience salvation by disabling Satan's hold on them. That is the challenge of redemption.

The substance of the request to Pharaoh was for the Hebrews to be allowed to go 'three days' journey

- NEGOTIATION
- Obtaining permission
 - Satan in control until defeated
 - Nature of request
 - Three days' journey to worship
 - Demonstration of power
 - Plagues
 - Compromises
 - In the land; not far; men only, people only

into the wilderness' in order to worship their God. It was to be a clear separation.

Two lessons emerge here. Being converted means 'coming out'. Abraham's call was to "*get out of the country, etc, and into a land that I will show thee*". In conversion we are "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son" which heralds a new start for those who are 'born again'. It is not only escape from the bondage of sin but a release in order to worship. Both requests were contested despite the evidence of power invested in Moses and some of it replicated by the Egyptian magicians.

As the confrontation went on, Pharaoh proposed compromises such as: 'worship in the land' or 'don't go far' - both common excuses offered by people today. Both were declined but were later followed by another two: 'men only' leaving families behind and then 'personnel only' leaving goods and possessions back in Egypt. Each of these was also turned down release must be total and departure complete.

Yet we see these compromises being offered and practised today when people respond luke-warmly to the demands of the gospel and fail to see that it must be definite and deliberate. Equally, there is a strong temptation for the new life to be only partially adopted and cover only certain aspects of the new existence.

It became obvious that release could not be achieved by power: it needed something much more effective: death. Death is the only means by which there can be release: it is the only way that power can be absolutely broken and cancelled.

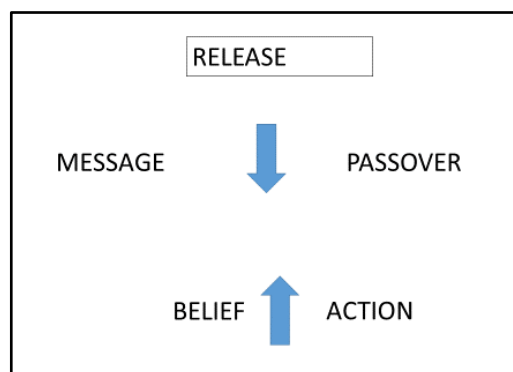
So the children of Israel were offered a chance to die vicariously. For them it was by taking a Lamb which would be a substitute for them provided they believed.

In the same way, the only release for a sinner is by recognising and believing, putting trust, in the death of Jesus as a divinely offered substitute in our place. *“He who knew no sin was made sin for us”*. *“All my iniquities on him were laid”*. That was at the heart of the Passover when the angel of death saw the blood and passed over them. It is the key to release which we will look at next time.

Release

It became clear that the exercising of power and the appeal to negotiation failed (as God knew it would) so the grounds of solution now shift to real power and potent action. God intervened with a message that told the people how things would happen and followed that with specific instructions as to what they should do. Reverting to the fact that only death would settle the matter they were told that the Egyptians’ refusal would result in the death of the firstborn but that they could be spared by taking a lamb and sacrificing it as their substitute by which God would ‘pass over’ them with resulting in their being ‘saved’ and thereby released.

The message came from God. They were to believe it and trust in it and demonstrate that faith by action – placing the lamb’s sacrificed blood on the doorposts. God would then Passover and effect redemption.



That is a model for our response to the gospel. In our condition we can do nothing to save ourselves. *“Nothing in my hands I bring”*. To

such a lost sinner comes the message that *“God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life”*. When that message is heard *then it needs to be believed* and followed by action – trust and confession. God would then complete the work through the application of the sacrifice of *“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”*.

That wonderful offer was open to others who would comply and believe and its significance remembered perpetually throughout their pilgrimage.

As a result they were released and we are born again –ready for our Escape.

Leaving Egypt was not easy. Yet they were already prepared for it in that, when they partook of the lamb’s sacrifice and displayed its blood they were dressed ready for departure.

Salvation was something with a purpose: they were not only coming from but going to.

On that journey they were to be sure to take resources with them. Joseph had long ago predicted this day and commanded that they should take his bones with them. Nothing was to be left behind and what represented those early experiences were to be retained as a memneto. Furthermore they were to take the gold, jewellery and precious items ‘borrowed’ from their Egyptian neighbours for they would need such artefacts to manufacture the Tabernacle and its components. Natural endowments, gained and trained in the world, are critical to the effective execution of contemporary witness.

As a result of their release they were to return thanks in the form of the dedication of the first-born and in regularly holding a feast of commemoration of what had happened on that first occasion.

Yet, they found themselves in a no-man's-land almost literally "*between the devil and the deep (blue / red) sea!*" What was worse, Pharaoh was not minded to let them go that easily so he pursued them. What were they to do? The God who had helped them before helped them now for, when Moses lifted up his rod, the sea parted and they traversed it on dry land while Pharaoh and his chariots were submerged, never to appear again.

The Red Sea experience was a clear break with the past. Similarly it marks for the believer a complete break with the past, a taking out of the control of the evil one; the end of the past.

It could equated to what is symbolised for the Christian in baptism where we are figuratively buried with Christ, sharing in (the benefits of) his death and raised to newness of life, reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive to God. It marks a clear break with the past. Romans 6 spells out clearly the implication of baptism for the believer and its practice – not to be confused with infant baptism which is essentially a different animal.

ESCAPE

- Take with you
- Obligation
- No man's land
- Pursuit
- Red Sea
- Song
- Sweetener

That experience of complete salvation resulted in praise expressed in the Song of Moses and even Hannah's tambourine refrain.

And, there was another incident. The water they had access to was bitter but God provided an antidote – a sweetener. Not everything in the new life turns out to be pleasant but "*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow lighter*".

Ahead of them is the real journey where they now need to sing: Guide me O Thou great Redeemer”.

Chapters 16 – 18 The early part of the Journey

Released from the bondage of Egypt and brought safely through the barriers that would have restricted them, they now had to learn the new life – its ethos, practices, and prospects. Yet, strangely enough, what they seemed to see was “this barren land” and so their thoughts turned back to Egypt and its apparent plenty and pleasures.

To help them journey forward God provided them with several things that would lead them on in discovery of the treasures of the new life.

The first of these were the pillar of fire by day and the cloud at night: instruments of guidance. Being a pilgrim was to follow the lead. Being a Christian is to follow the Lord. He is the Good Shepherd. And, he leads whatever the circumstances in ways that we can easily discern and follow. Later, in Numbers, we see the cloud progressing at various speeds and distances – often depending on their measure of trust – but surely it leads on to the Promised Land. Following Jesus is the key to moving forward effectively, pausing where he pauses and moving when he does.

Despite this provision they were prone to grumble, longing for what they had left rather than exploring what was ahead. Yet, that grumbling was almost a form of prayer, a seeking after what they should be desiring and aspiring to. In response, God provided them with sustenance in the form of manna, food provided by God in a mysterious way which everyone could access and would meet their need. Differentiation was a feature, yet everyone had sufficient. Greedy gatherers found the surplus turned to mildew: weaker souls

found that their meagre collection sufficed to meet their needs. And, it was fresh each day without fail and would be their staple diet for 40 years.

For the Christian this manna is the Word of God. The children's chorus exhorts us to *"read your Bible, pray every day, if you want to grow"*. That is why reading the Bible consistently is the chief source of life for the Christian. Scripture emphasises that *"man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"*. Peter could say, *"Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life"* And the Psalmist declares that *"Thy word have I hid in my heart"* and *"how can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed to Thy word"*.

It will need more than passive absorption of the word. They need water. But, this entails a degree of endeavour on their part for Moses has to strike the rock for water to flow out of such an unlikely source. Later, in Numbers, (in another incident) we are told that Moses was impulsive and mistrusting but, for now, the point is that he needed to strike the rock for water to come forth: it wouldn't happen on its own. Water is often associated with the Spirit in Scripture and to be so 'inspired' (in-spirited) may often mean endeavour, a seeking, on our part for that supply that can be the chief characteristic of a 'spiritual' life.

The same chapter highlights another aspect of the gracious provision of God, namely prayer support. Any distinctive life attracts opposition and, in this instance, that is opposition to the very existence of the people of God. So, they find themselves subject to attack by Amalek. Standing up to this Moses sends out Joshua and others to fight while he prays over them. But, he is only human and susceptible to weariness. To counter this Aaron and Hur come to

stand beside him and uphold his arms so that, with collateral support, he is able to secure victory for his troops. That is our privilege as Christians to exercise spiritual authority through prayer and to practise practical support in upholding one another in that constant battle. The NT has many exhortations to that effect.

Weariness does not only come from withstanding attacks but also through having to manage internal affairs, especially conflict issues. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law noticed what was happening and advised Moses to appoint sub-leaders and helpers in the extensive work of dealing with these matters thus leaving him to focus on the serious ones while they had the privilege of engaging in corporate responsibility. This aspect is implicit in the NT concept of the church as a body with each member fulfilling a particular and complementary role. It is the outworking of the concept of "*the priesthood of all believers*".

That degree of provision calls for a response, not only of gratitude but of obedience. That is what we encounter next in Chapter 19.

Chapter 19 Taking Stock

Way back in chapter 3: 12 Moses was told during his commissioning that when he had secured the release of the people from Egypt they were to "*worship God on this mountain*". That mountain was reached in Chapter 19.

There God was to tell the people to reflect on the way God had "*borne you (the people) on eagle's wings*" throughout their experience so far. That would have referred to their ancestry, their heritage, the answer to their prayers during their long years of affliction and slavery, the commissioning of Moses, the plagues, the Passover, the Red Sea and all the provisions made for them in the

wilderness. Now, it was time to be grateful and acknowledge God's goodness. He had proved himself as their God and saviour.

However, any lasting benefit they were to derive from it was conditional on their being obedient. If they were, then there was a glorious future. They would be *"a lasting treasure, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation"*; a distinctive people who radiated the very character of God's accomplishment in human hearts and corporate living.

It marked the need for a total transformation. So far, they had been recipients of God's bountiful acts towards them. Now, they were to exercise responsibility as his chosen people. From being self-centred it meant becoming wholly God-centred.

Having proved himself God was now in the position of making demands and setting challenges to which they had to respond positively. This was not just a reflection on the past but a challenge for the future.

All of that is a critical lesson for us, as individuals but especially as a corporate body, a church. At this point we can look back at the goodness of God in procuring our release from the bondage of sin, paying the debt on Calvary to secure our forgiveness, rising again from the dead to live in us and, throughout that journey, sustaining us with his word and Spirit as well as teaching us new ways of experiencing fellowship and complementary support. It is now time to look back and consider our obligation that *"love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all"*. The epistle to the Romans emphasises this in that the assurance of *"all things work together for good to them who are the called"* should lead to the transformational experience of *"presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service"*. And by not *"conforming to*

this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds we might taste what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God". It is a major attitudinal change and one that often becomes a second crisis point in the life of a believer.

But, it is a glorious prelude to discovering the riches of his kingdom and to play a part in its outworking. Glorious though that is, it is worked out in the most ordinary of situations as we shall see in the next section that spells out what God's demands really are.

Chapters 20 – 23 The Law

The challenge which Moses was given to deliver to the people (who had already glibly said they would accept it) was the Law in the form of the Ten Commandments and followed by a range of rules that dealt with its outworking in practical and cultural situations.



The Ten Commandments are probably the most maligned set of rules ever issued. The popular perception is that they are very negative and prohibitive. But that is far from being the case.

In the first place, they were issued by a benevolent God, a God who had already proved himself by 'bearing them on eagle's wings' and making positive provision for them in addition to securing their release from bondage. He deserved the right to make such demand and to issue such decrees. But, also, a close analysis shows that they are intended to

- 1 God alone
- 2 No idols
- 3 My Name
- 4 Sabbath Day
- 5 Father and Mother
- 6 No murder
- 7 No adultery
- 8 No stealing
- 9 No false witness
- 10 No coveting

set parameters to safeguard good life and to establish priorities. The first four all relate to God and our relationship to him in his unique existence. Then comes special consideration for parents, followed by

practical guidelines relating to other people. These were beautifully summarised by the Lord Jesus when he stated that *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself”* was what they are all about.

These Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone entrusted to Moses. They were divinely composed without any human involvement. They were not recommendations from a committee! When, eventually, the tablets were shattered God himself replaced them. They were to be accepted without question: they were trustworthy. In the same way a significant stance in total commitment as a Christian is unquestionable acceptance of the Bible – the Word of God – in its entirety. Without question, God rules.

It appears that this unique, stone, ‘document’ was not delivered to the people until later (Chapter 32) but, in the meantime, God communicated with Moses a range of rules relating to their life at home and in the community. These rules cover relationship with people, custody over them, errant actions involving them that would then lead to the need for compensation and restitution. Such living needed to demonstrate social responsibility and good will towards others; yet, not without acknowledging God by keeping the Sabbath, letting others enjoy its benefits, and worshipping in feasts and sacrifices.

These four chapters have much to teach us in terms of Christian life and witness. Beginning with total commitment that has shifted from being me-centred to being God-centred, there has to be aspiration for, and acceptance of, God’s decrees and fundamental principles of putting God first; respecting what is associated with him; having special regard to our family; and behaving circumspectly towards

others with laid-down parameters which allow initiative and enterprise.

That should then be followed by detailed behaviour in specific cultural and domestic contexts that demonstrate the outworking in practical actions – preventative, positive, corrective and compensatory – that is part and parcel of behaving under the direct influence of God and his purposes.

A simple illustration might help? When a young man falls in love someone else comes into his life and is greatly appreciated in general terms but his life is still, more or less, his own. When he marries he soon finds that the new person in his life, being a woman, has domestic standards that he, as a student bachelor, has gladly ignored. So, now, he has to tidy up, stop sloppy behaviour acceptable to boys but not to a wife, etc. As many a lad has experienced she is the making of him without altering his personality but by imposing her higher standards in domestic etiquette.

In the same way accepting Christ and all that he is proves beneficial. His presence enhances his experience. But he deserves more than that. The truth of *“if you love me, keep my commandments”* becomes critical in establishing and maintaining Christ-centred testimony and, above all, pleasing him.

But, there is more, as we shall see next week.

Chapters 24 – 31 The Tabernacle

Moses' experience on the mountain was a very precious time in that God revealed to him His requirements of the people by way of the

Ten Commandments and the exemplars for working them out in practice. It meant several trips up and down the mountain.



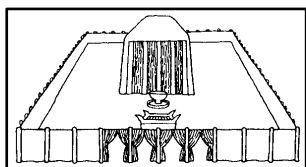
Moses reports these words to the people who had already declared their intention (empty words?) to follow

them. But, there was more and so, secondly, God spoke to Moses about a Tabernacle, or dwelling place for himself.

However, there are significant differences between the Law and the Tabernacle episodes. Whereas the Law was given by God in its entirety and written by Him on tablets of stone without any human intervention or reference to human contribution, the Tabernacle was a concept, an idea, a pattern. The Law was given and needed to be accepted and obeyed; but the Tabernacle was envisaged and required to be realised and actually produced in concrete format. It was the people’s responsibility to actualise what was in the mind of God.

This Mountain

- Law Given and needs to be accepted
- Tabernacle Envisaged and needs to be realised



There are a number of features of the Tabernacle that are worth highlighting.

It was dependent on contributions that everyone was to make, willingly. They were to contribute materials that were required for the Tabernacle – not just anything. And it was expensive and precious material. The material itself came from what they possessed naturally and especially from what they had acquired – by borrowing – from the Egyptians. And, it was to be offered by everyone – no exceptions or anyone regarded as unworthy or inferior – willingly, not coerced. Voluntary submission is important when given *“in full and glad surrender”*. For it was given for a purpose, a divine purpose, because God depends on people’s cooperation to see *“His kingdom come and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven”*

- Tabernacle - Contribution
- Where from
 - What
 - How
 - Why

The purpose for giving these contributions and the work to be done on them was so that God would have a ‘dwelling place’ among them; somewhere where he could abide, where people could meet with him and which effectively represented him.

The components themselves were in the form of artefacts; specially constructed from a combination of materials for specific purposes. For example, the lampstand illuminated the Holy Place, the Mercy Seat and the Ark contained the evidences of God’s goodness, and marked the Holiest of All, the curtains separated different parts, etc. And, everything was facilitated, not only by the availability of contributed materials and their subsequent manufacture, but also by the work of skilful men and the observing

- Tabernacle - Components
- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Ark | • Garments |
| • Mercy Seat | • Consecration |
| • Lampstand | • Altar of incense |
| • Tent of meeting | • Census Tax |
| • Oil for the lamp | • Laver |
| • Brazen Altar | • Anointing oil and incense |
| • Court | |

of sabbaths which gave them time to make sure they did all things well and *'according to the pattern shown on the Mount'*.

As mentioned above, the responsibility for the Tabernacle lay exclusively on them – each one of them – to ensure its realisation by giving, working, being and using. They were to do it from their own resources, with skill, according to the pattern, and for a unique purpose.

Tabernacle - Responsibility

- You do it
- From your resources
- With skill
- According to pattern
- For a purpose

What can we learn from this phase and its details?

Christian experience needs to move from being 'me-centred' to being 'God-centred'; less with satisfying my needs than with fulfilling His purposes. That takes the form of acknowledging and accepting the Bible in its entirety as the infallible and complete Word of God without modifying it in any way. It is God's Word. It is the exhaustive declaration of His will.

Alongside that, we have to cooperate in seeing His purposes fulfilled by giving of ourselves whole-heartedly to Him, contributing of ourselves and our possessions to be what He wants us to be and being totally involved in doing what He wants done, carrying responsibility, while *"letting this mind be in you"* and *"work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who is at work within you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."*

What the church on the ground actually looks like and how it operates is up to individuals and congregations as they respond to what they understand of God's purposes. Prayer meetings take place because people deliberately gather and actually pray. Worship takes place when people attend and take part in it. Evangelism and witness depends on someone actually doing it. The work and witness is

financed because people willingly give. Paradoxically, although the Almighty Creator God could 'make it happen' He chooses to see it done by, and through, His people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Significantly, at this time, when the relaxation from pandemic restrictions is in prospect, it is essential that we do not complacently sink back into the comfortable familiar but re-dedicate ourselves to the achievement of His purposes and avoid sinking back into the cosy familiar but to give ourselves totally to the realisation of His purposes in our life and witness both as individuals and as a church. It can be a new beginning if inspired by God through the effect of this crisis.

It is not automatic but dependent on committed servitude on the part of his people; for, left to themselves and their own initiative it is a different story – as we shall see in the next study.

Chapters 32 – 34 The Golden Calf and its lessons

While Moses was up on the mountain enjoying the glorious privilege of learning God's purpose and provision for his people the people themselves were down at the foot of the mountain growing impatient that Moses was away so long. So they took the initiative by asking Aaron to make an idol which they then worshipped and attributed their salvation to in direct violence to the Commandments they had been given.

That is a lesson for us in that our natural behaviour is always carnal. We don't do spiritual things by normal motives but need to be consciously deliberate in pursuing spiritual guidance and example.

Moses, on the other hand, reacted in a positive manner by pleading with God not to abandon his people nor his purpose, lest his name be dishonoured among the nations. His reputation depends on the behaviour of his people. So, Moses not only deals with the

disciplinary aspects but also intercedes with God for the redemption of the people.

God responds favourably by commissioning Moses to “depart” and continue with the journey they had set out on. In seeking God’s help for this, Moses declares two important values which were vital. One is the very presence of God with them. They were his people and so his presence among them was essential. Secondly, that would make them distinctive in that they were in fact a different people, marching to a different drum, loyal to a higher authority and living an ‘unnatural’ but superior spiritual life.

Otherwise, the Sinai descent into a scene of idolatry showed that it is possible to live at such a low level that spiritual things become meaningless. Minds are so darkened by the influence of the world that spiritual values appear irrelevant. It is possible *“that this world’s empty glory is costing me too dear”*.

In contrast, Moses lived on a higher plane (as did Joshua, his apprentice and eventual successor) who learned from Moses and spent time with him in these higher pursuits. The grounds for Moses’ pleading were the honour of God and the integrity of his promises.

These come to the fore in God’s response in providing Moses with a second issue of the Ten Commandments and assurance of his covenant to go with them and make all the provision, not only in terms of sustenance but also in going ahead and ‘making way’ for them.

With this episode over, it was a matter of returning to what they had been commanded to do, viz. *“build him a sanctuary that he might dwell in their midst”*.

Chapters 35 – 40 Completing the Project

The situation we left at the last episode was rather dire. Basically, the rescued people had seriously failed. They were living at such a low level that they could not appreciate the values of the Law and they had squandered meagre resources on raising an idol. Was this the end and should it be abandoned and deemed a bad job?

Certainly not. Scripture teaches that God is redemptive and is more concerned with future restoration than bemoaning the past. Failure need not be final. Moses' instructions from God were to '*Depart from here*' and '*lead this people*'. And, so, this section is concerned with pressing ahead, and getting on with it, and seeing God's purposes being fulfilled. That process has a number of significant features.

The first concerns resources to see the tabernacle coming into being in reality. The materials required varied from gold and silver to skins, wood and even precious stones for adorning the garments. Much of this material had been acquired in Egypt or cultivated on the way, brief though that was. It was given willingly – as all Christian giving should be - by those '*whose hearts God had stirred*'. And that so much so that subsequently the workmen had to call a halt because there was an accumulated surplus. Nor was it given at random for it had a specific purpose, viz, to make a dwelling place for God.

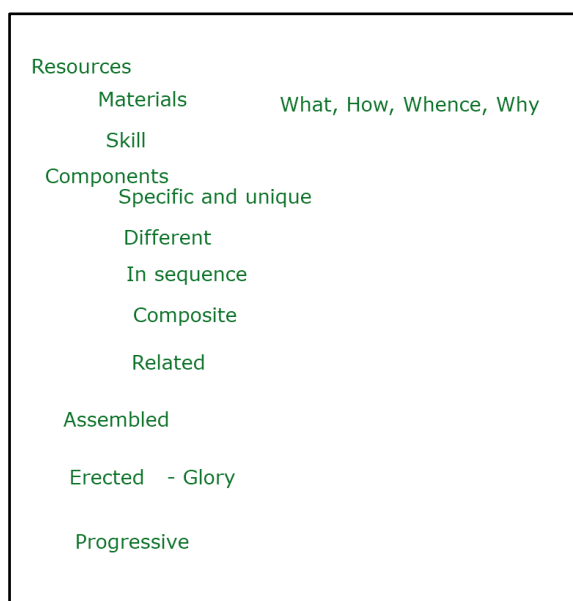
Alongside the actual material, the resources also included skills. Two men – Bezalel and Oholiab - are mentioned but everyone was involved, each contributing of their own expertise. The New Testament emphasises the contribution each believer can make to the growth of the body and the maturity of the church, for "*There's a work for Jesus none but you can do*".

This feature emphasises the importance of being available to God, of full surrender and active involvement in response to Mary's advice: *"Whatever He tells you to do: do it"*.

The second feature is the actual manufacture as Bezalel and Oholiab and their fellows set about constructing and shaping the various artefacts specified by God. These ranged from the Ark for the testimony to the curtains, the laver and the border fence. Each artefact had significance and a special purpose and location in the Tabernacle. Yet, in spite of being unique, and therefore different, they were complementary and were essential to the completeness of the structure. Each was also very practical designed specifically to perform a particular function. However menial that function might be they were exquisite products showing that anything God generates should always be 'very good'. Most of the articles were composite as far as materials go, depending on more than one element being merged with another.

These details have much to teach us in that the construction does not happen of its own accord, despite the materials being available. Someone has to do it. What they had been given from the Mount was a pattern. Its realisation and production was up to them. Yet, they were to be careful to follow the instructions, just as we must adhere to Scripture realising that each artefact is designed to perform a particular task or function through the concerted efforts of more than one contributor under God's guidance and the Holy Spirit's enabling. And it must be done well.

The third feature involves the assembly of these prepared and now completed artefacts as prescribed and executed in a specific order and in a relationship so that the whole can be what it is intended to be – a dwelling place for God. With everything in place it is then erected to become that visible and tangible tabernacle. But, it is more than a mere building. There are additional elements, such as the priesthood, the anointing oil the spices – these extras that make it a special place.



There are lessons for us in this aspect. Without materials being freely and willingly made available there can be no manufacture. Without completion of the manufacture the assembling cannot adequately take place. Nor can the assembled artefacts be erected to form the tabernacle, become a dwelling place and be commissioned unless all this is properly and adequately done. And, the whole needs to be enhanced by the addition of the priesthood, the garments, the anointing oil, etc.

How many of us hold up the effective work of God because of failed or flawed completion? And how easy to carry on mechanically, going through the motions, ticking all the right boxes but lacking the ‘added value’ of the special ‘extra’ elements, such as the anointing and spices. That is how the early church began by being all together with one accord in one place and thus being endued with the promised Holy Spirit from heaven transforming each one and making

them effective witnesses. To be really effective as a witness it needs to comply with *'the pattern showed thee on the mount'*.

That unique significance is manifested when the Glory of God fills the Tabernacle in the form of a cloud, an ethereal manifestation that is not confined to any small section but pervades and permeates the whole. It is reminiscent of the Holy Spirit falling at Pentecost. It was clear evidence of the presence of God, something that Moses had pleaded for following the fiasco of the Golden Calf episode.

Surely, that finds an echo in our hearts when we echo Isaiah's cry: "O that You would rend the heavens and come down". At this time of prospective easing of restrictions there is a danger of being content with 'normal service will be resumed as soon as possible' and falling back into a comfortable being 'at ease in Zion' rather than moving forward.

That moving forward completes this section for the Cloud not only signalled God's pervasive presence but also the progression required as they moved on through the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land. This journey would take more than *'three days into the wilderness'*.

Epilogue

In summary, these events recorded in the Book of Exodus provide a clear picture of redemption as experienced now as well as being enacted then.

It begins with the situation where the original guests are now slaves just as we are 'bound in sin and nature's night' by birth and genealogy.

Two elements work concurrently: the felt burden experienced by poor sinners and expressed in crying / praying; and the providential sovereign work of God in providing a rescue plan.

When that message is communicated then an adequate response is required. There has to be complete trust in the efficacy of the Lamb whose blood has been shed for us as 'a new and living way' there is release from the penalty of sin and the start of a journey to the Promised Land.

The immediate experience may be one of doubt and fear that the Oppressor still has a hold. However the Red Sea crossing proved not only to be the safe beginning of a new pilgrimage but the total destruction of any pursuing claim by Satan. Public confession, by baptism for example, is a way of consolidating that new freedom.

However, spiritual life and growth does not come naturally. Sustenance does not abide in the circumstances: it needs to be provided by God. So all the evidence of being fed and enabled by all the provision of God, bountifully available, is the hallmark of the Christian life as the truth of "*The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want*" becomes so abundantly obvious. But, that is not all.

God's goodness to His children wandering through this weary wilderness is such that he can now demand allegiance and dedication to a Master who has already proved himself. Realisation of this (as in Romans) marks a significant shift from being passive receivers to becoming responsible devotees.

Acceptance and experience of that major transition often leads to a critical turning point in a Christian's walk.

That walk is characterised by two elements. On the one hand is total acceptance of and obedience to the Bible as the authoritative and

inspired source of the revelation of God's purposes. Secondly it is an acceptance and committed espousal of the responsibility to establish a 'dwelling place' for God on earth through willing education, diligent behaviour, skilful collaboration with others to be a 'distinctive' people reflecting all that God is and wants to see fulfilled in the lives of His redeemed people and the witness of His church.

While human effort is essential it can only go so far. What makes it really distinctive is the very presence of God, the glory filling the Tabernacle and its corporate witness 'moved on' along the journey to the Promised Land.

What a joy to be "*Marching to Zion, beautiful Zion*" as "*pilgrims bound for the heavenly land and never losing sight of Jesus*."

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