

THE GOSPEL OF EXODUS:

Guiding Grace for Desert Days



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Devotional + Small Group Curriculum | Fall 2025

“For nearly 3,500 years Exodus has left such an imprint on people’s memories that I cannot imagine it had been invented just as a legend or a tale.”

Elie Wiesel

“It is quite exhilarating to speak about a God who has an incredible bias, a notorious bias in favor of the downtrodden. You look at Exodus and the Israelites’ escape from a bottomless pit. God is not evenhanded. God is biased up to his eyebrows.”

Desmond Tutu

Introduction

The Greek word *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) means “good news,” particularly the good news of a military victory. When Caesar Augustus overtook the region known as Galatia, public inscriptions were written into stone declaring the *euangelion* of his conquest. News of his victory was unavoidable. And one ignored the glad tidings at their own peril.

And yet, when the disciples of Christ sat down to tell the story of Jesus’ life and mission, they realized that they, too, were writing of a victorious outcome. Thus, they called their account an *euangelion*, a “gospel.” This gospel, however, relayed a victorious outcome like the world had never known. They pronounced a divine rescue of the entire mortal world through a death reserved for common criminals. They told of unimaginable power that chose to reveal itself through unthinkable humility, suffering, and grief. There simply was no template in the ancient world for this kind of story. Or, at least, that’s what most people thought.

But these first-century fishermen and followers were not working without a pattern. In story upon story in the Hebrew scriptures, what the Christian church would one day call the “Old Testament,” the fingerprints of this upside-down kingdom are everywhere. You will be hard-pressed to find a better, clearer example of the gospel’s prehistory than the Book of Exodus. In these pages, we discover a loud declaration of the “distinctive character” of the God of Israel. As the historian Tom Holland observes in his book, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*:

Here, then, in a world where the gods tended to bestow their favors upon kings and conquerors, was yet another mark of the distinctive character of the God of Israel: that he had chosen as his favorites slaves. The memory of how he had set their ancestors free would always be tended and treasured by the Jews. As cloud by day, and fire by night, he had been more visibly present than at any time before or since: first as a column guiding them through the desert, and then imminent within a tent fashioned to serve as his throne-room.¹ Thus, Holland sees Exodus as the revelatory introduction to the way God will relate to his chosen tribe of former slaves and subjugated peoples. In the ancient world, the gods would never have stooped to the eye level of Egypt’s servant class, much less orchestrated a grand, theatrical escape like the world had never seen—and has never seen since.

This study is not called “The Gospel *in* Exodus,” as if we are in search of some corollary passages that help shed light on the mission of God. Exodus is itself a proclamation of

1. Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 70.

victory, stolen from the jaws of defeat and despair. It is a story that contains just such a proclamation of *euangelion*, uttered by one of God's most revered but unlikely prophets, Moses. And in page upon page, chapter over chapter, we learn that the heart of God is the heart of a rescuer, a redeemer, a restorer.

Although there is some debate, the English word "rescue" most likely comes from two Latin roots: *re-* ("back, again") and *excutere* ("to shake off, drive away, discard"). The word thus literally means to draw back from those forces that would discard or drive off. That is precisely the story of Exodus: God drawing his people back toward their native land, away from the forces that were treating their lives as expendable. Exodus is about the power and dignity of the human person and about God's desire to be in relationship with those he has created.

Most importantly, Exodus is about the preeminence of God's grace. Scholar Douglas Stuart argues that Exodus reveals a certain kind of formula for the way God works: "The Exodus story is one of grace before law. God doesn't give them any laws before he starts to deliver them."² In the economy of God's actions, *grace always precedes law*. A nice turn of phrase, but what do those words actually mean? God does not send Moses to the enslaved people of Israel with a code of law, promising to deliver them from suffering on the condition they prove themselves obedient. No, God sends Moses with clear instructions to deliver and rescue his people. It is only after the dramatic escape from Egypt that God introduces anything resembling the law as we know it.

The same is not only true for followers of Jesus, but also Jesus' teachings repeatedly emphasize this very point. The "good news" that Jesus preached was precisely this: the saving grace of God is available to all people and requires no preexisting righteousness as a price of admission. And to drive that point home for us, Jesus went to the cross to offer himself as the lasting, final payment, so that we could be covered in his righteousness and so approach God's grace with no barrier or boundary. *Grace Always Precedes Law*.

So, this study is called "The Gospel of Exodus" because laced within this thrilling, complex, and quite literally meandering tale is the very DNA of God's heart for the world: he rescues the oppressed and the enslaved, he loves the unloved and forgotten. He draws us back from those who would shake us or leave us abandoned. And just as fascinating, when he leads his people into seasons of wilderness and waiting, he provides for them a model structure for social flourishing. There is so much we can learn from the tablets and templates found in the pages of Exodus.

2. Douglas K. Stuart, "Israel's Law and Order," OT 500: Exploring the Old Testament (class lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA, 2022). See also Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006).

How To Use This Study

This twelve-week study will do its best to cover the forty chapters of Exodus. It will do so primarily by focusing attention on a key passage each week, particularly in our small group meetings, while still encouraging readers to fill in the gaps on their own time. Some weeks' reading is longer than others, but you can certainly plan ahead or catch up on lighter weeks. Each week, there will be reflective questions and a proposed reading schedule, helping you keep pace with the story of Exodus. Here is the structure of our study, week over week:

- Week 1: Names to Know (Ex 1:1–2:25)
- Week 2: Meet Your Maker (Ex 3:1–4:17)
- Week 3: Setting the Stage (Ex 4:18–6:30)
- Week 4: The Plagues (Ex 7:1–10:29)
- Week 5: The Passover (Ex 11:1–13:16)
- Week 6: The Red Sea (Ex 13:17–14:31)
- Week 7: Setting Out (Ex 15:1–18:27)
- Week 8: Sinai (Ex 19:1–24:18)
- Week 9: The Tabernacle (Ex 25:1–30:38)
- Week 10: Holiness and Rebellion (Ex 31:1–33:11)
- Week 11: Glory (Ex 33:12–34:35)
- Week 12: Recapitulation (Ex 35:1–40:38)

In each week's reading will also be the opportunity to explore moments where Exodus is employed in the New Testament, particularly in the gospel accounts. Look for a box titled "New Testament Parallel" to learn more about these remarkable moments of biblical connectivity.

Find a Small Group

Small Groups will be the centerpiece of this study—a place to bring your questions, dig deeper, and build relationships as you explore one of the world's most formative and ancient stories. If you're not currently connected with a **Small Group**, please check out our group search tool at citychurch.org. You can also always email our Congregational Life Director, Kai Chen (kai@citychurch.org).

WEEK 1: Names to Know [Exodus 1:1–2:25]

In the Torah, the book of “Exodus” is known as *Shemot*, which means “Names.” The title is drawn from the opening verse of the book: “These are the *names* of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family” (Ex. 1:1). *Exodus* is actually the Greek title, provided closer to the time of Christ by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament, or the LXX, so named for the seventy scholars who supposedly oversaw translation efforts). *Exodus* simply means “departure,” or “going out.”

It might be tempting to see the Greek title as an improvement—as a word that more fully captures the story of this second book of the Bible. And yet, we’d be remiss not to see some profound symbolism in the Torah’s title. For while Exodus is about a “going out,” it is also about the God of history coming to dwell among real people with real names, seen more fully in the second half of the story (Exodus 19–40).³ The promise of God dwelling among his people is then later echoed in Revelation 21, as the long-awaited fulfillment of the Kingdom of God that Christ came to inaugurate and set in motion through his life, death, and resurrection. And, we should add, Exodus is also the book that reveals God’s own divine name, “I am” or Yahweh.

These “names” animate more than Israel’s history: they actually animate many parallel encounters and teachings in the New Testament. Throughout each week of this study, therefore, we will offer some of those parallel passages (though the list is by no means exhaustive). It is no small irony, and likely a very intentional point of comparison, that Matthew begins his gospel—the first gospel in our Bibles—with a list of “names” (that is, a genealogy). It’s in keeping with Torah tradition to fill in the genealogical gap between where a previous story left off and the current story picks up.

And while in many ways Exodus is a continuation of the theological story of Genesis—God working to provide a promised land where his people could call “home”—Exodus most certainly marks a new beginning. We left Jacob’s family thriving in the land of Egypt, with Joseph second-in-command to the mighty Pharaoh. But Exodus 1 makes plain that the situation has dramatically changed. The new Pharaoh is nothing like the old, and the people’s position is nothing like the scene described in Genesis...

3. See T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 1.

• **READ** Exodus 1:1–2:25

• **REFLECT**

What is the new Pharaoh’s expressed reason for oppressing the Israelites in Egypt?
What is ironic about his fear?

Read the excerpt from **Psalm 9** printed below. Given the history of the Israelites, reflect on how David’s words here might animate his people’s own legacy.

Psalm 9:13–18:

Lord, see how my enemies persecute me!
Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death,
that I may declare your praises
in the gates of Daughter Zion,
and there rejoice in your salvation.
The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug;
their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.
The Lord is known by his acts of justice;
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.
The wicked go down to the realm of the dead,
all the nations that forget God.
But God will never forget the needy;
the hope of the afflicted will never perish.

• RESPOND

Pray for those experiencing oppression, exclusion, or suffering injustice (including yourself). Where might comfort be found? Where have you experienced God's goodness in the midst of suffering or pain? Do you have any role to play in relieving another's pain?

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 2:1–10]

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

⁸ "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Small Group Questions:

1. In what ways is Moses' deliverance like the later deliverance God provides for the Israelites? In other words, how does Moses' own story foreshadow the Exodus?
2. What had to "go right" in this situation in order for Moses to be saved? Read the story closely and look for details that some might regard simply as "coincidences." Have you ever had an experience where you sensed God's fingerprints or intervention?
3. Some have suggested that the name "Moses" resembles the Hebrew word meaning "to draw out" (2:10).⁴ Aside from being a literal interpretation of the events that preserved his life, what else might this name mean for him, and Israel's? On a related point, what is the significance of him being from the "tribe of Levi" (2:1)?
4. Where are you in need of being "drawn out" of the water in your life right now? What would that mean or look like in your situation?

4. Most likely the name is of Egyptian origin, meaning "son of" or "child of." It seems highly unlikely that Pharaoh's daughter would speak Hebrew, although she could have perhaps collaborated with her servants on the name. This detail introduces another interest wrinkle in Moses' naming (cf. Alexander, *Exodus*, 15).

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

John 5:31–47

Jesus Claims Moses Wrote About Him...

³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.

³³ “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶ “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹ You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹ “I do not accept glory from human beings, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

⁴⁵ “But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

WEEK 2: Meet Your Maker [Exodus 3:1–4:17]

Moses' story continues to foreshadow the Israelites' own story: saved by God through waters that threatened to end his life, and now he finds himself in a season of wilderness, in many ways lost and alone. Little did he know that God would have him serve as an instrument of his peoples' rescue, only to lead them into a season of intense wilderness where they would complain about feeling the same way: lost and alone.

“The Burning Bush” is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, a divine revelation of God's power and presence. Most importantly, it is here that God reveals his holy name—a name still unutterable in formal Jewish tradition except under particular, ritualistic circumstances. That name is Yahweh, recorded in the Torah as the Tetragrammaton (a four-letter representation of that name, YHWH). Its meaning? Well, that is a matter of not a little debate.

Most famously, YHWH means “I am that I am.” But that does not quite capture the totality of the claim. Grammatically, God's name is meant to be the very ongoing nature of existence itself: most literally, and least poetically, we might say the word means “I am am.” As John Durham explains:

The verbs are first person common “qal” imperfects of the verb הָיָה “to be,” connoting continuing, unfinished action: “I am being that I am being,” or “I am the Is-ing One,” that is, “the One Who Always Is.” Not conceptual being, being in the abstract, but active being, is the intent of this reply. It is a reply that suggests that it is inappropriate to refer to God as “was” or as “will be,” for the reality of this active existence can be suggested only by the present: “is” or “is-ing,” “Always Is,” or “Am.”⁵

Because the verb is imperfect (meaning *ongoing*), some have offered the following gloss, which is one of our preferred translations: “I am that which is becoming.” God's name means *being, existence*, all that was and is becoming and developing. He is the quintessence of what it means to live and move and have being.

Even with such a dramatic revelation, Moses struggles to trust the Lord. He asks for signs and ultimately asks that the Lord send someone else to rescue his people. His faith—like the Israelites' and like our own—struggles to maintain the level of trust that is often found in the first encounter.

5. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 38-39.

• **READ** Exodus 3:1–4:17

• **REFLECT**

One of the major themes of the Book of Exodus is the holiness of God. How is God's holiness revealed in this formative encounter with Moses? How does Moses react and how does God guide Moses in order to experience his holiness?

God gives Moses three signs to show his people (4:1–9). What do you think might be significant about these three signs, in particular? How do they anticipate the kinds of wonders God will do through Moses in the coming narrative?

• **RESPOND**

Praise the God whose very name means existence and life. Pray these words from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

Behold now, praise the LORD,⁶
all you servants of the LORD,
You that stand by night in the house of the LORD,
even in the courts of the house of our God.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
and sing praises unto the LORD.
The LORD who made heaven and earth
give you blessing out of Zion.

- Psalm 34

6. When you see the all-caps "LORD" in the Old Testament, that is the translators' way of signaling that the divine name of God (YHWH) is being used.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 3:1–17]

³ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites:

‘I am has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

¹⁶ “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

Small Group Questions:

1. Why do you think it is so important for Moses to know God’s name? What is his anxiety, and why do you think he had this particular anxiety?
2. Many translators, based on the verb tense that God speaks, argue that we should translate God’s name as “I will be who I will be,” or “I am that which is becoming.” How does that name amplify or alter your understanding of God’s divine name?
3. What are some words you would use to describe Moses in this passage? Is he confident or lacking confidence, secure or insecure? What can we learn from the fact that God would choose someone like Moses to liberate and lead the freed Israelites?
4. Moses initially says “Here I am” when called (3:4), but when asked to free his people he says something quite different: “Who am I?” (3:11). Can you relate? Where do you most struggle with living into the *calling* you have received, if you feel that you have indeed received a *calling* in your life? What even is a calling?

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Acts 7:20–38

Stephen, the First Martyr, Tells the Crowd of Moses' Significance...

20 “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

27 “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place

where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

35 "This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

37 "This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

WEEK 3: Setting the Stage [Exodus 4:18–6:30]

The story begins to gain some legs in terms of plot and characterization immediately after Moses encounters the Burning Bush. Pharaoh is introduced as one who refuses to free the Israelites on the basis that he does not know their God (5:2). Moses continues to struggle with his calling, repeatedly complaining that he speaks “with faltering lips” (6:12, 30). The Hebrew is even more striking, literally meaning that he speaks “with uncircumcised lips.” Moses’ complaint is both that he is unable and unqualified to be the leader God must need, *uncircumcised* being code for Moses’ feeling that he is an outsider.

Moses’ feeling is confirmed in Exodus 5, when his initial attempts to free the Israelites leads to Pharaoh’s new decree that the Hebrew slaves must gather their own straw to make bricks. This edict makes their labor far more challenging and turns the Israelite leadership against Moses and Aaron, who are seen as troublemakers rather than God’s chosen agents of liberation. Moses appeals, once again, to God’s guidance.

Here, in Exodus 6, is God’s richly layered explanation of his work as deliverer. Moses’ ancestors knew God as the Almighty, as Maker, as Judge and Authority over the world he created. But they did not understand his name, and they did not understand—at least not fully—a core aspect of God’s character that becomes abundantly apparent across the pages of Exodus: *God is a delivering God*.⁷ No divine force or earthly Pharaoh can stand in the way of his heart for deliverance.

• READ Exodus 4:18–6:30

• REFLECT

What words *most* describe God as you have known him in your life, or as you have encountered him in the Bible? Make a list.

7. There is debate in the scholarly community as to whether the Patriarchs “knew” God’s divine name, YHWH. It seems there is ample evidence that God’s holy name was known in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 15:7), but perhaps what Exodus 6:2–5 means to relay is that this name’s full meaning was still opaque to Moses’ ancestors. It is only through Exodus that the full force of that name will be revealed—or increasingly revealed (Alexander 38).

Moses struggles to balance his calling with the consequences of that calling. He faces threats of death from the persecuting Egyptians and threats of rejection from his own people, the Israelites. Have you ever experienced the tension between calling and consequences? If so, how so? If not, reflect on why your calling does not entail consequences?

• RESPOND

If you are anything like me, you might struggle with the language of “calling.” Still, praying for clarity about our purpose is always an appropriate means of trusting God with our future. Where are you wrestling with your purpose right now? Try writing this in prayer / request form.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 6:1–12]

6 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.”

² God also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

⁶ “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. ⁸ And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”

⁹ Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.

¹⁰ Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ “Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.”

¹² But Moses said to the LORD, “If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?”

Small Group Questions:

1. Why does God wait until now in Hebrew history to reveal this meaningful name to his people? What does it tell us about the nature of his holy name that this is the right time to reveal this instrumental detail?
2. Identify and reflect on the promises God lists in his words to the Israelites. What do we learn about God and his plans through this passage? Is there anything here that you haven't noticed before, or that helps you understand God more?

3. Moses says, literally, that he speaks “with uncircumcised lips.” What do you think that phrase means in this context? After discussing, does this idea speak to you at all?
4. Moses says something like this to God: “If the insiders won’t listen to me, why would the outsiders?” (6:12). Perhaps there is a lesson here for all those who would call themselves Christians: how do we help people outside Christian community truly hear the message that God might have for their lives? Reflect on how you and your community are trying to share a message of truth for the world.

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Romans 9:14–24

Paul's Use of Exodus in his Letter to the Romans...

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

WEEK 4: The Plagues [Exodus 7:1–10:29]

This week's reading will cover nine of the ten plagues, leaving the final and most heartrending for next week's discussion of the Passover tradition. One of the most challenging aspects of this section of Exodus is how God's orchestration of events involves the "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart, but as T. Desmond Alexander explains, the English here is lacking:

The motif of Pharaoh's heart being hardened recurs throughout chapters 7–11, appearing in each episode involving a supernatural sign or portent. Unfortunately, the English idiom "hard-hearted" conveys connotations that are not present in the Hebrew idiom. For ancient Israelites, a heart that is hard, heavy, or strong is resolute or stubborn, and this can be viewed as either a positive or negative quality.⁸

Pharaoh's stubborn insistence on his empire's flourishing comes into direct opposition with God's powerful insistence that his chosen people will be free. And here, as throughout Exodus, it is worth reflecting on this God who chooses the enslaved and outcasts as his elected instruments, relaying his story of deliverance for *all* people.

The Plagues are a literary high point in Exodus, but they raise all kinds of spiritual questions and perhaps, for some, doubts. They may sound "harsh," but they are undoubtedly a response to the harsh treatment of the Israelite slaves. And in this week's key passage, from the Plague of Darkness (Ex. 10:21–29), we discover a deeply symbolic gesture from God: his light shines on the oppressed, and darkness falls upon the high and mighty.

That Pharaoh's heart remains hard in the face of both symbolic and literal darkness shows that for this earthly ruler, his own pride is more important than his people's survival. That is often how worldly power works: in pursuit of preserving power, it creates "divisions" (7:4). God's power is a power oriented toward unity and corporate strength. God's power is good news for those who feel forgotten.

• READ Exodus 7:1–10:29

This week consider dividing up the reading into four chunks, one day per chapter.

8. Alexander, *Exodus*, 41.

• REFLECT

Which of the Plagues do you find most striking or frightening? Why do you think that one sticks out to you?

How do you make sense of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart? How does this resonate you’re your view of God, or else challenge your view?

Have you ever experienced something like a “plague,” metaphorically speaking? In other words, have you experienced a season that felt like judgment or trial, but that judgment led you into a deeper understanding of God and his Word? Explain.

• RESPOND

This week, respond to the study by reading the “New Testament Parallel” below, from **Revelation 15**. Pray the hymn from 15:3–4:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.

⁴Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

What “righteous acts” have you experienced in your life? Have they led you to worship, or no?

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 7:1–6, 10:21–29]

Exodus 7:1–6

7 Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ² You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. ⁵ And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.”

⁶ Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷ Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Exodus 10:21–29

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. ²³ No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

²⁴ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.”

²⁵ But Moses said, “You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. ²⁶ Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshipping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD.”

²⁷ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. ²⁸ Pharaoh said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.”

²⁹ “Just as you say,” Moses replied. “I will never appear before you again.”

Small Group Questions:

1. *Gospel Check-in.* Remember “gospel” means a pronouncement of “good news.” Where do we see good news in this section of Exodus? What do we make of the fact that this “good news” is announced alongside a story about plagues and grief?
2. What does God claim to be the intention behind the plagues? (*Hint: look at 7:4.*) What do you think he means by this?
3. Pharaoh is always trying to barter with the Israelites, through Moses and Aaron, but God is unwilling to compromise on his demands. What do we learn about both God and Pharaoh in these passages?
4. When Pharaoh promises to release the Israelites, what does he expect they will do? Thus, what is the connection between freedom and worship in this context? How does this passage change your understanding of the nature of “worship?”

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Revelation 15:1–8

The Bible Ends with a Vision of “Final” Plagues...

¹⁵ I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. ² And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God ³ and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,

Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways,

King of the nations.

⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord,

and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship before you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

⁵ After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened. ⁶ Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. ⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

WEEK 5: The Passover [Exodus 11:1–13:16]

On the night Jesus was arrested, he served his followers a Passover meal (called *Seder* in the Jewish tradition). At that meal, he explained that what he was about to suffer was in the tradition of the Passover. He would be the ultimate sacrificial lamb, the once and for all sacrifice that would allow us unfettered access to the Spirit of God. As Hebrews 7:27 explains, “Unlike the other high priests, [Christ Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”

Neither Jesus’ institution of what we now call the “Lord’s Supper” nor the Book of Hebrews’ beautiful demonstration of the gospel make any sense without this first, formative Passover. On this night of bloodshed and fear, God secures passage for his people out of the grips of Egyptian slavery. Much like that later night of bloodshed and fear—perpetrated against his only Son—God secures passage for all people away from the grips of the slavery of sin and death.

There are few motifs in all of scripture more important to understand than that of Passover—than the passing over of God’s righteous judgment secured by the innocent blood of a sacrificial lamb. God the righteous judge and God the delivering agent of grace meet in the story of this final plague turned miraculous exodus.

• **READ** Exodus 11:1–13:16

• **REFLECT**

God’s instructions to Moses and Moses’ instructions to the people fill in different details of the Passover tradition. What differences do you notice, and how might these additional details add to the theological richness of Passover?

God sends a dramatic, final plague in order to free his people. However, this final plague—the death of the Egyptian firstborns—can cause a fair amount of confusion

and struggle. What does this final plague mean in the context of Exodus, first, and then in the context of scripture's larger story? Consider how the death of God's own Son might figure into this narrative.

• RESPOND

The Passover festival and consecration of firstborns is a major part of Jewish history—and both are commemorated in Jesus' own life and ministry. *The Book of Common Prayer* remembers Jesus' consecration in the temple (from Luke 2) with the following words:

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly pray that, as your only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh, so we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts by Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Why was it important for Jesus, even though he was the Son of God, to be dedicated to his Father following these same customs? What does it look like for us to *consecrate* our lives to God, now that we are no longer bound by the same religious rules and customs? Do you think of your life as belonging to God? Why or why not? Write your thoughts, perhaps even a prayer, below.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 12:1–16]

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ²“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.

¹²“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance. ¹⁵For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do.

Small Group Questions:

1. Quickly review the requirements for the Passover festival. What captures your attention? Why do you think that image or instruction is so striking for you?
2. What significance is there in the fact that Passover institutes a new calendar for the Israelites? God begins with the instruction that this moment will mark “the first month of your year” (12:2). Is there any lesson or application for us today?
3. Clearly, Passover *takes time*. There is much preparation that must be made in order to carry out God’s designs. Is there anything in your spiritual life that, quite simply, *takes time*? How do you find the time, if and when you can?
4. Through Moses, God describes Passover a “a festival to the LORD” (12:14). What do you think that means? Given how important God’s divine name has been in this story (YHWH, or the LORD), calling Passover a “festival to the LORD” is worth considering. What if we thought of weekly worship in these terms, as that which was done “to the LORD?” Would that change anything for you?⁹

9. Christian worship should be, first and foremost, a commemoration of God’s deliverance. Even the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is not simply a ritual that compels us to reflect on the model of Christ, but also a direct engagement with the themes of Passover and salvation. We remember these elements, even if symbolically, as a direct reflection of our understanding that, through the body and blood of Christ, God eternally passes over our guilt and instead focuses his loving attention on the glory and honor secured by his Son.

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Luke 2:22–35

Jesus Consecrated in the Same Manner Commanded in Exodus...

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

WEEK 6: The Red Sea [Exodus 13:17–14:31]

Is there any more arresting single image in Exodus than the parting of the Red Sea? Is there any story from the Exodus account more famous than this? These are impossible questions to answer, but it would still be hard to overstate how significant this moment has become for a global cultural imaginary. Like Noah's Ark or the Garden of Eden, the Red Sea parting is one of those high-water marks for the literature of the Old Testament (pun intended). Is it simply the miraculous nature of the event that has caused it such a place of privilege in our minds, or is it, perhaps, something more?

Having been passed over by the angel of the Lord in the previous passages, the Israelites must now *pass through* the waters that divide Egypt from their wilderness journey. (There, too, they will one day pass through the waters of the Jordan River as they march into the promised land of Canaan.) Water, in other words, symbolizes the movement between stages or chapters in the story of the Israelites. Remember Moses is delivered from the water by Pharaoh's daughter in the episode that begins this entire book.

Geography is important here. Once the Israelites cross this boundary line, they are left with only desert and searching. Sinai is most assuredly not on a direct course that leads from Exodus to Canaan, so they clearly followed the Red Sea farther south into what is known as the Sinai Peninsula. The route taken is a matter of some speculation and scholarly discord, but the provided sample should give us some idea. In the historical and archaeological community, some debate exists as to whether Sinai is actually located on the other side of the Sinai Peninsula, near Midian. In these discussions, as with the proposed routes, assumptions and projections abound. What is important is the way that passing through the northern reaches of the Red Sea opened the Israelites into a new existence for their people—one with few



established roads or known routes. The Wilderness of Paran will be “home” to the people of God for the next forty years.

Of central note in this section of Exodus is the leading role God immediately takes with his people. Notice how this passage begins: “When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter” (13:17). It is God who leads them, anticipating and avoiding potential military conflict. And again later in the episode: “The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (14:14). Here are words we all might interiorize, learning to be still in the presence of our divine guide and defender.

• **READ** Exodus 13:17–14:31

• **REFLECT**

Let’s check-in on our rational, modern minds. How hard is it for you to believe in miracles like the parting of the Red Sea? If it’s easy for you, what has led you to that place (having never experienced it yourself)? If it’s hard for you, what, if anything, could you imagine might lead you to change your mind?

A new development in the way God reveals himself to his people: a “pillar of cloud” and a “pillar of fire” lead them as they make way for the wilderness (13:21). The Lord’s presence is often associated with smoke and fire (cf. 14:24, 19:18, 24:17). Can you think of an earlier example in Exodus of God being revealed through fire? Why do you think these images are used so frequently?

• RESPOND

Take time to pray for “dry ground” (14:22) in the storms of your life. If you allow yourself to think metaphorically, what would parting the Red Sea mean for your season of life? In other words, what unthinkable miraculous intervention does your heart long for? If you’re honest, do you believe God is capable of delivering that miracle? *Record that prayer.*

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 14:5–22]

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. ⁷ He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. ⁹ The Egyptians—all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

¹³ Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

¹⁹ Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

Small Group Questions:

1. For modern-day Christians, our spiritual journey’s beginning is also marked by passing through water, is it not? How is the practice of baptism and the parting of the Red Sea similar, and different?
2. How hard is it for you to “be still” in the presence of God (14:14)? How hard is it to hand over your worldly anxieties and battles to the Lord?
3. Pharaoh and his officials change their mind constantly, but God remains constant with regard to his designs for the Israelites. Is your experience of God as one whose love and purposes are constant? Or, has he seemed to change over the course of your relationship? Finally, how can we tell if it is God changing or ourselves?
4. The “pillar of cloud and fire” moves from in front of the Israelites to behind them (14:19). What practical effect does this transition have? Also, here we learn that this pillar of God’s presence is linked to “the angel of God.” What might this detail signify? (*Hint: the “angel of God” played a large role in last week’s study.*)

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

1 Corinthians 10:1–5

Paul Calls to Mind the Red Sea Deliverance in his Letter to the Corinthians...

10 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

WEEK 7: Setting Out [Exodus 15:1–18:27]

Deliverance, or something else? God has liberated the Israelites from the Egyptians. Moses and his sister, Miriam, sing a beautiful song of salvation: “The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation” (15:2). But it takes only three verses for the song of deliverance to transform into a chorus of grumbling. It is as if the people are saying, “Saved, sure, but saved for what?” This other song, this song of distress and anxiety, reaches a first pinnacle in Exodus 17: “Water from the Rock.” Here Moses nearly cracks under the pressure of providing for his people, but God once again provides instructions and a path forward.

At this point, it might be appropriate to reflect on the subtitle of our study: *Guiding Grace for Desert Days*. The people have made their “exodus,” but now comes the next evolution in their journey: learning to trust God in the wilderness that welcomes all of us when we leave an old, familiar way of life. In Numbers 14, the people’s complaints get so dramatic that they rebel against Moses’ leadership and try to *return to slavery in Egypt*:

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt” (Num. 14:1–4).

Freedom, it turns out, can inspire its own doubts. Is there a strange kind of comfort in oppression, a surprising relief to be spared from negotiating with God’s timing and purposes? Following God will lead us into unknown territory full of uncommon peril, but the promises of God assure us that we will also be met with uncommon grace. This is likewise the message for those following Christ. He assures his followers that they will have “trouble” in this world, but we can’t miss what he says next: “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

So, too, for the Israelites. Their wilderness is a world of trouble, but their God is the overcomer of that world, the champion of their deliverance, and the author of their salvation.

• **READ** Exodus 15:1–18:27

• **REFLECT**

What daily anxiety disrupts your ability to trust God? What fear intervenes in your desire to follow the Lord in your own days of desert?

“Manna” sounds like the Hebrew word that means “What is it?” This provision of the Lord followed no known template. It was simply an overflow of the provisions of God, defying both expectations and belief. Have you ever encountered something that defied expectation and belief patterns, something you had no template for?

If you were an ancient Israelite, what part of their “desert days” would have been most challenging for you? Why?

• RESPOND

Pray these words from Moses and Miriam's song.

"I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.

² "The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³ The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

⁴ Pharaoh's chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh's officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵ The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, LORD,
was majestic in power.

Your right hand, LORD,
shattered the enemy."

What "enemy" in your life do you hope to see overpowered by the grace of God?

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 16:1–19]

16 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ²In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

¹⁰While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

¹¹The LORD said to Moses, ¹²“I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”

¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. ¹⁸ And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

¹⁹ Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.”

...

³¹ The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’”¹⁰

Small Group Questions:

1. What is the greatest enemy of your trust in the Lord? Notice it takes the Israelites only a few verses to seemingly forget their miraculous deliverance through the Red Sea.
2. God provides both manna and quail to help satiate the Israelites' hunger, but only manna seems to be a daily provision in context. What is the difference between the two, in your mind? Is there any symbolism or lesson for us in how God provides for our needs?
3. Why does Moses instruct the Israelites to throw away the uneaten manna (16:19)? What is the Lord asking from his people, and how does it connect to our own acts of saving and trusting him?
4. God commands his people to preserve manna as an example of the Lord's provision (mind you, how it stayed fresh I am unsure!). In what ways can we preserve the knowledge and memory of the Lord's provision among our people?

10. It's clear from context that verses 32–35 record later events, likely those recorded closer to the construction of the Tabernacle and the collection of required elements (Alexander, *Exodus*, 80).

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

2 Corinthians 8:8–15

Paul Appeals to the Corinthians' Generosity on the Basis of Exodus 16...

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

WEEK 8: Sinai [Exodus 19:1–24:18]

The scenes at Sinai could inspire their own study—and, in fact, *should* inspire their own study. The covenant is more than God’s “rules for life.” The striking of this agreement between God and his people is a key developmental milestone in God’s revelation of his heart for all nations. Recall the key concept of this study, *The Gospel of Exodus*: grace precedes law, deliverance makes way for design. We must acknowledge the tension between God’s desire that we be free and God’s desire that we live lives of justice and mercy. In Galatians 5:1, Paul writes, “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” But throughout Galatians, and elsewhere in his letters, Paul still shares his expectations for the behaviors and principles of the early Christian community.

Much the same could be said of the Israelites. God desired and secured their literal freedom from their era of Egyptian slavery. But he does not withdraw from their lives once they are free, and his presence means that he will continue to expect a relational reciprocity between himself and his people. In exchange for his presence he expects their holiness, a problematic exchange that is never solved in the story of the Old Testament.

Sinai is a gift and a curse. It’s the moment where God graciously reveals his view of social flourishing and the kinds of characteristics that he expects the Israelites to exhibit in their dealings with one another—and with those *outside* their community. On the other hand, it’s also the moment where the extent of God’s expectations, the crushing weight of his law, is made known to a people who continually prove unable to follow it (as would be true for all of us). Sinai discloses a deep conduit of God’s purposes, but in the same breath begins to create the need for another way into God’s presence—a mediator, a priest, or as they would come to long for, a Messiah.

• **READ** Exodus 19:1–24:18

• **REFLECT**

God tells his people to respect the foreigner because their story of deliverance was one in which they were foreigners, abused and forgotten. How does this reminder connect to the Christian story for those who feel they have been saved by grace? (*For a New Testament connection, check out 1 Peter 2:9–25.*)

As you read the Sinai episode, what aspect of God's law seems most challenging or confounding? Reflect on some of the mysteries here, honestly naming the confusion that might ensue.

If someone were to ask you the "theme" of the Sinai covenant (the "main point," in other words), what would your answer be? Why this explanation?

• RESPOND

Are you someone who tries to work your way toward salvation? Do you find comfort in the covenants at Sinai, its clear expectations and standards? Or not? Maybe it depends on the situation? *Reflect and Pray.*

How can the same God who struck the covenant at Sinai also free us from the consequences of not keeping that covenant? How can God be both law-giver and gospel-provider? *Reflect and pray for understanding on the complex tension between law and gospel.*

Sidebar: The Covenant

At Sinai, God establishes his “covenant” with the people of Israel, famously beginning with what we call “The Ten Commandments.” This actually follows an established contractual form from this time period—a six-part Ancient Near Eastern Covenant form. Read Exodus 20 closely, and see if you can identify these six parts in the terms of God’s covenant:

1. **PREAMBLE** – Generally identifies the parties involved.
2. **PROLOGUE** – Brief background concerning how the parties are linked or associated.
3. **STIPULATIONS** – Explains under what conditions the covenant is made and kept.
4. **SANCTIONS** – Outlines the “carrot” (blessings) and “stick” (curses) based on stipulations of the covenant.
5. **WITNESSES** – Covenants always list witnesses, listing those who will promise to oversee how these stipulations are observed.
6. **PRESERVATION OF THE COVENANT** – The covenant must be documented or registered in some way. This could include a matter of inscription or storage of the covenant.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 23:1–11]

23 “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

² “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, ³ and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

⁴ “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. ⁵ If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.

⁶ “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. ⁷ Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

⁸ “Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.

⁹ “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

¹⁰ “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, ¹¹ but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

Small Group Questions:

1. *Gospel Check-in.* When we think about the injustices committed against Jesus, which of the laws explained in Exodus 23:1–11 were broken by those who persecuted him?
2. Which of these societal standards seems most urgently ignored in today's world? What, if any, of these laws surprised you the most?
3. The Hebrew word for “oppress” in 23:9 can also mean “press,” or “crush.” How does that definition help explain God's commands here, and on what basis does God make this command? Is there a connection for modern-day followers of Christ?
4. This passage connects two big ideas in the Torah (the Old Testament's first five books): sabbath for God's people and justice for the sojourner. How are these ideas connected in this passage? How might this principle of mercy and provision apply to us today?
5. Look closely at Exodus 23:4–5. How does “hate” function in this verse and what is this command actually instructing the people to consider?

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Matthew 5:38–42

Jesus Reimagines the Sinai Covenant in Light of His Ministry...

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

WEEK 9: The Tabernacle [Exodus 25:1–30:38]

The first five words of the Bible: “In the beginning God created.” With this pronouncement, Genesis introduces both the main character of scripture and the primary action of that character. God is a creator, a maker, a designer. He creates worlds and people, but he also makes paths for deliverance and segues toward salvation. As a creator, God understands the value of aesthetics, of beauty, of form and function combining in order to sing of his glory.

The Tabernacle is a clear indication that God’s Kingdom is one with deep aesthetic commitments. The level of detail, the expectations of its artisans, the layers of symbolism and foresight—all of it is unbelievably rich with meaning. Like the scenes at Sinai, the individual instructions contained in the plans for the Tabernacle could motivate and organize an entire semester’s worth of studies (and has inspired no shortage of books and studies).

In this week’s small group study, we will focus only on the Ark of the Covenant. Your writers’ love for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* notwithstanding, the details for the Ark’s creation and installation bear profound significance for the ways in which the New Testament writers understand the work of Christ. The lid of the ark, often called the “Atonement Cover” or “Mercy Seat,” is figured, later, as the person and work of Jesus himself. The Greek word *hilasterion* was used to describe this “mercy seat,” and Paul himself will later pick up on that language in his letter to the Romans:

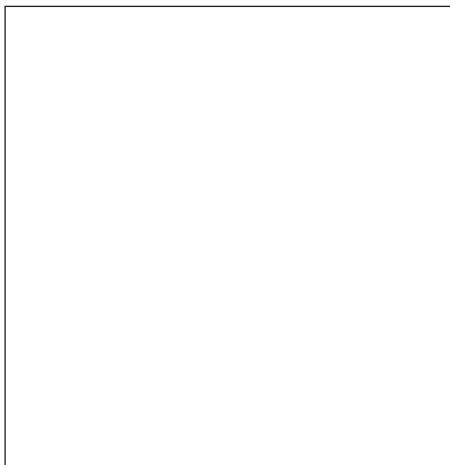
God presented Christ as a *sacrifice of atonement* [*hilasterion*], through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:25–26).

In a footnote, the NIV translation rightly notes that the phrase “sacrifice of atonement” is literally “mercy seat.” Their concession to the language of sacrifice is provided in hopes of aiding a general readership’s understanding, but we risk missing the profound ties to Exodus’ covenantal regulations with this somewhat inexact translation. This “mercy seat” on the Ark was thus a long-buried foreshadowing of the atoning work of Jesus—and all these many details and dogmatic instructions were designed to create an unbearable weight from under which Jesus, our once and for all seat of mercy, would free us forevermore.

• **READ** Exodus 25:1–30:38

• **REFLECT**

Take time to note some of the instructions for the Tabernacle. Maybe even try your hand at a little sketch of how you imagine the Tabernacle complex looking.



If you were an Israelite hearing these manifold instructions, how close to God would you feel? What would your relationship to God be like?

• **RESPOND**

Here are David's words from **Psalms 15**. Pray these words and reflect on the truth that because of the work of Jesus, we can now all “dwell in [his] sacred tent.”

¹ LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?

²The one whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from their heart;
³whose tongue utters no slander,
who does no wrong to a neighbor,
and casts no slur on others;
⁴who despises a vile person
but honors those who fear the LORD;
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind;
⁵who lends money to the poor without interest;
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things
will never be shaken.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 25:10–22]

¹⁰“Have them make an ark of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. ¹²Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it. ¹⁵The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. ¹⁶Then put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law, which I will give you.

¹⁷“Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁸And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. ¹⁹Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. ²⁰The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. ²¹Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. ²²There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

Small Group Questions:

1. Why does God care so much about these ornate particulars? What difference does it make how the gold overlay is structured, or what kind of wood they use to make the poles on which the ark is carried?
2. The Ark's cover is called the "mercy seat." In Romans 3, Paul compares Christ Jesus to this "mercy seat." How does it make sense that Jesus serves as the cover to the Ark?
3. In 1 Chronicles, David calls the ark "the footstool of our God" (28:2). Elsewhere the Ark is figured as God's throne, seated between two cherubim. Why is the Ark seen as God's central seat of power?
Follow-up: Why are God and his law so intimately connected?
4. How *close* do you think the average Israelite felt to their God? In what ways is our relationship with God different? *Consider reading Hebrews 8:1–6 and discussing (provided on the next page).*

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Hebrews 8:1–6

The Writer of Hebrews Writes of the “New Covenant” of Christ, Our High Priest...

8 Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” ⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

WEEK 10: Holiness and Rebellion [Exodus 31:1–33:11]

An oversight, perhaps, finds us only talking about the concept of “holiness” several chapters removed from the heights of Sinai. *Holiness* is one of the most significant themes of Exodus—in particular, God’s holiness. The people’s lack of holiness is also a point of emphasis, creating a spiritual ravine between God’s presence and the Israelites’ ability to coexist alongside that presence. Next week, we’ll talk about Moses’ personal desire to continually encounter the holy presence of God—and in that week, we’ll add another key term to the mix: *glory*.

Holiness is a term that means “set apart, other, separate, consecrated” (קִדְּשׁ, *qodesh*). Only one being in the entire universe is unequivocal and unqualified in his *being set apart*: God. God is “wholly other,” as the theologian Karl Barth would say. That is a level of *otherness* and distinctness that no other creature could even imagine. And yet, God promises to in some way impart that holiness to his people through their observance of his laws and principles: “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy” (31:13).

But struggling to observe the Sabbath is the least of Israel’s problems. As Moses climbs down Sinai with the tablets “inscribed by the finger of God” (31:18), he encounters a people who have already turned to idol worship—the famous episode of the Golden Calf. As Moses negotiates with God, we see God’s holiness on display. His *otherness* cannot abide such rejection, and so Moses and Aaron must constantly navigate the gap between his standards and the people’s belief.

While followers of Christ no longer need an earthly high priest, we still observe practices like Sabbath in order to help bridge the connection between us and God, to align our lives with his way of being, and thus to become, in some mysterious fashion, holy. As Peter reminds us in his first letter to the Christian churches, quoting the same Levitical laws that Moses handed down to the Israelites, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15–16).

• **READ** Exodus 31:1–33:11

• **REFLECT**

Given all of this talk about God’s *holiness*, what does it mean, really, for us to be “holy?” What changes could you make in your life to align your days with God’s holy designs?

When the Israelites turned to the worship of the Golden Calf, what do you think they were looking for? Is there any lesson to be drawn for us, when our hearts are tempted to wander?

• RESPOND

Rebellion so often stems from a spirit of fear and anxiety. Pray these words from *The Book of Common Prayer*, requesting trust in place of worry:

Most loving Father, you will us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on the One who cares for us. Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested unto us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

What anxiety is pulling on your heart right now, making trust in God more challenging?

SNALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 31:12–18]

¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹³“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

¹⁴“Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people. ¹⁵For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death. ¹⁶The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

¹⁸When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

Small Group Questions:

1. Do you find it hard to rest? Why or why not? What is the biggest obstacle in your desire to institute rhythms of sabbath rest?
2. Do you think the Sabbath “laws” still apply to Christians today? (*Of course, I’m not asking about the penalty aspect of ignoring the Sabbath.*) Why or why not? What, if any, of the laws are still applicable to Christians today?
3. God says that Sabbath is a “sign” between God and his people, an outward expression of their relationship. Why is this emphasis on rest so central to the identity of those who follow God? Hardest question of all: why does God choose to rest at all, given that he is in the infinite source of all power? *Optional Follow-up:* What is the connection between rest and holiness?
4. What does it mean, practically, for the Lord to make his people “holy?” Does this promise of extended holiness also apply to followers of Christ?

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Acts 7:39–43

The First Martyr Stephen's Speech Again Calls to Mind the Story of the Exodus...

³⁹ “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. ⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

⁴³ You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.
Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.”

WEEK 11: Glory [Exodus 33:12–34:35]

Last week we discussed the holiness of God—the fact that, in relation to all that *is*, God is utterly and completely other. We cannot fathom the mind of God, and we cannot bear to even coexist alongside his full presence (at least not “on this side of the veil,” as it were). *Holiness* describes God’s nature. *Glory* describes the result of that nature. In Hebrew, “glory” is the word *kabowd* (כָּבוֹד), meaning “of great weight or splendor. God’s “glory” refers to his expansiveness, his profound, sovereign weight over all things. As creator and author of life, he pours out his glory copiously, spilling over all that was and is and will be.

Holiness is what God is. *Glory* is what God does. He creates glorious things, he excludes glorious truths. His glory is so complete, so total, so *wholly* other that to be in his presence is fatal. As the rebellions and complaints mount, as Moses struggles to understand his role, he makes a bold request: “Now show me your glory” (33:18). The ensuing scene is famous for the theology of God’s glory that it reveals, and it also precedes the re-inscription of the covenant with his people (Exodus 34).

This is yet another passage that bears echoes for the story and work of Christ. He is like the cleft rock in which Moses hides: he is the force that secures us from God’s glory and yet allows us to view him in a dramatically new way. As the famous hymn has it:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

There is a potential “plot hole” in this episode between God and Moses. We read that “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (33:11), but then in a few short verses, God declines to show his “face.” There is therefore a distinction between the two uses of the idea of God’s “face”: one referring the intimacy of their friendship and one referring to the fullness of God’s character. Clearly, the former use is meant colloquially while the latter is more literal. Therefore, we find layers in the ways God communicates even with his chosen representative, filters and mediations.

All of these stories are designed to create in us, as in Moses, a longing for fuller access to God and his ways. The more we lean into that longing the more we understand just how *good* the good news of the gospel really is—that announcement that God has come into our world, that he has begun the work of building his lasting Kingdom, that we can all have access to the power and presence of the Lord.

• **READ** Exodus 33:12–34:35

• **REFLECT**

Setting aside “Sunday School answers” for the moment, what comes to mind when you think of glory? What do you find *glorious*? Does this bear any connection, in your mind, to the person and work of God?

Why do you think Moses is so insistent on “seeing” God given that he has the privilege of speaking to him “as a friend.” Do you think you would be so bold in demanding a vision of God?

In Romans, Paul writes, “In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (8:24–25). Do you agree? If we were to “see” God, would we lose the need for “hope?” How do you maintain hope in that which you cannot see?

RESPOND

Pray these words from **Hebrews 11:1–3, 24–29**:

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

...

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

Do you often think of *faith* as “assurance about what we do not see?” If so, write a prayer for faith rather than a demand for sight. Boldly ask for faith the way Moses asked to see God.

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 33:12–23]

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴ The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

¹⁸ Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

¹⁹ And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

²¹ Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

Small Group Questions:

1. God speaks of himself *anthropomorphically*, describing himself in human terms (e.g. “my face,” “my hand”). What is so important about the face? Why would the face be the center point of his glorious self-revelation?
2. Let’s wrestle with God’s self-declaration here. Yes, he causes his “goodness to pass” before Moses, but then says these mysterious words: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (33:19). Does this imply that God is arbitrary in extending his mercy and compassion? How do you understand these words?

3. God says that he knows Moses “by name,” but he’s God and knows everyone by name, right? What is God saying here, and how have *names* shaped the story of Exodus? (Remember that the Hebrew word for Exodus is *Shemot*, meaning “Names.”)
4. Why do Christians refer to Jesus as the “Rock of Ages?” In what sense does he function like the “cleft of the rock” in Exodus 33? (*Hint: check out 1 Peter 2:4–10.*)

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

2 Corinthians 3:7–13

Paul Describes the Glory Moses Experienced with God...

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹ If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰ For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹ And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.

WEEK 12: Recapitulation [Exodus 35:1–40:38]

For the general reader, the ending of Exodus can feel a bit odd, even redundant. Here the voluminous instructions for the Tabernacle and its accoutrement are simply recapitulated as the Israelites carry out God's vision. While it feels repetitive, it is most assuredly not a repetition for the people. These chapters tell of fulfillment: those Sinai instructions have reached their culmination after years of planning, craftsmanship, and installation.

It is not the Promised Land they have been hoping for, but it is a stable solution to the problem of securing a proximity to God's holy presence. In their wandering, God's presence could not be maintained among the people the way it was on Sinai. Their encounters with God since the parting of the Red Sea had been far more mediated and indirect, but with the finishing of the Tabernacle, we learn that "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (40:34). For many, the people's impatience and desire are relatable. After such a dramatic rescue, it surely seemed odd to experience what likely felt like God's distance, or even absence. Even for us "moderns", God's initial presence in times of crisis or conversion can soon be followed by seasons in which God feels far more distant, or even silent.

The goal of our own spiritual wilderness might be to pursue something quite similar to the Israelites: through practices and prayer, build a life that can increasingly accommodate the holiness of God. Building a spiritual life, developing spiritual rhythms and practices, are not terribly unlike constructing a transportable Tabernacle in the wilderness days of our lives. God's desire is to be with us and among us, but in order to accommodate his holiness and glory, we must give of ourselves, our time, and our resources.¹¹ As it turns out, life with God requires a radical form of giving and generosity that nevertheless pales in comparison to the generosity of God, our deliverer.

The *Gospel of Exodus* can be summarized this way: God is a rescuer, and God wants to dwell among his rescued people. The spiritual life is one that requires work and time and resources in order to accommodate the holiness of God in a fallen world. But praise God for the newfound freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We no longer need to sweat over physical Tabernacles and Temples, and can take our worries directly to our God, mediated only by the righteousness of Christ.

11. See Alexander, *Exodus*, 187.

• **READ** Exodus 35:1–40:38

Six whole chapters this week. Maybe take one each day.

• **REFLECT**

These chapters confirm that the Israelites followed the instructions given by God. They are far from redundant; they actually share important information about Israel's faithfulness under the renewed covenant. And, it should be noted, the order of completion does vary from the order of instructions, likely because of the time demanded by each respective task. Take some time to compare these chapters with the instructions for the Tabernacle (Week 9 of this study). What similarities and differences do you note?

The climax of Exodus is marked by God's presence coming to dwell among the people, moving from the mountaintop to the Tabernacle. But even here, his access is limited: "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (40:35). Reflect on these past few weeks of study, where we paid attention to God's holiness and glory. How and why has our situation changed? Do we *really* have more access than the Israelites? Why or why not?

• RESPOND

Throughout this study, we have sought lessons about God's pattern of guidance and deliverance in times of wilderness or oppression. Pray this prayer, from *The Book of Common Prayer*, asking God for guidance in the days ahead. Reflect below on where you most need guidance right now.

Go, before us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, through your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Where are you most longing for God's guiding hand? Where are you most seeking understanding?

SMALL GROUP STUDY PASSAGE [Exodus 40:1–16, 34–38]

40 Then the LORD said to Moses: ²“Set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, on the first day of the first month. ³Place the ark of the covenant law in it and shield the ark with the curtain. ⁴Bring in the table and set out what belongs on it. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. ⁵Place the gold altar of incense in front of the ark of the covenant law and put the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle.

⁶“Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the entrance to the tabernacle, the tent of meeting; ⁷place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it. ⁸Set up the courtyard around it and put the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard.

⁹“Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it; consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy. ¹⁰Then anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils; consecrate the altar, and it will be most holy. ¹¹Anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate them.

¹²“Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them

with water. ¹³ Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ Bring his sons and dress them in tunics. ¹⁵ Anoint them just as you anointed their father, so they may serve me as priests. Their anointing will be to a priesthood that will continue throughout their generations.” ¹⁶ Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded him.

...

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

³⁶ In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷ but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. ³⁸ So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

Small Group Questions:

1. *Gospel Check-in.* Exodus ends with the Lord’s glory filling the Tabernacle. The gospels end, generally, with God’s glory being subjected to the humiliation and misery of crucifixion (and naturally, his resurrection). How is the notion of God’s glory changed or at least expanded through the coming of Jesus?
2. How does God communicate with the Israelites according to the last verses of the book? Does this detail call to mind any other passage in the book of Exodus? Is there any application for Christians today as we seek to discern God’s movements?
3. Imagine how much insecurity the Israelites must have felt as they wandered and waited. How do you respond to wilderness seasons in your life? Has this study helped you understand ways of seeking God’s presence in your life, practically speaking?
4. Exodus provided a deep dive into some of God’s laws (though by no means all of them, and surely not all of the additional laws that the Jewish leaders would install over the coming centuries). Read the passage from Matthew below. How can Jesus say that these two commandments encapsulate the entirety of God’s Law? In what sense or fashion?

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL:

Matthew 22:34–40

Jesus Tells Us About the Fulfillment of the Entire Law...

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”



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