

## EXCURSIONS INTO EXODUS (VOLUME 1)

### Introduction

The book of Exodus is a key book not only in the life of Moses and the people of Israel, but also in the whole plan of salvation which Almighty God has provided in his grace. It is therefore a book full of the greatness and glory of God, and this is particularly seen in the way he worked on behalf of his people in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians, and then revealing to them his holiness in the giving of the 10 commandments in chapter 20. Alongside this we see God's patience again and again as the people of Israel were so slow to believe God and trust him as they ought. In fact there are many vital spiritual lessons that are of great benefit to the Christian believer today. The apostle Paul, referring to the Old Testament, wrote in Romans 15:4, *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."* (See also 1 Corinthians 10:11.)

I am indebted to Peter Mayo who recorded the contents of this book in a series of radio programmes for Sound Words. The programmes and this book have been given the title, 'Excursions Into Exodus' because we are not looking at every chapter nor every detail, but picking out the main themes. It is our prayer that the Lord will graciously help you to understand this important part of

Holy Scripture and by his grace be able to apply its lessons to your own life today.

Derek French

April 2004

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### **Chapter 1 An unusual day in the life of Moses (Exodus 3:1-17)**

We begin with Exodus chapter 3 as it was quite a turning point in the life of Moses. Moses first appears in the Bible in Exodus chapter 2 and in the space of just that one chapter we cover the first 40 years of his life.

By the time of Moses' birth, Israel had been held in slavery in Egypt for many years. However, there came a time when Pharaoh decided to kill all the Hebrew baby boys, and it was around this time that Moses was born. According to Pharaoh's plan Moses should have been killed, but by God's over-ruling hand Moses was protected. His parents hid him for a while and then one day the Egyptian princess, Pharaoh's daughter, found him and took pity on him. Through this event God brought Moses into Pharaoh's family and under their protection for the duration of his childhood and while he was a young man. His mother was able to nurse him as he grew up and she would have taught him all about God and God's promise to Abraham. Moses continued to live as a prince in Egypt until he was 40 when he killed an Egyptian and had to run for his life.

**An extraordinary experience.**

Exodus chapter 3 opens 40 years later, by which time Moses was 80 years old. He was married and had his own children, living in the remote area of Midian as a shepherd. The chapter opens in a very ordinary manner (v1): *“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 desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”*

That day when Moses got up to move Jethro’s sheep to new pasture, he expected just another ordinary day. But that was not the case. In verse 2 we are told that Moses came across a bush that was burning but not being burnt up! The bush was on fire, but what should have been reduced to ash in seconds wasn’t; it just kept on burning. The leaves did not blacken or curl up and float away in the heat, neither did the twigs and branches twist and crumble and fall to the ground as they should. The bush continued to burn but was not consumed.

Of course, Moses wanted to see what was going on. As he got closer to the bush he heard a voice. He found himself in the presence of Almighty God. The voice was God’s voice. Moses listened, but with mounting dismay. Nothing could have prepared him for a message like this! God’s message to Moses was in three parts:

Firstly, God stated that he was going to rescue his people, Israel. He was going to bring Israel out of Egypt, away from Pharaoh and away from slavery. They were going to have a land of their own.

Secondly, Moses was going to be the person through whom God would bring about this rescue plan. This was instant promotion for Moses. The shepherd of sheep was to become a shepherd of people. Moses was to move from looking after Jethro’s sheep to looking after God’s children.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, God told Moses who he (God) was. The third part of the message was God’s revelation of himself.

**An important explanation.**

Let us try to imagine this meeting as Moses would have experienced it. With the burning bush in front of us, we see its light, we feel its heat and we hear the voice. Imagine we are standing in front of the burning bush. God is spelling out the substance of the task ahead. We can hardly believe our ears! We tremble as we absorb what God is saying! Weak at the knees, we listen as long as we can. However, there comes a point when we feel the need to take a step back. We feel the need to check again just who is actually speaking to us. We have got the flavour of the task and it is so big that we need to know just who is giving these instructions. We need to know something more about this person. We need to know his name.

Even our 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture understands the need to know someone’s name when they are talking to us. Usually we ask a person’s name at the beginning of the conversation. For Moses, however, and God’s people of Bible times, names had far more significance than we give them today. For Moses, and for the whole of Old

Testament culture, a person's name told something of the essential quality of that person. Parents chose their child's name for a reason. God himself named certain people for a particular reason. Names were sometimes changed for particular reasons.

Jacob is an example of this. In Genesis 32:28 we read: "*Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.*" An even earlier example is Abram. We read in Genesis 17:5, "*No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.*" We find another example in the New Testament, in Matthew 1:21: "[Mary] *will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*"

We can see that names through the Bible declare something of the character, or the 'essence', of a person. So when in Exodus 3:13 Moses asked God to declare his name, the force of his question was, "What are you like? I don't really know you. Tell me something by which I can understand you; tell me something I can pass on to the people when they ask me about you." And God's response was one of the most memorable in the Old Testament, because in verse 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.'*"

The significance of this name, 'I AM WHO I AM' — or as the footnote in many Bibles tell us, *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE* — is that God was, God is, and God always will

be. God is self-existent. This really means that God does not depend on anything outside himself for his existence. So when he describes himself as 'I AM' he is saying that he has been there from eternity past, right through to the present, and that he will be right into eternity future. God is outside of time; his life never ends.

Now, this was a very important truth about God that Moses was learning, and the underlying thought that would not have escaped Moses was, what a complete contrast to everything we are! There is a very important verse about this very thing in Psalm 39:5, where David tells us God has "*made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.*" The brevity of our lives, even if we lived for over 100 years, is really nothing in comparison with God's eternity.

The same thing is put very graphically in 1 Peter 1:24: "*All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall...*" That sums up our existence — in the broad expanse of time, our lives on earth are barely even noticed! What a difference there is between God's life and human life — his life never ceases.

Then in verse 15 God went on to give Moses the name by which he (God) was to be known: 'the LORD'. The LORD in capital letters in our English Bibles is pronounced 'Yahweh', or sometimes 'Jehovah' in Hebrew. This name means 'HE IS'. God calls himself, 'I AM'. His people are to call him 'HE IS'. 'LORD' means 'HE IS'. And so we see that his name sums up his eternity.

Moses wanted to know God's name, so God told him. But then he added, "However, Moses, you, and the people I have committed myself to, are to know me as LORD, HE IS. This is the name by which you are to address me." God's name captures his essence, so all through the Old Testament God's people spoke of God in terms such as, "the God of Israel *who is (present) from everlasting (past) to everlasting (future).*"

So first of all we see that God reveals his name, and thereby his character, to Moses.

### **A vital commitment.**

The relevance of knowing God's name goes back to the time of Abraham. Hundreds of years before, God had made a commitment to Abraham and his descendants. God had told Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "*I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.*" The commitment was that Abraham and his descendants were to have the privilege of entering into a relationship with God. This is a truly awe-inspiring fact: the Creator of the entire universe, and insignificant men and women! It seems incredible, but it was true. God committed himself to a relationship with Abraham's descendants.

Let's look at the value of that commitment by the following illustration. Cast your mind back to childhood days. This will be true in many parts of our world – you may have had a meaningful relationship with a pet which

has long since died. It might have been a pet rat or mouse or guinea pig. In some countries cats and dogs often become family pets, or it may be a lamb or a goat. Where is that pet animal now? Looking back, what lasting value was your commitment to that pet? What, ultimately, was the benefit for that little creature? Now that it's dead, your commitment was really of no lasting value at all. It was just your pet, your hobby; it kept you company. When it died you may have shed a tear or two, and then went and got another one. You may wonder what this has to do with Moses and the value of God's commitment to him. In Exodus chapter 3 we found Moses living in Midian minding sheep, when God told him that he had been chosen to bring about the rescue of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. What was this going to mean for Moses? What help was it going to be to him? We must go further and ask, what was in it for the ordinary every day Israelite who was mixing up bricks to build Egyptian cities, and dying so cheaply and so painfully as a slave? In fact, some may want to conclude that God did not seem to care for them at all, not even as much as some of us care for our pets!

So what is the value of this commitment, to Moses, to Israel, to anyone? Are we just God's pet, just a little hobby, a plaything for him while we are alive and then when we die there are plenty of others he can turn his attention to? The answer is in this chapter. It is an answer that God brings home very forcibly to Moses. God came to Moses at the burning bush and said (Exodus 3:6), "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac*

*and the God of Jacob.*” It is in the New Testament that Jesus himself tells us the force of God’s words at the burning bush. In Mark 12:26 Jesus said, “... *have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?*” Then Jesus said, “*He [God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*” So when we come to Exodus 3:6 it is as if God was saying, “Moses, listen carefully to what I am saying. I am the God of your father, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I AM at this very moment! I am (present tense) the God of these people because they are also in the present. What I am saying, Moses, is that they are with me NOW! God’s commitment to his people is for the whole of time and for all eternity.

The whole point of the episode of the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3 is that God is proving something to Moses from three different angles:

Firstly, “Look, Moses, I AM. In other words, I am the eternal one; I was, I am and I always will be. I exist because I exist; I need no other life to support me. I AM!

Secondly, “Look, Moses, look at the bush. It has not been burned to a cinder. It could burn on and on for ever, and still remain! It gives light; it gives heat; it expends all this energy, yet it is never consumed! This is what I am like. I AM LIFE!

And thirdly (the point that Jesus later elaborates), “Look at Abraham, Moses. I am his God; he is here with me! It is not a case of, ‘I was his God while he walked the hills of

Canaan’, but I am his God; he is here with me now, as are Isaac and Jacob. I have life that needs no feeding, always working, always giving, but never consumed. I have as much life at the end of a task as I had at the beginning. I have given that life to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. And my life, my everlasting life, the life that needs no feeding, no sustaining – this life, Moses, I GIVE YOU!

The whole thrust of God’s revelation to Moses here is not his power and his awesomeness; that would come later. Rather, God was revealing his eternity and the eternal life he gives to his people. This was the real value of the commitment. It is as if the Lord was saying, “Moses, if you die tomorrow in the heat of the battle, then it would not matter at all because you would come into my presence, and I would raise another in your place. The battle ahead with Pharaoh is my battle. It does not matter that you might die, or that my people might die before reaching the Promised Land, or before seeing the other promises made to Abraham fulfilled. If they die it is simply to come into my presence. I give my life to my people.” In short, the thrust of God’s revelation in Exodus 3 is his LIFE, his eternal life. Dying people — when they are GOD’S people — possess it!

### **New Testament parallels.**

Now, as we know, we live in the New Testament era, so does any of this have echoes in the New Testament? Remember what we have seen:

- (1) God declared himself to be the eternal ever-present one,
- (2) God declared how his people were to address him,
- (3) God declared that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live. After they died they were taken to be with God, to eternal life.

Now when Jesus came, he had something to say about each of these three points. God declared himself to Moses to be the eternal, ever-present one. What a shock it was for the people of the gospels when Jesus said to them (John 8:58), *"I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!"* Jesus used that ancient name (which God spoke to Moses) for himself. In other words, the Everlasting One was actually there, present on earth as Jesus Christ, standing right in front of them in human form. God's revelation of himself to Moses had to be somewhat remote — a voice from a burning bush. In the New Testament the remoteness is taken away. God reveals himself to men personally, in a way that they could understand and relate to!

Secondly, the way people were to address God and speak of him: God declared to Moses how his people should address him in Exodus 3:15 *"Lord ... This is ... the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."* All through the Old Testament God's people addressed God in that way. Nowhere would they speak of God in a lesser way than indicated to Moses. What a shock then when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray

*"just as John taught his disciples"* in Luke 11:1. What they expected was a prayer that began with 'LORD' as Moses had taught and as John would have done. What they got was a prayer that began, "Father". This would have been such revolutionary teaching for them. The gospels recognised the immense impact of this change because they record it using Jesus' own words; no one could misunderstand because Jesus himself gave permission. *"When you pray (says Jesus) say Father, hallowed be your name..."* 'Father' is how God's New Testament people address him from generation to generation.

The final parallel is this: God declared to Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live (present tense). That is, after they died they continued to exist and went to be with God. God's own life was given to them. That is the real substance of the promise to Abraham. Jesus came, saying in John 11:25 and 26, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* In other words, Jesus' life, his eternal life, is possessed by dying people, when they are "Jesus' people".

### **Application.**

Let us look back at the people of Israel in Moses' time, and compare ourselves with the common people who were enslaved in Egypt. Moses arrived out of the desert, talking about God and his rescue plan for Israel. The Israelite slaves had two choices: (1) to believe Moses and take his word for it. If they did, then they joined with other

believers and would be rescued. (2) Not to believe Moses, which meant rejecting his claim that he has been sent by God. In this case they were rejecting the message that God was giving through his servant, Moses. Those who refused Moses' message would not soil their hands with the sacrifice, and would not concern themselves with the blood that Moses had said was necessary to the rescue plan. However, rejecting Moses' message meant that rescue would pass them by. They would suffer the same crushing judgement as Egypt ultimately.

Now let us move forward in time to today and what we call the Christian or New Testament era. Moses was only a messenger used by God, but in Jesus Christ God sent the real thing. Jesus was God. God revealed things about himself to Moses and Moses then went to tell the people. But Jesus Christ was God; he was in himself God's own revelation; he came himself with a message to all people.

In order to perform the rescue of the Israelites Moses confronted Pharaoh, the enslaver. But Moses, of course, was only a man; it was God's power that came to bear on Pharaoh. But Jesus Christ was God and in order to perform the rescue of people's souls Jesus confronted sin, and Satan who enslaves our souls. Sin and Satan were defeated. Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, strange as it might seem, was the act that rescues people from slavery to sin and Satan.

But we have got to believe it! Israel had to believe Moses if they were to be rescued. We have got to believe Jesus Christ if we are to be rescued from slavery to sin and

Satan. Physically, we are all on the road to death. Some of us are young and might have many years ahead. Some of us are older and we know we have not got long. But dying people, when they believe the message of Jesus Christ, are God's people. And God's people possess life, his life, eternal life.

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## **Chapter 2 The Lord, The Rescuer (Exodus 5:1 – 6:12)**

### **A difficulty and a comfort to recognise.**

Sometimes the people of God find themselves in terrible circumstances. One of the most difficult is when the Lord's people have to face persecution. And sadly this is the experience of many Christian believers in our world today. Just because we belong to the Lord does not make us immune from the pressures of life, which at times can be very intense. Indeed, with regard to persecution in particular, Jesus himself told his disciples in John 16:33, "*In this world you will have trouble.*" So we should not be surprised when we face hostility and opposition from those who do not yet believe in the Lord Jesus. Indeed, for many believers the trouble they have faced has actually deprived them of their lives as they have been martyred for the cause of Christ. So we must take the words of Jesus seriously. Trouble, even severe trouble, may come to us as his followers. Those who teach the error that following Christ means we will never have any problems and only have prosperity are clearly contradicting the teaching of the Saviour. We must beware of such people and not be led astray by them.

However, we also need to remember that when Jesus gave this instruction to his disciples he added a very important additional statement. He said, *“But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* And that is a great reassurance for us when we find ourselves in deep trouble. The final victory is his, and we share in it with him.

This leads us into the situation we find in Exodus chapters 5 and 6 where we see that the people of Israel were not only facing trouble, but severe trouble. At the beginning of Exodus we find God’s people in Egypt. The book of Genesis tells us how they were invited there hundreds of years before during the days of Joseph, but at this point they were being held against their will. In fact, they existed as slaves under a ruthless dictator, Pharaoh.

By the middle of Exodus they will find themselves free once again. 430 years after arriving in Egypt they will be on their way to a new life in a new homeland. But the passage we are looking at in this chapter covers a period just a few weeks before that great event, that ‘exodus’. We need also to note that the events in Exodus chapters 5 and 6 mark the beginning of the end of Pharaoh, the beginning of the end of his grip on the Hebrew nation. Pharaoh is shortly to be forced to let Israel go.

Now, Moses played a vital part in this event. You will remember that he was called by God at the burning bush. Now he was back in the land of his birth and his people, but very much against his own wishes. He had been called to confront Pharaoh and demand freedom for the Israelite slaves. Now, there have been a number of dramatic films

about these events and usually the actor playing the part of Moses is someone strong and imposing, with broad, muscular shoulders and giving the appearance of command and authority. At the age of 40 Moses could well have been just like that, a solid forceful figure, a capable and authoritative man. The Bible tells us he was *“educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians ... and ... powerful in speech and action”*. Take, for example, that day recorded in Exodus 2 verse 11 onwards, when Moses came across an Egyptian beating up an Israelite slave. Moses did not just slink away, not wanting to get involved, but instead he attempted to sort out the argument and finished by killing the Egyptian. At that point Moses thought it could be the beginning of the overthrow of Pharaoh. If the man Moses had saved had gone home and spread the message ... if Israel had picked up the initiative and followed Moses’ example, then it could have been the downfall of Pharaoh. Instead it was the beginning of a downward spiral for Moses that would reduce him to his knees. It is this downward sequence of events that I want us to concentrate on first of all.

### **A downward spiral.**

Moses killed the Egyptian. Inevitably, people heard about what he did. But instead of a popular uprising, Moses found his own people turned against him, and Pharaoh would execute Moses as soon as he discovered what had happened. So Moses had to run away. The spark that might have ignited revolution and freedom was extinguished barely before it reached the touch paper. It

was a great failure for Moses, and he was shaken to the core. As far as Moses was concerned, that was the end. His confidence was shattered so that he would never again voluntarily make a bid to win Israel's freedom. The conviction that he even belonged to Israel was under question, too, because we learn later that he decided not to circumcise his son. For Moses, it seems, the memory of the people of God's promise was put behind him and forgotten. It was a very subdued Moses who spent his subsequent years surviving as a shepherd.

So 40 years later, it was not a confident Moses who approached God at the burning bush. When God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt he said (Exodus 3:11), "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" God wanted Moses to go back, but Moses had recovered none of his self assurance. He expressed both fear and dismay at God's command. God pressed on, and as he did so, Moses' courage diminished by the minute. In Exodus 4:10 we read, "*O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.*" So Moses certainly did not want to go.

However, God persisted because Moses was his chosen servant. He had to go back and confront Pharaoh. As God continued to press Moses, we see the hero of 40 years ago now begging to be let off: "*O Lord, please send someone else to do it*", he said in Exodus 4:13. This was a true crisis of confidence for Moses, but God persisted and finally persuaded Moses that he must return to Egypt, in spite of the fact that he felt so inadequate.

Exodus chapters 5 and 6 are set probably a few weeks after Moses' conversation with God at the burning bush. Moses was back in Egypt and was waiting for an audience with Pharaoh. Together with his brother, Aaron, he put on a brave face and in Exodus 5:1 we read what Moses said to Pharaoh: "*This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'*" This was precisely the kind of thing that God had told Moses to say; it was brief, explicit, and it was not bad for a man who thought he could not put the message across clearly. In a strange way it does show a measure of courage in Moses, in spite of his sense of inadequacy.

But Pharaoh could not believe his ears! What was this he has just heard? "*Who is the Lord,*" Pharaoh responds, "*that I should obey him and let Israel go?*" "Who is the Lord? What has he got to do with me? Don't be so ridiculous, Moses." And so Pharaoh laughed the preposterous idea aside. However, Moses and Aaron were not put off by Pharaoh's response and they pressed on to explain further. Pharaoh became very angry: "*Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labour? Get back to your work!*" Poor Moses! He was not keen to face Pharaoh in the first place, and then after just one encounter the result was that the suffering of the children of Israel was to be increased considerably. They now had to make bricks for Pharaoh without having any of the necessary straw supplied, and yet the same quota was expected from them each day.

For a man experiencing a crisis of confidence this was the last thing Moses needed. To fail again in such spectacular

fashion was a devastating blow, but worse was yet to come. The Israelite foremen felt quite let down. They had been prepared to give Moses a chance, but he had failed. Bypassing Moses, they made their own way to Pharaoh to try to repair the damage he had caused. But all they discovered was the deep trouble that Moses had got them into. This caused them to turn against Moses, as we read in Exodus 5:20-21: *“When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, ‘May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.’”* Moses, servant of God and leader of Israel, was shown up as having absolutely no credibility whatsoever. It was as if the foremen said, *“Moses, this is a serious situation here. Don’t you realise that people are exhausted, people are suffering, people are starving. All you have succeeded in doing is to put a sword in the Egyptians hands to kill us! You haven’t helped at all!”* Sadly, invoking the name of the Lord, they even cursed him: *“May the Lord look upon you and judge you!”*

### **Two important lessons.**

Moses had been doing his best to obey God in the best way that he could and yet this was the response to his obedience. He was devastated, and in chapter 5:22 he was heartbroken and cried out: *“O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me?”* He was at rock bottom; if ever a big strong man cried, it must have been then! Moses must have asked why the Lord was working in this way, and the answer is that the Lord had

driven Moses to the end of himself. At 40 years of age, Moses was strong and brave and ready to take charge in his own strength. 40 years later, Moses had no strength, no ability to command, no confidence, no friends, no weapons in his armoury, no personal power or resourcefulness that he could call on; he had nothing. Moses had to learn that he was unable to rescue God’s people.

The people were helpless, discouraged and weakened by hard labour. The foremen were helpless, angry and disillusioned with the man they trusted. And Moses was helpless. His own weakness had been all too publicly exposed. Humanly speaking there was no hope. All the options were exhausted. Moses could not rescue God’s people; no one could. And that’s the first really important lesson: humanly speaking, rescue is impossible.

The second lesson comes in the words that begin chapter 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.’”* What follows is a declaration of supreme confidence and supreme certainty: *“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 judgement. 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. 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.”*

Humanly speaking rescue is impossible but now we are not speaking humanly. God is speaking. He is the supreme rescuer. He has the power, the strength and the authority. Rescue is a certainty: "I am the Lord; I will do it." Israel cannot save themselves; the foremen cannot save them; even Moses cannot save them. The second lesson is that God can save - and he will!

### **The relevance for us.**

The good news is that this is not just a historical tale, it does have relevance to New Testament believers. There are two passages in the New Testament that provide the key to our understanding of Moses. They tell us that the major comparison we need to draw is not between ourselves and Moses, rather it is between the Lord Jesus Christ and Moses.

The first line of application is to do with salvation itself. Satan binds people in their sin; they are enslaved in their sin by Satan. Sin will be judged by God; all of us have sinned so we are all under God's judgement. In addition, people are powerless to break out from Satan's slavery. We cannot rescue ourselves. Our pastors and elders cannot rescue us. The rulers of our country (however good they may be) cannot rescue us from God's judgement. No one can rescue us. Humanly speaking, rescue is impossible. We are slaves to Satan, and that is the end of it.

However, God can carry out the rescue. Indeed, God must carry out the rescue if men and women are to be released from the slavery to sin that leads to judgement. The account of Moses is a living picture of this very fact. What

do we see when we look at Jesus? We see a man, a genuine person who lived and walked with men and women. But he was more than that. Remember, Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt. And we have just followed those painful, excruciating experiences that Moses had to go through in order that he, and Israel, (and we, too) would understand that rescue is not brought about by Moses' power or ingenuity. Once Moses was exhausted and had no more self belief, no more self confidence, at that point God stepped in: "**Now, you just do what I tell you Moses. I am the Lord. My power will rescue you.**"

That is what Moses did. Emptied of himself, by faith he did everything that God commanded. But Moses was a man, born a sinful human being, just like all Israel and just like us (cf. Hebrews 3:1-6). Hebrews chapter 3 describes Moses as being "*of the house*". In other words, although he was faithful (that is, he rescued God's people by obeying God's commands) he was still, and only, one of them, a faulty, sinful human being. He was "*of the house*" that was rescued.

In contrast, what do we see when we look at Jesus? We see a man but he was more than simply "*of the house*". He was "*the builder of the house*" as Hebrews puts it. This house, the one that Jesus built, is the church, the world wide body of God's people. Moses' rescue of the house of Israel is a living picture. It helps us understand Jesus Christ's rescue of all those who put their faith in him. The book of Hebrews tells us that if we are Christians then we are his house. Our salvation, our rescue from slavery to sin and Satan, had to be performed by God himself. No person

“of the house”, in other words, no normal sinful person, could do it. Jesus, however, was perfect. More than that, Jesus was God. God carried out our rescue; it was his initiative; he took all the steps that were necessary. **Moses is a picture of Jesus Christ.** And God’s mercy in sending his own Son to rescue us is truly wonderful.

There is a second point to emphasise here. We accept that God called Moses to be his servant to lead Israel to freedom. We accept it was God’s rescue, although Moses was his human agent. We accept it was a picture of the greater rescue described in the New Testament. But why did God have to send his own son, Jesus Christ, to be a man? Why was it that when God performed the rescue that we are part of, our rescue, our salvation, that God himself came as a man? Why not a ‘power’ or a ‘force’ that we could observe and marvel at, some sort of ‘cosmic miracle’?

When we consider the battle between Moses and Pharaoh it represented an earthly battle, one nation pitted against another so we expect to be ‘earthbound’. But why didn’t this heavenly battle, God versus Satan, take place ‘out there’ in the heavens? Why did that become earthbound as well, as God’s Son took on a human body in Jesus Christ? The book of Hebrews answers this very issue in chapter 2. The wonderful fact is that mankind means everything to God. We are lower than the angels. But in God’s order of priorities we are higher than the angels! The order is God, mankind, then angels! Satan is an angel so he is actually beneath us in God’s order. In Hebrews 2:5-8 we read, “*It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come ...*

*you crowned him* (i.e. man) *with glory and honour.*” The writer goes on to explain that although it is mankind to whom God has subjected the world to come, while we are still in our sinful state that fact will remain masked. So when Satan caused Adam to sin he actually had no right to do that. Satan’s war was against God, but mankind was between Satan and God. Drag mankind down (drag God’s prized creation down) and Satan would have dealt a blow against his true enemy who is God himself.

The question still remains, why send his Son to be a man? The answer is, simply because Satan had tried to defeat God through man. Therefore, it was just and fitting, appropriate, right and proper, and lawful that God should defeat Satan also through a man.

We can conclude, then, that Moses is a picture. God defeated Pharaoh through the man, Moses, so Moses helps us to understand how God defeated Satan through his own Son who came as a man, Jesus Christ. Though still free, Satan is defeated!

Let me close by drawing your attention to the opening words of Hebrews chapter 3: “*Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*”

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### **Chapter 3 The first nine plagues (An example from Exodus 9:13-35)**

Have you noticed that as we look back over the years of our lives we find that many of them fade and are forgotten? Things happened and they may have been interesting and

happy years but nothing makes them stand out from the rest. Of course, as we get older our memories are not as accurate as they once were. Yet, on the other hand, some years do stand out, brimming with significance, such as the year we left school or started our first job, the year we got married, or the years when new babies entered our lives. These were life-changing events. It is also true that not all memories are good ones. Perhaps we had a major accident, or a serious illness, and that made the year stand out from the rest. Indeed, it may have affected us ever since. We may remember the year a much loved friend or relative died; we never really fully recover from such events. As we look back over our lives, certain events make some of the years more significant than the rest.

### **The plagues in Egypt.**

It was like that for the Egyptians, and one year in particular: the year of the plagues, the year of Israel's exodus from Egypt. The plagues probably spanned only a period of about nine months. But this whole series of dramatic events was to bring to an end this particular Pharaoh's dynasty. There were ten plagues in all, and the final one was unlike any of the others in that it resulted in the death of the firstborn in the land. The plagues started with water changing into blood, followed by a plague of frogs. Then there was the plague of gnats, followed by one of flies. Another plague affected the livestock, and then there was the plague of boils. This was followed by the devastating plague of hail, then the plague of locusts, and

these were then followed by the plague of darkness. So it was a memorable year indeed for the Egyptians.

Each of these plagues followed a regular pattern. Take the plague of hail, for example. This was the seventh plague and we read about it in Exodus chapter 9. All the relevant ingredients are there, showing the cycle that was repeated over and over again. It began when Moses demanded Israel's freedom from their slavery and Pharaoh refused. The Lord sent a plague upon the land. Pharaoh relented and Moses prayed that God would remove the plague. Once everything was back to normal, Pharaoh changed his mind. Then we find this cycle was repeated all over again, then again, and again, and so on. These were horrifying events. They were national disasters, involving real people and real suffering. A genuine historical nation was devastated over a few months by these plagues.

Let us look at another example: the plague that affected the livestock, recorded in the early part of Exodus 9. It was not simply a portion of the national herd that was killed, it was all of it: cattle, sheep, goats, all died. And it did not stop there either. The horses, the donkeys and the camels died too. In other words, it also affected the beasts of burden, the animals the Egyptians relied on for all their heavy work on the soil and for moving large loads. The already weakened Egyptians now had to dispose of thousands or even millions of their animals. It must have been a terrible time. Each plague brought its own difficulty and suffering for the Egyptian people.

### **Lessons from the plagues.**

God's teaching is very clear. It is spelled out for us plainly, as Moses recorded the events. Before the plague of water turned into blood (Exodus 7:17) God said, "*By this you will know that I am the Lord.*" Then at the end of the plague of frogs in chapter 8 verse 10, Pharaoh was allowed to dictate the timing of the end of the plague. God said that this was for a specific reason, namely, "*so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God.*" Again, before the plague of flies in chapter 8 verse 22 God said, "*So that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land...*" And God goes on to explain that he is going to make a distinction between Egypt and Israel. Israel is not going to be affected by this plague. God said (Exodus 9:14-16), "*... so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.*"

God's word to Israel at this time was also along the same lines. Before the plague of locusts in chapter 10 God said he was sending these miraculous signs "*... so that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD.*" There is a striking similarity about the plagues because, firstly, we need to know who is speaking. God told Moses to say these very words, and Moses quoted them in the first person because it was the word of God. It was God speaking, because it was God's rescue plan, not Moses'.

Moses, remember, was powerless. He knew himself to be weak and powerless. He had been shown publicly to be weak and powerless. Pharaoh, the elders of Israel, the foreman who oversaw the work that Israel did for the Egyptians, the people of Israel themselves, everyone knew that Moses could not rescue them. This was God's rescue, so God told Moses what he was to say; this was God speaking.

It was important that there was to be no misunderstanding. The whole purpose of these plagues was that people should 'know'. Something was to be learned, and the lesson was to reach far and wide. In fact, it was to reach throughout the whole earth. Notice carefully how the statements to Pharaoh broaden. Each one builds on the one before. Each statement shows another dimension of God. Firstly, there was a statement about God's identity: "*By this you will know that I am the Lord.*" Then came a statement about his uniqueness: "*so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God.*" Thirdly, there was a statement to say the Lord really holds the power: "*So that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land...*" Finally, for Pharaoh, there was a statement about world power: "*...there is no one like me in all the earth!*" He went on to say that these things were to ensure God's power and his name were proclaimed throughout the whole earth.

### **Lessons for God's people at that time.**

Israel had to learn the same truths about God, but for them it had more of a relational dimension. These things were to be taught by these believers to their children, and their

children's children. These events had particular relevance for them as God's people. There was something of enormous significance happening here. This was no local tribal skirmish. The knowledge was to go round the world: Israel was being rescued by God, the Almighty God, the Lord. God himself fought this battle, and there is no one like him in all the earth. God was teaching the world that it is he who rescues his people. This is summed up in Deuteronomy 4:34: "*Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?*"

Secondly, God coined a special name for the actions he took on Israel's behalf: 'signs and wonders'. For example, in Exodus 7:3 God says, "*...though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he [Pharaoh] will not listen to you.*" So God described the events surrounding this rescue as "*my signs*", says God, and "*my wonders*".

These signs and wonders were to point to God himself. "*I am the Lord...there is no one like the Lord our God... I, the Lord, am in this land... There is no one like me in all the earth ...my power and my name is to be proclaimed in all the earth.*" As we read through the Old Testament we find that some of the Israelites understood the message fully. The Old Testament writers encouraged Israel to remember how God rescued them from Egypt. They reminded them that the events of the Exodus were the

supreme demonstration of the greatness and the might of God. For example, we read in Psalm 77 verse 11: "*I will remember your miracles of long ago...With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.*" 'Signs' and 'wonders' were things done by God to demonstrate who he was, and to demonstrate his power. Their purpose was to declare to the entire world that this God could, and would, rescue his people. However, notice in passing that God never once showed his face. The face that the world saw was that of his chosen servant, Moses. God worked signs and wonders through Moses and God accredited Moses through these signs and wonders.

So the first main point taught was that God is the one who rescues his people. And the second point was that God surrounded his rescue with signs and wonders. The signs and wonders declared his power to rescue his people, and they accredited his chosen servant Moses through whom God's work was done.

There is a parallel here with what God was doing in the New Testament era. Look at Acts chapter 2 and the events of the day of Pentecost. Remember, Moses had said hundreds of years before, "*Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation ... by great and awesome deeds...*" In Acts chapter 2 we see that God was doing exactly that again. He was building a new kingdom: the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light, the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ, the kingdom of those who love God, the kingdom of a saved, brought out, redeemed people. Once again God demonstrated his power by

mighty acts, by signs and wonders. This is the point that Peter was making as he proclaimed God's words on the day of Pentecost.

Firstly, let us look at Acts 2 verses 19 and 20: *"I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord."* Peter here is referring back to the prophet Joel, and Joel (when he wrote those words) was referring back to the events of the Exodus, the time when God saved Israel through Moses. Joel was using those images of the past, the Exodus, to say something about the future. But in Acts 2, in the light of recent events, Peter was able to put these images (written down by Joel) into their correct context. In other words, Peter puts Joel's words into the context for which they were written, that is, the day of Pentecost. Peter, in Acts 2, and the prophet Joel are calling on the imagery of the first rescue event, the Exodus in the time of Moses. Peter recalls them in order to prepare his audience to understand that they have just witnessed the second rescue event. Then, having taught them to understand that they have witnessed this second rescue event, Peter spells out who God's chosen servant was this time (Acts 2:22): *"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."*

We can say this in another way. What would be the point of Peter talking to his Jewish audience, thousands of

people, in obscure terms that they couldn't understand? Momentous events have just taken place with deep practical significance for all people:

The dramatic death of Jesus

- followed by his resurrection
- followed by his ascension
- followed by the spectacular outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

These people were confused. In all their lives they had never seen or heard anything like this, and Peter was not there to confuse matters even further. He was there to clarify and to explain. The clarification and the explanation have to be done within the framework of what these people already knew and understood. What a waste of time for Peter to quote so much from Joel if his hearers were unable to fit the recent sequence of events into it! Peter quotes Joel because Joel spoke of the future, deliberately using imagery from the past, the events of the Exodus. For Joel there was always going to be a greater rescue than the Exodus, and there was always going to be a greater rescuer than Moses to be seen before the coming Day of the Lord. Joel was effectively saying, *"Before the coming day of the Lord there is going to be another, greater rescue. And then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Peter quoted Joel to remind his hearers about this, and so he identifies Jesus as God's chosen rescuer. In Acts 2:36 he finally reaches the point of saying that Jesus was not just God's chosen servant: *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made*

*this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” In other words Jesus was Lord himself, as well as the chosen rescuer.

What the apostle Peter said in Acts was so simple to understand that the people realised its significance immediately. They had killed God’s servant. They had killed God’s chosen one. They had killed the Lord, the Christ, the rescuer. And since they had killed him, what hope was there for them now? Who was going to be their rescuer now? They were devastated by the reality of what they had done. They cried out, *“Brothers, what shall we do?”* And Peter told them, *“Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”* The point is that signs and wonders surround this rescue event, demonstrating God’s intention and power to save his people. Signs and wonders accredit God’s chosen servant: *“By this you will know that I am the Lord,”* says Almighty God. No wonder, then, that the man of lawlessness, the agent of Satan, mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2, will use signs and wonders! Satan wants the man of lawlessness to use signs and wonders because Satan wants to say, *“By this you will know that I am the lord.”* *“There is no one as great as I am. I want my power to be seen; I want my name to be worshipped.”*

For us, the work of rescue has been finished, completed. There is nothing more to be done. But Satan wants us to believe that there is more to be done. So he is going to mimic the things that characterise and surround God’s rescue in order to deceive men: the signs and the wonders. If we are still looking for signs and wonders in our present

age then it means that we are still looking for another rescuer. And it means that we are not accepting Peter’s explanation of events.

If we simply gaze at the apostles of the book of Acts and say, “Look at them; if they showed this power, then we should show this power too,” then we have missed the point. They were a part of the second rescue event in the same way that Aaron was a part of the first one. The man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2 will come with the appearance of a rescuer. If we are still looking for signs and wonders in our present age, then he will supply all the signs that we desire. And he will make sure, of course, that our false expectations are kept alive by suitable appetisers before he actually arrives. If it were possible he really would deceive us. This is a serious warning not to be deceived by false prophets and teachers but to stay faithful to Jesus, who is the only Saviour.

### **Conclusion.**

God effected a full and complete rescue for us who live in New Testament times, through Jesus Christ. Unlike Moses, who was a man, Jesus was the Son of God. In God’s providence Moses lost his high princely status and comforts as a result of Moses’ own mistakes and weaknesses, his own humanity. But Jesus gave up his high princely status and comforts voluntarily. He did not have to, but he did. Moses suffered grief and humiliation in front of Pharaoh and his own people. Jesus volunteered for that! Jesus voluntarily took on our infirmities and carried our sorrows; he was pierced, he was crushed, he was led

like a lamb to the slaughter. No one has seen God's face; in the Old Testament rescue they saw Moses, but for the greater rescue of the New Testament, for us, we see Jesus!

### **Chapter 4 The Passover (Exodus 12)**

We come now to Exodus chapter 12, which is linked with two great events: the final plague in Egypt, the death of all the firstborn of men and cattle which is described in Exodus chapter 11, and the institution of the Passover and the sacrifice of the Passover lamb which is what chapter 12 is about. In effect, the book of Exodus describes the birth of this nation of Israel. Now for many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what we know as modern day Israel did not come into existence until May 14<sup>th</sup> 1948. So we must not confuse that relatively modern event with the origin of Israel. Israel had its beginnings around 3 1/2 thousand years ago. Further, we must not think that the birth of this nation is restricted to Israel itself because in Exodus 12 we read of something that happened that reaches far, far forwards into later history and even impacts us today. The reason Exodus 12 is so important is because it tells us how to understand Jesus and his death! It shows us how Jesus impacts on our lives! Jesus and his death is explained by Exodus chapter 12.

#### **The Passover and Jesus.**

Let us use an illustration. It often takes a person of real genius to see a scientific truth for the first time and to write it down. The truth has always been there! But one day someone 'discovers' it and they write it down in very

concise terms as a 'law' or an equation that expresses the truth they've discovered. One thinks of Sir Isaac Newton's understanding of force and the mathematics he wrote down to make it possible for us to see how forces work. We use these equations to help us understand why cars crumple up when they crash into each other, and engineers can work out how to make vehicles much safer as a result. Take, for example, a simple mathematical equation such as  $2 + 3 = 5$ .

Now in that little equation was the '=' or the equals sign.. It tells us that the values on the left of the equals sign add up to exactly the same as the value on the right side, in this case 5. Now, as we deal with Exodus 12 and what it means in a sense we find ourselves coming to terms with an equation, a truth. Strictly speaking, of course, Moses did not actually write an equation in Exodus 12. In fact he could not because God's ongoing revelation of himself in Moses' day was not yet complete. If we use our illustration of the equation, he had only part of it that he could write down for Moses simply did not have all the facts available then that were available many years later. By the time we get to the apostles Paul and Peter in the New Testament, God's revelation was complete. By their time in history all the facts were available. Taught by the Holy Spirit they were able to write down this equation:

Jesus Christ = Our Passover Lamb

Now, of course, they did not write it quite like that! They wrote it in words. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*" Peter wrote in 1

Peter 1:8-19, “...you were redeemed ...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” Now those words of Peter and Paul express the foundation on which our Christian faith stands, but we need to know something about the two parts if we are going to benefit from it personally.

1. Jesus Christ - Who was he? Where did he live? When did he live? What did he do?
2. The Passover - What was it? What did it represent? And in particular, what part did the lamb play in the Passover?

Paul and Peter were the best placed people to understand and to write down this truth because they lived when Jesus lived. So they tell us who Jesus was. They tell us what he did. They give us a diary of the important and relevant parts of Jesus Christ’s life and work. They understood how God had revealed himself to men and women. They understood that in the Old Testament God has giving a preview of the work of Jesus Christ ... a detailed and accurate ‘living picture’. This Old Testament picture teaches us how Jesus should be understood. So those words of Paul and Peter can be summarised by saying: **Jesus Christ’s death on the cross was to rescue people from God’s judgement.**

Peter and Paul’s allusions to the Passover and to the lamb without defect were very carefully chosen. Also the Passover had its root in one specific event in history, the time this nation of Israel was born, in Exodus 12.

Exodus 12 begins with a new beginning! God decided that a new nation was a good time to start a new calendar. So whatever day or week or month Moses and his people thought they were in, they were to scrap it and start all over again. And we have in Exodus 12 the very first minute of the very first hour of the very first day of the very first month of Israel’s existence! And we find that with that new calendar there were also very definite marker points through the year, of which the Passover was to be the first. We must also add that when Jesus died on the cross, that too was a new beginning. The kingdom of God had come! The New Testament church could now come into existence. And very importantly, there need never be the sacrifice of a Passover lamb ever again. But let us stay with Exodus 12 and the first Passover.

The head of every household had to go to his flock of sheep or goats and choose a lamb which was to be perfect with no blemish or defect at all. That very phrase that Moses writes in Exodus is picked up by Peter when he describes Jesus Christ as ‘*a lamb without defect.*’ The lamb in Exodus also had to be male because it was a picture of Jesus who was perfect and sinless. Humanly speaking, there was no reason for Jesus to die. He was not ill neither was he a criminal. He was just like the lamb of Exodus 12 which we will now consider.

Once selected the lamb was taken care of until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month. Then on that particular day in the late afternoon, at twilight, it was to be killed. The killing however was not the end of the process! It is what

followed that carries the weight of meaning of the sacrifice. The death of the lamb was going to yield two components.

### **a. The body.**

There would be a body and there would be blood. As far as the body was concerned none of it was to remain. It was to be thrown out with the rubbish and completely destroyed. In fact if we came along even just a week after the Passover searching for the body of this dead lamb it would have disappeared because it was not to be left to decay in the ground. God's instructions were that the body was to be eaten and what could not be eaten was to be burned! We also discover in Exodus 12 that in the whole process none of this lamb's bones was to be broken either. And that again is a picture of what happened to Jesus. In Jesus' day it was normal for the Roman soldiers to break the legs of the people who were crucified. But, and this is interesting, not with Jesus! When he was crucified circumstances prevailed that his legs were not broken. And no evidence of Jesus' dead body has ever or will ever be found. That is a fact! It is a fact because Jesus rose again three days after his death.

### **b. The blood.**

Perhaps the second component of the Passover sacrifice, the blood, is the one that comes most easily to our remembrance. God's instructions to Israel were that the head of the house must take some of the blood outside and paint it on the top and the sides of the doorframe. The blood could not be seen by the occupants of the house

because it was on the outside. They had to put it there and then come back into the house and stay there until the Passover had been completed. The reason was that in this final plague in Egypt God would send the angel of death to each home and the firstborn in every family, including animals, would die. The only place where this would not happen was where the blood of the Passover lamb was painted on the doorposts and lintels of the home. Then the angel of death would see the blood and literally 'pass over' that house and everyone inside would be safe, no firstborn member of the family would die. And here is the crux of the whole matter. The blood painted on the doorframe indicated a sacrifice had been made. A lamb had died in order for that blood to be there. That blood was all that stood between the occupants of that house and judgement! Everyone in Exodus 12 is under God's judgement. Everyone! It did not matter whether they were Egyptian or Israelite. There were no exceptions! There were no 'good guys' not even Moses himself.

In the previous chapter, Exodus 11, we read this in verses 4 and 5. *"This is what the Lord says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die (Egypt referring to the whole land) , from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill.'"* Note, it involved the slaves as well as their masters which meant it included the Israelites as well as the Egyptians because they were slaves in Egypt themselves. They were all under judgement! The importance of this must be emphasised

because if the people did not believe Moses, if they did not respond in faith to what he was saying they needed to do, then that household would bear the judgement that God had prescribed. The firstborn son of the household would die! Everyone was under this judgement! But, as already mentioned, where the household sacrificed the lamb and painted the blood on the door posts, everyone inside that house was safe. The lamb had died as a substitute. The lamb died in order that God's judgement would 'pass-over' the house where the blood was painted outside on the doorposts. From the inside of the house the occupants could not see the blood, because the blood was on the outside as a sign to God! God had said, "*When I see the blood I will pass-over you*" "*you will be safe.*" And this is where the direct parallel is seen between the Passover lamb and the death of Jesus. Significantly Jesus' death on the cross took place at the exact time of the year when the Jews celebrated Passover. It could not be any other way. In fact the Jewish authorities had tried to have Jesus executed before that time and they simply failed! God planned it that way to complete the evidence to the truth that Jesus has become the Passover lamb.

### **Application.**

First, we need to note we are all under God's judgement because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23). We need to be very clear about that. No one can say, "I'm OK. My religion, my good behaviour, my 'anything else' - will see me through God's judgement." We can listen to this radio programme every week. We can go to church and join

heartily in all the hymns the believers there sing. But it makes no difference. When we face God in judgement unprepared we will not survive! His judgement will crush us. BUT, and this is very important and most precious BUT ...**God has provided a way of escape!** That Old Testament Passover was real and necessary for Israel. It was important they did precisely what God instructed them to do. He told them how to escape his judgement. He gave them all the information they needed to be released from it. Now that Old Testament picture has served its purpose because it teaches us of the greater provision that God made to allow us to escape his judgement. God sent his own Son to be the substitute sacrifice. Jesus Christ came from God, he was God (John 1:1). God loved the world so much that he sent his own Son to be the substitute lamb. God does not simply tell us what is necessary for our salvation; he has done it for us as well in sending Jesus to the cross! What God requires from us is a response of faith. We need personally to believe that Jesus is God's provision for the forgiveness of our sins. He was sacrificed in our place. You see, it is no good claiming that because we cannot see his blood then we cannot believe, because neither could the firstborn of Israel see the blood. Remember they were on the inside the blood was on the outside. Also, the firstborn did not kill the lamb. The firstborn did not put the blood on the doorframe. It was the head of the household who did that. What comfort then did the firstborn have that the deed had been done and that his life would be preserved? Well, he was eating it in the Passover meal! Jesus said in John 6:57 " ... *the one who*

*feeds on me will live because of me.*” He was not suggesting people turn into cannibals. He was saying that each of us has got to come to terms with Jesus. We have got to come to terms with the fact that we are all under judgement. By faith we must accept him as our substitute if we are to survive the judgement. Paul wrote to those who had put their faith in Jesus in 1 Corinthians.5: 7, *“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”* And Peter wrote to those who had put their faith in Jesus in 1 Peter 1:18-19 *“...you were redeemed ...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”* We need now to put our faith in him too, and if we do, God will pardon us all our sins and through Jesus deliver us from the coming wrath.

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## **Chapter 5 The crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14 & 15)**

### **An illustration.**

How would you answer someone who asks you, ‘what is your experience of God? What does he mean to you?’ Well, imagine that you were listening to a conversation between an unbeliever who had no personal knowledge of God themselves and a Christian believer. Let’s call the believer Joe and the unbeliever Bill, and Bill had asked Joe those very questions to which, after some thought the believer Joe replied, “Well, my life was in a bit of a mess. God came into my life and now everything is wonderful!” Then Bill very quickly said, “My life was a bit of a mess too! I realised that if I carried on behaving like I was that I was going nowhere! So I made up my mind to sort

MYSELF out. Now my life is wonderful too! No Joe, you have not answered my question. Tell me why is your God is special?” Joe tries to think of something appropriate, and it comes to him. “God keeps me safe and guides me. When I have to make a decision I talk to God about it and he tells me what I should do. I asked God that I should get the job I had applied for, and he answered my prayer and I did!” But then unbeliever Bill answers, “Well, my friends and I don’t ask God for anything! But we’ve all got good jobs and we sort things out ourselves! You still haven’t answered my question. Tell me what God means to you? What special thing has he done for you?” Getting desperate and feeling under pressure another thought comes to Joe’s mind: “I was diagnosed with a terminal illness a few years ago. My church prayed for me, and then one day I went to the hospital for treatment and the doctor said it was completely gone! They couldn’t understand it!” Then after a long pause in the conversation, unbeliever Bill eventually replies, “Well! I’ve got a friend whose disease just went away! No one prayed for him, but now he’s just fine!”

Now obviously I’m contriving this illustration, but it is not so unrealistic! So far as this illustration is concerned, Joe has not really answered Bill’s questions in a satisfying way. He still has not got to the heart of what the Christian’s experience of God really is which is unique and different from an unbeliever’s! It has got to be something that cannot be matched! Strange as it may seem things that are apparently spectacular or miraculous do not really hit

that target. They do not really qualify because they can be copied, and we have examples right here in Exodus. In Exodus 7:10 we read, *“Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh ... Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake.”* That was spectacular! No doubt about it. But now read verse 11 of the same chapter. *“Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts.”*

Now Moses was saying and doing what God had instructed him to, and God had already warned him not to expect an encouraging response! Also Moses and Aaron did end up on top here because their snake was hungry and it eat all the Egyptian snakes. But these Egyptian magicians did perform a miraculous sign. Now look at Exodus 7:19-20, *“The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs’ - and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars.’ Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded ... and all the water was changed into blood.”* Miraculous! Absolutely remarkable! But verse 22 of the same chapter states, *“But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts.”* Now there did come a point where the Egyptian magicians knew they could not match the miracles Moses and Aaron performed but they were able to duplicate many of the spectacular signs. The lesson is that miracles on their own are not enough to answer the questions, ‘What does God mean to you? What does he

mean to me? What is unique about our God? What quality defines the Christian believer’s experience of him that makes him stand out above all other (so called) gods?’

#### **Four important lessons.**

To answer those questions we must turn to Exodus chapter 15 because the children of Israel have identified it! Indeed, it leads them to say in verse 11 *“Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you -- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, and working wonders?”* Chapter 15 is an expression of certain knowledge; God is unique! And it is Exodus 15 which identifies and defines the distinctive thing that God is and the special relationship Israel has with him. So, what’s your experience of God? What does he mean to you? What’s the distinguishing thing about your relationship with him? This chapter has the answer! Remember that Exodus 15 is the day after the crossing of the Red Sea. But to understand the chapter we need to ‘action replay’ the events leading up to that Red Sea experience. To do that we need to step back a few months, starting at the point where Moses was still keeping sheep in the desert, and the people of Israel were oppressed and doing forced labour building for their taskmasters in Egypt. Imagine going up to an Israelite and asking him what his experience of God was then. I wonder what his response would have been when life was unpleasant and hard? He may have even said that God had deserted him, or at least it appeared that way. I suspect that phrases like Exodus 15v11 would not have sprung to his mind at that stage. *“Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like*

*you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?* We might even question just what extent or depth of faith was left in Israel at all! Hundreds of years suffering ... hundreds of years of slavery. They must have taken their toll on true faith in Israel. Even for Moses when confronted at the burning bush, God had to start from the beginning in his revelation of who he was.

So step 1 in our action replay of God's revelation to Israel is that they learned his name! Exodus 3:14, *"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.'"* The Eternal God, the one who was present when Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were alive. Their father's God is also their God. At first - Israel only knew his name.

The second thing they came to know was something of the terrible power of God. We do not know how long a period of time the plagues covered, but it was probably several weeks or months. Israel witnessed dreadful suffering in that time as Egypt was struck by wave upon wave of disasters, all brought about by God's mighty hand. They saw the Lord work in such dramatic, awesome and devastating ways. So secondly they came to understand God's power. They learned the fear of God and they learned that Egypt's gods were no match for the Lord their God.

The third lesson was that they discovered the awful reality of God's judgement! The 10<sup>th</sup> plague is the only one where God brings his power to bear on human life directly – the death of the firstborn in every family. Of all the plagues

this is the big one! All previous plagues brought extreme discomfort or suffering but this one carried death itself to the people of the land. Israel too discovered they were equally under this final judgement, but God's people know they must take God at his word and fear him. This final judgement, the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the Passover, was to fall on God's people as equally as it would the Egyptians if they remained unprepared!

There was also a fourth lesson that all of these previous lessons prepared them to appreciate. Fourthly, they discover God's mercy. The Lord told Moses, *"Kill the lamb - put the blood on the doorposts - The blood will be a sign for you (i.e. in the place of you) on the houses where you are - and when I see the blood - I will pass over you"*

So let us recap quickly. First they only know his name. Then they come to know his power. Then they realise they too were under his judgement. That is really important because it is then they discover his mercy. Mercy - for Israel! They would never have understood the depth of God's mercy if they had not first understood the certainty of his judgement. Now we can begin to see how far they have moved in their knowledge of God over those last few months in Egypt. And we can begin to understand why they can say Exodus 15:11 *"Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"* The great question we must ask ourselves is this, 'Does my experience of God bear any resemblance to this?'

**A final lesson.**

As we continue to replay the events that precede Exodus chapter 15, there is one more step for us to consider. The rescue at that stage was in fact incomplete. Israel had indeed been snatched from the jaws of the enemy who enslaved them. But that enemy Pharaoh was still alive. And what is more he is wounded and very angry! Let us go back again to their exodus or departure from Egypt. Israel made this in haste, leaving the Egyptians behind to bury their dead. What joy and laughter would have surrounded that departure? But as they began their new life the Israelites had very little notion at all that the old enemy was determined to claim them back! Well, the account of the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea is another of those great Bible narratives. And we know that by the time it was all over God's people were alive and safe on the other side and the old enemy was well and truly vanquished. Everyone, including Pharaoh was drowned as God caused the waters of the Red Sea to overwhelm them. So the fifth thing that God revealed to Israel about himself was that God destroyed their old enemy. That enemy would never be able to claim them back again!

In Exodus 14:13-14 Moses said, "*Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.*" With Israel standing on the far shore of the Red Sea we might ask: 'What does God mean to you now Israel? What is your experience of him now?' Exodus 15 is known as the song of Moses and Miriam, and we see how all these events translated into the language of this song. The song

begins with a kind of refrain: "*I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.*" Then if we look ahead to v21 we find those lines echoed by Miriam and the women. In overview, we find the song reveals six facets to Israel's understanding in the light of all that has taken place.

- i. in verses 2-3 is what they knew about God then, after they had crossed the Red Sea.
- ii. in verses 4-5 we have what they knew then about the enemy.
- iii. in verses 6-8 is their understanding of God's approach and involvement in the rescue of his people.
- iv. in verses 9-10 is their understanding of the enemy's approach and involvement as God snatched Israel away from him.
- v. in verses 11-12 we have the only logical conclusion to make! That God is unique, majestic, holy, awesome and powerful.
- vi. in verses 13-18 we have the impact this made on the way the people of God viewed the future.

And so with their recent history in mind, we will go through chapter 15. Verses 2-3 "*The LORD is my strength - and my song! He has become my salvation! He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.*" Note that there is a reference to God or the Lord in almost every line. They identify God by the name he gave them. God called himself - 'I AM' - they call him LORD - or 'HE IS'. These words also show they understand how they

had been under judgement along with the Egyptians, but God showed **them** mercy! They are truly a favoured people. He is truly a merciful God. And not just a merciful God but ‘...the Lord is a warrior’ (v3). He fought for them! He defeated the enemy on their behalf. So they were God’s people whom he had rescued from judgement, rescued from slavery, AND, as verses 4-5 commemorate, rescued from fear of the enemy. *“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.”* The significance here is completely obvious. The enemy had been totally overthrown, meaning that enemy could never snatch them back again. They know that they need never fear slavery to him again. We then read in verses 6-8, *“Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them - like stubble! By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.”*

Throughout these verses every aspect of this rescue is attributed to God! No mention of Moses. He did not rescue them, he could not! No mention either of the discipline or the resolve or the sheer grit and determination of Israel. This was a rescue that was achieved solely by God himself. Then in verses 9-10 we read, *“The enemy*

*boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’ But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.”* Israel now understood that their enemy had never intended to let them go anyway! It would not actually have mattered what threats or bargains Moses might have made with Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s intention was to keep Israel, or if he could not keep them then he would destroy them! Israel had been well and truly subjugated, held by a power much stronger than themselves. They could not have fought this terrible enemy, so God fought for them and ended the threat from Pharaoh forever! And so we come to the fifth lesson in verses 11-12, and what was the only logical conclusion. *“Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.”* If we read v12 in isolation it seems to relate to the Egyptians. But if you read v12 within the context, it is more likely to refer to the other gods of v11: *“Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.”* Israel has identified that the false gods that people create for themselves and which then seem to drive their existence simply become an irrelevance as the Lord raises his arm against them. The best gods that Egypt could produce were as ‘make-believe’ compared to the LORD. And now we come to the best bit of all, namely verses 13-18. How was all this going to impact on the people of God? How strange it would be if God had

brought Israel thus far only to leave them there on this foreign shore and then leave them to fend for themselves.

Remember the promise God made back in Exodus 6:6-7, *“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 judgement. I will take you as my own people, - and I will be your God.’”* God had made a promise, and on the strength of their redemption they had confidence that he would fulfil the rest of the promise, that they would become God’s own people for the future. And so the song continues in verses 13-18, *“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them - to your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone - until your people pass by, O Lord, until the people you bought pass by. You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance-- the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever.”* What an expression of great confidence in God! Not only that, it is an expression of an ongoing relationship with the Lord being their eternal king. v17 *“You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place,*

*O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever.”* A wonderful vision and a true one! But it is worth noting that it does not give the impression of a trouble free pilgrimage ahead. The nations, the people of Philistia, the chiefs of Edom, the leaders of Moab and the people of Canaan are going to be glowering down at them. These predatory people are going to be held at bay. I can imagine them standing like walls on either side of Israel as they proceed on their pilgrimage, standing there just longing to reach forward and grab Israel by the throat to strangle the life out of it! But they cannot! God restrains them by the fear that his presence brings! They dare not do anything but look on *“...until your people pass by, O Lord, until the people you bought pass by.”* It is Moses’ equivalent to Psalm 23 where you remember we read in verses 4-5, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*

### **Application.**

Remember our question earlier. Christians, what is our experience of the Lord? The answer is a direct parallel to that which Israel experienced in the Red Sea crossing. First we came to know his name. Then we came to understand something of his power and authority over us and the world we live in. Then we realised we were under his judgement! And that came as a shock to many of us, because we thought we were alright, but we were not!

Indeed, those of us who were brought up to go to church as a habit may have even considered ourselves God's people. What a surprise to find that we were actually under the same judgement as everyone else, even those who may never even go into a church at all! Then we discovered that we too had to accept the way of escape that God had provided or suffer his judgement. True Christians are only those who have personally 'sheltered behind the blood of Jesus Christ'. Jesus Christ died to bear God's judgement for us. For ancient Israel, they had to shelter behind the blood of the Passover lamb. It died as a substitute to bear God's judgement for them. Then we who are Christian believers, to our great relief, came to realise that the old enemy that enslaved us, Satan, could never have us back again! He's been defeated by God's own almighty power.

This does not mean that our earthly pilgrimage is going to be easy. The Bible never promises an easy life for the Christian church. Of course, all the problems common to man afflict the church as well. But the church has particular challenges, spiritual challenges. The New Testament tells us that the church wrestles against '*spiritual powers and authorities*'. Those powers would just love to strangle the life out of the church. It is only because of fear of God's presence with his church that spiritual powers have to let the church continue. And it is a fact that everyone who truly accepts Jesus Christ as their own personal Redeemer will reach the place of God's dwelling. The church will triumph in the end. God will bring each of his people home to his own place. He will not lose even one of them. Exodus 15:17-18, "*You will*

*bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever.*" In the light of this it is no wonder that when the apostle John speaks of the song that God's people will sing in heaven, he refers to it as 'the song of Moses and of the lamb'. In closing read John's words about that song that we will sing. It is found in Revelation 15 beginning at verse 1. "*I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues -- last, because with them God's wrath is completed!. And I saw - what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and - notice where God's people are standing - and, standing beside the sea, -- those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps - given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvellous are your deeds, - Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, -- King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O 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."*

Christian, what is your experience of God? What does he mean for you! Does your God bear any resemblance to the God of Old Testament Israel?

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