

# Exodus

HEADING HOME WITH GOD



*Jim McGuiggan*

# *Exodus*

Heading Home With God

Jim McGuigan

Former Instructor

Sunset International Bible Institute



Sunset Institute Press

3710 34<sup>th</sup> Street ❖ Lubbock, Texas

800/687-2121 ❖ [www.extensionschool.com](http://www.extensionschool.com)

## **Exodus**

*Heading Home with God*

© Copyright 2011, 2017 Jim McGuigan. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover design Richard Cravy

SIBI 978-1-938335-91-4

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

To

JIM, LINDA, and GEORGE

With love from  
MOM & DAD



## FOREWORD

This isn't a commentary but maybe there's a place for a book like this that takes the good work of others and makes some of it available for the rest of us who have neither the time or skill or patience to drill down deep for ourselves.

If it works at all you should come away from this volume with *something* of an improved sense of what the book of Exodus is about and a deeper realization that every generation of humans is on the same journey and is in need of rescue, challenge and guidance toward this planetary "land of promise".

I accept that there's too much in this work about "what should our response be?" rather than "What is it that God has done and means to do with the Exodus record of his mighty works?" We certainly need to think about our response in light of what God has done and meant to do in doing it but I'm certain that first and foremost it's the business of believers (Jews or Gentiles) to "learn the Story" and find out who and whose they are. If we do that then by God's grace we'll discover our identity in the new world we've become part of in the Lord Jesus. If we gain this we will know better how to live out our destiny and mission. Maybe Romans 12:2 speaks of that.

# Contents

FOREWORD.....	3
Introductory Matters. ....	9
<b>I RESCUE UNDER YAHWEH: 1:1—18:27.</b> .....	23
1 THE BLESSING CONTINUES. ....	24
2 THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS. ....	27
3 WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE? .....	31
4 NOBILITY IN STRANGE PLACES.....	33
5 EARTH'S GREATEST WONDER.....	36
6 THE IRISH WOLFHOUND. ....	40
7 SO FAR FROM HOME. ....	41
8 I SHOULD HAVE GONE BAREFOOT. ....	45
9 AFRAID TO LOOK AT GOD.....	48
10 I AM COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM. ....	51
11 MYSELF!.....	54
12 THE RELUCTANT DELIVERER. ....	57
13 SEE THAT JACKET?.....	60
14 THE HARDENED HEART. ....	64
15 DRAMA AT THE INN.....	66
16 AND WHAT OF CIRCUMCISION?. ....	69
17 ISRAEL WITHOUT PASSOVER OR CIRCUMCISION.....	73
18 DELIVERER OR TROUBLER?. ....	75
19 LET MY PEOPLE GO. ....	79
20 LET MY PEOPLE GO (2).....	81
21 "LAZY, THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE—LAZY".....	85
22 HURTING TOO MUCH TO BELIEVE. ....	88
23 PAIN OR INCONVENIENCE?.....	89
24 ANOTHER FAMILY TREE?. ....	93
25 STORIES IN CONFLICT.....	96
26 THE MESSAGE OF THE PLAGUE/SIGNS.....	99
27 THE REPENTANCE OF A SCARED MAN. ....	101
28 A NIGHT TO KEEP VIGIL.....	103
29 DEATH OF A TYRANT. ....	107
30 A SONG OF TRIUMPH. ....	110
31 HE SHOULD HAVE SUNG. ....	113
32 ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS.....	116
33 A SCHOOL IN THE WILDERNESS.....	119

34	THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH & WILDERNESS. ....	122
35	THE SMITTEN ROCK AND AMALEK. ....	126
36	REUNIONS IN THE WILDERNESS.....	130
37	LEADERSHIP AND WISDOM.....	132
38	LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP.....	135
39	POWER SHARING.....	139
<b>II.</b>	<b>COVENANT UNDER YAHWEH: 19:1—24:18.</b> .....	<b>141</b>
40	THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE TORAH. ....	143
41	CHOSEN. ....	153
42	TEMPTATIONS OF THE CHOSEN. ....	157
43	A NATION OF PRIESTS.....	161
44	THE DECALOGUE. ....	164
45	YOU WILL HAVE ONE GOD— ME!. ....	167
46	NO GOD BUT YHWH?. ....	169
47	NO GOD BUT YHWH? (2).....	172
48	NO GOD BUT YAHWEH? (3). ....	176
49	GOD OR THE WIZARD OF OZ?.....	179
50	NO GRAVEN IMAGES. ....	182
51	IN IT THOU SHALT DO NO “WORK”.....	184
52	THE LORD RESTED THE SEVENTH DAY. ....	187
53	THIS SHALL BE A SIGN.....	191
54	YOU WERE SLAVES IN EGYPT. ....	194
55	HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER. ....	196
56	NOT MERELY OUR NEIGHBORS.....	199
57	HONOR THEM BECAUSE....	203
58	THE IMAGE OF GOD IN PARENTS.....	206
59	DO NO MURDER. ....	210
60	NOTHING TO DO WITH ME AND MY WIFE. ....	215
61	YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY. ....	218
62	YOU SHALL NOT STEAL. ....	223
63	THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS. ....	226
64	THOU SHALT NOT COVET. ....	231
65	A FEW PRELIMINARY REMARKS. ....	234
66	THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT. ....	236
67	I LOVE MY MASTER.....	238
68	THE REALIZABLE BEST.....	241
69	CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.....	245
70	THE KILLING OF WITCHES. ....	248
71	WHO OWNS EVERYTHING ANYWAY?.....	251



72	DON'T SHARE A TABLE WITH FLIES. ....	254
73	HOW IT FEELS TO BE ALIENS. ....	257
74	SO THAT YOUR DONKEY MAY REST. ....	260
75	THE HEART OF THE SABBATH. ....	262
76	BOILED IN MOTHER'S MILK. ....	266
77	HAVING DINNER WITH GOD.....	269
<b>III</b>	<b>WORSHIP IN THE PRESENCE OF YAHWEH 25:1-40:38. ....</b>	<b>272</b>
78	GIVING AS WORSHIP.....	274
79	A HOUSE FOR GOD TO LIVE IN. ....	278
80	WHAT DOES THE TABERNACLE MEAN?.....	281
81	SO WHAT'S WORSHIP FOR?. ....	286
82	WORSHIP THE OXYGEN OF THE SOUL. ....	289
83	WORSHIP & THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT. ....	292
84	HOLY FURNISHINGS. ....	295
85	HOLY CLOTHING. ....	300
86	THE BLESSING OF REPRESENTATION. ....	305
87	ELECT OR ELITE?.....	309
88	SERVICE OR POWER?. ....	311
89	MONEY THAT MAKES A CONFESSION. ....	315
90	GOLDEN CALVES AND ELECTRON MICROSCOPES. ....	318
91	THE ART OF BUILDING. ....	323
92	A GRASS-EATING BULL.....	325
93	A HARD PILL TO SWALLOW. ....	328
94	GOD IS IN EARNEST. ....	330
95	I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES. ....	334
96	LEAVE THIS PLACE. ....	337
97	GO WITH US OR DON'T SEND US. ....	340
98	AS A FRIEND TO HIS FRIEND. ....	343
99	MY FACE SHALL NOT BE SEEN.....	345
100	THE DARK LINE. ....	348
101	HE WAS NOT AWARE. ....	351
102	A HOME BUILT OUT OF SUFFERING.....	354
103	BEZALEL AND THE MESSIAH. ....	356
104	THE KING IS IN RESIDENCE.....	358
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY. ....	360

# Introductory Matters

## THE NAME OF THE BOOK

The Hebrews used the first few words of each book to name the first five books of their Bible. In the Hebrew Bible our book of Exodus is called ‘shemoth’ (names) since it begins with “and these are the names”. Sometime around 250 B.C. the OT began to be translated into Greek (the LXX) and “ve’elleh shemoth” was given the name “Exodusos” (“the path or road or way out”) because the major historical event was the leaving or exit out of Egypt. From there we got the Latinized form Exodus.

## THE STORYLINE OF THE BOOK

A new Pharaoh is on the throne in Egypt. He doesn’t know what Egypt and the throne owe to the former Hebrew prime-minister, Joseph, and he has become fearful of this foreign nation which is prospering within Egyptian borders. What if they sided with enemies who sought the throne of Egypt? A policy of ethnic cleansing and slave-labor was initiated. During this critical period Moses is born and is raised as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. When Moses kills an Egyptian official for harming an Israelite, events are set in motion that result in his fleeing to Midian where he marries Zipporah, a daughter in the family of Jethro.

For forty years the fugitive tends to his father-in-law’s sheep and then God calls him to pastor his flock which is back in Egypt. The beginning of Moses’ return to Egypt is the burning bush meeting with a God who reveals himself as YHWH. The man is enlisted by YHWH to help Him keep his promises to Abraham to rescue Israel from slavery and settle them in the land he promised would be their inheritance—Canaan. After initial objections, Moses obeys and appears in Egypt before Pharaoh, the ‘son of Amon-Re’.

The stern demand, “free my people, says YHWH!” provokes the pharaoh’s derisive response, “Who is YHWH that I should obey him? I won’t let Israel go.” A series of fierce blows (the ten plagues) from YHWH compels Egypt to hurry the slave-nation out of their borders and into the wilderness to worship this God of judgment. The army of Pharaoh pursues the Hebrews, catches up with them at the “Red” sea but the God of Israel puts himself between the two groups. The sea opens up to allow the Israelites to cross on dry land and returns to drown the forces of tyranny. The

newly freed nation sings a song of praise and deliverance and turn to face the wilderness.

The people finally arrive at mount Sinai (Horeb) and there YHWH forms those who had simply been the seed of Abraham into a holy and priestly nation. The ‘ten Words’ (Decalogue) are followed by a series of laws which would govern their lives and a Tabernacle is built in which YHWH will dwell in the center of the people. The book concludes with the actual rearing of the sanctuary and the entrance of God into the Holy of Holies.

### **THE PURPOSE AND DIRECTION OF THE BOOK**

The problem with incredible books like Exodus is that they are so rich that it’s surely impossible to fully grasp their purpose. It isn’t difficult to read the book and summarize the contents but that isn’t the same as determining the purpose. Since it deals with ancient history you might say its purpose is to give us a history lesson. Hardly! While it offers historical information, its purpose goes beyond expanding our stock of historical knowledge.

The book of Exodus can’t be understood independent of the other four books of the “Pentateuch” (five rolls). It is immediately and inextricably linked to Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It has its own peculiar thrusts, of course, but it has no themes that are completely independent of the other four books.

It tells its own part of the story of God’s creative and redemptive work on behalf of the whole of mankind. In Exodus this work of God centers in the Hebrew nation. It is Act two of a drama in five Acts. Because this is so it takes from, adds to, shapes and enriches, is shaped and enriched by the other four books. To take our cue from John Bright, to see Acts 1, 3, 4 and 5 without Act 2 is to miss much of the meaning of all five Acts. So, whatever we say about the purpose of Exodus must be understood in that light.

And though what we think a writer’s purpose is must be drawn from what the writer actually says it is possible for a writer to be revealing more than he knows. He may pass on words and laws that are richer than he understands or he may tell us of events that can only be appreciated fully at some later date and another perspective. (Haven’t we all had experiences which, at the time of their happening, didn’t appear to be significant, but which in later years we recognized as profoundly significant?) And if we have reason to believe that there is a divine hand at work, one who’s superintending the record as well as the general course of events we’ll be

slow to think we have exhausted the purpose or purposes of the book.

Genesis deals with God's work with and for humanity through special individuals. Exodus deals with God's work with and for humanity through a nation, Israel. The worldwide scope of the earlier chapters of Genesis (1-11) is easily seen. With chapters 12-50 the universal scope of things remains but it's less obvious since special characters take the center stage (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph). Exodus sees the God of Abraham as the central character and Moses as his special witness, but it's the creation of "a priestly nation" under God that has the lion's share of the Exodus material.

That creation of the nation begins with a mighty and gracious deliverance of the people from the power and oppression of one of the earth's powerful monarchs. It continues with the enactment of a covenant at Sinai, which constitutes the offspring of Abraham as that "nation under God". Exodus pays special attention to the covenant as the terms under which and the vehicle by which the nation lived in relation to itself, its neighbors and God. And Exodus pays special attention to the homage toward and worship of God as set out in the planning and construction of the tabernacle. This structuring of the nation's worship and governing of its lifestyle in terms of the covenant is not merely a response to the initial redemption it's part of the redeeming work of God. The Rescue is a gracious and liberating experience but so is the giving of the covenant and the structuring of worship. Exodus will have nothing to do with the notion that the "Exodus" is an event distinct from what follows. It is always a deliverance "in order to". The nationalizing of the Abrahamic offspring is no mere "extra" tacked on to the Exodus, it is one element in a grand purpose that embraces the deliverance itself but which is not exhausted by the deliverance. In accomplishing the "Exodus" (the "leading out"), God's purpose was to bring the people to himself (19:4). Their trek was not merely geographical (from Egypt to Sinai) it was spiritual/theological (from bondage to an oppressive master to freedom under God). It was a move from Pharaoh to God! This is especially clear in 6:5-9.

Israel's identity is unknowable unless it is sought and understood in relation to Yahweh. The truth is more radical than that. Israel's identity doesn't even exist outside of its relationship with Yahweh. "Israel" did not create herself, shape herself nor define herself. Israel did not even know herself. All this sprung from God as a source. The sound "Israel" might mean many things for modern people but in the Mosaic explanation of the

sound, “Israel” takes its meaning from the purpose and actions of God! In one sense it’s true that “Israel explains God”. But it is more true to say “God explains Israel”. To understand “Israel” we should begin with God rather than Israel. It’s true of course that the God we begin with in Exodus is a God who is related to Israel rather than some “Eternal Being” who is the conclusion of an Aristotelian argument. Nevertheless, as with Man, so it is with Israel, we understand the creature when we understand the creator. It will probably be helpful, then, to break the book of Exodus into three grand segments:

**1. Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel**

(The Exodus events)

**2. Yahweh, the Covenant Partner of Israel**

(The covenant materials)

**3. Yahweh, the Worshipful Center of Israel**

(The tabernacle materials)

The substance of the book is written from a post-Exodus standpoint and it is written from a pre-Canaanite perspective. It seems clear that the book of Exodus (along with the other books of the Pentateuch) was written for Israel to teach her whose she is, who she is and how (as a consequence) she should live before the nations.

In carrying out this purpose Moses:

Repeatedly links Israel with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob and with the God of these patriarchs;

Tells the story of their oppression by Egypt and their rescue by YHWH;

Tells of the giving of the Law at Sinai which shaped the people into a holy and priestly nation which was especially related to YHWH (though he was Lord of and cared for the entire earth);

Insists that Israel is a sign of the reign (kingdom) of God and that she is on her way to dwell with God in Canaan;

Tells of the Tabernacle, which was to be built by people of a willing heart, that YHWH might dwell in the center of them and be approached only as and when he prescribed;

And makes it very clear that this new nation was to be nothing like the people of Egypt from which they were delivered or Canaan to which they were going (compare Leviticus 18:1-4).

## MAJOR THEMES OF THE BOOK

Later readings of a great book almost always end with our having seen so much more than we saw in earlier readings. There are numerous reasons for this, no doubt. See again paragraph 9 above. As we become wiser our eyes are opened to truths we hadn't seen before. As we become more familiar with the book, it often becomes more itself and rather less than we made it to be at first reading. As we become purer (and less selfish) we pick up on challenges and demands we subconsciously avoided in earlier days. As we become more acquainted with God's full counsel in Scripture we see more of what he was driving at in independent books. This should lead us to modesty and make us cautious in our judgments. Still, we'd have to suspend judgment altogether if we didn't think we could recognize some major themes in this incredibly rich book of Scripture.

### *The nature and character of YHWH.*

*There is for example, His centrality and supremacy.* Believers would rightly insist that God is the center of the whole corpus of Scripture but it's clear that his centrality is more obvious in some books than in others. God is not thrust upon us as the leading character in, say, the Song of Solomon, as he is in Exodus.

*The record of Exodus itself is saturated with YHWH and his activity.* The "contest" between YHWH and the gods of Egypt proclaims his supremacy and the comments of psalmists and prophets on the material of Exodus herald his glory. No one is saved, enlightened, protected, judged, commissioned, fed, given water to drink, made victorious in battle, builds, serves, lives or dies without the directing and enabling hand of God! No one is to be praised, served, followed, feared, exalted, thanked, trusted, worshiped or obeyed but YHWH.

*There is His faithfulness to his promises and purposes.* The book opens with the Israelite connection with Jacob (and so, Abraham and Isaac) and the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. There is Joseph who spread blessing everywhere he went (see Genesis) and there is Exodus 1:7,12 where we have echoed the promise of blessing to Abraham. In 2:23-24; 3:6,13,15-17 God's redemptive purpose is linked with his promise to Abraham. This includes not simply the rescue from Egypt but the final rest in Canaan, the land of promise and gift.

*And there is His creative power and purpose.* It's true that Exodus doesn't have a doctrine of creation as it is developed in Genesis but it would

be easy to overstate the difference. Since it's true that Exodus is part of a five-book story, it's interesting that Moses began the story in Genesis with "creation". Why with creation? It's not only that everything begins there historically; it all begins there theologically! Exodus is part of the story that God is faithful to his creation purposes. *Redemption serves creation*. God didn't wash his hands of humanity when they rebelled; his love of humanity, which was expressed in creative activity, then takes a redemptive aspect—God begins to work toward removing the curse, which resulted from sinful rebellion and to swallow up cursing in blessing. The book of Exodus contributes its part to that Story. (See the comments on the meaning of the Tabernacle.)

The words of Exodus 1:7,12 remind us of God's promise to Abraham but God's promise to Abraham reminds us of the words of Genesis 1. The whole notion of "blessing" and "cursing" has its roots in the creation and fall narratives. Words like multiply, teem, prosper, fill, grow, flourish or replenish are all in the semantic domain of blessing. What is happening to Israel (the seed of Abraham) is what God wants humanity to experience.

The same God who took formlessness, lifelessness and disharmony and brought about order and fullness of life in the beginning is able to do the same in Egypt. There, where they should not prosper and multiply, they do! By the power of YHWH! In the wilderness, which proclaims "curse" in the starkest fashion, God blesses and makes Israel to prosper. In the wilderness, with its chaos, disorder and stunted, lower life forms, we see a nation thriving. In Genesis 1, ten times we hear a creative "let" and in the wilderness we have ten creative "words" which form a nation out of a rabble of fugitives. The God who could create a wilderness out of Egypt (because they sought to curse those whom God sought to bless) could create a home within a wilderness. It's no surprise to hear that the God who divided the Red Sea is the creator who divided the waters from the land in Genesis 1.

*There is His awful holiness, which sets him apart from humans.* Throughout the book there are independent verses and events that stress this. There is the awful isolation of YHWH on the summit of Sinai, a mountain quaking, heaving and burning. There are the frightening blasts of a trumpet, increasing in volume with each sounding and the dread voice of God when he speaks like a man. There are the boundaries set around the base of the mountain and guarded by fierce Leviticus with the threat that anyone, human or beast, that touched the mountain would be executed immediately. There

were the special preparations, which the handful of leaders had to make in order to approach the Lord. There are rules and washings that must be obeyed by ministering priests and approaching worshipers. There are the spotless animals and scrubbed pots and pans involved in His worship and that silent, perpetually-shrouded-in-darkness sanctuary within Tent, where no one but the high priest could enter on only one day in the year and not without sacrificial blood. Then there are the many passages that teach us that even Moses came to God when he was called and not otherwise. And of course, there were the calamities, which he poured out on rebellious Egypt as well as the judgments at various points on a treacherous Israel. All of this and more was to stress the separateness of YHWH who nevertheless dwelled at the heart of a sinful people.

*Then there is His never-ending lovingkindness.* It's true that YHWH's fierce judgments call into question his lovingkindness but if one takes in the over-arching purpose of God toward all of humanity and the goals toward which he strives, the judgments on rebellious people take on a different complexion. In a world where sin has entered YHWH is more concerned about the character of humans than about their immediate happiness. What he offers is life but what he *is* often forced to execute is judgment. Any good government wants life and prosperity for its citizens but it often has to deal out punishment on criminals who oppress other citizens. Good governments reward those who approve of and contribute to justice and mutual prosperity but they also chastise those who oppose those ends. If we view a government only in the sternness of its judgments against criminals we might think it cruel and unjust or merciless. If we saw it, however, actively pursuing policies, which benefited all its citizens, our judgment about its sternness would be balanced. It isn't necessary for us to view people as vindictive and cruel because they punish offenders.

The Story as developed in the Scriptures tells of a "personal" God who seeks the blessing of all his creatures and who sometimes experiences a "conflict of interests" in the face of the oppressed and the oppressor. The book of Jonah assures us that YHWH cares deeply for the Assyrian nation, which is oppressing the other nations. The book of Nahum tells us that God cares for the nations that Assyria oppresses and so he is finally forced to bring judgment on Nineveh. The God who judges Egypt in Exodus is the God who blessed Egypt in Genesis. Difficult as it may be for moderns to swallow, God's judgments on people are severe mercies. Severity toward



those who are cut off because they oppose God's purpose to bless and mercy toward all others who will benefit from the removal of that obstacle to blessing. YHWH's judgment on Egypt brought blessing to Israel and through Israel he would bless humanity. And we must remember that this purposes to bless and give life rise out of his lovingkindness (see Psalm 136:1-26).

### ***The Deliverance from Egyptian Bondage.***

Since this event takes up 14 chapters of the book and another is devoted to a song about the event, it's obviously of supreme importance. And we are told repeatedly that God is identified as the one who brought them out of the "iron furnace" or the "house of bondage". This strongly suggests that we are to view YHWH as a God of rescue or redemption. When the Tabernacle is completed we're told that the silver sockets into which the framework of the Tent is fitted are made of redemption money. In addition to this we have the perpetual ordinance of the redeeming of the firstborn established by God and linked to Israel's salvation on the night of the Passover. Books like David Daube's *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* show just how crucial to Hebrew—Christian faith this event was and continues to be. Psalmists and prophets will, again and again, use the Exodus as the model for new national and individual deliverances from enemies whether spiritual or human, from sins or political/social oppression.

### ***The Covenant Law at Sinai.***

The actual deliverance from Egypt was not an end in itself. The move from Goshen to Sinai was no more geographical than Abraham's move from Ur to Canaan. Of course geography was involved but it was a movement of the spirit, a shift from the lower to the higher, from distance to intimacy. Israel wasn't brought to Sinai so much as they were brought to God (see on 20:3).

What the covenant Law did for Israel (and the world) can hardly be exaggerated. Jews since that day have exulted in the Law and what the Law means to them. This is not the place to say much about the NT's treatment of the Law (and Paul's treatment of it in particular) but a slow and thoughtful reading of Psalm 119 (and others) is an education in the effects of the Law on this nation. Whatever we should conclude about Paul's varied pronouncements on the Law we know that no enlightened Jew (and certainly not Paul!) would have viewed the covenant Law as given at Sinai to be a bringer of death. (This is especially clear from Deuteronomy, which

repeatedly tells us that the covenant Law was given so that life might result!)

The Law was a gift of God to a nation in dire need of light! It was an expression of God's love for Israel and the patriarchs. It enabled them to live with this YHWH about whom they were so ignorant. It guaranteed justice to the defenseless and a way to redress wrongs committed by rebels against the Law (and so, against God and the people). It shaped worship and provided ordinances, which kept alive the Story of God's loving-kindness, which is the soil out of which Israel's ethical response grew and in which the noble life was nourished. Worship is part of what enables people to live nobly and gallantly because it keeps people aware of the living presence of the God who calls them up and strengthens their noble purposes. And the Law saw to it that the nation kept in close touch with its living Lord and never forgot her gracious roots. (See Exodus 22:21 and 23:9 which illustrate this.)

God always intended Israel to be a blessing to the world's peoples. One way in which the Jews have done that is their teaching of their covenant Law to the nations. To say that the Mosaic covenant has shaped the foundations of justice in (at least) the Western world is to say only what is common knowledge. It never failed to irritate T.H. Huxley, the Darwinian and agnostic, to hear people glibly dismiss the Hebrew Law. He tirelessly insisted, and with great passion, that we should recognize its grandeur and the profound benefit it brought to the world.

### *The Doctrine of Access Through Sacrifice*

There is an interesting tension in the book of Exodus between God's insistence on being removed from the people and his wanting them near him. He makes it clear their sinfulness is an obstacle to unbroken communion but makes it equally clear that he is working toward full and intimate fellowship. YHWH hides himself in a perpetually darkened sanctuary away from the people and yet will not dwell anywhere else but at the heart of those people. He stands aloof from them but invites them into a covenant relationship with him. He sets up numberless "hindrances" to communion with him but gives them a priesthood and a sacrificial system to enable them all to have communion with him (compare Leviticus 17:11). Their sins, he assures them, put up a wall between him and them, but he offers them a way to have those sins forgiven—sacrifice!

## **THE GOD GIVEN AUTHORITY OF MOSES**

From Exodus 5 until his death, Moses functions as the clear leader of Israel but there is always a debate going on in that generation about his moral right to be leader. Exodus (and Numbers) stresses the divine commissioning of Moses in the face of opposition, which continues to rear its head. It is brought out and dealt with in the narrative.

While still in Egypt he rebukes an Israelite for wronging a brother and the offender snarls at him (2:14): “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” Rejected as leader (Stephen in Acts 7:25 says Moses thought he would be recognized as a deliverer) and forced to flee, Moses may well have brooded over this and that would explain his reluctance to return as deliverer (see Exodus 3 & 4). Be that as it may, it’s clear from chapters 3 and 4 that Moses didn’t promote himself into the position of leadership and authority. He insisted he was not the man to the point where God became angry with him. All this being the case, later claims that it wasn’t God but Moses who engineered the march into the wilderness (14:11; 16:3; 17:3; 32:1) are seen to be rubbish.

In Numbers 14:2 we have Aaron and Miriam doubting the special commission of Moses and again in 16:3,12 we have the rebellion led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram during which Moses is accused of self-promotion and lording it over the people. This whole matter clearly bothers Moses and we find him constantly seeking assurance of God’s presence with him as he leads the people. The narrative takes great pains to show that what Moses did and said came to him from the Lord. In the last two chapters of Exodus when we’re told how the tabernacle was being set up, we’re told seventeen times that they did it “as Yahweh commanded Moses”.

### **WHO WROTE EXODUS?**

Sometimes it doesn’t matter who wrote the Bible book under consideration. Who wrote Hebrews doesn’t matter much but if Jesus credits David with Psalm 110 and builds an argument on it (see Matt 22:41-46) that’s an entirely different matter. Jesus, in keeping with the OT record, attributed “the Law” (the Pentateuch) to Moses (cf. John 5:45-47; Luke 24:27,44; Josh 1:7,13; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; Ezra—Nehemiah). R.D. Wilson reminds us that OT texts consistently tell us of new legislation ascribed to David, Hezekiah and others but they always distinguish between that and “the law of Moses”.

I believe Moses “wrote” the Pentateuch so I believe he wrote Exodus.

I don't believe he personally wrote every word in the Pentateuch (or Exodus). I think conservative scholars like E.J. Young and R.K. Harrison are correct when they say that the Pentateuch is "fundamentally" Mosaic. Harrison could be right when he says, "It may well be that the presence of third person pronouns in various sections of the Mosaic enactments indicate that these sections were dictated" (538). He goes on to say that many of the smaller sections of the Hebrew text may have been later "assembled into some sort of mosaic and joined together into a roll". If someone later, under God's superintendence, compiled Moses' materials that would suit us.

(We hardly need to believe that the prophecies of Jeremiah were written in the order we find them in the book of Jeremiah. Just check the dates of the various oracles. The same is true of Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel. But the dating of the oracles undermines the notion that men centuries after the named prophets wrote the oracles under the name of the named prophets. The same holds true for Mosaic materials. Many of them are dated.)

That Moses used earlier sources would be no more surprising than that Luke used them or the author/compiler of the Kings/Chronicles literature used them (see 1 Kings 8:8 and compare 2 Kings 25:27). Wilson characterizes the conservative position saying, "...the Pentateuch as it stands is historical and from the time of Moses; and (that) Moses was its real author though it may have been revised and edited by later redactors, the additions being just as much inspired and as true as the rest" (p.12).

That Moses wrote Deuteronomy without writing 34:5-12 is perfectly acceptable to me. I just know he didn't write 34:10, "Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses..." And it looks like Exodus 40:38 is a later reflection on the whole wandering experience of Israel though it may have been written by Moses ("...in the sight of all the house of Israel, through out all their journeys" ASV). But vv. 36-38 would be separated from the events of 34-35 by something like forty years. I wouldn't think Moses would have written Numbers 12:3 ("Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth"). In all this I'm saying, that holding to the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch (and Exodus in particular) doesn't necessarily exclude insertions and compiling under the superintendence of God.

What conservative evangelicals don't want, because they believe it dishonors the Scripture, is the claim that the Pentateuch made its appearance centuries after Moses, is clumsily put together, is said to be from Moses

when it really isn't, is a compilation by unknowns from unknown periods for purposes that can only be guessed at. What they become irritated at is the often incredibly flimsy foundation on which all these claims are made. What is not, in and of itself flimsy, is sheer speculation and gratuitous to boot. To hold to the essentially Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is not something we need apologize for.

### **THE APPROACH TO EXODUS OFFERED HERE**

There will be no verse-by-verse treatment but I'm hoping to say something useful about sections of scripture before "applying" them to 21<sup>st</sup> century believers. I want to keep in mind what Exodus meant to Israel as they were preparing to enter Canaan. If I do anything useful in that area you should learn something about what Israel was to make of the book in light of their peculiar needs and challenges.

But the "People of God" down the ages is one People—ancient or modern, Hebrew or otherwise, under this covenant or that covenant. That has to mean that while we must allow ancient texts to have their immediate message there are truths that transcend their immediate origin and immediate addressees. When Moses speaks to his peers, for example, in Deuteronomy, he speaks of their descendants as "you". He doesn't limit his words to the people he addresses. He sees the generations that follow his own, as the extension of his own generation. The Scriptures are for all the People of God in all generations. The Messiah himself placed himself under the authority of texts that addressed God's people more than a thousand years before he appeared (see Matthew 4:4, 7,10). And in the NT the apostles did what their Master did and called on fellow-disciples to do the same. Of course there are texts that can't be taken over and practiced just as they stand but all the texts bear truths that don't vanish with age! As Goldingay has reminded us, the form of the "People of God" has changed repeatedly. Once it was a wandering patriarch and his wife, then it became seventy people entering Egypt, later it was a host in captivity and later still the nationalized "seed of Abraham", the nation of Israel at Sinai. A little later it was a wandering host of rebels and later still a people settled in the land of their inheritance. Not long after they became a divided people in the land and then a nation in exile. By and by it was a Solitary One and then "the Body of Christ". In all these changed situations, there was still the "People of God" who needed the Word of God and who fed on or were smitten by the Law and the Prophets. The canon of the Church is the whole Bible. There are theological truths,

which are just as binding on us today as they ever were on ancient Israel who stood under Mount Sinai for a year on their way to Canaan. I'm hoping we can feed on some of those truths.

In Exodus there are truths that will remain as long as God does and there are rules that should be reverently laid aside as belonging to an age that is past. There are rules in Exodus (about gathering manna, for example) that were not to survive Israel's entrance into Canaan. But even those rules have things to teach us as we bring our lives under submission to God.

But there's more than one way to teach people upright behavior and it isn't enough to "inform" people of what upright behavior is. People need rules and can't live without them but they also need an emotional attachment to rules to help them keep them. People need to be inspired and they need models. Birch argues that morality is not to be found solely in the legal, prophetic and wisdom texts, which seek to control conduct, but is observable also in the narratives that can disclose reality and transform the reader. Stories have power; power to motivate as they enlighten. Stories can woo us into loveliness as well as shock us out of moral ugliness so it shouldn't surprise us that much of God's word is narrative. One of the strengths of narrative is that it can convey and illustrate more than one truth and at more than one Level.

The book of Exodus records history but it doesn't record "brute facts". Like other biblical books it takes events and weaves them together for the purpose of making its points. The history Exodus records is *interpreted* history. The "gospel of John" unashamedly tells us of its theological and spiritual purpose (20:30-31). To understand the book of Exodus is to do more than rehearse its stories (which is a profoundly important thing to do), it is to understand the point of the stories and to be able to make use of its truths in our own culture and environment as part of God's continuing work. To know what it meant to and did for Israel is one part of understanding. To grasp it so that its truths bear fruit in our lives and attitudes, that's another dimension of understanding and to find our place in the theodrama is more again.

Missing the first produces "sermonettes" and pious platitudes where there was a revelation of the Lord God Almighty. Missing the second can leave us wishing God hadn't retired and pulled down the shades after Sinai. If we miss the first part, we're left with 'sermon thoughts' and "homiletical hints". If we miss the second part we're left with a book of antiquities about

a generation of fellow-humans who long ago dried up and were blown away in the wind. Miss the first and our souls grow lean on ‘dainties’ while we long for something substantial to feed on. Miss the second and Bible study is like licking carpet. Thank God for those scholars and teachers everywhere who enable us to understand that it isn’t just “Exodus” but “Exodus & Us”.

But in addition to all the above and maybe more important to us who want to “hear” the message of Exodus—Exodus is part of a narrative, a drama, a Story in which God is the central character whose character and purpose generates and shapes the “script” of the Story. To look at Exodus as a compendium of rules handed down by God is to miss the essential character of the book. It is “a chapter” in his Story.

This means that it makes no sense to say we can dispense with it. Might as well say we can tear out a chapter of Dickens’ *David Copperfield* because we don’t need it, because it deals with Copperfield’s boyhood rather than his manhood. To do that would be to violate the entire story.

When we read of rules and regulations, commands and instructions we’re tempted to isolate them from the Story rather than to see them as contributing to the Story of God’s relationship with and purpose in Israel. The rules and ordinances and such disclose the character of God and his dealings with Israel as well as defining what it means to be “Israel”. The “rules” are more than rules! As surely as sadistic parents create sadistic rules and in this way reveal themselves and the situation in which the children exist so loving parents create life-furthering rules. In doing this they reveal their own hearts and shape the existence of their children.

# I

## **Rescue Under Yahweh**

1:1—18:27

*The creative Lord is still at  
work even in a world of sin and  
chaos, working blessing in the  
midst of cursing*



# 1

## ***THE BLESSING CONTINUES***

*So God blessed them, and God said to them “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” – Genesis 1:26a*

**E**xodus takes up the story that ended with Jacob and his family going down to Egypt. He knew his inheritance was to be Canaan and appears to have been afraid to go to Egypt (see Genesis 46:3) but God assured him that it was there he would make of him a great nation.

Many years had passed since God had sworn to Abraham that he would multiply his seed and make of him a great nation and yet when Jacob entered Egypt there were only seventy-five of them (Acts 7:14), hardly a great nation. But it's there that they “were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceeding numerous, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7).

The language echoes Genesis 1:26ff. The creative Lord is still at work even in a world of sin and chaos, working blessing in the midst of cursing. The language is also the language of Genesis 12:2; 13:14-15; 15:4-5; 17:2,6,15f; 22:17-18; 26:4,24; 28:3. God's creative purpose to bless as he redeems has never ceased despite the evil that has increased. No circumstances, however chaotic they appeared, proved the point that God had changed his mind about what he intended for humanity and Abraham his instrument of blessing. This blessing language implies what we are expressly told again and again: *the Abraham file has not been closed*.

In Egypt the blessing work of God continues but sin arises to bring curse to those God intended to bless (1:8-22). Pharaoh makes it an “us” and “them” matter and a policy of ethnic cleansing and exploitation is initiated. In this case the cursing work of Pharaoh is no match for the blessing work of God and the more he curses them the more they increase (1:12). This fear-inspired work of cursing those God intended to bless raises the Abraham connection again (Genesis 12:3) and ensures that the Pharaohs were spelling out their own future judgment.

The biblical Story insists that Israel is the blessed instrument of blessing by which God would bless the world. There is nothing elite about Israel but she is elect. Her election is not merely for personal gain, she is to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Those who opposed God's instrument of blessing opposed themselves and were an obstacle in the way of God's purpose to bless the world. That being the case, when he had to, God moved them out!

The political reason for this "shrewd" (1:10) policy of Pharaoh is to make sure his own throne and his own people might be secure, free from future threat. The oppression, the ethnic cleansing he undertook wouldn't have been called "cruel" or "brutal," "savage" or "unjust". Of course not! It was a question of "foreign policy" and "internal necessities". When has a group or nation of oppressors ever named their policy anything other than "good diplomacy" or "political necessity"? Ask Hitler or Stalin why they did what they did. Ask Pol Pot, Papa Doc or the Shah of Iran why they tortured and exterminated. Ask Mao Tse Tung or Chiang Kai Shek why they did what they did. Ask the major powers why they've involved themselves in policies that everyone knows are monstrous. In most prisons they say there are no guilty prisoners. It seems there are no guilty nations either; none who have involved themselves in deceit, lies and injustice. Everyone is innocent.

We sometimes wonder why it takes God so long to get things done in this world. Because the corruption in the world is so widespread and the wickedness is so entrenched and governments are such liars and people are so self-serving. But in the midst of it all, is God, wading through the corruption and moving things to his purposed end.

***The power of the powerless is  
the certain knowledge that no  
lie can live forever and no  
tyranny can reign forever.***

## 2

### ***THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS***

Two things said Kant, fill me with awe  
The starry heavens and the moral law,  
But I know something, more mysterious and obscure,  
The long, long patience of the plundered poor.

I think Edwin Markham wrote that. And haven't you felt that wonder? Sometime back my Ethel and I watched the news together. From Africa they showed an incredibly long line (surely it was a mile long) of people who needed medical attention. Most of them, or so it seemed, were skeletal women carrying dying babies. There was a single doctor sitting at a table and a solitary nurse assisting him. (Dear Lord, how this must hurt you!) Later that day Ethel had a fearful asthmatic attack. I bundled her into the car, drove her round the corner to the clinic, the sympathetic receptionist said she'd get one the doctors to look at her immediately one was free. I was grateful, Ethel was choking and I was anxious. Mere minutes passed and I began to feel my veneer of maturity peeling away. What was keeping them? What kind of medical service was this that my wife had to sit here choking for air? In my head I was reading the riot act to the whole establishment and then the vision of these plundered poor crashed its way into my chaotic innards and for only another few minutes (when a doctor quickly came to our rescue) I felt their condition with special clarity. That evening, almost simultaneously, she and I brought up the two experiences of the day (the news report and the visit to the clinic) and we just had to speak to God about our situation and theirs. No one was to blame for any aspect of Ethel's hurt, the delay was very brief and a relief-bringing injection brought us both sanity. How different the situation was for this long, long line of waiting people. Quiet, patient, unprotesting sufferers, many of whom couldn't have made it to be two figures sitting at a single table away in the distance. Victims of warmongering, fratricidal governments and troops at home and predatory wealth abroad. The plundered poor! The powerless poor? No, not

without power. Exodus 1:8-22 and 2:24 speak to all this.

- The power of the powerless lies in the truth that such a God exists as will not let wrongs go unrighted!

- The power of the powerless is the certain knowledge that no lie can live forever and no tyranny can reign forever.

- The power of the powerless is not in their capacity to absorb punishment or their intolerable meekness, it lies in the character of the God who now takes note of them and who assures them that the last word is not that of the earthly juggernauts that grind their bones to powder.

- The power of the powerless lies in the fact that their groans don't simply die in the still air that hangs above their squalid ghettos or sewer-pipe homes, that the God who hated pharaonic tyranny and oppression 2,000 years before Christ hates it still 2,000 years after him.

- Their power lies in the truth that the God who took grim note of the Jewish tragedy takes note of the black, yellow, white and brown groans rising from any street in any village, town, city or metropolis anywhere in the world. He hears the voiceless groans of the more than 36 million developing humans who are done away with each year. (Almost all of them are being hunted down because they get in the way of trouble-free life-style. And Westerners who have discriminated against the handicapped in the womb are aghast at Easterners who are discriminating against females in the womb. It doesn't matter that the Easterners are doing what they're doing for the same reason Westerners are doing what they're doing. Both handicapped and females are seen as obstacles to a self-fulfilled life for the adults.)

- The power of the powerless lies in the truth that God will not only punish the evildoers, he will right all wrongs. He will do what is right!

Well, that settles that. Since God is going to take care of it all in some future judgment, I needn't move my finger to lift a burden or redress a wrong. That response might do if God's righting of wrongs was confined to the future. It might do if we were not a vehicle of his justice and mercy, if Christians were not a sign and a manifestation of the reign of God. Since we are a sign and a manifestation of the reign of God, we'd best get on with it and embody a God-imitating justice and kindness. Anyone who is just going to "leave it all with God in the future" is asking to have Matthew 25:31-46 stamped on his forehead.

As amazing as it may seem in light of our excessive and growing interest in ourselves, part of the power of the powerless is the Church, the disciples

of Christ (see Isaiah 42:1-4 as used by 2 Tim 2:24-25 which puts us in the “justice bringing” business). We are given the duty and privilege to (under Christ and as part of Christ) bring a glad-hearted justice to the world at large. It isn’t an option—it’s an obligation.

Harry E. Fosdick speaks of obedience when he tells of something his father said. As he left the house the father said to the mother: “Tell Harry he can mow the yard today if he feels like it.” A few yards farther and he turned again and said: “And tell Harry he’d best feel like it.” Fosdick said he mowed the yard utterly without rancor because he was being obedient to someone who was his friend as well as his father. I’m certain that’s true, but he mowed it just the same. I was going to make an application of that to us but I’ve forgotten just how I would phrase it.

*Sometimes the circumstances  
yell loud and it would appear  
that “Pharaoh” is running the  
show*

### 3

## ***WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?***

*The king of Egypt said, "If it is a boy kill him; but if it is a girl let her live." Exodus 1:15-16*

**G**oldberg reminds us that for all his power, Pharaoh couldn't even get his daughter to keep his rules. He wanted all the Hebrews boys killed and here's his daughter breaking the law (2:1-10).

Who would deny that the daughter made a choice? But, in light of the narrative, who would deny that God was at work in her choice? Had we asked the princess if she was a free agent she would rightly have said yes but how can a sensitive woman be utterly free when they see an abandoned baby at the mercy of the elements, destined to die if someone doesn't do something about it? And on top of that, when she opened the little casket, "he was crying" (2:6) so are we surprised when we read, "and she felt sorry for him"?

But the baby wasn't abandoned in the usual sense. This had been a protected baby—for three months a mother had defied the law of the land and when the baby's growth became a threat to himself, the mother acted wisely. She put the baby where one might least have looked for him—in the river where the law said he was to be drowned. The divine irony is that the place designed to kill him becomes the location where he is preserved and the house (of Pharaoh) from which death is being handed out becomes his refuge. 2:10 speaks of some kind of public confirmation of Moses' adoption into the house of Pharaoh. While Egyptians kept a careful eye out for boys, for would-be deliverers, so that they might kill them, the adopted grandfather, Pharaoh, was bouncing on his knee the only boy in his whole kingdom he needed to kill! He was educating him, nourishing and advancing him (Acts 7:22). He would have been amazed at any Israelite who would think to warn him that his God was seeing all Pharaoh's evil and would work to bring him down. He would have found that hard to believe while he played with his grandson Moses.



Is it any wonder that David (Psalms 2), seeing the plots and schemes of his own people and foreigners as they opposed Yahweh and his anointed—is it any wonder, while looking at these judges and kings who thought they could successfully thwart God’s purposes, he says, “The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them”? To hear Pharaoh bellow about his power and what he would or would not do to Israel must have amused Yahweh. Pharaoh, who couldn’t dress himself without the help of God was sovereign? Hardly!

The ancient picture is no more amusing than the modern ones. We listen to men and women who have achieved some acclaim speak as though they were gods, as though they were God. What the scientists will or will not do one of these days. (One prediction I read was that when our sun burns out in a million years or so, the scientists will put another, maybe two, in its place.) It’s amazing what splicing a few genes and drawing out the implications of some phenomenon will do for some scientists. They begin to believe they are in charge and it isn’t the first one I’ve heard snigger at a believer’s claim that God was in charge. Sometimes the circumstances yell loud and it would appear that “Pharaoh” is running the show but one of these days someone will walk up to a modern pharaoh and offer him a ten-lesson correspondence course on who Yahweh is.

## 4

### ***NOBILITY IN STRANGE PLACES***

*He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.” Exodus 2:20*

Presuming, as I do, that the midwives of ch.1 were Hebrew women, it isn't surprising that they favored the Hebrew mothers. I can see that it might be difficult for them when the Egyptian authorities were putting pressure on them to act against their own people. (We've read much about that during the Nazi regime and read of Jews turning against fellow-Jews to save their own skin. In view of their horrendous conditions I have no criticism to offer about that.) Nevertheless, Hebrew women stood by Hebrew women. And it isn't difficult to understand that Moses' mother, Jochebed and her daughter Miriam showed concern for Moses but it's nice to read that an Egyptian princess can show as much human decency and compassion as a Hebrew.

No group or people have a monopoly on nobility or honor. In 2:13 we have a Hebrew oppressing a fellow-Hebrew. When confronted with his wrong, rather than renounce it and turn from it, in a bitter sulk he insults and implicitly threatens one who sought to right a wrong the day before (2:12-13). We are all capable of oppressing our own. This Israelite snarls his bitterness at Moses and rejects him as an interfering and arrogant interloper.

In 2:17-20 we have an outsider taking an entirely different view altogether. Some shepherds bullied the daughters of a Midianite priest and Moses, who had been rebuffed the last time he interfered in a quarrel, couldn't stand by and see that happen. He stood up for the oppressed ones and the priest saw it as gallantry. When he was told the story of Moses helping the girls, he wanted to know, “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat” (2:20). Bear in mind, when he offered hospitality, the only thing he knew of him was that he was “an Egyptian” (2:19).

What might have made it even more difficult to offer hospitality to this stranger would be finding out that he was an Israelite. Jethro was a

Midianite and that meant he was as much a descendant of Abraham as Moses but he was of the “rejected” line as were Ishmaelites and Edomites (Genesis 25:1-6 tells us the Midianites were deliberately separated from Isaac). Jethro treated Moses as Esau treated Jacob in Genesis 33. It’s lovely to see healing!

Again and again in Genesis and Exodus we are shown that outsiders are capable of kindness, discernment and integrity. A stranger called Melchizedek blessed Abraham and a Philistine king called Abimelech rebuked Abraham for a callous rejection of Sarah as his wife (to save his own skin) leaving her at the mercy of anyone who came along. Jacob is completely forgiven by Esau the brother he conned and the Pharaoh who exalted Joseph welcomed him. Here in Exodus an Egyptian princess defies the law of Egypt and a Midianite priest praises Moses who was insulted by his own.

It’s too easy to dismiss nobility in those who aren’t of “our house”. Wendy Kaminer in a *Theology Today* article some time ago took a severe look at the self-help books of evangelicals in which evangelicals praised themselves as people who loved their children, cared what happened to society, took marriage seriously and so forth. Looking at it through her eyes I began to feel my toes curl as quotation after quotation showed us up as smug and self-righteous, seeing ourselves as a cut above everybody else.

A godly Christian woman compared with a non-Christian decadent is a sight to behold but what about comparing a carnal, apathetic, whimpering and bigoted Christian with a patient, compassionate, socially-useful, unembittered non-Christian? Jesus, it is said in the NT, marveled twice. Once he marveled at the unbelief of his own people (Mark 6:6) and on another occasion he was astonished at the faith of a foreigner (Matthew 8:10). And it isn’t a rare thing to hear Christians confess one to another that sometimes “outsiders” show more love and compassion than the people we worship with.

We don’t need to needlessly attack believers and praise the world to show the world we’re really “honest” people or to curry favor with them. If we should show understanding and generosity to “outsiders” we should show it at least as much to struggling believers. But if the Bible shows us anything and if the Master’s example counts for anything we should gladly recognize nobility, gallantry and compassion where we see it, no matter the immediate source, for in the end, it all has one source.

*He who gives all humans food,  
clothing, fruitful seasons and  
glad hearts also helps them to  
live lives of beauty and  
strength.*

## 5

### ***EARTH'S GREATEST WONDER***

*“By faith when he was grown up, Moses refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.” Hebrews 11:24-25*

**T**he sun shines down on nothing lovelier or grander than a boy, girl, woman or man of high moral integrity and cheerful endurance. Autumn forests are wonderful, snow-capped mountains or high and thunderous waterfalls are breathtaking, vast deserts and grand canyons are spellbinding but nothing’s as awesome as a human who with cheerful stubbornness refuses to surrender her integrity! Nothing’s as riveting or creates as many lovely, gallant dreams as a vulnerable little human who with a characteristic smile refuses to exchange his integrity for something less than the vision that has seized him.

And I know in a world of spiraling figures on divorce, crime, abuse; I know in a world where the bizarre and monstrous grab the headlines that it isn’t always easy to look long at and appreciate the grandeur of such people. But they’re there; the virgins, the un-embittered, the forgivers, the honest, the faithful, the straight, the kind, the clean, strong and compassionate people—they’re all around us. They aren’t Jesus but they’re genuine!

If you think only Christians are like this—wake up! If you don’t already know that there are people who profess no allegiance to Christ and still live lives of breathtaking loveliness I won’t take the time to tell you about them. If you’ve never had an experience that led you to swear that “people outside the Church often treat you better than those in it” you’ve lived a sheltered life. God doesn’t wait until people make a commitment to him before he makes a commitment to them! He who gives all humans food, clothing, fruitful seasons and glad hearts also helps them to live lives of beauty and strength. As Paul put it in Acts 17: 25, God gives all humans life “and

everything else.” I’m weary of a superficial use of Scripture that denies what is plain to be seen by anyone who is able to see—God’s work of building character goes on with wonderful effectiveness even in the lives of non-Christians!

Where do people of moral integrity come from? How do they arise? What shapes them? The short and complete answer, of course, is God! That’s enough. But let me isolate two things that God uses in creating and shaping such wonders:

- 1) Early experiences and environment, and,
- 2) An abiding sense of the invisible.

I don’t know if any biblical character illustrates this better than Moses. Exodus 1—2, Acts 7:20-38 and Hebrews 11:23-28 would be helpful here.

When found by Pharaoh’s daughter Moses was given back into his mother’s arms for nursing. It wasn’t unusual for a child to be four (in some cases, even five) when weaned from his mother. With a mother like Jochebed (Hebrews 11:23) you can be certain Moses was nursed while his mother sang and told him stories. And faithful Amram while leading Moses around by the hand would have told him stories of how God led Abraham here and there like a child. Day after day, knowing that he was to be taken from them soon and subjected to tremendous pressures and temptations, they would have filled his yielding mind with God, covenant, election and destiny. It doesn’t surprise us, then, after he has been educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and showed himself to be a man, mighty in word and action (Acts 7) that he says “No!” to Egyptian glory, wealth and prestige. I’m not saying it was an easy decision or one quickly made. I’ve no way of knowing that; but we do know it was thoroughly decisive!

Is it pressing Heb 11:24 too far to see a public and formal rejection of the pharaonic family name? Was there a time when he was asked formally to accept the adoption into the family of the Pharaoh and in the sight of all Egypt’s elite he turned it down? Formally or not, his “no” was one of the grandest in history (MacCartney). Illustrating this biblical truth Josephus tells us that even as a little boy Moses took the crown Pharaoh had playfully put on him and stepped on it. What we know for sure is this: he chose his revered past and painful future with his enslaved and oppressed people rather than the power and wealth of Egypt.

Who can estimate the power of childhood training? Or the power of a single noble deed in the life of an otherwise poorly trained child? We’ve all

heard horror stories about the awful deeds which shaped a child for evil but we've also heard people tell us of some sublime single experience that never left them and kept a light on in their heart down the years. We can't overestimate the importance of catechizing our children with deep, rich, abiding and ennobling truths. And people we don't know but who are watching, can see us do something gallant, something stubbornly right and be redeemed by it without even knowing quite why.

Hebrews says Moses said "no" to Egypt's vast wealth and power because he knew what was ahead. Saw by faith what wasn't yet "seeable". He endured, it goes on to say, because he saw Him who is invisible. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. That's one of the key elements in these incredible people—they rise beyond the visible and grasp what is not yet subject to the eye or the senses.

The battle for full truth and faith, following George Roche, hinges on the meaning of a rainbow. Only a fool denies the physical. Only an ingrate uses the good things scientists and medical researchers bring and then dismisses the scientists with contempt. These professionals bring many of God's finest gifts to us but the worst kind of technology is the kind that kills rainbows, that takes the mystery out of everything and that substitutes equations, measurements and symbols for meaning. It's one of the glories of these remarkable people of faith and integrity that they will not allow rainbows to die; that they will not allow technology to dissolve mystery!

"What is a rainbow? Why it's an atmospheric optical phenomenon caused by water droplets refracting light." Of course it is! And who would want to deny that important truth? But that's not all. Beyond the physical, beyond the water droplets and refracted light there is Genesis 9 and a Story.

With sophisticated cameras, electronic microscopes and computers people can follow the path of a human from conception through cell division and replication to maturity and finally to death—from the womb to the grave. See? Pictures and physical explanations for everything, no mystery, no needless hypotheses (like "God" or "meaning" or "values")—all is naked to the eye and having sensed it—that's the end of it. But it's not the end of it, not for the "keepers of rainbows". And what do the defenders of rainbows have to offset the (partial but) powerful truth of the mere senses? A Story! These people know that beyond the bully now before us, beyond the seducer now before us, beyond the embittered, hand-wringing and cynical, beyond the statistics on crime, premarital, extramarital and

perverved sex; beyond the rape of nations, unemployment, lords of porn, booze and injustice there is the Righter of all Wrongs! Not just the Punisher of the Wicked but the Righter of all Wrongs! Beyond the important temporal there is the eternal; beyond the important visible there is the Invisible. Beyond the microscope, the telescope and the theory— there are glorious humans and there is the Story!



## 6

### ***THE IRISH WOLFHOUND***

*“When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong.”  
Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?” Exodus 2:13-14*

**T**he government was exterminating their little boys, they were enslaved to the point where they cried to God because the bondage was so severe and they were brothers and sisters. If that was the situation, how come they were oppressing each other? You’d think since they were enduring oppression from their enemies that that would be enough, how could they turn on each other and do the enemy’s work for him? Wasn’t there enough pain in the world for the People of God to face? Weren’t there enough enemies who bullied and butchered? In 2:13 we have one brother wronging another (and by consequence, wounding the man’s family—do we ever wrong only one person?). There, there, in the land of injustice, where Hebrews should have stood by each other, had good reason to stand by each other; there, we find brothers wronging brothers.

And in a world filled with tireless evil, vicious, brutal, evil; slimy, rotting evil; crushing, debasing, cruel evil—in a world filled with that we find churches grinding each others’ bones. We find journals, bulletins, taped-sermons and all kinds of church media devoted to the exposure of some preacher, church or other on matters of teaching. Ah, yes, but it must be on something foundational like the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? Maybe his atoning death? The certainty of judgment? The one true God? The truth and trustworthiness of Scripture? Some central affirmations of Scripture—surely? No! Take one quick glance around at these papers and see for yourself. With the porn industry, the booze industry, the drug industry, the vice industry, the abortion industry; with the many open sewers pouring out filth, with countless open wounds around us, caused by gangsters, corrupt landlords, politicians and war-mongers—with all these in front of us as enemies, who do we pick a raging battle with? Some other little assemblies which, despite their limitations, with Bible in hand and God

set in their hearts, have for years stood opposed to these monstrous tyrannies. That's who some of us devote our papers, sermons and letters against! These are the sort of little congregations that some huge assembly leaders dismiss as churches that should close shop. [It's amazing what a bit of "success" will do to some people.]

There's this story of the Irish Wolfhound that enjoyed a big juicy bone and then hobbled off on three legs. I don't believe I'll tell it.