

# **EXODUS**

Part III: Chapters 15-20  
THE ROAD TO MT. SINAI &  
THE REVELATION OF THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

**ASBURY**

## WHAT'S FREEDOM FOR?

Everyone knows that Exodus tells the story of the miraculous deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. The accounts in the early chapters of Exodus are some of the most memorable stories in the Bible: Moses in the bullrushes, the burning bush, the plagues, the Passover, and the parting of the sea. By the end of chapter 14, Pharaoh's army lies drowned at the bottom of the sea, and Moses and the Hebrew people are on the far side of the Red Sea, ready to walk forward into freedom. But this is chapter 14, and there are 40 chapters total in Exodus. So, here's the question:

What is their freedom *for*?

The whole purpose of the exodus from Egypt was to set free God's people for a purpose. *That purpose will be given to the people at Mount Sinai.*

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## FIRST MOSES, THEN ISRAEL

Remember that everything that happens to Moses prefigures what will happen to Israel. Israel's story expands and elaborates on Moses's story.

For example:

- Moses is oppressed by Pharaoh → Israel is oppressed by Pharaoh;
  - Moses is saved through water and the reeds → Israel is saved through water and the reeds;
  - Moses is shaped by his wilderness wanderings → Israel is shaped by its wilderness wanderings;
  - Moses meets God on the mountain in the fire → Israel meets God on the mountain in the fire;
  - Moses is commissioned by God on the mountain and given a new identity → Israel is commissioned by God on the mountain and given a new identity.
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## ISRAEL RECEIVES ITS MISSION ON MOUNT SINAI

This reading guide covers Exodus chapters 15-20. Our account starts with Pharaoh's army drowned in the sea and the children of Israel ready to move forward into the desert.

1. We'll first read about Israel's journey through the desert to Mount Sinai.
2. Then we'll read how the Lord makes a covenant with the people at Sinai and gives them the Ten Commandments.

Their time in the desert will shape and make the Israelites into God's people, but it is on Mount Sinai that Israel will receive its purpose from the Lord. That purpose is to represent the Lord to the nations, and the Ten Commandments and the laws at Sinai give Israel guidance on how to do that.

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## HOW THIS READING PLAN WORKS

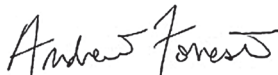
**Remember, consistency is more important than intensity!** That is, don't try to read the whole Bible in one sitting—rather, pace yourself and make a commitment to be consistent. To that end, the readings are parceled-out on weekdays only—if you get behind, catch up each weekend. Each day I've written brief commentary to help you get something out of your reading; the commentary is NOT the point, the Bible is the point. If the commentary helps you, great! If it doesn't, no worries—just skip it.

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## WHY EXODUS MATTERS TO YOUR LIFE TODAY

As we will see, the Ten Commandments are guidance from God about how to live well. The Ten Commandments (and the other laws that follow) are revealed from God to His people so that they can be His representatives to the nations.

The church has that same purpose today (see 1 Peter 2:9-12)—we represent the Lord to the world. It's my prayer that these readings will show us how to live well so we can be a blessing to our neighbors and to the nations.



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P.S. Want to receive these daily readings and commentary each weekday morning in your inbox? Sign up on my website: [andrewforrest.org](http://andrewforrest.org).

P.P.S. What are we supposed to do with all the Old Testament laws? Are Christians supposed to follow all those laws about fabrics and livestock and sacrifices? **I'll be teaching an All-Church Bible study on these questions on April 3, 6:30-8:00 PM in the Asbury Sanctuary.** (Dinner available beforehand, 5:00-6:30 PM. 18 and under are free on Bible study evenings!) Going to be out of town? Catch the livestream: [www.asburytulsa.org](http://www.asburytulsa.org).



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## ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER

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In a Bible study or small group?

Use the order below to provide some structure to your gathering.

### 1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

*Psalm 118:24*

### 2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

### 3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### 4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

*The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.*

### 5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen.

## **6A. MORNING PRAYER**

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **6B. EVENING PRAYER**

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **7. CLOSING BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;  
The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace;  
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,  
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

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## **OCCASIONAL PRAYERS**

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I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

### **A GRACE BEFORE MEALS**

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*or*

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR OUR NATION**

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A BIRTHDAY**

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as *he* begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY**

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY**

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and His Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **A THANKSGIVING PRAYER**

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of His Word and the example of His life; for His steadfast obedience, by which He overcame temptation; for His dying, through which He conquered death; and for His rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make Him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

## **FOR OUR ENEMIES**

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

## **FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON**

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that *his* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **AT THE TIME OF DEATH**

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may *his* soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

## **FOR DESIRING GOD**

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.



### **FOR A PERSON IN TROUBLE OR BEREAVEMENT**

O merciful Father, you have taught us in your holy Word that you do not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men: Look with pity on the sorrows of your servant *N*. Remember *him*, O Lord, in mercy; nourish *his* soul with patience; comfort *him* with a sense of your goodness; lift up your countenance upon *him*; and give *him* peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR THE DISCOURAGED AND DOWNCAST**

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy: Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of your poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **FOR HELP TO BEAR BEREAVEMENT**

Heavenly Father, help us to entrust our loved ones to your care. Though sorrow darkens our lives, help us to look up to you, remembering the cloud of witnesses by which we are surrounded. And grant that we on earth, rejoicing ever in your presence, may share with them the rest and peace which your presence gives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE**

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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(I've selected these prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

**MONDAY, APRIL 1**  
**EXODUS 15:22-25A**

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN, INTO THE FIRE?

<sup>22</sup>Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. <sup>23</sup>When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. <sup>24</sup>And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” <sup>25</sup>And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

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Our story resumes after Pharaoh’s army has been drowned at the bottom of the sea, and the Hebrews have walked through the waters on dry ground. They have praised the Lord and sung their songs of thanksgiving. Now it’s time to move forward in freedom—their first steps as free people.

And they immediately run into trouble! Just three days into the desert, and they find themselves without water. As everyone knows, if they go without water for three more days, they will all die. Why would the Lord bring them out of Egypt just to have them die of thirst in the desert?

Remember that the process *is* the point. That is, the entire point of Exodus is about the formation of God’s people into Israel, God’s nation. The people needed to be set free from Egypt, but they are not yet ready to bear their charge as God’s people. And, perhaps *the essential lesson* they will need to learn is to trust God.

So, they run out of water, and they begin to panic. The Lord does not immediately supply the water—they have to wait for it. Note that Moses is forced to turn to the Lord, and the Lord then promptly provides relief.

How does it shape a people for them to have to learn to wait on God?

What about you? Could there be a lesson for you today when you find yourself with a gap between what you have and what you need?

P.S. A fun note: the Nile was drinkable until the Lord—using Moses’s staff—turned it into blood during the first plague and made it undrinkable; here, the water is undrinkable until the Lord—using a piece of wood—makes it drinkable.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 2**  
**EXODUS 15:25B-27**

THEY WERE RIGHT BY AN OASIS ALL ALONG!

There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them,<sup>26</sup> saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.”

<sup>27</sup>Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

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Three days out from the Red Sea, the people run out of water and cry out to the Lord. He supplies it, thereby teaching them that He can be trusted. Here, the Lord makes the lesson explicit:

*“If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.” [15:26]*

The lesson: just obey my voice rather than assuming that you know what’s right by your own eyes, and things will go well with you.

And then, the very next place they come to is a desert oasis! If they had just trusted the Lord previously, they would have ended up there sooner.

A good lesson for us: the Lord’s way—obedience—is always the best way.

P.S. Note that the Lord calls the Egyptian plagues “diseases” and connects them to the Egyptians’ disobedience. In other words, the plagues were a consequence of the Egyptians’ rebellion against the Lord.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3**  
**EXODUS 16:1-3**

GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF THE PEOPLE

<sup>16</sup>They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, <sup>3</sup>and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land

of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

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Remember, the theme of Exodus is the formation of God’s people into God’s nation, Israel.

The people are now out of Egypt.

But the Egypt is not out of the people!

Here, because of their hunger, they say that they would prefer to *remain as slaves* rather than have to face the challenges of the wilderness!

The people are out of Egypt but still living in bondage. The Lord’s task is to set them truly free.

Are there places in your life—between your ears—in which you are still living enslaved?

What would it mean for the Lord to truly set you free?

## **THURSDAY, APRIL 4**

### **EXODUS 16:4-12**

#### WHO IS THE LORD?

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” <sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” <sup>8</sup>And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” <sup>10</sup>And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold,

the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

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At the burning bush, Moses asked the Lord, “Who *are* you?”

The Lord’s answer: “I am who I am.” In other words, you’ll know who I am because of the way I will be. You’ll know me from what I do.

One of the themes of Exodus is the Lord’s revealing of who He is, both to the Israelites and to the Egyptians.

Look what the Lord says:

*“At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”* [16:12]

The Egyptians learned about the Lord through His power to liberate the slaves. The Israelites learn about the Lord through His power to provide.

P.S. “A day’s portion every day” [v. 4] is the exact same phrase in Hebrew as chapter 5:13 and 19 when Pharaoh orders the slaves’ daily quota of bricks to be the same, despite lacking straw. The contrast: Pharaoh orders a burden every day, but the Lord offers a blessing.

## **FRIDAY, APRIL 5** **EXODUS 16:13-21**

WHAT JESUS MEANT BY “DAILY BREAD”

<sup>13</sup> In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. <sup>14</sup> And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” <sup>17</sup> And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” <sup>20</sup> But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it

till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup>Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

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When Jesus teaches His disciples the model prayer that we now call The Lord's Prayer, He includes this phrase:

*"Give us each day our daily bread."* [Matthew 6:11]

Jesus is, of course, drawing on this story about the wonderful supply of manna that the Lord provided to the Israelites during their forty-year sojourn in the desert. The point is that just as the Lord provided for the Israelites, so does He provide for us what we need each day.

Just think about the lessons the Israelites are learning as they gather the manna each morning:

- The Lord sees their need and meets it;
- The Lord gives them just what they need for that day—tomorrow it will happen again;
- There is no need to hoard, because there is just the right amount for all;
- They must learn to focus on the day at hand;
- They have to learn to control their desires for excess and their fears for the future.

There is plenty for everyone. And God provides *just because*; not because people deserve it.

If you don't use the manna, it spoils! Financial plenty is meant to be used!

*"In all these respects, the provision of manna in the wilderness stands as a correction of agricultural Egypt, where land ownership was centralized, inequalities were everywhere, acquisitiveness knew no respite, excesses were hoarded, the multitudes sold themselves into slavery to survive, neighbor fought with neighbor, and one man ruled over all as if he were god—eventually leading his entire people to destruction."*

-Leon Kass, *Founding God's Nation*

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Those are lessons worth learning today, aren't they?

**MONDAY, APRIL 8**

**EXODUS 16:22-30**

THE FREED SLAVES' FIRST HOLIDAY

<sup>22</sup> On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, <sup>23</sup> he said to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” <sup>24</sup> So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. <sup>25</sup> Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup> Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.”

<sup>27</sup> On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. <sup>28</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? <sup>29</sup> See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” <sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.

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The passage of time is one of the most fundamental and mysterious aspects of human existence. What we see with the seventh-day Sabbath is that the Lord is teaching His people to mark time by His standards, and not by the world’s.

In Hebrew, *sabbath* means “to cease, to stop.” So, every seven days God’s people are to totally cease from labor. What about daily bread? Well, on that sixth day the Lord doubly provides!

Think about what the first experience of Sabbath must have meant for these newly-freed slaves.

P.S. The word “holy” in the Bible doesn’t mean “religious” it means “separate.” The point of a holy day is that it is meant to be separate from all other days.

## **TUESDAY, APRIL 9**

### **EXODUS 16:31-36**

WHAT ARE YOU IN DANGER OF FORGETTING TODAY?

<sup>31</sup> Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. <sup>32</sup> Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" <sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." <sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. <sup>35</sup> The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. <sup>36</sup> (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

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We are all in constant danger of forgetting that which is most important. You think, "there is no way I'd ever forget that lesson," and then you promptly forget it.

This is why the Bible is so concerned with remembrance. Here the Lord gives specific instructions as to how Israel is to remember forever their experience with manna in the wilderness; because in the future, remembering will be essential to their survival.

This is one of the reasons why it is crucial that God's people make weekly church attendance a non-negotiable part of their lives. At church every Sunday, we are reminded of that which is most important and that which we are always forgetting: the Resurrection.

P.S. Note that one of the blessings of their daily manna was that the Israelites were able to focus on learning to be God's people. With their material needs met during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, they could fully devote themselves to formation.

## **WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10,**

### **EXODUS 17:1-7**

THE PROCESS *IS* THE POINT

<sup>17</sup> All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to



drink. <sup>2</sup>Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” <sup>3</sup>But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” <sup>4</sup>So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” <sup>5</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

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Here we are again: another episode in which the Israelites lack water. It's easy to self-righteously condemn the people for their lack of trust in the Lord, but how many times have I, myself, seen the Lord answer my prayers only to worry the next time that exact same need arises?

What's interesting to me is that the Lord is the one who has led them to the place that lacks water. So, this is clearly meant to be a lesson for them. Remember: the process *is* the point. What lesson might the Lord be wanting to teach you through your circumstances today?

**THURSDAY, APRIL 11**

**EXODUS 17:8-13**

THE HANDS OF MOSES

<sup>8</sup>Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” <sup>10</sup>So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup>But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. <sup>13</sup>And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

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- Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12). Haman, the genocidal enemy of the Jews so many centuries later (see the book of Esther), is an Amalekite!
- This is the first mention of Joshua in the Bible. He will come to be a central figure in Israel.

How does this story relate to the practice of intercessory prayer? I've always thought that devoted prayer for someone else is one of the purest forms of love there is because it's totally sacrificial and anonymous.

Over whom can you be praying today?

## **FRIDAY, APRIL 12**

### **EXODUS 17:14-16**

#### HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO BE

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup>And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, <sup>16</sup>saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

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Just as with Passover and manna, we see here again how important remembrance is to the people of God. Moses is instructed to write down, while the memories are fresh, exactly what happened in the victory over the Amalekites. This is the first time that "writing" is referred to in the Bible, and gives us a glimpse into the Bible's own formation. For some reason, we modern people tend to think of the Bible dropping down from heaven to the church. In fact, it was written down over time after people had an encounter with the Lord. The gospels are a great example of this—the apostles knew Jesus, and then they set down in print what had happened.

When you read the Bible, you are reading what an ordinary person who had an extraordinary encounter wrote down!

**MONDAY, APRIL 15**  
**EXODUS 18:1-9**  
THE FIRST WITNESS

18 Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> Now Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her home, <sup>3</sup> along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land"), <sup>4</sup> and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). <sup>5</sup> Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. <sup>6</sup> And when he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her," <sup>7</sup> Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. <sup>8</sup> Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. <sup>9</sup> And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

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We're told that Jethro had *heard* of what the Lord had done. He becomes the first representative of the nations to recognize the Lord's mighty work. He's a mysterious figure but one whom Exodus goes out of its way to honor and respect. It seems clear that he was an important influence on Moses's life.

How can you be a Jethro for someone else today?

**TUESDAY, APRIL 16**  
**EXODUS 18:10-12**  
"THE LORD IS GREATER THAN ALL GODS"

<sup>10</sup> Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. <sup>11</sup> Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." <sup>12</sup> And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

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One of the goals of the exodus was to show the Lord's superiority over the so-called "gods" (really, "demons") of Egypt. Here, Jethro shows us that that goal has been realized, as he proclaims that "the LORD is greater than all gods."

We're getting ahead of ourselves, but at Sinai (chapter 19 and following) Israel will be charged with representing the Lord to the nations. The same charge lies on the church today—we represent the Lord to the watching world. This is why our conduct is so important: it teaches others—for good and for ill—about the Lord.

### **WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17**

#### **EXODUS 18:13-27**

**BUT, WHO'S TO SAY WHAT'S RIGHT?**

<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup>When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" <sup>15</sup>And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; <sup>16</sup>when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." <sup>17</sup>Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup>You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. <sup>19</sup>Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, <sup>20</sup>and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. <sup>21</sup>Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>22</sup>And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup>If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

<sup>24</sup>So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup>Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>26</sup>And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. <sup>27</sup>Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

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Jethro brilliantly shows Moses how to administer justice by delegating his authority. But, what is justice? What standard can be used to permanently show people how to live well? This is what the Ten Commandments (and the subsequent laws at Sinai) will answer.

## **THURSDAY, APRIL 18**

### **EXODUS 19:1-6**

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT PARAGRAPH IN EXODUS

19 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup> They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, <sup>3</sup> while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

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These six verses make up the most important paragraph in Exodus. Back at the burning bush (3:12), the Lord told Moses that when he and the people would arrive again at Mount Sinai, he would know for certain that God’s plan was being accomplished. So, finally, they have arrived at Mount Sinai, and the Lord reveals to Moses the true purpose of the exodus. The Lord tells the Israelites that they have seen with their own eyes what He did to the Egyptians and that the journey through the wilderness has had a purpose. The Lord didn’t bring them into the desert to kill them like they complained, but rather He brought them “on eagles’ wings” through the desert to this mountain so He could speak to them.

Then, the Lord sets out the terms of the covenant He intends to make with them. A contract is a short-term agreement, but a covenant is a lifelong, binding promise. In the ancient Middle East, covenants were made between nations and between kings and subjects. The terms of the covenant: the people need to listen and obey, and they will be God’s special nation among all the nations of the earth. The whole earth belongs to the Lord, yes; but Israel is especially chosen to represent the Lord to the nations. In fact, Israel is meant to be a “kingdom of priests.”

Priests mediate between God and man and they both represent people to God and God to people. That's Israel's special job—to represent the Lord.

Just as at the burning bush, here, Moses goes up the mountain to receive a commission from the Lord, but this time the commission is for all the people. Previously, they served Pharaoh, but now they are to serve the Lord. Just as Moses received his identity at the burning bush, so here the people receive their identity as the Lord's special people.

The Apostle Peter drew upon this story when he wrote 1 Peter in the New Testament:

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. [1 Peter 2:9-12]*

The purpose of God's people is to represent the Lord to the nations, so that the nations can come to know Him and trust Him and receive life in His name. Ten Commandments and the subsequent laws are specific ways that God's people are to live so that they can draw the nations to the Lord.

P.S. Note in verse 1 that the entire calendar has reset with the Exodus. From now on, Israel will mark time from the day of their liberation.

## **FRIDAY, APRIL 19**

### **EXODUS 19:7-9A**

#### THE PEOPLE AGREE

<sup>7</sup> So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. <sup>8</sup> All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. <sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever."

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A few more thoughts on covenant and law: The covenant is permanent, at least from the Lord's point of view. He is committed to being faithful to

the covenant, no matter what, even when it costs the life of the Son of God. Also, note that covenant precedes law. That is, the law provides details to the covenant, so the people know how to keep it.

Here, the Lord strengthens Moses's position before the people, so that the people won't question that Moses is speaking for the Lord.

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"Israel's laws are the fences within which life can flourish. They make possible a distinctive way of life so that other nations can see what [the Lord] is like and what he expects."

-Carmen Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*

The people see that the covenant is a good thing, and they accept its terms. When they remember their promise, things will go well with them; when they forget it, they will struggle. This is the pattern of the Old Testament from here on. Ultimately, the Father sends the Son to perfectly keep the terms of the covenant and so thereby release blessing to the entire world.

## **MONDAY, APRIL 22**

### **EXODUS 19:9B-15**

#### **HE'S NOT A TAME GOD**

When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD,<sup>10</sup> the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments<sup>11</sup> and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.<sup>12</sup> And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.'<sup>13</sup> No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."<sup>14</sup> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments.<sup>15</sup> And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

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To emphasize the importance of the covenant and what's about to happen, Moses instructs the people to prepare themselves—even to the point of abstaining from sexual activity. They are going to learn that the Lord is not to be trifled with, but that he must be respected. The Lord is approachable, but He's still holy.

I think we modern Christians sometimes make the mistake of losing a sense of reverence in our worship of God. Because we know Jesus, we have

seen what the Lord is like and we know that He wants us to approach. But respect is not the same thing as standoffishness. What would it look like for you to prepare for Sunday worship in a deliberate and reverent way this week?

## **TUESDAY, APRIL 23**

### **EXODUS 19:16-20**

#### THEOPHANY

<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup> Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. <sup>20</sup> The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

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It's a tremendous scene—thunder and lightning and smoke, but to his credit, Moses is not afraid.

This reminds me of the scene in the gospels on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John are with Jesus when something miraculous occurs:

*17 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [Matthew 17:1-8]*

The same Lord who was at Sinai with Moses is there present on the Mount of Transfiguration, and the experience is dazzling. No wonder the people trembled and the disciples were terrified!



## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24

### EXODUS 19:21-25

#### DON'T LOOK DIRECTLY AT THE SUN

<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. <sup>22</sup> Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” <sup>23</sup> And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” <sup>24</sup> And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” <sup>25</sup> So Moses went down to the people and told them.

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When there is an eclipse, we’re told not to look directly at the sun, as doing so could damage our eyes. The sun is a good thing and provides light and warmth and makes life possible, but it also has power to harm us if we don’t approach it properly. In the same way, the Lord’s presence is good for the people, but they will need to learn how to live in His presence. (This is, in fact, what the book of Leviticus will be about.)

## THURSDAY, APRIL 25

### EXODUS 20:1-2

#### THE TEN WORDS [LONG POST!]

<sup>20</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

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We are at Mount Sinai and here, in chapter 20, we finally hear—directly from the Lord himself—the words He wants His people to live by. This is the central event in Israel’s founding—the Ten Commandments. So it’s interesting that the Bible itself never uses the phrase “The Ten Commandments”! Yes, in most English Bibles you can find the phrase “the Ten Commandments” but that is a deliberate gloss by Bible translators. In Hebrew, the phrase is always “the Ten Words.” (The same word can also mean “things,” so it could also be translated as “The Ten Things.”) If you look at Exodus 34:28 in the ESV translation, you’ll see “the Ten Commandments” printed, but you’ll also notice a little textual note <sup>1</sup> and if you look to see what it says you’ll see printed there <sup>1</sup> “Hebrew *the ten words*.” For familiarity, I usually refer to the “Ten Commandments” but somehow I like thinking of them as the Ten Words or the Ten Things, too.

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There are 613 laws in total in the Torah. A good way to think of the Ten Commandments is that they are like a prologue or preamble to the Law. The Ten are guiding principles that reveal God's heart to the world.

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All of the commandments are in the second person singular. That is, they are addressed to "You yourself." So, when the Lord says "I am the Lord your God," He is in effect saying, "I am your personal God."

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At the burning bush, the Lord identified Himself in relation to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Here, they are not mentioned. Now, it's just about the Israelites who have been brought out of slavery. It's as if history has started over.

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The very first statement the Lord makes is about freedom. He says, "I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." They have been set free for a purpose, and they ought never to forget it.

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The Law is not a new kind of slavery, but rather it is freedom because it is instruction on how to live the right way. Modern Christians—due to a longstanding misreading of the New Testament—often sneer at the Law. This is a heartbreaking development of which we ought to repent. The Law is God's great gift to His people. Note that the Law is given *only after they have been saved*. In other words, the Law doesn't save them—rather, it shows them how to live well now that they have been saved.

I love this image from Carmen Imes:

*"Imagine that your community is planning to build a new playground with easy public access, right beside a busy intersection. Wouldn't it be odd if someone argued that children would have more fun on this playground if there weren't any fences to cramp their style? No, putting a fence between the cars-in-motion and kids-in-motion just makes sense. It ensures that children can play freely without fear of harm. It provides parents with a respite from watching their every move. A good playground includes physical boundaries. These ensure that everyone can have fun and fewer children end up in the emergency room. The fence is a gift! A playground with no fences isn't really freedom; it's an accident waiting to happen.*

*"Israel's laws are the fences within which life can flourish. They make possible a distinctive way of life so that other nations can see what Yahweh is like and what he expects."*

-Carmen Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*

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Because the Law is loving instruction on how His people ought to live, it represents God's character. The people are to be a kingdom of priests, and the Law is how they will do it. The Law is their mission, but not the point in itself. This is the error that Jesus faced in His time. Some of the Jews—like the Pharisees, e.g. —had come to see a punctilious keeping of the Law as the point of living. Rather, the point of the Law is to help Israel fulfill its mission as a light to the nations.

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Jesus says that knowing the truth will set you free.

*<sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [John 8:31-32]*

One way to think about the Ten Commandments and the Law is that they are a revelation from the Lord about the truth and how to live by it. And, therefore, they show us how to live as free people.

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The Holy Spirit has been given to the church to enable us to keep God's Law. The Father sent the Son to die for His people, thereby freeing them from the Egypt of sin and death. Those who trust in Jesus are set free to live in the Promised Land of His presence and the Spirit now makes it possible for them to live freely and obediently.

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Ezekiel was an Old Testament prophet during the time of the Babylonian exile. Israel had worshipped idols and forsaken the Lord, and the consequence was their captivity in Babylon. But the Lord didn't abandon them, and Ezekiel foresaw a time when God would rescue them and change their hearts so that they could live freely and obediently:

*<sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. [Ezekiel 36:24-27]*

What follows this passage is Ezekiel's famous vision of the valley of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37) when what seems impossible—dry bones coming back to life—actually happens!

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With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church at Pentecost, the impossible has happened! The Ten Commandments therefore are a great gift to us, and they are words to live by. We shall see that they address the essential parts of life and offer guidance to show us how to think about life and what's important.

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Jesus famously summed up the greatest commandment like this:

*<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” [Matthew 22:36-40]*

Jesus has perfectly summed up the heart behind the Ten Commandments. What the Ten do is show us what it looks like to love God and love our neighbors. The first few speak specifically about loving God, and the second batch about loving our neighbors. Together, these Ten are the great commandments.

I am looking forward to reading through them with you. I've found that focusing on these Ten regularly and meditating on their meaning has been changing the way I think, and my prayer is that the same would happen for you.

Let's GO.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 26**

**EXODUS 20:3**

FIRST THINGS FIRST [THE FIRST COMMANDMENT]

<sup>3</sup>“You shall have no other gods before me.

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The first commandment is as simple as it gets—the Lord must be first. Now, most of us modern people today would deny that we are worshipping “other gods.” After all, we're not sacrificing to Aphrodite or Baal. And, as far as it goes, that might be true. But remember that these various names for pagan gods rest on a deep spiritual truth, namely that there are dark spiritual powers at work in the world. And, as soon as we value sex or money above obedience to the Lord, we are in fact worshipping these “gods.”

So, it all starts with the first commandment: the Lord must be first, and the worship of anything else enslaves.

What "gods" are you in danger of worshipping today?

## MONDAY, APRIL 29

### EXODUS 20:4-6

#### WATCH OUT FOR IDOLS [THE SECOND COMMANDMENT]

<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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Note how much longer the second commandment is compared with the first. The lack of brevity implies that this word needs more explanation!

An idol is an image of a spiritual being. In the Bible, these spiritual beings are sometimes called “gods;” today, we might call them “fallen angels” or “demons.” It’s interesting that when God’s faithful servants—His angels—show up in the Bible, the first reaction of their human interlocutors is to prostrate themselves in terror, which is why angels always say, “Don’t be afraid.” When in Revelation John the visionary falls on his face before the angel, the angel hurriedly rebukes him and tells him to get up!

<sup>8</sup>*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”* [Revelation 22:8-9]

Here, the Israelites are specifically told not to make idols *of anything in the universe* because there is only one Lord who made everything else, including the spiritual beings. To worship the created rather than the Creator is idolatry and will always lead to spiritual slavery.

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In Genesis 1, we are told that people are made in God’s image. This is the reason why we ought not make idols, because the Lord has already made us in His image. If we worship idols, we are actually diminishing ourselves and failing to live as fully human. We are, in effect, giving the glory that

the Lord has uniquely bestowed on us over to dark powers for whom that glory was not meant.

Although the occult is sadly on the rise in modern America, most of us are probably not in danger of creating literal idols in the way the Israelites were. Nevertheless, the second commandment is a grave warning against being pulled into idolatry. What the Lord tells us is that sin in one generation will have effects on our grandchildren and even our great-grandchildren. And, we know from experience that this is true—sin in families affects multiple generations.

And yet look at the effect that faithfulness will have: one life of obedience will be the means by which the Lord will cover a thousand generations with grace! If we are faithful *now*, our actions can be a covering for those who will come after us.

Look at Abraham—his faithful obedience to the Lord is still having its gracious effect today.

Your actions matter!

## **TUESDAY, APRIL 30**

### **EXODUS 20:7**

WAY MORE THAN JUST NOT CUSSING [THE THIRD COMMANDMENT]

<sup>7</sup>“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

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What Exodus 20:7 literally says is “Do not *carry* the name of the Lord in vain.” This is related to the way the high priest carries the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate (see chapter 28) when he goes in before the Lord. He is representing the people before the Lord. And, he carries on his head the name of the Lord, so he is also representing the Lord to the people.

When Israel was told to be a kingdom of priests (see 19:5), this is their vocation—to represent the Lord to the nations. So, the third commandment is about much more than just not cussing. It certainly includes that, but more than just the words we use it’s about how we are supposed to live.

If we represent the Lord, we need to bear witness to Him and His character faithfully.

How does this change how you interact with other people today?

## **WEDNESDAY, MAY 1**

### **EXODUS 20:8-11**

#### STOP [THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>8</sup>“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

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The command about the Sabbath is, along with the command to honor one’s parents, a positive command. That is, it is about *doing* something and not about *forbidding* something.

The word *sabbath* means “to stop, to cease.” The Sabbath is a day on which everyone puts down his tools, and it is a day for everyone in the community. Sometimes we think that the purpose of the Sabbath is to rest so we can work better in the future. Although, of course, rest is necessary, note that the purpose of the Sabbath is not work. In fact, it’s the opposite: the purpose of work is rest!

This is the logic of the fourth commandment: the Lord worked to bring order to the cosmos, and then when everything was ordered, the Lord ceased from work so He could enjoy His labor. So, work is not the point of life—living is the point of life, and work makes living possible. The Sabbath is a day when we cease producing and just start enjoying.

You can see what a disaster it has been that in America we have essentially abandoned what used to be called *blue laws*. These were laws that restricted forms of commerce on Sunday. What those laws did was make Sabbath possible for everybody. When those laws were repealed, the temptation to make money and get ahead of my competitors became nearly irresistible. What a loss for society that we gave up the practice of stopping one day a week.

Each Sabbath day is a little Eden, when we stop to enjoy and savor God's blessings. I love the heart of the Lord that is revealed with this fourth commandment: God wants us to enjoy life.

For most of us, making Saturday special and different is a good goal. Starting at dinnertime Friday, what could you do in your household to make Saturday a day of enjoyment? What would it look like to cease from work on that day and just enjoy the life that the Lord has given you?

## **THURSDAY, MAY 2**

### **EXODUS 20:12**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER? [THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>12</sup>“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

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What does it mean to honor your father and your mother?

At the very least, it means to be grateful that the Lord used them to give you life. Procreation is a partnership with the Lord; obviously, a man and a woman have to come together for there to be conception, but it's God who makes life possible. The Lord has delegated power to fathers and mothers to make procreation possible. So, every human life is a product of what the Bible calls the “one flesh” union between a father and a mother. There are no people who do not have both a biological father and a biological mother.

Now, many people don't know their biological parents for many reasons, and many other people had parents who were abusive or even evil. And yet, the basic fact is the same: none of us would be here were it not for our parents (and their parents, and their parents, etc.).

So, honoring your father and mother must always start with gratitude that the Lord used them to give your life. It can be more than that, but it's not less. And gratitude is always a good place to start.

P.S. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus (Ephesians 6:2-3), this is the first commandment with a promise. Do this, and things will go well for you.

P.P.S. Note how both fathers and mothers are given equal place here—both are essential to life, and neither is more important than the other.



**FRIDAY, MAY 3**

**EXODUS 20:13**

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KILLING AND MURDER? [THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

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The difference between killing and murder is that murder is unlawful killing.

But that answer just raises another question:

What is lawful killing? By whose law?

In some ways, the rest of the Torah will offer answers, as it spells out times when death is the consequence for human sin. Pharaoh himself was killed in the Red Sea as a consequence of his behavior. But, what about when human laws are unlawful in God’s eyes? Just because a human law permits killing doesn’t mean it aligns with God’s justice.

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Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount draws attention to the heart behind this law when He tells His disciples to beware even of hateful thoughts:

*21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

*23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

*25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. [Matthew 6:21-26]*

In the background here is the story of Cain and Abel: Cain is so angry with the offering his brother Abel offers to the Lord that it drives him to murder.

Anger, Jesus says, can lead to murder—be careful.

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So, when is killing justified? An answer lies beyond the scope of this commentary, but I won't dodge the question completely. The sixth commandment seems to imply (and the rest of the Bible supports) the idea that some human sins bring with them the consequence of death. A relatively easy example would be murderous actions against the innocent. If the innocent defend themselves and the result is the death of the would-be murderer, then that killing would be justified (though a human tragedy). The problem is that people nearly always claim that their actions are justified. This is why due process and a judiciary system is so important for human societies—we must watch over each other and seek justice in every situation. Of course, we will fail at this and some people have concluded that since justice is always imperfect, it is better and safer never to permit lawful killing. I understand that point of view, but I do not totally agree with it. To me, there are times and situations when death is the consequence for human sin. Sometimes that means defending yourself in war, and sometimes that means a society defending itself in times of peace. But always, death is a tragedy and ought never to be shamelessly celebrated.

But, this is what I think, and I certainly could be wrong. What about you? Is there a difference between killing and murder? If so, what is it?

## **MONDAY, MAY 6**

### **EXODUS 20:14**

#### THE ADULTERY ONE [THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>14</sup>“You shall not commit adultery.

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Jesus said that part of the greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, though He was quoting from Leviticus 19:18).

One of the ways to love one's neighbor is to stay away from his or her spouse. It is a wicked thing to steal another's spouse, and the consequences of adultery will affect future generations. Because adultery requires two people, an adulterous spouse still needs a willing partner for adultery to be possible. Think how different life would be if one of the two parties in an adulterous relationship had refused to take part. The seventh commandment teaches that I am responsible for guarding my neighbor's marriage by staying away from adultery.

How can you stay as far away as possible from adultery today?

(Remember, adultery always begins first in the mind.)

**TUESDAY, MAY 7**

**EXODUS 20:15**

WHY STEALING IS WRONG [THE EIGHTH  
COMMANDMENT]

<sup>15</sup>“You shall not steal.

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One way to look at the second half of the Ten Commandments is that they are about my responsibility for my neighbor. I don't take my neighbor's life, I don't take my neighbor's wife, and I don't take my neighbor's property. The Ten give me the responsibility to look out for my neighbor.

Theft is also a sign of a lack of trust in God. In essence, when I steal I'm saying, “I want that person's property and I do not trust that the Lord will provide it for me, so I'm going to take what I want.”

Theft begins in the thoughts. How can you direct your thoughts away from theft today?

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 8**

**EXODUS 20:16**

FALSE WITNESS [THE NINTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>16</sup>“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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Just as the previous commandments spoke about my responsibility to my neighbor, so does this one: I am responsible for telling the truth about my neighbor. In any society, truthfulness is necessary for there to be flourishing. When you cannot trust other people, everyone suffers.

What if Christians were known in every community to be scrupulously honest and faithful to the truth?

How does the ninth commandment relate to the third commandment?

**THURSDAY, MAY 9**

**EXODUS 20:17**

DESIRE [THE TENTH COMMANDMENT]

<sup>17</sup>“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

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I like the word “covet” because it is an English word that we only use in religious contexts:

1. We use it in the tenth commandment. (More on this below.)
2. We use it in the Christian phrase, “I covet your prayers.” (This is an example of what you might call “Christianese.”)

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The word covet means *desire*, and in fact in Hebrew the word used in the tenth commandment has the same root that is used in Genesis 3:6 when Eve sees that the tree with the forbidden fruit is desirable.

The tenth commandment is strange, because it obviously cannot be legally enforced—you cannot prosecute someone for his thoughts. This is an important insight into the nature of the Ten Commandments overall, because it indicates that the Ten are less about specific legislation than they are about the ideas behind the laws. The Ten, in essence, are guiding principles from the Lord about how to live well. The right way to use the Ten Commandments, then, is to use them as bedrock principles on which to build a well-ordered society.

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The tenth commandment is important and occurs last because our thoughts determine our actions. It is very hard to commit adultery if you haven’t first coveted another person’s spouse; it is very hard to steal if you haven’t first coveted another person’s property, etc.

### **HOW TO KEEP FROM COVETING**

One of the marks of Christian maturity is to learn to discipline your thoughts. The way to practically do this is to practice gratitude. When you give thanks, you leave no room for desiring that which you do not have. By its very nature, coveting requires ingratitude—I’m not grateful for my house, or my wife, or my donkey, or my car, and so I desire yours.

What if you woke up tomorrow with only that which you thanked the Lord for today?

**FRIDAY, MAY 10**  
**EXODUS 20:18-21**  
MOSES GOES UP

<sup>18</sup>Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” <sup>20</sup>Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup>The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

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With the Ten Commandments concluded, the people are overwhelmed. The Lord has been speaking directly to the Israelites, but from now on He will speak to Moses on the mountain and then Moses will speak to the people.

We resume our reading on Monday with a new reading guide, Exodus Part 4.

Something to think about over the weekend: how can the Ten help you live more fully and freely? How are they God’s gift to you, today?





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