

# The Gospel in Moses's Story

## *From Bondage to Freedom*



## Part 2: Wilderness to Commissioning Studies 15-28

### What's Included

For each passage in the study guide for Part 2, Studies 15-28, in *The Gospel in Moses's Story: From Bondage to Freedom*, you will find the following:

- Outlines for each passage to help you understand their meaning and flow, designed to be enhanced and elaborated upon through your personal study and preparation
- Teaching helps embedded within these outlines to guide you as you teach classes or facilitate groups
- Questions for each passage to assist you with reflection and discussion

### Suggested Commentaries

- Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land in The Bible Speaks Today* series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2008. Expository commentary for Numbers.
- Selvaggio, Anthony T. *From Bondage to Liberty: The Gospel According to Moses*. Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2014. Theological and pastoral reflections on Exodus.
- Turner, David L. *The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Press, 2005. Expository commentary for the Gospel of Matthew with New Living Translation text.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021. Expository commentary for Exodus with New International Version text.
- Wright, N. T. *John for Everyone: Part 1*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. Expository commentary for John with original translation of text.
- Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. Expository commentary for 1 Corinthians with original translation of text.

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## 15. Exodus 32.1-35, “Wilderness: Idolatry”

### OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 32.1-35 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the idolatrous creation of the golden calf in Exodus 32.1-6 [15 minutes].

- Moses still on mountain, receiving Sabbath command (Exodus 31.12-17) and 10 Commandments “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31.18 ESV)
- While Moses gone, people wondering where he is and if he’s coming back, so instruct Aaron: “Make us some gods who can lead us” (Exodus 32.1 NLT)
- Note how quickly Aaron (remember he’s Moses’ brother) gets on board with project
- Aaron instructs people to give him gold rings; melts, molds gold into shape of calf
- Idolatrous intention of people very clear, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32.4 ESV)
- Next day celebration proclaimed by Aaron: sacrifice of burnt offerings, followed by “feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry” (Exodus 32.6 NLT)
- Word translated “play” or “revelry” can imply sexual acts; orgy probably implied here
- In light of behavior, stands to reason first of 10 Commandments will focus on idolatry
- Idolatry often seen as foundational sin: review Genesis 3.1-19 and Romans 1:18-25

4. Discuss the passionate conversation between God and Moses in Exodus 32.7-20 [10 minutes].

- God tells Moses what is happening below; see Exodus 32.8 as excellent summary
- God threatens wrath and judgment against Israel, offering “Plan B” to Moses: start over with a new people for Moses to lead
- Important to notice that God could have acted in wrath immediately without Moses’ input; some comparison with God’s interaction with Abraham regarding Sodom
- Moses intercedes for Israel, emphasizing God’s redemption of His people, God’s own name and reputation, and God’s covenantal promises to Abraham
- Moses’ anger burns against Israel as well as he sees the calf and the dancing: throws and breaks tablets, then destroys calf before people in memorable fashion
- Mystery here about how intercession can somehow alter course of events: “The fact is that, far from human intercession being an irritating but occasionally successful intrusion upon divinely prefabricated blueprints for history, it is actually an integral part of the way God’s sovereignty in history is exercised. That does not totally solve the mystery, but it puts it in its proper biblical perspective. God not only allows human intercession, God *invites* it (in later biblical texts God also commands it), and builds it into the decision-making processes of the heavenly council in ways we can

never fathom... God chooses in sovereign freedom to link that sovereign freedom to human prayer.” (Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 139-40)

**5. Discuss the dire consequences for the people in Exodus 32.21-35 [10 minutes].**

- Moses confronts Aaron, who struggles to admit his sin (read Exodus 30:24)
- Situation out of control: Moses calls for people to follow God
- Only Levites respond; vast majority of people still unwilling to repent, return to God
- Not orgy of random killing; systematic survey and execution of 3000 guilty leaders
- Moses offers not to die on behalf of the people (Moses is not Jesus!), but to die with the people: rejects a future where he goes on and people do not
- Plague sent in judgment upon the people; cannot escape consequences of choices

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 32.1-35, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- In a few sentences, describe the “who, what, where, when, and how” of Exodus 32.1-35.
- The rebellion and idolatry of the Israelites in verses 1-6 is breathtaking. Describe and explain the rapid descent of the Israelites and many of their leaders even after they experience God’s mighty actions on their behalf on numerous occasions.
- How is idolatry a foundational sin of humanity? While we are not molding golden calves into being, how do we give way to idolatry’s temptations?
- God appears to offer Moses a Plan B: I will destroy the Israelites and start over with you. How does Moses respond? What does this say about Moses? About how God deals with humans?
- Intercessory prayer is an important part of Exodus 32.1-35. How do you respond to those doubtful, on one side on the coin, of intercession’s effectiveness and impact? How do you respond to those who insist, on the other side, that we will receive whatever we pray for?
- God’s wrath is a foreign topic to many people today. Why has wrath historically been considered as a necessary ingredient of God’s nature and character? What is lacking or missing if divine wrath is non-existent?

## 16. Numbers 12.1-15, “Wilderness: Opposition”

### OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Numbers 12.1-15 [5 minutes].
2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].
3. Discuss the exposure of the opposition to Moses in Numbers 12.1-3 [15 minutes].
  - Context from Numbers 11: People complaining about food; Moses recognizes he needs help from elders; God responds with manna and quail (see Exodus 16-18)
  - Unexpected opposition: sister Miriam and brother Aaron criticize Moses’ marriage to “Cushite” woman (variant of Midianite; Exodus 2); not new relationship
  - Also: Miriam and Aaron dispute God’s speaking through Moses alone
  - Envy apparent here: “Has indeed the Lord only spoken through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” (v. 2 ESV)
  - Sibling rivalry? Aaron older, and customarily would receive preferential treatment
  - Moses described as “meek” (ESV); better to render as “humble” (NLT)
  - “The word humble is from a root meaning ‘bowed down’; in leadership he [Moses] was genuinely ‘subordinating his personal interests to those of God and his cause.’” (Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers*, 101)
  - “But the Lord heard them.” (v. 2 NLT); key to what happens next is God’s awareness of what is going on with Miriam and Aaron
4. Discuss the resolution of the opposition to Moses in Numbers 12.4-9 [10 minutes].
  - God assembles meeting at tabernacle, also called tent of meeting
  - God descends via pillar of cloud and goes to entrance to tabernacle
  - Very clear God is there in opposition to Miriam and Aaron; addresses them by name
  - God’s response: Moses more than a prophet, because prophets usually addressed in dreams and visions; “But not with my servant Moses. Of all my house he is the one I trust. I speak with him face to face, clearly, and not in riddles! (vv. 7-8 NLT)
  - “The Lord was very angry with them” (v. 9 NLT): God quite clear what He wants; acts swiftly, decisively, authoritatively, and justly
  - As deferred maintenance with buildings often leads to financial ruin, so deferred maintenance with relationships often leads to relational ruin
5. Discuss the ramifications of opposition to Moses in Numbers 12.10-15 [10 minutes].
  - As the Lord departs the tabernacle, Miriam revealed to have skin disease like leprosy with skin “white like snow” (v. 10 NLT)
  - Aaron’s response one of remorse, repentance, and contrition: begs Moses (who obviously is in a more favored status with God than Aaron and Miriam) for healing

- Moses intercedes for Miriam with God; but lesson still needs to be taught to Miriam and community
- Seven days of public knowledge and shame for Miriam's pride and opposition; repentance and forgiveness rarely forecloses consequences for one's actions
- Example: convicted murderer becomes Christian in prison; set free spiritually, but still must experience remainder of sentence for crime (possibility that witness of transformed life could have impact on sentence later on)
- Why Miriam and not Aaron? Not really sure; possibility Miriam was ringleader

## **6. Close in prayer.**

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Numbers 12.1-15, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Sum up the plot of Numbers 12.1-15 in your own words. What's happening?
- What surprises you about Miriam and Aaron's opposition to Moses? Why?
- What does Numbers 12.1-3 state are causes of Miriam and Aaron's opposition to Moses? From your experiences, what may be causes not specifically listed in the passage?
- What things cause broken relationships between family and/or friends in our day? How can we respond to these circumstances in ways faithful to Christ?
- God intervenes directly and promptly. Why do you think this is so? What can we learn from Numbers 12.4-9 in this regard?
- Most relational conflicts have ramifications that play themselves out not just in the short term, but in the long term as well. Going forward, what are some long-term ramifications of Miriam and Aaron's opposition to Moses that you think will reappear later? Give at least two brief examples.

## 17. Numbers 13.1 – 14.10, “Wilderness: Spies”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Numbers 13.1 – 14.10 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the reconnaissance of the Promised Land in Numbers 13.1-24 [10 minutes].**

- Immediately after opposition from Miriam and Aaron put down, Moses given instruction to send scouts/spies to Canaan
- One spy from each of 12 tribes (tribes have beginning as sons of Jacob in Genesis)
- Go into land where Abraham dwelled (see Genesis 12-25): through Negev and into Hebron; reminder of God’s faithfulness with him and now with Israel
- Specific set of questions to ask and answer in verses 17-20, including preparation of people there for battle, fertility of soil, and samples of crops grown
- Bountiful nature of land emphasized: grapes in clusters so large they take two people to carry
- Prophetic description of land “of milk and honey” seems to bear up to scrutiny

**4. Discuss the report given on the Promised Land in Numbers 13.25-33 [15 minutes].**

- Spies return; community of Israelites assembled to hear report
- Perhaps first instance in Old Testament of “majority report” and “minority report”
- Majority report affirms bountiful nature of Promised Land, but emphasizes the might of people living there, strong fortifications of towns, and presence of large men; “Next to them we felt like grasshoppers” (Numbers 13.33 NLT)
- Descendants of Anak alleged to come from the “Nephilim” referenced in Genesis 6.4 before the Flood, but no reason to think majority report is accurate in perceptions
- Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites specifically referenced; see Exodus 3.17 on God’s promised victory over these peoples
- Minority report voiced by Caleb: “‘Let’s go at once to take the land,’ he said. ‘We can certainly conquer it!’” (Numbers 13.30 NLT)
- According to OT scholar Raymond Brown, majority report magnifies the problems in and minimizes God’s resources for taking the Promised Land (*The Message of Numbers*, 111-113)

**5. Discuss the rebellion against God’s plan for the Promised Land in Numbers 14.1-10 [10 minutes].**

- Panic among Israelites as majority report spreads, with weeping and crying, with what has become typical response: deny God’s providential care, choose new leaders, and go back to Egypt
- Begins with rejection of Moses and Aaron, who fall on their faces before community

- Ultimately the issue is lack of faith in God—His care, strength, and provision—despite numerous instances in past of God’s mighty actions their behalf
- Difficult to explain such lack of faith and trust in God in the midst of miracles worked by God thus far; but human intransigence before God is illogical and nonsensical with plenty of examples given in both Old and New Testaments (and our lives).
- “Gloom spreads like wildfire among an unbelieving community. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin maintained that in the Lord’s work pessimism has done infinitely more harm than atheism.” (*The Message of Numbers*, 114)
- Caleb and Joshua advocate for following through with God’s plan in God’s power in verses 6-9, but to no avail, according to verse 10

## 6. Close in prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

**After starting your group with prayer, read Numbers 13.1 – 14.10, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Talk about the story of Numbers 13.1 – 14.10. Who are the main actors? How does the plot play out?
- At God’s direction, Moses sends a team of spies or scouts into the Promised Land in Numbers 13.1-24. How is the author of Numbers careful to note the connections with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis? List some of these connections and how they are significant in our passage. What should these connections mean for the Israelites?
- How might we connect God’s faithfulness to us in the past with His faithfulness to us in the situations we face? Why do we struggle to have faith?
- The majority report, from 10 spies, is emphatically pessimistic about the Israelites’ prospects for taking over the Promised Land. How so? Why do you think they are so negative, especially in light of God’s miracles in freeing them from bondage in Egypt?
- What motivates Caleb and Joshua to swim against the tide and move ahead with the conquest of the land? What may we learn from their motivation?
- Raymond Brown observes that for people seeking to do God’s work, “pessimism has done infinitely more harm than atheism.” (*The Message of Numbers*, 114) Agree or disagree? When have you seen pessimism damage or stop something that it looks like God is honoring and blessing? How and why?



## 18. 1 Corinthians 10.1-14, “Wilderness: Lessons”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read 1 Corinthians 10.1-14 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the lessons learned from the Israelites’ sins in 1 Corinthians 10.1-11 [15 minutes].**

- Paul begins with connections between the Israelites and Christians as he’s talking to Corinthian Christians about idol worship and sacrifices to idols
- Focuses first on cloud and sea with allusion to baptism: “The children of Israel, then, were ‘baptized into Moses,’ as Christians are ‘baptized into the Messiah.’ The foundational events of the cloud and the water, the presence of God and the crossing of the Red Sea, made the Israelites ‘Moses’ people,’ somewhat as baptism and the Spirit make Christians ‘the Messiah’s people.’” (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 123)
- Then note parallel between food and drink of Israelites in wilderness and spiritual food and drink of Christians (clear allusion to the Lord’s Supper) followed by Christ as “spiritual rock”
- Verses 5-6 head in different direction: God displeased with Israelites, and their story of rebellion provide lessons of warning to followers of Jesus
- Specific occasions of sin by some Israelites in verses 7-10: worshiping of idols, revelry with golden calf, sexual immorality of Israelite men with Moabite women (Numbers 25), testing God and complaining in wilderness with consequence of death by serpents (Numbers 21; see John 3 for Jesus’ expansion)
- Verse 11 key interpretation of Israelite story: “These things were written as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.” (NLT)
- Design is for Christians to learn from both positive and negative examples of Israelites; reality is there are more negative than positive examples

**4. Discuss the way out God provides from temptation in 1 Corinthians 10.12-13 [10 minutes].**

- Must be careful: “Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall;” tendency to deceive ourselves that we have things together when reality is different
- But verse 13 speaks of continuing assistance by God in midst of temptation: God will make a way to escape, for He is faithful
- Despite apparent power of individual temptations, never tempted beyond our ability to resist; do not have to give in
- Way of escape empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit can vary in application: sometimes standing strong and firm; other times fleeing sources of temptation; still

other times calling on support and encouragement from fellow Christians; still other times changing behaviors and thoughts leading up to sinful patterns

**5. Discuss the central sin of idolatry cited in 1 Corinthians 10.14 [10 minutes].**

- Summation of argument: flee or run away from idolatry
- Idolatry is primal or foundational sin of humans, bringing Israelites down as well as Corinthian Christians and modern-day Christians
- From Genesis 3 to present day, our desire is to be as God and to worship something other than the true God
- Important to clarify how idolatry is an issue for us today, and not just problem of Israelites in antiquity

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read 1 Corinthians 10.1-14, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Give a brief outline or summary of 1 Corinthians 10.1-14. The reading from 1 Corinthians 10.1-14 comes in the middle of a conversation already going on between Paul and the Corinthian Christians. What is it about? Why do you think Paul introduces the lessons learned from the Israelites now?
- What are the specific comparisons Paul makes between the experiences the Israelites have with God's presence and power and the experiences Christians have with God's presence and power? How does Paul connect the dots?
- Verses 5-6 turn the discussion into a different direction. How so? How do verses 7-10 expand upon the concerns noted in verses 5-6?
- What lessons, both positive and negative, can we learn from the Israelites with regard to our continuing relationship with God? How do you see these lessons at work in your life?
- Paul describes both a sobering reality and a marvelous truth in verses 12-13. What are they? Put both the reality and the truth into your own words.
- What are means through which the Holy Spirit provides a "way of escape" (ESV) from temptation? List at least three you have experienced in your life.
- Idolatry is the central, primal sin we humans face ever since the beginning (see Genesis 3). But most of us are not sacrificing meat to idols, as were many in the city of Corinth. So how does idolatry reveal itself in today's world? In your world? How might you stand firm against it?

## 19. Matthew 4.1-11, “Wilderness: Victory”

### OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 4.1-11 [5 minutes].
2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].
3. Discuss how Matthew sets up Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4.1-2 [5 minutes].
  - Jesus led by the same Holy Spirit endowing Him for service and ministry
  - Testing/temptation not deviation from God’s plan, but integral part of His plan
  - Satan is “the tempter”: specific role to play, even if he doesn’t like it
  - Two parallels with Israelites: 1) wilderness as location of testing/tempting, like Israelites; 2) 40 as symbolic number of fasting, referring to God’s time with Israelites
4. Discuss the first temptation in Matthew 4.3-4 [10 minutes].
  - Note: all three replies by Jesus come from quoting Deuteronomy (“second law”); record of God’s faithfulness and Israelites’ story in wilderness
  - Not quoting Scripture that works for Jesus, but Scriptural truth that Jesus affirms
  - Jesus physically hungry after 40-day fast, so first temptation is to misuse power for personal need and satisfaction, without trusting in God’s care
  - Affirmation of Incarnation: Jesus’ physical hunger is real, not imagined
  - Jesus called Son of God by Satan, but only as means of setting up temptation
  - Reply: Quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, referencing God’s creative and sustaining power with all human needs
  - Israelites faithless in God’s stated provision for physical need (re: complaining about food and water regularly), but Jesus responds with trust and faith in God’s provision
5. Discuss the second temptation in Matthew 4.5-7 [10 minutes].
  - Second temptation in Matthew is third temptation in Luke, and vice versa
  - Setting moves away from desert to Jerusalem, holy city, at highest peak of Temple
  - Probably now a visionary temptation rather than physical movement
  - Jesus again called Son of God, but in throw-away fashion
  - Second temptation: to jump off roof and make the Father intervene to save
  - Satan misuses/misinterprets Psalm 91.11-12, taking out of context (important reminder of how we must read and understand context as part of interpretation)
  - Reply: Quote from Deuteronomy 6.16; statement with context in Israelite fear that God would not supply water
  - “Once again Jesus recapitulated an event from Israel’s history but with better results.” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 66)
6. Discuss the third temptation in Matthew 4.8-11 [10 minutes].

- In all probability, third temptation also visionary rather than physical: Jesus shown vantage point of all the world's kingdoms and offered them if He would follow Satan
- Short-hand way for Jesus to bypass suffering/pain of Incarnation, Crucifixion
- No mention of Jesus as Son of God; lower than Satan on organizational chart
- Jesus gives Satan sharp rebuke: "be gone" or "get out of here" (verse 10, ESV/NLT)
- Reply from Deuteronomy 6.13, with strong reference to warnings given to Israel about sins of idolatry and worshiping false gods
- "This section of Matthew cannot be left without a reiteration of how Jesus is presented as the personification of Israel in Matthew 3-4. Jesus passed through the waters and entered the desert to be tested, just as Israel did. Remarkably, Scriptures from Deuteronomy 6-8, which remind Israel of its past failures in the wilderness and present obligations in the Promised Land, were on the tip of Jesus' tongue when Satan tested him." (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 69)

## **7. Close in prayer.**

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 4.1-11, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Figure out the setting and plot of Matthew 4.1-11. Share your version with the others in your group.
- Matthew 4.1-11 borrows from the Exodus story in several significant ways. What are they? What do these borrowed ways say about the Israelites? What do these ways show about Jesus?
- The first temptation centers around Jesus' physical needs. What is the specific temptation? How does Jesus resist it? What can we learn from Jesus here?
- The second temptation centers around Jesus' trust in the providential care of His Father. What is the specific temptation? How does Jesus resist it? What can we learn from Jesus here?
- The third temptation centers around Jesus escaping the pain and suffering destined to come His way. What is the specific temptation? How does Jesus resist it? What can we learn from Jesus here?
- The Israelites struggle and resist God's leadership and care in the wilderness, while Jesus triumphs. How does your day-to-day story sound more like the Israelites? How does your day-to-day story sound more like Jesus?
- What steps can you take to move you closer and closer to Jesus, and further and further away from the Israelites?

## 20. Exodus 19.1-9; 1 Peter 2.9-10, “A Holy Nation”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 19.1-9 and 1 Peter 2.9-10 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant in Exodus 19.1-6 [20 minutes].**

- Israelites camped before Mt. Sinai as Moses makes his way to God’s presence
- Exodus 19.3-6 one of key statements in book: “It is as if God has at last got his people to himself, after all the noise and excitement of the story so far, and chooses this moment to clarify what the story is all about, who they are, and what their purpose in the story is to be.” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 337)
- Statement looks to past (v. 4), establishing relationship with His people based upon what He has already done for them in His saving grace
- Statement looks to future (v. 5), defining identity and role as people trust in God’s covenant and locating them within the big Story of Scripture
- Statement looks to present (v. 6), expressing the people’s mission and ministry as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”; holy defined as “set apart” (ESV)
- Important to draw connections with covenants in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 21, and 22: not brand new covenant being affirmed, but continuation of Abrahamic covenant
- Setting stage to go up mountain for 10 Commandments (Exodus 20)

**4. Discuss the endorsement of the covenant by the people in Exodus 19.7-9 [5 minutes].**

- Moses calls elders of Israelites to himself and shares with them God’s words
- People affirm God’s covenant with them
- God tells Moses that He will come to Moses in thick cloud so people will know that God has spoken to Moses, affirming Moses’ leadership of people
- God will not be seen, but He will be heard through His word; Moses will communicate what God has to say to the people
- In OT, visual always much less trustworthy than auditory; hearing God is primary; God speaks universe into being in Genesis

**5. Discuss the reaffirmation of covenant relationship for the church in 1 Peter 2.9-10 [10 minutes].**

- Apostle Peter writing to Christians in 5 Roman provinces; both Jews and Gentiles as followers of Jesus
- Four major descriptors listed in v. 9: chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, God’s possession
- All four terms refer in some fashion to Exodus 19, with royal priesthood and holy nation as direct references

- Verse 10 goes on to discuss how those formerly outside of Christ now part of Christ's family with vivid terms; out of darkness and into light; once not a people but now God's people; once had not received mercy, but now received mercy
- Connection of Old Testament calling with New Testament calling; strong affirmation of God's love and mercy at work among His people
- Christopher J. H. Wright: "Our priestly identity is missional. Or to put it the other way around, our mission has a priestly dimension: being the living representatives of the living God and proclaiming the good news of God's salvation among the nations so that they can come to enjoy the promised Abrahamic blessing, to know and glorify God." (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 351-352)

## 6. Close in prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

**After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 19.1-9 and 1 Peter 2.9-10, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- In Hollywood, people talk about the "arc" of a show's story. In a short paragraph, how would you express the story "arc" of Exodus 19.1-9 and 1 Peter 2.9-10.
- Exodus 19.1-9 and 1 Peter 2.9-10 appear to have many similarities. What are they? What you believe makes these similarities important to understanding these passages?
- Exodus 19.3-6 is a key statement in Exodus. Explore it in detail. 1) What is it saying with a past orientation to how we've experienced God's grace before? 2) With a future orientation toward how we will find our place in God's story? 3) With a present orientation toward our mission and purpose as God's people?
- Review quickly how God affirms His relationship with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 21, and 22. How does this review help you pick up on what God is doing in Exodus 19.3-6?
- God promises that through Moses, the people will hear what He has to say. How do we hear what God has to say today? Why is speaking and hearing given priority over seeing and watching?
- Jews and Gentiles struggled to serve and love together in the early Christian church. How is Peter attempting to address this struggle? What can we learn from 1 Peter that would apply to our contemporary challenges regarding race, class, politics, and so on?
- Christopher J. H. Wright says that our mission has a "priestly dimension" to it. How so? How does a follower of Jesus function much like a priest in his/her relationships with family, friends, and neighbors?

## 21. Exodus 19:16–20:21, “Giving the Law”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 19:16–20:21 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the preparation needed to receive the covenant community’s core instructions for faith and practice in Exodus 19:16–20:2 [5 minutes].**

- Fearsome signs of God’s presence: thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, earthquake
- Cannot take this God lightly at all: must revere, not just respect or appreciate; “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9.10 ESV)
- God knows double-mindedness of people: thus repeated instructions multiple times
- Exodus 20.1 establishes baseline of relationship: this God is the particular God “who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery” (NLT)

**4. Discuss the receiving of the covenant community’s core instructions for faith and practice in Exodus 20:3-17 [25 minutes].**

- 10 Commandments universal precepts of divine moral law (re: C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*), but must not pull out and abstract from core: first and foremost instructions on how to believe and live as part of God’s covenant community
- One way to understand 10 Commandments is to see them as three integrated sections: 1) Commandments #1-3; 2) Commandment #4; 3) Commandments #5-10
- Commandments #1-3 emphasize faith and practice regarding God
  - No other gods but or besides this One (“before” not best translation here)
  - Doesn’t mean “put God on your list” or “put God at the top of your list,” but rather “God is your entire list”
  - No visual images can do the true God justice; always lead to idolatry (primordial sin of humanity) and constructing a God of our specifications
  - Taking His name in vain includes swearing, but so much more: speaking of Him without considering what you’re saying in any context
- Commandment #4 serves as bridge
  - Sabbath commandment is central to living all of life under God’s lordship and living our lives in balance and perspective
  - Devote 1 day in 7 to focusing and remembering core relationship: essential to living in reality of God’s lordship (#1-3) over human relationships (#5-10)
  - Easy to reduce this into what you can or can’t do and lose impact of Sabbath
- Commandments #5-10 emphasize faith and practice regarding human relationships
  - Context of community gives these commandments life and power
  - Central aspects of how humans interact with each other: not everything that could be listed, but ones integral to primary human connections

- Nothing destroys community like family disarray, murder, sexual relationships outside “one man, one woman, one flesh,” theft, truthlessness, covetousness
- Unfortunately, history of humanity is clear inability to walk in this path
- Reason why Reformed theological tradition states that Law both 1) shows us our need for the gospel and 2) shows us what a fruitful life in Christ looks like

**5. Discuss the aftermath of receiving the covenant community’s core instructions for faith and practice in Exodus 20:18-21 [5 minutes].**

- People trembling in fear, talking to Moses about God’s “otherness”
- Verse 20 denotes two uses of fear: one is being afraid; the other is reverence of God’s needed to live as “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (see Exodus 19.6)
- Details and implications of these core instructions drawn out throughout Exodus as well as throughout rest of OT and NT

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 19.16–20:21, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- What is the overarching purpose of the 10 Commandments? Why is the identity of the God who gives the Commandments foundational to this purpose?
- Note how the 10 Commandments can be read in three interrelated groupings: 1) Commandments #1-3; 2) Commandment #4; and 3) Commandments #5-10. How does this arrangement help you see the flow of the Commandments? Put this flow into your own words.
- Why do you think God starts with Commandment #1? He could have started anywhere, but He begins here. Why? What does this reveal to us about us?
- Why are “but” and “besides” better words to use than “before” in Exodus 20.3? What misunderstandings and misapplications can result in our lives if we perceive God merely as first on our list of many possible options?
- How does Commandment #4, regarding Sabbath, connect Commandments #1-3 and Commandments #5-10? Why should one day out of every seven focus on God? Why does Commandment #4 get little emphasis today?
- Commandments #5-10 describe how the most important human relationships should work to further God’s covenant community. Why do we struggle so with these? What does the struggle reveal about who we are and what we truly need?
- In Exodus 20.20, Moses appears to distinguish between being afraid of God and the fear of the Lord referenced in Proverbs 9.10. How do you compare the two? How do you differentiate between reverence of God and respect or recognition of God?



## 22. Matthew 5.1-16, “Teaching the Law”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 5.1-16 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the correlation between Jesus and Moses in Matthew 5.1-2 [10 minutes].**

- Significant correlation between Jesus and Moses already noted in our study: parallels between the young Moses and young Jesus (Exodus 1.1—2.10; Matthew 1.18—2.23); Moses and Jesus passing through the water (Exodus 13.17—15.21; Matthew 3.1-17); and Moses and Jesus in the wilderness (Exodus 32.1-35; Numbers 12.1-15; 13.1—14.10; 1 Corinthians 10.1-14; Matthew 4.1-11)
- Correlation with Moses continues with first of five teaching discourses by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (5.1–7.29; 10.5–11.1; 13.1-52; 18.1–19.1; and 24.1–26.2)
- Jesus goes up mountain and sits to teach; disciples come to Him, crowd gathers
- “Once again Matthew presents Jesus doing something significant on a mountain, which may reflect an intended typological relationship between Jesus and Moses.” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 75)

**4. Discuss the characteristics of the God-blessed covenant community Jesus describes in Matthew 5.3-12 [15 minutes].**

- Ways Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount have been interpreted include: 1) ethical standards of God’s Kingdom; 2) descriptions of how far we are from ethics of Kingdom and thus need grace; 3) Jewish requirements no longer binding on Christians; 4) unrealistic, aspirational teachings not expected to be closely followed
- Helpful way forward: The Sermon on the Mount “describes what human life and human community look like when they come under the gracious rule of God. And what do they look like? Different! Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God’s kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but from him, and so prove to be the children of their heavenly Father.” (John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 18)
- “Blessed” is not the same as “happy”; can be more literally rendered “O the blessedness of...” (William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible: Matthew*, 83): emphasizes not blessings yet to come, but blessings already being experienced by Christ-followers in community
- Radically different from expectations of 1st-century world and 21st century world: those poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted for righteousness’ sake all living in God’s blessedness at present time
- Church has historically struggled with these characteristics, aligning itself more with status quo of world, even as some Christians exemplify them in daily living

**5. Discuss the connections between the God-blessed covenant community and its witness Jesus describes in Matthew 5.13-16 [10 minutes].**

- Radical difference of Christ-followers from world around them has numerous effects
- One significant effect: winsome, fetching witness as to the reality of God's rule/reign
- Two strong, universal images used: salt and light
  - Salt: preservative, flavor enhancer
  - Light: illuminates path, eradicates darkness
- Salt thrown out if it loses "saltiness" (ESV); light not hidden, but placed on stand
- Those who taste and see give glory to God through examples of Christians

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 5.1-16, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- In no more than three sentences, summarize the "who, what, when, where, and how" of Matthew 5.1-16. Now take it a step further by choosing one word—yes, only one word—that encapsulates Matthew 5.1-16 for you. Tell a little about why this word is so appropriate.
- Matthew 5.1-2 appear to emphasize a correlation between Moses and Jesus. How so? Expand your view over the Gospel of Matthew. What other events or teachings in Matthew seem to have the same type of correlation between Moses and Jesus? Do you think Matthew's Gospel does this on purpose? If "yes," what is Matthew seeking to achieve through this correlation? If "no," what is really going on?
- "Blessed" and "happy" are not synonyms. How do they differ? What does it mean to be blessed by God? When have you experienced God's blessing in a particularly rich and profound way?
- Pick the "Blessed are the..." statement from Jesus that seems the most significant to you for Christian living. How? Why?
- Pick the "Blessed are the..." statement from Jesus that causes you the most distress or struggle. What do you think Jesus is seeking to accomplish in your life through it?
- What are the two nearly universal items Jesus uses in Matthew 5.13-16 to make His point about Christian discipleship and witness? How are Jesus followers supposed to be like the first one? The second one?
- How are the beliefs and practices of people who follow Jesus to be different from the beliefs and practices of people who do not follow Jesus? Why is this difference supposed to be the case? What results follow if there is little difference between the beliefs and practices of people on Team Jesus and people not on His team?

## 23. Matthew 5.17-48, “Fulfilling the Law”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 5.17-48 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the exposition of Jesus’ purpose about the Law in Matthew 5.17-19 [10 minutes].**

- Easy for disciples and crowd to think Jesus wants to do away with the Law; instead Jesus intends to fulfill—e.g., complete, accomplish, achieve—Law’s purpose
- Upholds the validity and eternal status of the Law; will be brought to ultimate fruition;
- Even iota, dot, “smallest detail” (NLT) of Law will come to pass; therefore can’t ignore, relax, or denigrate teachings of Law
- Important to remember in light of sentiments often uttered that Christians are free from dictates and requirements of the Law
- Law cannot save or rescue, but it guides and instructs in: 1) our need for the gospel and 2) what manner of life lived in the Spirit pleases God; see Galatians 3.19-29 for more on role of the Law in Christian faith and practice

**4. Discuss the exhortation Jesus gives on the Law in Matthew 5.20 [5 minutes].**

- Command: Righteousness of Jesus’ followers must exceed Pharisees, scribes
- First blush: impossible to do; Pharisees and scribes known for devotion to Law
- But in reality, Pharisees and scribes reduces Law to surface matters easier to obey
- Setting up Jesus’ elaboration in following verses of what Law really means in human lives; turns out Pharisees and scribes not particularly righteous after all

**5. Discuss the elaboration Jesus develops upon the Law in Matthew 5.21-48 [20 minutes].**

- Recurring pattern: “You have heard that it was said” introduces Pharisaical reduction of Law; “But I say to you” introduces elaboration of Law’s depth and relevance
- Not all commandments of Law mentioned in this section: Jesus focuses on ones He deems significant, grouping them in three sections with two commands each
  - Passions in vv. 21-30: Anger as elaboration on murder, and lustful looks as elaboration on adultery
  - Promises in vv. 31-37: Rare divorce as elaboration on easy dissolution of marital vows, and basic fidelity as elaboration on truthful living
  - Pay-back in vv. 38-48: Turning the other cheek as elaboration on eye-for-eye retaliation, and loving your enemies as elaboration on loving your neighbors
- Elaboration of Law’s application and implications for daily living show how deeply Law must penetrate into heart and mind far deeper than surface-level living of “rules and regs; two comments from Jeremiah especially helpful here:

- Human sinfulness: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (17.9 ESV)
- God’s action to address human sinfulness: “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.” (31.33-34 NLT)

## 6. Close in prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

**After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 5.17-48, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- What is the flow of Jesus’ argument in Matthew 5.17-48? How does it start? How does it develop? How does it end?
- Jesus says that He comes to fulfill the Law in Matthew 5.17. What do you think that means? How did Jesus fulfill the Law? How is He still fulfilling the Law? How will He fulfill the Law in the days ahead? How might the correlation between Moses and Jesus as previously noted help you address these questions?
- Christians debate vigorously what role the Law now has in Christian faith and practice. Based on what Jesus says in Matthew 5.17-48, how do you respond? What other Scriptures may help you as you seek more understanding?
- In what ways does your righteousness fall far short of the Pharisees and scribes’ righteousness? In what ways does your righteousness far exceed theirs?
- How does Jesus’ elaboration in Matthew 5.21-30 upon the commands related to murder, anger, adultery, and lust expand the meaning of these commandments for your daily living? How do you fall short? How can you love and obey Jesus here?
- How does Jesus’ elaboration in Matthew 5.31-37 upon the commands related to marriage, divorce, and truthfulness expand the meaning of these commandments for your daily living? How do you fall short? How can you love and obey Jesus here?
- How does Jesus’ elaboration in Matthew 5.38-48 upon the commands related to “eye for an eye” retribution and loving your neighbors expand the meaning of these commandments for your daily living? How do you fall short? How can you love and obey Jesus here?

## 24. Numbers 21.4-9; John 3.10-17, “Lifted Up”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Numbers 21.4-9 and John 3.10-17 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss the sinful attitude of the Israelites in Numbers 21.4-5 [10 minutes].**

- Numbers 21.1-3 briefly tells the story of military victory over the Canaanites as foreshadowing of God-enabled triumphs to come, but good feelings don't last long
- Grumbling and complaining continue in abundance, with complaints in same vein as many times before: “Why have you brought us... to die in the wilderness?” (v. 5)
- Unexplainably nostalgic for past, resentful about present, fearful about future; inability to recognize how good they have it
- Manna in particular comes up for vehement attack; adjective describes something worthless, trivial, or trifling; hard to imagine a more ungrateful reaction
- “It is a profane accusation: if only they could have reversed the miraculous plan of God's salvation and returned to the oppressive regime of Egyptian slavery! Turning their backs on the Lord's mighty acts of deliverance, they wished he had not made a covenant with them at Sinai as their savior and sovereign.” (*The Message of Numbers*, 182)

**4. Discuss God's response to the Israelites in Numbers 21.6-9 [15 minutes].**

- God acts to make it clear such ingratitude and near blasphemy not tolerated: sends “fiery serpents” (ESV) or “poisonous snakes” (NLT); multitude died; “In ancient times, the area was notorious for its poisonous snakes.” (*The Message of Numbers*, 181)
- People come to Moses and entreat him to go before God on their behalf
- Response: God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent on a pole and puts it before people; look at the lifted-up serpent and you will be healed and live
- Why look at serpent? 1) area known for serpents as noted before; 2) deliberate appropriating of Egyptian symbols (in light of cry to return to Egypt) and using them to show instead God's power; 3) unusual nature makes it clear God is source of healing; 4) any member of Israelite community able to avail themselves of God's gracious answer; 5) effectiveness of God's solution clearly witnessed
- Postscript: bronze serpent kept around by Israelites, so that hundreds of years later, people worship it as an idol; King Hezekiah of Judah destroys it (2 Kings 18:4)

**5. Discuss Jesus' connection with the serpent on the pole in John 3.10-17 [10 minutes].**

- John 3: account of night-time secret conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus
- Enter into middle of conversation: Jesus commenting on Nicodemus' ignorance on things an elder of Israel, Pharisee, and member of ruling counsel should know

- Brings up Numbers 21.4-9 event to Nicodemus, then compares His ministry to this act of God in Old Testament: He will be lifted up
- “But when Jesus used the phrase ‘lifted up’ here, He was speaking more directly to what had to happen for people to enter His kingdom—He must be lifted up on a cross; He must become the substitute serpent, if you will. He had to take on Himself the sting of death. He had to take on Himself the poison of sin on the cross. There’s little doubt in the minds of the commentators that when Jesus spoke of being lifted up like the bronze serpent, He was referring primarily not to His exaltation but to His crucifixion.” (R. C. Sproul, *John*, Kindle edition, location 662)
- Then passage moves directly to John 3.16-17 in explanation of Jesus’ saving work

## 6. Close in prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

**After starting your group with prayer, read Numbers 21.4-9 and John 3.10-17, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Describe the “who, what, when, where, how” of both Numbers 21.4-9 and John 3.10-17.
- Note the particulars of the Israelites’ complaints against God in Numbers 21.4-5. Why is such ingratitude and near blasphemy happening yet again? What does it reveal about the Israelites?
- How do we mirror the attitude and behavior of the Israelites toward God? What causes our ingratitude and near blasphemy against Him? How may we help one another to break free from these patterns when we find ourselves in them?
- How does God act to bring His people to repentance? What is surprising, insightful, or confusing about what He does?
- How is God’s grace shown to the Israelites through the lifting up of the bronze serpent?
- Over time, the bronze serpent on a pole moves from symbol of God’s grace to idol worshiped by later generations of Israelites. Talk about the human ability to take what is good and helpful and turn it into something twisted and sinful. How do we exhibit this ability?
- In John 3.10-17, how does Jesus say to Nicodemus that He will be like the bronze serpent on a pole from Numbers 21? How and why is this comparison especially meaningful in communicating the truth and power of the gospel?

## 25. Exodus 33.7-23; Exodus 34.29-35, “Glory Revealed”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 33.7-23 and Exodus 34.29-35 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss Moses and the Tent of Meeting in Exodus 33.7-11 [10 minutes].**

- Important to remember context for this passage: golden calf, idolatry, and God’s statement to Israel about not going with them (Exodus 32.1 – 33.6)
- Makes sense of Moses meeting with God far outside the camp in Exodus 33.7
- Why outside? Via Moses, God tells Israelites they are “a stubborn and rebellious people. If I were to travel with you for even a moment, I would destroy you. Remove your jewelry and fine clothes while I decide what to do with you.” (Exodus 33.5 NLT)
- This “tent of meeting” not the same as Tabernacle found in Exodus 26 and 36
- Process for Moses visiting with God described in detail, with descending of cloud representing presence of God in tent: “Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak with Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” (Exodus 33.11 NLT)

**4. Discuss Moses’ experience of God’s glory in Exodus 33.12-23 [15 minutes].**

- Moses’ intercession for God to journey with people as they move to Promised Land; God states that He will be with Moses, without stating He will be with people
- Then Moses: we should not go if You are not with us (note 3rd person); otherwise how will the nations see we have “found favor in your sight”? (Exodus 33.16 ESV)
- God draws out of Moses a commitment to Israel after offering the possibility of mere personal favor:
- Moses then makes specific request to see God’s glory; God pleased with Moses’ intercession and tells Moses he will experience God’s glory in mediated form: hide Moses in crevice of rock while God’s glory passes by; anthropomorphic description of “you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33.23 ESV)
- Word translated “glory” has roots in word for “weight”: denotes substance, significance, importance (still present in English: talk about people with “gravitas”)
- “In reference to God, the *kabod* or ‘the glory of the Lord’ refers to the reality of his presence as the supreme ruler of his people manifested in power, splendor, and holiness (Isaiah 3.8). This is consistent with Exodus 24.17, where the appearance of the ‘glory of the Lord’ was like a consuming fire; this explains why Moses could not enter the tent in 40.34. Hence, this is called the ‘glory of the Lord’ because it reveals his person and dignity.” (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, 289)
- Questions about how much of God Moses actually experiences: told on other occasions that Moses “sees” God, and earlier states in Exodus 33.11 they talk “face

to face,” yet evidently still not a full revealing of God’s glory; language evidently more figurative, picturesque

**5. Discuss Moses’ residual effects of God’s glory in Exodus 34.29-35 [10 minutes].**

- Moses comes down from mountain with new tablets of Law and covenant renewed (Exodus 34.1-28); face shines from experiencing God’s glory
- Aaron and Israelites afraid to come near (remember context of Exodus 32)
- “Clearly, this little detail about Moses in his relationship with God and the people functions primarily to authenticate Moses as the divinely authorized intermediary, the one true and trusted bearer of God’s word and instructions to the people. There is some irony in the account, as well. Moses was not permitted to see the face of God (though he did have some kind of controlled visual encounter with the glory of God), but now Moses’s own face reflects that glory of God, to such an extent that Aaron and the Israelites are struck with fear, as they had been when the glory of God shook Mt. Sinai.” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 590)
- Cannot be in the presence of God without it leaving tell-tale signs and marks

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 33.7-23 and Exodus 34.29-35, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Work through the story of Exodus 33.7-23 and Exodus 34.29-35. Summarize what is going on here.
- When is this all taking place? After what pivotal event? How does this context help you understand better what is going on?
- How does Exodus 33.7-11 describe the relationship between Moses and God? Are there any parallels or connections with this description in the way Christians view our relationship with Jesus Christ? If so, what are they? How do they make a difference in your ongoing walk with Jesus?
- How does Moses intercede for the Israelites in Exodus 33.12-23? What does Moses refuse to do? How do you think God is prompting Moses to respond and to act here?
- “Glory” is a powerful word in both Old and New Testaments. What does it mean? How does its connection with “weight” help you perceive the importance of glory?
- How do you “see” God and His glory in your daily life? What best reveals God’s nature and character to you most emphatically and clearly?



## 26. Matthew 17.1-13, “Glory Confirmed”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 17.1-13 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss Jesus with Peter, James, and John in Matthew 17.1 [5 minutes].**

- Two points of context in Matthew to pay attention to in addition to Exodus:
  - 1) Jesus’ foretelling of His death (Matthew 16.21-23) and His call for anyone who would be His disciple to “deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16.24-27 ESV)
  - 2) Jesus’ foretelling that some hearing His call “will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16.28 ESV)
- Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves, away from the other disciples; 3 of first 4 disciples called, but Andrew left out
- Mountain is unnamed, but still significant, as it parallels with Moses in Exodus

**4. Discuss Jesus’ transfiguration in Matthew 17.2-8 [25 minutes].**

- “Transfigured” sometimes translated as “transformed” (NLT); Greek word is word from which English language gets “metamorphosis”
- Two similes used to describe Jesus: 1) His face shines like the sun; 2) His clothes as white as light; Mark’s Gospel says His clothes “became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9.3 ESV)
- Appearing with Jesus: Moses (often said to be representing Law, but called a prophet) and Elijah (often said to be representing prophets, yet stands for Law numerous times); easier to say Jesus completes and fulfills ministries of both men
- Peter, per usual, fails to get it: let’s make three shelters, one for each; image borrowed from Feast of Booths or Tabernacles; equates Jesus with Moses and Elijah
- Cloud comes and voice comes from cloud: direct connection with Exodus; enthusiasm of disciples changes to fear as they fall on their faces
- Words from cloud echo words said by the Father at Jesus’ baptism, with important addition: “Listen to him” (Matthew 17.7 ESV and NLT); clear inference is they haven’t
- When cloud and voice disappear, Jesus touches the three to reassure them
- “In light of other New Testament texts, the transfiguration should probably be viewed not as the illumination of the man Jesus with an extrinsic glory but as the momentary uncovering of the Son of God’s own intrinsic glory, which has been temporarily veiled and will be reassumed at the resurrection and ascension (John 17.4-5, 24; Philippians 2.5-11; Colossians 1.16-19; Hebrews 1.1-4).” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 230)
- “It is written that we shall ‘stand before’ Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of

Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.” (C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 38)

**5. Discuss Jesus’ conversation with the three down from the mountain in Matthew 17.9-13 [5 minutes].**

- Instructions from Jesus: tell no one what has happened here until my resurrection
- Last reference in Matthew of Jesus commanding silence about miraculous events in the Gospels; often called the “messianic secret”; much discussion on why; often understood as matter of best timing and preparation for His crucifixion/resurrection
- Surprisingly no response to resurrection statement (!), but questions instead about Elijah; still fail to see that Elijah represented by John the Baptist

**6. Close in prayer.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 17.1-13, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Work through the plot line of Matthew 17.1-13, also reviewing Matthew 16.21-28. In your own words, summarize in 2-3 sentences what is going on here.
- A lot is happening in Matthew that has parallels with the story of Moses in Exodus. Why do you think Matthew pays so much attention to these? What do they emphasize about the Jesus Story that we need to know so we understand it well?
- “Transfigured” is not a word we use in English a great deal. What are 2-3 synonyms we may employ that help us with what it means? (Please feel free to check out [thesaurus.com](http://thesaurus.com) and other helpful websites.)
- Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the mountain. Why? What do you believe they represent? How is Jesus best connected with Moses? With Elijah? How do you see Jesus fulfilling or completing Moses and Elijah?
- On the surface, Peter’s request regarding Jesus, Moses, and Elijah may sound perfectly fine. As you think about it, though, what is wrong with it to such an extent that God decides to make His viewpoint clearly known?
- How do many in our day misunderstand who Jesus is and what Jesus is about? What are some of the most common misunderstandings? How can we respond in helpful, kind, and truthful ways when we encounter these misunderstandings?
- “Listen to him,” says the voice from the cloud. How did the disciples not listen well to Jesus? In our day, how do we not listen well to Jesus? How does Jesus speak to us? How can we help each other listen better to Him?

## 27. Deuteronomy 31.1-8; Deuteronomy 34.1-12, “Commissioned to Go”

### OUTLINE

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Deuteronomy 31.1-8 and Deuteronomy 34.1-12 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss Moses’ words of encouragement in Deuteronomy 31.1-6 [10 minutes].**

- In section of Deuteronomy with Moses’ last words to Israelites regarding covenant with God and conquering of Promised Land (29.1 – 33.29)
- Moses at 120 years old; at a stage where he must pass the torch of leadership to the next generation, represented by Joshua
- Moses unable to go to the Promised Land because of actions recounted in Numbers 20.1-13: disobedience against the Lord’s direct command, striking the rock
- Yet Moses affirms God’s direction of the Israelites through leadership of Joshua and encourages people to follow Joshua’s leadership
- To Israelites: “So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.” (Deuteronomy 31.6 NLT)

**4. Discuss Moses’ commissioning of Joshua in Deuteronomy 31.7-8 [15 minutes].**

- Moses affirms and publicly supports Joshua’s role as leader of Israelites; echoes words spoken to people in Deuteronomy 31.6
- Joshua preparing for this role for long time, from days as faithful subordinate: one example among many: one of two scouts with positive, faith-filled response to seeing peoples of Promised Land in Numbers 13-14
- Work given to Joshua is an example of a “God-sized” work: if God’s power and presence is not available, then he will fail
- Public affirmation of Joshua’s leadership and gifts meant to enable smooth transition into next phase of Israelites’ journey described in Old Testament book of Joshua: to cross the Jordan and begin the conquering of the land in affirmation of covenantal promises made to Abraham in Genesis
- “Such a momentous change of leadership called for a public ceremony of investiture. Calling for Joshua to stand in the midst of the assembly, Moses exhorted him to be courageous in taking up the mantle of responsibility that had fallen upon him by divine appointment. The words of Moses’ charge to his younger confidant are echoed and expanded upon by Yahweh himself, who, following Moses’ death, appeared to Joshua and directly sanctioned the commission first uttered here (Joshua 1.9).” (Eugene Merrill, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 643)

**5. Discuss Moses’ final actions and death in Deuteronomy 34.1-12 [10 minutes].**

- Moses goes from plains of Moab to summit of Mt. Nebo

- God shows Moses all the land as noted in vv. 2-3 and reiterates covenantal promise
- Moses then dies at 120 years old; aging, but “his eyesight was clear, and he was as strong as ever.” (Deuteronomy 34.7 NLT)
- Location of Moses’ grave unknown, and “the fact that no one knew where he was buried, coupled with the later mysterious tradition about Michael the archangel arguing with Satan about Moses’ body (Jude 1.9), appear to favor the idea that God himself entombed the prophet, perhaps to prevent idolatrous veneration of his remains.” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 672).
- Interesting to note, in reference back to previous lesson on Jesus’ transfiguration, that neither Moses nor Elijah have typical death experience: Moses buried by God, and Elijah carried to heaven by fiery chariots (2 Kings 2)

## 6. Close in prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

**After starting your group with prayer, read Deuteronomy 31.1-8 and Deuteronomy 34.1-12, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Review Deuteronomy 31.1-8 and 34.1-12. What is occurring in the Deuteronomy 31 passage? What happens in Deuteronomy 34 as the story of Moses concludes?
- Moses will not enter the Promised Land with the Israelites, according to Deuteronomy 31.2 and 34.1-4. Read Numbers 20.1-13 for assistance here. In response, some say the punishment for Moses exceeds the crime, while others insist leaders like Moses always bear great responsibility for their actions. Thoughts?
- Moses commissions the people to be “strong and courageous” as they prepare to enter the Promised Land for battle, and then repeats the same commission to Joshua. What promises from God are reiterated by Moses that allow for such strength and courage?
- What qualities does Joshua possess that make him the best successor to Moses? What previous passages from Exodus and Numbers have you read that emphasize these qualities?
- What characteristics make for excellent leadership in our day? List at least three that come to mind as you reflect upon Moses’ story.
- Some describe a “God-sized task” as a work or mission God gives you of such a nature that if God is not present in and through it, you will fail miserably. Joshua’s commission to lead Israel into the Promised Land is an example of such work. What is an example of a God-sized task today? What God-sized task have you undertaken or are currently undertaking? If you are not engaged in a God-sized task right now, why not?

## **28. Matthew 28.16-20, “Commissioned to Make Disciples”**

### **OUTLINE**

**1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 28.16-20 [5 minutes].**

**2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss Jesus' meeting with the eleven disciples on the mountain in Matthew 28.16-17 [10 minutes].**

- Choice of mountain for meeting place continues long-standing connection of Jesus with Moses as described through Matthew, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Jesus chooses specific mountain in Galilee: 1) most of disciples' home base; 2) part of His plan for preparing and empowering them for next phase of their ministry
- Mountains in Matthew all unnamed, from Sermon on the Mount to Transfiguration to Great Commission: Why? Possibly to avoid idolatrous worship at identified sites
- Verse 17 most curious: disciples worship Jesus, yet doubt at the same time
  - Word translated “doubt” occurs in Matthew 14.31 as Peter walks on water
  - Specific nature of doubt not mentioned
  - Human response of disciples to presence of risen Christ one more affirmation that Scripture is truthful about events it describes; if events made up, most likely to leave out details that make disciples look bad

**4. Discuss Jesus' Great Commission for the disciples in Matthew 28.18-20a [20 minutes].**

- Starts with Jesus' statement about His intrinsic, explicit authority over all life and creation: builds on this sense of authority: because Jesus possesses authority, then He may command what He commands and promise what He promises
- Two-part set of instructions comprise the remainder of the commission:
  - Go to all peoples and be about the primary task of making disciples
  - Do this disciple-making work with two primary actions: 1) baptizing in the name of Triune God; 2) teaching the baptized ones to obey Jesus' commands for faith and practice, as Jesus Himself taught to them
- Some read this commission as being only for original disciples; but strong majority of interpreters sees this commission being for all disciples, all locations, all times
- “There may be no better way to summarize the theology of Matthew than by following up on the themes found in the Great Commission. The setting of the commission finds the restored disciples worshiping Jesus, but not wholeheartedly. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew has presented the weaknesses of the disciples, but all the same, Jesus still promised to build his church on their foundational ministries. God's power can overcome their infirmities... The commission is concerned with making true disciples who obey Jesus—their Lord—not just casual hangers-on who may listen to his message without doing it. And these disciples are to be made not

only from Israel, but from all the nations, where eager converts, reminiscent of the Roman officer and the Canaanite woman, will be found.” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 377)

#### **5. Discuss Jesus’ final assurance in Matthew 28.20b [5 minutes].**

- Great Commission work will be difficult, demanding, dangerous to a degree disciples cannot yet begin to fathom
- But when bad times come and work gets hard, disciples are to remember Jesus expressly promises to be with them
- “End of the age” (NLT and ESV): when Jesus returns to put things right and to restore creation to its original state and purpose; “new heaven and new earth”
- Through the Spirit, Jesus will lead them, guide them, and give them power as they lead people into relationship with Him

#### **6. Close in prayer.**

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 28.16-20, briefly review the lesson outline, and then discuss the following:**

- Work through the “who, what, when, where, and how” of Matthew 28.16-20. Who are the main characters? What do they do? What surprises happen as things unfold?
- Yet another mountain reference is made in Matthew! Talk about why this repeats over and over. What is being communicated through such repetition?
- How can the disciples worship Jesus and doubt Jesus at the same time? When have you experienced the twin realities of worship and doubt in your life? What happened in your life as a result?
- This Great Commission is based on one indisputable fact: Jesus has authority. What do you think it mean for Jesus to have authority? Put into your own words how Jesus’ authority reveals or expresses itself in today’s world in general and in your world in particular.
- Talk about the primary task in the Great Commission. What is it? Where is it done? How is this task to be accomplished, according to Jesus?
- How have you participated in the Great Commission? How are you participating in the Great Commission now? What is one thing you can do this week that is Great Commission related?
- Jesus promises to be with His disciples as they engage in the Great Commission. When have you seen Jesus show up as you are involved in this work? Give at least one specific example from your experience.