THE BOOK OF EXODUS

The King Who Breaks Chains

Exodus, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Breaks Chains: The Book of Exodus, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Exodus is another book people think they already know. A baby in a basket, a burning bush, frogs everywhere, a sea that splits in half, and an old man coming down a mountain with two stone tablets. Maybe you’ve seen the movies. Maybe you’ve seen the memes.

But Exodus is so much more than a Sunday school story. It’s the story of a nation of slaves and a God who hears them. It’s about a superpower that thinks it can own people, and a God who proves it can’t. It’s about freedom, and about what freedom is for. It asks huge questions. Who is God, really? What’s His name? Can He be trusted when life is brutal? And how can a holy God live with people who keep messing up?

Exodus is also the story the rest of the Bible keeps coming back to. The prophets retell it. The psalms sing it. Jewish families still celebrate it every year at Passover. And when Jesus sat down for His last supper with His friends, He was celebrating the exodus, and He gave it a whole new meaning.

Genesis ended with a coffin in Egypt and a promise that God would bring His people home. Exodus is where God starts keeping that promise in a big way. So grab your sandals and your staff. It’s time to get out of Egypt.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Exodus in nine chapters: Israel enslaved and Moses' birth (Exodus 1–2), the burning bush (3–4), the plagues (5–10), Passover (11–13), the crossing of the sea (14–15), manna and the wilderness (16–18), Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments (19–20), the laws and the plans for the tabernacle (21–31), and the golden calf and God's glory (32–40). The law and tabernacle chapters are summarized more briefly than the story chapters, so you can see the big picture without getting lost in the details.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book Exodus is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as what it means that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, where the sea crossing happened, and when the exodus took place, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. Exodus also tells some painful stories of oppression and violence. When it does, you'll find a box with a safety note. This book quotes Exodus in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each section of Exodus first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the second book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Exodus raises questions teens will ask, and some they'll hear from skeptical friends. I've presented the main Christian views fairly, without endorsing one, on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the location of the sea crossing (the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds), and the date of the exodus (the early date of about 1446 BC and the late date in the 1200s BC), and I've noted that some scholars doubt the story can be confirmed historically at all. I'd encourage you to share your own church's view with your teen, and to explain why other Christians see it differently.

Exodus contains hard material: slavery and forced labor, an order to kill newborn boys, the death of Egypt's firstborn, and violence after the golden calf. These are handled carefully and age-appropriately, without graphic detail. Where it's relevant, a safety box tells readers that abuse and exploitation are always wrong, that it is never the victim's fault, and that they should tell a trusted adult; the boxes on

slavery and oppression include the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees Exodus fulfilled in Jesus, the Passover Lamb, the true bread from heaven, and the Word who "lived among us," while acknowledging that Jewish readers celebrate and read the exodus in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will meet in Exodus a God who hears the cry of the oppressed, who sets captives free, and who wants to live among His people.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

The Way Out

The name Exodus comes from a Greek word meaning a way out or a departure. In Hebrew, the book is called Shemot, which means names, from its first line: These are the names of the sons of Israel. Both titles fit. Exodus is about a people with names, not just numbers, and about the way out God makes for them.

Part Two of the Torah

Exodus is the second of the five books of Moses, the Torah. It picks up where Genesis left off. Genesis ended with Jacob's family, about seventy people, living in Egypt as honored guests. Exodus opens centuries later, when that family has become a huge nation, and the guests have become slaves. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy continue the story as Israel travels through the wilderness toward the promised land.

Three Big Movements

Exodus has three main parts. In chapters 1–15, God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt. In chapters 16–24, God leads them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai and makes a covenant with them. In chapters 25–40, God gives instructions for the tabernacle, His tent, and comes to live among them. You could sum it up in three words: rescue, relationship, residence. God saves His people, binds Himself to them, and moves in.

Who Wrote Exodus?

Like Genesis, Exodus doesn't name its author in a title line, but it does say that Moses wrote down certain things God said (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27). Jewish and Christian tradition has long held that Moses wrote the Torah, and Jesus refers to "the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). Many scholars, following the documentary hypothesis or newer theories, believe the books were assembled from several sources over a long period. Others hold that Moses is the main author, with later editing. Christians with different views agree that Exodus is God's Word.

The World It Came From

Egypt in the second millennium BC was the greatest superpower on earth, with pyramids already a thousand years old, a god-king called Pharaoh, a huge army with chariots, and armies of workers who built cities and temples. Egyptians worshiped many gods: the sun god Ra, the Nile god Hapi, the cow goddess Hathor, and others. Pharaoh himself was considered divine. That's the backdrop for Exodus. The question isn't just whether Israel will be free. It's who the real God is.

When Did It Happen?

Christians and scholars disagree about the date. One view, the early date, uses 1 Kings 6:1, which says Solomon began building the temple 480 years after the exodus, and places the exodus around 1446 BC. Another view, the late date, points to the city of Raamses that the Israelites built (Exodus 1:11), named after a family of pharaohs who ruled in the 1200s BC, and takes the 480 years as a symbolic number (twelve generations of forty years), placing the exodus around 1260 BC. A stone inscription from Pharaoh

Merneptah, from about 1208 BC, mentions a people called Israel already living in Canaan. Some scholars think the story can't be confirmed historically at all, since no Egyptian record mentions it; others reply that Egypt rarely recorded its defeats, and that a desert journey leaves little for archaeologists to find. Faithful Christians hold different views on the date.

The Name

In Exodus, God reveals His personal name to Moses. In Hebrew it's four letters, YHWH, probably pronounced something like Yahweh. Out of reverence, Jewish readers stopped saying the name aloud and said Adonai, which means Lord, instead. Most English Bibles, including the one quoted in this book, follow that tradition by printing the name as LORD, in small capital letters. So whenever you see LORD in small caps, you're looking at God's personal name. When you see Lord with lowercase letters, it's the ordinary word for master.

Hard Stories and Safety Notes

Exodus begins with slavery and an order to kill babies, and it includes plagues, death, and war. Including a story in the Bible doesn't mean God approves of everything in it. When we come to these stories, you'll find a safety box. Here's what they all say: oppression and abuse are always wrong, it's never the victim's fault, and if something like it is happening to you or a friend, tell a trusted adult. In the United States you can call or text the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or call 911 in an emergency.

Rescued for a Reason

Exodus isn't just about getting out of something. It's about being brought into something. God doesn't just free Israel from Pharaoh; He frees them so they can know Him and serve Him. The same Hebrew word can mean both to serve and to worship. Israel trades slavery to a cruel king for service to a good one. That's one of the big ideas of Exodus, and of the whole Bible: true freedom isn't having no master. It's belonging to the right one.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Exodus 1–2): Slaves in Egypt and a baby in a basket.

Chapter 2 (Exodus 3–4): The burning bush and the name of God.

Chapter 3 (Exodus 5–10): The plagues and Pharaoh's hard heart.

Chapter 4 (Exodus 11–13): Passover.

Chapter 5 (Exodus 14–15): Through the sea.

Chapter 6 (Exodus 16–18): Manna, water, and the wilderness.

Chapter 7 (Exodus 19–20): Sinai and the Ten Commandments.

Chapter 8 (Exodus 21–31): The laws and the tabernacle plans.

Chapter 9 (Exodus 32–40): The golden calf and the glory of God.

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CHAPTER 1

Born Under Pharaoh

Exodus 1–2

Exodus opens with a list of names: the sons of Jacob who came down to Egypt with their families, seventy people in all. Then Joseph dies, his brothers die, and that whole generation dies. But the family doesn't disappear. "The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them." If that sounds familiar, it should. It's the language of Genesis 1, when God told humans to be fruitful and multiply. God's promise to Abraham, that his descendants would be as many as the stars, is coming true, even in a foreign land.

Then comes one of the most ominous sentences in the Bible: "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who didn't know Joseph." Joseph had saved Egypt from famine. But history has a short memory. This new Pharaoh doesn't care what an Israelite did hundreds of years ago. All he sees is a huge foreign population, and it scares him. What if they join Egypt's enemies in a war? So he decides to deal with them shrewdly.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Which Pharaoh?**
>
> Exodus never tells us the name of the Pharaoh who enslaved Israel, or the one Moses confronted. That may be on purpose. In Egypt, Pharaoh's name was everything; inscriptions celebrated it on temples and monuments. In Exodus,

the midwives get names (Shiphrah and Puah), but the most powerful man on earth doesn't. Scholars who hold the late date for the exodus often suggest Seti I as the oppressor and Ramesses II, the most famous of all the pharaohs, as the Pharaoh of the exodus. Those who hold the early date often suggest Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. Either way, Exodus makes a point: God knows the names of slaves. The great king is just Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's plan starts with forced labor. He puts slave masters over the Israelites to crush them with heavy work, and they build storage cities for Pharaoh, Pithom and Raamses. Egyptian art from this era actually shows foreign workers making mud bricks under the eye of overseers with sticks.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Semites in Egypt**

Archaeologists digging at Tell el-Dab'a in the eastern Nile Delta, the site of the ancient city of Avaris, have found evidence of a large population of Semitic people, people from Canaan and Syria, living there in the second millennium BC, with Canaanite-style houses, pottery, and burials. Later, Pharaoh Ramesses II built a great new capital nearby called Pi-Ramesses, the house of Ramesses. An Egyptian document called Papyrus Leiden 348 even mentions Apiru people hauling stones for one of Ramesses' building projects. None of this proves the exodus happened as Exodus describes. But it shows that the world of Exodus 1, with foreigners living in the Delta and forced into royal building projects, fits what we know of ancient Egypt. But the plan backfires. "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out." So Pharaoh makes it even worse. The Egyptians make their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and in the fields, and they work them ruthlessly.

SAFETY NOTE **Slavery and Forced Labor**

Slavery isn't just ancient history. Today, millions of people around the world, including in the United States, are trapped in forced labor or sex trafficking. Traffickers often target teenagers, sometimes through social media, fake job offers, or someone pretending to be a boyfriend or girlfriend who then

controls them. Warning signs include someone who takes your ID or phone, controls where you go, makes you work to pay off a debt, or pressures you into sexual acts for money or a place to stay. If anything like this is happening to you or someone you know, it is not your fault. Tell a trusted adult right away. In the United States you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733, any time. In an emergency, call 911.

When forced labor doesn't stop the Israelites from growing, Pharaoh moves to something far worse. He calls in two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and orders them to kill every baby boy born to a Hebrew woman, while letting the girls live. It's genocide, an attempt to wipe out a people. And it's aimed at the most defenseless people there are.

But the midwives have a problem with that. "The midwives feared God, and didn't do what the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the baby boys alive." When Pharaoh calls them in to explain, they tell him the Hebrew women are so strong and lively that they give birth before the midwives can get there. Did they bend the truth? Probably. But God blessed them for protecting the babies, and gave them families of their own. Two women with no political power defied the most powerful man on earth, and God honored them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Brave Women of Exodus**

Count the heroes in Exodus 1–2, and you'll notice almost all of them are women. Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives, refuse to kill the babies. Jochebed, Moses' mother, hides her son and then builds the basket. Miriam, his sister, watches over him and comes up with a brilliant plan. Pharaoh's daughter rescues a Hebrew baby in defiance of her own father. And later, Zipporah, Moses' wife, saves his life. Pharaoh was afraid of Hebrew men, so he let the girls live. He never imagined the women would be the ones to bring down his plan. God loves to use the people the powerful overlook.

REAL TALK **When Authorities Command Evil**

The Bible generally tells people to respect and obey those in authority (Romans 13:1). But the midwives show that there's a limit. When a ruler commands you to do something clearly evil, like harming innocent people, you must obey God rather than people (Acts 5:29). This has inspired believers through history, from Christians who refused to worship the Roman emperor to people who hid Jews from the Nazis, like Corrie ten Boom's family in the Netherlands. Most of the time, for you, obeying parents, teachers, and laws is the right thing. But if anyone, even an adult in authority, tells you to hurt someone, lie to cover up abuse, or do something seriously wrong, you don't have to go along. Talk to another trusted adult about it.

Finally Pharaoh drops the pretense. He commands all his people: "You shall cast every son who is born into the river." The Nile, the river that gave Egypt life, is turned into a weapon of death.

SAFETY NOTE **When Children Are Harmed**

Pharaoh's command to kill baby boys is one of the darkest moments in the Bible. Sadly, children are still harmed by adults today, sometimes by people who are supposed to protect them. If you or someone you know is being hurt, threatened, or neglected by an adult, it is never the child's fault, and it should never be kept secret. Tell a trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor, pastor, or relative. In the United States you can also call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. God cares deeply about children; Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me (Matthew 19:14).

Into this nightmare, a baby is born. A man and a woman from the tribe of Levi have a son. (Later we learn their names: Amram and Jochebed.) "When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months." Hebrews 11:23 says they did it by faith, and weren't afraid of the king's command. But you can only hide a baby for so long. So his mother takes a basket made of papyrus reeds, coats it with tar and pitch to make it waterproof, puts her son inside, and

sets it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His older sister, Miriam, stands at a distance to see what will happen.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Little Ark**
>
> The Hebrew word for Moses' basket is tevah. It appears only one other place in the Bible: Noah's ark. That's no accident. Just as God saved Noah and his family through the waters of the flood in an ark sealed with pitch, He saves baby Moses through the waters of the Nile in a tiny ark sealed with pitch. The water that was supposed to kill Hebrew boys becomes the place where God rescues the one who will lead them all to freedom.

Then the most unlikely person comes down to the river to bathe: Pharaoh's daughter. She sees the basket, opens it, and the baby is crying. "She had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'" She knows exactly whose child this is, and she knows her father's command. But she has pity on him anyway. Then Miriam, thinking fast, runs up and asks if she should go find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. The princess says yes, and Miriam brings... the baby's own mother. Pharaoh's daughter even pays her to nurse her own son. You can't make this up. Pharaoh tried to kill Hebrew babies; now his own daughter is paying a Hebrew mother to raise one, in safety.

When the boy is older, his mother brings him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he becomes her son. She names him Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water." The name sounds like the Hebrew word for draw out, and it may also be related to an Egyptian word meaning born of or son, found in pharaohs' names like Thutmose and Ramesses. Either way, the name is a prophecy. The one drawn out of the water will one day draw his people out through the water.

REAL TALK **Adoption**

Moses was raised by an adoptive mother, Pharaoh's daughter, while his birth mother nursed him. He had two mothers, two names, maybe two languages. If you're adopted or in foster care, you might relate to Moses more than most people. His story shows that God works through adoptive families, and that your story matters to Him from the very beginning. The Bible even uses adoption to describe what God does for everyone who trusts Jesus: He adopts us as His own children (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5). Being adopted isn't second-best in God's eyes. It's how He builds His whole family. If you have big questions about your story, it's okay to ask them, and to talk with a trusted adult or counselor.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Raised in the Palace**

Stephen says in Acts 7:22, "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Growing up in Pharaoh's household, Moses probably learned to read and write hieroglyphics, studied mathematics, law, and literature, and maybe learned military skills. Egyptian royal households did raise children of foreign nobility, so a Hebrew boy in the palace isn't as strange as it might sound. God was preparing Moses for a job no one else could do. Someday he would need to stand before Pharaoh, write down God's law, and lead a nation. Nothing in your life, even the parts that don't make sense yet, is wasted in God's hands.

Moses grows up. One day he goes out to see his own people, the Hebrews, and watches them at their hard labor. Then he sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, "one of his brothers." Moses looks this way and that way, sees no one, kills the Egyptian, and hides the body in the sand. It's a shocking scene. Moses' heart for justice is real, but his method is violent and secret.

SAFETY NOTE **Anger and Violence**

Moses saw a real injustice, and he was right to be angry about it. But he responded by killing a man and hiding the body. Wanting justice is good; taking violent revenge into your own hands is not. If you see someone being

> bullied or hurt, the best thing you can usually do is speak up, get help from a trusted adult, or call 911 if someone's in danger. And if you ever feel so angry that you're afraid of what you might do, talk to a counselor or trusted adult before you act.

The next day, Moses sees two Hebrews fighting, and he asks the one in the wrong why he's hitting his fellow Hebrew. The man snaps back: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you plan to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses is afraid. His secret is out. When Pharaoh hears about it, he tries to kill Moses, and Moses runs for his life to the land of Midian, in the desert east of Egypt. Acts 7:25 says Moses thought his people would understand that God was using him to rescue them, but they didn't. He tried to save them his own way, and it failed.

The New Testament gives Moses' choice a deeper meaning. Hebrews 11:24–26 says that by faith Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, "choosing rather to share ill treatment with God's people than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time." He gave up the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to a greater reward. Moses' method was wrong, but his choice to stand with the oppressed instead of enjoying privilege was an act of faith. It cost him everything he had.

In Midian, Moses sits down by a well, and history repeats itself. (Remember how Isaac's wife and Jacob's wife were both found at wells?) Seven daughters of a priest of Midian come to water their father's flock, and some shepherds drive them away. Moses stands up and rescues them, and waters their flock. Their father, Reuel, also called Jethro, invites Moses to dinner, and Moses ends up marrying one of the daughters, Zipporah. They have a son, and Moses names him Gershom, saying, "I have lived as a foreigner in a

foreign land." The prince of Egypt is now a shepherd in the desert. He'll stay there for forty years.

It's worth pausing on how far Moses has fallen. He grew up in the most powerful household on earth, with servants, the best education, and every comfort. Now he's a fugitive, living in a tent, taking care of someone else's sheep. Egyptians actually looked down on shepherds (Genesis 46:34). Moses has gone from the top of society to the bottom. But that's exactly where God will meet him.

> **REAL TALK** **Wilderness Years**
>
> Moses spent forty years in the palace thinking he was somebody, then forty years in the desert learning he was nobody, and then forty years learning what God can do with somebody who knows he's nobody. (That's an old saying, not a Bible verse, but it fits.) Maybe you're in a season that feels like the desert, where nothing exciting is happening and you feel forgotten. Moses' wilderness years weren't wasted. He learned humility, patience, and how to survive in the very desert he'd one day lead his people through. God often prepares people in hidden places before He uses them in public ones.

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, the king dies, but nothing changes for the Israelites. They groan under their slavery and cry out, and their cry for help goes up to God. And then come four short sentences that change everything. God heard their groaning. God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "God saw the children of Israel, and God understood." God hears. God remembers. God sees. God knows.

> **REAL TALK** **Your Family Story**
>
> Moses grew up between two worlds: born a Hebrew slave, raised an Egyptian prince, living as a Midianite shepherd. He named his son Gershom because he felt like a foreigner. Maybe you know what that's like. Maybe you're adopted, or your parents are divorced and you move between two homes, or your family immigrated and you feel caught between two cultures. Moses'

complicated story didn't disqualify him from God's plan; it prepared him for it. He could speak to Pharaoh because he knew the palace. He could lead people through the desert because he'd lived there. God can use every part of your story, including the parts that feel confusing or painful. If parts of your story are really heavy, find a trusted adult to talk them through with. The people may have thought God had forgotten them. He hadn't. He was about to act.

REAL TALK **When God Seems Silent**

Israel spent generations in slavery, and for most of that time there's no record of God speaking. No visions, no prophets, no miracles. It must have felt like God had forgotten them. Maybe you've felt that way too, praying for something for a long time with no answer. Exodus 2 doesn't explain why God waited so long. But it does say He was listening the whole time, and that He remembered His promises. God's silence isn't the same as God's absence. Keep crying out to Him. And if your situation is unsafe or overwhelming, don't wait silently; tell a trusted adult.

KEY VERSE

God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

Exodus 2:24 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Pharaoh forgot what Joseph had done for Egypt. Why do you think people and nations forget the good things others have done for them?
2. The midwives disobeyed Pharaoh because they feared God. Can you think of a time when doing the right thing meant disobeying someone in authority?
3. Moses tried to rescue his people his own way, and it went badly. Why do you think God made him wait forty years?
4. Exodus 2:23–25 says God heard, remembered, saw, and knew. Which of those do you most need to remember about God right now?

TRY THIS *Look up the National Human Trafficking Hotline's list of warning signs online, together with a parent or youth leader, so you know what to watch for. Then pray for people who are enslaved today, the way Israel was in Egypt.*

CHAPTER 2

The Bush That Wouldn't Burn Up

Exodus 3–4

Forty years have passed. Moses is eighty years old, tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness. One day he leads the flock far into the desert and comes to Horeb, "God's mountain," also called Sinai. He doesn't know it yet, but he's about to stand on the most important ground of his life.

"The LORD's angel appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the middle of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." A bush catching fire in the desert heat wasn't so unusual. But this one keeps burning without burning up. Moses is curious. "I will go now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

When God sees that Moses has turned aside to look, He calls to him from the bush: "Moses! Moses!" And Moses answers, "Here I am." Then God says, "Don't come close. Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing on is holy ground." The ground isn't holy because of the dirt. It's holy because God is there. Then God introduces Himself: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And "Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fire in the Bible**

Fire is one of the Bible's favorite ways of showing God's presence. God passed between the pieces of Abraham's sacrifice as a smoking furnace and a flaming torch. He'll lead Israel through the wilderness in a pillar of fire. He'll come down on Mount Sinai in fire. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will come as tongues of fire. Fire is beautiful, warm, and bright, but also dangerous and powerful. You can't control it or tame it. That's a pretty good picture of God. Hebrews 12:29 says our God is a consuming fire. And yet at the bush, the fire doesn't destroy. Many readers have seen the burning bush as a picture of Israel, suffering in Egypt but not consumed, because God was in the middle of it.

Then God tells Moses why He's come. "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows." God isn't distant or unaware. He sees, He hears, He knows. And He's not just sympathetic. "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey."

And then comes the twist. "Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh." God is going to rescue His people, and He's going to use Moses to do it.

Moses' response is the first of five objections. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" Forty years earlier, Moses thought he was the man to save Israel. Now he can't imagine it. God's answer is beautiful. He doesn't tell Moses how great he is. He tells Moses who will be with him: "Certainly I will be with you." The question isn't who Moses is. It's who God is.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Where Is Mount Sinai?**

Nobody knows for sure where Mount Sinai is. The traditional location is Jebel Musa (Mountain of Moses) in the southern Sinai Peninsula, where St.

Catherine's Monastery has stood since the sixth century AD; some monks there even point out a bush they say descends from the burning bush. Other scholars suggest mountains in the northern Sinai, closer to Egypt and Canaan. Still others point to Saudi Arabia, since the Bible places Midian east of the Gulf of Aqaba, and Paul mentions "Mount Sinai in Arabia" (Galatians 4:25), though Arabia in Paul's day could include the Sinai Peninsula. Like the location of the sea crossing, the location of the mountain is debated. What matters most is what happened there.

REAL TALK **Who Am I?**

Maybe you've felt like Moses. Who am I to lead this group? Who am I to tell my friends about Jesus? Who am I to stand up for someone who's being bullied? Notice that God never argues with Moses about his weaknesses. He just promises His presence. That's the same promise Jesus gave His followers when He sent them out: I am with you always (Matthew 28:20). You don't have to be impressive. You have to be willing, and you have to trust the One who goes with you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Holy Ground**

Why did Moses have to take off his sandals? In the ancient Near East, removing your shoes was a sign of respect and humility, the way a servant would go barefoot before a master. Priests in Israel's tabernacle seem to have served barefoot too. Even today, people remove their shoes before entering mosques, many Hindu and Buddhist temples, and some homes. Taking off your sandals means: this place is different, and I'm not in charge here. Worship begins with recognizing that God is holy and we are not. You don't need to go barefoot at church, but you might ask: do I come to God with any sense of awe?

Moses' second objection is a big one. If the Israelites ask, "What is his name?" what should I tell them? In the ancient world, a name wasn't just a label. It told you something about who a person was. Egyptians had hundreds of gods with hundreds of names. Which god are you talking about, Moses?

And God answers with the most mysterious and important name in the Bible. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM,'" and told him to tell the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you." Then God adds that He is the LORD, the God of their fathers, and "This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations."

BACKGROUND CHECK **I AM WHO I AM**

What does I AM WHO I AM mean? The Hebrew phrase is ehyeh asher ehyeh, and it can also be translated I will be what I will be. Readers have found several layers of meaning in it. God simply is; He depends on nothing and no one, and He has always existed. God is faithful; He will be who He has always been, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God is free; He can't be controlled or boxed in by a name the way people thought they could control their idols. God's personal name, YHWH, sounds like the Hebrew verb to be, and it's connected to I AM. It appears about 6,800 times in the Old Testament.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Bibles Print LORD**

Look at almost any English Bible, and you'll see the word LORD printed in small capital letters thousands of times. That's not a typo. It stands for God's personal name, YHWH. Hebrew was originally written without vowels, so we're not completely sure how the name was pronounced; most scholars think it was something like Yahweh. Over time, out of deep reverence and a desire not to misuse God's name (one of the Ten Commandments), Jewish readers stopped saying it aloud and said Adonai, which means my Lord, instead. Ancient Greek translations used kyrios, Lord, and most English Bibles have followed that tradition, using small caps to show that the Hebrew has God's name. When you see Lord GOD, with GOD in small caps, the Hebrew says Adonai YHWH. The older English form Jehovah came from combining the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of Adonai. So when you read LORD, remember: it's not a title. It's a name. God has told us who He is.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jesus and I AM**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says I am again and again: I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the

way and the truth and the life. And once He says something even bolder: "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM." His listeners immediately picked up stones to kill Him (John 8:58–59). They knew exactly what He was claiming. He was taking the name God gave Moses at the burning bush.

Moses' third objection: what if they don't believe me? So God gives Moses three signs. "What is that in your hand?" Moses says, "A rod." Just a shepherd's staff. God tells him to throw it down, and it becomes a snake; when Moses grabs it by the tail, it turns back into a staff. In Egypt, the cobra was a symbol of Pharaoh's power, worn on his crown. God is showing Moses that Pharaoh's power is in His hands. The second sign: Moses puts his hand inside his cloak, and it comes out diseased with a skin condition; he puts it back, and it's healed. The third: water from the Nile will turn to blood. God is about to use ordinary things, a stick, a hand, some water, to show His power.

REAL TALK **What's in Your Hand?**

When Moses said he couldn't do what God asked, God asked him a simple question: what's that in your hand? It was just a shepherd's staff, something Moses used every day. But in God's hands, that ordinary stick would turn into a snake, split the sea, and bring water from a rock. You may think you don't have much to offer God. But what's in your hand? Maybe it's a talent for music, a knack for making people laugh, a skill with computers, a kind heart, or simply time. God doesn't need you to have something impressive. He needs you to put what you have in His hands.

REAL TALK **Signs and Proof**

God gave Moses miraculous signs so people would believe. Sometimes we wish God would do the same for us: if He'd just show me a sign, I'd believe. But notice how the story goes. Pharaoh saw sign after sign and only got harder. The Israelites saw the sea split and were complaining three days later.

> Signs can point to God, but they can't force anyone to trust Him. Jesus once said that people who won't listen to Moses and the prophets won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:31). If you're looking for evidence for God, it's a great question to pursue; there's a lot to explore, from history to the resurrection to the experience of believers. But faith in the end isn't just about proof. It's about trust in a Person.

Moses' fourth objection: "I am not eloquent." I'm slow of speech and tongue. Some think Moses had a speech problem; others think he'd just been out of practice with Egyptian for forty years. God answers with a question: "Who made man's mouth?" God made Moses' mouth, and He'll help him speak.

And then Moses' fifth objection, which isn't really an objection at all. It's just the truth: "Oh, Lord, please send someone else." Moses doesn't want to go. And God's anger burns against him. But even then, God doesn't give up on Moses. Notice that God was already a step ahead. Aaron was on his way to meet Moses before Moses ever objected. God had a plan for Moses' weakness before Moses even admitted it. He sends Moses' brother Aaron to be his spokesman, and Aaron is already on his way to meet him.

> **REAL TALK** **Please Send Someone Else**
>
> It's comforting that Moses, one of the greatest leaders in history, tried five different ways to get out of what God asked him to do. Most of us have felt that way. But notice the difference between Moses' honest questions and his final refusal. God patiently answered every question. It was only when Moses said, basically, I don't want to, that God got angry. It's okay to have questions and fears. Bring them to God. But don't let them become excuses for saying no to Him.

Moses asks Jethro for permission to go back to Egypt, and he sets off with his wife and sons, carrying "God's rod" in his hand. God tells

him to say to Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go, so he may worship Me. If you refuse, I will kill your firstborn son. That's a preview of the final plague. Pharaoh had been killing Israel's sons. Now God is calling Israel His son, and He'll protect His son.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Strangest Story in Exodus**

On the way to Egypt, there's a short, puzzling scene. "The LORD met Moses and wanted to kill him." Zipporah, Moses' wife, quickly circumcises their son, touches Moses' feet with the foreskin, and God lets Moses go. What's going on? Most readers think Moses had failed to circumcise his son, neglecting the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. The leader of God's covenant people couldn't ignore the covenant in his own family. Some think the attack was on Moses' son, not Moses. Scholars admit the passage is one of the hardest in the Bible to understand. What's clear is that Zipporah saves the day, and that God takes His covenant seriously.

Aaron meets Moses at the mountain of God, and together they go to Egypt. They gather the elders of Israel, Aaron tells them everything God said, and Moses performs the signs. "The people believed, and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped." After four hundred years, God has come. Hope is alive. The next chapter will test that hope to the limit.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Moses and Aaron**

Aaron was three years older than Moses, and he'd stayed in Egypt the whole time Moses was in the palace and in Midian, living as a slave among his people. God brings the two brothers together for this mission. Moses would speak for God to Aaron, and Aaron would speak for Moses to the people and to Pharaoh. God tells Moses, you will be like God to him, and he will be your mouth. It's a team. Later, Aaron becomes Israel's first high priest. God rarely calls people to serve Him alone. Moses had Aaron and Miriam. Later he'd have

Joshua, Hur, and seventy elders. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. If God is calling you to something, look for the people He's put alongside you. But Aaron will also fail badly in the story of the golden calf. Like everyone in Exodus except God, he's a mix of faith and weakness.

KEY VERSE

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and he said, "You shall tell the children of Israel this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Exodus 3:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Moses had to turn aside to see the burning bush. What might you need to turn aside from in order to notice God?
2. God answered "Who am I?" with "I will be with you." How does that change the way you face something scary?
3. What does it mean to you that God has a personal name? How might that change the way you pray?
4. Which of Moses' five objections do you relate to most?

TRY THIS *This week, every time you see* LORD *in small caps in your Bible, stop and remember that it's God's personal name. Read Exodus 3 and John 8:48–59, and write down every connection you see between the burning bush and Jesus.*

CHAPTER 3

Let My People Go

Exodus 5–10

Moses and Aaron walk into Pharaoh's palace with God's message: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" And Pharaoh laughs in their faces. "Who is the LORD, that I should listen to his voice to let Israel go? I don't know the LORD." That's the question the next six chapters will answer. By the end, Pharaoh, Egypt, and Israel will all know exactly who the LORD is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Pharaoh the God-King**
>
> In Egyptian belief, Pharaoh wasn't just a king. He was considered the son of the sun god Ra and the living embodiment of the god Horus. His job was to maintain ma'at, the cosmic order that kept the Nile flooding, the sun rising, and Egypt's enemies defeated. So when Pharaoh said he didn't know the LORD, he was speaking as a god himself. The plagues are a direct challenge to that claim. One by one, the very things Pharaoh was supposed to control, the river, the land, the health of the herds, the sun, fall apart. By the end, it's clear who really rules creation, and it isn't Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's response is to make life even harder for the Israelites. He accuses them of being lazy: that's why they want to go worship their God. Give them more work, he says, so they won't have time to listen to lies. It's an old tactic of oppressors: keep people too exhausted to think about freedom. Until now, the Egyptians had

supplied straw for making bricks (straw helped hold the mud together). Now the slaves have to gather their own straw, and still make the same number of bricks. When they can't, their Israelite foremen are beaten. The foremen turn on Moses and Aaron: "May the LORD look at you and judge," they say, because you've made us stink in Pharaoh's eyes. And Moses turns to God and basically says, why did you send me? Since I came, things have only gotten worse.

> **REAL TALK** **When Obeying God Makes Things Worse**
>
> Moses did exactly what God told him to do, and everything got worse. Have you ever had that experience? Maybe you stood up for what was right and lost a friend, or you started following Jesus and your family thought you'd gone weird. Obeying God doesn't always make life easier right away. Sometimes the darkness gets darker just before the dawn. Moses did the right thing with his frustration: he took it straight to God. And God answered him with a promise.

God tells Moses that He is the LORD, and that He will act. He makes seven great I will promises: I will bring you out. I will rid you out of their bondage. "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm." "I will take you to myself for a people. I will be your God." I will bring you into the land. I will give it to you. To redeem means to buy back, like paying the price to free a slave or a family member. God isn't just going to free Israel. He's going to claim them as His own family. Jewish families still drink four cups of wine at the Passover meal, each one connected to these promises.

But when Moses tells the Israelites, "they didn't listen to Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." They're too crushed to believe. Sometimes pain is so heavy that even good news can't get through. God doesn't scold them. He just keeps working.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Bricks Without Straw**

Mud bricks were the main building material in ancient Egypt for homes, walls, and storehouses. Workers mixed mud from the Nile with water and chopped straw or other plant material, pressed it into wooden molds, and dried the bricks in the sun. The straw helped the bricks hold together and keep from cracking. An Egyptian document from the time of Ramesses II, called Papyrus Anastasi, mentions a quota of bricks for workers and complains about a lack of men and straw. Making slaves gather their own straw while keeping the same quota was a deliberate way to crush them. Some ancient mud bricks found in Egypt actually contain no straw at all.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Magicians of Egypt**

When Moses and Aaron go back to Pharaoh, Aaron throws down his staff and it becomes a snake. Then Pharaoh calls his wise men, sorcerers, and magicians, and they do the same with their staffs. “But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.” Egyptian magicians were famous in the ancient world, and some ancient texts describe magicians handling snakes, possibly by putting them into a rigid, trance-like state that made them look like staffs. Later Jewish tradition named two of these magicians Jannes and Jambres, and Paul mentions them in 2 Timothy 3:8. Whether by trickery or dark power, the magicians can copy the first few signs. But they can’t stop them, and they can’t undo them. And soon they can’t keep up at all.

Then the plagues begin. There are ten of them, and they come in a pattern of three groups of three, plus the final, devastating tenth. Here’s a quick tour.

The first plague turns the Nile, and all the water in Egypt, into blood. The fish die, the river stinks, and the Egyptians can’t drink the water. The Nile was Egypt’s lifeline, worshiped as a god (Hapi). The river where Hebrew babies were drowned is now full of blood. The magicians do the same thing on a small scale, and Pharaoh’s heart is hardened.

The second plague is frogs. Frogs in the houses, frogs in the beds, frogs in the ovens and the mixing bowls. (Imagine waking up with a frog on your pillow.) The Egyptian goddess Heqet, who helped women in childbirth, had the head of a frog. Pharaoh asks Moses to pray for the frogs to go away, and Moses asks when. Pharaoh says, "Tomorrow." Why not now? Maybe he hoped they'd go away on their own. Moses agrees, so that Pharaoh will know there's no one like the LORD. When the frogs die, the Egyptians pile them up in heaps, and the land stinks. And Pharaoh hardens his heart.

The third plague is gnats, or lice, from the dust of the ground. This time the magicians try and fail. And they tell Pharaoh, "This is God's finger." Even Pharaoh's own experts recognize that this is something only God could do. But Pharaoh won't listen.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Plagues and the Gods of Egypt**

God says in Exodus 12:12, "I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt." Many readers see each plague as an attack on a particular Egyptian god or something Egypt trusted. The Nile, worshiped as a source of life, turns to blood. Frogs, sacred to Heqet, become a disgusting pest. Livestock, connected with gods like the bull Apis and the cow goddess Hathor, die. The sun, worshiped as Ra, the greatest god, goes dark. And Pharaoh himself, supposedly a god, can't protect his own son. Scholars debate how many of these connections the original writer intended. But the big point is clear: the gods of Egypt are powerless against the LORD.

The fourth plague is swarms of flies, and for the first time, God makes a distinction. The flies cover Egypt, but not the land of Goshen, where the Israelites live. From here on, many of the plagues fall on Egypt but spare Israel. Pharaoh starts to bargain: you can worship your God, but do it here in Egypt. Then: you can go, but not very far. As soon as the flies leave, he changes his mind.

The fifth plague strikes Egypt's livestock with disease, horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. Israel's animals are untouched. The sixth plague is boils, painful sores on people and animals; the magicians can't even stand in front of Moses because they're covered with boils.

The seventh plague is the worst hailstorm Egypt has ever seen, with fire flashing down to the ground. But this time God gives a warning: anyone who brings their servants and animals inside will be safe. Some of Pharaoh's officials, who feared the word of the LORD, listened, and their servants and livestock survived. Even in judgment, God offers mercy to Egyptians who will listen. Exodus doesn't paint every Egyptian as a villain. Pharaoh's daughter saved Moses. Some of Pharaoh's officials feared God's word. Later, Egyptians would leave with Israel. God's judgment fell on a system of oppression and a king who refused to repent, but His mercy was available to anyone who would turn to Him. Pharaoh admits, "I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." But when the hail stops, he hardens his heart again.

The eighth plague is locusts, so many that they cover the ground until it's black, and they eat every plant the hail left. Pharaoh's own officials beg him: Don't you realize Egypt is ruined? Pharaoh confesses again, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you." And again he changes his mind.

> **REAL TALK** **Crisis Promises**
>
> Pharaoh kept saying the right words when he was in trouble: I have sinned. Pray for me. I'll let you go. But as soon as the pressure was off, he went right back. Have you ever made a promise to God in a crisis? God, if you get me out of this, I'll never do it again. Those prayers aren't wrong; God hears people in trouble. But real repentance doesn't disappear when the crisis does. It's a change of direction, not just a change of words. If you've made God a promise

in a hard moment, it's worth asking whether you meant it, and what keeping it would look like now.

The ninth plague is darkness, darkness so thick it can be felt, for three days. No one can see anyone else or leave their place. "But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." The sun god Ra, the chief god of Egypt, has been blotted out. Pharaoh tells Moses to get out and never come back: the day you see my face, you'll die. And Moses agrees: you won't see my face again.

Notice how the plagues escalate. The first ones are disgusting and annoying. Then they start destroying property and livestock. Then they hurt people's bodies. Then they wipe out the food supply. Then even the sun goes dark. Each one is a little more serious, and each one comes with a chance for Pharaoh to change his mind. God's judgments in Exodus aren't sudden and random. They're patient, gradual, and full of warnings. That's how God usually works. He'd rather people turn than be destroyed (Ezekiel 33:11).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Natural Explanations?**

Some people have tried to explain the plagues as a chain of natural events: red algae or red soil turns the Nile red and kills the fish, so the frogs leave the river and die, so flies and gnats multiply, spreading disease to animals and people, followed by a hailstorm, a locust swarm, and a sandstorm (the khamsin) that darkens the sky. Some Christians find this helpful, and think God may have used natural processes in a supernatural way, with miraculous timing, intensity, and precision (like sparing Goshen). Others think such explanations miss the point or don't fit the details of the text, and see the plagues as direct miracles. Skeptics see them as legend. Either way, Exodus presents them as God's mighty acts, announced in advance by Moses, coming and stopping at God's command.

Now let's tackle one of the hardest questions in Exodus. Over and over, the text says that Pharaoh's heart was hard, or that Pharaoh hardened his heart, or that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart. Before the plagues began, God told Moses, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." So was Pharaoh responsible for his choices? Or was he a puppet?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?**

Christians have read this in different ways. Some point out that in the first five plagues, the text says Pharaoh hardened his own heart or his heart was hardened, and only from the sixth plague on does it say God hardened it. In this view, God gave Pharaoh many chances, and then confirmed the choice Pharaoh had already made, giving him over to his own stubbornness (compare Romans 1:24). Others, often in the Reformed tradition, point to God's announcement before the plagues and to Paul's comment in Romans 9:17–18, "he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires," and see God as sovereign over Pharaoh's heart, while Pharaoh remained fully responsible for his evil. Still others suggest that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in the sense of strengthening his resolve, giving him the courage to do what he already wanted to do. Jewish commentators, like Rashi and Maimonides, also wrestled with this, and many concluded that Pharaoh's repeated wickedness eventually cost him the freedom to repent. All of these views agree that Pharaoh was a cruel tyrant who chose to oppress and kill, and that God used even his stubbornness to show His power and make His name known.

REAL TALK **Hardened Hearts**

Whatever you think about how God was involved, notice how Pharaoh's hardness grew. Each time he refused, the next refusal got easier. He made promises in a crisis and broke them as soon as the pressure was off. That's how hearts get hard. It doesn't usually happen in one big decision. It happens through lots of small ones, ignoring your conscience, pushing away the people who love you, saying not yet to God over and over. Hebrews 3:15 says,

> Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart. If you sense God nudging you about something, don't wait. A soft heart is a gift. Protect it.

God also explains why He didn't just wipe out Egypt with one plague: "to show you my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." The plagues weren't just about getting Israel out. They were about showing the whole world who the real God is. And it worked. Forty years later, people in Jericho were still talking about what God had done in Egypt (Joshua 2:10). And three thousand years later, you're reading about it.

KEY VERSE

I will take you to myself for a people. I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Exodus 6:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Pharaoh asked, "Who is the LORD?" How would you answer that question?
2. Moses obeyed God and things got worse. How do you keep trusting God when that happens?
3. Which view of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart makes the most sense to you? Why?
4. Pharaoh kept making promises during the plagues and breaking them afterward. Have you ever made a promise to God in a crisis? What happened?

TRY THIS *Make a chart of the ten plagues. For each one, write down what it attacked (the Nile, the land, the livestock, the sky, and so on) and how*

Pharaoh responded. Then circle the places where God showed mercy or gave a warning.

CHAPTER 4

The Night of the Lamb

Exodus 11–13

Nine plagues have devastated Egypt, and Pharaoh still won't let Israel go. Now God announces one more. It will be the last, and the worst. "All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the mill." There will be a great cry throughout Egypt, worse than any before or since. But among the Israelites, not even a dog will bark.

This is the hardest part of the exodus story to read. Before we go any further, it's worth saying that out loud. Many of the firstborn who died were children. Many were ordinary Egyptians who had little to do with Pharaoh's decisions. How can a good God do this?

REAL TALK **The Death of the Firstborn**

Christians have wrestled honestly with this, and there are no easy answers. A few things are worth noticing. First, this judgment didn't come out of nowhere. Pharaoh had been killing Israel's baby boys for decades, and God had warned him from the start: Israel is my firstborn son; if you refuse to let him go, I will kill your firstborn (Exodus 4:22–23). Pharaoh's own cruelty came back on his own house. Second, God gave nine plagues of warning first, and He made a way of escape that was open to anyone, Egyptian or Israelite, who trusted Him; a mixed multitude of non-Israelites left Egypt with Israel. Third, the Bible says God alone is the giver of life, and He alone has the right to take

it; He doesn't give that right to us. And finally, the Bible doesn't ask you to stop feeling the weight of this. It's okay to grieve the losses of that night, and to bring your questions to God. If thinking about death frightens you or keeps you up at night, talk about it with a parent, pastor, or another trusted adult.

Then God gives Moses detailed instructions for a meal unlike any other. On the tenth day of the month, each household is to choose a lamb, "a lamb for a household." It must be "without defect, a male a year old." The family keeps the lamb for four days, which means it would become almost like a pet, before killing it at twilight on the fourteenth day. Then they're to take some of the blood and put it on the doorposts and the top of the doorframe of their houses. That night they're to eat the lamb, roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread (bread made without yeast) and bitter herbs.

And they're to eat it dressed for travel: "with your belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's Passover." This is a meal for people who are about to leave.

Then God explains the meaning of the blood. That night He will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will be on you to destroy you." That's where the name Passover comes from. The blood of the lamb is a sign. Every house with blood on the door is protected. A lamb dies so the firstborn can live.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Blood?**

To modern readers, smearing blood on a doorframe sounds strange, even gross. But in the Bible, blood represents life. Leviticus 17:11 says the life of a creature is in the blood, and that God gave it to make atonement. The lamb's blood on the door said: a life has been given here. Death has already come to this house, so judgment passes over it. It wasn't that Israelites were better

people than Egyptians. They were protected because they trusted God's word and put the blood where He told them to. That's why Christians talk about being saved by the blood of Jesus. It doesn't mean there's something magical about blood. It means Jesus gave His life in our place.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Unleavened Bread and Bitter Herbs**

Every part of the Passover meal is a reminder. The unleavened bread, called matzah, reminds Israel that they left in such a hurry that their bread didn't have time to rise. The bitter herbs remind them of the bitterness of slavery. God commands Israel to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days every year, removing all yeast from their homes. In the Bible, yeast often becomes a picture of sin, which spreads through everything it touches; Paul says, "Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump." Today, Jewish families still celebrate Passover with a special meal called the Seder, which means order. They eat matzah and bitter herbs, drink four cups of wine, and retell the story, and the youngest child asks, Why is this night different from all other nights?

God makes Passover a permanent memorial. "This day shall be a memorial for you." And He builds in a teaching moment. When your children ask what this ceremony means, tell them: "It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians, and spared our houses." God wants the story passed down. Faith isn't supposed to stop with one generation.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Hebrew Calendar**

God tells Moses that the month of the exodus will be the first month of Israel's year. It was later called Abib, which means fresh ears of grain, and after the exile in Babylon it was called Nisan; it falls in March or April. So Israel's calendar was rebuilt around their rescue. Every year would start by remembering that God set them free. Christians have done something similar: our calendar counts years from the birth of Jesus, and many churches organize their year around Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.

Easter is tied to the date of Passover, which is why it moves around every year. What's the starting point of your year? What do you build your calendar around?

REAL TALK **Ask the Question**

God expected children to ask questions about the faith of their families. He didn't say, if your children ask, tell them to be quiet. He said, when they ask, tell them the story. If you've got questions about God, the Bible, or why your family does what it does at church, ask them. Questions aren't the enemy of faith; they're often the doorway into it. And if you can, ask your parents, grandparents, or youth leader to tell you their own story: when did they first realize God was real?

The Israelites do exactly what God says. Imagine that night. The family huddled inside, dressed and ready, eating roast lamb and flat bread by lamplight. The blood drying on the doorframe outside. Children asking questions. Parents whispering prayers. And then, somewhere in the dark, a cry. And "at midnight, the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt." From Pharaoh's palace to the prison cell, there's not a house without someone dead. A loud cry goes up all over Egypt. And Pharaoh, finally broken, summons Moses and Aaron in the night. "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said!" Then he adds something astonishing: And bless me also.

The Egyptians urge the Israelites to hurry. They give them silver and gold jewelry and clothing, so much that the Israelites "plundered the Egyptians." Slaves who had worked for nothing for generations leave with back pay. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would come out with great possessions (Genesis 15:14), and He kept His word. About six hundred thousand men set out on

foot, besides women and children, and "a mixed multitude went up also with them." Not everyone who left Egypt was an Israelite. Some Egyptians and others joined them, trusting Israel's God. God even gave instructions for foreigners who wanted to celebrate the Passover: if they joined the covenant, they would be treated just like native-born Israelites. From the very first Passover, the door was open to outsiders.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How Many People?**

Exodus 12:37 says about 600,000 men left Egypt, which would mean a total of two million or more people including women and children. That's a huge number to survive in the desert, and readers handle it in different ways. Some take it at face value and see God's miraculous provision as the explanation. Others point out that the Hebrew word for thousand, eleph, can also mean a clan or a military unit, which would make the number much smaller, perhaps twenty or thirty thousand. Others think the numbers are meant symbolically or represent a later census. Faithful readers hold each view. Either way, it was a lot of people for God to feed, and He did.

Exodus notes that Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years, and that they left "to the day." God's timing was exact. And Moses takes something special with him: Joseph's bones. Hundreds of years earlier, Joseph had made his brothers promise to carry his bones out of Egypt when God came to their aid. Now that promise is kept. The coffin that ended Genesis is going home.

God also tells Israel that from now on, every firstborn son and firstborn male animal belongs to Him. They're to be dedicated to God, and the firstborn sons are to be redeemed, or bought back, with a sacrifice. It's a permanent reminder of the night God spared Israel's firstborn. Centuries later, Mary and Joseph would bring their firstborn son, Jesus, to the temple to dedicate Him to the Lord according to this law (Luke 2:22–23).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Christ, Our Passover**

The New Testament sees Passover as one of the clearest pictures of Jesus in the whole Old Testament. John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus was crucified during Passover week, and John's Gospel notes that, like the Passover lamb, none of His bones were broken (John 19:36; Exodus 12:46). Paul writes, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place." And on the night before He died, Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. He took the unleavened bread and said, "This is my body which is given for you." He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." When Christians take communion, they're remembering a new and greater Passover. Just as the blood of the lamb protected Israel from death, Jesus' death protects all who trust Him from the judgment their sin deserves.

As Israel leaves Egypt, God doesn't lead them by the shortest route, along the coast through the land of the Philistines. He knows that if they face war too soon, they might change their minds and go back to Egypt. So He leads them the long way, through the desert, toward the Red Sea. And He goes with them visibly. "The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light." They never had to wonder whether God was with them. They could look up and see.

REAL TALK **Remember**

The word remember shows up again and again in Exodus. God remembers His covenant. Israel is told to remember the day they came out of Egypt, to remember the Sabbath, and to tell their children. Why so much remembering? Because people forget so easily. Within weeks of the Red Sea, the Israelites will forget what God did and complain that He's abandoned them. You probably do the same thing. One of the best ways to grow your faith is to remember what God has done. Keep a journal of answered prayers. Write down the times He came through. When you're struggling, read it again. Your own story of God's faithfulness can carry you through the hard days.

KEY VERSE

The blood shall be to you for a token on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. How do you feel about the tenth plague? What questions does it raise for you, and how does the rest of the Bible help you think about them?
2. Why do you think God wanted the Israelites to eat the Passover dressed and ready to leave?
3. What does the Passover lamb teach you about what Jesus did on the cross?
4. God told parents to explain Passover when their children asked about it. What question about faith would you like to ask someone in your family?

TRY THIS *If you can, attend a Passover Seder, or a Christian demonstration of one, with your family or church. If not, read Exodus 12 and Luke 22:7–20 side by side, and list every connection between the first Passover and the Last Supper.*

CHAPTER 5

Through the Sea

Exodus 14–15

Israel is finally free. But God tells Moses to do something that seems crazy: turn back and camp by the sea. It looks like a mistake, like they're lost and trapped. And that's exactly the point. God says Pharaoh will think the Israelites are wandering around confused, and he'll chase them. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will follow after them; and I will get honor over Pharaoh, and over all his armies; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD."

Sure enough, Pharaoh changes his mind again. What have we done? We let our slaves go! He takes six hundred of his best chariots, plus all the other chariots of Egypt, and races after them. And when the Israelites look up and see the Egyptian army coming, they panic. They have the sea in front of them, the army behind them, and nowhere to run. "The children of Israel cried out to the LORD." And they turned on Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?" It would have been better to stay slaves.

Think about that for a moment. Just days earlier, these people watched God destroy the most powerful nation on earth on their behalf. They walked out of Egypt carrying Egyptian gold. They'd been following a pillar of fire. And the moment they see a threat,

they're ready to go back to slavery. Fear has a way of erasing memory. That's not just Israel's problem. It's a human problem.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Chariots**

Egyptian chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. Light, fast, and pulled by two horses, each carried a driver and an archer, and they could cut through a crowd of foot soldiers in seconds. Egyptian art shows pharaohs like Ramesses II charging into battle in their chariots, firing arrows. For a crowd of escaped slaves on foot, with women, children, and animals, the sight of hundreds of chariots coming at them would have been terrifying. There was no way Israel could fight them.

Moses' answer is one of the great statements of faith in the Bible. "Don't be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today." The Egyptians you see today, you'll never see again. "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall be still."

REAL TALK **Be Still**

Being still is hard. Most of us are used to constant motion and noise, notifications, music, scrolling, and plans. When something scary happens, our instinct is to do something, anything, to fix it. Sometimes that's right. But sometimes the bravest thing you can do is stop, breathe, and trust God to act. Psalm 46:10 says, Be still, and know that I am God. Try it this week. Put your phone in another room for ten minutes, sit quietly, and tell God what you're worried about. Then just be still, and remember that He's fighting for you.

But then God says something surprising to Moses: "Why do you cry to me? Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward." There's a time to be still, and a time to move. Israel had to trust God to fight for them, and then they had to step forward in faith.

REAL TALK **Stuck Between a Sea and an Army**

Have you ever felt trapped, with no way out? Maybe it's a family situation, a friendship gone bad, anxiety, or a mistake you can't undo. Israel's story shows

that God sometimes leads His people into situations that look impossible, so that they'll see Him do what only He can do. The answer wasn't to panic or to go back to Egypt. It was to trust God and take the next step He gave them. If you feel trapped right now, talk to God about it honestly, and talk to a trusted adult. And if you're feeling hopeless or having thoughts of hurting yourself, please tell someone today; in the United States, you can call or text 988 any time.

Then the angel of God and the pillar of cloud move from in front of Israel to behind them, standing between Israel and the Egyptians. The cloud brings darkness to one side and light to the other, so the armies can't come near each other all night. God has put Himself between His people and their enemies.

Moses stretches out his hand over the sea, "and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." The Israelites walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with "the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." Imagine walking through that, with walls of water on either side, and the sound of chariots somewhere behind you.

REAL TALK **The Next Step**

The Israelites didn't get to see the whole path through the sea before they started. They had to walk forward in the dark, with the wind howling and the waters standing up on either side. Faith often works like that. God doesn't usually show you the whole plan for your life, your college, your career, or your future relationships. He shows you the next step. Psalm 119:105 says God's word is a lamp to my feet, not a floodlight for the whole road. If you're anxious about the future, try asking: what's the next faithful step I can take today? Take that one, and trust God for the rest.

The Egyptians chase them right into the sea. But in the early morning, God looks down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of

fire and cloud and throws them into confusion. Their chariot wheels jam or come off, and they can hardly drive. The Egyptians realize: the LORD is fighting for Israel. Let's get out of here! But it's too late. Moses stretches out his hand again, and at daybreak the sea returns. "The waters returned, and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even all Pharaoh's army." Not one of them survives.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Red Sea or Sea of Reeds?**

The Hebrew name for the sea Israel crossed is yam suph. The same name is used elsewhere in the Bible for the Gulf of Aqaba, an arm of the Red Sea (1 Kings 9:26), and the ancient Greek translation called it the Red Sea, which is where most English Bibles get that name. But suph usually means reeds or rushes (it's the same word used for the reeds where baby Moses' basket was hidden), so many scholars translate it Sea of Reeds. That has led to several proposals about where the crossing happened: one of the marshy lakes near the Suez region, like the Bitter Lakes or Lake Timsah; the Gulf of Suez; or the Gulf of Aqaba, much farther east. Some skeptics suggest the event was a crossing of a shallow marsh that became a legend. Many Christians reply that the text describes deep water, walls of water, and an entire army drowned, and that the point of the story is God's miraculous power, whatever the location. Faithful Christians hold different views on where it happened. All agree on who did it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Pillar of Cloud and Fire**

The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night was Israel's GPS, their shield, and their nightlight. It went ahead of them to show the way, moved behind them to protect them from the Egyptians, and later rested over the tabernacle. Some people have suggested it was something natural, like the smoke and fire of a brazier carried at the front of a caravan, which ancient armies sometimes did. But Exodus presents it as God's own visible presence, the same glory that would fill the tabernacle. The prophet Isaiah looked forward to a day when God would create a cloud by day and fire by night over all of Jerusalem, a canopy of glory over His people (Isaiah 4:5). Christians believe

God's presence now goes with His people through the Holy Spirit, who lives in every believer.

BACKGROUND CHECK **When Did the Exodus Happen?**

We touched on this in Setting the Scene, but it's worth a closer look here. The early date view (around 1446 BC) is based on 1 Kings 6:1, which places the exodus 480 years before Solomon's temple, and on Judges 11:26, where Jephthah says Israel had been in the land 300 years. Supporters connect it with the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. The late date view (around 1260 BC) points to the city of Raamses (Exodus 1:11), signs of building in the Nile Delta under Ramesses II, and evidence of new settlements in Canaan's hill country around 1200 BC. Supporters often read the 480 years as twelve generations of forty years each, a round number. The Merneptah Stele (about 1208 BC) proves a people called Israel existed in Canaan by then, which fits both dates. Some scholars think the exodus story grew from a smaller event, or doubt it happened at all, because no Egyptian record mentions it. Others answer that the Egyptians almost never recorded defeats, and that a large group of nomads in the desert would leave very little archaeological trace. You don't have to settle the date to see the point: God rescued His people.

"Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians." And when Israel sees the great power God has used against Egypt, the people fear the LORD and believe in Him and in His servant Moses. The people who were panicking the night before are now standing on the far shore, safe.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Same Water**

There's a powerful pattern here. The Nile was the water Pharaoh used to drown Hebrew babies, and God turned it to blood. Now the sea is the water that drowns Pharaoh's army. Moses, drawn out of water as a baby, leads his people out through the water. The waters of chaos, which God tamed at creation in Genesis 1 and which flooded the earth in Noah's day, part at His command. In the Bible, God is always Lord of the waters. Jesus showed the

same authority when He calmed the storm, and His disciples asked, Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him? (Mark 4:41).

Then they do what anyone would do after a rescue like that. They sing. Exodus 15 is one of the oldest poems in the Bible, often called the Song of the Sea or the Song of Moses. "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously. He has thrown the horse and his rider into the sea." The song celebrates God as a warrior who fights for His people: "The LORD is a man of war. The LORD is his name." And it asks a question that rings through the whole Bible: "Who is like you, LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

BACKGROUND CHECK **Miriam's Song**

After Moses' song, "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dances." Miriam is the first woman in the Bible called a prophet. She's probably the same sister who watched over baby Moses in the reeds, now an old woman leading a nation in worship. Her song is short: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously. He has thrown the horse and his rider into the sea." Many scholars think Miriam's short song may be one of the oldest pieces of the Bible. In the ancient Near East, women often led victory celebrations with music and dancing (compare 1 Samuel 18:6). Worship in the Bible isn't always quiet and still. Sometimes it's loud and full of dancing.

REAL TALK **Is God a Warrior?**

The Song of the Sea celebrates God as a warrior who defeated Pharaoh's army. That can feel uncomfortable. But remember who God fought against: a slave-owning superpower that had murdered babies and refused to let the oppressed go. For people who have been crushed by cruelty, the news that God fights for the victims is very good news. The Bible pictures God as a warrior against evil, injustice, sin, and death, and ultimately the final battle is

won not by a sword but by a Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5). God is not a bully. He's the defender of the defenseless.

The song doesn't just look back. It looks forward too. God has redeemed His people, and He'll lead them to His holy dwelling, plant them on His mountain, and reign forever. "The LORD will reign forever and ever." In Revelation 15:3, the people of God who have overcome evil stand beside a sea of glass, holding harps, and sing "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." The exodus song becomes the song of the end of history.

REAL TALK **Songs for Hard Times**

Israel's first response to rescue was to sing. Music helps people remember what God has done, and it helps carry faith through hard times. Enslaved African Americans in the United States sang spirituals drawn straight from Exodus, like Go Down, Moses, with its refrain, Let my people go, and Wade in the Water. Those songs expressed both faith in God and a longing for freedom, and some may even have carried coded messages about escape on the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman, who led many people out of slavery, was called the Moses of her people. What songs carry your faith? Make a playlist of songs that remind you of what God has done, and listen to it when life gets hard.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Through the Waters**

The New Testament sees the crossing of the sea as a picture of baptism. Paul writes that the Israelites were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and "were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Going down into the water and coming up on the other side is a picture of leaving the old life of slavery behind and starting a new life of freedom with God. Luke even uses the word exodus (Greek exodos, translated departure) to describe Jesus' coming death and resurrection in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Jesus' death and resurrection is the new exodus, leading His people out of slavery to sin and death.

But three days after the song, the singing stops. The people have walked into the desert of Shur and found no water. When they finally find water at a place called Marah, it's bitter and undrinkable. And the people grumble against Moses: What are we supposed to drink? Moses cries out to the LORD, and God shows him a piece of wood. He throws it into the water, and the water becomes sweet. Then God promises that if they listen to Him and obey His commands, He won't bring on them the diseases He brought on the Egyptians, "for I am the LORD who heals you." Then they come to Elim, an oasis with twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camp by the water.

> **REAL TALK** **Bitter Water**
>
> Marah means bitter. Life sometimes hands you bitter water: a divorce in your family, a friend who betrays you, a diagnosis, a loss. It's okay to say it's bitter. The people's mistake wasn't noticing that the water was bad; it was turning on Moses and doubting God. Moses' response was to cry out to the LORD, and God showed him a way to make the bitter water sweet. Many Christians have seen the piece of wood as a picture of the cross, which turns the bitterest moment in history into the sweetest. And notice what came next: Elim, with twelve springs and seventy palm trees. Bitter seasons don't last forever. God knows where the oasis is.

KEY VERSE

The LORD will fight for you, and you shall be still.

Exodus 14:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. The Israelites went from panic to praise in one night. What helps you remember God's faithfulness when you're afraid?
2. God told Moses both to be still and to go forward. When do you think it's time to wait on God, and when is it time to act?
3. Which view of the date or location of the exodus seems most convincing to you? Does it change how you read the story?
4. Why do you think the people started complaining just three days after singing God's praises?

TRY THIS *Write your own song or poem of thanks to God for a time He brought you through something hard. If you play an instrument, put it to music. If not, read it out loud, like Miriam.*

CHAPTER 6

Bread from Heaven

Exodus 16–18

A month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites are deep in the desert of Sin (that's a place name, not a description), and the food is running out. And the grumbling starts again, louder this time. "We wish that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots, when we ate our fill of bread." That's selective memory. In Egypt they were slaves, beaten and worked to death, with their babies thrown into the river. But hunger has a way of making the past look better than it was.

Notice who they're complaining against. Moses tells them: your grumbling isn't really against us, it's against the LORD. That's often true of complaining. When we complain constantly about our situation, we're often really saying that we don't trust God to take care of us. That doesn't mean we can't be honest about hard things; the psalms are full of honest complaints brought to God. But there's a difference between crying out to God and grumbling about Him.

> REAL TALK **Nostalgia for Egypt**
>
> Have you ever missed something that was actually bad for you? A toxic friendship, an old habit, a relationship you knew you needed to leave? Israel remembered the meat pots of Egypt and forgot the whips. That's how temptation often works: it highlights the pleasure and hides the pain. When you find yourself longing for something God has rescued you from, try to

remember the whole picture. And if you're struggling with something you can't seem to leave behind, like an addiction or an unhealthy relationship, you don't have to fight it alone. Talk to a trusted adult who can help.

God's response to their grumbling isn't to strike them down. It's to feed them. "Behold, I will rain bread from the sky for you." Every day the people are to go out and gather enough for that day. On the sixth day they're to gather twice as much, so they can rest on the Sabbath. God says this will test them, to see whether they'll follow His instructions. That evening, quail cover the camp. And the next morning, when the dew evaporates, thin flakes like frost appear on the ground.

The Israelites look at it and say to each other, "What is it?" In Hebrew, that's man hu, which is where the name manna comes from. Manna literally means What is it? (Imagine eating What-is-it every day for forty years.) Moses tells them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat." It was white like coriander seed, and "its taste was like wafers with honey."

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Was Manna?**

People have tried to identify manna with something natural. One popular suggestion is a sweet, sticky substance produced by insects feeding on tamarisk trees in the Sinai desert, which local Bedouin still collect and call man. But that substance appears only for a few weeks a year, in small amounts, and doesn't fit many of the details in Exodus: manna appeared six days a week, all year, for forty years, enough for the whole nation; a double portion appeared on the sixth day and none on the seventh; and it bred worms if kept overnight, except on the Sabbath. Most Christians see manna as a miracle. Some think God may have miraculously multiplied something natural. Either way, it came every morning as a gift from God.

God gives clear instructions: gather about an omer (roughly two quarts) per person. "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack." Everyone had enough. Some people gathered more and some less, maybe depending on how strong or fast they were, but when they measured it, everyone had exactly what they needed. No one went hungry, and no one could hoard. In God's economy, there was enough for everyone. Paul quotes this in 2 Corinthians 8:15 to encourage Christians to share generously with those in need, so that there would be equality.

But some people don't listen. They keep some manna overnight, just in case, and in the morning it's full of worms and stinks. Others go out to gather on the Sabbath, and find nothing. God was teaching them to trust Him one day at a time. They couldn't stockpile. They had to depend on Him every single morning.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Wilderness**

The Sinai wilderness isn't a sea of sand dunes. It's mostly rocky desert, with steep granite mountains, dry riverbeds called wadis, and only a few scattered springs and oases. Temperatures can top 100 degrees in summer and drop near freezing at night. Rainfall is only a few inches a year. Today, only small groups of Bedouin live there, moving their flocks from place to place. For a large crowd of people and animals, survival without God's help would have been impossible. That's the point. The wilderness was where Israel learned that they couldn't make it on their own.

REAL TALK **Daily Bread**

When Jesus taught His followers to pray, He told them to ask, "Give us today our daily bread." Not this year's bread, not a lifetime supply, just today's. That's a manna prayer. It's hard to live one day at a time, especially when you're anxious about the future: grades, college, money, friendships. Jesus said not to worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself (Matthew 6:34). God gave Israel exactly what they needed, exactly when they

needed it. He's still that kind of God. If anxiety about the future feels overwhelming, talk to someone you trust; anxiety is common, and it's not a sign of weak faith.

The manna also came with a built-in day off. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much, and it didn't spoil overnight. On the seventh day, there was none, because it was a Sabbath. Even before the Ten Commandments were given, God was teaching His people to rest. Slaves in Egypt never got a day off. Free people in God's family did.

God tells Moses to keep a jar of manna as a reminder for future generations, so they can see the bread God fed them with in the wilderness. Later it's kept in the ark of the covenant. "The children of Israel ate the manna forty years," until they reached the edge of Canaan.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The True Bread from Heaven**

After Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, the crowd asked Him for a sign, pointing out that their ancestors ate manna in the desert. Jesus answered, "it wasn't Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven." And then He said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." The manna kept Israel alive for forty years. Jesus offers life that lasts forever. And when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered with Deuteronomy 8:3, a verse that looks back on the manna: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of God's mouth" (Matthew 4:4).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Quail**

The quail that covered the camp were probably migrating birds. Every spring and fall, huge flocks of quail fly across the Sinai between Africa and Europe and Asia, and when they're exhausted from flying over the sea, they land and can be caught easily by hand. For centuries, people along the Mediterranean

coast have netted them by the thousands. So the quail may have been a natural event, timed perfectly by God, much like the wind that pushed back the sea. That's a helpful reminder: God's provision doesn't always look like a dramatic miracle. Sometimes it looks like ordinary things arriving at exactly the right moment. Either way, it comes from His hand.

Next, the people camp at Rephidim, and again there's no water. Again they quarrel with Moses, so fiercely that Moses fears they'll stone him. God tells Moses to take his staff, go ahead of the people with some elders, and strike a rock at Horeb. God says, I will stand there before you by the rock. Moses strikes the rock, and water pours out. Moses names the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling), "because the children of Israel quarreled, and because they tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us, or not?'" After all the miracles, they're still asking that question. Paul later writes that the Israelites "drank of a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4).

SAFETY NOTE **War with Amalek**

Then the Amalekites, a desert people, attack Israel at Rephidim. Deuteronomy 25:18 adds that they attacked from behind, picking off the weak and exhausted stragglers at the back. Moses sends a young man named Joshua to fight, while he stands on a hill holding up the staff of God. "When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." When Moses gets tired, his brother Aaron and a man named Hur sit him on a stone and hold up his arms, one on each side, until sunset, and Israel wins. War stories in the Bible can be troubling, and they're not instructions for us to use violence. The New Testament teaches Christians that our real battle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). But notice who Amalek attacked: the weakest, at the back. Preying on people who are vulnerable, whether that's bullying, harassment, or exploitation, is especially wicked in God's eyes. If someone is targeting you because you're younger, weaker, or alone, tell a trusted adult.

REAL TALK **Hold Up Someone's Arms**

Moses was the great leader, but he couldn't do it alone. His arms got tired, and he needed people to hold them up. Who holds up your arms? Who are the people who pray for you, encourage you, and help you keep going when you're exhausted? And whose arms could you hold up? Maybe a friend going through a hard time, a teacher, a parent, or your pastor. Sometimes the most important person in the battle is the one standing beside the leader. Moses built an altar after the victory and named it "The LORD our Banner". The victory belonged to God, but He used ordinary people working together.

In chapter 18, Moses' father-in-law Jethro comes to visit, bringing Moses' wife Zipporah and their two sons. Moses tells Jethro everything God has done, and Jethro, a priest of Midian, rejoices: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods." Then Jethro watches Moses at work. From morning till evening, Moses sits as judge for the people, settling all their disputes alone. And Jethro says, "The thing that you do is not good." You're going to wear yourself out, and the people too. "You are not able to perform it yourself alone."

So Jethro gives Moses some wise advice. Teach the people God's laws. Then choose capable, trustworthy men who fear God and hate dishonest gain, and appoint them as leaders over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Let them handle the simple cases, and bring the hard ones to you. Moses listens, and it works. The best leaders are teachable. Moses, the man who talked with God, was humble enough to take advice from his father-in-law. Numbers 12:3 even says Moses was more humble than anyone else on earth. Notice that this great advice came from a non-Israelite priest. God's wisdom can come through unexpected people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jethro the Outsider**

Jethro is a fascinating character. He's a priest of Midian, not an Israelite, yet he rejoices at what God has done, offers sacrifices to God, and eats a meal with Aaron and the elders of Israel in God's presence. Some readers think he became a true worshiper of the LORD that day; others think he already worshiped God in some form, like Melchizedek in Genesis. Either way, Jethro is a reminder that God's people were never meant to be a closed club. From the very beginning, outsiders were welcomed into worship: Jethro, the mixed multitude who left Egypt, and later Rahab and Ruth. God's plan always included the nations.

REAL TALK **You Can't Do It All**

Moses was trying to do everything himself, and it was crushing him. Maybe you know the feeling: school, sports, a job, church, family responsibilities, friends who need you. It's good to work hard and help people. But you're not supposed to carry everything alone, and trying to can lead to burnout, anxiety, and exhaustion. Jethro's advice still works: share the load, ask for help, and let others use their gifts. If you're overwhelmed, talk with a parent, coach, or counselor about what you could let go of. Saying no to some things isn't weakness. It's wisdom.

REAL TALK **Complaining**

Count the complaints in Exodus 14–17: at the sea, at Marah, in the desert of Sin, about the manna, and at Rephidim. Five in a row, each one after God had just provided for them. It's easy to judge the Israelites. But how often do you complain about your food, your school, your parents, your phone, your siblings? Paul uses Israel's grumbling in the wilderness as a warning for Christians (1 Corinthians 10:10), and he also tells believers to do everything without complaining or arguing (Philippians 2:14). That doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. It means bringing your real needs to God, honestly, instead of grumbling about Him. Try a no-complaining challenge for a day. You'll be amazed how hard it is, and how much it changes your attitude.

KEY VERSE

When they measured it with an omer, he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack.

Exodus 16:18 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Israelites remembered Egypt as better than it really was? Have you ever done something similar?
2. God gave manna one day at a time. What would it look like for you to trust God for just today?
3. Who holds up your arms? Whose arms could you hold up this week?
4. Jethro told Moses he couldn't do everything alone. Where in your life do you need to ask for help?

TRY THIS *For one week, pray the daily bread prayer every morning: "Give us today our daily bread." Each evening, write down one way God provided what you needed that day.*

CHAPTER 7

Ten Words

Exodus 19–20

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel arrives at the foot of Mount Sinai, the same mountain where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. God had promised Moses, "you shall serve God on this mountain." Now here they are. They'll camp here for almost a year, and the rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and the first part of Numbers take place at this mountain. It's where Israel becomes a nation.

Moses goes up the mountain, and God gives him a message for the people. It's one of the most beautiful summaries of the gospel in the Old Testament. "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself." Notice the order. God doesn't say, obey Me, and then I'll rescue you. He says, I already rescued you; I carried you; I brought you to Myself. Grace comes first. Then God invites them into a covenant: if you obey Me and keep My covenant, "you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Kingdom of Priests**

A priest is someone who stands between God and people, bringing people to God and representing God to people. God wanted the whole nation of Israel to be priests for the world, showing the nations what God is like and bringing

them to Him. That was always the point of God's promise to Abraham: through you, all nations will be blessed. Peter picks up this exact language for Christians: you are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). If you follow Jesus, you're part of a kingdom of priests too. Your job isn't just to be saved. It's to help others know God.

The people answer together, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." Then God tells Moses to prepare the people for three days. They're to wash their clothes and set boundaries around the mountain. Anyone who touches the mountain will die. God is about to come down, and He's holy.

On the third day, the mountain explodes with God's presence. "There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and the sound of an exceedingly loud trumpet; and all the people who were in the camp trembled." The whole mountain is covered with smoke, "because the LORD descended on it in fire." The mountain shakes violently. The trumpet blast grows louder and louder. Moses speaks, and God answers him with thunder.

REAL TALK **Is God Scary?**

Sinai is terrifying. Fire, smoke, earthquake, thunder, and a voice that makes a whole nation tremble. Some people only want a God who's cozy and safe, like a friendly grandfather. Sinai shows that God is holy, powerful, and not to be taken lightly. But notice that the God of the fire on the mountain is the same God who carried Israel on eagles' wings. He's not scary because He's cruel; He's awe-inspiring because He's so great and so pure. Hebrews 12:18–24 says that, through Jesus, Christians don't come to a mountain of fire and fear, but to a city of joy, and to Jesus, who brings us near. God's holiness is still real. But in Jesus, it's not a threat. It's a welcome.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Covenant Treaties**

Scholars have noticed that the covenant at Sinai follows a pattern similar to ancient treaties between great kings and smaller nations, especially Hittite

treaties from the second millennium BC. Those treaties usually began by naming the great king, then reviewed the history of what he had done for the smaller nation, then listed the obligations of loyalty, then gave blessings and curses, and called for the treaty to be stored and read regularly. Exodus 20 begins the same way: I am the LORD your God (the King's name), who brought you out of Egypt (the history), and then the commands (the obligations). God speaks in a language His people would have understood: He is their great King, and they belong to Him.

Then God speaks the Ten Commandments. In Hebrew they're called the Ten Words. Before He gives a single command, God reminds the people who He is: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The commandments aren't a ladder to climb up to God. They're the way of life for people God has already rescued. They're not rules to make you a slave. They're instructions for how free people live.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How Do You Count to Ten?**

Exodus doesn't number the commandments, and different traditions count them differently. Jewish tradition often treats "I am the LORD your God" as the first Word and combines no other gods and no idols as the second. Catholic and Lutheran tradition, following Augustine, combines no other gods and no idols as the first commandment and splits the commandment against coveting into two. Most Protestant and Orthodox traditions treat no other gods as the first and no idols as the second. All of them include the same content. This book follows the most common Protestant numbering.

BACKGROUND CHECK **1. No Other Gods**

"You shall have no other gods before me." This was radical in a world with hundreds of gods. Today you probably won't be tempted to worship Ra or Baal. But a god is whatever you trust most, love most, or can't live without. It might be popularity, success, a relationship, money, your phone, your appearance, or your own comfort. Martin Luther said that whatever your heart clings to and relies on, that's really your god. Here's a test: what do you

think about when your mind is free? What would devastate you if you lost it? God doesn't want to be one of many priorities. He wants to be first, because He's the only one who can carry the weight of your whole life.

BACKGROUND CHECK **2. No Idols**

"You shall not make for yourselves an idol." The first commandment is about worshiping the right God. The second is about worshiping Him the right way. Israel wasn't to make any image to represent God, because no created thing can capture Him, and because idols can be controlled, carried, and manipulated. God can't. It's also easy to make mental idols: a version of God shaped the way we want Him to be, who agrees with us about everything. The real God sometimes surprises us, challenges us, and says no. As 1 John 5:21 says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

BACKGROUND CHECK **3. Don't Misuse God's Name**

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God." This is about more than swearing, though it includes using God's name as a curse word or a careless expression. In the ancient world, people swore oaths in the name of a god, so misusing God's name included lying while claiming God's backing. Today that might look like using God to win an argument, saying God told me so to manipulate someone, or calling yourself a Christian while living in a way that makes God look bad. God's name represents who He is. Treat it the way you'd want someone to treat the name of someone you love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **4. Remember the Sabbath**

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Six days you work, but the seventh is a day of rest for everyone, including servants, foreigners, and even animals. The reason is creation: God worked six days and rested on the seventh. (In Deuteronomy 5:15, the reason given is the exodus: you were slaves, and slaves never got a day off.) Christians differ on how this applies today. Many keep Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, as a day of worship and rest; others observe Saturday; others see the principle of regular rest and worship as what carries forward. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." For overworked, overscheduled, always-online

teens, a weekly day to rest, worship, and unplug may be one of the most countercultural and healthy things you can do.

BACKGROUND CHECK **5. Honor Your Parents**

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land." Paul notes this is the first commandment with a promise attached (Ephesians 6:2–3). To honor means to treat as weighty, to respect and value. For teens, it means things like speaking respectfully, obeying in the things that matter, listening even when you disagree, and caring for them as they get older. But honoring your parents never means letting them abuse you or helping them do something seriously wrong. If a parent or anyone in your home is hurting you, you can honor God by telling a trusted adult, like a teacher, counselor, or pastor. In the United States, you can call or text the Childhelp hotline at 1-800-422-4453.

BACKGROUND CHECK **6. Don't Murder**

"You shall not murder." Human life is sacred, because every person is made in God's image (Genesis 9:6). But Jesus took this commandment deeper. He said that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, or calls them a fool, is in danger of judgment (Matthew 5:21–22). Murder starts in the heart, with contempt, hatred, and the belief that another person doesn't matter. That includes cruel words, online pile-ons, and wishing someone were dead. The commandment also invites us to protect life: standing up for the vulnerable, the unborn, the elderly, the bullied. If you're having thoughts of hurting someone else, or yourself, please tell a trusted adult today, or call or text 988 in the United States.

BACKGROUND CHECK **7. Don't Commit Adultery**

"You shall not commit adultery." Adultery means sex with someone other than your spouse, breaking a marriage covenant. God's design is for sex to be a gift within marriage, a lifelong covenant of faithfulness. Jesus again went deeper: "everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." That includes things like pornography, which can be deeply addictive and distorts how we see real people. If you're

struggling with pornography, you're not alone and you're not beyond help; talk to a trusted adult or a pastor. And if anyone, including a boyfriend or girlfriend, pressures you to send sexual images or do anything sexual you don't want to do, that's not love. It's wrong, and in many cases it's a crime. Tell a trusted adult.

BACKGROUND CHECK **8. Don't Steal**

"You shall not steal." This includes shoplifting and taking things that aren't yours, but also cheating on tests, pirating music or movies, plagiarizing a paper, or wasting an employer's time. In Exodus 21:16, kidnapping a person to sell them, the ultimate theft, carries the death penalty. Paul gives a positive version: "Let him who stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, producing with his hands something that is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need." The opposite of stealing isn't just not taking. It's working hard and giving generously.

BACKGROUND CHECK **9. Don't Lie About Others**

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Originally this was about lying in court, which could ruin or even end someone's life. Today it covers gossip, spreading rumors, posting things about people that aren't true, screenshotting out of context, and exaggerating to make someone look bad. Words can destroy reputations in minutes, and online they can last forever. Before you share something about someone, ask: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? Would I say it to their face?

BACKGROUND CHECK **10. Don't Covet**

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house." Coveting means wanting what belongs to someone else so badly that it eats at you. It's the only commandment that's entirely about what goes on inside you, and it's often the root of breaking the others. It's also especially hard in an age of social media, where you can see everyone's best moments, vacations, clothes, and relationships all day long. Comparison is the fuel of coveting. Paul says covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and he also says he learned to be content in any situation (Philippians 4:11). Gratitude is one of the best

weapons against coveting. Try thanking God for three specific things every time you feel the pull of comparison.

After God speaks, the people are terrified. They see the thunder and lightning, hear the trumpet, and see the mountain in smoke, and they tremble and stand at a distance. They say to Moses, "Speak with us yourself, and we will listen; but don't let God speak with us, lest we die." Moses tells them, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, that you won't sin." Then "the people stayed at a distance, and Moses came near to the thick darkness where God was."

REAL TALK **Is the Law Still for Us?**

Christians agree that the Ten Commandments still matter, but they explain the connection differently. Many traditions distinguish between the moral law, which still applies, and the ceremonial and civil laws of ancient Israel, which were fulfilled in Jesus or applied only to Israel as a nation. Others emphasize that Christians are under the new covenant and the law of Christ, and that the moral teaching of the Ten Commandments is repeated and deepened in the New Testament. Jesus said, "I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill." He summed up the whole law in two commands: love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–39). The first four commandments show how to love God; the last six show how to love people. And no one keeps them perfectly. That's why we need the One who did.

REAL TALK **Why Rules?**

Some people think of God's commands like a strict parent's list of don'ts, designed to keep you from having fun. But think about the rules of a game. Without them, there's no game, just chaos. Or think about the lines on a highway; they don't take away your freedom to drive, they make it possible to drive safely. The Ten Commandments describe what it looks like to live as a free person who loves God and loves people. Psalm 19:7–8 says the law of the

> LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul, and that it gives joy to the heart. God's commands aren't a cage. They're more like a fence at the edge of a cliff.

KEY VERSE

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:2–3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. God reminded Israel that He had rescued them before He gave the commandments. Why does that order matter?
2. Which of the Ten Commandments do you find hardest to keep? Why?
3. What are some of the gods or idols people your age are tempted to put first?
4. Jesus said anger and lust break the commandments in the heart. How does that change the way you read them?

TRY THIS *Memorize the Ten Commandments this week. Then pick one and, for seven days, practice its positive opposite: if it's do not steal, give something away; if it's do not covet, write down three things you're grateful for every day.*

CHAPTER 8

Laws and a Tent

Exodus 21–31

After the Ten Commandments, Exodus gives a collection of laws, often called the Book of the Covenant, in chapters 21–23. Then, after the covenant is sealed, God gives Moses detailed instructions for building the tabernacle, in chapters 25–31. These chapters aren't action-packed, and many readers skim them. But they're full of surprises, and they answer a big question: what does it look like for a holy God to live with His people? We'll take a quick tour.

The laws cover all kinds of situations: servants, injuries, property, theft, borrowing, lending, justice in court, and festivals. Some look strange to us, like what to do if your ox gores someone. (If an ox was known to be dangerous and the owner didn't keep it penned, the owner was responsible.) But many of them are startlingly humane for the ancient world.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Law Codes**
>
> Israel wasn't the only ancient nation with written laws. The most famous is the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian king who ruled around 1750 BC; his laws were carved on a black stone pillar now in the Louvre in Paris. Many of Exodus's laws deal with similar situations, and some sound alike. But there are striking differences. In Hammurabi's code, punishments often depended on social class; harming a noble was punished far more harshly than harming a commoner or a slave. Property crimes could bring the death penalty.

Exodus treats human life as far more valuable than property, protects slaves, foreigners, widows, and orphans, and grounds everything in a relationship with God, who had rescued Israel from slavery.

One of the most famous laws is "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." That sounds harsh, but it was actually designed to limit revenge. Remember Lamech in Genesis 4, who killed a man for wounding him? This law said the punishment must fit the crime, no more. It was a principle for judges, not permission for personal revenge, and later Jewish law often applied it through payment rather than physical punishment. Jesus quoted it and went further, teaching His followers not to take revenge at all: "whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does the Bible Approve of Slavery?**

The laws in Exodus 21 regulate servants and slaves, and that troubles many readers, understandably. Here are some things worth knowing. The most common form of servitude in Israel was debt servitude, where a person who couldn't pay a debt worked it off; Exodus says a Hebrew servant was to go free after six years "without paying anything." Exodus also contains protections that were unusual in its world: a master who killed a slave was to be punished (21:20); a slave whose master knocked out an eye or a tooth went free (21:26–27); and kidnapping someone to sell them was a capital crime (21:16). Still, these laws don't abolish slavery, and some passages, especially concerning foreign slaves, are hard to read. Many Christians understand them as God working with a fallen culture step by step, the way Jesus said divorce laws were given because of the hardness of people's hearts (Matthew 19:8), while the whole story of the Bible, beginning with the exodus itself, points toward freedom. Christians like William Wilberforce and Frederick Douglass drew on the Bible to fight slavery, and the exodus story became a rallying cry for enslaved people and for the civil rights movement; Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of seeing the promised land the night before he was killed. Others, sadly, twisted it to defend slavery, which was a terrible

misuse. If you have questions about this, talk them over with a pastor or youth leader. It's an important question, not an off-limits one.

SAFETY NOTE **Modern Slavery**

Slavery still exists today in the form of human trafficking and forced labor, including in wealthy countries. Exodus 21:16 treats kidnapping someone to sell them as one of the worst crimes there is. If someone is controlling you, forcing you to work or perform sexual acts, keeping your documents, or threatening you or your family, it is not your fault, and help is available. In the United States, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733. In an emergency, call 911. Tell a trusted adult, too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Feasts**

Exodus 23 commands Israel to celebrate three great festivals every year, when all the men would gather before God: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, tied to Passover, in spring; the Feast of Harvest, also called Weeks or Pentecost, fifty days later; and the Feast of Ingathering, also called Tabernacles or Booths, in the fall, when the people lived in temporary shelters to remember the wilderness. These feasts turned Israel's calendar into a cycle of remembering and thanksgiving. They matter for the New Testament too. Jesus died at Passover, and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, when Jerusalem was packed with worshipers from all over the world (Acts 2:1).

Running through these laws is a powerful theme: care for the vulnerable. "You shall not wrong an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." "You shall not take advantage of any widow or fatherless child." If you lend money to the poor, don't charge them interest. If you take someone's cloak as a guarantee for a loan, give it back before sunset, because it might be the only blanket they have. Even if you find your enemy's donkey wandering away, take it back to him. Israel was to remember what it felt like to

be powerless, and treat the powerless the way God had treated them.

> **REAL TALK** **Remember Egypt**
>
> Over and over, God told Israel to treat foreigners well because "you know the heart of an alien, since you were aliens in the land of Egypt." In other words: you know what it's like to be the outsider, so don't treat others the way you were treated. That's a powerful principle for anyone who's ever felt left out, picked on, or looked down on. When you see a new kid, someone eating alone, or someone being mocked for their accent, their clothes, or where they come from, remember your own Egypt. Remember how it felt. And be the person you needed then.

Then, in chapter 24, God seals the covenant. Moses reads the Book of the Covenant to the people, and they answer, "We will do all that the LORD has said, and be obedient." Moses sprinkles blood from sacrifices on the altar and on the people, and says, "Look, this is the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you concerning all these words." Centuries later, Jesus took a cup at the Last Supper and spoke of the new covenant in His blood.

Then something amazing happens. Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy elders go up the mountain, "They saw the God of Israel." Under His feet was something like a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky. And they ate and drank in God's presence. It's a covenant meal, like a picnic with God on the mountain. Then Moses goes up alone into the cloud, where "the appearance of the LORD's glory was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain." He stays there forty days and forty nights.

During those forty days, God gives Moses detailed instructions for building a tabernacle, a portable tent where God will live in the middle of the camp. Here's the purpose in one sentence: "Let them

make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." The God who came down on the mountain in fire wants to move into the neighborhood.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Willing Hearts**

Notice how God asks for the materials for the tabernacle. He doesn't tax the people or force them. He tells Moses to receive an offering "From everyone whose heart makes him willing." The gold, silver, bronze, fine linen, and precious stones probably came from what the Israelites carried out of Egypt. God had given them the wealth of Egypt, and now He invited them to give some of it back freely for His house. Paul says the same thing about giving in 2 Corinthians 9:7: each person should give what they've decided in their heart, not reluctantly or under pressure, because God loves a cheerful giver. God doesn't need your money. But He loves it when you give from a grateful, willing heart.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Tabernacle**

The tabernacle was a large tent, about 45 feet long and 15 feet wide, set inside a courtyard about 150 feet by 75 feet, surrounded by a linen fence. Inside the courtyard stood a bronze altar for sacrifices and a bronze basin for washing. The tent itself had two rooms. The first, the Holy Place, held a golden lampstand, a table with twelve loaves of bread (the bread of the presence), and a small altar for burning incense. The second room, the Most Holy Place, was a perfect cube, and held only one thing: the ark of the covenant, a gold-covered wooden chest containing the stone tablets of the law. Its lid, called the mercy seat or atonement cover, had two golden cherubim on top. A thick curtain, the veil, separated the two rooms. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Every detail was designed to teach that God is holy, that He wants to be near His people, and that sin has to be dealt with before people can come near Him.

The tabernacle was full of echoes of Eden. Its lampstand was shaped like a tree. Cherubim were woven into the curtains, just as

cherubim guarded the way back into the garden. The entrance faced east, the direction Adam and Eve went when they left Eden. It was as if God was rebuilding a little Eden in the middle of the camp, a place where He could live with His people again. And from above the mercy seat, God says, "There I will meet with you."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Pointing to Jesus**
>
> The New Testament sees the tabernacle as a picture of Jesus. John writes, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." The Greek word for lived literally means pitched His tent, or tabernacled. Then John adds, "We saw his glory," just as Israel saw God's glory fill the tabernacle (John 1:14). Hebrews says the tabernacle was "a shadow of the good to come," and that Jesus entered the true Most Holy Place in heaven with His own blood (Hebrews 9–10). When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), showing that the way into God's presence was open. Jesus called Himself the light of the world (the lampstand), the bread of life (the bread of the presence), and the way to the Father (the door). And Paul says Christians themselves, together, are now God's temple, where His Spirit lives (1 Corinthians 3:16).

God also gives instructions for the priests, Aaron and his sons, including their special clothing. The priests were to be ordained in a seven-day ceremony, washed, dressed, anointed with oil, and consecrated with sacrifices, so that they could serve God on the people's behalf. Hebrews says Jesus is our great High Priest, who understands our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:14–16). Because of Him, we can come boldly to God. The high priest wore a breastpiece with twelve precious stones engraved with the names of Israel's tribes, so he carried the people over his heart whenever he went into God's presence. On his turban was a gold plate engraved "HOLY TO THE LORD." [BOX] The Day of Atonement

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the high priest would pass through the veil into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the mercy seat of the ark, to atone for the sins of the whole nation. Leviticus 16 describes it in detail, including a second goat, the scapegoat, which symbolically carried the people's sins away into the wilderness. The word atonement means to cover or to make at one. Hebrews 9:12 says that Christ entered the holy place "through his own blood," once for all, "having obtained eternal redemption." Jewish people still observe Yom Kippur today as the holiest day of the year, with fasting and prayer for forgiveness.

Then God names the artists who will build it all: Bezalel and Oholiab. God says, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all kinds of workmanship." This is the first time in the Bible anyone is said to be filled with the Spirit of God, and it's an artist.

> **REAL TALK** **Art Matters to God**
>
> Bezalel was filled with God's Spirit to design, carve, cast metal, cut stones, and weave. God cares about creativity and beauty, and He gives artistic gifts. If you love to draw, paint, write, film, design, build, sew, or make music, your gifts aren't second-rate compared to preaching or teaching. They can be ways to worship God and serve others. The tabernacle was beautiful because God is beautiful. Use what He's given you.

Finally, God reminds Israel to keep the Sabbath as a sign between Him and them forever, and He gives Moses the two stone tablets, "written with God's finger." Everything is ready. God's people are rescued, the covenant is sealed, and the plans for God's house are drawn up. What could possibly go wrong?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Where Is the Ark Now?**

The ark of the covenant traveled with Israel through the wilderness, into the promised land, and eventually into Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Then it disappears from the Bible. Most historians think it was destroyed or taken when the Babylonians burned the temple in 586 BC. Legends say otherwise: one says the prophet Jeremiah hid it in a cave on Mount Nebo (2 Maccabees 2), and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims it's kept in a chapel in the city of Aksum, guarded by a single monk, though no one else is allowed to see it. And of course there's the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark. The prophet Jeremiah said that one day no one would even miss the ark (Jeremiah 3:16), because God's presence would be with His people in a new way.

KEY VERSE

Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Exodus 25:8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Many of the laws in Exodus protect the weak and vulnerable. Who are the vulnerable people around you, and how could you protect them?
2. What do you think about the laws on slavery? What questions do they raise for you, and who could you talk to about them?
3. Why do you think God wanted to live in a tent in the middle of His people, instead of staying on the mountain?
4. How does knowing that Jesus tabernacled among us change the way you think about Him?

TRY THIS *Draw or build a simple model of the tabernacle, using the description in this chapter and Exodus 25–27. Label each part, and next to each one, write how it points to Jesus.*

CHAPTER 9

Show Me Your Glory

Exodus 32–40

While Moses is on the mountain receiving instructions for God's house, the people at the bottom are getting restless. Forty days is a long time. Where is Moses? Is he ever coming back? So they gather around Aaron and say, "Come, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him."

Aaron, who should have stopped them, tells them to bring him their gold earrings. He melts the gold, shapes it into a calf, and the people say, "These are your gods, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt." Aaron builds an altar and announces, Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD. The next day they offer sacrifices, then sit down to eat and drink and get up to party, which probably included drunken and sexual revelry.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why a Calf?**
>
> In the ancient Near East, bulls and calves were symbols of strength and fertility, and they were connected with gods like the Egyptian bull Apis and the Canaanite god Baal. Some scholars think the calf may have been intended as a pedestal for the invisible God to stand on, rather than an image of God Himself, the way the cherubim on the ark were thought of as God's throne. Either way, it broke the second commandment, which the people had heard only weeks earlier. And notice that Aaron calls the festival a feast to the LORD.

They didn't think they were abandoning God. They were just trying to worship Him their own way, in a form they could see and control. That's what makes idolatry so sneaky.

REAL TALK **When God Seems Slow**

The golden calf happened because the people got tired of waiting. Moses was gone, God felt far away, and they wanted something they could see right now. That's a temptation you'll face too. When God seems slow to answer, it's tempting to grab whatever's within reach: a relationship you know isn't right, a shortcut, a habit that numbs the waiting. Waiting is one of the hardest parts of faith. But Isaiah 40:31 says those who wait on the LORD will renew their strength. The people at the bottom of the mountain didn't know that Moses was about to come down with the plans for a place where God would live among them. Something good was coming. They just couldn't wait for it.

On the mountain, God tells Moses what's happening, and His anger burns. He tells Moses to leave Him alone so He can destroy the people, and He'll make a great nation from Moses instead. It's a test, and Moses passes it. He refuses the offer and pleads for the people. "LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, that you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?" Think of what the Egyptians will say! Remember Your promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! "So the LORD turned away from the evil which he said he would do to his people."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does God Change His Mind?**

The Bible says God doesn't change (Malachi 3:6), and that He isn't a man that He should change His mind (Numbers 23:19). But here, and in other places like Jonah 3:10, God relents from a judgment He announced. How do these fit together? Many Christians explain that God's character never changes, but His responses to people do change when they repent or when someone intercedes, because that's exactly what His unchanging character of justice and mercy would lead Him to do. Others emphasize that God speaks in

human terms so we can understand Him. Others see this as a genuine give-and-take relationship that God chose to have with His people. All agree on the big lesson: prayer matters. Moses' prayer made a difference.

Moses goes down the mountain with the two stone tablets in his hands. When he gets close enough to see the calf and the dancing, his anger burns, and he throws the tablets down and smashes them at the foot of the mountain. The covenant has been broken, almost as soon as it was made. Moses burns the calf, grinds it into powder, scatters it on the water, and makes the people drink it.

Then Moses confronts Aaron. What did these people do to you, that you led them into such a great sin? And Aaron gives one of the worst excuses in history. They brought me gold, "and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." As if the calf just jumped out by itself. It's the Genesis 3 blame game all over again.

SAFETY NOTE **The Levites' Violence**

Then the story turns violent. Moses stands at the entrance of the camp and calls, "Whoever is on the LORD's side, come to me!" The Levites gather to him, and at Moses' command they go through the camp with swords, and about three thousand people are killed. This is a deeply troubling passage, and many readers struggle with it. Some see it as a one-time judgment on open rebellion at the very birth of the nation, similar to how serious treason was treated in ancient times. Others emphasize that it shows how deadly idolatry and rebellion are. Whatever we conclude, it's important to be clear: this is not a pattern for Christians. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52), and the New Testament never calls believers to use violence against people who reject God. If you ever hear anyone use religion to justify hurting people, that's wrong. And if you're being threatened or hurt by anyone, tell a trusted adult or call 911.

The next day, Moses goes back up to God. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold." And

then he prays one of the most selfless prayers in the Bible: "Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written." Moses would rather be erased from God's book than live without his people. Centuries later, Paul would say something similar about his own people (Romans 9:3). And Jesus would go further than either of them. He didn't just offer to be blotted out. He actually took the punishment for His people's sin.

God says He'll still give Israel the land, but He won't go with them, because they're a stubborn people and He might destroy them on the way. That's the worst news yet. What's the point of the promised land without God? The people mourn. They take off their jewelry, the same kind of gold they used for the calf, as a sign of grief and repentance.

Moses sets up a tent outside the camp, called the Tent of Meeting, where anyone who wanted to seek the LORD could go. When Moses went in, the pillar of cloud would come down and stand at the entrance, and the people would watch and worship from their own tents. "The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." And Moses' young assistant, Joshua, wouldn't leave the tent. He wanted to stay where God was. Joshua was probably still a young man at this point, and one day he'd lead Israel into the promised land after Moses died. His leadership started here, in a young man's hunger to be near God.

> **REAL TALK** **Friends with God**
>
> Exodus says God spoke with Moses like a friend. That's an amazing thing to say about the God of the burning bush and the fire on the mountain. Jesus said to His disciples, I don't call you servants anymore; I call you friends (John 15:15). Friendship with God doesn't mean God becomes your buddy who

always agrees with you. It means real conversation, honesty, time together, and trust. Like Joshua, who didn't want to leave the tent, the more time you spend with God, the more you'll want to stay.

In the tent, Moses pleads with God again. If You won't go with us, don't send us up from here. How will anyone know we're Your people, unless You go with us? And God answers, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses asks for something even bigger: "Please show me your glory."

God's answer is gentle and amazing. "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the LORD's name before you." But "You cannot see my face, for man may not see me and live." So God puts Moses in a gap in the rock, covers him with His hand as He passes by, and then takes His hand away, so that Moses sees His back. "But my face shall not be seen."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Seeing God's Back**

What does it mean that Moses saw God's back? Since God is spirit, Christians have generally understood this as a picture: Moses got a glimpse of God's glory, the afterglow of His passing by, but not the full blaze of His face, which no human could survive. Some readers also find a beautiful truth here: we often see God most clearly when we look back, at where He's already been. Later, Jesus' disciples would see the glory of God in a human face. Paul says God's glory shines "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6), and John says "We saw his glory" (John 1:14). What Moses longed to see, God showed the world in Jesus.

The next morning, Moses chisels two new stone tablets and goes back up the mountain. God comes down in the cloud and stands with him, and passes in front of him, proclaiming His own name. This is God describing Himself, and it's one of the most important passages in the whole Old Testament: "The LORD! The LORD, a

merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth, keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin." God doesn't describe Himself first by His power, but by His mercy. And yet He's also just: He "will by no means clear the guilty." The effects of sin can echo through families for generations, but His love lasts for thousands.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Bible's Favorite Description of God**

Exodus 34:6–7 is quoted or echoed more than almost any other Old Testament passage. You'll hear it in Numbers 14:18, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalms 86:15, 103:8, and 145:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2, where the prophet complains that he knew God was gracious and merciful and would forgive Nineveh. The Hebrew word translated loving kindness is chesed, a rich word that means loyal, covenant love that never gives up. Notice the proportion: God's punishment reaches to the third and fourth generation, but His love to the thousandth. Mercy outweighs judgment. If you want to know what God is like, start here. And if you want to see what it looks like in a person, look at Jesus.

Moses bows to the ground and worships. Then he asks God once more to go with the people, forgive their sin, and take them as His own. And God answers by making a new covenant with them, promising to do wonders never seen before in any nation. And God renews the covenant, rewriting the Ten Commandments on the new tablets. Moses stays on the mountain another forty days and nights, without food or water. When he comes down, he doesn't know it, but his face is shining because he's been talking with God. The people are afraid to come near him. So after he speaks with them, Moses puts a veil over his face, and takes it off whenever he goes in to speak with God. Paul uses this story in 2 Corinthians 3 to say that in Christ, the veil is taken away, and "we all, with unveiled face

seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Moses' Horns**

In the Latin Bible used in the Middle Ages, the Hebrew word for shone was translated as having horns, because the Hebrew word for rays of light is related to the word for horn. That's why some medieval and Renaissance art, including Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses in Rome, shows Moses with two small horns on his head. It's a reminder that translation matters, and why careful study of the original languages is so valuable.

The last six chapters of Exodus describe the people actually building the tabernacle, and they're mostly a repeat of chapters 25–31, with one big difference: now the plans become reality. Moses asks for offerings, and the people respond so generously, "everyone whose heart stirred him up," that the craftsmen have to tell Moses, "The people have brought much more than enough." Moses has to tell them to stop giving. That's probably the only time in history a building campaign had to be shut down because people gave too much. And notice that both men and women brought gifts and worked on the project; skilled women spun the yarn and goat hair with their own hands.

REAL TALK **A Second Chance**

Notice the contrast. In chapter 32, the people gave their gold to make an idol. In chapter 35, they give their gold to build God's house. Same people, same gold, completely different purpose. After the golden calf, Israel deserved to be destroyed. Instead, God forgave them and let them build the place where He would live with them. God's grace gave them a second chance to use their gifts for Him. Whatever you've used your time, money, talents, or body for in the past, God offers you a fresh start. What you once gave to idols, you can now give to Him.

Bezalel and Oholiab and the skilled workers make everything exactly as God commanded: the tent, the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the priests' clothes. When it's all finished, "Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded." And Moses blessed them, the way God blessed His creation when it was finished. On the first day of the first month, one year after the exodus, Moses sets up the tabernacle and puts everything in place. "So Moses finished the work."

And then the moment the whole book has been building toward: "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the LORD's glory filled the tabernacle." The glory is so heavy that even Moses can't go in. The God who came down on the mountain in fire has come down to live among His people. From then on, whenever the cloud lifted from the tabernacle, Israel set out on their journey, and when it stayed, they stayed. "For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys."

REAL TALK **Following the Cloud**

Israel didn't decide when to move. They watched the cloud. When it lifted, they packed up and went. When it stayed, they stayed, whether for a night or for a year (Numbers 9:22). That must have been frustrating sometimes, especially for people who liked to plan ahead. But it meant they never had to wonder whether they were going the right way. Christians don't have a visible cloud today, but God still guides His people through His Word, through prayer, through the Holy Spirit, through wise counsel from other believers, and through the circumstances He opens and closes. Following God isn't about having every answer in advance. It's about staying close enough to Him to notice when He moves.

Exodus began with Israel enslaved in Egypt, building cities for Pharaoh. It ends with Israel free in the wilderness, building a house

for God. They've gone from serving a cruel king to serving the true King. And the King has moved in.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Exodus in One Breath**

Here's the whole book in a few sentences. Jacob's family grew into a great nation in Egypt, and a new Pharaoh enslaved them and tried to kill their sons. God heard their cry, called Moses at a burning bush, and revealed His name. Through ten plagues, He showed that He alone is God. On the night of Passover, the blood of a lamb protected Israel's firstborn, and they walked out free. God split the sea, fed them with bread from heaven, and brought them to Mount Sinai, where He gave them His law and made them His people. They broke the covenant almost immediately with the golden calf, but God forgave them, showed Moses His glory, and came to live among them in the tabernacle. Exodus is the story of a God who rescues, who makes covenant, and who comes to dwell with His people. And it's a preview of what He would do for the whole world in Jesus.

KEY VERSE

The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD! The LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth, keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the children's children, on the third and on the fourth generation."

Exodus 34:6–7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. The Israelites made the golden calf because they got tired of waiting for Moses. What are you tempted to do when God seems slow?
2. Moses prayed for people who had badly let him down. Who could you pray for, even though they've hurt or disappointed you?
3. In Exodus 34:6–7, God describes Himself. Which part of that description means the most to you right now?
4. The book ends with God's glory filling the tabernacle. What do you think it means for God to live among His people today?

TRY THIS *Memorize Exodus 34:6. Then look up Psalm 103:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2, and see how the Bible keeps coming back to it. Write it on a card and keep it somewhere you'll see it every day.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Exodus ends with a cloud of glory filling a tent in the desert. God has rescued His people, made a covenant with them, and moved in. But the story isn't finished. The people keep failing. The tent has to be entered carefully, through blood and sacrifice. Even Moses can't go in when the glory fills it. Exodus leaves you longing for something more: a rescue from something deeper than Pharaoh, and a way to live close to God without fear.

Jewish readers have celebrated the exodus for more than three thousand years as the great act of God's love for Israel, and the prophets looked forward to a new exodus, when God would rescue His people again (Isaiah 43:16–19). The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, believed that new exodus had come in Jesus. Paul calls Jesus "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). John the Baptist called Him "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus called Himself the true bread from heaven (John 6:32–35). And John says that the Word "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14); the Greek word means He pitched His tent, or tabernacled, among us. In Jesus, God came to live with His people in a whole new way.

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than you can imagine. Like Israel in Egypt, you're seen and heard by Him.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We're all slaves to something.

Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh. The Bible says all of us have turned from God, and that sin enslaves us in ways we can't escape on our own.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the Lamb.

On the first Passover, the blood of a lamb protected every house where it was placed. Jesus died on the cross as our Passover Lamb, and rose again.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Israel didn't free themselves; God did. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for loving me first. Thank You that Jesus died for me as my Passover Lamb and rose again. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me and set me free. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Thank You for hearing me, the way You heard Your people in Egypt. Lead me the way You led them, and live with me every day. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Exodus straight through, a few chapters a day. Then read the Gospel of John, and watch for the Lamb, the bread, the I AM sayings, and the Word who tabernacled among us.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Remember who set you free. Israel was told to remember the exodus every year. Start each day by thanking God for setting you free, and use your freedom to serve Him and others.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Exodus was written so that every generation would know what God did and who He is. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Exodus is right, the God who heard slaves crying in Egypt hears you too.

The LORD is my strength and song. He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Exodus 15:2 (WEB)