

# “Exodus”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 2

## “Exodus 22:22-24:18”

**Objective:** To examine the account of the exodus from Egypt and to learn as much as we can about the nature of God, His mercy and what He desires for His creation. We will seek to do this by examining the historical background of the Exodus account, the interpretive history of Exodus amongst both Jewish and Christian scholars, where helpful. We will seek to understand the message of Exodus for us as Christians living in the 21st century American context.

**Materials:** The Bible, Ancient translations, Commentaries, both ancient and modern, Books, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet, and other resources as may be appropriate.

#### Procedures

1. To explore the message God of hope that the original audience will have understood from this text.
2. To understand how this text has inspired, challenged, and educated people down through the centuries guiding them not only in their personal lives, but the destinies of governments and nations.
3. We will seek to find out how these beliefs have played a role in the history of Christianity and how they continue to impact our existence and service to Jesus Christ today.
4. We will provide a sheet to take home as a reminder of what has been examined and to provide additional opportunities for consideration of these truths and their application in our daily living out of our eternal destiny beginning now. This sheet can be used as a discussion guide for small group discussion. We have several groups using this effectively.

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In the last lesson we left off with instructions largely intended to help the people of Israel to live in community with one another. This community looked a lot different from what we conceive of as community today. It is important for us to realize that their world looked very different from modern America, and for that matter the modern world in general. It should be expected to be the case that there has been considerable progress in the world as God's people have been a light in that world now for more than three thousand years. The challenge for us, as we look at these ancient texts, is to understand what it is that God is calling us to do, and to become, as His people today. We are participants in a long line of those who have sought to glorify God and participate in unequal partnership with Him as He redeems the cosmos, restoring it back to the state of being "very good" in alignment with His will and purpose.

As we start this section, we are reminded of where we left off in 22:21, we are reminded of God's care and concern for the vulnerable, the weak, and the defenseless. Verse 21 highlights that they should not oppress the resident aliens and God reminds them that this was exactly what they themselves (Israel) were in

Egypt, resident aliens, oppressed and helpless. Reminding them of where they came from is intended to be a powerful force of change in their lives to keep them from becoming arrogant and lacking in humility. It is all too easy for people to forget the journey that they had to take in order to get where they are today; to forget where they came from. Israel needed to recall that they were mistreated, abused, and then rescued by a gracious and loving God. Understanding the source of their standing as free people, and as people of the covenant with Him, was essential for them and it is still essential for us today. We are redeemed, not because of who we are, but because of who He is, and through His abundant grace. "There but by the grace of God go I." This should be something constantly upon our hearts and in our minds. Otherwise arrogance can cloud our vision and become a part of our central core in a manner that blocks all opportunity for accepting God's grace.

At 22:22 there will be a focus given to the treatment of widows and orphans. The people are reminded that if they do abuse them (the vulnerable) they will cry out to God and He will hear the cries of the abused. I have often heard it said that God

does not hear the prayers of sinners. Usually this statement comes from the self-righteous. Here there is no stipulation given for hearing these prayers other than the fact that they are being oppressed. God indicates that He will definitely hear their prayers and that his wrath (22:24) will burn against those oppressing, or not helping, and that He will “kill” (הָרַג - *harag*) them. This is a word that is often used to describe the wholesale slaughter of food animals like cattle. He then lets them know that those who treat widows and orphans in this fashion will have their wives made into widows and their children will become orphans. A harsh and horrendous prospect.

In the next section, 22:25-27, we find stipulations with regard to lending. God’s people must not exact interest from the poor to whom they lend money. If they take their cloak in pawn they are to restore it to them before the sun goes down and it becomes cold. In each of these instances they are to be concerned for others, especially for the weak and vulnerable. Clearly reflected in these passages is the fact that God is concerned for them and He hears their cries because He is “compassionate” (רַחוּם)

- *hanun* - In the Greek text the word is ἐλεήμων - *eleemon*, which means “merciful.”).

At 22:28 we have a new subsection that is set apart from what has gone before. The theme of this subsection is the powers and authority bestowed upon a leader. The “leader” in this passage may be a reference to the civil ruler, or the righteous “prince,” who presides at the apex of the system of human justice.<sup>1</sup> The people are told that they must not “curse” either God, or a leader of the people. For us today, we may struggle to define what it means to “curse” someone. The Old Greek translation of the Scriptures (the Septuagint) uses a word that is perhaps of help to us; it uses the word κακολογέω (*kakologeō*) which means to “revile,” “abuse,” “to speak in an evil, or slanderous way.” This is perhaps something that is more than appropriate in our modern world when this practice seems like the favorite pass-time for many, if not most, people in our country. The fact that this prohibition is set in the context of covenant indicates that such a practice will indeed result in a negative consequence, perhaps even being considered a breach of the covenant with God.

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<sup>1</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus 20-24*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2014), p. 149.

At 22:29 there is an indication that they are not to delay in making their offerings from their harvest. We might ask how this applies to us today? It means that we today are to give of what God gives to us without delay. When God gives these things to us we are to insure that we give to God His portion. At the time that this covenant was given that will have been 10%, it should perhaps be expected that today we would give at least as much, but perhaps even more due to the great blessings that we know we have received in Jesus Christ. This giving of goods includes even the firstborn of their sons, and all of their livestock (22:29b-22:30). The location of these verses with regard to giving appears to be connected to the honor due to God. There is a connection being made here between the giving of the sacrifices promptly as an act of honor; giving promptly is seen as honoring God.<sup>2</sup> Failure to give sacrifices to God is a failure to honor God, or in fact it to go further than this it is to dishonor God.

At 22:31 the reason for these instructions are given, because the Israelites are called to be a people “consecrated” (קִדְּשׁ - *kodesh*), or “holy” people. “In pursuit of this end, one must, among

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<sup>2</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1987), p. 294.

other things, avoid polluting substances and defiling actions, for these disturb the relationship with God.”<sup>3</sup> The people needed the sacrifices in order for their hearts to feel that they could make up for the things that they did which breached the covenant. In reality, it was not the sacrifices that brought the mercy and grace of God, but the heart alignment that came into existence along with the offering of sacrifices that were given from a willing and humble heart. The people knew instinctively perhaps that God was not the same as they were, He was trustworthy, honorable, and pure. As His people they must reflect this as His image-bearers. This reflecting of the nature of God is described as holiness. The reference to “dogs” in verse 31 may be “...a pejorative reference to male cult prostitutes” (cf. the parallel in Deuteronomy 23:17-18).<sup>4</sup> Their consumption of meat that is unclean is still a further means to invalidate their ministry.<sup>5</sup> In the ancient world it is particularly the case that the sacrifices of meat to pagan gods was in the form of swine and this may stand behind

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<sup>3</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary series (Philadelphia PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus 20-24*, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus 20-24*, p. 153.

the prohibition given Israel regarding eating the flesh of swine, this was most often meat sacrificed to idols.

At 23:1-3 we come to the first of five prohibitions that outlaw behavior in courts of law that would jeopardize the “integrity and impartiality of the judicial process.”<sup>6</sup> Up to this point the Torah has been concerned with observing love and compassion toward people who were weak and unprotected and honor that was to be to those who were leaders. In this section, the emphasis will change indicating that virtue must indeed be practiced towards all people in general, not just a select few. Justice is for all people not simply the weak, and the powerful, but for all people whatever their status, or standing.<sup>7</sup> Partiality must not be shown to anyone, even to the poor. The frequency with which the Torah calls upon people to show compassion for the poor dictates the need for caution against allowing a person’s emotions, however desirable and noble, to color a person’s judgement. The same warning appears also at Leviticus 19:15 and Deuteronomy 1:17.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 142.



At 23:4-5 we find prohibitions designed to prevent one's hostile and vindictive emotions from overcoming one's humanity. The people of God are called upon to demonstrate concern for the plight of one's enemies (Proverbs 25:21<sup>9</sup>).<sup>10</sup> Jesus will express similar concerns knowing the heart of human beings.<sup>11</sup> The focus is absolutely plain in the teaching of Jesus: the reflection of the love of God is to be found in the hearts and actions of His people. God's people are to reflect God's nature. Having someone who is an enemy can easily taint the perceptions that we might have of them and special care must be taken in dealing with such people to love them in the way that God loves them. This love can be seen in not taking advantage of the those moments when their might be an opportunity to take advantage.

Over and over again the emphasis is upon remaining just and unbiased in all court dealings (23:6-8). The people of God are

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<sup>9</sup> **If your enemies are starving, feed them some bread; if they are thirsty, give them water to drink.** CEB.

<sup>10</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 5:43-47 **"You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.* <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you <sup>45</sup> so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.** CEB.

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to bear the mark of God in their dealings with one another, especially in moments of conflict and disagreement. They are to be a people marked out as just and unbiased as a reflection of the nature of God Himself. In this, they are not to pervert justice, to be a part of false charges and they are not to acquit the guilty. They are not to take part in bribery. Bribery acts to blind officials to what is right and therefore subverts justice.

At 23:9 we come back again to the theme of the resident alien. It is as if God knew there would be a tremendous temptation for people to fall into this type of oppression. This is something that is still a pressing issue for people around the world today and it is especially poignant and prominent in our country. We fear that which differs from us and it is so easy to demonize the alien among us and to blame them for things that go wrong. We must recognize the call that God gives to them is that He calls Israel to recognize their resident alien status in Egypt. For us we must remember: "There but by the grace of God go I." We must never forget that we are where we are by the grace of God and with our wealth, status, and security comes much

responsibility to reflect the nature and compassion of God as His image-bearers in the community and in the world.

At 23:10-13 we come to prescriptions regarding agriculture. In today's world these might be more associated with business and what we do for a living as we are not as affected as they were by the cycles of agriculture, though in West Texas it is still of critical importance. Verses 10-11 express a great concern for the underprivileged and unfortunates of society. The same law found here is repeated with greater emphasis on its humanitarian purpose in Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22, while at Deuteronomy 15:1-10 the provisions are extended even further to include the remission of debts. God understood something that was not likely to be understood by the people of ancient Israel in that the continuous usage of arable lands depletes nutrients and reduces productivity. So there is a conservationist aspect to the system that God gives to His people here.<sup>12</sup> A part of the original mandate of God to Adam in Genesis chapter 2 was to "till" and "keep" the garden which definitely includes taking good care of, and using good practices for sustaining, the earth.

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<sup>12</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 143.

I have heard it preached that there is no need for us to observe such good practices today, or to recycle since God is going to destroy this earth. This is wrong at so many levels that I will not cover them all, but just like the sacrifices and other things that God calls upon His people to do being good conservationists reflects something inside the person that recognizes that we are not owners of this earth, we are servants and representatives of God. We are caretakers and as caretakers we should leave it better than we found it as a mark of our love and respect for God and as a mark of our participation with God in His reconciliation of creation to what He always intended it to be. How God chooses to do that, whether through some destructive means, or not, does not change the fact that as we care for this planet we reflect our faith and trust in God. We continue to honor Him and His calling as good stewards of all that He has given into our care.

There is also a sense of letting the beasts of burden (23:12) rest as well as the slaves that work the land. The people of Israel are challenged to refrain from even mentioning the names of pagan gods. To us this seems odd and maybe intrusive, but it would have been very relevant in their day. In the pagan world of

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the people of the Ancient Near East there were invariably magical rites aimed at propitiating divine powers and enlisting their aid in regenerating the soil, ripening the crops, and in making their livestock produce young, and even to grow in healthy ways. The Israelites are to have no part in such activities.<sup>13</sup>

At 23:14 we come to the three festivals that were to be held for God each year. These verses present the triad of agricultural festivals that form the core of Israel's sacral calendar. Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and the Passover are omitted here because they are not festivals rooted in the life of the soil. This is the encompassing topic of verses 10-19 of this section. Another feature of this section is the lack of fixed dates for any of these festivals, which is a striking feature, although in the case of the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (Passover), the phrase "at the set time" most likely refers back to Exodus 12:6, 14-20. The name of each of these festivals bears the definite article before its name indicating that they are well known, they are universal in nature, reflecting the rhythms found in nature itself. Israel, unlike their neighbors is to recognize

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<sup>13</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, pp. 143-144.

that these rhythms are the result of YHWH and not the result of any of the pagan gods, or the magical practices of the indigenous peoples of the area they will occupy.<sup>14</sup>

Each of the three festivals is referred to using the Hebrew term **חג** *hag*. This term indicates that these festivals entail an obligatory pilgrimage to a sanctuary. This same meaning endures even today in the Muslim word when they refer to The *Hajj*.<sup>15</sup> Three times during the year all males were to appear before YHWH God. The implication is that this appearance would be at His sanctuary. They are to bring gifts that are appropriate to each of the agricultural seasons in order to express their thanksgiving and to acknowledge their loyalty to YHWH God.<sup>16</sup> It is of note that in the male dominated world of this era there are no prescriptions with regard to the women regarding the festivals. Primarily this covenant is focused on the male, or being attached to a male in some manner. One of the major changes in covenant nature would be the status of women in the New Covenant. The layered and stratified ordering of this covenant (the Old Covenant) would be

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<sup>14</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>16</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus 20-24*, p. 179.

replaced and women would be given a standing as covenant members in their own rite through faith in Jesus Christ (in the New Covenant). This is one of the major differences between the “Old” and the “New” covenants, or testaments.

At 23:18 the Israelites are instructed that none of the blood of their sacrifices was to be offered with leaven. The reason for this prohibition of leaven is not strictly stated. One reason for the exclusion of leaven was likely that its removal will have served as a reminder of the hasty departure of the Hebrews at the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. However, since leaven is also banned as an ingredient to be allowed with other sacrifices it is perhaps banned because it was associated with pagan rites. In post-biblical times fermentation came to be associated with decomposition and decay and was taken figuratively to symbolize moral and spiritual corruption.<sup>17</sup> At 23:19 they were told that the choicest of their firstfruits were to be brought into the “house” (בַּיִת *bayith*) of YHWH. They were not to give God their leftovers, or that which was surplus. They were to give to God the

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<sup>17</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 58.

first part, the best part. This too, is an expression of the heart of the giver.

There are many mysteries left to the people of God in this section. The meaning of 23:19b, the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk, is one of those mysteries. There is a lot of speculation among the rabbis, but in the end there is nothing more than speculation. I am sure that this had meaning for the ancient Israelites and it will have been to draw the people toward God and into deeper loyalty to Him in some way.

At 23:20 we come to the final part of this chapter and the people are informed that *YHWH* will send an “angel” (מַלְאָךְ - *malach* - Greek - ἄγγελος - *angelos*) a “messenger,” or an “envoy” ahead of them to the place that God has prepared for them. At 23:21 the people are told to be attentive to his voice and to be careful not to rebel against him. The indication is that he will not pardon “rebellion,” or “transgression” (פְּשָׁעַ - *pesha*). This is the case because *YHWH*'s name is “in him.” The “angel” will not add to, or take away from, the instructions given to him by *YHWH*. In Jewish sources there is considerable debate as to what is meant by the “angel” here. Some see it merely as a manifestation of *YHWH*



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Himself while others see it as a servant dispatched to carry out His will. In either instance this “angel” represented for the people God’s presence.

At 23:22 we are told that if they will carefully listen to “His voice” then He will be an enemy of their enemies and a foe to their foes. The unpacking of what that means is given in the verses that follow. *YHWH* will blot out their enemies, but they are warned not to bow down to other gods (23:24). Their role in this is to smash the foreign gods and pillars into pieces. Their loyalty will bring great protection and blessings while their failure to be loyal to the covenant will mean that God will not provide these blessings. The language here is covenant language. Covenant keeping brings great blessing and great success among the people of God, but only if there is true loyalty to Him.

At 24:1 we come to a chapter that is concerned with the ratification of the covenant between *YHWH* and His people Israel.<sup>18</sup> At 24:1 we have the summons of God issued to Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel (what we would come to know as the Sanhedrin in the time of Jesus). Even

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<sup>18</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 150.

here there is a distinction made and a lesson that is shown in the fact that Moses is told to approach *YHWH*, while the others are to worship at a distance. This point is reiterated for emphasis in 24:2. We are not told why here, but perhaps at least a part of the reason for this can be because God said to do it this way and in compliance there is obedience even without understanding. In a similar way that today it is not necessary to understand the reasoning of a doctor giving instructions, but compliance to instructions has a purpose apparent to the doctor to improve the health of the patient. God knows the reason why and that should be sufficient for His people that trust Him and seek to follow Him and His instructions. This is predicated on the understanding and belief that He knows best and has the best interests of His people and all of His creation in mind.

At 24:3 Moses delivers to the people “all the words, of *YHWH* and all the ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטִים - *mishpatim* - judgments, decisions as in a court case) of *YHWH*.” The people answered with “one” (אֶחָד - *one*) voice that they would do all that *YHWH* had spoken to them. At 24:4 we are told that Moses writes down all of the “words of *YHWH*,” built an altar, set up twelve pillars that were

representative of the people. Sarna wrote that, “It is likely that the dashing of the blood “on the people” described in verse 8 was effectuated by sprinkling it over the pillars.”<sup>19</sup> At Genesis 31:45-54 there is the account of the covenant made between Jacob and Laban and a pillar is set up to act as a witness of this covenant.

At 24:5 we are told of sacrifices that were offered to *YHWH*. The first offering is a sacrifice of well-being and is completely consumed by the fire. These sacrifices are totally dedicated to *YHWH*. The blood from the sacrifices was taken (24:6) and put in basins and half of this blood is then dashed against the base of the altar. The two parts of the blood represented the two parties in the covenant, *YHWH* and Israel. “The significance of the sprinkling of the blood is never explained. However, the prevailing notion in Israel was that the blood, the vital bodily fluid, constituted the life. As such, like life itself, it belonged to God alone.”<sup>20</sup>

An interesting fact is that the usage of blood in the ratification of a covenant is found in no other place in the Old Testament. This fact makes the words of Jesus at the institution of

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<sup>19</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 152.

the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper all that much more remarkable. This should challenge Christians to new levels of understanding regarding the powerful and poignant imagery being created by Jesus when he draws this imagery into this time of remembrance. If, as the Israelites understood we are too to understand that blood symbolizes life and all life belongs to God, then in Jesus we are being promised life that comes from God and life that comes at His cost. Blood is used as something to cement the bond between the two parties of the covenant. In God sharing the life of the blood with Israel then God allows the life of the recipient to take on new dimensions and to be elevated to a higher level of intimate relationship with God.<sup>21</sup> So too, this is the message of Jesus in the communion.

At 24:7 Moses took the book of the covenant and reads it to the people and once again they affirmed they would "be obedient." At 24:8 Moses wrote that the remaining blood was dashed on the people (not on the pillars) and he uses the words, "Behold, the blood of the covenant that *YHWH* has made with you ...." The expression "blood of the covenant" occurs here and then 4 further

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<sup>21</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 152.

times in the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> The expressions used in the Book of Hebrews match the Old Greek (Septuagint) translation of the Hebrew Scriptures exactly, the two from Matthew and Mark add the pronoun “my” (μου - *mou*) to the phrase. In my mind, this clearly and powerfully links initiation of the New Covenant in some way with initiation of the Old Covenant, it replaces it. I believe that the Apostles would have understood this, from the words of Jesus as did Paul.<sup>23</sup>

At 24:9-11 there is what appears to be an encounter between the selected group of leaders and God. There are a great many questions regarding what happens here and indeed massive speculation and many explanations, but the text simply says, “they saw the God of Israel” (וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - *vayirau eth elohey yisrael*). Clearly the Rabbis had a problem with what appears to be a clear statement of seeing God and in the Old Greek Translation it says, “And they saw the place, there where the God of Israel stood, ....”<sup>24</sup> The rabbis also struggle with verse 11 that says they “ate and drank.” Sarna says that this is just another way

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Hebrews 9:20; 10:29

<sup>23</sup> Galatians

<sup>24</sup> New English Translation of the Septuagint.

of saying that they survived, or shared a meal made of the sacrifices that occurred at the conclusion of the one phase of the covenant making.<sup>25</sup>

These explanations seem unlikely for a number of reasons:

1. The type of sacrifice designated here was normally completely burned up, and if this was so it could not been a partaking in this type sacrifice. 2. There seems to be a clear connection between the eating and drinking and seeing God (וַיַּחֲזֹּק אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים - *vachezu eth-haElohim*) made in verse 11. The word used here for “to see” means to see with the eyes.<sup>26</sup> I have no explanation to offer here as to what happened other than to give the text itself. I would only note that it does not say that they saw *YHWH*. I would think that this is of some major significance here.

At 24:12 Moses is told to ascend to the top of the mountain to receive the stone tablets with “the law and the commandment” which God had written for the instruction of the Israelites. The wording here is perplexing. The tradition is that what was written on the tablets was the ten commandments, but that is not confirmed here and indeed does not seem to support this. Here

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<sup>25</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 153.

<sup>26</sup> Job 19:26-27; Psalm 11:7; 58:8, 10; Proverbs 22:29; 29:20; Isaiah 33:20; 57:8.

we are told that the “Torah and the commandment” (תּוֹרָה) (וְהַמִּצְוָה - *hatorah vhamitsvah*) were given. What is stated clearly is that Aaron and Hur are left to settle any disputes that might arise. Moses then ascends the mountain and cloud covers it (24:15). We are told that the “glory” (כְּבוֹד - *kavod*) of YHWH covered the mountain for six days and then on the seventh day YHWH called to Moses from the cloud. At 24:17 the “glory” is described as having the appearance of a “fire that eats” (כָּאֵשׁ אֹכֵלֶת - *keaesh aokeleth*). Fire is often associated with theophanies in Scripture and perhaps at times indicates lightning.<sup>27</sup> The image of a consuming fire indicates that this fire was indeed impressive.

Moses entered the cloud (24:18) and stays there for forty days and nights. This then sets the scene for the “Great Sin” that will come when the people think that Moses has delayed coming down too long. What are we to learn from this section of Scripture? We are to learn that God seeks relationship with people, that He seeks redemption and that He seeks for people to reflect His image and His values. This is not simply to be boiled

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<sup>27</sup> Exodus 3:2; 19:18; Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 15, 24, 33, 36; 9:24; Psalm 18:14, 148:8.

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down to a list of do's and don't's. God seeks for the heart of the people to be aligned with His heart and for them to reflect this in their care for the poor and the weak, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. God gives of Himself, to draw Israel to become like Him, God makes it clear that He will listen to such as these (the vulnerable). Jesus makes the same plain when He says: **“Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**

**5:4 “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.**

**5:5 “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.**

**5:6 “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.**

**5:7 “Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.**

**5:8 “Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.**

**5:9 “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.**

**5:10 , the “Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**



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**5:11 “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me.”<sup>28</sup>**

Jesus also seems to draw connections to what occurs here in the making of the words of covenant used at the institution of the Lord’s Supper on the night He was betrayed. God too would be betrayed when He opened up and made Himself vulnerable as would Jesus. The connections are powerful and poignant reminders of the great love that God has for people and how sacrificially He pursues relationship. He calls His people to bear His image and to become people that love sacrificially as He does.

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<sup>28</sup> The Beatitudes of Jesus as found at Matthew chapter 5 in the Common English Bible.

# Synopsis

This section begins with a focus upon caring for the vulnerable, the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the resident alien. Israel had lived through the experience of being resident aliens and at the time these precepts were given through Moses Israel was homeless and without a country. God calls upon His people to reflect His nature through exhibiting an ethos of graciousness, mercy, justice, and loyalty. This most needs to be reflected in dealings with those that do not have the power, or influence, to force these to happen on their behalf. These things are to stand at the core of the people of God as reflections of their heart and soul as the image-bearers of YHWH. They are to be people marked by compassion and justice.

A part of this ethos will be seen in the way that the people demonstrate respect for the poor, but also in the way they demonstrate respect for their leadership and their God. They are to be known as a generous people helping not only the poor and vulnerable of their own community of faith, but of those who are outsiders. They are to be a people marked out as sacrificial givers that give offerings promptly to God and give to Him the

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“firstfruits,” the very first part of what they have, not the leftovers, or surplus. In this giving, they express their trust of God along with their love and compassion as His image-bearers.

They are to be known as people that are just, concerned for justice, and do what is right to all people not based upon wealth, power, ethnic group, or status. This is a reflection of the nature of God Himself. They are also to reflect the purpose for which God created human beings in being good stewards of our planet as protectors and keepers of God’s good creation. This is to be reflected even in the way they treat animals by insuring that even they are treated with compassion and care as creations of God. Festivals are given to remind people of their obligations before God and to remind them of what God has done for His people in rescuing them. They are to be a people marked by a sacred covenant with God.

We are called into covenant with God. God’s call to us is costly and ultimately is expressed most fully in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. We are called to reflect this in our laying down our lives for others. We are called to love others and trust God as a demonstration of that trust.

# Questions

1. What do you think it looks like to be the unique people of God in the world today?
2. Why do you think that God expresses so much concern for the resident alien and people that are vulnerable, the widow, the orphan, the weak?
3. How does being reminded of the care of God for the weak and vulnerable help us to understand God?
4. Does God hear the prayers of sinners? Why, or why not?
5. How will God respond to the prayers of the weak and vulnerable?
6. How do lending practices reflect “faith” in God?
7. Why do you think God cautions Israel with regard to how they respond to “leaders?”
8. How would you define “justice?”
9. As God talks to Israel about their offerings, what are the lessons that God is trying to teach them?
10. What is the purpose of offerings today? Are they to appease God or persuade Him to be in our favor?
11. What does it mean to be a “holy” people, a people devoted to God rather than self-interest?
12. How is a willing and trusting heart reflected in offerings?
13. Why are judicial integrity and impartiality important for the people of God?
14. What does it mean to show “partiality?”

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15. How can hostile and vindictive emotions overcome the humanity of people?
  16. What are the way that Jesus told His followers to respond to enemies?
  17. How do you think God is calling us to treat the weak, the aliens, and the disenfranchised in our country today? Who are these people?
  18. What do you think God is calling us to as stewards of His creation?
  19. Why do you think God teaches His people about taking care of the earth and its creatures?
  20. How do you think the regular festivals of Israel were meant to promote loyalty among the people of God?
  21. What blessings do you think come to the disciples of Jesus Christ today as a result of their trust in God?
  22. What are some ways that you see people giving of their life to others?
  23. What are some ways that you find it hard to trust God?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that God watches over the weak, the vulnerable, the defenseless and the poor. This is His nature. God is humble Himself and that aspect of the image of God is to be reflected in the humility of those that were created to bear His image. When human beings are humble, it is at that point that they look the most like God. Humility is not something that is generally valued by societies of the world. We all like it in others, but often it is not something that we seek to cultivate in ourselves. What are some ways that we as human beings can cultivate and grow humility in each other and in ourselves?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in the words of this section of Scripture calling His people to reflect His nature and His image. In this, we are given great insight to what God values and pursues, what He nurtures, and how He expects people to treat one another. This will have been hugely different from many of the expectations valued by cultures in the ancient world. This section emphasizes the giving of offerings to God as an expression of devotion, love, loyalty, and trust. What does it mean when a person gives an offering to God?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

The implications of what is said here are meant to change the way that the people of God live their lives. They are to stand out as a beacon of light in the darkness. They are meant to be a people that are not just ethical, following in a rote manner a set of rules, but they are to be people with an ethos that adheres not simply to the letter of the law, but to its core intent. The difference between ethics and ethos is enormous and makes a huge difference in the hearts of a people. How would you explain the difference between being people of ethos rather than people of ethics?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us to “be” something not simply to do something. People can, and often do things out of a sense of fear, obligation, or some ulterior motive, but those things which are the most like a person are those things that come from the heart and soul of a person. It is those things that reflect the true nature of a person. God wants us to reflect His nature, not just outwardly and superficially, but inwardly and from the core of our being. What are some ways that you nurture “becoming” more and more like God in your life?