

Introduction

Welcome to the Mini Bible College. We will be studying the Bible from beginning to end together over the course of the next 33 booklets. Our journey in understanding will take us from Genesis through Revelation. We will view the panoramic picture each Book of the Bible presents, study its outline, and, most importantly, focus in for a closer look at ways to apply what we learn.

The Bible can be a confusing book. It is hard to keep track of what happened when and who was related to whom and what it all means. But each verse of Scripture, each tiny piece of the puzzle, adds up to a glorious whole. At the end of our trip together, my prayer is that you will have gained an understanding of how the Bible fits together. Having toured all the Books of the Bible, you will come away with a snapshot image of each one, and you will be able to place it in the context of the history of God and man. You will have seen how God worked in Old Testament times, and you will have learned what changed with Christ's coming and why. What you have believed with your heart will become established in your mind, and you will experience a new confidence and a new competence in expressing your faith to others.

I hope you will plan to stay with us through the entire study, and that you will invite others to join us as we get acquainted with the most important book in the world, the Bible. Pack your bags and get on board, because we're ready to begin!

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

Genesis and Exodus

Study Booklet #1

Tools for the Task

The Apostle Paul tells us that the only way we can keep from being embarrassed or ashamed when the subject of the Bible comes up is to become “a workman”. The only way to really understand the Bible is to work at it. I would like to challenge you here, in the beginning of this Bible study, to commit yourself to earnest and wholehearted study of the Bible. No book could be more deserving of dedicated, diligent, and determined study! If you desire to go deeper than these survey studies take you, make a commitment to find other tools that will enable you to dig deeper into the Scriptures.

Besides diligence, there are some tools that will help you as you delve into these studies. The first one is obvious: you will need a Bible, and if possible, more than one translation of the Bible. And, of course, you will need a notebook and pen.

Just as any job around the house is accomplished more easily and with better results when the right tools are used, so Bible study is more effective when you use the resources available to you. Make it a goal to accumulate the study aids we have listed, and you will be amazed at the difference they make.

Chapter 1

The Bible and Its Organization

Its Meaning and Origin

Before we begin our study of the individual books of the Bible, let us look at the Bible itself, as a whole. Why is it called that, and why is it so often referred to as “The Holy Bible”?

The word “bible” comes from the word “biblia,” which is the plural of the Latin word for “books.” So “bible” simply means “a collection of books”- sixty-six, to be exact. The word holy means, “that which belongs to God” or “that which comes from God.” So The Holy Bible is, literally, “The holy little books of God,” or, “a collection of books belonging to and coming from God.”

The Bible is also referred to as the Word of God. Why? Because of statements made by apostles, like Peter and Paul. Second Timothy 3:16-17 is a good example: “The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.” (emphasis added)

Over and over, we are assured that the Bible is not merely a collection of human writings about God. Instead, it contains the words of God Himself, written through the pens of men, perhaps as many as forty or more over a period of 1500 to 1600 years. The process by which God moved these men to write these books is

called inspiration, which literally means, “to breathe in”. Peter described it this way: “No prophecy recorded in the Scripture was ever thought up by the prophet himself, for the prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

The Greek word for “carried” presents a beautiful image. It is the word “phero”. Imagine being in a boat carried along by the tide, or blown along by the wind in the sails, and you have the idea of inspiration as it is presented here by Peter.

Its Organization

Having established what the Bible is, let us now look at how it is organized. Contrary to what you might expect, the books do not appear chronologically, nor are they grouped by author. Instead, they are organized by type and message. The two main groups of books are the Old Testament and the New Testament. This has not always been the case, for obvious reasons. In the days of Jesus, for instance, there was no such thing as an Old Testament and a New Testament. The New Testament had not been written yet, so the books that existed in the days of Jesus were simply called “The Word of God” or “The Scriptures.” It was after the New Testament was written and brought together into a collection of books that the distinction was made between Old and New Testaments.

The essential message of the Old Testament books is this: “Jesus is coming.” In the beginning, according to the Scriptures, God

and man were in harmony with each other. But God made man a creature of choice and man chose to turn away from God. Because God cannot tolerate rebellion (sin), God turned away from man. Thus, there was a “divorce” between God and man. That divorce between God and man is the fundamental problem with which the all the Scriptures deal.

In the Old Testament, God says to us, “Will you believe Me when I tell you I'm going to do something about that divorce?” In the New Testament, God is saying to us, “Will you believe Me when I tell you that I did do something about that divorce?” You see, the Old Testament books say, “Jesus is coming, and He is going to reconcile that divorce between God and His creatures.” The New Testament tells us this good news: “Jesus came, and when Jesus came He did reconcile that divorce between God and man.”

Besides the major division of the Old and New Testaments, there are further divisions within each Testament. The books of the Old Testament come under five different headings.

First, there are the five books of the Law. In these books, God tells us what is right and what is wrong, giving us His standard for righteousness.

Next come the ten History books, which tell us, essentially, that sometimes the people of God obeyed those Law books and sometimes they did not. Their stories serve as examples and warnings for us. The key verse for all the history recorded in the Bible is found in the New Testament. Paul told us that everything

happened to the people we read about in the Bible for examples and warnings. When they obeyed the Word God gave them, they were examples for us. When they did their own thing, they were and are warnings for us.

The History books are followed by the books of Poetry. In the Poetry books God speaks to the hearts of His people as they try to live out His Word in this world. For instance, the Book of Job speaks to the hearts of God's people when they are hurting. The Book of Psalms speaks to their hearts when they are worshipping. The Book of Proverbs speaks to their hearts when they need the kind of wisdom that equips them to do business and relate to people. The Song of Solomon speaks to their hearts when they are making love. Each of these books contains practical help and encouragement for believers.

The next section of the Old Testament is the largest. It is called The Prophets. This section is further broken down into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets - not because of the importance of their messages, but simply because of their length. It took the major prophets longer to say what they wanted to say!

In the New Testament we have five kinds of books as well. First there are the four Biographies of Jesus (also called the Gospels), written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Next comes one History book, the Book of Acts. Then there are the epistles, or letters. They fall into two categories: the Epistles of Paul and the General Epistles. Half the New Testament consists of letters written by the Apostle Paul to fledgling churches established after the Resurrection. The

other letters were written by an assortment of people. Finally, there is one Prophetic book, The Book of Revelation.

As we study the Bible, come to the Old Testament realizing what its primary message is: Jesus is coming. That is what the Old Testament is really all about. Come to the New Testament looking for this message: Jesus came. That is what the New Testament is all about.

Chapter 2

The Bible and It's Purpose, Authorship, and Origins

Its Purpose

From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible is basically about Jesus Christ. The Bible is not a history of civilization or a scientific textbook on creation. Some people think that the Bible is primarily a handbook for living a good moral life; many think that Jesus was only presented as a teacher and example of this lifestyle. Jesus Christ is the Bible's one central theme. In support of this theme, though, the Bible has four main purposes. The first of these four purposes is this: to present Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of this world. Now, for us to understand this first purpose, we need to understand why a savior is necessary. So the second purpose of the Bible is to provide for us the historical context in which Jesus came.

But in Genesis 12, the story slows way down. From this chapter all the way through Revelation — all 1,178 remaining chapters — the plot line narrows. From this point on, the story is mainly about Abraham and his descendants, especially that one Descendant of his through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Once we have understood those first two purposes, the second two are obvious. Number three is to lead the unbeliever into faith; and number four is to show the believer how God wants a believer to live.

Its Authorship

Who wrote the books of the Bible? When and where? In what language, or languages? Do any original manuscripts still exist? Who decided what to include in the Bible and organized it as it is today? You do not have to study the Bible for long before these kinds of questions occur to you.

Let us consider, first of all, the authorship of the Bible. We have already said, of course, that God wrote it, through the pens of men (we will talk about who those men were later). But first there are two terms we need to understand when we talk about God writing these books. The first one is revelation. Revelation is the general term that covers all the ways that God reveals truth to man — through nature, through the Holy Spirit, through prophets and many other means. The second term is inspiration. This refers to what the

theologians call “Special Revelation.” The Bible is the special revelation of God. It has a beginning. It has an end. Over a period of about sixteen hundred years, God moved men to write these books. But when the last words of the Book of Revelation were written, the Special Revelation was complete. The Special Revelation, or that kind of inspiration, is no longer happening.

Now, having established that God wrote the books of the Bible, we also have to say that men wrote these books. These men were kings, fishermen, shepherds, generals, priests and a fig picker. One was a physician. One was a publican. They were all kinds of men.

Its Origins

Who decided what writings should be included in the Bible, and when? How were the decisions made?

In about 100 A.D., at the Council of Jamnia, the Old Testament was officially compiled, although it had already been in use for three or four hundred years. The books were included based on the reliability of their human authors and their reputation as a prophet or scribe. Most of these books were written in Hebrew.

The New Testament books, most of which were written in Greek, were selected and compiled in about 692 A.D. at the Council of Trullan. The standard by which these books were chosen is called canonization, and it consisted of three criteria:

1. Did an apostle or the close associate of an apostle write this book?
2. Did the book have the kind of spiritual and devotional content that ministered grace to the believer?
3. Did the content of this book agree with the content of the other inspired books, and was there unanimous agreement among the churches regarding the inspiration of this book?

How is it that books written so long ago are still available to us today? They have been very carefully preserved. Obviously, we do not have any of the original manuscripts; paper does not last that long. However, we have very good copies. Great care has also been taken in translating these documents into our modern language.

In Conclusion

How can we really know that the Bible is the inspired Word of God? How can we be sure the right books were chosen, that no mistakes were made in the copies or translations? There is only one way to know, and Jesus tells us what it is. He said, "If any man wills to do, he will know." It is found in your heart. When you come to the Word of God with the will to do what it says, when you act on what you find there, it makes such a tremendous change in your life that you then say, "That is the Word of God. It has to be. There is no other explanation."

Chapter 3

How to Study the Bible

When it comes to really studying the Bible, we need to be careful and wise. One effective method of study is this four-part process: observation, interpretation application, and correlation.

Observation comes first. As you read the passage through, you should be asking the question, "What does it say?" Next comes interpretation, during which you ask, "What does it mean?" Then comes application. In this step, you're questioning, "What does it mean to me?" Correlation asks the question, "How does this Scripture relate to the all the other books of the Bible?"

Knowing what the Scriptures say and what they mean is important. But if you do not act on them, your study has been meaningless. When you get to that section called "application," you can find out what a passage means to you by making that broad question more specific. Try these questions to get you started:

- Are there any examples to follow?
- Are there any warnings to heed?
- Are there any commandments to obey?
- Are there any sins to forsake?
- Are there any new truths about God or Jesus Christ?
- Are there any new truths about my own life?

When studying the Bible, there are some rules that should guide us. Here is one. When you come to a passage of Scripture, remember this: Even if there is only one interpretation, there can be a thousand applications. You may feel strongly about how a particular passage applies to your life, but please allow the Holy Spirit to work differently in someone else's life through that Scripture.

Second, since the Bible is a book about Christ, you should look for Christ all the way through the Scriptures as you study. Third, when you come to a verse that seems puzzling or obscure, always interpret it in light of verses that have a clear meaning. There are many verses of Scripture that are hard to understand. There are many verses that are not hard to understand. Rely on the clear ones to guide your thinking about the more difficult ones.

This next one is important: never come to a passage of Scripture with your mind already made up as to what it means. You may be absolutely correct in the thinking you bring to it; but then again, you may not be! It will be difficult for the Holy Spirit to teach you if you are certain you already know what there is to know.

Another important principle, especially if you teach the Scripture, is to be willing to obey it yourself before you teach it to someone else. And here is another one. Always remember that God speaks to us through His Word, so approach the Word of God prayerfully, asking God to reveal things to you personally through the Holy Spirit.

Here is another hint: always consider the context of any passage of Scripture. If you have ever been quoted out of context, you know how your own words can seem to mean something you never intended. Likewise, Scripture can be used to prove almost any point if you isolate a verse from the verses that come with that verse. Studying a single verse apart from its context is almost sure to lead to misinterpretation.

And now, having established a foundation for our study of the Word, we will dig in to the first book, Genesis. As we begin, my prayer for you is this: that you will get into the Word of God ... and let the Word of God get into you.

Chapter 4

Genesis—A Book of Beginnings

The Book of Genesis is about beginnings. The word “genesis” literally means “beginning.” This book constitutes the beginning of the Bible, but it is also a book about beginnings. The first beginning it describes is the beginning of the world.

In Genesis, God tells us about man, as he was in the beginning and as he is now. This will help us understand ourselves. He tells us about sin. Seeing how sin began helps us see how it affects us today. He shows us His first communications with man,

and those first simple conversations help us see how He communicates with us as well. In the conflict between Cain and Abel, we see how conflict begins, and we start to understand the conflict we experience today.

In chapters six to nine, we read about the world's first catastrophe, the flood. And in this story, we find a picture of salvation. Because of Noah's faith, God saved him from destruction. And if we have faith, we, too, can be saved from the destruction of sin.

Throughout the remainder of the book, we find story after story showing us that God is, ultimately, the One in charge. With the repetition of that theme, can we doubt that He is still in charge today?

Your assignment today is to begin reading the Book of Genesis. As you do, ask yourself the questions: What does this say about the way things were? What does that imply about the way things are today? And how should that change my thinking and my life?

Chapter 5

Is Creation Credible?

The Book of Genesis — indeed, the entire Bible — begins with the story of creation.

Now, for all the significance of that fact, the account only takes up a chapter and a half. Why do you think that is? As we discussed in our last chapter, this book was written not only to tell it like it was, but also so that we can understand things as they are. God does not owe us an explanation. He does not need to defend Himself. He does not give us this creation account because He believes He owes us an explanation of how He created everything.

Still, we cannot pass over this book without a discussion of what is probably the most frequently debated issue in the Bible. There are typically two extremes on the subject of creation. First of all, there is the position that says that the creation account in Genesis is not scientifically reliable, so therefore the Bible cannot be the inspired Word of God. The other extreme is the position that the question is not, "Is the Bible scientifically reliable?" but, "Is science biblically reliable?" Those who hold this position say, "The Bible is not on trial. Science is on trial."

The real issue is this: Are the Bible and science compatible when it comes to how the world was formed?

We need to put some things in perspective. First of all, the very nature of science does not leave room for belief in God, strictly

speaking. This is not to say that a scientist cannot be a devout believer. But science itself is the study of data or phenomena that can be observed and objectively measured and quantified or proven. It is based on experiments, conclusions, and applications. It is controlled and controllable. By His very nature, God does not fit into that kind of study. It is impossible to approach God through a scientific method. The only way to come to God is through faith, as Hebrews 11:6 tells us: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

We read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). And then we read that, “the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (2).

The Bible says, the Spirit of God began to move upon this creation and develop it and manipulate it and change it. For instance, Genesis 1:9 says, “Then God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.’” (emphasis added)

God did not say, “Let the dry land come into being.” This is not the moment dry land was created. It had apparently already been created, in that initial act of creation, but had been underwater. In this verse, it is being uncovered. It is interesting that the scientific community is certain this whole earth was under water at one time.

The word bara, or “create,” means to make something from nothing. This word is only used three times in this creation account. God creates in the beginning, in verse one. This first act of “bara” accounts for the universe, the earth, and all plant life.

The other words between verses 2 and 20 are different. They are words that indicate change, or taking something that exists and altering its form. The next act of creation takes place in the water. In verse 21 we read: “And God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good.”

Again, there is an agreement between the biblical account and science. Scientists seem to be very sure that animal life began in the water, and that is what the Genesis account says.

The next act of “bara” takes place in verse 27: “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

The Genesis revelation of creation accounts for the beginnings of everything in the universe. After these original acts of creation, though, the Spirit of God changes and develops this original creation. This parallels what scientists have observed about life forms evolving, and in this regard I see a parallel with evolutionary thinking.

Where creationists and evolutionists cannot agree at all, though, is over the issue of what I call the three missing links. The

three missing links are focused in three questions. How did it all begin? How did plant life become animal life? How did animal life become human life? Science has no explanation for these missing links. Genesis, though, does. The answer of the Genesis account is simply “bara” — God created.

Chapter 6

The Birth of Mankind

We have discussed the origins of the universe; now let us get more personal. In this chapter, we will consider what the Book of Genesis has to say about the beginnings of man. Remember, the purpose of the Book of Genesis is to tell it like it was so that we might understand it like it is. As we come to the subject about the beginning of mankind, we are coming to the subject of ourselves. What does the Book of Genesis have to say about God’s purpose in creating man? Let us start by reading the description of how man — and woman — came into being.

God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.” So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him. Male and female, created He them. And God blessed them and God said unto them, “Be fruitful and multiply

and replenish the earth.” ... And the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make an help meet for him.” And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept ... and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh thereof ... and out of the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made He a woman and brought her unto the man ... Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh. (Genesis 1:26-28a; 2:18, 21-24)

In the Image of God

The first thing that stands out in this passage is the fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God. Those words are familiar to us, but what do they really mean? Since God is a Spirit, He does not have a body, and so this probably does not refer to the way we look. What it does refer to is the capacity we have to be spiritual. That is the way in which we are like God. Of course, in Genesis 3, we see that this resemblance to God is marred when Adam and Eve sin. From that point on, the fundamental problem with which Scripture deals is that of “recreating” God’s image within man. Genesis 1 and 2 show us man as he was created and as he was intended to be. Genesis 3 shows us man as he is.

Male and Female

Another observation that we can make about the creation of man is that He created them male and female. This is the first

example of surgery with anesthesiology. The first anesthesiologist was God! He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; then He took one of his ribs and from that rib He made woman. The symbolism here is beautiful. God did not take woman from man's head that she should rule over him, and He did not take her from his foot that she should serve him. He took the woman from the man's side, so that she would be close to his heart.

Why did God create woman? The Hebrew word for “alone” might better be translated “incomplete”. The word “helpmeet” could be translated “completer”. If you get into the Hebrew grammar, you find that when God brings this man and this woman together into what we call today “holy matrimony”, or sexual union, that man and that woman united in one flesh make one whole man.

It is important to note here that when God brought that man and that woman together, He brought into existence the most important institution we have on earth today. We call it the family, or the home. It was the plan of God when He made them male and female to take two persons and bring these two persons together into a partnership so that they could become parents. And then, as parents, they would produce persons who one day themselves would become partners and parents and produce persons who would become partners and parents. This is the great law of life that has given birth and nurture and direction to the whole human family.

The partnership between the man and the woman is a very important part of God's basic law of life. This is why God created

them male and female. Picture a triangle with God at the top, the man at the lower left corner and the woman at the opposite corner of the triangle. If the man is related to God and if the woman is related to the same God, then as that man and that woman move closer to God, they move closer to each other.

As you study marriage in the Book of Genesis, you will discover that it is to be an exclusive relationship in two senses. For the cause of marriage, a man leaves his father and mother. He excludes that family with whom he has spent twenty or twenty-five years. Also for the cause of marriage, he will forsake all others. He is to live with his wife exclusively for the rest of his life. The woman is to make this same exclusive commitment to her husband. That is the blueprint of God for marriage.

Chapter 7

Where Are You?

One of the most familiar parts of the Book of Genesis is the third chapter, where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit. Chapter 2 showed us man, as he was created and intended by God to live his life. This chapter shows us sin — as it was then, and as it is today. It shows Adam and Eve facing the same decision we all face many times every day: Are we going to have it God's way or are we going

to have it our way? God made us creatures of choice. Because of this, we can do God's will, or we can do our own will.

The third chapter of Genesis is describing that crisis the first time it happened. It is describing the battle of the wills as it was so we can understand that battle as it is in our lives today. The setting was described for us a little earlier, in chapter 2:8-9: "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Somewhere along the way people have gotten the idea that the forbidden tree was an apple tree, but there is no mention of apples, either here or in chapter three. Instead, we read about the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now before we go on, we need to talk about the kind of language that is being used here. This story is historical, but it is also allegorical. An allegory is a story in which people, places and things have a meaning in addition to the historical or obvious meaning, and it is usually morally instructive.

In the description of the Garden of Eden, the types of trees we read about indicate that God was going to meet the needs of man in this place. Notice the priority: first of all, these trees were to meet the need of man's eye; then they were to meet his need for food, and

then they were to give him life. But there was also a tree of knowledge, and that tree was declared by God to be off limits.

In chapter three, where the story of the first sin takes place, notice that the order of priority is changed. Instead of putting the eye first, the food second, life third, and knowledge never, they put food first, then the eye, then knowledge — and they never got to life. Instead, they got spiritual death. Deuteronomy 8:3 reads that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." We do not really live when we go out and look for ways to get our needs met or our desires gratified. According to this verse, true life comes from obeying every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, He provided everything they would ever need. He knew their needs because He had made them. And because He made us, He knows our needs as well; and He has every intention of providing for them

Now, you might wonder why the eye came first in the list of priorities. When the Scripture mentions the eye, it often does not mean the literal eye. For instance, in Matthew 6:22-23, Jesus said, "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." Jesus was not talking about physical vision. He was talking about the way we look at things, our mindset, our outlook on life. And when God placed such a high priority on what is pleasant to the sight in the Garden of Eden, He was really saying that they needed to look to Him to meet one of their greatest

needs. The greatest need they had and the greatest need we have is to let God show us how we should see things.

There is another picture in this chapter as well, though. After Adam and Eve gave in to temptation, we read that they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” (8-9)

It is interesting that God begins His dialogue with Adam and Eve by asking questions: “Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? (Genesis 3: 9-11) God already knew the answers, of course; He is everywhere at once, seeing everything. God asked these questions because of things Adam and Eve did not know. The questions were designed to get them to think. You see, when God asked, “Where are you?” He was really asking, “Why are you hiding from me?”

God’s second question, following Adam’s confession that he was hiding because he was naked, is a favorite of mine: “Who told you that you were naked?” (11a). In the Hebrew, the question literally reads, “Who made you know that?” The real answer, of course, is that God was the source of that information, just as He is the source of all information. There is some information He wants us to have, and some He chooses to keep from us, but there is no information that He does not have Himself. Anytime we know where

we are spiritually, if we will think about it, God is the One Who is making us know where we are and where we should be.

Next God asks, “Have you eaten from the wrong tree?” (11b). Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, and now they were hiding in the woods, clutching fig leaves to their bodies, suffering the consequences. If you are banqueting on consequences you find distasteful, ask yourself this question: Have you been eating from the wrong tree? Have you been disregarding or disobeying the Word of God? Are you ignoring His direction in your life?

God’s fourth question, “What have you done?” is directed toward Eve, and it produces a confession, albeit on the heels of an excuse. The word “confess” comes from two words which mean, “to say” and “sameness”— in other words, “to speak sameness.” Literally, confession is merely agreeing with God about what you have done. God wanted Eve to put all the facts on the table between them, so they could deal together with what had really happened. And that is what He wants of us as well. He wants us to realize what we have done and confront it honestly.

Genesis 3 is a picture of two people who sinned and how God dealt with them, but it is also the picture of all of us, who have sinned, and it shows us how God deals with us when we hide from God when we sin. It is the picture of sin and its consequences. And it is the picture of God pursuing the sinner and opening the lines of communication.

Chapter 8

Where Is Your Brother?

One of the main messages of the Bible is the need for man to reconcile with God. And He starts making reconciliation possible as soon as the first sin is committed. In Genesis 3:15, the first messianic prophecy appears as God speaks to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise Him on the heel.”

Understanding that the serpent represents Satan, this is the first hint in the Scripture that God is going to bring Someone into this world Who is going to set things right. That is the prophetic consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve.

There were so many negative consequences! First, mankind was separated from God. And then in chapter 4 we read about another consequence of the fall — conflict. God describes conflict for us - conflict as it was so that we can understand conflict as it is. We are in conflict with ourselves; we are in conflict with our spouses; we are in conflict with our children and with our parents. We are in conflict at the workplace, and, of course, we have conflict between nations. Conflict is one of our biggest problems. In Genesis 4, we will discover some of the primary causes of conflict and some of the solutions that can resolve it. Genesis gives us this information in the form of a story about two brothers.

These brothers’ names are very familiar to us — Cain and Abel. As the story goes, Cain had the idea to bring an offering to God. Since he was a tiller of the ground, a farmer, he brought that kind of an offering to God. His brother Abel was a shepherd, so he brought an animal offering. Abel’s offering was acceptable to God; Cain’s was not.

Now, many people make the mistake of thinking that Abel’s offering was acceptable because it was an animal sacrifice. But frankly, that is not in the text. Abel’s offering was acceptable to God because he himself was acceptable. Cain’s offering was not acceptable, because he himself was not (6-7).

When you come to the story of Cain and Abel, it is easy to read in something that is not there. Cain was not instructed to bring an animal sacrifice. In fact, in the Book of Leviticus, people were instructed to bring grain or produce offerings, if that is what they raised. So the type of offering is not the important issue in this story; the men themselves are what is important. Cain himself was unacceptable, and when he discovers this, he is angry and depressed.

Just as He did with Cain’s parents, God asks questions: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?” (6). Of course, God knows the answers to these questions very well. But Cain’s stubborn heart appears not to be getting the message, so God goes on: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but

you must master it” (7). Tragically, Cain does not master sin. In verse 8, we’re told that he killed his brother in a fit of rage.

Once again, the questions come: “Where is your brother? What have you done?” But Cain, still stubborn, refuses to acknowledge his sin until God makes it plain that He already knows what has happened (9-10).

In Genesis 3, the question was, “Where are you?” In Genesis 4, the question is, “Where is your brother?” In asking this question, God was trying to get Cain to realize what had really happened — that he had taken out his anger on an innocent party, and that, in reality, he was still angry. His actions had not solved anything; instead, they had made things worse.

Backing up a bit, verse 7 is really the key to this whole story. It addresses the core issue of conflict, and it offers the solution: If you do what is right, you will be acceptable to God, you will be acceptable to yourself, and you will not have to go through life beating Mr. Acceptable to death. There is a passage of Scripture from the Sermon on the Mount that parallels the story of Cain and Abel. It is found in the first five verses of the seventh chapter of Matthew. Jesus asks questions of hypercritical people. He asks them why they are so critical and how they hope to be effective with such a critical spirit? He uses the ridiculous illustration that they are like people who feel their calling is to find specks of sawdust in other people’s eyes when they have a log jammed in their own eye.

Many people think this passage is telling us not to judge others. But Jesus was really saying what God was trying to teach Cain: “You’re looking at the wrong issue. Stop worrying about your brother, and take a look at yourself instead.”

Thankfully, though, the death of Abel was not the death of goodness. Two generations later, in Genesis 4:26, we see the first instance of man initiating communion with God, or prayer. Up until then, all the communication between God and man had been initiated by God.

We all deal with conflict at times. Sometimes we are not the source of it; sometimes we are. But whenever you find yourself in a conflict, try to get control of your feelings enough to ask yourself what the real problem is. And then, as Genesis 4:7 suggests, do what is right, be acceptable to God and yourself so you will not go through life beating Abels to death.

Chapter 9

The Father of Faith

We now come to the largest section of the Book of Genesis, which has to do with three well known Bible characters: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Remember, the amount of space given to a subject tells us something about its importance. The subject of this section of Genesis, which tells the story of Abraham, is faith. As we study the next several chapters, God wants us to understand faith as it was and as it is now.

Hebrews chapter 11, which is known as the Faith Chapter of the Bible, has this to say on the subject: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (6)

Since faith is so very important and God wants us to understand faith, He tells us the story of a man named Abraham. This man is referred to more in the New Testament than any other Bible character, always in conjunction with faith. If you want to understand faith, you need to understand Abraham.

His Name

This man is the walking definition of faith. When we first meet him at the end of Genesis 11, his name is Abram, which means “father of many sons”. An ironic name for a childless man of 75!

Yet God told Abram that he would “make [his] descendents as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendents can also be numbered.” (13:16) And by Abram’s faithful obedience to God’s every instruction, we can presume that he trusted God in the matter — at least most of the time. (see Genesis 16)

His Altars

We usually think of being called to a mission field or to a church or to an organization. But do we think of being called simply to God? What if God asked you to head out into an unpopulated wilderness without telling you why? That is what happened to Abraham when he was 75 years old (see 12:1-4). God was calling Abraham to leave his father, his home country, and all his relatives and come into a barren wilderness.

There are two sides to this story, as there are to every God story: the God - side, and the man - side. To see the God - side, study the appearances of God to Abraham. God appeared to Abraham eight times. It was He Who initiated the relationship, and that is true of every relationship with God. In Romans 3:11, Paul tells us that no man seeks God. It is God Who seeks man. If a man looks as if he is seeking God, he is only responding to the God Who is seeking him. God always initiates the relationship.

The man - side of the relationship, or the response of Abraham to God, comes in the form of the four altars Abraham built.

The first altar was erected in the plains of Moreh, where God appeared to Abram and told him, "To your descendants I will give this land" (12:7). The word Moreh literally means "teaching or seeking." I call that first altar of Abraham the "Altar of Response" because it was built in response to the God Who was calling him into a wilderness.

His second altar was built between Hai and Bethel. In Hebrew, Bethel means "the house of God". Since God did not have a house at this point, this word appears to mean "the place where God is". Hai means, "Ruin, misery, the pits". Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death", and that is what the name of this city represents. Further east beyond Hai are Sodom and Gomorrah. At his first altar, Abram was saying, "Teach me". At this second altar, he shows by its placement that he has not yet decided how to respond to what God is teaching him.

Abram leaves this second altar and goes south, geographically and spiritually. He tells his wife to say she is his sister so the Egyptian men will not kill him to take her. He gets into a lot of trouble and seems to be "out of it" spiritually.

After this incident, Abraham returned to the site of his second altar and called on God. After that sincere worship, he suggested to Lot that they separate. The Scriptures do not tell us what they talked about, but it seems likely that God pointed out to him that he was not supposed to bring Lot with him in the first place. And since later on we find Lot entrenched in the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah), we can

see why.

Lot went east; Abraham went west and built his third altar at a place called Hebron. The word Hebron means "communion." I think this name, too, is symbolic. Where the first altar said, "Teach me," and the second altar said, "I am not sure", or, "I am Mr. In-between", this altar indicates, "God, I want to know You." I call this the "Altar of Relationship".

In the first two chapters of Abraham's story, chapters 12 and 13, he built three altars. He does not build another altar until chapter 22. What happened between the third altar and the fourth altars?

When Abraham said, "God, I want to know You," I think God replied, "Abraham, if you want to have a relationship with Me, I want you to know something. If I am anything, I am everything. Because until you see Me as everything, you have not seen Me as anything." And Abraham's life was full of other things that he did not want to give up.

In Genesis 16, we see Abraham and Sarah becoming concerned about how God is going to fulfill his promise to give Abraham offspring — so they decide to help Him along. At his wife's suggestion, Abraham has relations with her Egyptian maid Hagar (1-4). The child of that union was Ishmael, who fathered the Arabs. There would not be any Middle East crisis today if Abraham had not decided God needed his help.

I believe Sarah presents another kind of problem in Abraham's relationship with God. The third altar, the Altar of

Relationship, deals with vertical relationship and horizontal relationship. They are inseparable. In order to know God, God had to have His rightful place in all of Abraham's relationships. God had to speak to Abraham about Lot and get Lot out of his life. Lot represents the people we put in our lives that God does not want in our lives. He also had to work Ishmael out of his life. Ishmael represents the factor of faith that the greatest enemy of God's best is something good. God appeared to Abraham and told him to send Ishmael away. One by one, God is rooting out all these people who are competing for first place in Abraham's life.

Sarah is a different kind of problem. Sarah is a picture of the people God does put in our lives but whom we do not recognize as God's provision. God had to appear to Abraham twice about Sarah. The second time, He said, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her." (17:15-16) When Abraham heard this he fell on his face and laughed! When Sarah heard this news she also laughed!

A year later, a son was born to Abraham and Sarah, and God told them to call this son Isaac, which in Hebrew means "laughter". God never wanted these "heroes of faith" to forget that they laughed at Him when He told them what He was going to do.

Finally, when Isaac is a young man, Abraham builds the fourth altar, and this one is the most important. It was built on a mountain in Moriah. Moriah means "Jehovah will provide". Up

until now Abraham had picked the location, but this fourth altar is different. This time, God picks the place. And this time, God names the sacrifice — Isaac.

Isaac is not only the son of Abraham and Sarah's old age, but also the fulfillment of twenty-five years of faith. And now God says, contrary to what makes sense, "I want him." And Abraham takes the boy up on the mountain with every trembling intention of following through with what God has asked. But at the last minute, when he has proven his obedience, God provides a ram as a substitution for Isaac's life (see 20:1-19). Abraham calls that place Jehovah-Jireh, which means, "Jehovah will provide". This allegory of faith says through the altars of Abraham, that on the mountain of Gods choosing, at the altar of "God first", God provides the fruition of twenty-five years of faith. Abraham did not offer up Isaac at this fourth altar. At the altar of "God First", Abraham offered up Abraham.

The message of the Bible can be summarized in two words; "God first". Now, that is not easy, but neither is it complicated. Either He is your God, or He is not. Finally, for Abraham, He was.

Chapter 10

Who Are You?

The story of Jacob is an incredible story. Jacob's name meant "Graber" because when he and his twin brother were born, he was grabbing the heel of his brother who was born first. He lived up to the meaning of his name. There were two things worth having in his family and Jacob grabbed both of them. The birthright was the inheritance that went to the oldest son and the blessing was the promise God made to Abraham that was passed on to their father Isaac and was to be passed on to the oldest son. Jacob's brother Esau, sold the birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup and Jacob deceived his father and stole the blessing from his brother. After Jacob deceived his father and grabbed the birthright and the blessing, his mother came to him and said, "You must leave, Jacob, because your brother is going to kill you. Go stay with my brother Laban for a few days until he cools down" (see 27:42-43).

The first night Jacob was away from his home, he had a dream. In it, he saw a ladder on which angels were ascending and descending. In this dream God appeared to him and reaffirmed the covenant God had made with Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. God promised to make Jacob a part of the plan, adding, "I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (28:15).

Jacob woke from his dream filled with awe. "Surely God was in this place and I did not know it," he said (16). And before he continued his journey, he took the stone that he had used as a pillow and anointed it with oil, vowing to give back a tenth of all God gave him (18-22).

Jacob's Battle

Now what happens next is the main part of Jacob's story. After twenty very hard years working with his uncle Laban, Jacob had a very subjective spiritual experience with God. That experience is described in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis, where we read: "A Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me." So He said to him, "What is your name?" And he said "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked Him, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask Me My name?" And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (24-30)

Notice the question God asks Jacob: "What is your name?" In Bible times, names had significance, as we have already

discovered. They told something about the person they belonged to; they signified the person's identity. With this question, God was not asking for Jacob's name. He was really asking, "Who are you?" And, of course, it was not because He needed to know the answer, but because He wanted Jacob to know the answer. The name Jacob, as we have seen already, meant "Grabber". But his new name, Israel, the name all his offspring would bear, meant "Fighter".

Now there is one more item of significance in this story that we do not want to miss. I call it the "Cripple Crown Blessing". Because Jacob was such a rascal, God could not bless him until He broke him.

Sometimes God cannot get through to us any other way, and so He has to cripple us in some way, forcing us to rely on Him. That is how it was with Jacob. And finally, Jacob got the message. When he finally met up with Esau — who, by the way, did not fight him, but fell upon his neck and kissed him — he told his brother that he had all his wives and children and flocks because "God has dealt graciously with me" (33:11). Not because he had grabbed them, but because of God's grace. Grace is the attribute of God by which He lavishes upon us blessings we do not deserve. The mercy of God withholds from us what we do deserve.

God also teaches us to submit to Him. Sometimes He chooses to do that by breaking us, so that he can bless us. We really need to look in three places in order to see who we are meant to be. First, we need to look up. Throughout the Bible stories we will

study, we will see that it often takes God a long time to get people to "look up". But looking to God is a must if we are to find out who we're meant to be. After all, God is the one Who made us. He holds the blueprint for our lives.

Next, we need to look in. In Psalm 139, David prayed, "Search me, oh God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (23-24). We all need to ask God to look with us into our hearts and lives and show us who He wants us to be.

Finally, we need to look around. The person who has looked up and who has really looked in is now ready to look around and relate to people and be part of God's plan for the world. Have you ever really looked up to God to see what He says about your identity in Him? How frequently do you look in to see the state of your heart? Are you looking around to see how God wants you to interact with the people in your life?

Chapter 11

The God Who Is in Charge

We have now studied Abraham, who taught us about faith. We have looked at Jacob, who showed us God's grace. And now we come to Joseph, whose story fills the last 14 chapters of Genesis.

Joseph appears to be one of the purest characters in Scripture. With most characters in the Bible, God shows us their weaknesses as well as their strengths, but Joseph is one of the exceptions to that rule (the other is Daniel, whom we will see in a later study).

Joseph's Story

The story of Joseph is really about the providence of God. The message of this story is summed up in one verse in the New Testament, Romans 8:28, which says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purposes." Joseph's brothers were understandably troubled when they found out who he was, but he responded to them with these comforting words — words that assure us of God's working behind the scenes of our lives as well: "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Genesis 45:5, 7-8)

In the story of Jacob, Joseph's father, we saw a man whose life was going very well, but not because he himself made it happen that way. God was actually in charge the whole time. Joseph illustrates the same truth, but from another angle. In his story, we see a man whose life, for a time, did not seem to be going very well. He was sold into slavery by his brothers; he was unjustly accused of a crime; he was forgotten by those who promised to help him. But none of these circumstances came about through his own actions. He was going through very difficult problems and circumstances, not because he deserved them, but so that God could be glorified and His plan carried out.

Applications for Today

This story offers several applications for our own lives. First, consider the relationships Joseph had with his father and his brothers. Those were far from model relationships! Jacob was clearly not an ideal father. His partiality toward Joseph brought his son far more grief than pleasure — and it was certainly not fair to the other boys. But who of us does have perfect parents? How many of us have perfect relationships with our siblings? We did not choose the family who raised us, yet its members shape our lives. Many of us have broken wings or deep heartaches or hardships in our lives because of those relationships. But the message Joseph's story has for us is this: God is sovereign over the circumstances of our lives, and there is no situation so bad that He cannot redeem it and bring good from it.

God can use the influence of your parents even when your parents are delinquent. God can use the influence of your brothers and sisters even when they are delinquent. God used the adversity of Joseph's dysfunctional family to providentially place Joseph in Egypt and save from starvation the chosen family, through whom the Messiah would come into the world. God can use your response to the adversity of your dysfunctional family to shape your life. One day you will see how the providentially arranged circumstances of your life to prepare you to play the role God designed for you.

Chapter 12

Genesis Ends, Exodus Begins

As we study the Bible, and especially as we survey the Old Testament, we want to consider the development of this very special people into a nation. In the Book of Genesis we read that these people were born through Abraham. Jacob gave them their name, Israel, and Joseph saved them from starvation. When the Book of Genesis ends, this nation was only twelve families, and those families were in Egypt.

When the Book of Exodus opens, this group of people that had not yet become a nation, had multiplied from twelve tribes into a multitude. Before they could become a nation, they would need a

leader. The Book of Exodus is going to tell us about one of the greatest leaders in all the history of God's people, Moses.

One of the big problems that Moses had in leading this great multitude of slaves was that there was no law. There were no rules. He had no structure by which to govern these people. And so in this book, we will see the first set of rules given to man by God, hundreds of commandments summarized in Ten Commandments.

Moses has another problem: he has the right people, but they are in the wrong place. They are in Egypt, in slavery, and God wants them to be free. The word exodus actually means "way out". And much of this book involves the story of the Israelites finding their "way out" of slavery.

The Book of Exodus, in addition to being history, is also allegory. The Israelites were literally in slavery; without Christ, we are figuratively in slavery to our sin. The Book of Exodus deals with the problem of getting the Israelites out of their physical bondage; the entire Bible deals with the problem of getting all people out of their spiritual bondage to sin.

Have you been freed from the bondage of sin that God has provided for you? In the next chapter we will continue our study of the Book of Exodus. Begin reading it now, asking yourself those three important questions: "What does it say? What does it mean? And how can I apply this to my life?"

Chapter 13

Making Somebody out of Nobody

To understand the book of Exodus, you need to understand the people, the problem, and the prophet. The Book of Exodus is the story of God's people and how they escaped from slavery under the leadership of Moses.

Three Main Messages

As we have seen, the word exodus means "the way out". The message of the Book of Exodus is really this: What is the way out of this slavery of the children of Israel? This slavery is, first of all, a literal slavery, and the story of their deliverance from that slavery is one of the greatest miracles of the Bible. It is a true story. It is history. How that took place and what that involved is the exciting message of the Book of Exodus, and that is the first focus of this book.

By application, in addition to being historical, the book has a beautiful allegorical truth to be applied to our lives devotionally. The application is this: We, too, are slaves. We do not do what we want to do; we do what we have to do. And if we are doing what we have to do and not what we want to do, we are not free. If we are not free, we are slaves and we, too, need a solution for our slavery. We need to find deliverance from our slavery to sin. The word salvation, with which we are all so familiar, really means the same thing as the word

deliverance, especially in the Old Testament. Salvation is really deliverance from sin. Not only of sin's penalty, present and future, but also of sin's power.

We should also focus our study of the Book of Exodus on the character study of the prophet Moses. When you consider the men of God in the Scripture, this man stands head and shoulders above all of them. I believe, without any reservation at all, Moses is the greatest man of God in the Scripture. You can appreciate the greatness of this man Moses if you think about his contribution to the work of God. Abraham fathered the people of God and, as we have said before, Jacob named them, and Joseph saved them. But think about what Moses did for the people of God! The Book of Exodus is the biblical record of what Moses contributed to the work of God.

The Contribution of Moses to the Work of God

First of all, Moses gave these enslaved people freedom. Most of us do not know what it is to be a slave. When people are in prison, the one thing that consumes them, that possesses them, is the desire to be free. Moses gave those slaves what they wanted more than anything else when he gave them freedom. Then Moses gave them what newly emancipated people need more than anything else in the world: government, or law.

In the spiritual realm, Moses gave the people of God two things that are invaluable: He gave them the Word of God, and he gave them worship.

When people read the Bible through, they do pretty well going through the Book of Genesis, especially the character studies. Then there is the drama of Exodus, the deliverance from Egypt. That keeps them going pretty well. But when they get to the last third of Exodus and on into Leviticus, they slow down, their reading becomes more difficult, and many quit reading the Bible. It begins to read like an architect's book of specifications, or a manual. That is exactly what it is. And when you understand the purpose of the manual, you will begin to find it exciting. This part of the Book of Exodus and the entire Book of Leviticus are a manual for worship.

Left on our own, we do not know how to worship. Just as the apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, the Israelites needed to be taught how to worship — and so do we. In churches that we call "liturgical," the minister has his back to the people with his face to the altar much of the time. These churches and the synagogues in the Jewish faith have their roots in the form of worship we find in this little tent of worship that God instructed Moses to build.

I would like to look at the life of Moses in this way. The big problem in the Book of Exodus is the problem of slavery. The solution is deliverance. God called Moses to be the deliverer the children of Israel needed. By application, just as the Book of Exodus is an illustration of deliverance, or salvation, the life of Moses is one great big illustration of how to be a deliverer.

Moses' Story

To be delivered from the power of sin yourself is the greatest experience you can have in life. The second great experience in life is becoming the instrument through which somebody else is delivered.

Consider the life of Moses three periods, each one 40 years long. In the first 40 years the main lesson God taught Moses was, 'Moses, you are nobody'.

Through some unusual circumstances, Moses was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh. (see Ex. 1-2:10) Perhaps it was because of this that he might have thought that he was somebody special. But around the time that he was forty years old, God apparently succeeded in convincing him that he was really nobody. (see 2:11-15)

The second lesson God taught Moses took place in the second forty years of his life. This time, the message was, "Moses, you are somebody because I have chosen you and I am with you." At the end of his first forty years, Moses went out one day and looked upon the suffering of the Hebrew slaves, knowing now that he was himself a Hebrew slave. Exodus chapter 2, verse 11 says, "Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren." And the idea the passage conveys is that he had compassion for them, and that he felt very deeply with them what they were feeling in all of their sufferings.

At that point, God essentially says to Moses, “That is no way to be a deliver, Moses. Let us go to “Seminary” for forty years and think about how to deliver these people from their slavery. Forty years later, Moses was out in the desert and saw an acacia bush burst into flame. Now, because of the intense heat in that desert, this in itself was not unusual there. Usually these bushes would be consumed in about five seconds. This time, however, the bush was not consumed; it kept burning. Moses went to find out what was happening (3:1-3). Watch what happens next. “So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” Moreover He said, “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, for he was afraid to look upon God.” (4-6)

In this passage, God goes on to tell Moses that the important thing is not that he has seen the problem of the awful slavery of Israel. The important thing is not his compassion or desire to do something about this slavery. God tells Moses at the burning bush that what really matters is that the God of Moses has seen the problem and has come to do something about that problem. Therefore, God tells Moses that he is to go to Pharaoh and demand the freedom of the people of Israel.

Can you imagine the shock this was to Moses? When Moses failed to deliver these people by killing an Egyptian, God showed Moses that he was nobody. At the burning bush, God was convincing Moses that he was somebody. Basically, these two lessons — that Moses was nobody, and that Moses was somebody when God was with him — add up to humility. God taught Moses these two lessons to make Moses the human vehicle of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

Most people in authority make every effort to pick the most qualified people to do important jobs. In the Bible, it almost seems that God tries to pick the man who is least qualified. If we are going to be used of God to deliver people today, if we would like to see some friend or loved one delivered from the bondage of sin, we need to remember this: We are not the deliverer. God is the Deliverer.

A Lesson for Us

A humble person understands Who is really doing the work. The humble person says, “It is the plan of God to use the power of God in the people of God to accomplish the purposes of God, according to the plan of God.”

In the Book of Exodus, God is like a Vine, and He is looking for branches to be part of His Vine. God will not work without an instrument. Therefore, God must find His Moses. But once He calls His Moses, He has to convince him. He has to tell him, "Moses, you are nobody. You are not the one who is going to do this. When you

understand that, Moses, then you are somebody I can use, you are somebody through whom I can work and you can discover the great miracle of what I can do through somebody who has learned he is nobody."

Chapter 14

Human Objections and Spiritual Secrets

We have seen how God prepared Moses for the ministry of delivering the children of Israel. In this study we will look at the secrets God shared with him that would make him the vehicle of God's deliverance; and we will see how Moses responded to God's call to be a deliverer.

God's secrets for being the instrument of deliverance can be summed up in one statement: "You're not the deliverer - I am. On your own, you cannot deliver anybody. But I can, and I am with you, Moses. You do not even want to deliver these people, but I do. These secrets were true for Moses, and they are true for us as well. God taught them to Moses at the burning bush.

Moses was concerned that he did not express himself very well. This could mean that he did not think he was articulate, or perhaps he had a speech impediment. Maybe he stammered or stuttered. But whatever it was, God obviously knew all about it and

wanted him to go to Pharaoh and demand deliverance for Israel in spite of it. In fact, perhaps God wanted him because of it. You see, God wanted it to be obvious that this deliverance, when it took place, was the result of His own power and not the charisma of some man. That is why He wanted a Hebrew, a shepherd, (whom Egyptians hated more than they hated Hebrews), perhaps a man who stammered, going into the presence of Pharaoh demanding the release of His people. When His people were released, God did not want anyone to say, "Oh, it was that Moses. Oh, he was so eloquent. Oh, I was there when he demanded the release of those people. It was dynamic!" God did not want it to be that way. That is why He chose the man He chose. Look at the words of verse 11: "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

These questions are hard for some people to take. I think what God was saying again was the same lesson we saw in the life of Joseph: the dynamics of your life are designed by God. You may never know why, but God does make us the way He makes us. And God was saying to Moses, "If I wanted an eloquent man, I would have made you eloquent."

At that point, God gave him a little object lesson. God asked him, "What is that in your hand?" And Moses said, "A shepherd's rod." And God said, "Lay it down." When Moses laid the rod down, it became something that God used mightily all through the ministry of Moses. The Word "dedicate," literally means, "to lay down."

Then God told him to put his hand inside his jacket and take it out again. When he took his hand out, it was leprous. God told him to do this again and his hand was healed (2-7).

God was remarkably patient through all of Moses' objections. But when he finally says to God, "Please send somebody else", (13), he caused the anger of God to blaze against him. Now I wonder, when God commissions you to be a deliverer, do you raise these same objections? Do you end up saying, "Send somebody else, not me"? So many of the people in the Scripture were honest enough to say to God, "God, I do not want to." That is what Moses was saying. In a sense, this is healthy, because the motives of the one who wants to are very often suspect.

Eventually, of course, Moses did go. And he was successful. The success, however, was not his, but God's.

Some people have much ability and very little availability. Some are very short on ability and very long on availability. The Scripture says to us that it does not matter whether you are long or short on ability. The important thing is to be long on availability. In the work of God, the greatest ability is availability. He does not use us because of who and what we are, or what we want, but in spite of who and what we are or what we want.

The most important truths God taught Moses can be summarized in this short poem:

I am not, but He is and He is with me.

I cannot, but He can and He is with me.

I do not want to, but He wants to and He is with me.

I did not, but He did because He was with me.

I call these four propositions, "The Four Spiritual Secrets."

I could not function as a human being or as a minister of the gospel without personally applying these spiritual secrets in my life and ministry. I trust that you will also learn to apply these four spiritual secrets, Moses learned at a bush that burned but was not consumed.

Chapter 15

Plagues, Miracles, and Principles of Deliverance

Now I would like us to focus on the story of deliverance pictured in the Book of Exodus. As I have already observed, the word deliverance is synonymous with the word salvation. When we come in the Book of Exodus to the subject of deliverance, to the salvation these people of God experienced, we see the power of God. That is because there is no such thing as salvation, past or present, without the power of God. In the Book of Exodus, you will see the power of God displayed in a very unique way, beginning with the ten plagues.

The Plagues

The message of the ten plagues is a picture of a great truth that is taught in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In 1 John 4:4, that truth is expressed this way: "He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world." That is the devotional application of the message of the ten plagues.

In Exodus 5:1, Moses and Aaron make their first plea to Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But Pharaoh merely scoffs. After all, it was so ridiculous. What motivation would he have had? The rationale they gave obviously meant nothing to Pharaoh: "The God of the Hebrews has met with us; therefore, let us go because that is what God told us to tell you." (1)

In this story, we also see what we might call "principles of deliverance" from the power of sin or evil. As Moses demands the release of the people of God and Pharaoh refuses to let them go, the plagues come and they keep coming. Ultimately, these plagues are very persuasive. Little by little, Pharaoh begins to yield to the power of God. But as he does, notice the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh. Many people believe that Moses is the picture of our deliverer, Jesus Christ, and that Pharaoh is the picture of Satan, who is the personification of evil. If we understand the dynamics of what is going on between Moses and Pharaoh, we can understand the dynamics of what is going on between Jesus Christ and Satan today in our deliverance, or salvation.

For example, observe what Pharaoh says in Exodus 8:25 after Moses demanded that the children of Israel be permitted to go and sacrifice to their God. "You can sacrifice to your God, only do it in Egypt! Do not leave Egypt!"

After a few more plagues, Pharaoh again agrees to let the people go and have their religious ceremony, but he insists on a compromise: "Well, you can go, but do not go very far." (28) This is also a picture of the way the pressure comes upon the new believer. "All right, if you are going to be a Christian, go ahead, but I hope you are not going to be one of those fanatics. I mean, I hope you are not really going to go very far or take this business too seriously."

In 10:8-10, after more plagues, Pharaoh relents a little more. "All right, you can go, but you cannot take your children. Leave your children in Egypt." When Satan finds he is unable to make us compromise our faith, he will try to get our children. It is amazing how many people have come to faith but they "leave their children in Egypt."

After still more plagues, Pharaoh says, you can go, but leave your flocks and herds in Egypt (Exodus 10:24). This is like the evil one suggesting that we not bring our wealth into our faith.

I believe this is a strategy of Satan, which you see personified here in Pharaoh. The first principle of deliverance is: Never, never, never, make any compromises with the devil. Do not let the evil one tempt you to stay in Egypt (the world), to be apathetic about your

faith, to leave your children in Egypt, or to leave your wealth in Egypt.

The Miracles

But if you are already into sin, as most people are, what is the way out? The Book of Exodus tells us: to get out of the bondage and tyranny of sin you need a miracle. We see a picture of the kind of miracles we need pictured in the Passover, and in the crossing of the Red Sea. Those miracles represent the children of Israel's final deliverance from Pharaoh.

The ultimate plague is the wrath of God that takes the lives of all the first born in Egypt. As God's chosen people observe the Passover, the wrath of God passes over them. Jesus shows the relationship between this Passover and our salvation when He tells the apostles that His death on the cross was the fulfillment of all that was pictured in the Passover (Luke 22:16).

Throughout the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh, you know that Pharaoh is not going to let the children of Israel go. Pharaoh keeps changing his mind. He says, "You can go," but when the plagues ease up he says, "You cannot go." Even after he releases them, Pharaoh has another change of heart. When the people of God are backed up against the Red Sea, he assembles his army, and it looks as if Pharaoh is going to slaughter them. These children of Israel obviously need another miracle.

Moses does what God tells him to, and the rest of the story is well known. The water parted into towering walls, and the children of Israel marched between them on dry ground. When the Egyptians tried to pursue the children of Israel, the walls collapsed and the Egyptian army was drowned (14:21-28).

When you come to the Old Testament miracles, you have to decide whether you believe in the supernatural or you do not believe in the supernatural. I believe in this miracle. I believe this story just as it is written. I believe it happened exactly that way. I believe this story pictures our salvation. It takes a miracle for God to save you. It takes a miracle for God to save me. That is what the miracles of the Passover and the Red Sea picture for us.

Once the children of Israel got through the Red Sea and were out in the wilderness, they had a new, enormous problem. What were those people going to eat and drink out in the middle of nowhere? Somewhere between two and three million people needed food and water. Moses had no idea what to do. But God did.

God comes through for them and meets their needs with another miracle. One morning when they get up, there is a white substance all over the ground. They say, "What is it?" In Hebrew the words "what is it" are translated "manna", and that is what they called it. From then on, it appeared for them every morning.

The food God provided for the children of Israel evidently met all their nutritional needs, because they survived on it for forty years. This supernatural provision points out another miracle that you

and I need — sustenance. Who or what is the source of your sustenance? Are you trusting in the economy of the country, or in your own ability to get what you need? The true source of all we need is God. When we look to Him, He gives us what we need, when we need it. They had to gather this manna every day, which symbolized the instruction of Jesus, that when we pray, we are to ask our heavenly Father, “Give us this day, our daily bread.” Before our meals, when we thank God for our food, we are acknowledging the fact that God is the source of that food and the source of everything we need. God's provision for the children of Israel during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness reminds us of the truth of God's provision.

Our Deliverance

In the Book of Exodus, we also discover the basis of our salvation and our most important worship form. The sacrament at the heart of the deliverance of the children of Israel has become the sacrament at the heart of our salvation. The people of God had been instructed to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood along the top and both sides of the doorposts of their homes. This is a picture of the cross of Christ, which makes it possible for the wrath of God to pass over us. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed for us, and it is His blood that saves us. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, pictured by the Passover lamb.

My prayer is that as you read the Book of Exodus you will see

that the miracles that delivered the Israelites are a picture of the same miracles that save you and save me today.

Chapter 16

The Spirit of the Ten Commandments

I would now like to move through the Ten Commandments, as we see them listed in Exodus 20:1-17. These Ten Commandments summarize the spirit of hundreds of more specific commandments.

The Ten Commandments were written on two tablets. On one tablet there were four commandments, all of which govern our relationship with God:

- 1. You shall have no other gods before Me.**
- 2. You shall not worship idols.**
- 3. You shall not take My Name in vain.**
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.**

Those four commandments have to do with our relationship with God.

The second tablet had six commandments on it, and those six commandments are to govern our relationships with people.

- 5. Honor your father and your mother.**
- 6. You shall not murder.**
- 7. You shall not commit adultery.**

8. You shall not steal.

9. You shall not lie.

10. You shall not covet.

Let us look more closely at those Ten Commandments to see what they really mean.

The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." It has been said that the Bible can be sifted down to two words: "God first". That is spirit or essence of the first commandment.

The second commandment forbids us to make any graven image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth and call it God. Literally, this commandment is forbidding idolatry. The spirit of this law, however, is something like this: God is a Spirit. We are instructed to come to God by faith. Since God is a Spirit, the object of our faith is always going to be unseen. That is the way God has structured our approach to Him and our relationship with Him. He wants us to come to Him by faith. If we try to make something material or tangible and say that thing represents God, we are eliminating the need for faith.

The third commandment was that we are not to take His name in vain. Although most people presume this to apply primarily to profanity, the essence of this commandment is broader than that. It is really saying this: Any time you speak the name of God, even in worship, you should remember Who God is and not speak His name in vain, or without being called according to the purposes represented

by His name. We are not to speak of Him carelessly or thoughtlessly or disrespectfully, even when we are worshipping Him.

The fourth commandment instructs us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Literally, this had many, many applications in the hundreds of commandments in the Law Books. A lot of the Jewish rules grew out of this commandment, but the principle is similar to that of the first commandment: Put God first in your life. Set aside time only for Him. Another application of that Sabbath principle is plain rest. There are epidemic emotional and physical breakdowns and complete exhaustion because people have violated the spirit of the fourth commandment.

When you come to the second tablet, you come to the commandments that relate to the people in your life. The first one, of course, applies to your parents. In the normal course of things, those are the first people you are going to have anything to do with. This fifth commandment says that we are to honor our parents. This is the only commandment that has a promise: If you will honor your father and mother, your days will be long upon the earth (12). Make the observation though, that the commandment is to honor your parents. The commandment is not necessarily to obey them. The Bible teaches that children are to obey their parents. When you are children, you obey. But this commandment is talking to adults, and it is commanding us to honor and respect our fathers and mothers. One reason this is important is it shows your children how they should honor you.

The next commandment informs us that we are not to murder. It is not literally "you shall not kill" because there are places in the Bible where God commands His people to kill (see Genesis 9 and Romans 13, among others). The spirit of this commandment is that life is in the hands of God; God gives life and it must be God's prerogative to take life.

The seventh commandment tells us not to commit adultery. I believe the spirit of this commandment is what we might call "children's rights." It is the plan of God, as stated back there in Genesis 2, to take persons and make them partners, so that they might be parents and produce persons who become partners and parents. Marriage is the secure context in which God wants children to be nurtured and prepared to face life. The security of children, then, depends on the commitment or the fidelity of that married couple. I believe that truth is at the heart of this commandment. God is thinking about families and children when He commands: "You shall not commit adultery."

The eighth commandment is, "You shall not steal." The spirit of this commandment is that God is a God of order. Based on His grace and our sowing and reaping, we accumulate certain assets in life. When you steal, you violate the order God intended. This God-ordained structure is the spirit of this commandment.

The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness." This is one commandment I do not think most people have looked at closely enough. We tend to think in terms of big lies and

little lies, black lies and white lies. One of the cleverest ways to lie is to tell the truth out of context, or to tell only part of the truth. People become experts at this when they want to assassinate someone's character. But the commandment cuts through all this when it simply says: "You shall not bear false witness." It does not matter how cleverly you do it. If you give a false impression, big or little, by omission or commission, you have violated the ninth commandment. The spirit of the ninth commandment is to communicate the truth by talk, gestures, or other means.

The last commandment says that we are not to covet. The spirit of this one is similar to the spirit of the eighth one, "You shall not steal." God does have a will about what we have. The spouse we have, the family we have, the house we have, the position we have, our whole place in life. God has a will about all of those things. According to the Scripture, we are not supposed to compare ourselves to other people. We are all unique individuals. When God made you and when God made me, He threw the pattern away. He does not want us to be like anybody else. He does not want anybody else to be like us. Now if that is true, then we should not compare ourselves to others and we should not envy or covet what other people have. Envy and covetousness show that we are dissatisfied with God's will for our lives. I believe that is the spirit of the tenth commandment.