



# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton

# Through the Bible



March 2011

*Go worship the Lord...only leave your flocks and herds behind. (v.24)*

There seems little left for Pharaoh to do than give in...but he's not about to do that. His heart is still hard and getting harder all the time – he is an obstinate man. Pharaoh's advisors are willing to concede defeat but not Pharaoh! The passage indicates that even Pharaoh's advisers are freaking out look at 10:7 *'How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?'*

This is where starvation has begun to set in. Locusts in giant swarms strip fields completely bare of all vegetation. What had not been destroyed by the hail was consumed by the locusts. There was nothing green left in the whole land of Egypt. (10:15). And again we see God hardening Pharaoh's heart.

And now the ninth plague, darkness over all the land. It is so dark they cannot see in front of themselves. Pharaoh summons Moses and makes a compromise offer. The people are allowed to go and worship – all of them – but not the flocks and herds. Pharaoh wasn't dumb; he realised that people are attached to their property and that if the Egyptians could keep the property of the Israelites, then they could be assured that the Israelites would return. Moses would not accept the compromise though – after all they may need some of the animals for sacrificing to God.

Pharaoh was now past feeling anything, and the omniscient God also knew that he was unchangeable. Thus, the Bible says again in verse 27 that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. All the heartache and pain of plagues – and all because of a hard heart. What terrible grief results when people set their wills against God as Pharaoh did.

**Pray:** asking God to melt your hard heart and to help you follow his will for your life.

**Reflect:** what area(s) of my life am I resisting God's will and following my own ways? Repent now before it's too late!

*Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you – so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt. (v.9)*

The longer Pharaoh resisted God, the more serious the judgements became. The first three plagues were distressful (water to blood, frogs and gnats). The second three were painful and costly (flies, death of livestock and boils). And the last four were dangerous and destructive (hail, locusts, darkness and death of the firstborn). The longer sinners resist God's will and refuse to hear His word, the "louder" He has to speak to them through His judgements.

The final plague is announced – and it is the death of the firstborn sons across all of Egypt. No Israelite firstborn will be harmed only the Egyptians. And there will be great wailing, worse than has ever been. And notice what Moses says will be the outcome of all this in verse 8 '*All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying "Go, you and all the people who follow you!" After that I will leave.*' And with that, burning with anger, Moses left Pharaoh. Pharaoh heart was hard. He refused to listen. Even after all the plagues Pharaoh still refused. Moses has made his pronouncement to Pharaoh. He has warned of the coming of the final plague.

If you have not placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour – if you are hardening your heart against him – then you remain under the wrath of God. Charles Swindoll writes, "As much as he desires to cleanse you from all wrongdoing, he cannot allow you to go unpunished for your sins. Don't wait for his judgement to fall. Today is the day of salvation. On the other hand, if you are a Christian, then do not take God's grace lightly. Because his love is so great, he will not permit us to continue in an ungodly lifestyle without disciplining us (Hebrews 12:5-11). Remember from the story of the plagues that when God judges, he does a thorough job.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive your sin and naming Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

**Reflect:** have I placed my trust in Jesus? Am I resisting or hedging my bets? Today is the day of salvation!

*And when your children ask you...then tell them. (v.26-27)*

One of the most important events in Jewish history is the exodus, when God freed His people from the bondage of Egypt. Prior to leaving Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to eat a special meal called the Passover. As an act of judgment upon the Egyptians, God said that He would strike down every firstborn son, but He would pass over the houses that had the blood of a lamb on the top and sides of the door frame.

To prepare for this and then to commemorate and remember this great event, the people of Israel were to celebrate with a meal. The Passover meal is extremely detailed with each element bringing meaning to the Jews. The significance of this meal was to be everlasting. God told Moses that from here on the Passover would be an enduring celebration for the people of Israel. It was to be a yearly celebration that would commemorate the events of God's deliverance. The celebration would remind Israel of God's power, God's love, and God's grace in making them His own. For the Jews, this celebration is akin to our Christmas and Easter. Our celebration of communion has the same kind of purpose as the Passover did for the Jews.

Importantly when their children would ask in time to come why this celebration the Israelites were to tell their children all about the exodus story and God's salvation. God did not want the story of His great salvation to get lost in one generation. Jews carry this on to this very day.

When our children come and ask us why we go to church, why we read the Bible, why we pray, why we celebrate communion and all the other things they ask, we have to be ready to give them an answer. We have to tell them of our faith in Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, and how he has saved us.

**Pray:** for your children and the children in the church family that they would come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

**Reflect:** do I share my faith with my children – do I teach them the Salvation story of Scripture.

*So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.  
(v.18)*

Gladys Aylward was a British missionary to China, and shortly after her arrival in the 1930s the Japanese invaded China. After the town where she lived was bombed, Japanese soldiers were sent to kill any survivors. Aylward led the survivors, including many children, on a long march through perilous terrain. Miraculously, many survived this harrowing escape and caught the last train for freedom.

There's something very compelling about rescue operations, the greatest of which is surely found in the story of the Exodus. Here we see a pattern of God's redemptive work. God has sent the plagues on Pharaoh in order to have his people released. On their release they head toward the Red Sea. And God does not take them the most direct route. God it is who is setting the course. He has the route planned. And it is not the shortest and quickest route. And there are reasons given there. God feels that if they encountered opposition the Israelites might cave in and return to Egypt.

We may not always understand the way He chooses, or even agree with it, but His way is always the right way. We may confidently say with the Psalmist (23:3) '*He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*' And we ought to humbly pray with the Psalmist (25:4) '*Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me.*' Remind yourself that God knows what he is doing, that he isn't in a hurry, and that as long as you follow him, you're safe and in the place of his blessing.

**Pray:** asking God to continue to lead and guide you through life.

**Reflect:** where is God leading me just now? Am I resisting and questioning or following faithfully on?

*Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and all that night the Lord drove the sea back. (v.21)*

God has led and guided his people to the edge of the Red Sea. Moses and the Israelites see the sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind. The people are frightened because they fear they are caged in. Humanly speaking they see no way out – death from drowning in the sea or death by the hand of the Egyptian army behind. But Moses encourages them to stand firm.

The pillar of cloud for the first time has moved from in front of the people to being behind them. Behind them it protects them from Pharaoh and his men for the moment. And God tells Moses to lift his staff over the water. And in verse 21 Moses does just that. This simple shepherd's staff as we have thought on before has become a great instrument for God. God takes what we have and uses it for his glory. Nothing is wasted in God's hand.

We read in verse 21 *'all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided and the Israelites went through on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.'* God cleared the way. Humanly speaking there was no way through but with God there is always a way. The Israelites showed great faith as they walked through the sea.

Friend, what is that stands in your way just now? What memory is holding you back? What part of your life can you not let go of? What sin is pinning you down? What worry blocks the way? What is it? Because whatever it is God can clear the way; God can deal with it and lead you on. All you have to do is trust him. All you have to do is walk with him by faith and he will clear the way. Let go...and let God.

**Pray:** asking God to clear the way in that difficult situation in front of you where you see no way through.

**Reflect:** what is it that stands in your way just now? What sin is pinning you down? What worry blocks the way? Let go...and let God.

*If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees. (v.26)*

On the other side of every miraculous intervention by God on our behalf, there is a road of faith to travel. Whether God's power has touched our health, finances, or family relationships, we must not only praise and thank the Lord but obey Him as well. The children of Israel have been rescued from Pharaoh and have been given safe passage through the Red Sea. The first thing they do is sing a song of praise. Their hearts are grateful and thankful and they praise God. How often in life does God work a miracle in our lives and pour his blessing on us? We have many reasons for being grateful and being led to sing a song of praise.

Joyously, the people praised God for His strength and salvation (v. 2), His power (v. 6), His greatness (v. 7), His holiness (v. 11), His mercy, redemption, and guidance (v. 13), and His eternal reign over them (v. 18). They poured out their hearts in worship to the God of their salvation. Look over the attributes for which the Israelites praised God. Review how His character has touched your life in so many ways as well. Be drawn to praise and worship God.

After the time of praise they walked on and soon forgot God's goodness. They travelled for 3 days without finding water and began to grumble. They were walking by sight and not by faith. And God wants to test them on this and draw to them to learn to walk by faith. They will need this in time to come as they wandered through the wilderness for the next forty years. God heard and blessed them once more. This time though he leaves them with a decree – a conditional blessing if you like. If they would listen and obey then God would not bring disease upon them. Our challenge is to walk by faith as well and to keep listening and obeying.

**Pray:** thanking God for his goodness and asking him to increase our faith.

**Reflect:** on all the characteristics of God listed in the song of praise in Exodus 15 and sing your own song of praise to God.

*The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. (v.4)*

A frail, elderly woman fell and broke her hip. The doctor set the bones as best he could, but he knew that she would have a long and uncomfortable recovery. The next day when he visited her in the hospital, he found her in great anxiety. “Oh, Doctor,” she asked, “how long am I going to have to stay in bed?” With wisdom and kindness he gently replied, “Only one day—one day at a time!”

The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness and they had no food. They grumbled and groaned. God heard and God once more blessed his people. The instructions came to Moses that God would send down manna from heaven each day. God would send enough for the people for that one day only. If they tried to keep it, it went off. On the sixth day they were to gather twice as much so they could observe the Sabbath. When some went and tried to gather some on the Sabbath there was nothing to collect. God gave enough for each day.

Interestingly having been challenged on walking by faith and not sight in the previous chapter here again some still walk by sight; their faith is not yet strong. Some keep some manna for the next day but when they wake they find it moldy. Some try and gather some on the Sabbath but there is none there. God provides for them one day at a time. They are to walk by faith.

Later Jesus would say in Matthew 6:25 and following ‘*do not worry about your life what you will eat or drink...your heavenly Father feeds them...do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.*’ God is still in the business of providing for his children. He provides for what we need not necessarily for what we want. We will never go without. Keep walking by faith.

**Pray:** thanking God for his provision of all our needs.

**Reflect:** on God’s provision in your life. Think on a time when God provided just what you needed when you needed it. Give Him thanks.



*Aaron and Hur held his hands up (v.12)*

The people are again without water and again rather than walking by faith they walk by sight. They grumble and groan. And Moses doesn't know what to do. He calls out to God and is told to go to the rock at Horeb and strike it with his staff. As he does this water comes pouring forth. That stick given over to God is certainly proving useful. Remember to keep giving all you have to God – he can and will use even the smallest most insignificant items. Of course the other reminder here is how often we are like the people of Israel – we grumble because we walk by sight and not faith. No matter how much we know or how long we have been Christians there are still times we try and do it on our own – we walk by sight. Keep trusting in God.

The Israelites then face their first battle. They are to fight the Amalekites who will turn out to be a thorn in the flesh for years to come. Exodus 17 records a most interesting experience in the life of Moses. As long as his hands, grasping the staff of God, were up-held, Joshua and the Israelites prevailed against the Amalekites. As the battle progressed, however, Moses' hands became so heavy that he could no longer retain his posture. Aaron and Hur then held his hands up for him, and victory was achieved.

Even as Moses needed the assistance of Aaron and Hur, so today those called to spiritual leadership need the under girding of the people to whom they minister. I am thinking especially of pastors. I don't know of another work so demanding, discouraging, and fraught with potential pitfalls. These men need our support and encouragement. By the way, how long has it been since you took your pastor's hand and verbally expressed your gratitude for his ministry? A word properly timed will be, in effect, "holding up his hands" and will help to assure spiritual victory in your church. We need one another.

**Pray:** thanking God for your pastor and those in spiritual leadership in the church.

**Reflect:** how can I help and support others in the church.

*Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. (v.24)*

Insights from the older generation can greatly benefit the younger generation. Although Moses had been used by God to perform miracles and deliver Israel out of bondage in Egypt, he still listened to the advice of his father-in-law Jethro (v. 24). Jethro had watched his son-in-law care for the concerns of the people and observed: *'you and these people who come to you will surely wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.'* (v. 18) Moses followed Jethro's advice to select, train, and delegate others to share the workload (v. 22-24).

We don't always like to take advice from others particularly if they are a close relative or friend. Moses was no spring chicken at this stage either. He had been around the block. And yet his age and experience did not stop him from listening to wise counsel. Nor did he take badly to his father-in-law's advice. We need other people to help us at times.

In God's design of things, He has provided for each of us a powerful, wise resource in the older people in our lives. Let's never neglect their insight and good advice. We can learn from the wisdom of age.

Moses listened and made changes and things worked out for the good. We cannot do everything ourselves – we need others. Think on those who have helped you in the past, those who have shared their faith with you and also some of their wisdom. It is always wise to ask others for advice and listen to it. It is good to train up others and mentor them as well.

**Pray:** thanking God for those who have mentored you.

**Reflect:** do I have a mentor? Would one help? Who could I mentor and support and encourage? Go and approach them either asking for help or offering support – or perhaps even do both.

*We will do everything the Lord has said. (v.8)*

God is about to share the Ten Commandments with his people. He is coming to meet them at Sinai. And in this we see a promise given to Moses back in Exodus 3:12 being fulfilled. God has led his people out of slavery, through the Red Sea and to his holy mountain. God never forgets his promises.

In order to meet with God they have to be properly prepared. God has reminded them of their rescue and how he carried them on eagles' wings. He calls for them to obey him fully and keep his covenant and then he will make them his treasured possession. And so the people say we will obey. They are also to be prepared to listen. For them they would hear God but not see Him because of the dense cloud that would be around the hill. They had to listen intently. In our noisy world we have to listen intently and carefully for God's still small voice. We have to tune out of the world and all that is going on in our lives and around us and tune into God. As well as this the people were to consecrate their hearts. This means that they were to be pure and clean and ready to hear from God. Their clean garments were to reflect their clean hearts. No soil was to dirty their souls. And they were also to be ready to fear God – he is awesome and mighty!

And since the people were willing to obey, sensitive to listen, prepared to consecrate their hearts and ready to fear God he came and he spoke to them on the mountainside that day. The people were prepared properly to hear from God. The challenge to us is to be as prepared ourselves when we come into his presence. Any time we read his Word or meditate on it and/or on God; any time we pray; any time we come to church we ought to be prepared properly. For us, just as for the people of Israel, we are to be willing to obey God, to be sensitive to listen, to be prepared to consecrate our hearts and to be ready to fear God. Are we ready and willing to do all this in order that we might be preparing properly to hear from God?

**Pray:** thanking God for speaking to us through His Word.

**Reflect:** how do I prepare to hear from God?

*God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. (v.20)*

A man purchased a statue of Christ at an auction and put it in the living room. The next day his wife decided the statue belonged in a different room. When their five-year-old daughter saw her mother moving the statue, she blurted out, “Where are you going to put God?”

What a question. Where are you going to put God? I wonder where you put God. Is he on the throne of your life? Does he have first place? Or is he relegated to certain compartments within your life? It’s OK for God to be in the church compartment and the Sunday compartment but not in the work compartment or my family compartment or my leisure compartment. God deserves and wants to be on the throne of our lives. He ought to be the number 1. Our lives should revolve around God and his Word and his desires and plans for our lives.

And so to help us anchor our lives well God gives to Moses and his people the Ten Commandments. They are his guidelines for good living. They begin with four commands that speak of the need to love God first and foremost and above all else. The latter 6 then speak of the outworking of this in our lives as we love others. When we love someone we will not want to cause them any harm or pain.

Moses then speaks of God testing them so they would not sin. That word test as it is translated elsewhere in Scripture often means we are to learn and move on. Here the word could well be translated experience. God wants us to experience him and his word and in that experiencing we learn and move on. As we learn the Ten Commandments and apply them they help us to live God’s way which helps us not to keep sinning.

**Pray:** asking forgiveness for the times we have allowed others first place in our lives and asking for God’s strength to keep him first.

**Reflect:** what has priority in my life at the moment? What do I put first?

*Anyone who curses his mother or father must be put to death. (v.17)*

The Ten Commandments have been given. They are God's guidelines for the Israelites (and for us) for good living while in the wilderness and more importantly for when they settle in the Promised Land. The commandments give the broad principles by which people ought to live. How is that to work in practice though? Well the Book of the Covenant which is chapter 21 through to the beginning of chapter 24 is the covenant code that takes those principles and applies them to the social context. The covenant code is made up of negative commands; it's made up of case laws, that is, illustrations of how the general principles of the ten words might be applied in a specific situation. It also contains, however, exhortations and promises. And so it's not like a typical modern legal code. In a modern legal code you wouldn't expect the code to pause and go into a series that recounts the promises of the government to the people or to go through a series recounting or exhorting the people to obedience, but that's exactly what you find in this Book of the Covenant. And it shows God's concern that the principles of the ten words would permeate the way society looked and worked and acted in Israel.

Take one example there in verse 17 about cursing your parents. The law is dealing with respect here. I think we do need to teach our children to respect their parents and to respect their elders. We have lost that in our day and age...you only need to come to our kids' club or youth café sometime to realise the lack of respect out there. I get concerned when parents sit back and let their kids' backchat them or someone else. We need to teach them the fifth commandment. Respect for parents will permeate other aspects and areas of their lives as they grow. *'Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.'* Proverbs 22:6

**Pray:** for the children in your family and within the church family. Pray for parents to teach them well.

**Reflect:** how do I deal with my children? Do I respect my parents?

*If a man...he must make restitution. (v.5)*

This chapter is full of restitution, of which there is far too little in ordinary Christian life. We try to make amends for injury done to another by an extraordinary amount of civility – we try and be nice to them; but we are reluctant in so many words to frankly confess that we have done wrong, and make proper reparation for the act or speech. We often excuse ourselves by the thought that we were fully justified in speaking or acting as we did, but to be honest we ought simply to accept we have done wrong, seek forgiveness and make amends.

Loosing an animal into another man's field (verse 5) - we may through our carelessness allow another to suffer detriment. The animal ought not to have been allowed to stray; and, as we let it loose, we should make amends for our carelessness in respect to our brother's interests. We wrong another not only by what we do, or permit to be done, but in what we carelessly fail to do.

Kindling a fire (verse 6) - the tongue is a spark that kindles a great matter. If we drop firebrands and lighted matches in the inflammable material of a circle of gossip, we should make amends to the person whose character may have been injured.

And of course the next set of laws here deal with social responsibility. When God gave His people instructions in the desert, He told them they had a responsibility to care for widows and fatherless children in the land (verse 22-23). They were to leave some of the harvest in the field for them, and every third year they took up a special tithe for the needy. God expected His people to hear the cries of the powerless, defend their rights, and care for them. Let us imitate our Father by hearing the cries of the needy in our world.

**Pray:** for the poor and needy in our world. Remember those homeless in our own city.

**Reflect:** do I respond to the cries of the helpless? In what ways could I respond practically to a local need?

*Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. (v.2)*

As children and young people we follow the crowd. If the ‘gang’ is heading into town we follow. If they start picking on someone we join in with the name calling. If they jump the garden fence to steal some apples we have to be in on it too. In the workplace the crowd buys into the lottery bonus ball so we don’t want to stand out and join in too. Everyone else takes some paper or some small items from work home with them so we do too. Or everyone else sneaks away 5 minutes early or comes in 5 minutes late so we follow suit. We follow the crowd.

The call of God on his people here in Exodus 23 is to not follow the crowd in doing wrong. It is to do as the prophet Micah records ‘*And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*’ It is to stand against the crowd and to do what God would have us do – or as the bracelet says these days WWJD – what would Jesus do.

Not only is it about not following the crowd but it is about doing what is right as well. An honest and kind man drove the streets of San Francisco for more than an hour to find the woman who had left her purse with \$1,792 in cash on the back seat of his cab. I like what he said when some of his fellow drivers ridiculed him for not pocketing the money. He responded, “I am a card-carrying member of the Christian faith, and what good is it to go to church if you don’t practice what you preach?”

God calls for his people to be honest enough to return a straying animal to its owner, even if that person were an enemy (v.4). They were to be so concerned about making sure that a poor person got fair treatment that they would help him, even when it was a costly thing to do (v.6-9). Landowners were to let their farm lie idle every seventh year and allow the poor to glean freely from it (vv.10-11).

**Pray:** for strength to not follow the crowd and to follow Jesus completely.

**Reflect:** in what ways do I follow the crowd? What does the Lord require of me?

*Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. (v.4)*

Moses comes down and tells the people about the Laws that God commanded. The people answer together and say ‘*Everything the Lord has said we will do.*’ - just like they had said back in chapter 19. Of course, it won’t be long before the people are in rebellion and idolatry (Exodus 32). But before you think, “Oh, those foolish Israelites!” remember that the same thing often happens to us.

When you have an encounter - experiencing God, or hearing His Word - you can’t help but desire to live righteously. We often feel that way after a special convention or concert or ministry meeting. Unfortunately, when that experience or hearing fades into the distance, so does the desire for dedication. Our hearts quickly grow cold, and our desires rapidly turn to focus on the flesh. That is why we need to continually be experiencing God and hearing His Word. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 119:9-11 ‘*How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*’ When you wander from the Word, unrighteousness will not be far behind.

Moses knew that you can’t trust people to remember and repeat with reliability, so he wrote these things down. When God’s Word is written down, we can trust that we have the exact truth. We’re not relying on oral history to know the events of the past. And of course not only did Moses write the words down so that the people would not forget so did God. Later in the chapter God tells Moses to come up the mountain and he will give him tablets of stone with the law and commands engraved on them.

We ought to be so grateful that we have God’s Word written down and recorded for us. We have ready access to it. The challenge is to read it regularly and to obey it always. And like the Psalmist, hide it away in your heart.

**Pray:** thanking God for his Word and asking his help in obeying it.

**Reflect:** how well do I know God’s Word? Have I hidden it in my heart?



*Then have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them.  
(v.8)*

God is coming to dwell among his people. He is no distant God. But he needs a place to dwell where the people can come and worship him. God is going to give Moses a glimpse of something special while on the mountain, and Moses is going to be asked to make a copy of it in the building of the tabernacle. This will be the sanctuary. Now sanctuary may bring to your mind something glorious and beautiful, like the place that you're sitting in right now, but Exodus 26 makes it clear that God is asking Israel to build Him a tent. Take that in for a minute. The God of the universe is asking Israel to build Him a tent, not a palace, not a castle, not a cathedral, but a tent. The tabernacle would have been something like the tent of a desert sheik. Yes, that would have been a lavish, in some ways a grand place, to entertain one's visitors, but it's so clear here that in God asking Israel to build Him a tent, we are seeing a picture of His marvellous condescending grace.

Moses is then given very specific instruction for the building of the Tabernacle and all that will be in it. We find here the design for the Ark of the Covenant, the table and the lampstand. Find a commentary and look in detail at the design of each of these items and what they mean. And the people are called to come and give to the work. And the interesting thing is they are called to come and give freely but the giving is also costly. These people have been slaves for years and have never done anything voluntarily. Now the Lord says receive from those who have been prompted to give. And when you look at the list of items required we see the cost involved. Our giving to God should be done freely and cheerfully but it will also in all likelihood be costly.

**Pray:** thanking God for his grace and his desire to come and dwell with his people

**Reflect:** your own giving to God. Is it done freely and cheerfully? Do you give as you are able or do you scrape around for the loose change in your pocket? Is your giving carefully thought through?

*Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.  
(v.30)*

Moses is reminded in the middle of this chapter about doing everything according to the plan. God has revealed to him on the mountain how the tabernacle was to be constructed and all that was to be in it. He was informed of the plan right down to the material and colours. This can often be so difficult for us in church meetings – how many times have we spent ages arguing over the colour of the paint for the walls in the church. God gives the specific instructions to Moses and says follow them. And already we see here the emphasis on God's instructions, and an emphasis on our obedience to God's revealed instructions.

This chapter is all about curtains. The final 3 verses detail the curtains for the Most Holy Place. They are to be blue, scarlet and purple. Significant colours. Blue is the colour of the sky and it reminds us of the Heavenly origin of the Lord Jesus. He is the Son of God. Scarlet is the colour of blood and it speaks of Jesus as the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of man. Purple is the colour of royalty and it reminds us that Jesus Christ is the King of Kings. Purple is made by blending equal amounts of red and blue. Jesus Christ is a perfect blend of God and man. He is 100% both at the same time.

Pure, white linen was the cloth that was to be used. This speaks of the purity of the Lord Jesus. It reminds us that He was sinless. Notice that this cloth was to be 'finely twisted'. This tells us that the cloth used was to be of a special weave. It would be different from any other cloth. So it is with Jesus! There has never been another man like Him! In His person, He was the perfect blend of Deity and humanity. He is the God-Man! He is unique for He is God in the flesh.

**Pray:** thanking God for his instructions for living throughout the Bible and ask for help to keep following them.

**Reflect:** on the fine detail of the curtains for the Most Holy Place and praise God for all the signs that point to Jesus.

*Build an altar of acacia wood... (v.1)*

We see before us here in Exodus the requirements for the altar of burnt offering. This was important for the people of Israel for every time they came to the tabernacle they first approach the altar. The outer altar taught the Old Testament believer that the only way into communion with God was through sacrifice. This outer altar was the very first thing that a worshipper would see when entering into the tabernacle courtyard. The altar visibly drove home the point to every worshipper in Israel for 1500 years that you could not come into God's presence without sacrifice.

What does the author of Hebrews say? In Hebrews 9:22, *'In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.'* It is that point that the altar makes. When you come into the temple courtyard and you see the altar you're reminded, "I can't fellowship with God without the shedding of blood, without the offering of sacrifice, because I'm a sinner and He is holy." And that principle, that there is no communion apart from atonement, is universal since the fall. The great thing is we come now standing in and trusting in the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God.

There was an Irish Republican Army bombing in the Fleet Street area of London in the early 1990's and the wonderful church of Dick Lucas, Saint Helens Bishopgate, was badly damaged in that bombing. When they rebuilt the sanctuary after the bombing, they left out the old altar that had been built into that Church of England sanctuary. And one of the local council members was incensed. He said, "How could you have a church without an altar?" And they wrote back to him the words of Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." Jesus Christ is our altar. And so the principle is, Jesus is our altar. He is the one who provides the atonement that brings us in to the presence of God.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**Reflect:** on the cross of Christ and the price Jesus paid.

*Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart... (v.29)*

We now reach the point where the garments of the priest are detailed out for us. We might look at this passage and get lost in the minute detail which is given but there is so much even here for us to ponder. Read it through slowly and stop at the end of each section and ponder what is going on. The intricate detail of God's instructions indicate at least one thing about our worship of God: it's important. God takes His worship very seriously, and this is apparent from the sheer detail of the instructions in this passage. The great care and specificity of this relatively minor matter of the high priestly and priestly garments shows us that God takes worship very seriously. He even orders directions regarding the underwear that is to be worn by the priests (verse 42)! Did you notice that? It is such an awesome and privileged thing to come into His presence that every divine detail must be attended to.

Do the colours of the garments catch your attention? They ought to for they are the same colours used in the inner tent of the tabernacle. They were "colour-coordinated" with the tabernacle. If the tabernacle is to be a model of heaven, then there's a little bit of heaven in the priests' clothing. God wants us to be representatives of heaven.

Notice too that in the breastpiece there are 12 precious stones to represent the twelve tribes. If you look carefully at the twelve stones that were put on the breastplate, you will discover that they're the same stones that make up the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:19-20). Again, wearing around a little of heaven. And then since he carries the breastplate over his heart, the priest carries the burdens of the people not only on his shoulders but on his heart. Prayer ought to be a labour of love. If you aren't falling in love with people the more you pray for them, then perhaps something's wrong. I find that when my heart is right, and my praying is correct, I fall more in love with God's people as I pray for them.

**Pray:** worshipping God for his beauty and majesty.

**Reflect:** do I take worship of God seriously? Do I come prepared and focused on him?

*This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day...an offering made to the Lord. (v.38, 41)*

We move on from the design of the tabernacle and the garments of the priests to the consecration of those priests. In Old Testament times one could not get close to God unless proper sacrifice had been made for sin. You had to be right before God. And so the ritual is given here for the priest and it is given in fine detail. Sin has to be atoned for. As we get to the end of the chapter we see the description given for the continuous daily sacrifice. Every day they were to sacrifice to God. This is part of what their ministry was all about, daily burnt offerings, once in the morning, once in the evening. Daily consecration to God; daily commitment to God.

I remember the big change that happened in my life when I realised that God wanted more of me than just a few hours on Sunday - He wanted all of me (24/7), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Now that doesn't need to be full-time Christian ministry like me but it does have to be full-time Christian living. We can't simply come on a Sunday and offer our worship to God for an hour and then go away and live as we please the rest of the time. He wants all of us. He, the God of the Universe, wants to dwell with us and commune with us all day every day. How amazing is that?

Of course we don't have to come with daily sacrifices of lambs etc for Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, came and put an end to the sacrificial system. He paid the price once and for all. His blood was shed upon the cross of Calvary and made an atonement for our sin. The Lord does want our lives though to be a daily living sacrifice to him (Romans 12:1-2).

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus the perfect sacrifice and thanking him for forgiveness of your sin.

**Reflect:** is my life a living sacrifice? Do I daily consecrate myself to God and am I daily committed to God?

*Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting they shall wash with water so that they will not die. (v.20)*

In the tabernacle courtyard, the basin for washing stood between the altar of burnt offering and the tent, and the priests and Levites had to stop there regularly to wash their hands and feet. If they entered the tent or served at the brazen altar without first washing, they were in danger of death. There are no specifications that we read of here for the size or shape of the basin nor are there details given for how it was to be carried when the nation moved to a new location. That means these are unimportant. What is important is what the basin holds and its purpose. The basin holds water and the priests and Levites were to wash in it often.

From what we have read in previous chapters we can assume that they have made sacrifice on the altar and have been cleansed of their sin so why the basin? The Old Testament priest became defiled not by sinning against God but by serving God. Their feet became dirty as they walked in the courtyard and in the tabernacle (there was no floor in the tabernacle), and their hands will have become defiled as they handled the sacrifices and sprinkled the blood. Therefore their hands and feet needed constant cleansing, and this was provided at the basin.

And is not the same then true for us in life. Jesus has paid the ultimate price for our sin by dying on the cross to save us. He has atoned for our sin. We are a forgiven people once and for all. And yet in life we get dirty and defiled. Even after repenting and turning to follow Jesus we still muck up; we still make mistakes; we still sin. And so every time we come into his presence we ought to come examining our hearts, confessing our sin and receiving the cleansing Jesus offers. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we will but continually go to him (1 John 1:9). Whenever we come to worship we should always begin with confession.

**Pray:** confessing any sin to God and asking for his cleansing.

**Reflect:** do I rush into worship without preparing my heart properly? Do I take time to examine my heart and confess my sin?

*I have given skill to all the craftsmen... (v.6)*

A bricklayer whose brother was a famous violinist was talking with the head of the construction company where he worked. “It must be great to have a brother who is known around the world,” said the executive. He quickly added, “Of course, we must accept the fact that talent isn’t equally distributed - even in the same family.”

“That’s right,” replied the bricklayer. “Why, my brother doesn’t know the first thing about bricklaying. It’s a good thing he can afford to pay others to build a house for him.”

There is a great reminder in that story that we have each been given unique gifts and abilities by God. We cannot all be good at everything. We are, as Paul will later suggest, members of the one body although we make up the different parts. We need each other. Exodus 31 tells us that God gave certain people special skills to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels, and in all kinds of workmanship to help build the tabernacle. None is more important than the other. We should look at each other equally and confirm and delight in each others gifts and abilities.

What is your talent? Have you worked it out yet? Are you using it for God’s glory? If not the challenge is to ask God to reveal your ability (ask others you trust to help as well) and then to seek to use it. The tabernacle was only completed as God gave gifted people to the task. We can only serve him fully and properly in the church when we work together – using our gifts and allowing others to use theirs.

**Pray:** thanking God for each other and for the different gifts, talents and abilities he has given us all.

**Reflect:** am I using my gifts, talents and abilities to serve God and bring glory to His name? How can I serve God more fully?

*But now please forgive their sin... (v.32)*

I remember driving when I was younger during a cold spell and my windows were very dirty so I sprayed some water onto the window. Because it was so cold and the car still not fully warmed up, the water almost immediately froze on impact. How quickly water turned from a liquid into a solid. In a way this is an illustration of how quickly our hearts can cool toward God.

That happened to the ancient Israelites. After God miraculously rescued them from slavery, they became impatient when Moses climbed Mount Sinai to meet God and didn't return according to their timetable. They thought he had left them so they asked Aaron to make another god for them to worship. Aaron could have and should have said no...but he was too quick to try and please the people. Perhaps he too wondered where Moses had got to. Aaron had them give him all their gold and he melted it down and formed it into a golden calf. The people came and worshipped before the calf the next day forgetting all about Moses and more importantly God. And let's remember God has in recent days rescued them from Egypt, fed and watered them, and given them his Ten Commandments. How quick they are to forget.

Not only did they forget but then the finger pointing comes. The Lord sees what is happening and sends Moses back down the hill. He asks Aaron what is going on and he blames the people just as the people blamed Moses for leavening and God for being absent. Aaron says 'it wasnae me!' Not only does he blame the people but he says that he simply threw the gold into the fire and it came out like a calf – he lied.

Fortunately Moses stands up for his people and attempts to save them. He begs for God's forgiveness. Friends let's make sure we do not forget God and turn so quickly from him. Stick close to Him every day and avoid sin. And when we do sin, let us immediately seek His forgiveness.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive our sins.

**Reflect:** 'Count your blessings, name them one by one' and thank God for all He has and is doing in your life.



*The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. (v.11)*

The congregation listened intently as the pastor began to pray: “Dear heavenly Father . . .” Suddenly he was interrupted by a voice saying, “Hey there, good buddy!” Everyone began to laugh when they realised the voice was coming from the radio mic. It was picking up the conversation of a truck driver on his CB radio! Not much was accomplished in the service that day, because the congregation continued to chuckle about the voice that made them think God was responding to their pastor and calling him His “good buddy.”

Moses knew what it was like to be a friend of God - a relationship that went beyond buddies. The Lord often talked with Moses “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” Moses was close in his relationship with God. He had experienced that call of God from the burning bush. He had spent time with God on top of Mount Sinai. Now he is spending time with God in the ‘tent of meeting’. And people knew it was God meeting with Moses for a pillar of cloud would come down to symbolise this.

Moses shared everything with God. In the beginning he shared his fears and worries about going to Pharaoh. Just recently he had pleaded with God to forgive the sins of the people. Who other than a friend can share such intimate thoughts; who other than a friend can beg for mercy for others. Moses had a close relationship with God.

Incredibly we too can have that kind of relationship. We are friends of God too thanks to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Through Jesus’ death he has torn the temple curtain in 2 and allowed us access to the holy of holies. We can come and pray to our Father. Let us spend time often with God in prayer – speaking as to a friend.

**Pray:** thanking God for our relationship with Him.

**Reflect:** do I spend time often with God? Am I regularly in prayer?

*His face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD (v.29)*

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) was a brilliant theologian whose sermons had an overwhelming impact on those who heard him preach. One sermon in particular, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” moved hundreds to repentance and salvation. That single message helped to spark the revival known as The Great Awakening (1734-44).

Edwards did not have a commanding voice nor an impressive pulpit manner. He used very few gestures, and he read from a manuscript. Yet God’s Spirit moved upon his hearers with conviction and power. John Chapman tells the story of the spiritual preparation involved in Edwards’s most famous sermon:

For three days Edwards had not eaten a mouthful of food; for three nights he had not closed his eyes in sleep. Over and over again he was heard to pray, “O Lord, give me New England! Give me New England!” When he arose from his knees and made his way into the pulpit that Sunday, he looked as if he had been gazing straight into the face of God. Even before he began to speak, tremendous conviction fell upon his audience. He had spent time with God and he reflected something of God’s glory.

After spending time on Mount Sinai with God, Moses came down and his face was shining radiantly. The people were scared to go near him because they knew he had been with God. In fact he had been with God for forty days and nights and during this time he had been fasting as well. Time spent with God will change us. We will reflect his glory on earth. Every day before you go out to meet the world, spend some time with God by reading His Word and talking to Him in prayer. Spending time in His presence will bring the sunshine of heaven to your face, and others will observe this in you throughout the day.

**Pray:** asking God to kindle a heart of passion for being in His presence often.

**Reflect:** do I spend time often with God? Do I reflect His glory in my life after spending time with Him?

*These are the things the LORD has commanded you to do. (v.1)*

The coming chapters are virtually a repeat of all that Moses received from the LORD on Mount Sinai in chapters 25-31. Moses' is deliberate in repeating all this. But it has changed slightly. In chapters 25-31 Moses is sharing what the people will do for God but come chapter 35 he is sharing what they are doing and that it is being done at the command of God. And so, the difference between chapters 25-31 and 35-39 is first that God is giving the command, and then the people of God are fulfilling it.

And the reason for this is the intervening chapters. As Moses was up the mountain receiving the instructions the people have turned their back and gone their own way. They messed up. They disobeyed God. They disobeyed the first 2 commandments. Here Moses is recounting that they have given up on doing it themselves and are now doing it God's way. What's being emphasised in these chapters is that the people understood how they had messed up with the golden calf and now they were finished with doing it their way, and they were going to do it the Lord's way.

The other interesting point to note here is the mercy of God. The fact that they're building that tabernacle at all tells you that God in His mercy, was not only gracious to spare them from their sins, but He was willing to still come and dwell in their midst. The very fact that they're building that tabernacle which He had given the instructions to Moses for, is a sign of His grace. They deserved to be blasted and having not been blasted, not only does God spare them, but He goes right ahead and enters into fellowship and communion with them through this tabernacle. So the repetition of that material serves to remind us of those truths.

Moses has already reminded us in 34:6 that *'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'*

**Pray:** thanking God for his amazing grace, mercy and love.

**Reflect:** on the many ways God has been gracious to you and strive to live for Him alone.

*The people are bringing more than enough... (v.5)*

The Lord loves a cheerful giver and server. Preparations are underway to begin the work on the tabernacle. What is needed though are workers and materials. God has already pointed Moses in the direction of Bezalel and Oholiab. God has prepared the way – he has gifted these men with skill, ability and knowledge. More than that God we learn here that God has given these two ability to teach. They have skill to teach their trades. This way the work will always be able to continue. They are training up the next generation. And there is an element to all aspects of our service for God that we should always be training up our successors.

It's often tempting in church life that when we need helpers for things we resort to arm twisting and “gentle persuasion”. We feel we have to pressurise people into serving and helping. The lesson here is not to be doing that. God's standard is that service should come from a heart that wants to serve. And here those who were willing came and offered their services. And so we follow Jesus' instructions and pray for more labourers (Mat 9:36-38).

The other remarkable point here is the cheerful, lavish and abundant giving of the people. Moses has told them what is needed but he has also told them that only those who are willing should bring their offering to the Lord. The people, stubborn and disobedient at times, nevertheless rose to the occasion and voluntarily brought much more than was needed for the building of the tabernacle. The craftsmen end up coming to Moses and getting him to stop the people giving. What a problem to have!!

Their love and respect and gratitude for God has led them to freely give of themselves - their time and their talents. May we do likewise.

**Pray:** thanking God for His many blessings and asking Him how He wants you to serve Him.

**Reflect:** on your giving to God – is it freely, cheerfully and lavishly given?

*Bezalel made the ark...they made the table...they made the lampstand...they made the altar of incense. (v.1, 10, 17, 25)*

Having failed God so miserably at the foot of Sinai with their worship of a golden calf, the people are now desperate to obey all his commands and do as the Lord says. They have begun that with their offering of materials and their skills in chapter 35 & 36. They then made the tabernacle as per the given instructions in chapter 36. With the tabernacle made precisely to plan, the craftsmen move on to the other items. Here in chapter 37 it is the ark, the table, the lampstand and the altar of incense.

The ark is situated within the Most Holy Place so in time to come would only be seen by the people as it was moved from location to location with them. In fact the Ark of the Covenant led the way as the people marched on. It represented the power and authority of God. It also teaches us about Jesus. It was made of wood which speaks to us of His humanity but it was completely covered in gold, which speaks of His deity.

As the priest would enter the Holy Place he would find on his right the table, on his left the golden lampstand and ahead of him the altar of incense. They made each of these just as the Lord had commanded. On the table you will remember from 25:30 was to be placed the bread of the Presence. When the bread was placed on the table it was always accompanied by incense. The use of incense suggests that the bread was actually a 'meal offering' to the Lord in thanksgiving to him for their daily bread. The golden lampstand would light the way for the priest in the tabernacle. There was no natural light so they needed to see. Symbolically it also points to Jesus, the light of the world. And of course the altar of incense points us to prayer. Incense is often a picture of prayer in the bible. Whenever the priest burned the incense it was a call to the people for a time of prayer.

**Pray:** thanking God for the exact detail of the tabernacle and the many 'pictures' we see in every item.

**Reflect:** on our attitude to obeying God and following all His instructions.

*Bezalel...made everything the LORD commanded Moses. (v.22)*

Chapter 38 continues with the people making everything as the Lord has commanded Moses. This time we see the altar of burnt offering, the basin for washing and the courtyard as well as a final look at the materials used. We read of course that Bezalel made everything the Lord commanded Moses. The people were obedient to God.

The people would come to the entrance at the outer courtyard. Here the priest would check their animal to ensure it was perfect for sacrifice and then he would take it from them and offer it on the altar. The altar was made to the exact measurements and standard set by God. Have you noticed how often he describes the poles that were attached to these pieces of equipment? Why? It had to be mobile. This was the mobile sanctuary, and God was going to go with His people, so the sanctuary had to go with them, and it was made to be portable. Thus, the rings and poles on all this equipment.

The basin is mentioned again and this is placed between the altar of burnt offering and the entrance to the Holy Place. Thus the priest could wash his hands and feet before entering. The outer courtyard is mentioned and just to help you picture this it is 150ft by 75ft which is actually about the size of one half of a football pitch.

Every spiritual need of the Jewish people was met in the provisions of the tabernacle. What the Old Testament believers had in the tabernacle and later the temple, God's people today have in Jesus Christ. The furnishings and ceremonies point to Jesus and reveal the many glorious aspects of His character and the salvation he gives to all who trust Him.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus – all his characteristics and the salvation he brings.

**Reflect:** on some of the many characteristics of Jesus and allow them to lead you to praise Him.

*Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded. (v.43)*

We begin with the completion of the last tasks – the making of the priestly garments including the ephod and the breastpiece which we have thought on before. Again repeated throughout this section are the words ‘as the Lord commanded.’ Everything is being done properly – even down to the finest detail. There is no skimping, no cutting corners, and no shoddy workmanship – everything is done for the Lord and as he has instructed. In our service for God we ought to give him our very best. So often in churches we skimp and save – we don’t even give it as good a makeover as we would our own homes – in fact we often don’t treat the church building as well as we do our own home. Haggai prophesied about that very attitude. The Lord demands our very best and our very best is the least we should offer to him.

Finally the moment arrived when the different tasks assigned were all completed, and the result was ready for formal presentation to Israel’s leader. And notice that no one person is singled out for special mention or award; instead the whole nation was represented as doing everything in accordance with the Lord’s instructions to Moses.

Fittingly enough the one who had been with God on the mountain and had passed on to the people the blueprints for everything connected with the Lord’s tabernacle personally inspected the work and confirmed its successful completion. This is quality control. Everything is checked and double checked. And everything passes with flying colours. Moses is happy and he blesses the people. They have remained obedient to God and have given of their very best in this construction work. That’s all the Lord wants from us – our very best. Will you offer that to him?

**Pray:** asking for forgiveness for the times we have mistreated and neglected the church building and the work of the Lord.

**Reflect:** on what you offer to God – is it your best and all or is it simply a little part?

*Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it. (v.9)*

The tabernacle is complete...all that is required now is for it to be set up. This chapter deals with the instructions for setting it up in the first 15 verses and then the actual setting up of it in the following verses. And note that Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him. Moses is still faithful...he follows the Lord wholeheartedly and serves him fully and completely.

Moses is told to consecrate the tabernacle – the very pieces, the parts of the tabernacle are to be consecrated for their service. They are to be set apart for a holy use. They're common...they're beautiful, they're expensive, but they're common objects being set apart for a holy use, and so they're to be consecrated. Moses is to anoint them with oil.

What does it mean to anoint with oil? When something or someone was anointed with oil, they were consecrated. The word consecrated means, "to sanctify, dedicate, make holy." In pouring oil on it or him, they were setting apart for the Lord.

Now that is a beautiful picture of what happens to us. Remember that oil is a typological picture of the Holy Spirit. And when God pours out His Holy Spirit onto us, we are consecrated, set apart, exclusively for His use. We see this brought up in Scripture several times. Peter preached in Acts 10:38 '*You know how...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...*' When Samuel anointed David, the Holy Spirit was also poured out on him: 1 Samuel 16:13 '*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.*' May the oil of the Holy Spirit be poured out upon you and consecrate you for the exclusive use of God.

**Pray:** asking God to fill you with His Holy Spirit and use you in His service.

**Reflect:** have I given myself completely to God? Am I filled with the Spirit and living for Jesus 100%?