

Threads
through
Exodus

Titus Chu

Threads through Exodus
by Titus Chu

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Contents

Introduction: From Creation to Glory	1
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Thread 1: God and His Names— a Progressive Revelation

1. I Am Who I Am	11
2. The Lord, the God of Your Fathers	15
3. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	23
4. God Almighty—El Shaddai	27
5. The God of the Hebrews	29
6. The God of Israel	33
7. Elohim-Jehovah	35

Thread 2: God and His Vessel— Moses

8. Drawn Out of the Water	41
9. From Prince to Shepherd	45
10. The Burning Thornbush	49
11. Called to Serve	53
12. Answering God's Call	57
13. Progressing in Service to God	63

14. Knowing God through His Works and Ways	67
15. “Come Up to Me”	73
16. Seeing the Glory of God	79

Thread 3: God and His Testimony— the Children of Israel

17. Exodus	87
18. Life under Pharaoh	91
19. Learning to Trust God’s Process	95
20. The Exodus from Egypt	99
21. The Test of Bitter Waters	105
22. Food in the Wilderness	109
23. The Thirstiness in Rephidim	113
24. The Law, the Ordinances, and the Feasts	117
25. Making a Molten Calf	121
26. Becoming the Testimony of God	125

Thread 4: God and His Rest— the Feasts

27. Signs and Feasts	131
28. Feasting for God’s Testimony	135
29. Holding a Feast in the Wilderness	139

30. The Feasts of Israel	143
31. The Children of Israel's Experience of Rest	151
32. Resting by Relying on God	157
33. The Sabbatical Year	159
34. The Year of Jubilee	163
35. The Feasts of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Firstfruits	165
36. The Feast of Pentecost	169
37. A Living of Bringing Offerings	173
38. Maturity in Life	177
39. The Offerings of the Feast of Tabernacles	181

Thread 5: God and His Work— the Tabernacle

40. The Tabernacle and Its Furniture	187
41. The Altar of Burnt Offering	191
42. The Bronze Laver	193
43. The Table of the Bread of the Presence	197
44. The Golden Lampstand	201
45. The Golden Incense Altar	203
46. The Romantic Living of the Golden Incense Altar	207

47. The Ark of the Testimony	211
48. Aaron's Budding Rod	215
49. The Way of the Tabernacle	219
50. The Outer Court of the Tabernacle	221
51. Needing One Another	225
Works Cited	229

Introduction: From Creation to Glory

God and Man in Exodus

The entire Bible describes the relationship between God and man. Everything in the universe points to this. Without God, the universe would not exist. Without man, the universe would have no meaning. Without God, there would be no man (Gen. 1:26). Without man, God would be alone (cf. Gen. 2:18; Isa. 54:5; Eph. 5:31–32).

God told Moses that His name is “I Am Who I Am” (Exo. 3:14). Since God is I Am Who I Am, He is all-sufficient and self-sufficient. So, why did He create man? The creation of man implies that God needs man to display His all-sufficiency. This is why He came to save, lead, and bless man. God, as the all-sufficient I Am Who I Am, needs man, and man also needs God. Without God, man will be empty and without satisfaction. Without man, God can’t testify of His all-sufficiency.

Genesis

The seeds of the divine revelation throughout the entire Bible are found in Genesis. Here we see how God created man. Through the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we see how God gains man and how man grows unto maturity. Through Joseph, we see how man can represent God to rule on the earth. If we have this kind of understanding, we will worship God for

His marvelous and wonderful works. How amazing that He works on us so that we can grow, be constituted, and mature in His divine life!

God's work of creation is a display of His power and glory. God's creation is powerful. He said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1:3). He said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters," and it was so (v. 6). He said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear," and it was so (v. 9). He said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind," and it was so (v. 11). He said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens....Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind," and it was so (vv. 20–25). All this displayed God's creating power.

God's creation is also glorious. When God created man, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (v. 26). So "in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (v. 27). Man "is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7). God's glory is related to His image. God's creation of man was glorious, and man will become the expression of the God of glory (John 17:22). Here in Genesis, there is not only the God of glory, but also a man who was created in His image so that this created man could express His glory.

When we read the stories of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we feel happy, encouraged, and comforted. However, at the end of Genesis, Jacob's entire household went down to Egypt (Gen. 46:27). Eventually, Joseph told his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob....You shall carry my bones up from here" (50:24–25). Although there is much spiritual meaning in his words, his words are sad. Joseph trusted God's faithfulness. Though he believed that God would accomplish the words which He swore to his fathers, Joseph's tone was sad. Finally, Joseph's body was put in a coffin in Egypt (v. 26). Since this marvelous God had done so many wonderful works, we may wonder why Genesis ends like this.

Joseph's death does not seem glorious, victorious, or complete. Thus, we need Exodus to continue Genesis so that we may see the other aspect of God's work.

Exodus

Genesis describes the work of God in individuals. But Exodus shows God's work not only in individuals but even more in a corporate man through whom He gained a kingdom, a testimony, a dwelling, and an expression.

In Genesis, God gained Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the persons of the house of Jacob. At the end of Genesis, Jacob's household included seventy people (Gen. 46:26–27). Yet in the beginning of Exodus, the children of Israel filled the land of Egypt (Exo. 1:7). When the children of Israel journeyed out of Egypt, there were six hundred thousand men (12:37). There were probably more than two million people in total. In the eyes of God, these two million people were a corporate man.

God desires a corporate man to be His testimony. In Genesis, God called Abraham to the land He would show him and promised to make of him a great nation and to bless him (Gen. 12:1–2). However, God didn't clearly explain to Abraham what kind of land he was going to, what kind of the nation he would become, or what kind of blessing he would gain. None of these were realized until God gained a corporate man to be His kingdom in Exodus.

God wanted to gain a corporate man not only to be His testimony but also to be His dwelling (Exo. 25:8). God needs a testimony to testify of Himself. He also needs a dwelling place to be His house and His resting place (Isa. 66:1).

It didn't take a long time for the children of Israel to come out of Egypt. It was probably only a year from the Passover to the time the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. During this year, God lead them to experience many miracles. In the end, though God filled the physical tabernacle with His glory, the children of Israel were the reality of that tabernacle, the built-up corporate man, the testimony of God, the dwelling of God, and the glorious expression of God.

The children of Israel in the Old Testament typified the believers in the New Testament. Today, we are the church, the built-up corporate new man, the testimony of God, the dwelling of God, and the glorious expression of God (Eph. 2:15, 21–22). In the church, we should testify God, become God’s resting place, and express His glory. When others see us, they should see God, His testimony, and His glory.

A Testimony of God’s Glory

There are forty chapters in Exodus. It begins with the children of Israel in Egypt, where they “were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them” (Exo. 1:7). However, they were suffering under the slavery of Pharaoh and groaned, crying out to God (1:11; 2:23). This opening is even sadder than the end of Genesis.

Having heard their groaning, God raised up Moses, making him a proper vessel. Through Moses, God led the children of Israel out of Egypt and freed them from the slavery of Pharaoh. Furthermore, God gave the children of Israel many experiences in the wilderness, eventually forming them into His glorious testimony.

Exodus ends with God’s glory filling the tabernacle (40:34). While Genesis has a glorious beginning with a sad ending, Exodus has a sad beginning with a glorious ending.

In Genesis, God called Abraham from his country, his relatives, and his father’s house to go to the land that He would show him (Gen. 12:1). Although Abraham didn’t know anything about the land he was going to, he never complained. Neither did his son Isaac nor his grandson Jacob. This was a characteristic of their lives. Yet the children of Israel in the wilderness were full of complaint, disbelief, and corruption. They even made a molten calf and worshipped it (Exo. 32:8). It is amazing that God was willing to save such complaining and disobedient people. He even desired to be with them, lead them through the wilderness, and through them build up the tabernacle so that His glory could be expressed among them. How marvelous!

I like Genesis because I like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How heavenly it is that God led Abraham to the land of promise! How divine it is that God blessed Isaac! How glorious it is that God transformed Jacob! But when I consider the children of Israel in Exodus, I wonder how can they cry out to God with their mouths yet forsake Him in their hearts.

After many years of following and serving the Lord, I realized that the experience of the children of Israel is also our church experience today. Our condition matches theirs. They cried out to God with their mouth, and so do we. They missed the food in Egypt, and we still have an appetite for the world we left to follow the Lord. When things go smoothly, we praise God. But when we encounter difficulties, we complain about God's leading, the arrangement of the church elders, and the situation in our church life.

We may not be like Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, but we are certainly like the children of Israel. Just look at our church life. When we complain to God, blame the elders, or criticize things in the church, we are just like the children of Israel. Their condition in Exodus matches our own.

The maturity of Jacob and the ruling of Joseph at the end of Genesis depict a healthy relationship between God and man. In Exodus, however, although the children of Israel were corrupt, rebellious, and far from God, they still became God's testimony on the earth. How marvelous! The glory of God filled the tabernacle in their midst!

The glory of God filled the tabernacle to such an extent that no one could enter (Exo. 40:34). There was only God in His glory. God will never allow anything or anyone to replace Him. When the glory of God filled the tabernacle, even Moses was not able to enter. Although without Moses there would be no exodus and no tabernacle, even he had to step aside at that moment.

Exodus focuses on the relationship between God and a corporate man as His dwelling, His testimony, and His glorious expression. Although the children of Israel had a poor beginning, they had a glorious ending. Moses matured and led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness to build up the tabernacle, which was filled with the glory of God. Through them, God gained a dwelling, a testimony, and an expression of His glory.

An Overview

This book is divided into five parts, or, “threads.” Each thread considers a different aspect of the book of Exodus and how it applies to us today as we seek to build up the church as God’s testimony. Thread 1 examines God’s progressive revelation of Himself as seen in the various names used to describe Him. Thread 2 looks at how God gained and perfected an individual man—Moses—so that He could gain the children of Israel. Thread 3 is the journey of the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. In the process, they were dealt with by God and labored together with Him to become His corporate testimony. Thread 4 shows that the purpose of leading the children of Israel out of Egypt was to celebrate a feast to God and to live a life of feasting before Him. Thread 5 is concerning the tabernacle, which depicts the will, work, and administration of God, the experiences of the believers, and the purpose of these experiences. It shows us in picture form what God wants to achieve in His economy.

God’s will in Exodus was to gain His chosen people, the children of Israel, to serve Him, worship Him, keep feasts before Him, and become His testimony. When He created man, He had a purpose in view. He also had a purpose when He performed signs in Egypt and in the wilderness. He was purposeful when He instructed the children of Israel to build the tabernacle. God never does things just to do them. He never leads or blesses just for the leading or blessing itself. Our God is a purposeful God who does all things according to His desire and will.

THREAD ONE:

GOD AND
HIS NAMES

A PROGRESSIVE
REVELATION

I Am Who I Am

The Revelation of God in Exodus

God has a will, a plan, and an economy. This economy is His life-dispensing process for the fulfillment of His will and plan. He also has His operation and work. When talking about God, we need to focus on His being. When talking about God's will and plan, our emphasis should be on His heart's desire. Through His operation and work, our God carries out His plan through His economy for the fulfillment of His will to satisfy His heart's desire.

In Exodus, it was through God's progressive revelation of Himself to the children of Israel that He, as the operating and working One, eventually carried out His economy to gain His testimony of glory. God wanted not only to free His people from the slavery of Egypt but also to make His name known to them (Exo. 6:3, 7).

Throughout Exodus, God revealed Himself to Moses and to His people. When He first appeared to Moses at the burning bush, He revealed Himself as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exo. 3:14) and as "the Lord, the God of your fathers" (v. 15). The Hebrew word for "God" here is Elohim, and the Hebrew word for "the Lord" is Yahweh or Jehovah. Later, when Moses built an altar, he called it "The Lord Is My Banner" (17:15). The Lord also revealed Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:15), the Mighty God, or El Shaddai (6:3), the God of the Hebrews (3:18), the God of Israel (5:1),

and Elohim-Jehovah (19:3–6). In Thread 1 of this book, we will explore all these titles of God.

The revelation of God concerning Himself can only be realized by His people through His work in them. In Exodus, God wanted to produce a corporate man—the nation of Israel—as His testimony. To accomplish this, He needed to reveal Himself to them in a progressive way. In the New Testament age, the corporate man God desires is the church. To produce this new man, firstly God reveals Himself to us. Then He works on us based on His revelation.

God’s work on us is like a young man’s courtship of a young woman. First, he sees her and is attracted to her. This attraction is just like a revelation. Yet this is not enough. He also needs to do something. He asks her out, and over a period of time they come to know each other. Then they may decide to get married. This is work issuing from revelation. God attracts and gains us in the same way.

Revelation produces divine works, and works deepen the revelation. This deeper revelation helps the works go even deeper, eventually causing us to be completely gained by God.

Sometimes we don’t recognize the works of God and complain, “Lord, why me? Why do I need to experience this kind of situation?” However, God wants to reveal Himself to us through these difficult environments. He continues working on us and revealing Himself to us in an ever deeper way. This causes us to grow into oneness with God and to become His expression.

I Am Who I Am

When Moses asked God what His name was, God answered, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exo. 3:14). Through this description of Himself, God revealed who He is.

How we describe God depends on who we have become based on the revelation of God we have received. In other words, others can tell how mature a Christian we are from our description of God. For instance, we may be asked, “How is your relationship

with God?” I am afraid that we may never have thought about this question before. We may attend Christian meetings and sometimes read the Bible yet remain very distant from God. It is difficult for us to consecrate ourselves to God if we only know Him in this way. We may barely follow Him or even regard Him as God. Neither will we feel He is glorious. If God seems distant to us, our relationship with Him is unhealthy. We all need God’s mercy to say, “Lord, I want to know You subjectively, not just objectively. I long to know You better and to become more intimate with You. I want to experience Your person and behold Your glory more.”

The Unchanging God

God reveals that He is I Am Who I Am (Exo. 3:14), indicating that He is unchanging (Psa. 102:25–27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). He is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). No one on the earth can make this claim, for everyone changes. Only God is the I Am forever. When I met the Lord and began to love Him fifty years ago, He was the I Am. Today, I can testify that He has not changed. Although so many years have passed, I can still touch Him and enjoy Him as the I Am. He was the I Am when He led me fifty years ago, and He is still the I Am as He leads me today. If the Lord allows me to remain on the earth for more years, I am assured that I can still experience Him as the I Am.

As to His being, our God is always the I Am. As to His works, He is still the I Am. No matter what we are, He remains the I Am. No matter what our condition is, He is still the I Am. No matter how we may change, God will say, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

As to His leading and work, our God is also the I Am. His purpose is unchangeable (Heb. 6:17). When we began to follow God, He was the I Am. While we are following God, He is the I Am. When He works on us in many ways, He is still the I Am.

The All-Sufficient God

When God says, “I Am,” the obvious question is, “I am what?” Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35), “I am the Light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door” (10:9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6), and “I am the vine” (15:5). He is whatever we need. If we feel empty, He is our satisfaction. If we are weak, He is our strength. If we feel hopeless, He is our hope. If we have no way out, He is our way. If we can’t live, He is our life. If we think there’s no meaning in our life, He is our reality. If we are poor, He is our wealth. To an orphan, He is a father. To a widow, He is a husband. With Him, we have everything. With Him, we are truly satisfied. Our God supplies all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). But if we say, “With God, I can make a great fortune,” we are preoccupied with making money. Our heart’s desire is not God. His riches toward us are not for the vain accumulation of wealth. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Cor. 9:8).

Moreover, this I Am is a living person. We should know Him in this way, not merely as doctrine. As a living person, Christ Jesus “became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Since He is the I Am, we can experience Him throughout our entire life. He is the I Am Who I Am.

The Lord, the God of Your Fathers

After God revealed to Moses that He is I Am Who I Am, He revealed further that He is “the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exo. 3:15). This name implies that God is triune, and this triune God has an economy. When He meets our needs, He is I Am Who I Am. When He accomplishes His economy, He is “the Lord, the God of your fathers.”

Elohim—The Mighty and Faithful One

The Hebrew word for “God” here is Elohim (Strong, H430), which is a plural noun of *Eloah* (Strong, H433). This indicates that God is triune. According to Strong, *Eloah* probably is a form of *El*, which means “strength; as adjective mighty; especially the Almighty” (Strong, H410). Elohim “signifies the putter forth of power. He who is called by it is the Being to whom all power belongs” (R. B. Girdlestone, 45). As Elohim, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom He promised the seed and the land. Since He is the Almighty One, He had the strength and power to be faithful to His word.

A mighty person is not necessarily faithful, and a faithful person is not necessarily mighty. Our God is not only mighty but also faithful. God takes care of us in His might and faithfulness, so we can entrust all things to Him.

Is there any company that will never close down? No company can remain in business forever because no company is utterly powerful or trustworthy. The employees may feel satisfied and secure with their salary and benefits, but their boss may be so worried about making payroll this week that he can't sleep at night. Only our God is absolutely faithful and mighty. If we are willing to follow Him and entrust our lives to Him, we will experience that He never fails to fulfill His promises. Because He is faithful and mighty, He never disappoints us. Praise the Lord! He is the faithful and mighty One!

The Godhead

God told Moses He was “the Lord, the God of your fathers” (Exo. 3:15). The Hebrew word for “Lord” here is sometimes rendered “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.” This name refers to His Godhead. “I Am Who I Am” is one of the many characteristics of the Godhead. Even though we will one day be like God in life and nature, we will never become I Am Who I Am, for this is reserved for God alone. The power of creation is also one of the characteristics of the Godhead. Only God can create things from nothing. Being all-sufficient is also a characteristic of the Godhead. In this universe, the needs of all creatures are met by the God who is all-sufficient. Also, only God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

Jehovah—The Eternal and Unchanging One

The Hebrew word for “the Lord” or “Jehovah” in Exodus 3:15 means “who is forever; self-existent” (Potts, 134). This indicates that He is the one “who was and who is and who is to come” (Rev. 4:8). Not only so, but He is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). He remains the same throughout the past, present, and future.

We can never fathom the name “Jehovah,” because no one understands the meaning of “who was and who is and who is to come.” Just as antiques lose their color and white pearls become

yellow, everything on the earth is corruptible and temporary. Nothing stays the same forever except God.

In this universe, only God is eternal, self-existing, and unchanging. His eternal attributes are the same before the foundation of the world, after the creation of man, and for eternity. The God we experienced in our initial salvation is the same today as He leads, guides, and supplies us. Just as He takes care of us today, He will still take care of us tomorrow, because He is “the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Though I have seen so many things change in the past fifty years of following the Lord, I know that God will never change. The joy of getting a new job will die. A new house will have many shortcomings and disappointments. Beloved children will grow up and leave to live their own lives. However, God never passes away or changes. The Lord I believed in fifty years ago is the same as the One I believe in today. He is unchanging, but our understanding of Him becomes ever deeper. Praise the Lord! He is the One “who was and who is and who is to come.”

Jehovah—The Life-giver

Many scholars say that the name “Jehovah” “is derived from *havah*, ‘to exist’” (Morrish, 321). Other scholars say it is derived from a Hebrew root meaning “the one bringing into being, life-giver” (Brown, 218). It is “a name of relationship with men.... [This] may be seen in the change from Elohim, the Creator, in Genesis 1, to Jehovah Elohim in chapter 2, when man was brought into relationship with God” (Morrish, 321). The name “Jesus” is the Greek version of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” which means “Jehovah the savior” (Morrish, 450). When we call upon the Lord Jesus, He saves us in life and dispenses life into us. He is the God who has a life-relationship with us.

Whoever touches God will be made alive. Even when we are overwhelmed with problems and feel dead, when we touch God, we will be revived. This is because Jehovah is the life-giving One.

Jehovah causes us to gain life. We can operate in the divine life because He is our life supply. Last year in a conference, I felt too sick to give a message. Yet as I began to speak, I sensed

this divine life flowing out from me. It was not my capability or eloquence but Jehovah who supplied life to me.

When we unite with the Lord, speak for Him, and operate in Him, Jehovah saves us and supplies life to us (Rom. 8:6, 10, 11). Due to His supply, the more we speak for Him, the more we gain His life, experience the anointing, and enjoy His presence. He is the Lord of life. Whenever we touch Him, we obtain life.

Jehovah not only supplies life to us but also sustains us in life, enabling us to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). The divine life within Christians never dies. Even if some have stopped meeting with other believers and act like unbelievers, Jehovah is still able to sustain them in life.

I know a Christian sister in Taiwan who hadn’t come to a church meeting for many years. One day as she played Mah-jong with three friends, her friends began criticizing Jesus. The more they criticized, the more uncomfortable she felt. When she could no longer tolerate it, she exclaimed, “Stop criticizing Jesus! I am a Christian!” Even though she had backslidden for years, the life within her never died. Even when this divine life isn’t manifested in us and we have no sensation of its sustaining power, the operation of life will spring into action as we encounter difficult situations.

From the time we believed, the Lord has continually nourished us with life. God is living and forever new; He is the eternal life. How wonderful it is that our experience and enjoyment of God is endless and inexhaustible! Everything has an end except the pursuit of God. We should never stop drawing nourishment from Him. The more we enjoy Him as our food, the deeper our life relationship with Him becomes. Uniting with Him in life makes us hunger more for God’s nourishment.

Jehovah’s Relationship with His People

Exodus presents a detailed depiction of the relationship between Jehovah, who sustains us in life and supplies us with life, and His chosen people. It is conveyed by these four uses of His name “Jehovah”: Jehovah our God (Exo. 5:3), Jehovah your

God (6:7), Jehovah their God (29:46), and Jehovah is My Banner (17:15).

Jehovah Our God

Moses used the phrase “Jehovah our God” in relation to the meaning of Israel’s existence and the testimony of the power of God before Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to [Jehovah] our God” (Exo. 5:3). He is not only Jehovah but also Jehovah our God (Exo. 5:3, 8:10, 27).

In our experience, going “a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to Jehovah our God” means that our God calls us in His power to walk out of the world, live in fellowship with Him, consecrate ourselves to Him, and serve Him. God has “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Now we live, move, and have our being in Him. Because we have this relationship with Him, we can call Him Jehovah our God.

When I studied at Taiwan University, I could call it my school. Many years after I received my degree from there, I was walking with an old friend on the campus. Since we still thought of it as our university, I expected that the young students would greet us when they saw us. To my surprise, none of them even spoke to us. Not until then did I feel that this was no longer my school, for I no longer had an active relationship with it.

We say that the city where we live is ours because we have a daily, on-going relationship with it. If we have a healthy relationship with God, we can boldly declare, “Jehovah is our God!”

Jehovah Your God

God told Israel, “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am [Jehovah] your God” (Exo. 6:7). As to God’s faithfulness to the children of Israel, He is called Jehovah your God (Exo. 6:7, 8:28, 23:25). “Jehovah our

God” refers to our relationship with God, while “Jehovah your God” refers to His relationship with us. When we say, “Oh God, You are my God,” we may feel somewhat proud, but if God says to us, “I am your God,” we may feel ashamed because we are not spiritually mature. Though we may not feel qualified for God to say this, yet He still says, “I am Jehovah your God.”

I really love this statement—“I am Jehovah your God.” If I were God, I would have told the children of Israel, “I am ashamed of being associated with you because you are disobedient, you like to talk back to me, and you sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play.” However, God loves to tell us, “I am Jehovah your God,” even though we are a rebellious people, for He knows that any spiritual progress we make depends on His unchanging faithfulness. As He faithfully works His richness into us bit by bit, He proudly tells us, “I am Jehovah your God!”

Jehovah Their God

Because the children of Israel were the testimony of God, He told Moses, “They shall know that I am [Jehovah] their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am [Jehovah] their God” (Exo. 29:46).

From our side, we should say, “Jehovah our God.” From God’s side, He says to us, “I am Jehovah your God.” In addition to this, God testifies to others, “I am Jehovah their God,” implying that we are His testimony. From this we can see how real and rich God is to us.

Jehovah Is My Banner

After Moses built an altar to the Lord, he “named it [Jehovah] is My Banner” (Exo. 17:15). A banner represents victory, as David indicated in his psalm: “We will sing for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners” (Psa. 20:5). A flag is a kind of banner. The famous Iwo Jima Memorial near Arlington National Cemetery depicts a group of soldiers raising the American flag in victory.

A banner also represents a testimony as indicated by David in another psalm: “You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth” (Psa. 60:4).

Furthermore, a banner shows us where we belong. When the children of Israel traveled through the wilderness, they used banners to indicate where the various tribes and families were to set up camp (Num. 2:2).

We experience Jehovah as our banner when we testify God in His triumph and experience and declare Him as our everything. Today few people have the experience of God as their banner because few want to build an altar for Him as Moses did. Only those who build an altar for God are able to experience Jehovah as their banner. As long as we consecrate ourselves on the altar to God, we will experience Him as our banner. If we are willing to fight for God, we will also experience Him as our banner. As we work and fight with God, we live and rest in the triumph of Christ. How glorious is the triumph we enjoy in our union with Christ!

3

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

After God revealed to Moses that He is I Am Who I Am, He revealed further that He is “the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exo. 3:15). This name implies that God is triune and that this triune God has an economy. When He meets our needs, He is I Am Who I Am. When He accomplishes His economy, He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

The experience of Abraham typifies God the Father in His economy; the experience of Isaac typifies God the Son who accomplishes God’s economy; the experience of Jacob typifies God the Spirit who applies the accomplishment of God’s economy to man. Therefore, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob portrays that He is the God who carries out His economy in His divine trinity.

The God of Abraham

The God of Abraham signifies that God the Father is the source. He is the One who calls us, and He is also the initiator of our spiritual pursuit. The apostle Paul tells us that “there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:11). Without God’s initiating, none of us would seek Him. In the same way that God called Abraham while he was serving other gods in Mesopotamia (Josh. 24:2; Acts 7:2), God as the God of Abraham calls us and causes us to believe into Him (Rom. 8:30). If we love

the Lord, it is God who causes us to love Him. If we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, it is God that causes our consecration. Our belonging to the Lord is His doing. We would never follow Him unless He drew us to Himself. On the day when we see the Lord, we shall boast of nothing but only praise Him as the God of Abraham (Rom. 3:27). He initiates all of our spiritual experiences. We believe in Him, love Him, and follow Him at His initiation.

Since our God is the God of Abraham, we need not worry, thinking, “I believe in Him now, but what if one day I don’t believe? I love Him today, but what if I don’t love Him tomorrow?” We only need to trust Him as the source and initiator of all our spiritual experiences. May we say to God with boldness, “Oh God, You are the initiator. I am willing to open to You, to fully trust You, and to let You work in me. I know You will bring me through to the end of this heavenly journey.”

The God of Isaac

Since Isaac was Abraham’s son, the God of Isaac signifies Christ, the Son of God. Just as “Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac” (Gen. 25:5), so the Father “has given all things into [Christ’s] hand” (John 3:35). As Abraham offered up Isaac, his only begotten son, and received him back in resurrection in type (Gen. 22; Heb. 11:17–19), so the Father offered up His only begotten Son, Jesus, on the cross and received Him back in resurrection. And just as Isaac received Rebekah as his bride (Gen. 24), so Christ today awaits the presentation of His bride who is making herself ready (Rev. 19:7; 21:2).

One of the main items described in Isaac’s life is his digging again the wells of his father Abraham in Gerar (Gen. 26). These wells are a picture of Christ becoming a rich life supply to us. He came that we “may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

All things are held together by Christ (Col. 1:17), and all positive spiritual matters are accomplished by Him. It is He who upholds our consecration. It is He who consummates our pursuit and growth. It is He who operates in our service, for

apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Through Him we are able to stand before the Lord, hold the truth, and keep running to the end (Jude 24–25). Praise the Lord! He is the God of Isaac!

The God of Jacob

Our God is the God of Jacob. Throughout his life, Jacob was dealt with by God until he was transformed into Israel. Today, God desires to work on us and transform us into “a people for [His] own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9). Most people are ordinary, yet because we not only have the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, but also the God of Jacob, we are becoming extraordinary people through the Spirit’s work on us.

After we believe in the Lord, love Him, and pursue Him for some time, others may notice we have changed. We are different because the divine life is changing us. This should be our story throughout our entire Christian life. It is the experience of being transformed by the God of Jacob. The Spirit will transform us until we are conformed to the image of the Son and constituted with the divine life (Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18).

Experiencing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

God as the God of Abraham is our initiator, and as the God of Isaac, He is our supply, taking care of us. As the God of Jacob, He works on us to transform us, conforming us to His image. Hence, we trust Him, enjoy Him, and let Him work on us throughout our life. Because our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we can be assured that the day is coming when we will match the desire of God.

God Almighty— El Shaddai

God told Moses, “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty” (Exo. 6:3). The Hebrew words for God Almighty are *El Shaddai*. After examining all uses of this name in the Old Testament, Robert Girdlestone concluded, “These passages appear to establish the fact that whilst the name *El* sets forth the might of God the title *Shaddai* points to the inexhaustible stores of His Bounty and the whole title might well be rendered God the All Bountiful” (Girdlestone, 57–58). *Shaddai* is from a root meaning “a breast” (Girdlestone, 56), implying love. God is *El*, which indicates that He is not only almighty but that He also takes care of us in His power. God is *Shaddai*, which signifies that He is all-sufficient, and He has a bountiful supply in His love to be our satisfaction.

From El Shaddai—God Almighty—we see His power as well as His love. His works of power operate outwardly, while His supply of love becomes our provision inwardly. When the Almighty God operates in His power, His operation is full of the enjoyable and nourishing supply of love that gives us harmony, peace, and joy unspeakable. Because His great power is of life, He can supply and feed us in life.

When I first came to the United States, I received a scholarship from a theological seminary in Texas. At the beginning of the semester, one of the professors told us, “Jehovah is Yahweh, and Yahweh is from the God of Babylon.” I thought to myself, “If the God I believe is the God of Babylon, I won’t believe in

Him any longer. Continuing to study in this school will lead me to Babylon.” Therefore, I left that school.

In one way, it made sense to stay at the seminary, since the scholarship was the source of my living. Without it, I knew neither how to live nor where to go. Later, someone I knew in Cleveland wrote to ask me to join him there. I prayed about this. Assured that it was from the Lord, I took a bus to Cleveland.

On this trip, I only had one hundred dollars, and I didn’t know how long it would have to last. Even though I only ate one hot dog a day, I felt so joyful. I knew the Lord would watch over me, but I was still careful how I spent my money. Neither did I worry about getting accepted by a school to satisfy my student visa, nor how I would afford it once I got there. I just felt I was in El Shaddai—He would hold me, support me, and lead me in His great power. My God was trustworthy. I simply needed to trust in Him. So all the way to Cleveland, I sang hymns, fellowshiped with the Lord, looked out the window, prayed, and read the Bible. Seeing so many passengers coming and going, I said to the Lord, “Thank You. I am different from these people because I have You as My God, and I know You will take care of me.” When we experience the flow of life and its enjoyment, we will be full of praise to the Lord as our El Shaddai.

In order to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God had to be their El Shaddai. God Almighty as El Shaddai not only led them out of Egypt in the supply of love but also brought them to the good land of Canaan (Exo. 6:7–8). Likewise, He is also our El Shaddai today. Because He leads us in His great power and satisfies us in His supply, our life is filled with joy and happiness beyond words. Eventually, He will sanctify us from the world and bring us to the enjoyment of the divine and heavenly riches of Christ as our good land.

The God of the Hebrews

God asked Moses and the elders to go to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and say to him, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us” (Exo. 3:18). God was pleased to reveal Himself as the God of the Hebrews. We may think this is not an appropriate title for God because He is infinite, glorious, and holy, whereas the Hebrews were lowly, weak, finite, and even corrupt. But God was delighted to be called the God of the Hebrews. Likewise, although we are weak, corrupt, and offensive to God, God is also pleased to be our God. We can’t measure how much God loves and treasures us. We should praise Him for His great love!

The root of the word “Hebrew” means “opposite side of the river” (Potts, 108). It can mean specifically to pass over a river. When Abraham was called by God, he crossed the Euphrates River to enter the promised land. When the children of Israel left Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and then entered the good land by crossing the Jordan River.

God doesn’t want us to stay where we are. Beginning with baptism, He wants us to keep crossing river after river, following Him continually. He is delighted to be the God of the Hebrews—the God of the river crossers.

Crossing into a New Realm

To cross a river is not only an experience but also a transfer

from one realm to another. God wants to transfer us from “darkness to light” (Acts 26:18).

For example, Christians who are students live in the realm of studying, yet their studying should be different from that of unbelievers. While others are studying for a better future, the goal of believers should be to serve God. Otherwise, they are in darkness, striving for their own future like everyone else. May the Lord change our center from seeking our own profit into seeking the profit of the kingdom of God by turning us from darkness to light.

I know a Christian student who is majoring in library science. Because he is a river crosser, his studying is different. Unlike others whose purpose is to be a librarian or a library director and then wait for retirement, his goal is to serve God, and he takes his studying just as a process to that end. He is in a different realm. It is crucial to realize that we are different from the people of the world because we have passed over the river and crossed from darkness to light.

Crossing from the Dominion of Satan to God.

Furthermore, we need to cross over “from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). The whole world is under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). For example, I’ve heard of a university that holds a special graduation party. They invite their alumni, and everyone celebrates by getting drunk. It’s hard to imagine that a good university would sponsor such a thing. Doesn’t this show that people are under the authority of Satan?

I know a Christian who began working for a company after he received his PhD. Every day he has to carefully secure his research results so that others won’t access his files and steal his ideas. So many PhDs are trying to steal each other’s ideas in their workplace. What a shame! They are under the authority of Satan.

God wants us to cross the river, to leave the dominion of Satan and come to Him.

Rescued and Transferred

God has “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). The world is not only under the dominion of Satan but also in the domain of darkness. Darkness blinds people, causing them to be lost and uncertain concerning the purpose of their life. For instance, a man may want to make more money. If this causes him to forget the real purpose of his life, it is wrong. It is easy for people to miss the meaning of their lives and be controlled by money, becoming its slaves. Those who care for nothing but making money and getting a higher social status eventually still have nothing waiting for them but a coffin. This is the result of living in the domain of darkness.

Some people in the domain of darkness live under the authority of immorality, gambling, alcohol, and other vices. They even like to compare who commits more sin and who’s more skillful in committing sin. They are completely unaware of losing their direction in life. We are thankful that God has delivered us out of the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

Crossing from Religion to Christ.

We also need to leave religion and cross over to the subjective experience of Christ (Phil. 3:6–7). It was never God’s intention that we be trapped in religion. He is calling us out of religion to cross over to the subjective experience of Christ. Therefore, in our Christian meetings, in our morning watch, in preaching the gospel, in our care of others, and in practical service in our church life, we should have the living Christ. Otherwise, we are still in religion and have not crossed the river.

Crossing from Vain Pursuits to Gaining Christ.

Formerly, we pursued many things, but now God wants to deliver us from all these pursuits that we may focus on gaining

Christ (Phil. 3:8). We were dead, but God has saved us from death and is calling us to cross over into the life and reality of resurrection (Eph. 2:1, 6). Today, we can live with God and walk with Him in resurrection. Praise the God of the Hebrews!

The God of Israel

Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness’” (Exo. 5:1). God is the God of Israel. He wants to be the God of those who are gained by Him, live for Him, and celebrate a feast to Him. A feast is a time of joy and celebration. Holding a feast gathers a group of people together.

The Testimony of God

As the God of Israel, God gains a chosen race to be a royal priesthood and to live as a holy nation. He desires a people for His own possession to be His testimony (1 Pet. 2:9). Therefore, “the God of Israel” indicates that God is working to gain a testimony.

Christ is “the image of the invisible God,” “all things have been created through Him and for Him,” and “in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:15–17). However, because not all things are subject to Christ yet (Heb. 2:8), God called the Israelites from among all peoples in the Old Testament and called us in the New Testament to be His chosen race and to become His testimony. How marvelous it is that this God who creates all things and upholds all things desires to gain a group of people to be His testimony! This is why He is pleased to call Himself the God of Israel.

We are thankful that today we have become the true Israel through the redemption of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 2:29). We are the children of God who will enter into glory one day (Heb. 2:10). All believers eventually will become a testimony of God in His authority, attributes, and accomplishments.

Celebrating a Feast to God

Furthermore, as saved sinners, we are to hold a feast to God in the wilderness (1 Cor. 5:7–8). We are sojourners in the world, just like the children of Israel in the wilderness. Our life, living, and purpose are for enjoying Christ—we are living in the reality of the Old Testament feasts. Because of the death and the redemption of the Lord Jesus, we have the reality of the Feast of Passover. Because our Lord became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection to enliven and mingle with our spirit, we have the reality of the Feast of Pentecost. Today, we should live in the reality of the Feast of Tabernacles, enjoying all the riches of Christ. This feast is also called the Feast of Ingathering—we grow together as God’s farm until we ultimately are reaped together as a glorious harvest.

All of this is implied in the title “the God of Israel.” How marvelous this is!

Elohim-Jehovah

Once the children of Israel reached the wilderness of Sinai, “Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain” (Exo. 19:1, 3). In Hebrew, “God” here is “Elohim” and “the Lord” is “Jehovah.” Moses went up to Elohim, but God answered him as Jehovah. So Moses experienced God as Elohim-Jehovah.

We can apply Moses’ experience to our living. Elohim is the faithful and powerful One, but it is as Jehovah that He supplies us in His power. We go to Elohim, and Jehovah answers us. We come before Elohim, and it is Jehovah whom we enjoy. We call upon Elohim, and it is Jehovah who responds to our calling. Elohim becomes our salvation in different kinds of environments, while Jehovah becomes our provision in life.

Only those who have the experience of the wilderness of Sinai will experience Elohim-Jehovah, for it was on Mount Sinai that Jehovah called Moses. “Sinai” means “thorny” (Smith, 634). Thorns originate from God’s curse (Gen. 3:17–18). Whenever we realize that the world we live in is cursed, we will experience God as Elohim-Jehovah.

The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world” (John 17:15–16). We live in this world, but we are not of the world. We should have a feeling that this world is full of thorns due to the fall of man and the curse of God. The place where we work is a wilderness full of thorns. The school we attend is under God’s curse. If we still

boast in such things, it shows that we have not yet experienced Elohim-Jehovah. The more we realize that everything in the world is cursed, the more we experience the salvation and supply provided by Elohim-Jehovah.

To experience Elohim-Jehovah, we also need to come to God as Moses did. It was only after Moses came to God on the mount that God declared to him, “I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself....You shall be My own possession among all the peoples,...and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo. 19:4–6).

The eagles represent God’s provision in the heavenly resurrection, while their wings represent God’s operation and work to make us His treasured possession, the children of God. Our experience of the operation and work of the triune God in the heavenly resurrected Christ brings us into God. As a result, we become His people, His own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. We should tell God, “I never realized that You have such an economy, power, and supply. How available and trustworthy You are to Your children. Lord, although we are so unworthy, You still desire us to be Your possession, Your people, Your kingdom of priests, Your enjoyment, and Your testimony. Thank You, Lord! May You be glorified through us!”

THREAD TWO:

GOD AND
HIS VESSEL

MOSES

Drawn Out of the Water

God led Israel out of Egypt in order to gain a corporate testimony on the earth. Yet before God could gain this testimony, He needed to gain and perfect an individual man—Moses. Only after this could He gain and perfect a corporate man.

Israel's Condition at Moses' Birth

At the end of Genesis, Joseph became ruler over all the land of Egypt, and “all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy” (Gen. 46:27). Eventually, these all died, but their offspring “were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them” (Exo. 1:7). Eventually, a new king rose up over Egypt who said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land” (vv. 9–10). So they enslaved them and made them build storage cities for Pharaoh in Pithom and Raamses (v. 11). The children of Israel in Egypt were characterized by their enslavement to build storage cities for Pharaoh.

Egypt represents the worldly system which is ruled by Satan, today's Pharaoh. Building “storage cities” is the only work available to those living in this world. By building these storage

cities for Satan, we help him to store the glory of the world (Matt. 4:8–9).

We should be touched very much when coming to this point. Most believers today remain in Egypt building storage cities for Pharaoh. If our hearts are occupied by the world and we become enslaved by it, we can't carry out God's will.

However, the more the Egyptians afflicted the children of Israel, "the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel" (Exo. 1:12). Church history shows that when Christians have been persecuted by the world—including the political and religious world—they also have multiplied.

A Bitter Life

The Egyptians made the lives of the children of Israel "bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them" (Exo. 1:14). A bitter life is a life without Christ. Though we may find our work interesting and rewarding, without Christ, our hard labor will eventually make life bitter.

This is the experience of many immigrants to the United States. When they left their home country, friends and relatives envied and congratulated them. However, when they arrived in this strange land, facing a new culture and an uncertain future, they felt their life was bitter. This is a feeling no one else understands. In spite of receiving scholarships, working with good professors, earning PhDs, getting good jobs with high salaries, and living like Americans, they still feel bitter deep in their heart. Outwardly, they live a life that others envy, but inwardly, they must admit that their life is bitter. It is the same with other matters in life. Living in the world without Christ, life is bitter.

Pharaoh's Cruel Command

Besides enslaving the children of Israel and compelling them into hard labor, the king of Egypt also gave this command to

the two Hebrew midwives: “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live” (Exo. 1:16).

In the Bible, sons can represent overcoming Christians. For example, in the book of Revelation, a woman gives birth to a son who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod (12:5). This son represents the overcoming believers. God desires to gain the overcoming ones (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), yet Satan, the Pharaoh of this world, wants to destroy them (12:3–4).

Why are there so few who love the Lord, consecrate themselves to Him, and live absolutely for Christ and the church? It is because the world uses every means to destroy those who desire to follow the Lord. Many seem to live a good life while loving the world, but as soon as they begin to love the Lord, they encounter many hardships. This is because the world always tries to ruin those who seek to follow the Lord.

Due to the persecution from Pharaoh, the continuation of the children of Israel was in jeopardy, and it looked as though they had no hope for the future. However, the midwives feared God. Instead of doing as Pharaoh had commanded them, they let the male children live (Exo. 1:17). Under God’s sovereignty, this was the environment into which Moses was born (2:2).

Drawn Out of the Water

When Moses was born, his mother saw that he was a beautiful child and hid him three months due to Pharaoh’s cruel command (Exo. 2:2). When she could no longer hide him, she put him in a wicker basket covered with tar and pitch and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him (vv. 3–4).

Then, in the sovereignty of God, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile. She saw the basket and sent her maid to bring it to her. When she opened it, she saw the baby crying and had compassion on him. She said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children” (v. 6). At this point, his sister offered to fetch a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. Pharaoh’s daughter

agreed, so she went and called the child's mother, who then took him home and nursed him for wages (vv. 7–9). When the child had grown, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who called him Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water" (v. 10).

The fact that Moses was drawn out of the water contrary to Pharaoh's evil command indicates that he was a child of Israel preserved by God. He survived under the threat of death. Moses realized from his childhood that he was not an Egyptian but an Israelite preserved by God.

Many people who follow and serve the Lord experience God's sovereign preservation. They survive in their threatening environment because of God's sovereign preservation. I know a man who had an experience like this. When he was seven years old, he accidentally entered into a wolf's den while he was playing. However, he wasn't harmed at all and escaped safely. This is God's preservation. Later, he became a servant of the Lord. As God preserved Moses, He will also preserve us.

Moses was sovereignly drawn out of the water. His whole life was a life of God's sovereign preservation. God preserved him when Pharaoh sought his life, forcing him to flee (Exo. 2:15), and also when he returned to face Pharaoh (5:1). Again and again, we see God's sovereign intervention to preserve His chosen vessel (12:41; 14:29; 16:6–7; 17:11–13; 32:7; 33:7–11). Praise God for His preservation!

From Prince to Shepherd

Tested and Prepared by God

Although Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter and became her son, under God's sovereignty, he was nurtured by his own mother (Exo. 2:8–9). He stayed with his family until he grew older (v. 10). Therefore, he knew that he was an Israelite and knew the things about God (Heb. 11:24–26). Moreover, he grew up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Exo. 2:10–11), being educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and powerful in his words and works (Acts 7:22). His background indicates that he was a vessel equipped by God in His sovereignty for His later use to accomplish His purpose.

When Moses “was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel” (Acts 7:23). In the Bible, the number forty signifies being tested. For example, the Lord Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness for forty days (Mark 1:13). The people of Israel were tested by God as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Exo. 16:35; 1 Cor. 10:5, 11, 13). In like manner, Moses lived with Pharaoh in Egypt for forty years (Exo. 2:11; Acts 7:23), which indicates that his growing process in Egypt was a test.

Looking This Way and That

When Moses was almost forty, “he went out to his brethren

and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (Exo. 2:11–12). Moses didn’t roll up his sleeves and strike the Egyptian right away. He first looked this way and that to make sure no one was watching. He was helping his Hebrew brother by his own flesh and ability.

When we begin to serve the Lord, we tend, like Moses, to look this way and that. For instance, we check if there are sufficient funds in our bank account to carry out the Lord’s leading. This is looking this way and that.

Those just beginning to follow and serve the Lord tend to share this characteristic. They usually look this way and that—they check the deposit in the bank, the cooperation of others, the reaction of the church elders, and the condition of the church. If they find out that those around them are cold toward the Lord, they may not want to continue serving. If they discover others all love the world, they may not consecrate themselves to the Lord. If they face a difficult environment, they may be unwilling to put themselves into that situation. Yet if they have enough money in the bank, if others are cooperative, if the church elders agree, and if the church is healthy, they may decide to serve the Lord. This is what it means to look this way and that.

Becoming Fearful

Moses must have felt very proud of himself on the day he killed that Egyptian because he took vengeance for his Hebrew brother. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrew men fighting (Exo. 2:13). Moses asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?” The man answered, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” This frightened Moses, and he said, “Surely the matter has become known” (v. 14). Moses thought no one knew what he had done, but when he realized that others knew this matter, he feared.

At this time, the Moses who had looked this way and that became the Moses who feared. None of us can follow the Lord according to our own considerations. We are all likely to plan ahead before we follow the Lord, but eventually we will find that none of these plans and considerations work. This realization causes us to fear. When we are fearful, we must come to know that only God is faithful and trustworthy. We can depend on none but God (2 Cor. 1:9). Many look this way and that but not unto God when they serve the Lord. Although they are willing to serve God, because they lack confidence in Him, they become fearful and reluctant when they encounter difficulties.

Fleeing for His Life

Not only did the Israelites know about Moses killing the Egyptian, but also Pharaoh heard about it and sought to kill him. Moses fled for his life from the face of Pharaoh and became an exile in the land of Midian (Exo. 2:15).

It was not easy for Moses to flee. He had been living a good life in Egypt, enjoying all the privileges of being a prince. Now he was dwelling in the wilderness. We can hardly imagine how Moses could survive in this situation. Moses, having lived in the palace of Egypt, now became a sojourner in the wilderness.

Called by God at Eighty

In the wilderness, Moses lived with Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exo. 2:15; 3:1) and married his daughter Zipporah (2:21). She bore two sons, and Moses named the first Gershom, saying, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land" (v. 22). He expected to live out the rest of his years in the wilderness.

Moses shepherded Jethro's flock for forty years (Exo. 3:1; Acts 7:30). In the first year, he might have wondered whether Pharaoh had forgiven him. After three years, he might have wondered if he could go back to Egypt yet. But after eight or ten years, he would have expected nothing, wanted nothing, and hoped for nothing but to dwell in the wilderness as a common shepherd.

When Moses was eighty years old and in this state of hopelessness, God called him. How marvelous is this! When we are so zealous for God in the first stage of our Christian life, He may choose not to use us. On the contrary, we may find ourselves living an ordinary life in our own wilderness. It is only after we have reached our end, having no expectation, no ambition, no desire, being willing to live a mundane life, that God unexpectedly appears to us to gain us.

God called Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thornbush. When He told Moses to go back to Egypt and speak to Pharaoh, Moses appeared to be reluctant and impotent (Exo. 3:2, 11; 4:10, 13). Moses, being eighty years old, expected his life to be over, as he wrote in his psalm, “As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away” (Psa. 90:10). He may have wondered why God hadn’t used him while he was still strong forty years earlier. They could have done a great work together at that time, but now he was eighty years old and could do nothing. No doubt he felt he only had the capacity to spend his remaining days shepherding sheep in the wilderness.

If we endeavor to serve the Lord in our natural zeal as did Moses when he killed the Egyptian, the Lord may need to set us aside for some time until we lose all hope in our own ability. As we are living in our own wilderness, having lost all confidence in our ability to serve the Lord, God may call us and commit to us a spiritual burden as He did with Moses. It was not until Moses was eighty years old that God appeared to him with a divine commitment.

The Burning Thornbush

As Moses was pasturing his father-in-law's sheep, "he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God" (Exo. 3:1). "Horeb" means "parched; solitude; desolate" (Potts, 114). Mount Horeb is part of a parched wilderness of desolation. It was here that God appeared to Moses and gave him His divine commitment.

Burning but Not Consumed

"The angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed" (Exo. 3:2). The bush which was on fire was a thornbush, for the Hebrew word used here means "thorny bush" (Young, 131). Thorns are associated with God's curse due to man's failure (Gen. 3:17–18). The thornbush implied that Moses was simply a fallen and cursed human being. Yet it also indicated that Moses would hold the flame of God, though he himself was not its source.

Moses was already eighty years old and had been a shepherd in the wilderness for forty years. At this point, he probably cared for nothing but the flock. All the wisdom Moses gained in Egypt and all his ambition to rescue the Israelites he left far behind him. It is doubtful that he was burdened for the will of God or the future of the people of Israel anymore. While Moses was in this condition, God revealed to him that he was but a cursed thornbush.

Moses needed to realize that what mattered was not the thornbush—whether forty or eighty years old, a thornbush is still a thornbush—but the appearing and calling of God. Moses was just a thornbush, a fallen man under God’s judgment and curse, but the God of glory called him, wanting to use him. The thornbush Moses saw in the wilderness was in flames but was not consumed. God wanted to burn within Moses yet not consume him like fuel. On the one hand, without the thornbush, there would be no flames. On the other hand, the thornbush was not consumed because it was not burned as fuel.

In the eyes of God, we all are but thornbushes. Yet even though we have been judged and cursed by God, He still needs to use us. When He uses us, however, He does not use our natural life, because it is under a curse and judgment.

This is the principle revealed through the burning thornbush. Though God doesn’t use our natural life, He still needs to use us. Without us, God can’t accomplish His work, because He works through our cooperation. Yet when God works through us, it is not we who accomplish the work but God Himself.

God’s Appearing

God called to Moses from the midst of the thornbush and said, “Moses, Moses!” (Exo. 3:4). Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground....I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (vv. 5–6). When God appeared to him, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Although Moses had heard about God from his childhood, he had never met Him. To hear about God is one thing, but to meet Him is another.

When we meet God, we should also be fearful and hide our face as Moses did. We should no longer brag about ourselves. Like Paul, we should say, “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Instead of being boastful, we should feel, “Lord, how could a corrupt, weak failure like me meet You? How could a person so

offensive and troublesome to You see Your face? Lord, because I am so fearful and ashamed, I want to hide my face from You.”

Because God has appeared to us, we are able to believe in Him. Without His appearing, we could never believe, for “there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10–11). It is God who seeks for us and appears to us, causing us to believe. Many people study the Bible yet still do not believe in God. If God in His mercy would appear to them one day, they would believe.

When God appeared to us, we began to follow Him. We keep following Him because of His continual appearing. As He appears to us, He elevates our living and view to match Him.

An End and a Beginning

The Lord said to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey....Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exo. 3:7–10).

If Moses had heard these words forty years earlier, he might have responded, “Hallelujah! God, You’ve got the right person. No one but me can bear Your commitment.” But eighty-year-old Moses, having lost all ambition, could only say to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” (v. 11). It seems that Moses was saying, “God, why have You sought me out? I’m settled here in the wilderness with a wife and two sons. Look at the flock that I shepherd. I have been shepherding them for many years and am resigned to live out the rest of my life this way. Why do You ask me to go to Pharaoh now? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? This is impossible.”

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” (v. 13).

Here Moses didn’t say the God of “our” fathers but the God of “your” fathers, which implies that Moses felt the things concerning the children of Israel had nothing to do with him. It seems Moses was saying, “Now I am just a shepherd. I’ve been away from Egypt for forty years, so I can’t go to Pharaoh, and I can’t relate to the children of Israel.” How gloomy and hopeless Moses was toward the present situation, and how cold was his response to the divine calling. It’s hard to believe that the result of God’s work on Moses would be such a gloomy, hopeless, and cold outlook. However, if Moses didn’t come to an end, God’s work could not begin. When we experience something so sorrowful that it makes our heart numb, we feel that it’s the end of our life. Yet our end brings the beginning of God’s work. This beginning is a brand new start. This is when the God of glory, who has a plan and an economy, begins to work with His servant.

Called to Serve

A Deeper and Higher Calling

When God called Moses from the midst of a burning thornbush and told him He was sending him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses declined (Exo. 3:10–11). Therefore, God gave him a deeper and higher calling.

God said to Moses, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (v. 12). The Hebrew word for “worship” here, *abad*, can also be translated “serve” (Strong, H5647). Previously, God only called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, but now He wanted Moses to do more—to serve God at this mountain. Because Moses declined God’s calling and commitment, God took His own calling further. Originally, Moses only needed to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Now, he was to serve God at this mountain. Earlier it was God doing something for men—leading them out of Egypt; now it was men doing something for God—serving God at the mountain.

Whenever we try to turn down God’s calling, He deepens and advances His calling. Because Moses declined God’s second calling, God said to Moses, “You with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God’” (v. 18). Initially, Moses only

needed to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt; then, he was to serve God with them at this mountain; now, he was to lead them on a three days' journey to sacrifice to the Lord.

Because Moses declined God's calling, God gave him a deeper and higher calling. Isn't this marvelous? Only God is so assured of Himself. He knows who He is, and He also knows what He is doing. He even knows how to gain us so that we match His will. In His wisdom and sovereignty, He seemingly does not see our reactions. Neither does He seem to hear our refusal or notice our unwillingness. The very God who created all things out of nothing is able to create willingness within us.

Once God calls us, it is impossible for us to escape His calling. Even if we try to refuse God's calling, He still imparts Himself into us and further reveals Himself to us (Exo. 3:14–15). If we are still hesitant, God calls us forward, leading us to an even deeper experience. He desires to work on us to broaden our view. Through this kind of impartation and revelation, we see God and His purpose more clearly. We become willing to answer His calling and receive His commitment.

The Content of Our Service

Spiritually, the place where God appears to us is where we serve Him. God told Moses that when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, he would serve God at the very mountain where God appeared to him and called him. The place where God appeared to Moses is also where Moses served God.

When God appears to us concerning any matter, we can serve Him in that matter. If we have the Lord's appearance in loving Him, we can serve Him by causing others to love Him. If we have the Lord's appearance in reading His Word, we can serve Him by helping others to read the Bible. If the Lord's appearing causes us to consecrate ourselves to Him, we can help others to experience consecration. The place where God appears to us becomes the place where we serve God.

The substance, content, and reality of our service is the God who reveals Himself to us. When God calls us, He also reveals Himself to us. Once Moses knew he would be going back to

Egypt, “Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.” Now they may say to me, “What is His name?” What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’ God, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations’” (Exo. 3:13–15).

We can’t serve God without substance. When God appears to us, He reveals Himself to us so that He can become the substance and reality of our serving. I can testify that I’ve enjoyed the substance of God’s being as precious riches. These riches are not just objective doctrines or teachings to me. I take them as the substance, content, and reality of my serving. When I stop treasuring God Himself, I lose the appearing and speaking of this living God. I lose the substance and reality of my service and become merely a religious worker. My speaking becomes nothing but doctrine, and the source of my labor becomes religious zeal. If we want our dear living Lord as the substance and reality of our service, we must live in His appearing and have His living speaking.

When we serve God, we serve according to who He is. He progressively reveals Himself to us, just as He did to Moses. We serve according to “I AM WHO I AM” (Exo. 3:14), Jehovah and Elohim (v. 15), “The Lord Is My Banner” (17:15), “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3:15), the Mighty God, or El Shaddai (6:3), the God of the Hebrews (3:18), the God of Israel (5:1), and Elohim-Jehovah (19:3–6).

The Sign of Being Sent by God

God’s calling initiates our service to Him, and our service is the sign or proof that we have been called by Him. God said to Moses, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall [serve] God

at this mountain” (3:12). Once Moses brought the people out of Egypt, he and the children of Israel would serve God upon Mount Horeb. This would be the sign that Moses had been sent by God.

When I began to serve the Lord in my youth, God gave me a sign of being called. Though I had never considered spending my life serving the Lord, once He called me, it felt so sweet and glorious to serve Him. Nothing could be more glorious than simply consecrating myself to God and serving Him my entire life. This was the sign that God gave me at that time.

I have been following the Lord for over fifty years and have never lost this sign. I still consider serving the Lord as the most glorious thing in the world and the servants of the Lord as the boldest people in the world. No matter how weak I am or how difficult my environment is, when I touch the Lord and restore my initial consecration, this sign of being called becomes as clear and definite as before. I feel content, joyful, assured, heavenly and glorious beyond words.

God said to Moses, “You will [serve] God at this mountain” (Exo. 3:12). Nothing but our serving can be the sign of being called and sent by God. What the world boasts about isn’t the sign of being called. Being a Harvard graduate, a millionaire, or a famous athlete can’t be our sign. Even great experiences in the church life can’t be our sign. Only our serving the Lord can be the sign of being called. God’s calling initiates our serving, and our serving becomes a sign that testifies that we have received God’s calling.

Answering God's Call

God appeared to Moses and called him at Mount Horeb, but Moses didn't answer God's call right away. He was reluctant and did his best to excuse himself from God's mission. When God reveals Himself to us, it should result in our following Him our whole life. However, it is not always so in our experience.

Moses said to God, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you'" (Exo. 4:1). Again, Moses tried to excuse himself, yet God was not angry because He understood and supported him. He knew Moses to the depth of his being and sympathized with him in his weakness. God still supported Moses even when he was frustrated by his own limitation. He understood Moses' reluctance. Although Moses received the revelation of who God is, he did not yet realize who he himself was in the light of God. Therefore, God showed Moses three signs.

These three signs are types. The first sign, the staff becoming a serpent, was related to God; the second, Moses' hand becoming leprous, was related to Moses; and the third, water from the Nile becoming blood, was related to the earth. God revealed these three signs to Moses in order to help him know who he was and to convince the children of Israel that he was sent by God.

Moses' Staff Becoming a Serpent

Exodus 4:2–5 says, "The Lord said to [Moses], 'What is that

in your hand?’ And he said, ‘A staff.’ Then He said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’ So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail’—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” This was the first sign.

A staff represents the things we rely on in our living. Our true staff should be God Himself, because only He is trustworthy. We cannot depend on anything in the world.

God wants us to rely on Him and live by Him. For this purpose, He “gives to all people life and breath and all things... having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God,...for in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:25–28). All these things given to us by God are a staff. We rely on the things from God as we rely on God Himself.

However, Satan has turned all these things given to us by God into a system called the world. People now depend on his worldly system rather than God. When Moses threw down his staff, it became a serpent, which represents Satan, the ruler of the world (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9). In Satan’s world, there is a trend which people tend to follow. In so doing, they are walking “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). When we follow the trend of the world, we are following Satan.

If we rely upon the world, we will be forced to conform to its ever-changing trends (Rom. 12:2). For instance, college students trying to decide their careers will be influenced by the current career trends. The most popular college major might be business administration. Later, it might be computer science. Later still, it might be law. Few people realize that these trends are set by Satan’s world. We need to take the serpent by its tail and make it a staff, that is, to turn the worldly things into something useful in our hands that we may follow the Lord to accomplish His purpose. When God created Adam, it was with this intent—that mankind would rule over Satan (Gen. 1:26).

Although the world is now ruled by Satan (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19), the things in the world can still become the means for us to defeat him. They can be converted into things useful in the service to God (Exo. 7:12, 15, 17).

Moses' Hand Becoming Leprous

God asked Moses to put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, his hand became leprous like snow. Then God asked him to put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his flesh (Exo. 4:6–7).

The leprous hand signifies who Moses was in himself. It also indicates that although we are supposed to be vessels of God to express Him, and our hands are to do His work, because of the fall, our hearts have become unclean. Our problem is not with our hands but our heart. Thus, once our hands touch our heart, they become impure. For us to serve the Lord in a healthy way, we need Him to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh. He has promised to give us a new heart and a new spirit that we may express Him (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26).

The Water of the Nile Becoming Blood

God said to Moses, "If they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground" (Exo. 4:9).

The Nile river was critical to the Egyptians' living. Its water signifies earthly enjoyment and pleasure. The dry ground, where life was originally produced (Gen. 1:10–11, 24), signifies the place of God's work. The water becoming blood on the dry ground indicates that human enjoyment turns the source of life into a place of uncleanness and curse.

The ground that God originally created was good. However, when the blood of Abel was shed on that ground, it resulted in a curse. God said to Cain, "Now you are cursed from the ground,

which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (Gen. 4:11). In the New Testament, God became a man whose blood flowed out on the cross. This blood "speaks better than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). Instead of bringing a curse, this blood brought salvation and redemption to us that we might carry out God's work.

Aaron—The Companion in Life

After God gave him these three signs, Moses should have accepted God's calling. Surprisingly, he declined it and said, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exo. 4:10). He didn't feel he was able to preach at all. In his mind, to ask him to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the children of Israel would be like asking a lame man to run a race. He wanted God to find someone else to do this job.

This was Moses. He was not willing to accept God's commission, so he declined God's calling again and again. His first excuse was that Pharaoh would not listen to him; his second was that he didn't know God's name, so the children of Israel wouldn't listen to him. Now he said that he was slow of speech and slow of tongue.

The real problem was not with Pharaoh, God, or the children of Israel, but with Moses himself—he was full of self-doubt. Therefore, God gave Aaron to Moses to be his mouth (Exo. 4:14–16).

Because Moses gained Aaron as his companion in life, he eventually accepted God's calling. But the record in Exodus shows that Aaron didn't speak much. Moses was the real mouthpiece for God. How marvelous it was that without Aaron, Moses was slow of speech; yet when God gave Aaron to be his mouth, Moses became the real mouth. This is a principle with a deep spiritual meaning: God is able to use those whom we discount. He uses "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" and "the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Cor. 1:27).

Aaron should have spoken for Moses, but in fact, Moses was the one who spoke. The spiritual reality is more important than the manifestation of a gift. Without Aaron being the mouth for Moses, Moses couldn't speak. Yet even after Aaron was to be his mouth, Moses was still the real mouth because he had the spiritual reality. How wonderful the principle of God's operation is! We should worship Him for this.

The Sign of Circumcision

Eventually, Moses accepted God's calling at the burning bush. However, God's calling did not stop here. While Moses was on his way to Egypt to carry out God's commission, "the Lord met him and sought to put him to death" (Exo. 4:24). God had taken so much effort to prepare and call Moses, but once Moses was finally ready and willing to serve Him, God wanted to kill him.

Our not answering God's calling is one thing, but our answering God's calling without seeing our flesh is another. We answer His calling and consecrate ourselves to Him because of His continual leading, enlightening, and moving within us. However, after consecrating ourselves, we may not yet know ourselves. Before our consecration, we lived in the flesh and hoped to gain something in the world. After our consecration, we may still live in our flesh but hope to do something for the Lord. This is why we need to experience God's judgment after we answer God's calling.

When God sought to kill Moses, his wife, Zipporah, "took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.' So He let him alone. At that time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood'—because of the circumcision" (vv. 25–26).

The apostle Paul tells us that in the New Testament age, circumcision is of the heart and not of the flesh (Rom. 2:28–29). He tells us further, "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (8:13). This is circumcision. When we feel that we have nothing and can do nothing, we have the sign of circumcision, that is, the sign of being crucified.

Serving God in our flesh indicates that we lack the experience of circumcision and of walking with God in our service. If we serve the Lord with the sign of circumcision, others will sense God, rather than our flesh. God abhors the sinful flesh. He is so pleased when we tell Him we can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). We can serve, and even do all things, only through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

God doesn't need us to work for Him. What He needs is for us to walk with Him and allow Him to work through us. We are like the thornbush—God burns in us, but we are not consumed. He gives the calling and He also completes the work (Phil. 1:6).

Progressing in Service to God

Because God gave Moses the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments, we often associate him with the law and think of him as a stern man (Exo. 34:28; John 1:17). Yet Moses was a man full of passion and feelings (Exo. 2:11–12; 32:31–32). He had a healthy relationship with God and His people. He was willing to pour himself out for the accomplishment of God's will.

Three Cultivating Stages

God's work on Moses was a cultivating work in three forty-year stages. Moses had different reactions in each stage. In the first stage, in Egypt, Moses felt he could do anything, even without the children of Israel (Exo. 2:12). In the second stage, in Midian, he felt he could do nothing (3:11). In the third stage, he came to understand that God couldn't perfect him without the children of Israel, nor could God perfect the children of Israel without him. God needed to gain him in order to gain the children of Israel, and God also had to gain the children of Israel in order to gain him (32:9–11).

God gained Moses, perfected him, and caused him to grow into maturity so that Moses could walk and labor with Him. Working with the matured Moses, God helped the children of Israel to grow in life and walk and labor with Himself. At this time, Moses no longer took responsibility alone but among the children of Israel, typifying the church. Moses was leading in

the glorious testimony of God. This a beautiful picture in the book of Exodus.

Three Serving Stages

After Moses answered God's calling at the burning bush, he entered into another three stages. These stages were necessary for Moses to know God, and they are also crucial for every one of us as servants of the Lord today. Firstly, we need to know the works of God (Exo. 34:10); secondly, we need to know the ways of God, that is, the operating principles of God's work (Psa. 103:7); thirdly, we need to know God Himself (Jer. 31:34).

Knowing the Works of God

The first experiences that Moses and the children of Israel had of God caused them to know His works. These experiences included seeing Moses' staff becoming a serpent, his hand becoming leprous, the water of the Nile becoming blood, and the ten plagues coming upon Egypt (Exo. 7:17–11:10). After they left Egypt, God divided the Red Sea before them (14:21) and sweetened the bitter water (15:23–25). These were the works of God. When the children of Israel longed for the pots of meat in Egypt (16:3), God did not punish them. Instead, He sent quails for them to eat (vv. 8, 13). Additionally, God gave them manna every day for forty years (vv. 15, 21, 35). During these years in the wilderness, they lived in the stage of knowing the works of God, and they saw His wonders every day. This was their experience of the first serving stage.

Knowing the Ways of God

God led Moses beyond knowing the works of God to knowing the ways of God.

God sometimes answers the childish prayers of new believers because these believers are still in the stage of knowing the

works of God. Whether it is for admission to a college or buying a house, they get what they want through prayer. As they mature in the Lord, they find that God no longer answers this kind of prayer in the same way. This is so that they would grow beyond knowing the works of God by learning His ways.

Abraham learned to pray according to the ways of God, as can be seen in his prayer for Lot in Sodom (Gen. 18:22–32). He prayed based upon the righteous ways of God. Abraham knew that God was the God of righteousness and that He could not work contrary to His own righteousness. This shows that Abraham knew how to pray according to God's ways.

The ways of God are manifest in His works. When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, He showed them the wonders of the ten plagues and the dividing of the Red Sea in order to reveal His works to them. Then in the wilderness, God gave them manna as their food for forty years. On the one hand, manna is the work of God; on the other hand, it demonstrates the ways of God. God told the children of Israel to gather manna every morning (Exo. 16:21). This daily gathering of manna manifested the way of God.

God has His ways in His works. If manna is just the work of God, then the children of Israel could have collected a week's supply of manna on one day and slept in the rest of the week. When some tried to keep manna overnight, "it bred worms and became foul" (v. 20). God's way of providing a daily supply for them required their labor of gathering day by day. Thus, the works of God manifested the ways of God.

Knowing God Himself

God's desire was that all His people would know not just His works and His ways but Himself (Jer. 31:34). It was through His works and His ways that He revealed Himself. Eventually, Moses knew God Himself because God spoke to him face to face (Exo. 33:11), and God knew him face to face (Deut. 34:10).

Knowing only the works of God indicates that we are in the initial stage of serving God and live in the blessing of God. When we begin to know the ways of God, we have entered the

second stage of serving, which shows that we live in the operating works of God. The deepest experience of serving God is to know God Himself.

The experiences of these three stages are not strictly sequential. We can't advance in our experience to a higher stage without continuing to learn from the initial stage. Those who have been saved for many years and have experiences of knowing God Himself still need to experience more of God's works and ways that they may have a higher and more heavenly knowledge of God. By experiencing God in this way, they touch His heart and live in His heart's desire.

Servants of the Lord who know God Himself understand that the works of God are for the strengthening of their faith. They know how to labor with God in His operating principles, and they can speak to Him face to face. We should desire to progress in these three stages to become proper servants of the Lord.

Knowing God through His Works and Ways

Experiencing the Powerful Works of God

When Moses returned to Egypt and asked Pharaoh to release the children of Israel, he encountered a difficulty—Pharaoh denied his request (Exo. 5:1–2). Instead of releasing the children of Israel, Pharaoh increased their workload (vv. 7–8). After going to Pharaoh with confidence, Moses seemed to be frustrated with Pharaoh’s response (vv. 22–23). Then, God sent ten plagues to Egypt (7:20–11:10).

Moses worked with God through these ten plagues, and in the process, he experienced God’s works of great power each step of the way. Though God initiated each plague, He always carried them out through Moses. When Moses entreated God to end a plague, “the Lord did according to the word of Moses” (Exo. 8:13). For example, when God smote Egypt with frogs, He initiated it with Moses speaking to Pharaoh (vv. 1–4). Countless hopping and croaking frogs were everywhere. They even came into Pharaoh’s palace and bed (v. 3). The plague did not end until Moses cried out to the Lord concerning the frogs (vv. 12–13). This was one of the works of God.

Through the ten plagues, God trained Moses to stand firmly for His will before Pharaoh. No matter what Pharaoh said, Moses stood firm in the Lord, demanding that the children of Israel must leave Egypt to go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord (v. 27). It was not until the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt that Pharaoh let the

children of Israel go (12:29–33). Finally, they journeyed out of Egypt.

When Moses initially returned to Egypt and went to Pharaoh, he probably was an old man with a white beard whom no one would have recognized or honored. People looked at him differently after he brought in the plagues and wonders one after another. Eventually, they felt that he was so great that not only the children of Israel respected him but even the Egyptians bowed down to him as before a king (11:3, 8).

Now Moses dared to get angry with Pharaoh (v. 8). Even though Pharaoh was the king of the strongest country at that time, Moses was brave to face him. He dared to scold Pharaoh before his warriors and servants because he had experienced God's works of power.

It seems glorious when the servants of the Lord experience God's works of great power. When God answers whatever they pray for and does according to their words, they may feel powerful. God does this to gain them—without such experiences, they may not follow Him. Yet after they follow Him, He will reveal to them that He is not only a God of great power and wonders but also a God of operating principles.

Following God in His Ways

From the time the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai in the wilderness, Moses began to know the ways of God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself’” (Exo. 19:3–4). This indicates that the children of Israel had seen the works of great power that God had used to deliver them.

Then the Lord said, “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (vv. 5–6). God has His ways of carrying out His works. He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt through His wonders not

simply because they were suffering there but because He is purposeful. He has a will, a purpose, a plan, and an economy. He brought them out of Egypt in order to make them the people of God, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. At this point, God began to unveil His heart's desire and manifest Himself to Moses.

Once Moses understood what was on God's heart, he "called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do!'" (vv. 7–8). Here, the elders' response indicates that they agreed to do all that God had said and that they belonged to Him and would follow Him.

After this, "Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up" (vv. 18–20).

This scene on Mount Sinai with the thunder, lightning, trumpet, smoke, and earthquake was very scary. When Moses and the people of Israel stood at the foot of the mountain, maybe some tried to stop Moses, saying, "God didn't say you have to go now. You'd better wait until the fire is gone, the earthquake has stopped, and everything is calm and safe. If you go now and are burned to death, what will we do? You have to consider all of us!" But because Moses knew the ways of God, he went immediately when God called him.

Sometimes when we obey the words of God and want to follow the Lord in faith, others may say, "You need to consider what is best for us also!" Such words only come from those who don't know the ways of God. If we know the ways of God, we will answer God's call immediately. We won't wait for the best time to go, when all is calm and safe. Instead, like Moses, we should respond without any hesitation.

Moses' reaction showed that he had some realization of God. He did not respond as he did at the burning bush, making

excuses to refuse God's call. Because Moses didn't know God's ways at that time, he argued with Him. Now, God began to reveal a little of Himself in His ways. Just as God manifested His ways in His works, He was now manifesting Himself in His ways.

When we begin to follow the Lord, we are in command. It seems that God does not dare to refuse us. Gradually, He leads us to know His ways, and eventually, even Himself. Once we have this experience, we will want to take the Lord as our center to follow Him lifelong. If we have to forsake all things in the world and even sacrifice our life, we are willing. The Lord will have become that valuable to us. We will have a fresh appreciation of the feeling in this hymn: "Far, far behind me! Far, far behind me! And once for all I've left the world, Yes, left the world behind me" (Martin, no. 259). We will feel, "Lord, I am willing to pay the price to follow You no matter where You want me to go and no matter how hard the environment is. You are worthy of my lifelong pursuit."

Seeing God and Eating and Drinking

God revealed Himself to Moses through the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20). He is the unique and jealous God, so we cannot have other gods before Him (v. 3), nor can we make any idols (v. 4). Also, He has His attributes, in which there is no murdering, no stealing, no adultery, no false witnessing against others, and no coveting (vv. 13–17). All of His attributes are holy.

After giving the Ten Commandments, God went on to give the ordinances and feasts. The Ten Commandments revealed God Himself and His attributes. The ordinances showed God's ways and what kind of life the children of Israel were to live (Exo. 21:1–23:13). The feasts included the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (23:14–19). As the children of Israel followed God, they were to be full of enjoyment before Him.

At God's command, "Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw

the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exo. 24:9–11). They saw the God of Israel, but not His face, for no one can see His face and live (33:20). They did not die, nor did God lay His hand on them.

In addition, God was standing on what appeared to be a pavement of sapphire. Sapphire is “a precious stone, apparently of a bright-blue color” (Smith, p. 590). Blue typifies the heavens, and precious stone typifies God’s work. This shows that the foundation God stands upon is not only heavenly but is also of His own work.

They saw God, and they ate and drank. This is so good! They ate some and then saw God, and they drank some and then saw God. This may have been the most joyful moment in the whole Old Testament! These seventy elders, who represented the whole congregation of Israel, followed Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu to see God and to eat and drink before Him.

Of all the events in the Old Testament, I admire this one the most. The seventy elders saw God as they ate and drank. Have any of us ever had such an experience? We often fall into one of two extremes—either we see God and don’t eat and drink, or we eat and drink and don’t see God. For example, when a Christian sister applies to a university, she may pray much, but because of her anxiety, she has lost her enjoyment of Christ. She sees God but doesn’t eat or drink. Once she receives an acceptance letter from the university, immediately her anxiety disappears, but so does God. Very few of us see God and eat and drink.

These elders had such a sweet experience under the leading of Moses. They had come to know God’s mighty works through their many experiences after coming out of Egypt. Now, on Mount Sinai, God brought them to Himself. When they saw God and ate and drank, their knowledge of Him became more subjective and advanced.

“Come Up to Me”

A Revelation of God’s Heart’s Desire

Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel saw God and ate and drank (Exo. 24:9–11). What experience can be better than this? Yet following this experience, we will see that Moses progressed even further in his understanding of God. The more he knew God, the more he lived out the economy of God.

After Moses and the elders of Israel ate before the Lord on the mount, “the Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.’ So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God....The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud....Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights” (Exo. 24:12–18).

When Moses was with the elders on the mountain beholding God and eating and drinking, he might have imagined that it was almost time for them to enter into the good land. He already knew the works of God through all the miracles they experienced coming out of Egypt and journeying in the wilderness. He also already knew the ways or principles of God through the Ten Commandments (20:1–17), the ordinances (21:1–23:13), and the annual feasts (23:14–19). It seemed that

nothing was more wonderful than their present experiences, yet at this time, God had a higher calling for Moses. In order to know God Himself, Moses had to answer this calling.

On the seventh day, God called to Moses again out of the midst of the cloud. Moses went to Him and remained on top of the mountain for forty days and forty nights. During this time, God revealed the pattern of the tabernacle to him, which is a vision of the economy of God.

This further calling of Moses by God was to reveal Himself to him. God needed to reveal Himself again and again until Moses truly knew Him. He wanted to let Moses know His heart's desire. God not only showed Moses the Ten Commandments, the ordinances, and the feasts; He not only let Moses and the elders behold Him and eat and drink before Him; He also revealed the pattern of the tabernacle to Moses. God desired that the children of Israel would express Him through the tabernacle they were to build. This is why God revealed the tabernacle to Moses. The tabernacle signified God's dwelling among His people. It also indicated that they were to be His testimony and expression.

God Expressed through His People

The tabernacle included the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. In the outer court were the altar of burnt offering, signifying our consecration, and the laver of bronze, signifying our being washed before God. In the holy place were the table of the bread of the presence, signifying God as our enjoyment, the golden lampstand, signifying the beating work of God, and the golden incense altar, signifying our fellowship with God. The innermost part of the tabernacle was the holy of holies, in which was the ark of the testimony. The ark was covered with the mercy seat with its two covering cherubim. Within the ark were three items: the golden pot containing the hidden manna, signifying Christ as our life supply; Aaron's budding rod, signifying authority in resurrection; and the tablets of the covenant, signifying the being of God (Heb. 9:2–4).

God has His works, His principles, and His divine being. He is heavenly, transcendent, and glorious. He wanted to be expressed through the children of Israel. By having them build the tabernacle, He was able to dwell among them and be expressed through them.

If we want to follow God, we, like Moses, need to know God Himself and His economy, as revealed in the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God and expression of His glory. This was the vision that Moses gained when he went up the mountain again.

One with God

While God spoke to Moses at the top of the mountain, the children of Israel stayed at the bottom. Not knowing what happened to Moses, they made a golden calf. They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play (Exo. 32:1–6). Then God told Moses to go down to the people, for they had corrupted themselves.

As Moses and Joshua returned to the camp and “Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, ‘There is a sound of war in the camp.’ But [Moses] said, ‘It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; but the sound of singing I hear’” (vv. 17–18). Because Joshua was not as mature and experienced as Moses, he mistook the sound of singing as the sound of war. Without spiritual maturity and experience, we could make similar mistakes in the church life.

When Moses drew near to the camp, he saw the golden calf and the dancing of the people. He became so angry that he threw the tablets and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. He burned the golden calf, ground it up, scattered it on the water, and then made the people drink it (vv. 19–20). At this time, Moses was one with God in His operation—he abhorred what God abhorred and judged as God judged.

Moses commanded the sons of Levi, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh...and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor’” (v. 27). Although Moses

was harsh in his punishment, he still interceded before God for their forgiveness, saying, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (vv. 31–32). Moses’ words were very touching. Because Moses was a spiritual man, on the one hand, he was one with God in His judgment, and on the other hand, he was merciful toward the children of Israel. Because he knew God and was one with Him, he expressed God’s righteous judgment and abundant mercy.

Speaking to God Face to Face

Moses went up the mountain and received the law and ordinances of God (Exo. 19:20–23:19). He went up again with the elders of Israel to behold God and eat and drink before Him (24:1–11). Later, he went further up the mountain to receive the vision of the tabernacle (24:12–31:17). Because of the corruption of the children of Israel, Moses severely judged them, yet also asked God to forgive them. Through all of this, Moses earned the children of Israel’s honor and respect, as can be seen in the fact that “whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent” (33:8). Also at this time, the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (v. 11).

If we were Moses, we would have been thoroughly satisfied with this experience. However, Moses longed for something more—to know the way of God and God Himself in a deeper way. He told the Lord, “I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (v. 13).

God told Moses that because Israel was an obstinate people, He would not go with them into the good land (v. 3). However, Moses, knowing that he and the children of Israel were inseparable, was not willing that they would lose God’s presence. He told the Lord, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have

found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (vv. 15–16). Now, Moses truly had a deep realization of God.

Seeing the Glory of God

Broadened by the Infinite God

Moses said to God, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” (Exo. 33:18). Moses already knew God, His principles, and His economy, but now he wanted to see God with his eyes. This indicates that his previous conversations with God were a spiritual fellowship. He hadn’t yet seen God’s glory.

God answered, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (v. 19). I believe that this is a very popular verse because we all long for the grace and compassion of God. Yet His grace and compassion are not only for our needs but also for us to see His glory.

God continued, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (v. 20). Therefore, God put Moses in a cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand until He had passed by. Then He took away His hand and let Moses see His back but not His face. This is the grace and compassion of God.

No man can see the face of God and live, because God is infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:24). God let Moses see His back—part of His being—so that Moses might know that He is infinite. God is immeasurable, and He works and operates as the infinite One.

When we begin to follow the Lord, we tend to limit Him and put Him in the tiny box of our religious concepts. We want God to listen to our prayers, to love us, to heal us, to bless us,

and to be compassionate to us. Because we try to understand this immeasurable God according to our limitation, the God we know is small. However, Moses was different. He was ready and able to see God and to know who He is. This is why God, in His grace and compassion, let Moses see His back. Through this, Moses realized that God is infinite and that his own knowledge of God would never be complete.

When I was saved, I also limited God in my little box. After years of experiencing God's leading, blessing, and discipline, eventually I realized that God is infinite. If we have this realization, our serving will be different.

Religion corrupts people. Once we fall into religion, we easily become critical. We are quick to judge what is right and what is wrong. Yet when we realize that God is infinite, we understand that what matters isn't being right or wrong but having the presence of God. We aren't bothered by others' practices in their church life. When we drop our limitation and receive God's compassion, we will know who this infinite God is. When we measure spiritual practices according to the capacity of God instead of our limited perspective, we become broad-minded and are able to receive all truth and all believers.

We must live before God and be broadened by the realization that He is infinite. When we see the boundlessness of God, we will no longer be selective and demanding. Except for what is satanic and sinful, everything will seem valuable and precious to us. It is by such a realization that Moses came to know God and was able to work with God to build the tabernacle.

As we serve, we may become full of complaints and opinions. We become so picky because we are living in our limitations. One day, when we discover that God is infinite and begin to serve Him in His boundlessness, we will feel that the Lord is so broad. We will come to respect other believers and their service. May we all throw our boxes away and appreciate God's broadness.

Being One with God's People

When Moses went up to the top of the mountain again, "the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he

called upon the name of the Lord” (Exo. 34:5). This did not mean that the Lord stood next to Moses but that God’s standing and Moses’ standing were one.

Though Moses was on the mountain and the children of Israel were at the foot of the mountain, Moses was one with them. He said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession” (v. 9). Moses used the words “our” and “us” to indicate that he was one with the people. Like Moses, we should realize that we can’t be separated from the believers God has put us with.

How wonderful it is if we can tell others, “You are mine and I am yours; your blessing is for me and my blessing is for you.” Too often, we care more about our success than for others’ feelings. A real overcomer is able to be one with God’s people. Moses learned this lesson. He took the weakness of the children of Israel as his own and stood with them.

We should learn to say to each other, “My going on is for you, and your going on is for me.” We should not compare or strive. We should not become jealous of others’ success or bothered by their failure. If we are, we don’t know God. Instead of competing with others, we should say, “Lord, I can’t be separated from my fellow members in the body of Christ. We are all one.”

Being Incorporated with God

Moses stayed upon the mountain for forty days and nights and received the pattern of the tabernacle. After he came down, the skin of his face was shining because the Lord had spoken to him. This is a picture of our “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” and “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). In this way, we are being constituted with the divine nature and are becoming incorporated with God.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would remove the veil until he came out; and whenever he

came out and spoke to the children of Israel, he put the veil back on his face (Exo. 34:34–35).

Giving Place to the Glory of the Lord

At the end of Exodus, there was a wonderful scene: the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Exo. 40:34). At this moment, Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting (v. 35). All that could be seen was the glory of the Lord which filled the tabernacle.

The biggest temptation for a spiritual man is to seek a reputation. If we were Moses when the tabernacle was erected, we would have been tempted to be honored along with God by the people of Israel. We would have wanted the people of Israel to remember us as they worshiped God. However, Moses had no part in this. After he completed the work of building the tabernacle, Moses had to step aside and give place to the glory of the Lord. He could not enter the tent of meeting once the glory filled the tabernacle.

We need to pray, “Lord, thank You. I want You to gain me as You gained Moses. Let me know Your works, Your principles, and Yourself. I long to know Your glory and economy. I want to be broadened by knowing You as the infinite One. Lord, I am willing to build up Your tabernacle and be lost in Your glorious testimony. I long to see Your glory fill the tabernacle!” May the Lord have mercy upon us.

THREAD THREE:

GOD AND
HIS TESTIMONY

THE CHILDREN
OF ISRAEL

Exodus

The book of Exodus not only portrays God and Moses but also tells the story of the children of Israel. God called and commissioned Moses in order to gain the children of Israel to be His glorious corporate testimony. Moses worked with God to serve the children of Israel, and in the process, he came to know God.

Coming Out of the World

The name of the book of Exodus means “a going out, a way out” (Davis, 235). The children of Israel’s exodus from Egypt represents a special experience in the life of every believer.

In the Bible, Egypt was where Pharaoh enslaved the children of God. It typifies the world—the sinful world, the material world, and the religious world. Coming out of Egypt means coming out of the world.

This doesn’t mean we need to become ascetic monks. The Lord prayed to the Father for His disciples, saying, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one” (John 17:14–15). God doesn’t want to take us out of the world but wants our hearts to be freed from it. Our living, pursuit, and hope should be apart from this world. We should come into God Himself, His desire, and His economy.

If we don't come out of the world, God is not the unique goal of our life's journey. The whole Christian life is a journeying out. We not only journey out of the sinful world but also out of the material world and the religious world. We not only journey out of what the world would give us but also out of everything which is not from God.

Our destination is the will of God. Whether we are continuing our education, working, or starting a business, eventually we will say, "I am journeying out of the world. No place, no person, nor anything on the earth can hold me forever. The meaning of my life is the will of God." To follow the Lord, we have to learn the lesson of journeying out of the world's slavery. We journey out of everything that is not God and enter into Him and His desire.

Our daily living should be a journeying out. While others are working for fame and fortune, we are working for God and in God. If we work as a teacher, we are not just teaching but journeying out. We should keep journeying out our whole life. We should tell the Lord, "No place or profession can claim me. Neither will I claim anything as mine. No matter what I do, I am not of the world. Lord, I am Yours, so I am coming out of Egypt."

Coming Out of the Religious World

God is also calling us out of the religious world. Strictly speaking, the religious world is typified by Babylon, but Egypt could also represent our religious world. Just as the children of Israel gathered straw to make bricks as slaves in Egypt, we may unknowingly be "gathering straw" in our religious service. Even those who think they are serving God full time could actually be enslaved to a religious world. Our preaching or serving could be our gathering of straw and making bricks. We may be so preoccupied with our activities that we are unaware we have lost God's presence. Therefore, God is always calling to us to come out of everything of the religious world.

Enabled to Come Out of the World

Unless God appears to us, speaks to us, and leads us, it is impossible for us to come out of the world. However, once we find God, it is no longer difficult. Once God appears to us, spontaneously we become willing to lay aside everything to follow Him.

For example, suppose a man who is working for a certain company is offered a better position at another company which doubled his salary. He surely will take this offer and quit his job. Likewise, we will gladly come out of the world when we see God's glory. Like Paul, we will declare, "Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7–8).

As believers, we should join with those who are coming out of the world. Our home is not in the world. Our true home is with the members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). In this place, we only desire God Himself (Psa. 73:25). Our hearts belong to Him alone. He has become our source, our satisfaction, and our bountiful supply as we begin a new life in Him.

Life under Pharaoh

Building Storage Cities

The children of Israel were blessed by God. Because of this, they were fruitful and increased abundantly—they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, and the land was filled with them (Exo. 1:7). However, they were also enslaved by the Egyptians and compelled to build storage cities for Pharaoh (vv. 8–14). The children of Israel had the blessing of God, yet they lacked the divine reality.

Although the children of Israel belonged to God, their living was ruled by Egypt, which represents the world. Like the children of Israel, we live in the world, though we are saved in the Lord. We don't become hermits, retreating from society. We can live in the world without being controlled by the evil one, as the Lord prayed, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

I know a Christian brother who is an accountant. In his interview for a new job he said, "I am willing to accept this position, but I only work five days a week and eight hours a day. I don't work overtime." His honesty impressed his employer, who agreed to his terms. He worked for that company for many years and never worked overtime. After work, he served the Lord and the church. He was a good example of living in the world without being under its control.

We only have one life to live. Every time I hear others say, "I want to serve God full time after I retire," I always answer, "What do you mean by giving the best years to the world and the

rest to God? Is it because God collects the useless that you don't want to serve God until you are worthless to the world? Why don't you reverse it—serve God now and then serve the world after you are sixty-five years old?"

We should never use everything up for building the riches of the world. If we dedicate our life to research and development, eventually our work merely adds riches to the world's "storage cities." Our existence is related to God, and we are valuable to Him. Therefore, we shouldn't use all our time and energy to build up the world's storage cities.

Enjoying Egyptian Food

In spite of suffering affliction, the children of Israel enjoyed the food in Egypt. After they came out of Egypt, they complained to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full" (Exo. 16:3). This indicated that although the Egyptians "made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field" (1:14), they still took pleasure in the goodness of Egypt. Living there, they worked hard yet enjoyed eating meat and bread to the full.

They also ate cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic in Egypt (Num. 11:5). This is a picture of people today working hard to drive a good car, live in a great house, and enjoy high-class restaurants. In the world, people pay everything in order to live the good life.

Like the children of Israel, sometimes we may cry out, "Oh, God, my life is too bitter!" Yet, even though our life is bitter, we are still willing to pay the price to gain worldly pleasure—the price being our whole soul. In fact, many Christians are living such a life. They are compelled by the world to work hard. Though they are wealthy, the heavy burden exhausts them.

The Destroyer of God's People

Pharaoh signifies Satan, the ruler of the world, and Egypt

signifies the world. The world uses all different kinds of people, including those who specialize in science, engineering, construction, health care, and business. The world is a system controlled by Satan.

Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill the newborn sons of the Hebrew women. Yet because they feared God, they didn't follow Pharaoh's command but let the male children live (Exo. 1:15–17). So Pharaoh commanded his people to cast the newborn sons into the river (v. 22).

Satan is the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He not only controls the world but also tries to destroy the Lord's people (1 Pet. 5:8). More than this, Satan wants to cast them into the "river," causing them to follow "the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2). Just as the children of Israel enjoyed the pots of meat in Egypt, worldly Christians enjoy the pleasures of this age. Satan makes them work hard for this and wants to destroy their spiritual life. They may still meet with other Christians, read the Bible, and pray, yet not live for God and become one with Him.

How poor the condition of the children of Israel was! Their life was bitter with hard labor in mortar and brick. They gave their entire being in order to build storage cities for Pharaoh.

Crying Out to the Lord

Because the children of Israel were suffering under the affliction of the Egyptian taskmasters, they cried to the Lord for help (Exo. 3:7). Like the children of Israel, we often pray on our own behalf. We ask the Lord to make us better or happier. If we are sick, we ask the Lord to heal us; if we lose our job, we ask the Lord to give us another. We pray for our future, family, and finances. Nearly all of our prayers are for our own good. We may only pray for the kingdom and the will of God in church meetings.

We are all selfish and can hardly live for the interest of God. We should learn to pray, "Lord, turn me from myself to You. Teach me to care about what is on Your heart."

Learning to Trust God's Process

Following Moses

The Lord said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness” (Exo. 4:27). So he went to him at the mountain of God. Then Moses and Aaron gathered all the elders of the children of Israel, and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He also performed signs in the sight of the people: the rod becoming a serpent, the hand becoming leprous, and the water from the Nile becoming blood (vv. 1–9, 30). The children of Israel believed Moses and Aaron because of the words and signs from the Lord. They bowed and worshipped God because He had visited them and seen their affliction.

When the children of Israel cried out to God for help in their bondage, He answered their prayer according to His economy and will (2:24). God gave them Moses as their leader and had Moses and Aaron take them out of Egypt, to bring them “to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (3:8).

Complaining about Moses

Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go a three days' journey into the wilderness that they might hold a feast to God (Exo. 5:1, 3). But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the

Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go” (v. 2). He continued, “Why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!...Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!” (vv. 4–5).

Therefore, the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, “You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves....Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words” (vv. 7, 9).

When the children of Israel were not able to meet the quotas under the heavier burden made by Pharaoh, the foremen of the children of Israel were beaten by their Egyptian taskmasters. These foremen complained to Moses, saying, “May the Lord look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us” (v. 21). They made a complaint to Moses in the name of the Lord in order to protect themselves.

How poor the children of Israel were! Previously, they were worshipping God because He had seen their affliction. Now they were complaining to Moses because of the heavier workload. In fact, the Egyptians did not kill them as they feared. Their complaint regarding Moses’ putting a sword in the Egyptians’ hands was an exaggeration of their affliction.

The experience of the children of Israel is also ours today. When we complain to God, we are afraid of blaming Him, so we blame something or someone else. For example, if we don’t like a church meeting, we won’t blame God. We will say it’s the fault of those who led the meeting. We may complain about everything, but usually we are just exaggerating our trouble.

Some believers complain, “Why am I still unlucky since I have believed in Jesus? When I heard the gospel, I was told I would have peace and joy. Now I am a believer, but my wife is sick and I lost my job!” To our surprise, undesirable things happen after we believe in Jesus. We often question God because we don’t know His will. But God uses these things to save us from preoccupation with the world that we may enter the enjoyment of Christ and the reality of the church life.

Trusting God's Process

Although the children of Israel were upset and full of complaints, God did not blame them. He still regarded them as His people. He said, "I will take you for My people, and I will be your God" (Exo. 6:7). God had promised that the children of Israel would enter the land flowing with milk and honey. However, the children of Israel did not understand the process ahead. Through this process, God would expose them so that they might know themselves.

In like manner, even though we are a corrupt people, God promises that we will one day be transformed into gold, pearls, and precious stones (Rev. 21:11, 18–21). Yet we easily overlook the process we need to go through to be transformed. If we feel we have remained unchanged, we need to hold on to our faith and believe that God's promise will be substantiated over time through an ongoing process.

The way to follow the Lord is not easy. It is full of difficulties and trials. We need to firmly believe in the Lord and let Him constitute His riches into us day by day. Over time, we will accumulate many experiences of the works of the Spirit and will be able to give many testimonies of the salvation of Christ. We will become an expression of the glory of God.

The Exodus from Egypt

Experiencing the Passover

God judged the Egyptians with ten plagues (Exo. 7–11). The children of Israel obeyed God when they saw His signs and judgment. On the night of the Passover, when God went throughout Egypt to kill all the firstborn, they took a lamb for a household and put its blood on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house as God had directed. They roasted the lamb with fire that night and ate it with their loins girded and their sandals on their feet. When God saw the blood, He passed over everyone in the house (Exo. 11:1–12:13).

This lamb is a picture of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). For the children of Israel, this was their experience of the Passover; for us, this is our experience of redemption and salvation.

Leaving Egypt

Before the children of Israel left Egypt, “the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians” (Exo. 11:3). When we are going to serve the Lord, the people in the world will respect us in their hearts. A real servant of the Lord wins favor in the sight of the world.

In preparation to leave Egypt, the children of Israel gathered many articles of gold and silver from the Egyptians (12:35). After

eating the flesh of the lamb and enjoying salvation in the Passover, they were ready to leave Egypt and begin their journey of following God.

As they were leaving Egypt, they did something very meaningful—they deserted their land and houses in Egypt. The children of Israel had spent four hundred thirty years in Egypt (v. 41). Many of them owned their own land, houses, and other treasured possessions. Yet when they left Egypt, they left these things behind. In the sovereignty of God, they abandoned all.

In following the Lord, we also may be led to abandon what is of value to the world. For example, there was a Christian brother who felt called to quit his job to serve the Lord. He told his boss, “God has called me to serve Him. I can’t work for you anymore.” His boss was surprised because he had just promoted him. The next day, the boss gave him a stone inscribed with the word “Think.” It was meant to ask this brother to reconsider, because in the boss’s estimation, his employee was making a foolish decision. This brother, however, was ready to forsake the world to follow the Lord.

Becoming the Army of God

In describing the exodus, the Bible says, “All the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt” (Exo. 12:41). The word “hosts” here is a military term and can be translated as “armies” (Strong, H6635). God gained the children of Israel as His army with Himself as the leader. The children of Israel stood with God and sacrificed all things to become His army. How wonderful this was!

A mixed multitude went along with this army (v. 38). They followed the children of Israel but did not share their vision, commitment, and purpose. Later, they became a source of problems to the whole army, becoming a rabble with “greedy desires” (Num. 11:4).

Today, many Christians are like this. All saved believers should become the army of God. Healthy Christians fight for the kingdom of God and live under His authority. However, among Christians, there are so many mixed ones. They seem

to leave the world and follow the Lord, but they do not live as His army. Though they are mixed among the soldiers of Christ, they look out for themselves. As with the children of Israel, the mixed multitude in the church life is a source of many problems.

Pursued by Pharaoh

God told Moses, "All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die....Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt....But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark,...that you may understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Exo. 11:5–7). At that time, the Egyptians wanted the children of Israel to leave as soon as possible, which they did with boldness. They had a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire leading them day and night as they left (13:21).

Meanwhile, when Pharaoh was told that the people had fled, he and his servants had a change of heart toward them and said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" (14:5) Therefore, Pharaoh took all the chariots of Egypt and pursued them. As Pharaoh approached, the children of Israel became fearful and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness" (vv. 11–12).

When we forsake the world, others may remind us of what we are losing in order to entice us back. Maybe they will cause us to change our mind and think, "Why not go back to the world?"

Although the children of Israel had seen the signs God did for them, they lost their faith when facing the pursuing Egyptians. They forgot how brave they had been when they left Egypt, when even a dog dared not bark at them. They would rather die in Egypt than die following the Lord.

It was more difficult for Moses to lead the children of Israel than to shepherd the flock in the wilderness. Their complaint concerning him was unjustified. Likewise, in our church life, many act in their flesh and complain about the church leaders. I have many experiences of people complaining about me, yet I know I still need to remain joyful and committed. Concerning serving others, we all need the mercy of the Lord. Moses was a good example for us. When he faced complaints, he did not get angry. Instead, he said, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord” (v. 13).

Crossing the Red Sea

While leaving Egypt was an act of obedience for the children of Israel, crossing the Red Sea was an even more challenging act of obedience. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, the waters divided, and the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground (Exo. 14:21–22).

While crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel exercised great faith. It’s hard to imagine how they made it. There were old people, toddlers, men, women, sick people, and livestock. No doubt, the first ones through were scared to step into the dry seabed. What a faith they had! In spite of their previous complaint, “by faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land” (Heb. 11:29). God indeed blessed them, and their faith was strengthened to follow Him.

This is a great lesson for us—trust God and do not lose faith. If we learn to depend on God when we fail, we will not be frustrated by our weakness. In crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel experienced both failure and triumph. As we follow the Lord, no matter how victorious we are, we still have weakness. Yet in spite of our failure, Christ’s overcoming life is still in us. We should focus on our relationship with the Lord instead of our victory or failure.

After the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, the waters returned and covered all the army of Pharaoh (Exo. 14:28). The Red Sea signifies the water of baptism (1 Cor. 10:2). Just as

Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt were buried in the Red Sea, so we are crucified to the world and the world is crucified to us (Gal. 6:14).

Moses and the children of Israel sang to God, “The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation....In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation....You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever” (Exo. 15:2–18). What a song! How wonderful their praise was! They praised the Lord for who He is, for His might, and for the sanctuary He would establish. Even in the midst of this excited celebration, Moses remembered the will of God—He desires a dwelling place among His people.

The Test of Bitter Waters

After the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they experienced three tests. The first was the bitter waters in Marah, which was related to their living. This test will be covered in this chapter. The second was concerning the lack of food, and the third was concerning the lack of water, both of which are needed for life. If we follow the Lord, we will encounter these tests.

Shur—a Separating Wall

Exodus 15:22 says, “Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.” The Hebrew word “Shur” means “a wall” (Potts, 226). The first station that the children of Israel arrived at after crossing the Red Sea was a wall.

The experiences of the children of Israel were types that signify our condition today (1 Cor. 10:1–11). Their experience in Shur typifies our separation from the world. There is a wall between us and the world. Perhaps previously we were obsessed with opera, but now there is a wall that frees us from it. As soon as we follow the Lord, a wall separates us from the things of the world.

Before believing in the Lord, we may have bragged about our accomplishments. Yet after believing, we may feel that these are nothing. This is a wall which distances us from the

world. It makes us feel far away from the world regardless of how successful we are. We are distant from fortune, reputation, entertainment, and everything we had pursued. As Christians, there is always a wall that keeps us from the world. It doesn't mean that we can't enjoy anything in the world but that these enjoyments no longer occupy us. A wall separates us from the world.

Marah—the Bitter Waters

When the children of Israel “came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah” (Exo. 15:23). After the wall of Shur, they faced another problem. This was their first test after crossing the Red Sea. Although there was water, it was bitter. Therefore, the children of Israel murmured against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” (v. 24).

Today, what are the bitter waters for us? After we have followed the Lord and have given Him everything, at some point we may say to ourselves, “Christian meetings, preaching the gospel, visiting other believers, praying, and reading the Bible—is this all I'll do for the rest of my life? Isn't there more than this?” This is the bitter water that we experience due to our religious zeal.

Because the people of Israel murmured against Moses, he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. Moses cast the tree into the bitter waters, and they became sweet (v. 25).

This tree signifies the cross of Christ, and the wood of the tree signifies His humanity. In His humanity, with His human virtues, the Lord reaches us in His mercy. Today, although we may experience bitter waters, Christ puts to death this bitterness and replaces it with the sweetness of His humanity.

There the Lord made a statute and regulation for them and tested them (v. 25). He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer” (v. 26).

Elim—Twelve Springs and Seventy Palms

Then the children of Israel came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there by the waters (Exo. 15:27).

It is so marvelous that twelve springs and seventy palm trees could supply two million people plus their livestock. Praise the Lord that these springs flowed out as a river, satisfying them and bringing them rest. These twelve springs represent Christ as a spring of living water in our spirit and the living supply we receive from all our fellow believers. The seventy date palms represent the rich church life full of resurrection power.

The children of Israel's experiences in Shur, Marah, and Elim portray our experiences as we follow the Lord today. In the beginning, we encounter a wall that separates us from the world. Eventually we feel that our Christian life is like bitter water. Yet when we enjoy Christ and His accomplishment on the cross, this bitter water is made sweet. As we enjoy the supply of life from Christ and our fellow believers, our church life becomes full of resurrection power.

Food in the Wilderness

Complaints about Food

As we saw in the previous chapter, the first test the children of Israel encountered after leaving Egypt was the bitter waters in Marah. This test was related to their living. The second test, encountered as they journeyed from Elim to the wilderness of Sin (Exo. 16:1), was concerning food, which is needed for life. The children of Israel murmured against Moses, saying, “Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (v. 3).

The children of Israel complained easily. Because they were afraid of murmuring against God, they complained against Moses but mentioned the Lord’s name in their complaint. They had God on their lips but lacked His reality. They fondly remembered the pots of meat in Egypt where they ate bread to the full. It seems they had forgotten that they also were slaves in Egypt, under the authority of Pharaoh.

Today, we may have the same problem. We may complain, “I had many enjoyments in the world, though I was dead in my trespasses and sins. But today, what do I have to enjoy? I miss my life of hanging out with my friends. I am bored with meetings, gospel preaching, visitation, prayer, and Bible reading.”

In spite of the children of Israel’s complaint, God showed them mercy. It seems they had forgotten their affliction in Egypt,

the signs that God did for them, the salvation of God on the night of the Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, and their enjoyment of the seventy palm trees and twelve springs. Although they had forgotten all these things and only remembered the pots of meat and the abundant supply of bread in Egypt, God cared for their needs. That same evening, quails came up and covered the camp, so the children of Israel ate meat.

Manna—What Is It?

The next morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp (Exo. 16:13). After this layer of dew evaporated, “on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground” (v. 14). The children of Israel said to one another, “What is it?” (v. 15) They named this substance manna, a name which signifies “What is it?” (Morrish, 506). Manna was to become their food for forty years.

In our Christian life, there will be many situations that cause us to ask, “What is this?” During my fifty years of following the Lord, I have often asked Him, “What is this?” Many things happened without an apparent reason or explanation. Some of my situations were due to misunderstandings or reproaches, and I could only ask, “What is this?” At times like this, we should not complain. We can find Christ as our manna in such situations. We need to eat this manna because this is our food. Whether a situation is reasonable or not, whether we like it or not, we need to eat the Christ we find there.

This is why it is so romantic to follow the Lord. When others find themselves in an unreasonable situation, they look for a way to escape. However, those who follow the Lord are different. When unreasonable things occur, they first ask, “What is this?” and then find Christ as their nourishing manna in it. How wonderful is the food God provides! He arranges all the situations and people that cause us to ask, “What is this?” in order to supply us with spiritual food.

When my life goes so smoothly I can’t believe it, the Lord is there as my manna. When the Lord gives me a hard lesson, I ask, “Should a believer live such a life? What is this?” Yet the Lord is

there also as my manna. Whether the environment is smooth or hard, we need to receive it and find the Lord in it as our manna.

Gathering for Others

Concerning the manna, the Lord told the children of Israel, “Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent” (Exo. 16:16). The children of Israel “gathered it morning by morning” (v. 21). Just as the children of Israel gathered enough manna for those in their tent, we in the church life need to go to the Lord in the early morning and gather spiritual food to supply others. This is a healthy Christian life and a healthy church life. May we all become those who love the Lord and are willing to gather food for others.

The Thirstiness in Rephidim

Water from the Rock

The children of Israel were given three tests after they crossed the Red Sea. The first was the bitter waters in Marah, which was related to their living. The second was concerning the lack of food. We now come to the third test, which was concerning the lack of water.

Water is necessary for human existence. When the children of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and journeyed to Rephidim, “there was no water for the people to drink” (Exo. 17:1). The name “Rephidim” means “places of rest” (Potts, 204). The children of Israel were supposed to rest here, however, there was no water. Therefore, they contended with Moses to the extent that Moses feared they would stone him. The Lord told Moses to strike the rock with his staff. When he did so, water came out of it so that the people could drink (vv. 2–6).

The rock that Moses struck typifies Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), and the children of Israel’s experience in Rephidim signifies that our life supply is Christ who died for us and from whom flows living water for our supply (John 19:34; 4:10, 14). The water flowing out from Christ has become the source of our living.

The hymn “Rock of Ages” says,

*Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,*

*From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and pow'r. (Martin, no. 354)*

The Lord is our real satisfaction, our real food, and our water of life. He will take care of all our needs. When we live before God and hide ourselves in Christ, we experience the Lord's trustworthiness and shepherding care.

Victory over Amalek

Right after drinking water from the cleft rock, the children of Israel were attacked by Amalek (Exo. 17:8). It may seem that Moses should have asked God to let them rest awhile after the test at the rock. In fact, immediately after the children of Israel drank of the water flowing from the rock, Amalek came.

Once Amalek attacked, Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek" (v. 9). Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of a hill. When Moses lifted his hand up, Israel prevailed; and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur supported his hands until sunset. Eventually, Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (v. 13).

The lifting up of Moses' hands signifies our interceding prayer. It was not only Moses' individual prayer but also the corporate support of Aaron and Hur that contributed to the victory of the children of Israel. Likewise, in the church life, the key to our triumph also comes from our being one with God together. When we cooperate in prayer in the church life, we will experience victory in the spiritual battle. We will testify that the Lord is our banner (v. 15).

God's Works Manifested in Trials

The tests that the children of Israel went through all manifested the works of the Lord. The crossing of the Red Sea manifested the salvation of God. The bitter water in Marah manifested the

healing of God (Exo. 15:26). The supplying of food and water manifested the care and supply of God. And the fight with Amalek manifested the overcoming power of God. Praise the Lord! Every trial we pass through gives God another opportunity to manifest His wonderful works!

The Principle of God's Works

As we saw in chapter 12, when God called Moses at the burning thornbush, He deepened His calling every time Moses tried to turn Him down (Exo. 3). In like manner, the more the children of Israel failed, the more God deepened their experience of Him. After they crossed the Red Sea, each time they complained and murmured against Moses, God refused to give up on them, but instead, manifested Himself more and more to them through His works.

We shouldn't purposely fail and commit sin just so that the Lord would work on us. As Paul said, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Rom. 6:1–2). The principle of the works of God is that first He exposes us through our failures, and then He increases His work of grace on us. The experience of the children of Israel in Exodus went according to this principle: the more they were exposed by their failures, the more God manifested His works to form them as His testimony. Eventually, at the end of Exodus, the glory of God filled the tabernacle in their midst. How marvelous this is!

The Law, the Ordinances, and the Feasts

When Moses returned to Egypt and asked Pharaoh to release the children of Israel, he encountered a difficulty—Pharaoh denied his request (Exo. 5:1–2). Instead of releasing the children of Israel, Pharaoh increased their workload (vv. 7–8). After going to Pharaoh with confidence, Moses seemed to be frustrated with Pharaoh’s response (vv. 22–23). Then, God sent ten plagues to Egypt (7:20–11:10).

The theme of the book of Exodus is that God wanted to gain a corporate man as His testimony. He worked with the children of Israel to form them into this corporate man. However, this was not an easy process. First, God had to gain Moses, then He worked with Moses to lead the children of Israel step by step.

Generally speaking, there were four stages in this process of forming the children of Israel into the corporate testimony of God. The first stage was in the wilderness on the way to Mount Sinai. During this stage, they experienced three tests: the bitter water in Marah, the lack of food in Sin, and the thirstiness in Rephidim. The remaining stages took place at Mount Sinai. The second stage was with the receiving of the Ten Commandments, the ordinances, and the feasts. The third stage involved the exposing of the children of Israel in their worshipping the golden calf, plus the receiving of the pattern for the tabernacle. Finally, the fourth stage of forming the children of Israel into the testimony of God was their building of the tabernacle, which was then filled with the glory of God.

Mount Sinai—the World of Thorns

After the children of Israel left Rephidim, they traveled to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in front of the mountain. Then “the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” (Exo. 19:20). God called Moses up the mountain multiple times. One time, Moses went up with Aaron (19:24). Another time, he went up with Joshua (24:13). And yet another time, he went up alone (34:2–4).

The mountain that Moses went up was Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb. Sinai means “thorny” (Smith, 634). Horeb means “parched; solitude; desolate” (Potts, 114). This signifies that this world is nothing but a thorny, desolate wilderness.

I once visited Oxford University, and a young man gave me a tour of one of the dormitories. He told me that a prince lived in one room and a son of a certain country’s president lived in another. Many Oxford graduates later become world leaders. However, though I was at one of the best universities in the world, it felt like a thorny wilderness to me.

That night, as I walked through the campus, I had a feeling deep within that caused me to pray, “Lord, there are so many people graduating from this university. Some of them are world famous, and others are future leaders. But I am different. Lord, thank You that I do not belong to Oxford. I belong to You.”

Mount Sinai signifies that the world is a wilderness full of thorns. We may think that we have a bright future waiting, yet the world has nothing for us but thorns. No matter how much worldly success we have, after forty years, we will be hopeless, useless, and desolate because our lives will have been consumed in the wilderness.

The Ten Commandments

When Moses went up the mountain to meet with God, he received the Ten Commandments, the ordinances, and the revelation concerning the feasts. When Moses came down from the mountain, he shared these with the children of Israel. The

Ten Commandments picture God Himself and His attributes, the ordinances depict how God's people should live before Him, and the feasts indicate that the corporate life before Him is full of enjoyment. This was the second stage of the children of Israel becoming the testimony of God.

The Ten Commandments taught the children of Israel to live according to who God is. In these commandments, God told them, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Exo. 20:2–4).

The Ordinances of the Law

Moses also set before the children of Israel the ordinances of God (21:1). Chapters 21–23 list the ordinances of the law. When we read these chapters, we can see the fineness of God. These ordinances taught them how to come to God and treat each other with righteousness.

The Feasts

In chapter 23, God spoke of the feasts that the children of Israel should keep. The feasts were God's heart's desire. There were three major feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of the Harvest (or Pentecost), and the Feast of the Ingathering (or Tabernacles) (vv. 14–17). God intends that all His believers today should fully enjoy Him corporately.

We were sinners before the Lord saved us. He came into us as our Savior, and the judgment of God passed over us. This is the reality of the Feast of Passover.

We also experience the indwelling of Christ as the Spirit. The Spirit fills us and becomes the substance and enjoyment of our life so that we may enjoy His full supply (Eph. 5:18). As a result, we live out Christ and express Him in all kinds of environments. This is the Feast of Pentecost.

Once we apply the redemption of Christ to our living through repentance, we begin to have a corporate life among the believers. This is the Feast of Tabernacles. When we are weak, they are our support; when we fail, they become our supply. They enjoy the Christ within us, and we enjoy their Christ. Praise the Lord! This is our experience today.

Making a Molten Calf

Moses went up the mountain again and remained there for forty days. During this time, God revealed to him the pattern of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the laws of the offerings (Exo. 25–31).

Meanwhile, “the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top” to the children of Israel at the foot of the mountain (Exo. 24:17–18). They thought that Moses might not come back, so they made for themselves a molten calf using the gold rings of their wives and children and said, “This is your god, O Israel” (32:1–4). Their action exposed their ignorance and rebellion.

These two events—the receiving of the pattern of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the laws of the offerings, plus the exposing of the children of Israel through their worshipping the molten calf—are the third stage of the process of forming the children of Israel into the corporate testimony of God.

If we love the world, one day it may become our molten calf replacing God in our lives. For example, we like to make ourselves attractive. Some like to wear colorful clothing. Yet, their self-adornment may turn into a molten calf. I don’t mean that Christians should live as monks or nuns, but we should dress properly, not in a way to show off. We should not overly adorn ourselves. Otherwise, this adornment sooner or later will become a replacement for God.

There are many ways we can replace God in our church life. We may use what we regard as the best from our fallen nature

and flesh to replace Him. For instance, we may ask someone who is good at preaching to speak more and someone who is good at singing to sing more. If some are good at cooking, we may organize a cooking group for them; if others like to preach the gospel, we may set up a gospel team. If we rely on our ability more than God, that may become our molten calf, and we will worship it instead of God.

Aaron built an altar before the molten calf and proclaimed, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord” (Exo. 32:5). Afterward, the people “sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (v. 6). “Play” here probably refers to fornication because fornication is related to idolatry (1 Cor. 6:9). In other words, after they made the molten calf, they indulged their flesh in the worship of the god they made.

Moses’ Judgment

After Moses came down from the mountain, he was so furious about their idolatrous act that he judged them and passed sentence. He declared, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” (Exo. 32:26). When the sons of Levi came to him, he told them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor’” (v. 27). Moses’ word signifies that we need to cut off all natural relationships and deny all feelings that hinder our submission to God.

Moses’ Interceding

On the one hand, Moses judged the children of Israel, yet on the other hand, he interceded for them before God, seeking His forgiveness. He said to Him, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (Exo. 32:31–32). Moses seemed to plead, “God, if You desert the children of Israel,

forsake me as well. If You want to judge them, judge me first, because I am with them.” Moses was indeed a spiritual man.

Although Moses had led the children of Israel across the Red Sea and journeyed from Shur to Rephidim, these experiences must have seemed to be in vain once they made the molten calf. This is like raising up young believers today to follow the Lord and to know the power and principles of the works of God, only to find they eventually worship idols instead of God.

Moses asked God for His presence, saying, “You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me....Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (33:12–13). When we know the ways of God and walk in His ways, we also know Him.

Moses continued, “Consider too, that this nation is Your people” (v. 13). This prayer showed Moses’ wisdom. Since they were God’s people, it was His responsibility to care for them.

God’s Response

The Lord answered Moses’ prayer, saying, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exo. 33:14). Moses replied, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?” (vv. 15–16). When mentioning the children of Israel, Moses described them as “Your people,” which indicated that they were the people of God, not of Moses. Moses realized that he could not serve them without the presence of God.

Acknowledging God’s Infinity

Moses asked God to let him see His glory (Exo. 33:18). However, no man can see God’s face and live (v. 20). Therefore, God

put Moses in a cleft of the rock and let him see His back (vv. 22–23). Since God is infinite, we can only see part of Him. God puts us in Christ, the cleft rock, giving us a partial view of His infinity. We will never completely know God in this age. The apostle Paul said, “Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Realizing that we only see in part today, we should respect the vision and work of other believers. For example, I have received a vision of the local church, the way of life, and the way to be God’s testimony and satisfaction. God has revealed these to me, and I can never give them up. I don’t teach people to speak in tongues, but I do not despise congregations that do. I respect others who have different views from me because in God’s infinity His works are broad and immeasurable. If we all acknowledge God’s infinity, we will be broadened, and every Christian will be precious to us.

Becoming the Testimony of God

Bringing Offerings to God

After receiving the pattern of the tabernacle and being exposed by worshipping the molten calf, the children of Israel willingly brought offerings to God for the building of the tabernacle, for its service, and for the holy garments (Exo. 35:21). This was the fourth and final stage of forming the children of Israel into the corporate testimony of God.

The children of Israel brought articles of gold and presented them as offerings to the Lord (v. 22). This began their cooperation with God for the preparation of the construction of the tabernacle. Moses told them, “Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord’s contribution” (v. 5). What mattered was not how much they offered, but that they had willing hearts.

Among the people of Israel, there were women who were skilled. They spun with their hands and brought what they had spun, “in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen. All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ hair” (vv. 25–26).

The rulers of the people brought “the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense” (vv. 27–28). What the rulers offered was

not a common offering. The onyx stones, precious stones, and spices represented materials which were made through a process typifying God's transforming work. What they offered typified a valuable ministry constituted through consecration, resulting from the transforming work of God.

None of us can do anything worthy before God by our natural ability. Those who speak for God have experienced the work of God. Their ministries are produced through tears, consecration, and the transforming work of God. What they speak becomes valuable because their portion comes from the work of God.

Skill and Understanding

In addition, God provided Bezalel, whom He filled "with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship" (Exo. 35:31). He also provided "Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the Lord has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary" (36:1).

The meaning of "Bezalel" is "under the shade of God, i. e., under his protection" (Potts, 57; see Bezaleel). "Oholiab" means "The tent of his father" (Potts, 25; see Aholiab). Along with the basic materials that the people of Israel offered and the precious stones and spices that the rulers offered, there was still a need for Bezalel and Oholiab, men with the skill and understanding needed to build the tabernacle according to the blueprint given to Moses by God.

I often ask the Lord, "Where are our Bezalel and Oholiab?" Although there are many who want to build up the dwelling of God, we lack those like Bezalel and Oholiab who have been given skill and understanding by God. To build the tabernacle according to the pattern he received from God, Moses needed Bezalel and Oholiab. I hope we all can tell the Lord, "I want to become like Bezalel and Oholiab one day. I desire the skill and understanding needed to turn Your riches and accomplishments into Your testimony."

The Testimony of God at Mount Sinai

“In the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected” (Exo. 40:17). At this point, at the foot of Mount Sinai, the people of Israel, including Moses, became the testimony of God.

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (v. 34). Once the tabernacle was raised up and all its furniture was placed within it, the people of Israel enjoyed the glory of God. The cloud’s covering of the tent of meeting was related to the interest and the movement of God on the earth for the accomplishment of God’s economy, while the filling of the tabernacle with the glory of the Lord corresponded to God’s testimony for the completion of His will.

When the glory of God filled the tabernacle, only God Himself could occupy it. Not even Moses, who had been with God on the mountain and completed the work of erecting the tabernacle, could enter the tent of meeting once it was filled with God’s glory.

What remains after the completion of our work should be nothing but God and His glory. If we serve in a healthy way, those we serve will belong to neither someone nor some ministry but to Christ. Paul once said, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). After accomplishing our work, we shouldn’t hope to be honored along with God. A healthy and mature service only brings people to Christ and to the testimony of God.

The book of Exodus describes the journey of the children of Israel in forty chapters. In the end, Moses gave place to the glory of God, and the children of Israel walked and labored with God, becoming His testimony. God was the center of His glorious testimony. Praise the Lord for the wonderful work that God accomplished in and through Moses and the children of Israel!

THREAD FOUR:

GOD AND
HIS REST

THE FEASTS

Signs and Feasts

The book of Exodus describes many interesting and astounding events, such as the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, and the water from the rock. When we read the account of the ten plagues, we are fascinated by the frogs, flies, locusts, etc. Exodus may give us the feeling that God is a magician who performs wondrous signs. In fact, this picture of God exists only in our imagination.

Focusing on God's Will

Once we grasp the spiritual meaning of Exodus, we shall realize that God has a will, a purpose, a plan, and an economy. When God carries out His economy, He does so in the principle of the feasts. Without this understanding, we may focus on the miraculous signs God performed, even though the most important thing in Exodus is not the signs but the feasts, which are a picture of the enjoyment of God Himself.

God's will in Exodus was to gain His chosen people, the children of Israel, to serve Him, worship Him, keep feasts before Him, and become His testimony. God did not create man without a purpose. Neither did He perform signs nor build up the tabernacle without a purpose. God never does things just to do them. He never leads or blesses just for the leading or blessing itself. He does all things according to His desire, will, and purpose.

A Wrong Concept

We are so thankful when God blesses us and leads us. In our concept, God exists only for our sake. We can hardly imagine that in God's heart's desire, man exists only for God. For instance, we may think that if we lose our job, God should give us another one. If we are poor, God should make us rich. If we fight with our spouse, God should solve our problems. When our children get sick, God should heal them. Seemingly, God is delighted to meet these expectations, because He is generous.

During my fifty years of following the Lord, I've experienced numerous signs and miracles, which could be collected into a big storybook. But we should ask, why do Christians forget God after He answers their prayers and does such wonderful things for them? After God gives them a house, why do they invest their time gardening in their backyard instead of going to the prayer meeting? After God heals their illness, why do they pursue their own interest instead of God?

Gradually, I've realized that we are all named "Grace-forgetter." It's difficult for us to remember what God has done for us, whereas it's easy for us to remember what we have done for God. Someone might tell the Lord, "Last year I attended forty church meetings, and I spent four hours each time, including my commute. If I get paid twenty dollars an hour, each meeting cost me eighty dollars. So forty meetings cost me three thousand two hundred dollars. Lord, You owe me this amount plus interest."

Another person might say, "Lord, even though I love You so much and go to so many church meetings, I lost my job. How can You allow this? It is reasonable for those who don't go to church meetings to lose their jobs, but is it fair for me to lose mine?"

God's will is often contrary to our desire. The question is, who lives for whom? God says, "You should live for Me." We answer, "No, You should do things for me." Then God says, "No, you should give everything to Me." And we say, "No, You should bless me until I die."

A Life of Feasting

The truth is, the signs and miracles that God does for us should not become our focus. Such a focus cannot lead us to a deeper relationship with the Lord. A healthy Christian life is a life of feasting. When God fills us and causes us to live a life of feasting, our entire life will be revolutionized. It will no longer be centered on God's outward blessings and miraculous signs. Just as the signs God performed for Israel were to help them walk out of Egypt and live a life of feasting, God's blessings toward us are for our living a life of feasting according to His purpose.

Feasting for God's Testimony

The God of Israel

If we want to know God, we need to know who He is and what He desires. We have to know that God is love (1 John 4:8), God is holy (Lev. 19:2), and God is righteous (Psa. 7:9). Our God operates in His great power, ruling all things in the universe. If we know His will according to who He is, we will understand what He wants. The most wonderful blessing a Christian can have is to know God, experience Him in His many facets, and cooperate and labor with Him for His will.

Moses described God as “the Lord, the God of Israel” (Exo. 5:1). This God wanted His chosen ones to gain Him and live for Him as His testimony. To accomplish this, God told the children of Israel to hold a feast three times a year. By doing this, they became the testimony of God.

There were three main feasts that the children of Israel held: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of the Harvest (or Pentecost), and the Feast of the Ingathering (or Tabernacles) (Exo. 23:14–17). The Passover was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God died for us to be our Savior (1 Cor. 5:7). The day of Pentecost was fulfilled when the Spirit descended upon the believers to baptize them into one body (Acts 2:1–4; 1 Cor. 12:13). The Feast of Tabernacles represents how we dwell in and incorporate with Christ. These three Old Testament feasts show how God wants to be everything to His New Testament believers today.

Just as an architect may make a model of a future building, God used the children of Israel as a type that is fulfilled in the New Testament believers. The children of Israel were God's chosen ones and so are we. They followed God, and so do we. Yet we can enjoy God in a deeper way because the God of Israel has now become the God of the New Testament believers.

The Need for Moses

Without coming out of Egypt, the children of Israel would never have become the testimony of God. This is why God needed to call Moses to lead them out of Egypt. It is impossible for the work of God to be separated from the servants of the Lord. God always needs to gain His servants before He can continue His work to produce His testimony.

In 1969, the Lord called me to serve Him full time. I was in a place with a small congregation of believers. When I quit my job, those around me had serious doubts about my decision. They asked me, "Does the church need you to serve full time?" I said, "This is not a matter of need. This is a matter of the Lord's leading. I have to follow the Lord!" Until today, I still appreciate the value of serving the Lord full time. I am still very clear that nothing is greater than serving the Lord and His people. It is through the toil of the servants of the Lord that God gains His church. We should acknowledge the significance of the role of Moses. God needed Moses because without him He could not gain the children of Israel.

A Life of Feasting

When Moses stood before Pharaoh, he said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exo. 5:1). The purpose of leading the children of Israel out of Egypt was to celebrate a feast to God and become His testimony. In like manner, today God also wants to bring us into the reality of the feasts.

These feasts had five characteristics—purpose, meaning, riches, companions, and testimony. A good feast has a clear purpose. For instance, the purpose of a New Year's celebration is to conclude the past year and welcome a new beginning. A good feast is also meaningful. Different meanings result in different riches at the feasts. We also need companions to enjoy the riches together. Gathering together with our companions, we become a testimony. In the church life, we can enjoy Christ together, becoming each other's source of spiritual supply. Such a healthy condition in the church life indicates that there is a corporate life of feasting (Acts 1:15; 20:7; Heb. 10:25). This living is a testimony before God and man.

Holding a Feast in the Wilderness

At the burning bush, God told Moses, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Exo. 3:12). The Hebrew word for “worship” here can be translated “serve” (Strong, H5647). God wanted Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” (v. 18). Verse 12 mentions “worship” or “serve,” while verse 18 changes this to “sacrifice.”

Later Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness’” (5:1). Here, “sacrifice” is changed to “celebrate a feast.” “Serve,” “sacrifice,” and “celebrate a feast” all refer to the same thing, so we can say that they are three aspects of one thing.

These three terms are also three main items in a healthy Christian life. If we truly love the Lord and follow Him, firstly, we need to serve Him; secondly, we need to sacrifice to Him; and thirdly, we should celebrate a feast to Him. Serving is related to the church, sacrifice is related to God Himself, and celebrating a feast is related to our living. Our Christian life should always include these three aspects—service, sacrifice, and celebrating a feast.

Serving in the Body of Christ

Service is related to the church life. Since we are each members of the body of Christ, our service is related to the body. All

our service is in the body and for the body. We have to remain in the church life to serve in the body of Christ. The level of service in a church life is an indicator of its health.

Sometimes we may think we are serving, but our service is not related to the body of Christ. We may clean and set up chairs before a church meeting, or we may usher people to their seats, but are we really caring for our fellow members in the body of Christ? Paul served the Thessalonians by tenderly nourishing them and exhorting them in the Lord (1 Thess. 2:7, 11). Taking care of the believers, nourishing them, and supplying life to them is the best service.

Serving Based on Revelation

Without serving, we can't live a life of feasts. At the burning bush on Mount Horeb, God said to Moses, "Certainly I will be with you, and...you shall [serve] God at this mountain" (Exo. 3:12). Why "at this mountain"? It is because God appeared to Moses, called him, and gained him on the mountain. Therefore, where we receive revelation becomes where we serve God.

No believers should say that they don't have such a "mountain." Every believer receives revelation from God. We all have at least three mountains that can become the basis of our serving.

Firstly, our believing in Jesus is one mountain. Because we have believed and received Jesus as our Savior, we can preach the gospel to others and help them to be saved (Rom. 10:14).

Secondly, we receive revelation by reading the Bible. God speaks to us through His Word. We can nourish others with the words of the Bible we have read (2 Tim. 2:2). If we spend time reading the Bible together with others, we are serving God at this mountain.

Thirdly, we receive revelation by meeting with other believers. We can encourage others to meet together to be nourished and supplied with God as life (Heb. 10:25).

If we want to serve God, we need to serve Him according to the revelation we have received. Even if we think our visions or revelations are small, we still can serve upon these three mountains: preaching the gospel, helping others read the

Bible, and bringing others to church meetings. It is upon these mountains that we meet God, see Him, and receive revelations and visions. If we can help others to see what we have seen, we are serving God upon the mountain.

Sacrificing to God through Consecration

Holding a feast to God involves sacrifice—giving all things to God and living for Him. This is the Christian life. No matter how long we have been saved, we can live for God. Students can study for God. The employed can work for God. If we are for God, regardless of what we do, it becomes our sacrifice to Him.

To sacrifice is to offer something to God. What we offer to Him includes ourselves. In order to bring this offering to God, we need to come out of “Egypt” and enter the “wilderness.” It’s easy for us to forsake our serving when we are attracted to a beautiful city or a big house. Our Egypt is the world in which we enjoy such pleasures rather than serving God. Like the children of Israel, we must leave Egypt to serve God. If we pursue our future in Egypt, it is difficult for us to consecrate ourselves to God. We may find ourselves spending most of our life working in Egypt. It may only be after we feel we have made enough money and live in our own house that we begin to think about serving the Lord.

Serving corresponds to our vision, while sacrifice matches our consecration. In the wilderness, nothing attracts us or occupies our heart. Although we are living in the world, we are not of the world (John 17:14–18).

I didn’t go to my university graduation ceremony. Why? Because it had become unattractive to me. When my daughter graduated from medical school and got her PhD, I didn’t attend her graduation ceremony either, because it also held little attraction for me. Those who serve the Lord live in the wilderness. In spite of how beautiful the world is, to us it has no attraction. If we are willing to give ourselves to God, we will find that wherever we are is a wilderness where we only have God and are waiting for our Lord Jesus to return. This is the experience of sacrificing in the wilderness.

A Feasting Life

Our church life should be a feasting life. Even those who have only been in the church life for a month should already taste the sweetness of the care they receive from others. This feasting life is wonderful. As we gather together with our fellow believers, we enjoy the feasts, and there is an expression of joy among us. When we regard nothing of the world as attractive and give everything to the Lord, we are in the reality of holding a feast unto Him.

The Feasts of Israel

God said to Moses, “Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me” (Exo. 23:14). These are the three major feasts. The details concerning all the annual feasts are found in the book of Leviticus, which describes four types of feasts: the weekly sabbath, the annual feasts, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee (Lev. 23, 25). The weekly sabbath, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee can be considered as one group. The second group is the seven annual feasts, which can also be considered as three feasts: first, the Feast of the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits; second, the Feast of the Harvest (or Pentecost); and third, the Blowing of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles).

The key principle of these feasts is rest. When God spoke of these feasts, again and again He told the children of Israel, “You shall not do any laborious work” (Lev. 23:7, 8, 21, 25, 36; Num. 28:26). Rest is the main theme of the feasts.

The Weekly Sabbath

The description of the first group of feasts begins with the weekly sabbath: “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). The sabbath is the weekly feast, and

it establishes the principal for all the feasts. All of the feasts are rests in the principle of the sabbath.

The Sabbatical Year

Concerning the sabbatical year, the Lord said, “When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest’s aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year” (Lev. 25:2–5).

Every seventh year, the children of Israel were to enjoy a sabbatical year by resting. Not only did they rest, but the land also rested. In order to have sufficient food for everyone while the land was resting, God blessed them with three times as much produce in the sixth year (vv. 20–22). Keeping the sabbatical year seven times brought them to the year of jubilee.

The Year of Jubilee

God told the children of Israel to keep a year of jubilee: “You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. . . . You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family” (Lev. 25:8, 10). The fifty years that consummated in the jubilee included seven sabbaths of years plus the year of jubilee, which was also designated a sabbatical year, making a total of eight sabbatical years. In the Bible, the number eight typifies resurrection, signifying that the jubilee was related to resurrection.

The first and last years of this fifty-year period were eighth years—years after a sabbatical year—and in between there were

six eighth years. This indicates that the jubilee is an experience from resurrection, through resurrection, and to resurrection. Included within this fifty-year period were eight of these eighth years. Hence, we not only experience full resurrection (seven eighth years) but also the resurrection of resurrection (eight eighth years), and the resurrection of rest (eight sabbatical years).

In the year of jubilee, the children of Israel who lost their property had it returned to them. All who sold the land allotted to them by God returned to it (Lev. 25:23–28). Moreover, all who sold themselves into servitude were released and returned to their families (vv. 39–41). In the year of jubilee, all returned to their land and enjoyed freedom. This is grace. Isaiah 61:2, which Jesus read in Luke 4:19, describes the jubilee as the favorable year of the Lord.

The Seven Feasts of Israel

The seven feasts of Israel include the Passover, Unleavened Bread, the Firstfruits, Pentecost, the Blowing of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles. The number seven signifies fullness. This indicates that these annual feasts are in the rich fullness of God.

Among these seven feasts, the three main ones are the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. These three main feasts represent the believers, the church, and God. These three are one.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of the Firstfruits can be grouped together with the Passover. This is because the Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately follows the Passover, and the Feast of the Firstfruits was celebrated during the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. This first group of feasts relates to the believers.

The Feast of Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Harvest, is the second feast. It relates to the church.

The Blowing of the Trumpets and the Day of Atonement can be grouped together with the Feast of Tabernacles because all three were celebrated within the same month. This third group of feasts relates to the accomplishment of the economy of God.

We need to experience the Feast of the Passover in order to experience the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then, we will become firstfruits, represented by the Feast of the Firstfruits. In our church life today, we need to continually experience the Feast of Pentecost. Eventually, God will gain the Feast of Tabernacles. If we want to enjoy the reality of this feast, we need to experience the Blowing of the Trumpets and the Day of Atonement.

The Feasts of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Firstfruits

The Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year (Lev. 23:5). The children of Israel killed a year-old lamb without blemish, roasted it with fire, and ate it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The Passover signifies our experience of Christ as our salvation and is the beginning of our enjoyment of salvation. It also signifies God's judgment passing over us sinners, ushering us into the enjoyment of the rest and joy of His feast.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the fifteenth day and continued until the twenty-first day of the first month of the Jewish year (Lev. 23:6–8). This feast immediately followed the Passover. These two feasts could be considered as one because the one day of Passover was the beginning and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread was the continuation. In the Bible, leaven represents sin. These seven days signify that the Christian life is a life of experiencing redemption and release from sin. Today the guiltless Lord is the feast we enjoy our entire Christian life.

The Feast of the Firstfruits was celebrated on the sixteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year. It involved waving a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest before the Lord (Lev. 23:9–13). This signifies the resurrected Christ as the firstfruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). He is our feast in resurrection. Christ was killed on the Passover and resurrected on the third day, the day of the Feast of the Firstfruits.

The Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of the Firstfruits are the lifetime experiences of Christians. These experiences relate to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Feast of Pentecost

Pentecost was celebrated on the sixth day of the third month of the Jewish calendar. God told Moses, “You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord” (Lev. 23:15–17).

This was the Feast of Pentecost, celebrated on the fiftieth day counting from the day after the Sabbath that the sheaf of the wave offering was brought to God for the Feast of the Firstfruits. It fell on the day after the seventh Sabbath. The time from Christ’s resurrection to the day of Pentecost was fifty days.

On the day of Pentecost, the children of Israel were to offer a new grain offering of two loaves of bread of fine flour baked with leaven as firstfruits to the Lord. The two loaves of bread baked with leaven signify the church in two sections: the Jews and the Gentiles. Both sections have sins, signified by the leaven. The loaves in Leviticus 2 were baked without leaven, but these two loaves were baked with leaven because each part of the church still has sin. The first church, made up of all Jews, had sin, as seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). The church in Corinth, a Gentile church, was rebuked by the apostle Paul for tolerating the leaven of immorality among them (1 Cor. 5:1–6).

The Feasts of the Blowing of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles

The Blowing of Trumpets was on the first day of the seventh month, the beginning of the second half of the year, as God told Moses, “In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall

present an offering by fire to the Lord” (Lev. 23:24–25). This signifies the return of Christ at the blowing of the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16). When the trumpet of God blows, God will call His scattered people together to enter into His true rest.

The Day of Atonement was on the tenth day of the seventh month. Concerning this day, God said, “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the Lord. You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God.” (Lev. 23:27–28). On this day, they were to afflict their souls by mourning, repenting, and feeling sorrowful for sin. They also needed to offer an offering by fire to the Lord, signifying the offering of Christ as food to God for the satisfaction of both God and man. At the time of the Lord’s return, the Jews will afflict their souls in this manner, weeping bitterly as they mourn over Him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10–11).

The Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, was on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. This feast lasted seven days. God told Moses, “On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the Lord....For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the Lord; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work.... When you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days” (Lev. 23:34, 36, 39). This feast signifies that in the coming age, God will become man’s tabernacle, and both God and man will enjoy rest and satisfaction.

The Offerings of the Feast of Pentecost

God established five basic offerings to be made by fire: the sin offering, the burnt offering, the peace offering, the grain offering, and the trespass offering (Lev. 1:1–6:7). The sin offering signifies the Lord’s salvation for us, the sinners. The burnt offering signifies Christ, who offered Himself as a sweet-smelling

savor to God for His satisfaction. The peace offering signifies the Lord as the offering to establish peace between us and God. The grain offering signifies that Christ lived out a wonderful human living through His divine attributes. The trespass offering signifies the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of the Lord.

At the Feast of Pentecost, the children of Israel brought only four of these offerings: the sin offering, the burnt offering, the peace offering, and the grain offering (Lev. 23:16–19). They weren't required to bring the trespass offering.

There is a difference between the sin offering and the trespass offering. The sin offering emphasizes the sin which dwells in us, constituting us as sinners (Rom. 7:17). The trespass offering emphasizes our sinful acts, the mistakes we make.

The fact that the trespass offering was not included in the Feast of Pentecost indicates that in our church life, we should never focus on others' faults. The key to a healthy church life is to see ourselves as sinners but to cover the mistakes of others (1 Pet. 4:8). We should remember that in the church life, everyone is able to repent, follow the Lord, grow up, be transformed, and be conformed to the image of the Son of God.

In addition to these offerings, the Feast of Pentecost included the drink offerings (Lev. 23:18), which signify our willingness to pour ourselves out for the Lord and the church. Paul once said, "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all" (Phil. 2:17). Since this offering is poured out on another offering, it signifies that we are willing to offer over and above the basic offering. I know a young man who enrolled in a full-time ten-month Bible training when he had only been saved for forty days. Afterward, he dropped his future plans and consecrated himself to the Lord to serve full time. This is an example of offering above and beyond.

The Feast of Pentecost also included the wave offering (Lev. 23:17) and a peace offering, which included the heave offering (v. 19; 7:14, KJV). When the children of Israel offered the peace offering, the priests were to eat the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering (10:14, KJV). The breast of the wave offering typifies the unlimited capacity of Christ's love

in His resurrection. Since the thigh is the strongest part of the body, the thigh of the heave offering typifies the strengthening power of Christ in His ascension. Praise the Lord that Christ is strengthening us in His ascension!

The Children of Israel's Experience of Rest

The book of Genesis introduces the thought of God's rest and man's relationship to it. The book of Exodus is a picture of how the children of Israel entered into that rest as they left Egypt and journeyed in the wilderness.

Rest in Genesis

In God's work of creation, He created man on the sixth day. Before doing so, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Man is to rule all things as God's representative and expression. Even Satan is below the position of man. After God made man, "He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Gen. 2:2). This is the first time God's rest is mentioned in the Bible.

Though Satan's corruption resulted in the fall of man, God didn't give up. He continued His work with man in Noah, the new generation, after the flood. The Hebrew word for "Noah" is *noach*, which means rest (Strong, H5146). God asked Noah to build an ark in order to save his household and every kind of living creature. This typifies God's work of destroying the old creation in rest and bringing man into the realm of the new creation.

After the flood, “the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat” (Gen. 8:4). The Hebrew word for “rested” here is *nuach*. “Ararat” means “holy land” (Potts, 33), indicating that man is no longer in the curse but rests in blessing. Now, man is in a holy and new realm.

Experiencing Rest in the Wilderness

After the children of Israel journeyed out of Egypt, they spent forty years in the wilderness until they entered into the good land. During these years, God told them repeatedly to observe the sabbath. This was their rest. The children of Israel journeyed according to the principle of rest.

How did God give the children of Israel rest, and how did they enjoy this rest? It was through successive stages of their experiences of growth.

Gaining Rest by Eating Manna

In the first stage, the children of Israel experienced hunger and complained to Moses. As a result, God gave them manna to eat. After they gathered manna for six days, Moses said to them, “Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord” (Exo. 16:23).

The same principle can be applied to the church life today. The rest and the peace in the church life come from our enjoyment of the Lord as our daily manna. If we pray with each other and supply each other, we will be satisfied in the spirit. Otherwise, the church life will be full of opinions, arguments, and problems, which cause unrest among us.

Gaining Rest by Knowing God

In the second stage, God revealed Himself through the Ten Commandments. He said, “You shall have no other gods

before Me" (Exo. 20:3). This taught the children of Israel that He is a jealous God. He continued, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." This taught them that He is a holy God. Because the Ten Commandments revealed God to them, the children of Israel came to know the being of God and entered into rest with Him.

The more we know God, the more restful we become. For instance, if we understand that God rules all things, we will be restful during times of trouble. If we know that God wants to reveal Himself to us, our reading of the Bible will not be a struggle. We will be restful, allowing Him to speak through His Word. Our knowledge of God becomes our rest, and a fuller realization of God leads to a deeper rest. Why are some families so troubled? It is because their knowing of God is short. Why do some have no rest in looking for a job? The answer is the same. If we know who God is, we will be restful. We all need to tell the Lord, "I want to see You and know You. May You enlighten me and bring me into a deeper rest."

Gaining Rest by Receiving Revelation

The third stage is regarding the children of Israel's vision and revelation. God called Moses up the mountain and revealed the blueprint of the tabernacle to him (Exo. 24:12). He ended this time of vision and revelation by saying to Moses, "Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you" (31:14). Vision and revelation make us clear about what God wants and leads us to rest. When we love the Lord yet know nothing about His desires, we feel empty and unrestful.

Although I went to the best university in Taiwan, I spent most of my time reading the Bible. During these years, I received much vision and revelation concerning God's desire. Before graduating, many of my classmates were anxiously planning their future and were worried about their next step. Yet I was very restful and joyful because I was clear about what was on God's heart and just wanted to serve Him.

Gaining Rest through the Servants of the Lord

The fourth stage is related to the servants of the Lord. The children of Israel enjoyed rest as a result of their interaction with Moses. We not only need to have the same vision as the Lord's servants, but we also need to labor and fellowship with them. In this way, we will enjoy a mutual blessing and supply and enter into a deeper rest.

God told Moses, "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way" (Exo. 33:3). Because Moses wanted the Lord to go up to the good land in the midst of the children of Israel, he said, "This nation is Your people" (v. 13). God answered, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest" (v. 14). In other words, God wanted to give Moses rest first. If Moses had rest and the presence of God, the children of Israel would be blessed.

In the church life, if those who take the lead often pray together in the presence of the Lord, their prayers will bring in a heavenly rest. When they are restful, the whole church will be restful; if they have peace, everyone will have peace.

Being leaders in a church is not easy because few respect them. Too often, they are judged and criticized by those they serve. This criticism not only destroys the testimony of the church but also hurts individuals within it. The result is that no one is restful.

The way to maintain a restful and peaceful environment in our church life is to be faithful and submissive to those who take the lead among us. We must respect them as servants of the Lord. If they are restful before God, the whole church will enter into rest. We need to learn not to criticize in the church life. We need to pray, "Lord, may You give Your servants rest and keep them in Your presence." Thus, the rest enjoyed by the leading ones will become a blessing to the church.

Gaining Rest by Working

In the fifth stage, we see that rest comes from our diligent work. God told Moses, "You shall work six days, but on the seventh day

you shall rest" (Exo. 34:21). Without work, there is no rest. If we don't read the Bible, pray, pursue, go to the meetings, and fellowship with one another, we won't have rest. Spending time in the Word of God and taking care of the Lord's children brings us rest. Such a living results in a restful church life.

I know a serving one who once drove the young people of his church to a youth conference and drove back home by himself—a twelve hour round trip. After the conference was over, he drove back again to bring them home—twenty-four hours in total. What is this? A work of love resulting in fullness of rest.

Gaining Rest by Offering for the Tabernacle

In the final stage, the children of Israel gained rest by offering all the materials needed for building the tabernacle. After they received the vision regarding the tabernacle, they brought their offerings to the Lord (Exo. 35:21–29).

Once the tabernacle was built, the cloud of the Lord covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (40:34). Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the children of Israel moved on; otherwise they remained where they were (vv. 36–37). The cloud was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night (v. 38). The cloud in the day and the fire in the night was the presence, protection, and leading of God. This was their rest.

For the children of Israel to enjoy rest, their relationship with Moses had to be healthy and they had to live a laboring life. They brought all their offerings to God and labored according to the vision of the tabernacle given by God. As a result, they experienced the sabbath and enjoyed the feasts that God had given them.

Rest Being the Process of Growth

Christians do not grow smoothly without any obstacles. Like the children of Israel, we need to go through stage after stage. Though we encounter frustrations which cause us to lose heart,

when we regain our rest, we enter into another stage of growth. Our experience of rest becomes deeper and deeper with each stage. If we never experience unrest after believing in the Lord, it indicates we have not grown much.

Sometimes we are very restful. At other times, various hardships upset us. This is one of the wonderful things in following the Lord: we might say, “Lord, I can’t take it anymore!” Yet soon we find rest within. Though the outward environment remains the same, somehow the Lord makes us very restful within. Our understanding of God progresses through this process. God brings us from one stage of rest to another.

The Lord always leads us further after each difficulty. Once we enjoy rest for a period of time, we may meet another problem which tries our faith. No matter how difficult our situation is, it disturbs only us, not God. He comforts us, reminding us that His throne is still here. He not only works on us but also brings us into rest in Him.

Rest is a process of growth. On the one hand, we enter into rest as soon as we believe. On the other hand, to gain the full experience of rest takes a lifetime. We enjoy rest, experience trouble, and then enter into a deeper rest. This is why I always say that a Christian’s life is romantic. If we appreciate the romance of following the Lord, we will love Him more and become more willing to give ourselves to Him year after year. This is the reality of the Christian life.

Rest also corresponds to our enjoyment of the Lord. If we don’t go to the Lord and apply the spiritual riches to ourselves, we won’t be restful. Without experiencing the work of God and having a healthy fellowship with other believers, we will have no rest. As we draw from Him continually and increasingly through stage after stage, our application and knowledge of rest will become richer and deeper.

Resting by Relying on God

Rest Being the Testimony of God

When we experience God and what He has accomplished, we enter into His rest and thereby become His testimony. If in a family the children are misbehaving and everything is a mess, there is no testimony of successful parenting. In like manner, God is our Father, and He desires that every church would be a healthy testimony as His expression. In our church life, if we focus on things other than God, like how to read the Bible, sing the hymns, or pray—all without the reality of God—we will not become His testimony. We should only focus on Christ, love Him, experience Him, and enjoy His accomplishments so that we might enter into rest and become His testimony.

Neither Working nor Kindling Fire

Moses told the children of Israel, “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day” (Exo. 35:2–3).

The rest that Moses described allowed neither work nor kindling of fire. Kindling no fire meant they could do no cooking. Cooking and working represent our worries concerning our daily living.

Too often, we rely on our work and depend on our fire. Although we need to work, we should depend on the Lord, not our work. Although we kindle fire, we should depend on the Lord, not our fire. This is rest. We are restful because we trust God to take care of all our needs. We fully rely on Him. We trust that He will take care of His testimony, our living, our food, and our body because He is the Lord of all.

Entering into Rest

Though we enter into the reality of rest, we still work. This seems contradictory, yet according to God, it is not. Why? It is because God is our real rest. We fully trust in God that we might enjoy the heavenly rest. Even while many things pressure us outwardly, we remain joyful inwardly.

Though we are burdened for our church to become God's testimony and are actively working toward that goal, we do not rely on our works. As we stand for the Lord and apply His accomplishments to our life, we work in the resurrection of Christ.

Hebrews 4 says, "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest" (vv. 10–11). What does "rested from his works" and "be diligent to enter that rest" mean? If we try hard not to lose our temper, our trying hard indicates we are not resting. Being diligent to enter rest means to draw from that rest and to apply it. What we need is neither to make up our mind nor to try hard. The most essential thing is to dwell in, enjoy, and apply this rest, with the result that it becomes our reality.

To illustrate, we may hear about Canada, talk about Canada, or study about Canada. But once we live in Canada, we no longer need to study about Canada because we are already enjoying the reality of this country. Canada has so many riches for us to enjoy. We just have to be diligent to enter into these riches.

Therefore, entering into rest is entering into the resurrection of Christ, living in Christ, enjoying Christ, drawing from Christ, being mingled with Christ, and operating in the resurrection of Christ.

The Sabbatical Year

In addition to establishing the seventh day as the sabbath day, the Lord also established the seventh year as the sabbatical year. God told the children of Israel, “You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat” (Exo. 23:10–11).

Cultivating and Resting

Paul said, “You are God’s field” (1 Cor. 3:9). In the sight of God, we are His land. God cultivates us and leads us through alternating stages of hardship and rest. Each stage of cultivation is followed by a stage of rest, yet each stage goes deeper and deeper. This is how we experience rest.

When God cultivates us, we may have many complaints: “Why did I lose my job?”; “Why can’t I find a good house?”; “Why is my boss so mean to me?” We always ask why. But this is God’s cultivation. God wants to cultivate us so that our prayer, love, consecration, and desire to follow Him may grow.

However, God also knows when He should let the land rest. He knows when to comfort and encourage us, so we don’t lose hope. He is so skilled in cultivating us that He even knows how deep to plow. With some people, He plows deep; whereas with others, He plows shallow. Although God cultivates us,

He allows us to rest. When the land rests, we enjoy a sweet relationship with God.

When I was young, I was in the army and went through boot-camp training. I was then admitted into a military college of foreign language. Before this school started, surprisingly I was ordered to join a second boot-camp training. I wondered why only I had to go through boot camp twice. I was so angry with the Lord, I decided not to pray or read the Bible during the second training. In other words, I felt the Lord's plowing on me was so deep I couldn't take it anymore. After several days, I was so hungry in my spirit that I went to the Lord and repented to Him in tears. I said to Him, "Lord, although I tell You that I love You, I tried to escape when You disciplined me. Lord, please forgive me." That very day, I received an order allowing me to leave the training. It was amazing that just after I repented, the Lord gave me rest. The Lord knew when to test me and when to stop. During my time off, I was able to participate in a three-month church training. Through this, I experienced my first sabbatical year.

The Experience of the Sabbatical Year

In our experience of the sabbatical year, there is no discipline but only enjoyment, joy, and the presence of God. When I joined the church training, I enjoyed messages every day for three months. This training helped me to build up an excellent foundation of serving. During that period of time, I was so eager to gain the Lord. Whenever I prayed, I felt that the Lord was so wonderful and valuable. He was worthy of my trust. This was my first sabbatical year.

When God rests, man also rests. In this way, we experience the sweet incorporation of God and man. During the training I attended, I was bold to declare, "To live is Christ!" (Phil. 1:21). Although I was young in the Lord at that time, because I had a realization and assurance of Christ, I felt that when God rested, I did too. This is an experience of the sabbatical year. We need to tell the Lord, "I give myself to You. Bring me into the reality of the sabbath day and the sabbatical year."

The Experience of the Year of Release

The sabbatical year was also the year of release. In this year, the slaves were to be freed (Exo. 21:2). However, some did not want to go out free (vv. 5–6). They chose to stay with their masters to serve them. This is like those the Bible calls Nazirites (Num. 6:2). They choose to be separated to serve God. Similarly, although we can choose to go out free, we want to stay with our Lord to serve Him. The Lord is our Master, and He wants us to consecrate ourselves to Him and love Him forever.

If we don't experience the sabbatical year, we can't experience the reality of the year of release. Though we may think we love the Lord very much and are willing to serve Him steadfastly our entire life, without the experience of the sabbatical year, our desire to follow Him is easily changed.

Standing firm in the Lord is a matter of experiencing the sabbatical year in its full sense, not merely as a time of rest. Though in the church life there are good meetings, wonderful care, and a joyful corporate living, this is not the full experience of the sabbatical year. The reality of the sabbatical year is only made possible by the Lord's plowing on us for six years. This plowing process makes us a productive land and enables us to experience the sabbatical year not only as a rest but as a year of release in which we can choose to serve God steadfastly for our entire life.

The Year of Jubilee

The Jubilee—a Change of Realm

The proclamation of the year of jubilee was with the blowing of trumpets. It must have been a jubilant time with shouts of joy. At the end of the graduation ceremonies at West Point Military Academy, the students toss their hats into the air and shout because their rank and position have now changed. This kind of shouting conveys the feeling of the jubilee.

In our experience of the jubilee, we proclaim, “Hallelujah! I am different!” Originally we were enslaved to the flesh, our self life, religion, and all kinds of regulations, but now we are free! God brings us from one level to another, from one realm to another. This is the jubilee.

The Reality of the Jubilee

The jubilee is the first year after seven sabbath years, that is, the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:8–10). Five times ten is fifty. Five signifies responsibility, while ten refers to fullness. This indicates that God fulfills all His requirements. In the jubilee, we enjoy God’s accomplishments and His complete provision. We need to trust all things to God and let Him take the responsibility, yet most of us dare not do so. Our problem is that we are afraid to let God lead us in everything.

The year of jubilee can also be calculated as the seventh eighth year. Since the number eight signifies resurrection, the jubilee is in the wonderful reality of resurrection. In the jubilee, we are brought into resurrection and live in the divine and mystical realm.

Since the jubilee is started with the sounding of a ram's horn, it corresponds to the Lord's second coming, when the last trumpet will be sounded (1 Thess. 4:16). On the day the Lord returns, we will be changed, transfigured and glorified by God (1 Cor. 15:51–53). At that time, God will lead us from the old creation to the new creation, from the present to eternity. The jubilee relates to eternity, in which the reality of the jubilee is substantiated.

Christ as Our Jubilee

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus brought in the reality of the jubilee. When He was on the earth, He read from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19). He then told the people, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). Praise the Lord! He is the jubilee!

Today, since we have the reality of the jubilee, we can toss our "hats" into the air! In fact, we can throw them away and take Christ. Our hats represent what we were in the past. From now on, we should praise God because He has transferred us to a new realm, the divine and mystical realm in resurrection.

The Feasts of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the Firstfruits

The Feast of the Passover—Eating

The main characteristic of the Feast of the Passover is eating. In preparation for their exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel celebrated their first Passover by eating the flesh of a lamb with bitter herbs (Exo. 12:8). They took some of the blood of the lamb and “put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses” (v. 7) in which they ate the lamb. The Lord told them, “Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste” (v. 11). This feast was to be a memorial, celebrated from generation to generation (v. 14).

The Passover points to our experience of eating Christ for both our initial and daily salvation. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He said, “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me” (John 6:57).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread—Rest

Rest is the main characteristic and principle of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is a seven-day feast that begins and ends with a day of rest (Lev. 23:7–8). After we begin to experience the reality of the Feast of the Passover, we need to enjoy the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In other words, we need to live in rest.

Leaven refers to the sin in our nature. It is impossible for us to rid ourselves of this sin nature, yet we can stop leavening by enjoying Christ as our unleavened bread, our sinless life supply. No matter how long we have been in the Lord, sin still remains in our nature. This makes it impossible to have a perfect church life. Instead of focusing on others' weaknesses, we should learn to rest and enjoy Christ. When others fail, we should not look down on them. On the contrary, we need to be thankful that they are still pursuing the Lord in the church life. We have to see that they are kept in God's hands, not ours. If we have this realization, we will be restful. Solomon wrote, "He gives to His beloved even in his sleep" (Psa. 127:2). The building of the church is a process full of rest.

This feast was celebrated at the time of the harvesting of the firstfruits, and barley was the first crop to ripen. Therefore, during this feast, barley was used to make the unleavened bread. Barley is a type of resurrection.

During the course of following the Lord, we will encounter various situations of death. Yet, we need not fear—we have this barley loaf, the resurrection. As we pass through these situations of death, we can experience resurrection. If we enjoy the resurrected Christ, we will no longer criticize or judge others easily. Our worries will be chased away because we trust all things to God. This is the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

After following the Lord for so many years, I can testify that I never cease enjoying the resurrected Christ as my barley loaf. Whenever I die with Christ, I experience His resurrection. Whenever I am weak, discouraged, or defeated, I am alive in Christ because our Lord is the barley loaf. As we follow the Lord, we are restful because we have the resurrected Christ as our supply.

The Feast of the Firstfruits—Mature Believers

The Feast of the Firstfruits was celebrated when the first crops matured and the firstfruits were harvested. This is a picture of mature believers. When the firstfruits of the harvest were brought to God as a wave offering, they were offered

with a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering (Lev. 23:10–13).

On this day, it was not a single stalk but a whole sheaf of firstfruits that were presented to the priest to be a wave offering. In other words, we can't be individual Christians. We need to join ourselves together with others in a church life.

The children of Israel then offered a male lamb a year old, without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord. This indicates that mature believers offer themselves to God to be burnt to ashes on the altar—our self-preservation, our plans and dreams, and our peculiarities are all reduced to ashes.

The grain offering was made from fine flour mixed with oil. This indicates that mature believers express the divine attributes through human virtues.

Finally, the drink offering signifies that mature believers pour out everything for the will of God. Paul was such a drink offering (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6). When we can serve others to the extent that we are willing to do everything for their benefit, when we live for them and ask for nothing but their gaining of Christ, then we are becoming a drink offering.

We will never graduate from the experiences of the Feast of the Firstfruits. The sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest as a wave offering, along with a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering were all brought to God on this day. These represent experiences we will have our entire Christian life.

The Feast of Pentecost

The Passover is a picture of Christ as our Passover Lamb who died on the cross for our redemption (1 Cor. 5:7). The Feast of the Firstfruits coincided with Christ's resurrection. It is a picture of the resurrected Christ as the firstfruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). Christ was killed on the Passover and resurrected on the third day, the day of the Feast of the Firstfruits. It was on the day of Pentecost that the Spirit descended upon the believers to baptize them into one body (Acts 2:1–4; 1 Cor. 12:13). This indicates that the Feast of Pentecost as a type is related to the church life.

Calculating the Date of the Feast

The Feast of Pentecost, which is also called the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:10) and the Feast of the Harvest (Exo. 23:16), began seven weeks from the time that the children of Israel started to put the sickle to the standing grain (Deut. 16:9–10), that is, seven weeks after the Feast of the Firstfruits.

The date of the Feast of Pentecost can be calculated in several ways. It was seven weeks from the day following the sabbath celebrated on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:15). This is seven times seven plus one. Since the sabbath, the day of rest, is the seventh day, and Christ's resurrection occurred on the first day of the week, seven times seven plus one indicates that the church life is full of rest, and it is lived in the

resurrection of Christ. This is a sevenfold rest in the experience of resurrection.

Seven is three plus four. Seven is the number of perfection or complete satisfaction. Three is the number of God, and four is the number of His creatures, especially man. The joining together of God and man takes place in our human spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Therefore, three plus four times seven indicates that in the filling of our spirit, both God and man are satisfied. This sevenfold satisfaction brings in the enjoyment and reality of resurrection.

It was also “fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath” (v. 16). Fifty is five times ten. Since five represents responsibility and ten represents fullness, this indicates that the Lord takes responsibility for all our needs, and we are a testimony of His fullness in His care.

Experiencing Christ’s Death

For the Feast of the Firstfruits, the children of Israel put the sickle to the standing grain to harvest barley, a type of resurrection. The Feast of the Harvest or Pentecost coincided with the harvesting of wheat, a type of death. The Lord Jesus was the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to bear much fruit (John 12:24). Hence, wheat relates to death, indicating that the church life is also a living of death.

The experience of the wheat is the most difficult experience in the church life. We expect the church life to always be joyful and wonderful, without any problems. In reality, however, in the church life, we experience “the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Our experience of death is the application of Christ’s death to us. Christ is a realm that includes His death. If we are in this realm, it is very easy for us to experience His death. There is no need for us to try hard to put ourselves to death. Instead, the more we experience Christ’s death, the more joyful and restful we will be.

This experience of death doesn’t require outward unbearable suffering and bitterness. If we die in Christ, we will feel so peaceful within. Just as the Lord overcame Satan, we also overcome

Satan. As the Lord lived to God, we also live to God. As we experience the death of Christ, we will have joy beyond words.

Someone once asked me, "How do you remain joyful during so many difficult situations?" I answered, "By dying with Christ." We need to live the church life in the death of Christ. Without this, it's hard for us to remain joyful in the church life. If we refuse the experience of death to protect our own benefit, plan, future, and desire, our relationship with the Lord will become distant.

I know a Christian brother who moved to China to teach English. His burden was to preach the gospel. One day he told me, "I am willing to give up everything in order to preach the gospel in China. I don't care whether living in China is difficult or not. I just want to preach the gospel there." This is the experience of death. Originally, he was serving well where he lived and had many who supported him. But when he received God's calling and saw God's desire, he became different. Through this, he experienced Christ's death.

The death of Christ produces the church, and our fellowship of Christ's sufferings and conformation to His death builds up the church. We live and die with Christ (Gal. 2:20). If we don't experience this death, we will be critical of each other's shortcomings, and our church life will not be restful. We must experience the death of Christ so that we may be a blessing to His church.

A Living of Bringing Offerings

The church life, as typified by the Feast of Pentecost, is a living of bringing offerings. This means that we need to consecrate our whole being to God. After we enjoy the salvation signified by the Feast of the Passover, we need to continue bringing offerings to God in the church life, offering ourselves to God for His use and satisfaction. This living of consecration is portrayed through the offerings which are part of the Feast of Pentecost.

The New Grain Offering

The Lord told Moses, “You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord” (Lev. 23:16–17). This new grain offering signifies that our living should be full of human virtues as a result of our mingling with the humanity of Christ.

An ephah is a unit of measurement. The two loaves of bread are made from two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour. Fine flour is a type of the fine humanity of Christ. Bringing the two loaves of bread from the dwelling places is to bring our enjoyment of Christ to God in the church life. What we have experienced of Christ we share by speaking before God and His people.

The loaves that were brought for a wave offering at the Feast of Pentecost were to be made with fine flour and leaven. Leaven signifies our sinful nature. These leavened loaves indicate that even after we have consecrated ourselves to God to serve in the church life, we still have a corrupt fallen nature. We may think it is impossible for God to accept such leavened service because serving should be pure. Yet our leaven reminds us that no matter how well we serve, we are still fallen.

For instance, if we pray a great prayer, which stirs up everyone in the prayer meeting, we might feel proud. At this time, the Lord reminds us that no matter how well we pray, we are still fallen. Our pride exposes our leaven.

These two loaves were to be baked at home. The baking process signifies that the Lord puts us into seemingly unreasonable situations that pressure us, forcing us to draw from His grace and riches that we might be constituted with His human virtues. Without being baked by God, it is unlikely we will ever come to know how corrupt we are.

The church life is like an oven. It is through baking that we become the grain offering. Sometimes the baking temperature is 130° F, in which case we can still survive. Sometimes, however, the baking temperature is 375° F, in which case we are well baked as bread. We will be baked until we match the will of God.

The Burnt Offering

Concerning the Feast of Pentecost, God also told Moses, “Along with the bread you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord” (Lev. 23:18).

Firstly, there were seven lambs for the burnt offering. Since we only have one Savior as the unique Lamb of God, why are seven lambs needed here? The reason is that since it is through the serving and preaching of the believers that we enjoy and

experience the Lord Jesus as our Savior, this experience is in the principle of the mingling of God and man. Seven is composed of one (the unique God) plus six (created man, since Adam was created on the sixth day). So seven represents the mingling of God and man. It was when we heard the gospel preached by believers that we received the Lord Jesus and experienced Him as our Savior. Then, in order to grow in the life of God, we again need our fellow believers. None of us can receive the gospel or grow in life alone.

Secondly, there was one bull of the herd for the burnt offering. In a herd, the dominant bull leads. The bull of the herd signifies the eternal and complete Christ. In the church, He is the unique One who takes care of our needs and leads us. However, according to our concept, the bull represents the church's elders, and the lambs represent the Lord Jesus. We need to know that there were seven lambs but only one bull of the herd in the burnt offering. It is the Lord who leads the church. Apart from Him, none of us can lead the church. Christ is the church's true leader and unique blessing. We should follow Him alone. We should not add anything to Christ in the church life. There is only one Savior.

Thirdly, there were two rams for the burnt offering. The two rams signify peace. This indicates the sweet and peaceful testimony of the church life. In the church life, we have a harmonious relationship with one another. In the world, there is no real peace but only hypocrisy and deceitfulness. We should pay the price to maintain a harmonious relationship among ourselves.

The Drink Offering

Finally, we need to be a drink offering (Lev. 23:18). Like Paul, we have to pour out ourselves in the church life so others can gain Christ (Phil. 2:17). Our becoming a drink offering is their blessing. The church needs those who are willing to be drink offerings. May we tell the Lord, "I am willing to consecrate myself to You so that those with me may grow in You."

Not Reaping the Corner of the Field

After describing the Feast of Pentecost to Moses, God said, “When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien” (Lev. 23:22). The field here refers to the church (1 Cor. 3:9). Leaving the corner of the field for the needy means that we should not become closed and exclusive, considering ourselves the most blessed. We should not be self-centered, unable to receive others into our church life.

The needy in the church life are the newly saved and those who require our help with their spiritual growth. Whenever we gain spiritual riches, we should share them with others so that they might be nourished also. Whatever we enjoy of Christ, we should use to enrich the needy in the church life.

Besides the needy, there are the aliens in the church life (Eph. 2:19). They are those who seemingly stay in the church life, listening to the gospel for years, but still don’t believe. We need to continually take care of them and supply spiritual food to them so that they may become believers in the church life one day. Not reaping the corner of the field completely is a wonderful practice in the church life.

The Feast of Pentecost portrays a beautiful picture of the church life in which we bring others to the salvation of Christ and let the Lord lead us. This results in a peaceful, harmonious life together in which many pour themselves out on behalf of others.

Maturity in Life

Maturing in Life for the Lord's Return

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) was also called the Feast of the Ingathering (Lev. 23:34; Exo. 23:16; 34:22). Since this was the last feast of the year and celebrated the end of the harvest, it signifies the accomplishment of the will of God and the believers' maturity in life. Our maturity in life relates to the accomplishment of the will of God. According to truth, this feast symbolizes the Lord's return. According to our experience, it symbolizes our gradual maturing in life.

After we experience salvation with the Feast of the Passover, we begin to experience the Feast of Pentecost in the church life. The experience of the Feast of Tabernacles is the ultimate experience in our Christian life.

The Feast of Tabernacles was ushered in with the blowing of trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24). The feast began on the fifteenth day of the month and lasted for seven days (v. 34).

On the one hand, this feast symbolizes the Lord's return. Just as trumpets were blown before the Feast of Tabernacles, the angels will blow the trumpets before the millennial kingdom (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16–17; Rev. 11:15). On the other hand, this feast symbolizes our maturity in life. The Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days, indicating a perfect period of time. This shows us that it takes a long time to fully experience the Feast of Tabernacles and reach full maturity.

This maturity is the increase of God in us. Maturity has no absolute standard. We are comparatively mature but not absolutely mature. For instance, a two-year-old boy behaves differently from a four-year-old boy. This is because a four-year-old is more mature than a two-year-old. At the age of eight, maybe he will learn how to love others; when he is sixteen, maybe he will act like he is in love; then at twenty-five, maybe he will know love as a commitment. Compared to a grandfather, he is still young; yet compared with a child, he is more mature. Maturity is not absolute but comparative.

As the Lord adds Himself to us, we mature. It is the Lord's desire that all His believers would mature in life before He returns. If our spiritual condition remains the same, if we are pursuing our own desires instead of His, how can we bring the Lord back? We need to love the Lord with our whole heart. If we desire the Lord's return, we need to mature in life.

Given the present situation among Christians today, how can the Lord come back? We lack the experience of Christ as life. We need a more willing heart to consecrate ourselves to the Lord and to follow Him. We need to tell the Lord, "We desire to grow in life. We want You to increase in us, even in our life decisions such as when we buy a house or choose a career. We desire to grow up in You and become mature before You at Your return."

Our Declaration and Redemption

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in the seventh month, the month of Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2). Ethanim means "permanent flowing" (Potts, 80), indicating the constant supply of grace from the Lord Jesus as our living spring. This rich and constant supply results in a harvest of abundant fruit in maturity.

The Feast of Tabernacles began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasted for seven days (Lev. 23:34). On the first day of the seventh month, the children of Israel blew trumpets (v. 24), signifying a matured believer's declaration and testimony. The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement (v. 27). Both of these events preceded the Feast of Tabernacles.

Figuratively, we blow trumpets by testifying that we are for Christ and the church. We need to declare that the church, as the body of Christ, is of Christ and is His testimony. Also, the Day of Atonement is a picture of our redemption accomplished through the blood of Christ. We have to remind ourselves that we need the Lord's redemption, which is typified by both the Feast of the Passover and by the Day of Atonement. We need the Lord to be our redeeming lamb of the Feast of the Passover because we are sinners with leaven, and we also need the Day of Atonement.

A Picture of the Millennial Kingdom

The Feast of Tabernacles typifies the millennial kingdom. Just as the Feast of Tabernacles was initiated with the children of Israel's blowing of trumpets, the angels' blowing of trumpets will also precede the Lord's return and the millennial kingdom (Matt. 24:31).

The Day of Atonement before the Feast of Tabernacles typifies the turning of the children of Israel at the end times (Zech. 12:10–11, Matt. 24:30). When the Lord returns, there will be a great tribulation, at the end of which, all Israel will repent and be saved (Matt. 24:29–31; Rom. 11:25–26). Then the millennial kingdom will come. Eventually, the reality of the Feast of Tabernacles is substantiated in the millennial kingdom for the accomplishment of the will of God (Rev. 20:1–6).

A Testimony of Maturity in Life

In our experience, the Feast of Tabernacles is the Feast of the Ingathering "when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field" (Exo. 23:16). This is a picture of our expression and testimony of maturity in life. Many believers who came before us serve as wonderful patterns. They stored up rich spiritual revelations and experiences that we can apply today. They had the reality of the Feast of the Ingathering and lived in the reality of the Feast of Tabernacles. We, too, should store up

many spiritual riches throughout our life. We need to tell the Lord, “I want to enjoy and experience You every day so that my life will be a rich harvest for You.”

The Offerings of the Feast of Tabernacles

When the children of Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) in the good land, they lived in tents for seven days as a reminder that their fathers lived in tents in the wilderness after leaving Egypt (Lev. 23:42–43). Instead of settling in one place, these fathers wandered in the wilderness. This portrayed how the children of Israel were to live before God. Just as their fathers left the enslavement of Egypt, they did not belong to the world but to God, whom they were to follow their whole life.

For us as New Testament believers, this feast portrays that we are not earthly but heavenly (Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:6). Our existence is not based upon this temporary world but on the eternal life we have received. We are preparing to enter into our heavenly country (see Heb. 11:16).

The Testimony of a Mature Life

Moses told the children of Israel, “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat” (Deut. 16:13). The harvested and threshed grain represents the satisfaction of life, while the wine signifies the joy and happiness of life. When we become mature, we not only labor but also have the riches and abundance of life.

Moses continued, “You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants

and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns” (v. 14). When we become mature, we will have many sons and daughters begotten through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). We will participate in the priesthood, coordinating with the saints and serving God in the church life. Orphans and widows have lost those they depended on and now need care. If we are spiritually mature, we will take care of them and bring the gospel to them.

Moses also said, “Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days” (Lev. 23:40). This portrays a wonderful testimony of maturity. Palm trees grow in the desert around a spring. This indicates that as matured people, we have the spring of life enabling us to overcome different environments. We are also fruitful, displaying Christ’s divine attributes in our living as a wonderful testimony.

Focusing on Christ

The Feast of Tabernacles included the burnt offering (Num. 29:12–13) and the grain offering (vv. 14–15). Concerning the burnt offering, the children of Israel needed to prepare “thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old, which are without defect” (v. 13). On the following days, they were to offer again, but the number of bulls offered was reduced by one each day until the seventh day, in which only seven bulls were offered (vv. 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32). On the eighth day, they only offered “one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect” (v. 36).

Since the Feast of Tabernacles is a picture of mature believers, the reduction in the number of animals offered at the end of the feast would seem to indicate that the servants of the Lord become less and less rich. How can this be? It is easy for us to focus on how much Bible knowledge we have in the beginning. If others ask us about a verse, we have much to say because we have stored up so much spiritual truth. However, after serving

the Lord for a long time, we no longer focus on our own riches but the Lord's sovereignty and the person of Christ.

On the eighth day, they offered only one bull, and one ram, but seven lambs without blemish. Seven is one (God) plus six (man), so seven signifies the joining of God and man. This indicates that as we become more and more mature, all the great experiences we had and all the spiritual riches we stored up become secondary, whereas the Lord Himself becomes our primary focus. What matters is only Christ!

Thank the Lord, He has saved us. We should tell Him, "Though I have accumulated some spiritual riches, I don't treasure them more than I treasure You." We should only count Christ. Praise the Lord! Christ is the center of the Feast of Tabernacles.

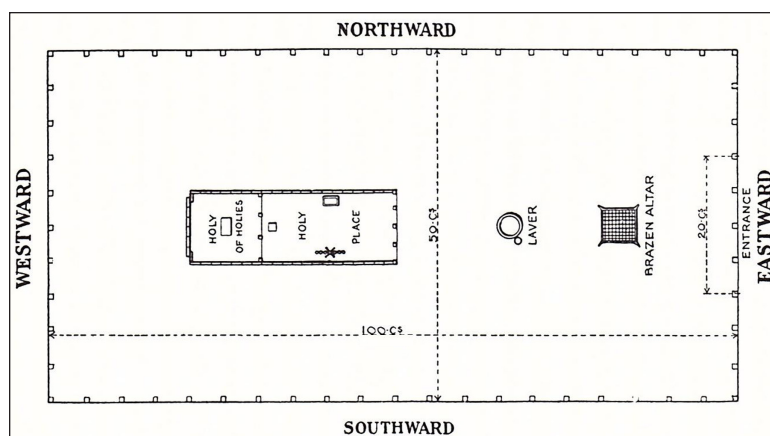
THREAD FIVE:

GOD AND
HIS WORK

THE TABERNACLE

The Tabernacle and Its Furniture

The tabernacle is a wonderful type in the Bible. It depicts the will, work, and administration of God, the experiences of the believers, and the purpose of these experiences. The tabernacle shows us in picture form what God wants to achieve in His economy.



The Tabernacle

When God met with Moses on Mount Sinai, He revealed the pattern of the tabernacle to him. He told him, “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you

shall construct it” (Exo. 25:8–9). In the next thirteen chapters of Exodus, the tabernacle is described in detail.

There were three sections in the tabernacle: the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies (27:9; 26:33). The outer court was one hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and five cubits high, and it had a single gate (27:16, 18). In this court were the altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver (30:18).

In the holy place were three pieces of furniture: the table of the bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand, and the golden incense altar (26:35; 30:6). In the Old Testament, the incense altar was within the holy place, yet in the New Testament, it belongs to the holy of holies (Heb. 9:3–4).

In the holy of holies, there was the ark of the testimony in which there were the tables of the covenant, the golden jar of manna, and Aaron’s budding rod (v. 4). This picture typifies our entire Christian life.

Six Pieces of Furniture

These six pieces of furniture in the tabernacle signify the six stations that all Christians need to experience. In fact, experiencing these stations is the purpose of the Christian life. We need to realize the importance of these stations and why we need to experience each of them.

Living the Christian life is not easy. After we are saved, God intends that we experience these six stations so that we may grow in life. The most meaningful Christian life lies in being one with the will of God, the work of God, the hope of God, and the economy of God. This is what the tabernacle portrays. It shows us how to grow step by step. The tabernacle is such a wonderful picture!

When we believed in Jesus and were baptized, we entered the tabernacle through the gate. Now we need to go through each station of the tabernacle until we enter the holy of holies. However, most Christians are satisfied to remain at the gate of the outer court by simply going to church and reading the Bible every Sunday. The pattern of the tabernacle indicates that what God desires is that we experience all the stations.

Going to church and experiencing the stations are two different things, just as going to school and graduating from school are two different matters. Each graduation represents experiencing and passing through one station in our Christian life. We pass from elementary school to junior high school, to high school, and then to college. In the same way, as we read the Bible, go to church meetings, and preach the gospel, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I advancing through each station in the Christian life?"

Experiencing Six Stations to Grow in Life

It may take us a long time to experience each station. It could take ten or twenty years to pass the altar of burnt offering. Then it may take even longer to pass the bronze laver and the rest of the stations. Passing through station after station, we eventually have the experience of the golden lampstand, the golden incense altar, and the ark of the testimony. We let God work on us as we pass through each station.

The experience of baptism is the gate to enter the outer court. However, most Christians never leave the outer court. They go to church or participate in Christian activities without further growth. If we remain at the gate of the outer court and consider the church life as our pastime, we will never experience the purpose of our Christian life. Our problem is not zeal but unwillingness to advance and grow in life. Without experiencing the stations, we can't grow. The Lord wants us to grow by experiencing His riches until we are transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). We all need to learn this lesson throughout our life.

What are these six stations? The first station is the altar of burnt offering, which signifies consecration. The second station is the bronze laver, which signifies our being judged and washed by God. The third station is the table of the bread of the Presence, which signifies that we enjoy God as our supply, and then we supply others. The fourth station is the golden lampstand, which signifies our being beaten by God to be formed as His shining testimony. The fifth station is the golden incense altar, which signifies our enjoyment of Christ's interceding, and our

praying with Him. The final station is the ark of the testimony, which signifies our expressing God by living Him out.

After our initial salvation, we need to grow in life, experiencing these six stations throughout our entire life. The deeper our experience of these stations, the more meaningful they become to us. We must come to these stations again and again. No matter how many Christian meetings or conferences we attend, and no matter how much we serve or fellowship with others, none of this counts if we don't experience these stations. May we all learn this lesson in life and grow in Christ to maturity.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

Consecration—Becoming Ashes

After entering the gate into the outer court of the tabernacle through baptism, we come to the first station—the altar of burnt offering. Here, the sacrificial animal for the burnt offering was slain, cut, and then burnt to ashes. This signifies our experience of consecration. This first station is the most difficult because no one wants to be sacrificed. Who can say, “Lord, I offer myself to You. Please burn me to ashes”?

Being burnt to ashes means not merely forsaking our future but having no hope of existence. This was Paul’s experience when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Some people hope to become pillars in the church or great servants of the Lord, yet they refuse to be reduced to ashes. Others desire to serve in the church life, follow the Lord, and offer money, but they are not willing to be completely burned to ashes.

It is not easy to follow the Lord. When we love the Lord and begin to follow Him, He requires that we first become ashes. We have to give everything to Him and become a soothing aroma for His satisfaction (Exo. 29:25). If we are to be burned completely, we can’t bargain or argue with God. We can only tell Him, “Lord, I give my whole being to You. I belong to You.”

In order to experience the altar of burnt offering, we need to become ashes and give up any dreams of becoming a famous

minister. Our need is simply to consecrate ourselves to God for His satisfaction.

Going Ever Deeper

It is common for Christians to go to church year after year, yet remain the same. We can't afford to live such a Christian life. After believing in Jesus, the first station we need to experience is consecration to God. Having passed through this station, we need to grow until we arrive at the last station, the ark of the testimony, when we become a testimony of God Himself. Eventually, we will know how to work and cooperate with God.

As we experience these stations, we often fail, yet our experience deepens each time. Just as learning math in school is a continual process, our experience of each station is not once for all. After we have a certain degree of growth, we still need to come back to the altar of burnt offering to consecrate ourselves again for a deeper and more wonderful experience.

During my fifty years of following the Lord, I have never ceased experiencing these stations. We need to tell the Lord today, "I am willing to pass the first station. I want to consecrate myself to You to be burned to ashes. I am willing to become Your satisfaction."

The Bronze Laver

Enlightened by the Light of God

The second station in our Christian experience is portrayed by the bronze laver. The bronze for the laver came from mirrors (Exo. 38:8). Mirrors are solely for reflecting, which signifies enlightenment and typifies our living in the light.

How do we know we are saved? It is by the light of God. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, the light of God enlightened us so that we saw ourselves and our need for a Savior. We saw our sins, and we saw the death of the Lord. We realized that we needed Him to save us and cleanse us of our sins by His precious blood. These realizations begin with the light of God.

Everyone has sinned; however, without the light of God, no one recognizes this fact. People don't think they offend God, and they don't regard themselves as sinners. They don't realize their need to receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior and their need of being born again. Yet one day, the light of God shines on them, and they begin to pray, "Lord, I am a sinner! I need You to save me and be my Savior. Lord, I really need You!" This is the result of the light's shining on sinners. The light causes them to pray, and they become refreshed and peaceful.

The Effect of the Light of God

On January 1, 1953, while living in Taipei, I received the Lord as my Savior. On that day, as I was riding a bicycle, I

passed a church building. A man stopped me and invited me to a gospel meeting. I made an excuse that I would come back later, and then I left.

When I got home, I had a strange feeling that I should return to the gospel meeting because I said I would. Once there, I found that it was so crowded that even the front yard was occupied with people. I found a place to sit in the last row at the entrance gate.

We sang a hymn, and then someone began to preach. Although I didn't understand the message, when the preacher asked those who wanted to believe in the Lord to stand, I did so. I had a feeling that I wanted to believe in Jesus, though I didn't know why. The light had come! I wanted to be saved, and I wanted the Lord to wash away my sins. I stood by the front gate, waiting for someone to contact me. After what seemed like a long time, a man saw me and asked, "Do you want to believe in Jesus?" I said, "Yes." He asked, "Do you know you are a sinner?" I said, "Yes." Then he told me that God is righteous, and I needed to receive Jesus as my Savior so that God would forgive my sins. I repeated after him and prayed, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. You died for me on the cross, and Your blood has washed away my sins. Lord, I receive You as my Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sins." Then he asked me to pray my own prayer.

After my prayer, he said I was now a Christian. I couldn't believe it was so easy. I was told to pray and to confess to the Lord at home. That night, I knelt down beside my bed, praying, "Lord, I am a sinner. You died for me on the cross and shed Your blood to wash my sins away." I couldn't remember what kind of sins I needed to confess, so I just said, "Lord, I committed a lot of sins that I can't remember. Please forgive all my sins."

After praying, there was an unspeakable joy and brightness within me. Even the next morning, I could still feel this inner happiness and enlightenment. I knew that I was born again because I had gained the Lord Jesus. I knew I was a Christian, and now I was different from others.

The light of God not only brings us the experience of the washing of the Lord's blood in salvation but also helps us to experience the washing of the bronze laver. The washing of the

blood is for our sins, while the washing of the bronze laver is for our uncleanness from touching the things of the world.

Washing and Renewing

I thank the Lord that during the fifty years I have been following Him, He has repeatedly led me to consecrate myself at the altar of burnt offering. Whenever I consecrate myself to Him, I have the experience of “the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5) at the bronze laver. Since we are living in a world where we encounter a variety of unclean environments, we need the laver’s cleansing water daily. If we are willing to offer ourselves to the Lord, our experiences of the washing of regeneration will become deeper and deeper.

After entering into the tabernacle through the gate of our initial salvation, we need to pass through the first station, which is the altar of burnt offering by experiencing consecration. Then we pass through the second station, the bronze laver, by living in the light and experiencing the washing of regeneration.

We may think that after we are saved, all our problems are solved: the Lord has washed all our sins away; we no longer live in darkness; we have joy and peace; we feel hopeful and know the value of life. Isn’t God lovely? Won’t He accomplish His desire in us? Yes, all this is true. However, it is so easy to forget God and devote our time to our own business. We may do all kinds of things without God’s presence. This is why we can still feel empty and anxious, even though we are saved. We need to experience the bronze laver. We need to be washed again and again and be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

A Daily Washing

The bronze laver is the second station that we need to experience to grow in life. The washing of regeneration and the renewing by the Holy Spirit help us grow in a healthy way. Will we have failures in the church life? Yes. Will we encounter weakness and frustration? Yes. Will we sometimes feel that life is

meaningless? Yes. When we feel this way, we need to call on the Lord and pray to Him so that we will feel as enlightened as the day we were saved. This is the experience of the washing of regeneration and the renewing by the Holy Spirit. Every day we need to come to the Lord and pray before Him in order to maintain our inner joy. In this way, we will be strengthened to maintain the reality of our consecration.

Experiencing the stations of the tabernacle is a lifelong lesson. Receiving salvation is just the beginning of this journey. After we are saved, we need to consecrate ourselves to the Lord and learn to live in fellowship with Him. We have to constantly pray to Him and call on His name. We can even sigh before Him. By contacting the Lord like this, we are washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Although we are born again only once, we must experience being washed every day throughout our entire life. This is the experience of the bronze laver.

The Table of the Bread of the Presence

In our experience, the tabernacle portrays the process of our passing through the various stations of the Christian life. After entering the gate, we confront the first two stations: the altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver. After this, we enter the holy place where there are three items: the table of the bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand, and the golden incense altar.

Enjoying Christ and Supplying Others

The third station is the table of the bread of the Presence (Exo. 25:23–30), which signifies that we need to enjoy the Lord and supply others. Twelve unleavened loaves of bread were set on this table, arranged as two sets of six loaves. These loaves are sometimes also called the showbread (2 Chron. 2:4).

The number two signifies “competent testimony. ‘The testimony of two men is true’ [John 8:17]” (Grant, 33). The loaves indicate that we enjoy Christ as our nourishment, and the fact that these loaves are in two groups indicates that our enjoyment of Christ together with others becomes a testimony.

Our enjoyment of Christ and our supplying of our fellow believers should be inseparable (Eph. 3:7, 2; 1 Pet. 4:10). Many Christians who have been saved for years enjoy the Lord every day, yet they don’t know how to supply and care for others. They are neither able to bring people to salvation nor to help

others love the Lord. We need to learn how to supply others. Enjoying Christ and supplying others are very crucial matters in our Christian life.

Some people have consecrated themselves to the Lord and are joyful in the church life. However, they remain quiet during the meetings, never sharing their enjoyment of the Lord. We need to experience the table of the bread of the Presence by not only enjoying the Lord but also becoming a supply to both believers and unbelievers.

Ministering Christ to Others

Many Christians stop at the experience of the bronze laver. They are saved, have consecrated themselves to the Lord, live in the light, and experience the judgment and washing of that light. Yet they lack the ability to supply others with their enjoyment of Christ. Their problem is that they don't know how to minister with their soul what they have enjoyed in their spirit.

The three parts of the tabernacle correspond to our three parts. The outer court corresponds to our body, the holy place corresponds to our soul, and the holy of the holies corresponds to our spirit. Therefore, the enjoyment of the table of the bread of the Presence relates to our soul. If we enjoy the Lord as the bread of the Presence, our soul will be purified and nourished. Our healthy enjoyment results in a healthy soul, enabling us to supply others.

Whenever we enjoy the Lord in our spirit, we need to dispense these riches of Christ to others through our healthy soul. For example, preaching involves both our spirit and soul. Our speaking for the Lord should be generated from our spirit. Yet when we speak, we use our soul as well as our spirit. Without a proper soul, our ministering of Christ into others will not be successful.

We need to grow to be able to minister. We need to enjoy the Lord and supply Him to others. If we live in the Lord every day, we should be able to dispense Christ to others every day. This is an important lesson for us to learn.

The more we enjoy Christ as the bread of the Presence, the richer and stronger our church life will be. Our speaking for the Lord issues from our experiences of the altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver. Without these experiences, our words have little weight. We need to ask ourselves: Are we consecrated? Have we been examined in the light? We come to the Lord to contact and enjoy Him, not to prepare a good speech. When we simply enjoy the Lord, spontaneously, we will speak for Him. The experiences of consecration and the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit bring in our enjoyment of Christ. Then we will be able to minister in a healthy way. May the Lord lead us through these experiences.

The Golden Lampstand

The fourth station in our Christian experience is portrayed by the golden lampstand, which was to be “one piece of hammered work of pure gold” (Exo. 25:36). This signifies that we are to be the beaten work of God. With the table of the bread of the Presence, we saw what we are to do—enjoy Christ and minister Him to others. Now, with the lampstand, we see who we are to be. If we compare two believers who have similar professions and educational backgrounds, we will find that they express different styles. We each have our own style. Yet as Christians, we need to let Christ be formed in us so that we may all express Christ.

Experiencing God’s Beaten Work

Letting Christ be formed in us is much more crucial than how well we can work or speak for the Lord. When we experience the golden lampstand, Christ becomes our testimony and expression.

If people ask me, “What is your favorite pastime?” I would answer, “Christ.” Christ is my food, drink, enjoyment, experience, and expression. My life is so meaningful because I have the Lord Jesus, and He is being formed in me. If I only impress others with my preaching, it is shameful. Being good at preaching should not become my style. Instead, others should see Christ in me. If people say I have the flavor of Christ, I will feel pleased because I am expressing Christ.

God desires to lead us through His beaten work so that we may become a golden lampstand. He values what is produced through His beaten work more than what we can do for Him. After we are saved, God dispenses His divine essence and elements into us. By reading His Word and fellowshiping with other believers, Christ increases in us day by day and becomes part of our being. We need to experience God's beaten work so that our nature and flesh will be exposed. Although we may feel we are suffering when we experience God's beaten work through our environment, eventually this constitutes God into us that we may be formed as His golden lampstand. When the golden lampstand shines, God is expressed not only through our speaking but also by who we are.

Shining Forth Christ

Many Christians want to become gifted preachers, not realizing that God's beaten work is more valuable than eloquence. We should desire to let Christ be formed in us (Gal. 4:19). Paul said that to him to live is Christ and that he hoped Christ would be exalted in his body (Phil. 1:20–21). This is the result of God's beaten work.

We need to tell the Lord, "I want to experience the altar of burnt offering, the bronze laver, the table of the bread of the Presence, and the golden lampstand. I desire that You work on me and make me Your testimony. I long for Christ to be formed in me." May we not only enjoy Christ and supply others but also be formed as the golden lampstand, shining forth Christ. Then, when others see us, they will touch and enjoy the Lord.

The Golden Incense Altar

The fifth station in our Christian experience is portrayed by the golden incense altar, signifying fellowship and intercession. In the Old Testament, this altar was placed in the holy place (Exo. 40:26), whereas in the New Testament, it is associated with the holy of the holies (Heb. 9:3–4).

The golden incense altar is a picture of our fellowship with God. This fellowship is in three steps: firstly, God initiates; secondly, we respond; thirdly, we enter into a mutual intercession for the work of God.

God Initiates

The fellowship between God and His people always originates with God. Our belief in God is not due to a complete understanding of Him. Our relationship with God is like a woman being wooed by a man. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Throughout our whole life, God's constant speaking, seeking, encouraging, leading, and interceding bring us into ever-deeper experiences of Christ.

If our spiritual condition is weak, the Spirit grieves for us (Eph. 4:30). For example, if we do something contrary to our conscience, we feel troubled in our spirit. Then the Spirit helps in our weakness, interceding for us "with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). This is the initial experience of the golden incense altar.

We Respond

After following the Lord for fifty years, I can testify that I still experience the interceding of the Spirit. We need to learn to fellowship with the Lord whenever He comes to us. We should not be afraid of praying to Him because of our weakness. Instead, we need to say, “Lord, thank You for interceding for me. I ask for Your forgiveness and presence.” If we are willing to pray to the Lord in this way, we have begun to experience the golden incense altar.

A Mutual Intercession

The experience of fellowship at the golden incense altar includes intercession. When the Lord prays for us and we respond to Him, the spontaneous result is a mutual intercession. There are so many churches, so many believers, so many lost souls, and so many works of God that need our prayers! We need to pray for the advancement of the gospel, the building up of the church, the servants of the Lord, and those who take the lead in the churches.

In our initial experiences of the golden incense altar, God prays for us. Then we respond in prayer to the Lord. Eventually, we enter into a mutual intercession with the Lord. In this process, not only does God remember us and we satisfy Him, but eventually the economy of God is carried out. If we have this experience, we have come to a higher level of growth in life.

If we are willing to grow from one station to another in the tabernacle, if we can kneel down to pray for the church, the testimony of God, the believers, and the work of God, then God’s desire will be fulfilled among us.

This is not according to our concept. We may think it is enough if we can pray for someone who is sick. This kind of prayer certainly has value. However, what is more meaningful in the economy of God is intercession concerning the move of God. When the Spirit intercedes for us and we respond to Him, this spontaneously produces a mutual intercession.

We have to grow from the altar of the burnt offering to the bronze laver, the table of the bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand, all the way to the golden incense altar. Yet, most believers stop at the experience of the table of the bread of the Presence. When they obtain the supply from the Lord and they are able to supply others, they think that they have reached a high peak of spirituality. Yet they still need to advance in their experience to the golden incense altar and become one with God for His economy.

We should tell the Lord, “Work on us so that we may become Your golden lampstand, Your living testimony. Lord, make us Your golden incense altar. We want Your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We join You in prayer for the fulfillment of Your plan. We are willing to cooperate with You and walk with You for the carrying out of Your economy.”

Becoming Valuable to God

The experience of the golden incense altar makes us valuable to God. Having experienced the reality of the golden incense altar, we are able to say that we want what God wants and do what God does. We labor as the Lord Jesus did and follow wherever God leads (John 6:38; 4:34). We are one with God and pray for His economy. What a worthy life this is! While others may be proud of their accomplishments or position in the world, we should boast of our value to God as His golden incense altar.

I know a brother who once rejected a job offer to work in the White House. If he had accepted this position, he would have had a bright future. Yet, he said he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God. When I heard his words, I felt that he had grown into the experience of the golden incense altar. He was able to walk with God and be one with Him.

Eventually, we will grow to be the golden incense altar. Through our fellowship with the Lord, we experience a mutual intercession for the economy of God. How marvelous it is! The more we grow, the more we are one with the will of God. In the beginning, we offer ourselves to the Lord (the altar of burnt offering), and then we are enlightened in the light of God (the

bronze laver). Gradually, we enjoy the Lord's presence, become others' supply (the table of the bread of the Presence), and experience the beaten work of the Lord to be formed as His testimony (the golden lampstand). Eventually, we participate in a mutual fellowship and intercession with the Lord as the golden incense altar.

The Romantic Living of the Golden Incense Altar

The experience of the golden incense altar makes our life most valuable and meaningful. The Lord intercedes for us, and we intercede for His work according to His economy. We work with God, labor with God, walk with God, and are one with the heart of God. The golden incense altar is not the final station in our growth of life—there are further experiences in the holy of the holies for us to learn. Yet at the golden incense altar, we can be fully one with God.

An Intimate Relationship

After David confessed his transgressions to God and experienced His forgiveness and deliverance, God told him, “I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Psa. 32:8). The eye here indicates a most intimate relationship between God and man. For people to be able to communicate with one another through their eyes, their relationship must be very deep and close.

The Hebrew word for “counsel” in this verse, *yaats*, also means advise, deliberate, resolve, consult, determine, guide, and purpose (Strong, H3289). This indicates that God leads us in His purpose and will. When we are one with God, He does not need to order us or lead us about like a mule without understanding (v. 9), but He leads by His eye.

We can even command God: “Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands

command ye me” (Isa. 45:11, KJV). When we are so one with God, we can command Him. He no longer needs to charge us with His works. We know and are one with God’s heart. We are able to pray for what He wants, and we long for what He desires. What a wonderful Christian life this is!

Our relationship with God is like that between a husband and wife. In an intimate marriage, the husband and wife not only understand each other’s feelings but also care for each other’s needs. When we pray at the golden incense altar, our prayer is no longer centered on ourselves. Instead, we care for the church, the believers, and the gospel because we are one with God. Our prayer is glorious because it matches God’s will.

The Romantic Life

Our life of believing in Jesus and following Him, from the beginning of our salvation all the way to the end, is full of romance. We will encounter endless romantic situations in which we experience salvation, consecration, enlightenment, enjoyment of the Lord, transformation, and fellowship with the Lord. Our Christian life is marvelous and glorious. When we have the experience of the golden incense altar, we will know how to please and satisfy God. Seeing and knowing Him gives us a clear view of His purpose and economy. The meaning of the Christian life lies within this living of the golden incense altar.

A Life of Growing

The word that best portrays our Christian life is “grow.” We need to grow in Christ, grow in our church life, grow in truth, grow in our serving, and grow in life. This process of God’s salvation for us is so romantic and wonderful that we can’t but worship God for His work. We should feel bold to follow the Lord. Poverty and wealth mean nothing because we have God. We are thankful regardless of what situations we confront. Whether we are rich or poor, we are one with the Lord.

What a romantic living this is! May we all live such a wonderful Christian life! Then we will be able to command God concerning His work because we will know the desire of His heart. He accomplishes our prayers because we are one with Him.

The Ark of the Testimony

The last station in our Christian experience is portrayed by the ark of the testimony. This ark is a picture of our living out of God's testimony.

Three thousand five hundred years ago, the center of God's work was the children of Israel in the wilderness, the center of the children of Israel was the tabernacle, and the center of the tabernacle was the ark of the testimony. This was the place of God's speaking. Once we realize the importance of the ark of the testimony, the work of God and the speaking of God will become our focus, and we will experience a healthy growth in life.

The Three Items in the Ark of the Testimony

The ark of the testimony is the most precious item in the tabernacle because it testifies of God and is the place where He speaks to His people. In the outer court, we see the works of God; in the holy place, we see the principle of His works; but in the holy of the holies, we see God Himself.

If we want to know God, firstly we need to know the works of God (Psa. 77:12; Heb. 3:9; Rev. 15:3). When we are saved and begin to love the Lord, we experience many wondrous events such as God rescuing us from a car accident or healing us from an illness.

Yet, this is not enough. Knowing His works should lead us to know His ways, that is, the principles of His works (Heb. 3:10; Psa. 77:13; 103:7). For instance, if we do not enjoy Christ, we can't supply others; if we do not let Christ dwell in us, we can't bless the body of Christ; if we do not receive the beaten work of God, we can't become the testimony of God. These principles are the ways of God.

Ultimately, it is God's desire that we know Him (Phil. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 John 5:20). We need to grow from knowing the works of God (the outer court) to knowing the principles of God (the holy place), and finally, knowing God Himself (the holy of holies).

In the holy of holies, there is the ark of the testimony, in which are the tablets of the law, the golden jar with manna, and Aaron's budding rod (Heb. 9:4). We will cover the tablets and the golden jar here and Aaron's rod in the next chapter.

The Tablets of the Law

The Ten Commandments, which were written on two stone tablets, reveal who God is. For example, the second commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exo. 20:3) represents God as the unique and jealous God.

In the final stage of our growth, this is the God we should know and live out. Eventually, we will be fully mingled together with God.

The Golden Jar of Manna

We will also have the experience of the golden jar of manna within the ark of the testimony. When God provided manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness, He told Moses, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations" (Exo. 16:33). This golden jar of manna was placed in the ark of the testimony.

The Bible is a kind of manna. As we spend time reading the Bible, we store up the riches of Christ within. Over the years,

the manna we accumulate becomes our own riches with which we are able to supply others.

A Christian brother I know went to a conference and was unexpectedly asked to give a message on the stage. Although he had not prepared at all, he spoke as requested. The more he spoke, the more he found that there was a golden jar of manna within that provided an abundant supply.

If we pursue Christ steadfastly, the objective words of the Bible will become our subjective manna. We should desire to grow in life and have rich experiences of Christ that we may have such a golden jar of manna with which we are able to supply others. The experience of the ark of the testimony with all its contents will bring us into a wonderful Christian life of service to God and His people.

Aaron's Budding Rod

The Resurrection Life

The third item in the ark of the testimony was Aaron's budding rod. We not only see who God is through the tablets of the law and enjoy Him as the manna in the golden jar, but we also experience Him as the budding rod of Aaron (Num. 17:10; Heb. 9:4).

After a major rebellion against Moses and Aaron among the children of Israel in the wilderness, God had the leader of each tribe place a rod before Him in the holy of holies overnight. The next day, only Aaron's rod had sprouted, budded, and borne almonds (Num. 17). This indicated his authority among the people.

Aaron's rod was a dead branch. A rod is used to assist in walking, and it also represents authority. However, as the deadness of the rod signifies, our strength and authority are dead. Only Aaron's rod came to life. It budded after one night, which signifies resurrection. At the last station of our spiritual growth, we grow into the abundant riches of God and into the resurrection of Christ.

It is such a marvelous experience to enjoy the resurrection of Christ. After we experience this resurrection, we need to learn how to abide in it in order to live out its power. This is the principle of Aaron's budding rod.

The Operation of the Resurrection Life

Resurrection is a realm in which there is no sin, darkness, death, satanic authority, worldliness, weakness, or limitation. In resurrection, all negative things are gone. When we believe in the Lord, we receive resurrection life. In resurrection, we enjoy eternity and all the riches of God.

When we experience resurrection, we are given the life-giving Spirit, which becomes our boundless provision (1 Cor. 15:45; Phil. 1:19). The Spirit dwells in us so that we may enjoy and apply it whenever we need. With this Spirit, we receive the power of resurrection. I once wrote a song about how the power of resurrection overcomes the authority of sin. It says,

*Is life eternal, divine in me?
Can it not vanish one day?
Through my abuse and neglect I fear
It might soon waste away.
At times it seems it might disappear,
Not bearing sinful display;
I often felt that it would depart,
Yet still it does increase.
Wonderful life, O soothing life!
Fresh and divine, so heavenly!
Wonderful life, now lives in me,
His satisfaction see. (Martin, no. 143)*

Sometimes we feel frustrated because we are defeated by sin. However, we could still tell the Lord, “I don’t know how to pray to You. I am just a sinner. Though I say I love You, my sin says I am lying to You. Although I want to forget You, at the same time, I want to tell You I love You!” This is the power of resurrection.

Resurrection is not merely a profound teaching but the divine life in operation. Because this divine life indwells us, we can apply its resurrection power whenever we fail. No matter how weak we are, we can still enjoy resurrection. It is never limited by our condition. Even when we feel empty, get sick, or encounter hardship, our Lord will never leave us. He will lift us up and empower us to overcome.

If we lose our job and have no income, we might pray, "Lord, I need to take care of my children, but I don't know how. I only know I have You. I trust myself to You. You are mine and I am Yours! You are the Lord of my household!" If we pray in this way, we will touch resurrection. Then we are no longer looking at our situation from the earth but from the heavens. We will feel that the difficulties we confront count as nothing.

Many Christians take the Lord as their servant instead of their master. They ask Him for blessings but rarely stand with Him. I can testify that in my life I have passed through many bitter situations and trials, yet these difficult experiences have made my life so romantic. When I experience the Lord's beaten work through my environment, I hide myself in the holy of holies and pray, "Lord, thank You! You are my Lord, and You are above all! Because I am with You, I am not on the earth but in the heavens!" This is the operation of the divine life, and this is resurrection.

Living in Resurrection

We initially experience resurrection as our overcoming strength that helps us prevail over sin, the world, limitations, pressures, and hardship. Gradually, resurrection becomes our strength for operation that we may live in resurrection. At this point, we can say, "Hallelujah! For me, to live is to live in resurrection!" At this time, we not only have the power of resurrection, but we also have the operation of resurrection. We become spiritual. The resurrection of God is in us.

Praise the Lord! Our life is a life of growth unto maturity. We consecrate ourselves to the Lord (the altar of burnt offering) and live in the light (the bronze laver). We supply our fellow believers (the table of the bread of the Presence) and let God make us His shining golden lampstand. We live in a mutual fellowship and intercession with God for His purpose (the golden incense altar). Thus we become spiritual and express the being and riches of Christ. We no longer belong to the earth but to the heavens! All of our experiences are in the heavens!

Growth Resulting in Glory

In the ark of the testimony were three treasures: the tablets of the law, the golden jar of manna, and Aaron's budding rod. Eventually, if we have the experience of the ark of the testimony, we will know God as He truly is (the tablets of the law), we will receive the riches of God as our supply and enjoyment (the manna in the golden jar), and live out the resurrection life of God as our living testimony (Aaron's budding rod). These three items show us that our focus should not be on becoming good Christians but on having a healthy growth in life. Regardless of how long we have been saved, we must keep growing in the Lord. This life of growing is romantic, and the result of our growth is glory (Rom. 8:30). May we all grow in the Lord.

The Way of the Tabernacle

The tabernacle typifies the process of growth in the Christian life. As we have seen, this journey of life consists of six stations, represented by the six pieces of furniture in the tabernacle. Now we will see that the description of the structure of the tabernacle—the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies—is also meaningful and significant.

An Ever-narrowing Way

The length of the court of the tabernacle was one hundred cubits, and its width was fifty cubits (Exo. 27:18). The tabernacle consisted of two sections: the holy place and the holy of holies. The entrance to the holy place faced east and consisted of five pillars supporting a screen (26:36–37). Based on the number and width of the boards used in the tabernacle's construction, it was ten cubits wide and thirty cubits long (vv. 15–25). The holy place was ten cubits wide and twenty cubits long, and the holy of holies was ten cubits wide and ten cubits long.

According to this picture, the tabernacle becomes smaller and smaller as we progress from the outer court to the holy place, then to the holy of holies. This signifies that as we follow the Lord, the way becomes narrower (Matt. 7:13–14).

A Christian brother I know was offered the position of department chair at his university. He felt reluctant to accept this position and called some other brothers for advice. He felt this

need for fellowship because he was following the narrow road of serving the Lord.

Following the Lord is not easy. At the beginning of this journey, we may think that the way is wide and broad. But we soon discover that this way becomes narrower and narrower. It becomes so narrow that we can't continue on this way without leaving the world and fully consecrating ourselves to the Lord. It is impossible to press on without increased enlightenment, a richer supply of life, and a more intimate fellowship with the Lord. Eventually, this way will lead us to the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies, where we experience the incorporation with God, the constitution of God and the authority of God. Here we are narrowed down to having nothing but God.

The Stations along the Way

We were once developing our own future in the world. After we began to pursue the Lord, our own space became smaller and smaller. Although it seems that we are limited, we are, in fact, growing in life. We experience consecration at the altar of burnt offering, washing at the bronze laver, and the supply at the table of the bread of the Presence. When we have grown to this stage, we may expect the Lord to praise us and give us a crown of glory. But it is too early to receive such a crown. We still need to experience the beaten work until we are conformed to the image of Christ and become the golden lampstand expressing Him.

Afterward, we enjoy a mutual fellowship and intercession with God at the golden incense altar. Our experience here grows from the soul to the spirit, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from infancy to maturity, and from the holy place to the holy of holies. Even though we think we have experienced the holy of holies and reached the goal, the Lord still arranges further experiences of the tabernacle for us. We will never graduate from these experiences because they are our lifelong lessons. Praise the Lord! The further we progress on this journey, the narrower, yet more glorious, it becomes!

The Outer Court of the Tabernacle

The tabernacle can be thought of as a representation of the church life. Outside, there is the world with all kinds of attractions. After we are saved, we enter into the church life, which corresponds to entering through the gate of the outer court.

Four Pillars

Four bronze pillars supported the curtain that formed the gate of the outer court. The number four signifies all creation, since the Bible refers to four corners of the earth, four seasons, four winds, and four rivers that flow from the garden of Eden. It especially refers to all mankind, since it is mankind that rules over the earth. The salvation of God has no selection—it is for all mankind. No matter how we are saved, we are saved in Christ. God doesn't save people because of their wealth or intelligence. He loves all people in the world regardless of race and nationality. No one should say, "The Lord saved me because He knows I am more special than others." No, the entrance into salvation is open to all. Whoever is willing is able to receive this salvation (John 3:15; Rom. 10:13).

Bronze Sockets

Surrounding the court of the tabernacle were a total of sixty pillars—twenty on the south side, twenty on the north side, ten on the west side, then three plus three plus four at the gate on

the east side (Exo. 27:9–16). In the church life, which is signified by the tabernacle, every believer is surrounded by these sixty pillars. These pillars were placed in sockets made of bronze (vv. 17–18). Bronze signifies judgment. For example, when the assembly of Korah rebelled against Moses and Aaron, “Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar, as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the Lord; so that he will not become like Korah and his company—just as the Lord had spoken to him through Moses” (Num. 16:39–40). In this account, the bronze of the censers of those judged by God which became plating for the altar of burnt offering indicated the judgment of God.

Through our experience of the church life, we can realize the meaning of the judgment of God. However, most people don’t like to live in the judgment of God. We are likely to have opinions concerning everything in the church life because we don’t live in the judgment of God. If we see His judgment, we will be afraid to criticize others or spread rumors. When we fear God, we respect and treasure His people.

I am concerned that in the churches today there is little fear of the judgment of God. Some tend to criticize the church and the leaders in the church. Only those who live in the judgment of God will live out the real church life.

Why do some who love the Lord leave the church life? When I was young, I had many companions who prayed with me, consecrated themselves to God with me, preached the gospel with me, and stood with me for the testimony of God. Yet they left the church life one by one. The main reason I have remained is that I allowed the Lord to judge me. I dare not criticize others nor rebel. I often tell the Lord that I am willing to stay under His judgment. Whoever lives under the judgment of God is blessed.

Fine Twisted Linen

God told Moses that the hangings for the outer court of the tabernacle were to be of fine twisted linen (Exo. 27:9). This fine

twisted linen signifies the humanity of Christ. In our church life, we need to live out the humanity of Christ (Rev. 19:8). For example, in a gospel meeting, if we welcome the new ones with friendly smiles and treat them with kindness, our testimony will attract them. This is an expression of Christ's humanity lived out through us.

Because the church life is also a human living, we should recognize that we all have weaknesses and limitations. We need to pass through the judgment of God and ask for His mercy so that we may express proper human virtues. It is through our human virtues that others experience the love of the Lord and the sweetness of the church life. And it is also in these human virtues that the church life is built up.

Needing One Another

One and a Half Cubits

Many measurements in the tabernacle included halves. For instance, under the ledge of the altar of burnt offering was a grating, which was halfway up the altar (Exo. 38:4). The table of the bread of the Presence was one and a half cubits high (25:23). The ark of the testimony was one and a half cubits wide and one and a half cubits high (v. 10). These half measures are very meaningful. They indicate that even after we have grown to be the ark of the testimony, have become spiritual, and are a blessing to the church, we are still incomplete.

Even great servants of the Lord are incomplete by themselves. They are each “one and a half cubits.” We tend to exalt servants of the Lord because we do not understand the meaning of one and a half cubits. No matter how mature we may be, we are still one and a half cubits. Even when we become so mature that we have the experiences of the riches of God, we still need to recognize we are only one and a half cubits. Only God is complete!

However, coming together with another “one and a half cubits” will make us three cubits. This is the church life, where every half needs another half.

The Corinthian believers said, “I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’” (1 Cor. 1:12). It’s our tendency to look for servants of the Lord who are perfect. But in spite of how excellent they may be, they are still only one and a half cubits, still incomplete. No matter how blessed we are, we

will never be complete on our own. We always need others to balance us. This is the principle of not only the ark of the testimony but also of the entire tabernacle.

The Greatest Picture of the Church

We worship our God, who revealed through many types in the Old Testament what the church needs today. The greatest of these types is in Exodus, where God gained Moses, His servant who gathered His children and formed them as a people to manifest His testimony. Moses' whole life was full of divine work and revelation. Eventually, through him, God revealed the strongest and most important type in the Old Testament—the tabernacle.

The tabernacle depicts the will, work, and administration of God, the experiences of the believers, and the purpose of these experiences. It shows us in picture form what God wants to achieve in His economy.

Every Jesus lover must know, appreciate, and understand the tabernacle. We should experience, enjoy, and partake of its reality so we can grow properly in our church life.

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