

I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience™



# BEGINNINGS

FAMILY GUIDE

*Almighty God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
grant, we pray,  
that we might be grounded and settled  
in your truth  
by the coming of your Holy Spirit  
into our hearts.*

*What we do not know,  
reveal to us;  
what is lacking within us,  
make complete;  
that which we do know,  
confirm in us;  
and keep us blameless in your service,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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— Welcome to —

# IMMERSE

The Bible Reading Experience

Leading a family is arguably one of the most challenging tasks a person can undertake. And since families are the core unit in the church, their growth and development directly impacts the health of the communities where they serve. The *Immerse: Beginnings Family Reading Guide* is a resource designed to assist parents, guardians, and other family leaders in guiding their families through the transformative Immerse experience.

## Planning Your Family Experience

This family guide is essentially an abridged version of *Immerse: Beginnings*. So it's an excellent way for young readers in your family to participate in the Immerse experience without becoming overwhelmed. The readings are shorter than the readings in *Immerse: Beginnings* and are always drawn from within a single day's reading. This helps everyone in the family to stay together, whether reading from the family guide or the complete *Beginnings* volume.

Each daily Bible reading in the family guide is introduced by a short paragraph to orient young readers to what they are about to read. This paragraph will also help to connect the individual daily Scripture passages to the big story revealed in the whole Bible. (This is an excellent tool for helping you guide your family discussions.)

The family guide readings end with a feature called Talking Together, created especially for young readers. These provide reflective statements and questions to help them think more deeply about the Scriptures they have read. (Talking Together is also useful for guiding your family discussions.)

The readings in the family guide are intended primarily for children in grades 4 to 8. Older children may be better suited for reading the full text of *Immerse: Beginnings*. (These age suggestions are only provided as a guideline. You know what is most appropriate for your children.)

Sometimes the best way to get everyone on the same page is to read something together aloud. If your family enjoys reading aloud together on a regular basis, that may be the most natural way for you to use the family reading guide. For families that haven't tried this, you may want to experiment with it by reading from this guide. Begin each daily reading with the introductory paragraph to give context, followed immediately by the daily Scripture passage. Then the Talking Together feature can help you lead a family discussion.

And don't forget about the audio and video resources that are available at [ImmerseBible.com](http://ImmerseBible.com). These small group tools could be just what your family needs to stay engaged in the Immerse experience.

Enjoy your journey into Scripture with your family. We hope and pray that this family resource will help you and your family to experience God's word together.

## DAY 1

# Song of Creation

(from *Beginnings*, pages 3-4)

*God created the world as his temple, a place where he intended to live together with us. He created order and beauty, putting the right things in the right places so they could live and thrive. The creation was filled with all different kinds of places and creatures, and all of it brought glory to God. God made human beings in his own image and gave them the task of watching over the world, so life and creation would thrive. We are God's creatures, made to serve, honor, and worship him.*



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with

seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened. God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the

sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

—from the book of Genesis

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What is your favorite part of God’s good creation? Do you have a certain kind of animal you like best of all? Or a beautiful place you love to visit (a beach, forest, the mountains, or some other place)? How does the world show us God’s power and majesty?

## DAY 2

### It All Went Wrong

(from *Beginnings*, pages 10-11, 13)

*When human beings started working against what God wanted in the world, he had to decide what to do. God’s heart was broken because of the rebellion of humans. Suffering and death had invaded his good creation. He could have given up on the humans and on the world. But instead he began to work on fighting against evil. God wanted the world to be his temple, a place of peace and well-being. So he decided to give the earth a fresh beginning and to start over with one man.*



The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the

earth. It broke his heart. And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.” But Noah found favor with the LORD.

+ + +

This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God. Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!

“Build a large boat from cypress wood and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Leave an 18-inch opening below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.

“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.”

So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

When everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous. Take with you seven pairs—male and female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice, and take one pair of each of the others. Also take seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that all life will survive on the earth after the flood. Seven days from now I will make the rains

pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created."

So Noah did everything as the LORD commanded him. . . .

Then God told Noah and his sons, "I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth."

Then God said, "I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth." Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth."

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

When God saw all the wrongdoing and evil on the earth, it made him very sad. But God always wants to give us a new beginning. When we see God's rainbow in the sky after it rains, it can remind us to say "Thank you" to God for giving us fresh starts in our lives too. How can you show God that you are grateful for his new beginnings?

### DAY 3

## New Family, New Nation, New World

(from *Beginnings*, pages 17, 20-21)

*Sin and wrongdoing had now found a home in God's good world. People had abandoned God and were following their own selfish ways. So God made a new plan to achieve his goal. He chose one man and*

*promised to bring blessing and life to all people through him. Abram's descendants would grow to become the nation of Israel, and the Bible is the story of what happened to them. This new family would be given a new land, and one day all things would be made new because of them. God is making promises, and those promises are what keep the story moving forward.*



The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him. After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD. Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev. . . .



Some time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."

Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir." Then the LORD

took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Then the LORD told him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

But Abram replied, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?”

The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half. Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him. Then the LORD said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. (As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”

After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day.

—from the book of Genesis

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

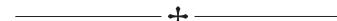
This story shows us that God often chooses one person in order to help out many other people. Are there ways God can use you to help out or serve other people?

## DAY 4

# Promises from Generation to Generation

(from *Beginnings*, pages 32-33, 35)

*Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old, and it was hard to believe they would ever have any children. But God kept his promise, bringing them new life after a long period of waiting and hoping. From this point on, God will be deeply involved in the story of this family. The covenant promises of God move on to Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac. These promises are what the Bible’s story is based on. God is working to make sure his plans for the world will surely happen. He is determined to bring life and restoration back to his people and his creation.*



Abraham was now a very old man, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. One day Abraham said to his oldest servant, the man in charge of his household, “Take an oath by putting your hand under my thigh. Swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac.” . . .

So the servant took an oath by putting his hand under the thigh of his master, Abraham. He swore to follow Abraham’s instructions. Then he loaded ten of Abraham’s camels with all kinds of expensive gifts from his master, and he traveled to distant Aram-naharaim. There he went to the town where Abraham’s brother Nahor had settled. He made the camels kneel beside a well just outside the town. It was evening, and the women were coming out to draw water.

“O LORD, God of my master, Abraham,” he prayed. “Please give me success today, and show unfailing love to my master, Abraham. See, I am standing here beside this spring, and the young women of the town are coming out to draw water. This is my request. I will ask one of them, ‘Please give me a drink from your jug.’ If she says, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!’—let her be the one you have selected as Isaac’s wife. This is how I will know that you have shown unfailing love to my master.”

Before he had finished praying, he saw a young woman named Rebekah

coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. Rebekah was very beautiful and old enough to be married, but she was still a virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. Running over to her, the servant said, "Please give me a little drink of water from your jug."

"Yes, my lord," she answered, "have a drink." And she quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and gave him a drink. When she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough to drink." So she quickly emptied her jug into the watering trough and ran back to the well to draw water for all his camels.

The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not the LORD had given him success in his mission. Then at last, when the camels had finished drinking, he took out a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets for her wrists.

"Whose daughter are you?" he asked. "And please tell me, would your father have any room to put us up for the night?"

"I am the daughter of Bethuel," she replied. "My grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. Yes, we have plenty of straw and feed for the camels, and we have room for guests."

The man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. "Praise the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham," he said. "The LORD has shown unfailing love and faithfulness to my master, for he has led me straight to my master's relatives."

The young woman ran home to tell her family everything that had happened. Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, who ran out to meet the man at the spring. He had seen the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man had said. So he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. Laban said to him, "Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the LORD! Why are you standing here outside the town when I have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels?" . . .

So they called Rebekah. "Are you willing to go with this man?" they asked her.

And she replied, "Yes, I will go."

So they said good-bye to Rebekah and sent her away with Abraham's servant and his men. The woman who had been Rebekah's childhood nurse went along with her. They gave her this blessing as she parted:

"Our sister, may you become  
the mother of many millions!"

May your descendants be strong  
and conquer the cities of their enemies."

Then Rebekah and her servant girls mounted the camels and followed the man. So Abraham's servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

Meanwhile, Isaac, whose home was in the Negev, had returned from Beer-lahai-roi. One evening as he was walking and meditating in the fields, he looked up and saw the camels coming. When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted from her camel. "Who is that man walking through the fields to meet us?" she asked the servant.

And he replied, "It is my master." So Rebekah covered her face with her veil. Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done.

And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother.

—from the book of Genesis

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

In the story of the Bible we can see that God sometimes does things slowly, over many generations of people. We usually want God to do things for us quickly, and it can be hard to wait. What can we do to help each other be patient and to keep trusting in God even when we don't see him working right away?

#### DAY 5

## Struggling Brothers

(from *Beginnings*, pages 36-37, 42)

God again keeps his promise, and Isaac and Rebekah have their own children. But their twin boys began struggling against each other even before they were born. God's story with Israel is moving forward. But God keeps doing unlikely things, like choosing the second-born son instead of the firstborn. This was unusual. In the ancient world, the firstborn son was always favored. We will see this throughout the story of Israel. God will pick some of the most unlikely people to advance his cause of bringing heaven and earth together again.



This is the account of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Be-thuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was unable to have children. The LORD answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the LORD about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

And the LORD told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

And when the time came to give birth, Rebekah discovered that she did indeed have twins! The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau. Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home. Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!" (This is how Esau got his other name, Edom, which means "red.")

"All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. "What good is my birthright to me now?"

But Jacob said, "First you must swear that your birthright is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left. He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn....



Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night.

Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, "I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" But he was also afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!"

The next morning Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had rested his head against, and he set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it. He named that place Bethel (which means "house of God"), although it was previously called Luz.

Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, and if I return safely to my father's home, then the LORD will certainly be my God. And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me."

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What are some of the reasons we favor certain people over other people? Because they get good grades in school? are talented at sports? are more popular or good looking? What are some things we can do to help everyone realize that they are important—to God and to us, too?

**DAY 6**

## Struggling with God

(from *Beginnings*, pages 50-51, 53-54)

*After Esau traded away his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew, a dangerous hatred between the brothers began to grow. Because of this conflict, Jacob had to run away to another land. There, he married two wives and his family began to grow. While Jacob and his family were returning to the land of Canaan, God appeared to him in the night.*



During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

"Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip. (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.) ...



Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."

So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing. We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."

So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem. As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob's family.

Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan. Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means "God of Bethel"), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

Soon after this, Rebekah's old nurse, Deborah, died. She was buried beneath the oak tree in the valley below Bethel. Ever since, the tree has been called Allon-bacuth (which means "oak of weeping").

Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel." So God renamed him Israel.

Then God said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you." Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob.

Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil. And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means "house of God"), because God had spoken to him there.

—*from the book of Genesis*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

Jacob and his family had to learn that there is only one true God. The LORD is God Almighty, the Maker of all things. What are some of the other things that we sometimes put our trust in? What are some things we can do today to remind ourselves that it's still true that there's only one true God?

**DAY 7**

## Dreams and Danger

(from *Beginnings*, pages 57-59)

*Jacob went on to have twelve sons. The descendants of these twelve sons would grow to become the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. But before that happens, the Bible tells us the story of Jacob's son Joseph. Here we learn that terrible things beyond our control can happen in the world, but we must trust God and take the longer view. God is working in and through the story to bring life and restoration. But it doesn't always happen quickly, and God's people must live with hope and patience.*



This is the account of Jacob and his family.

When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing.

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. "Listen to this dream," he said. "We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"

His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"

This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your

mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?" But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.

Soon after this, Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem. When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them."

"I'm ready to go," Joseph replied.

"Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along," Jacob said. "Then come back and bring me a report." So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.

When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"I'm looking for my brothers," Joseph replied. "Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?"

"Yes," the man told him. "They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, 'Let's go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there.

When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, “The boy is gone! What will I do now?”

Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph’s robe in its blood. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: “Look at what we found. Doesn’t this robe belong to your son?”

Their father recognized it immediately. “Yes,” he said, “it is my son’s robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!” Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “I will go to my grave mourning for my son,” he would say, and then he would weep.

Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever been jealous of someone? It can be very hard to be happy for someone else’s success. It can even be tempting to try to do something to hurt them or bring them down. Is there anything we can do about this? One thing to think about is that God has a different plan for everyone, and good things and hard things will happen to each one of us.

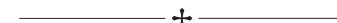
## DAY 8

### Pharaoh’s Dream and the Rise of Joseph

(from *Beginnings*, pages 63-65)

*After Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, God made him successful and he rose to become head over all of Potiphar’s household. Potiphar’s wife tempted him to sleep with her, but Joseph refused to do what was wrong. So Potiphar’s wife lied and told her husband that*

*Joseph had started it, and Joseph was thrown into prison. Once again Joseph is suffering unjustly. But God isn’t done with Joseph’s story yet!*



Two full years later, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing on the bank of the Nile River. In his dream he saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass. Then he saw seven more cows come up behind them from the Nile, but these were scrawny and thin. These cows stood beside the fat cows on the riverbank. Then the scrawny, thin cows ate the seven healthy, fat cows! At this point in the dream, Pharaoh woke up.

But he fell asleep again and had a second dream. This time he saw seven heads of grain, plump and beautiful, growing on a single stalk. Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were shriveled and withered by the east wind. And these thin heads swallowed up the seven plump, well-formed heads! Then Pharaoh woke up again and realized it was a dream.

The next morning Pharaoh was very disturbed by the dreams. So he called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. When Pharaoh told them his dreams, not one of them could tell him what they meant.

Finally, the king’s chief cup-bearer spoke up. “Today I have been reminded of my failure,” he told Pharaoh. “Some time ago, you were angry with the chief baker and me, and you imprisoned us in the palace of the captain of the guard. One night the chief baker and I each had a dream, and each dream had its own meaning. There was a young Hebrew man with us in the prison who was a slave of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he told us what each of our dreams meant. And everything happened just as he had predicted. I was restored to my position as cup-bearer, and the chief baker was executed and impaled on a pole.”

Pharaoh sent for Joseph at once, and he was quickly brought from the prison. After he shaved and changed his clothes, he went in and stood before Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream last night, and no one here can tell me what it means. But I have heard that when you hear about a dream you can interpret it.”

“It is beyond my power to do this,” Joseph replied. “But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease.”

So Pharaoh told Joseph his dream. “In my dream,” he said, “I was standing on the bank of the Nile River, and I saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass. But then I saw seven sick-looking cows, scrawny and thin, come up after them. I’ve never seen such sorry-looking animals in all the land of Egypt. These thin, scrawny

cows ate the seven fat cows. But afterward you wouldn't have known it, for they were still as thin and scrawny as before! Then I woke up.

"In my dream I also saw seven heads of grain, full and beautiful, growing on a single stalk. Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were blighted, shriveled, and withered by the east wind. And the shriveled heads swallowed the seven healthy heads. I told these dreams to the magicians, but no one could tell me what they mean."

Joseph responded, "Both of Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do. The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy heads of grain both represent seven years of prosperity. The seven thin, scrawny cows that came up later and the seven thin heads of grain, withered by the east wind, represent seven years of famine.

"This will happen just as I have described it, for God has revealed to Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do. The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt. But afterward there will be seven years of famine so great that all the prosperity will be forgotten in Egypt. Famine will destroy the land. This famine will be so severe that even the memory of the good years will be erased. As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen.

"Therefore, Pharaoh should find an intelligent and wise man and put him in charge of the entire land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh should appoint supervisors over the land and let them collect one-fifth of all the crops during the seven good years. Have them gather all the food produced in the good years that are just ahead and bring it to Pharaoh's storehouses. Store it away, and guard it so there will be food in the cities. That way there will be enough to eat when the seven years of famine come to the land of Egypt. Otherwise this famine will destroy the land."

Joseph's suggestions were well received by Pharaoh and his officials. So Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours."

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck. Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was shouted, "Kneel down!" So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt. And

Pharaoh said to him, "I am Pharaoh, but no one will lift a hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt without your approval."

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Not everyone can interpret dreams like Joseph did. But God gave Joseph this special ability to help him get out of prison. God had a bigger plan for Joseph, even though Joseph had to suffer a long time. Do you believe God can help you when you have to suffer? Does he have a bigger plan for your life?

## DAY 9

### God's Bigger Plan

(from *Beginnings*, pages 71-73)

*Just as God had revealed to Joseph, the famine spread all the way to the land of Canaan, where Joseph's family lived. So Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food and bring it back. When Joseph's brothers get to Egypt Joseph recognizes them. But he doesn't tell them right away who he is. He waits for just the right moment.*



Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

"I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor

harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

"Now hurry back to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.'"

Then Joseph added, "Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly." Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

The news soon reached Pharaoh's palace: "Joseph's brothers have arrived!" Pharaoh and his officials were all delighted to hear this.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'This is what you must do: Load your pack animals, and hurry back to the land of Canaan. Then get your father and all of your families, and return here to me. I will give you the very best land in Egypt, and you will eat from the best that the land produces.'"

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Take wagons from the land of Egypt to carry your little children and your wives, and bring your father here. Don't worry about your personal belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

So the sons of Jacob did as they were told. Joseph provided them with wagons, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he gave them supplies for the journey. And he gave each of them new clothes—but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothes and 300 pieces of silver. He also sent his father ten male donkeys loaded with the finest products of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other supplies he would need on his journey.

So Joseph sent his brothers off, and as they left, he called after them, "Don't quarrel about all this along the way!" And they left Egypt and returned to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan.

"Joseph is still alive!" they told him. "And he is governor of all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn't believe it. But when they repeated to Jacob everything Joseph had told them, and when he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him, their father's spirits revived.

Then Jacob exclaimed, "It must be true! My son Joseph is alive! I must go and see him before I die."

So Jacob set out for Egypt with all his possessions. And when he came to Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac. During the night God spoke to him in a vision. "Jacob! Jacob!" he called.

"Here I am," Jacob replied.

"I am God, the God of your father," the voice said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make your family into a great nation. I will go with you down to Egypt, and I will bring you back again. You will die in Egypt, but Joseph will be with you to close your eyes."

So Jacob left Beersheba, and his sons took him to Egypt. They carried him and their little ones and their wives in the wagons Pharaoh had provided for them. They also took all their livestock and all the personal belongings they had acquired in the land of Canaan. So Jacob and his entire family went to Egypt—sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters—all his descendants.

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

We can all get mad at people when they do something wrong to us. It's easy to want to get revenge. It's not surprising that Joseph's brothers were afraid he would want to hurt them. Why do you think Joseph didn't try to get revenge on his brothers?

#### DAY 10

## The Blessings and Promises of God Move Forward

(from *Beginnings*, pages 76-77, 80-81)

*Through fathers and sons and grandsons, the story of God and Israel is moving ahead. Remember the goal: God wants to have a special people in a special land to show the world what it means to know and worship God. God wants to bless the entire world through the descendants of Jacob, the nation of Israel.*

One day not long after this, word came to Joseph, “Your father is failing rapidly.” So Joseph went to visit his father, and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

When Joseph arrived, Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to see you.” So Jacob gathered his strength and sat up in his bed.

Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me. He said to me, ‘I will make you fruitful, and I will multiply your descendants. I will make you a multitude of nations. And I will give this land of Canaan to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.’

“Now I am claiming as my own sons these two boys of yours, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born here in the land of Egypt before I arrived. They will be my sons, just as Reuben and Simeon are. But any children born to you in the future will be your own, and they will inherit land within the territories of their brothers Ephraim and Manasseh.

“Long ago, as I was returning from Paddan-aram, Rachel died in the land of Canaan. We were still on the way, some distance from Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). So with great sorrow I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath.”

Then Jacob looked over at the two boys. “Are these your sons?” he asked.

“Yes,” Joseph told him, “these are the sons God has given me here in Egypt.”

And Jacob said, “Bring them closer to me, so I can bless them.”

Jacob was half blind because of his age and could hardly see. So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Jacob kissed and embraced them. Then Jacob said to Joseph, “I never thought I would see your face again, but now God has let me see your children, too!”

Joseph moved the boys, who were at their grandfather’s knees, and he bowed with his face to the ground. Then he positioned the boys in front of Jacob. With his right hand he directed Ephraim toward Jacob’s left hand, and with his left hand he put Manasseh at Jacob’s right hand. But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys’ heads. He put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger boy, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, though he was the firstborn. Then he blessed Joseph and said,

“May the God before whom my grandfather Abraham  
and my father, Isaac, walked—  
the God who has been my shepherd  
all my life, to this very day,

the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—  
may he bless these boys.  
May they preserve my name  
and the names of Abraham and Isaac.  
And may their descendants multiply greatly  
throughout the earth.”

But Joseph was upset when he saw that his father placed his right hand on Ephraim’s head. So Joseph lifted it to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. “No, my father,” he said. “This one is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head.”

But his father refused. “I know, my son; I know,” he replied. “Manasseh will also become a great people, but his younger brother will become even greater. And his descendants will become a multitude of nations.”

So Jacob blessed the boys that day with this blessing: “The people of Israel will use your names when they give a blessing. They will say, ‘May God make you as prosperous as Ephraim and Manasseh.’” In this way, Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Then Jacob said to Joseph, “Look, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will take you back to Canaan, the land of your ancestors. And beyond what I have given your brothers, I am giving you an extra portion of the land that I took from the Amorites with my sword and bow.” . . .

After burying Jacob, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had accompanied him to his father’s burial. But now that their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers became fearful. “Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him,” they said.

So they sent this message to Joseph: “Before your father died, he instructed us to say to you: ‘Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.’ So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin.” When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. “Look, we are your slaves!” they said.

But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

So Joseph and his brothers and their families continued to live in Egypt. Joseph lived to the age of 110. He lived to see three generations of

descendants of his son Ephraim, and he lived to see the birth of the children of Manasseh's son Makir, whom he claimed as his own.

"Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come to help you and lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he solemnly promised to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, and he said, "When God comes to help you and lead you back, you must take my bones with you." So Joseph died at the age of 110. The Egyptians embalmed him, and his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

*—from the book of Genesis*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Jacob blessed his son Joseph and his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim. He prayed that the promises of God would come true for them. What do you think God's promises are for your family? What are God's promises for you?

## DAY 11

### God Comes Down

(from *Beginnings*, pages 87-89)

After Joseph and his generation died, the descendants of Jacob continued to increase in number. Eventually they became a great nation, and a new king of Egypt came to power who didn't remember Joseph or what he had done. This pharaoh became worried about how many Israelites there were, so he made all the Israelites slaves. Brutal slave drivers were appointed over the people of Israel, and they were worked without mercy. This forced new questions to arise: Where was God? Did he see their suffering?



Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and he remembered his

covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

"Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?"

God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you."

This is my eternal name,  
my name to remember for all generations.

"Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, "I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you. I have promised to rescue you from your oppression in Egypt. I will lead you to a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live."

"The elders of Israel will accept your message. Then you and the elders must go to the king of Egypt and tell him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So please let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD, our God.'

"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand forces him. So I will raise my hand and strike the Egyptians, performing all kinds of miracles among them. Then at last he will let you go. And I will cause the Egyptians to look favorably on you. They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed. Every Israelite woman will ask for articles of silver and gold and fine clothing from her Egyptian neighbors and from the foreign women in their houses. You will dress your sons and daughters with these, stripping the Egyptians of their wealth."

But Moses protested again, "What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The LORD never appeared to you'?"

Then the LORD asked him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A shepherd's staff," Moses replied.

"Throw it down on the ground," the LORD told him. So Moses threw down the staff, and it turned into a snake! Moses jumped back.

Then the LORD told him, "Reach out and grab its tail." So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it turned back into a shepherd's staff in his hand.

"Perform this sign," the LORD told him. "Then they will believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—really has appeared to you."

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

God doesn't forget his promises. When he appeared to Moses in the burning bush he told Moses he was the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The promises had been made to these ancestors. So God was coming to keep his word. Many followers of Jesus today are suffering like the ancient Israelites were in Egypt. Pray for God to come down and rescue them, too.

## DAY 12

# Who Is the Ruler of the World?

(from *Beginnings*, pages 94-96)

*God had come down to rescue his people. But Pharaoh held the people in slavery by his own power. Pharaoh didn't know who God was, and he didn't know God's name: Yahweh. Why should Pharaoh listen to Yahweh? So working through Moses, God began to teach Pharaoh. God showed Pharaoh his power over all things. He brought his mighty power to earth in order to free his people from slavery.*



Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go back to Pharaoh and announce to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will send a plague of frogs across your entire land. The Nile River will swarm with frogs. They will come up out of the river and into your palace, even into your bedroom and onto your bed! They will enter the houses of your officials and your people. They will even jump into your ovens and your kneading bowls. Frogs will jump on you, your people, and all your officials.'"

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Raise the staff in your hand over all the rivers, canals, and ponds of Egypt, and bring up frogs over all the land.'" So Aaron raised his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs came up and covered the whole land! But the magicians were able to do the same thing with their magic. They, too, caused frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and begged, "Plead with the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people. I will let your people go, so they can offer sacrifices to the LORD."

"You set the time!" Moses replied. "Tell me when you want me to pray for you, your officials, and your people. Then you and your houses will be rid of the frogs. They will remain only in the Nile River."

"Do it tomorrow," Pharaoh said.

"All right," Moses replied, "it will be as you have said. Then you will know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials, and your people. They will remain only in the Nile River."

So Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh's palace, and Moses cried out to the

LORD about the frogs he had inflicted on Pharaoh. And the LORD did just what Moses had predicted. The frogs in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields all died. The Egyptians piled them into great heaps, and a terrible stench filled the land. But when Pharaoh saw that relief had come, he became stubborn. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had predicted.

So the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Raise your staff and strike the ground. The dust will turn into swarms of gnats throughout the land of Egypt.’” So Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded them. When Aaron raised his hand and struck the ground with his staff, gnats infested the entire land, covering the Egyptians and their animals. All the dust in the land of Egypt turned into gnats. Pharaoh’s magicians tried to do the same thing with their secret arts, but this time they failed. And the gnats covered everyone, people and animals alike.

“This is the finger of God!” the magicians exclaimed to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh’s heart remained hard. He wouldn’t listen to them, just as the LORD had predicted.

Then the LORD told Moses, “Get up early in the morning and stand in Pharaoh’s way as he goes down to the river. Say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse, then I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, your people, and all the houses. The Egyptian homes will be filled with flies, and the ground will be covered with them. But this time I will spare the region of Goshen, where my people live. No flies will be found there. Then you will know that I am the LORD and that I am present even in the heart of your land. I will make a clear distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will happen tomorrow.’”

And the LORD did just as he had said. A thick swarm of flies filled Pharaoh’s palace and the houses of his officials. The whole land of Egypt was thrown into chaos by the flies.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. “All right! Go ahead and offer sacrifices to your God,” he said. “But do it here in this land.”

But Moses replied, “That wouldn’t be right. The Egyptians detest the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God. Look, if we offer our sacrifices here where the Egyptians can see us, they will stone us. We must take a three-day trip into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, just as he has commanded us.”

“All right, go ahead,” Pharaoh replied. “I will let you go into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God. But don’t go too far away. Now hurry and pray for me.”

Moses answered, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD, and tomorrow the swarms of flies will disappear from you and your officials and all your people. But I am warning you, Pharaoh, don’t lie to us again and refuse to let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

So Moses left Pharaoh’s palace and pleaded with the LORD to remove all the flies. And the LORD did as Moses asked and caused the swarms of flies to disappear from Pharaoh, his officials, and his people. Not a single fly remained. But Pharaoh again became stubborn and refused to let the people go.

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

How did God show Pharaoh his mighty power? God is the Creator and Ruler of all things. But not everyone knows this, and not everyone follows God’s good ways of living. The story of the Bible is the story of the coming of God’s Kingdom into the world. How does God show his power today?

### DAY 13

## Israel’s Freedom Festival

(from *Beginnings*, pages 100-103)

*As the final confrontation with Pharaoh approached, God told his people to eat a special meal and then prepare to leave Egypt. Every year after this, Israel was to keep this festival and gather in their homes to eat the Passover meal. In this way Israel would remember what God had done for them and celebrate their freedom, knowing that God would always care for them. Whenever his people were in trouble in the future, this meal would remind them of his promise to come down and save them.*



While the Israelites were still in the land of Egypt, the LORD gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron: “From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you. Announce to the whole community

of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb or a young goat for a sacrifice, one animal for each household. If a family is too small to eat a whole animal, let them share with another family in the neighborhood. Divide the animal according to the size of each family and how much they can eat. The animal you select must be a one-year-old male, either a sheep or a goat, with no defects.

"Take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month. Then the whole assembly of the community of Israel must slaughter their lamb or young goat at twilight. They are to take some of the blood and smear it on the sides and top of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the animal. That same night they must roast the meat over a fire and eat it along with bitter salad greens and bread made without yeast. Do not eat any of the meat raw or boiled in water. The whole animal—including the head, legs, and internal organs—must be roasted over a fire. Do not leave any of it until the next morning. Burn whatever is not eaten before morning.

"These are your instructions for eating this meal: Be fully dressed, wear your sandals, and carry your walking stick in your hand. Eat the meal with urgency, for this is the LORD's Passover. On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the LORD! But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt.

"This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD. This is a law for all time. For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast. On the first day of the festival, remove every trace of yeast from your homes. Any-one who eats bread made with yeast during the seven days of the festival will be cut off from the community of Israel. On the first day of the festival and again on the seventh day, all the people must observe an official day for holy assembly. No work of any kind may be done on these days except in the preparation of food.

"Celebrate this Festival of Unleavened Bread, for it will remind you that I brought your forces out of the land of Egypt on this very day. This festival will be a permanent law for you; celebrate this day from generation to generation. The bread you eat must be made without yeast from the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month until the evening of the twenty-first day of that month. During those seven days, there must be no trace of yeast in your homes. Anyone who eats anything made with yeast during this week will be cut off from the community of Israel. These regulations

apply both to the foreigners living among you and to the native-born Israelites. During those days you must not eat anything made with yeast. Wherever you live, eat only bread made without yeast."

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel together and said to them, "Go, pick out a lamb or young goat for each of your families, and slaughter the Passover animal. Drain the blood into a basin. Then take a bundle of hyssop branches and dip it into the blood. Brush the hyssop across the top and sides of the doorframes of your houses. And no one may go out through the door until morning. For the LORD will pass through the land to strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, the LORD will pass over your home. He will not permit his death angel to enter your house and strike you down.

"Remember, these instructions are a permanent law that you and your descendants must observe forever. When you enter the land the LORD has promised to give you, you will continue to observe this ceremony. Then your children will ask, 'What does this ceremony mean?' And you will reply, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. And though he struck the Egyptians, he spared our families.'" When Moses had finished speaking, all the people bowed down to the ground and worshiped.

So the people of Israel did just as the LORD had commanded through Moses and Aaron. . . .

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The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. In fact, it was on the last day of the 430th year that all the LORD's forces left the land. On this night the LORD kept his promise to bring his people out of the land of Egypt. So this night belongs to him, and it must be commemorated every year by all the Israelites, from generation to generation.

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

When we take communion at church we are remembering the Passover too. Just like God came down to rescue his people Israel, Jesus came down to rescue us. Jesus is the Passover lamb, giving up his own life to save others. How can you show Jesus that you are thankful for his sacrifice for us?

**DAY 14****Bread from Heaven**(from *Beginnings*, pages 109-111)

*So God did indeed bring his people out of slavery in Egypt and make them free. But they still had to get to the land God had promised them in Canaan, where their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had lived. The land in-between was a wilderness, with very little food and water. So God again showed his mighty power by providing everything that his people needed to live.*



Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron.

"If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual."

So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "By evening you will realize it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaints, which are against him, not against us. What have we done that you should complain about us?" Then Moses added, "The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfy you in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. What have we done? Yes, your complaints are against the LORD, not against us."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Announce this to the entire community of Israel: 'Present yourselves before the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole community of Israel, they

looked out toward the wilderness. There they could see the awesome glory of the LORD in the cloud.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the Israelites' complaints. Now tell them, 'In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground. The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was.

And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you to eat. These are the LORD's instructions: Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person in your tent."

So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.

Then Moses told them, "Do not keep any of it until morning." But some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them.

After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. He told them, "This is what the LORD commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the LORD. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow."

So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. Moses said, "Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the LORD. There will be no food on the ground today. You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day."

Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food. The LORD asked Moses, "How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions? They must realize that the Sabbath is the LORD's gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day." So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.

The Israelites called the food manna. It was white like coriander seed, and it tasted like honey wafers.

Then Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: Fill a two-quart container with manna to preserve it for your descendants. Then later generations will be able to see the food I gave you in the wilderness when I set you free from Egypt.”

Moses said to Aaron, “Get a jar and fill it with two quarts of manna. Then put it in a sacred place before the LORD to preserve it for all future generations.” Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He eventually placed it in the Ark of the Covenant—in front of the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. So the people of Israel ate manna for forty years until they arrived at the land where they would settle. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

—from the book of Exodus

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Every time we eat we are receiving a gift from God. We must eat to live, so every time we eat we can remember that life itself is given to us by God. Later in the Bible’s story, Jesus called himself the Bread from Heaven. Why do you think Jesus said this? How can Jesus be our Bread from Heaven?

#### DAY 15

## God Teaches His People at Mount Sinai

(from *Beginnings*, pages 113-114, 121-122)

A key part of God’s plan for humanity was to teach them what it means to love God and help everything in his world to live and thrive. God wanted the nation of Israel to be the people who would show this to all the other nations. So God led the people to Mount Sinai out in the desert. There he planned to have a special ceremony with them to confirm that he would always be their God and that they would be his loyal people.

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Exactly two months after the Israelites left Egypt, they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai. After breaking camp at Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and set up camp there at the base of Mount Sinai.

Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.”

So Moses returned from the mountain and called together the elders of the people and told them everything the LORD had commanded him. And all the people responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has commanded.” So Moses brought the people’s answer back to the LORD.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will come to you in a thick cloud, Moses, so the people themselves can hear me when I speak with you. Then they will always trust you.”

Moses told the LORD what the people had said. Then the LORD told Moses, “Go down and prepare the people for my arrival. Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing. Be sure they are ready on the third day, for on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch. Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, ‘Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death. No hand may touch the person or animal that crosses the boundary; instead, stone them or shoot them with arrows. They must be put to death.’ However, when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, then the people may go up on the mountain.” . . .

Then the LORD instructed Moses: “Come up here to me, and bring along Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of Israel’s elders. All of you must worship from a distance. Only Moses is allowed to come near to the LORD. The others must not come near, and none of the other people are allowed to climb up the mountain with him.”

Then Moses went down to the people and repeated all the instructions and regulations the LORD had given him. All the people answered with one voice, “We will do everything the LORD has commanded.”

Then Moses carefully wrote down all the LORD’s instructions. Early the

next morning Moses got up and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He also set up twelve pillars, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent some of the young Israelite men to present burnt offerings and to sacrifice bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses drained half the blood from these animals into basins. The other half he splattered against the altar.

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, “We will do everything the LORD has commanded. We will obey.”

Then Moses took the blood from the basins and splattered it over the people, declaring, “Look, this blood confirms the covenant the LORD has made with you in giving you these instructions.”

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel climbed up the mountain. There they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there seemed to be a surface of brilliant blue lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself. And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and commands so you can teach the people.” So Moses and his assistant Joshua set out, and Moses climbed up the mountain of God.

Moses told the elders, “Stay here and wait for us until we come back. Aaron and Hur are here with you. If anyone has a dispute while I am gone, consult with them.”

Then Moses climbed up the mountain, and the cloud covered it. And the glory of the LORD settled down on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from inside the cloud. To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the LORD appeared at the summit like a consuming fire. Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Eating together is one of the best ways to show friendship. When God invited the leaders of Israel to eat and drink in his presence, he was showing that he fully accepted them. Who could you or your family eat a meal with to show your friendship and love?

## DAY 16

### A Place for God to Live with His People

(from *Beginnings*, pages 122-126)

Another key part of God’s plan was to make his home right here on earth with his people. He had always intended to live with humans in the creation he made. So God told Moses to have the people build a dwelling place for God that would be within their camp. He called it the Tabernacle. When it was complete, God’s own presence would come down and fill the Tabernacle. God would then truly live with his people.



The LORD said to Moses, “Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them. Here is a list of sacred offerings you may accept from them:

- gold, silver, and bronze;
- blue, purple, and scarlet thread;
- fine linen and goat hair for cloth;
- tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;
- acacia wood;
- olive oil for the lamps;
- spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;
- onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest’s chestpiece.

“Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them. You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.

“Have the people make an Ark of acacia wood—a sacred chest 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold, and run a molding of gold all around it. Cast four gold rings and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. Make poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings at the sides of the Ark to carry it. These carrying poles must stay inside the rings; never remove them. When the Ark is finished, place inside

it the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you.

“Then make the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—from pure gold. It must be 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. Then make two cherubim from hammered gold, and place them on the two ends of the atonement cover. Mold the cherubim on each end of the atonement cover, making it all of one piece of gold. The cherubim will face each other and look down on the atonement cover. With their wings spread above it, they will protect it. Place inside the Ark the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you. Then put the atonement cover on top of the Ark. I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel. . . .

“Make a lampstand of pure, hammered gold. Make the entire lampstand and its decorations of one piece—the base, center stem, lamp cups, buds, and petals. Make it with six branches going out from the center stem, three on each side. Each of the six branches will have three lamp cups shaped like almond blossoms, complete with buds and petals. Craft the center stem of the lampstand with four lamp cups shaped like almond blossoms, complete with buds and petals. There will also be an almond bud beneath each pair of branches where the six branches extend from the center stem. The almond buds and branches must all be of one piece with the center stem, and they must be hammered from pure gold. Then make the seven lamps for the lampstand, and set them so they reflect their light forward. The lamp snuffers and trays must also be made of pure gold. You will need 75 pounds of pure gold for the lampstand and its accessories.

“Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain. . . .

“For the inside of the Tabernacle, make a special curtain of finely woven linen. Decorate it with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and with skillfully embroidered cherubim. Hang this curtain on gold hooks attached to four posts of acacia wood. Overlay the posts with gold, and set them in four silver bases. Hang the inner curtain from clasps, and put the Ark of the Covenant in the room behind it. This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

“Then put the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—on top of the Ark of the Covenant inside the Most Holy Place. Place the table outside the inner curtain on the north side of the Tabernacle, and place the lampstand across the room on the south side.

“Make another curtain for the entrance to the sacred tent. Make it of finely woven linen and embroider it with exquisite designs, using blue, purple, and scarlet thread. Craft five posts from acacia wood. Overlay them with gold, and hang the curtain from them with gold hooks. Cast five bronze bases for the posts. . . .

“Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning continually. The lampstand will stand in the Tabernacle, in front of the inner curtain that shields the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron and his sons must keep the lamps burning in the LORD’s presence all night. This is a permanent law for the people of Israel, and it must be observed from generation to generation.”

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Think about all the details that these instructions for the Tabernacle contain. Why do you think God was so specific about all of this?

### DAY 17

## A Chosen Family to Serve God as Priests

(from *Beginnings*, pages 126-128)

Priests are people who are set apart from a bigger group to serve God and to represent all the people before him. God wanted to have priests to serve him in the Tabernacle, to offer sacrifices, and to learn from God what his will was for his people. So God told Moses to make special clothes for the priests that would show they were set apart for this special work.



“Call for your brother, Aaron, and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Set them apart from the rest of the people of Israel so they may minister to me and be my priests. Make sacred garments for Aaron that are

glorious and beautiful. Instruct all the skilled craftsmen whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom. Have them make garments for Aaron that will distinguish him as a priest set apart for my service. These are the garments they are to make: a chestpiece, an ephod, a robe, a patterned tunic, a turban, and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother, Aaron, and his sons to wear when they serve me as priests. So give them fine linen cloth, gold thread, and blue, purple, and scarlet thread.

"The craftsmen must make the ephod of finely woven linen and skillfully embroider it with gold and with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. It will consist of two pieces, front and back, joined at the shoulders with two shoulder-pieces. The decorative sash will be made of the same materials: finely woven linen embroidered with gold and with blue, purple, and scarlet thread.

"Take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the tribes of Israel. Six names will be on each stone, arranged in the order of the births of the original sons of Israel. Engrave these names on the two stones in the same way a jeweler engravés a seal. Then mount the stones in settings of gold filigree. Fasten the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod as a reminder that Aaron represents the people of Israel. Aaron will carry these names on his shoulders as a constant reminder whenever he goes before the LORD. Make the settings of gold filigree, then braid two cords of pure gold and attach them to the filigree settings on the shoulders of the ephod.

"Then, with great skill and care, make a chestpiece to be worn for seeking a decision from God. Make it to match the ephod, using finely woven linen embroidered with gold and with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. Make the chestpiece of a single piece of cloth folded to form a pouch nine inches square. Mount four rows of gemstones on it. The first row will contain a red carnelian, a pale-green peridot, and an emerald. The second row will contain a turquoise, a blue lapis lazuli, and a white moonstone. The third row will contain an orange jacinth, an agate, and a purple amethyst. The fourth row will contain a blue-green beryl, an onyx, and a green jasper. All these stones will be set in gold filigree. Each stone will represent one of the twelve sons of Israel, and the name of that tribe will be engraved on it like a seal.

"To attach the chestpiece to the ephod, make braided cords of pure gold thread. Then make two gold rings and attach them to the top corners of the chestpiece. Tie the two gold cords to the two rings on the chestpiece. Tie the other ends of the cords to the gold settings on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. Then make two more gold rings and attach them to the inside edges of the chestpiece next to the ephod. And make two more gold

rings and attach them to the front of the ephod, below the shoulder-pieces, just above the knot where the decorative sash is fastened to the ephod. Then attach the bottom rings of the chestpiece to the rings on the ephod with blue cords. This will hold the chestpiece securely to the ephod above the decorative sash.

"In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the sacred chestpiece over his heart when he goes into the Holy Place. This will be a continual reminder that he represents the people when he comes before the LORD. Insert the Urim and Thummim into the sacred chestpiece so they will be carried over Aaron's heart when he goes into the LORD's presence. In this way, Aaron will always carry over his heart the objects used to determine the LORD's will for his people whenever he goes in before the LORD."

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Can you think of some people in our world who are given special jobs that only they can do? Why is it important to have the right people doing these jobs?

## DAY 18

### The Danger of Worshiping False Gods

(from *Beginnings*, pages 133-136)

*The single biggest temptation that humans face is to put their trust and loyalty in something besides God himself. This is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the story. This is also what the people of Israel did right after God had delivered them from Egypt.*



When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. "Come on," they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt."

So Aaron said, “Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.”

All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, “O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, “Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!”

The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.

The LORD told Moses, “Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. How quickly they have turned away from the way I commanded them to live! They have melted down gold and made a calf, and they have bowed down and sacrificed to it. They are saying, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”

Then the LORD said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation.”

But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. “O LORD!” he said. “Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand? Why let the Egyptians say, ‘Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth?’ Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.’”

So the LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.

Then Moses turned and went down the mountain. He held in his hands the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. These tablets were God’s work; the words on them were written by God himself.

When Joshua heard the boisterous noise of the people shouting below them, he exclaimed to Moses, “It sounds like war in the camp!”

But Moses replied, “No, it’s not a shout of victory nor the wailing of defeat. I hear the sound of a celebration.”

When they came near the camp, Moses saw the calf and the dancing,

and he burned with anger. He threw the stone tablets to the ground, smashing them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made and burned it. Then he ground it into powder, threw it into the water, and forced the people to drink it.

Finally, he turned to Aaron and demanded, “What did these people do to you to make you bring such terrible sin upon them?”

“Don’t get so upset, my lord,” Aaron replied. “You yourself know how evil these people are. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will lead us. We don’t know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.’ So I told them, ‘Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off.’ When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!” . . .

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a terrible sin, but I will go back up to the LORD on the mountain. Perhaps I will be able to obtain forgiveness for your sin.”

So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a terrible sin these people have committed. They have made gods of gold for themselves. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, erase my name from the record you have written!”

But the LORD replied to Moses, “No, I will erase the name of everyone who has sinned against me. Now go, lead the people to the place I told you about. Look! My angel will lead the way before you. And when I come to call the people to account, I will certainly hold them responsible for their sins.”

Then the LORD sent a great plague upon the people because they had worshiped the calf Aaron had made.

The LORD said to Moses, “Get going, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I told them, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ And I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Go up to this land that flows with milk and honey. But I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way.”

When the people heard these stern words, they went into mourning and stopped wearing their jewelry and fine clothes. For the LORD had told Moses to tell them, “You are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I were to travel with you for even a moment, I would destroy you. Remove your jewelry and fine clothes while I decide what to do with you.” So from the time they left Mount Sinai, the Israelites wore no more jewelry or fine clothes.

*—from the book of Exodus*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

What are some of the things we are tempted to place our trust in besides God? How do we show this trust? How can we help each other stay loyal to God above all?

**DAY 19**

## Building God's House with Beauty and Skill

(from *Beginnings*, pages 139-141)

*When we read about how God's people built a home for God, one very important thing we learn is that all the gifts and abilities of the people were needed. Some were good at using tools to put wood and stone together; others to make things with leather and cloth. Still others were artists who knew how to design things and use colors together in a beautiful way. All the different parts of God's home were made by people using these different talents they had.*



Then Moses said to the whole community of Israel, “This is what the LORD has commanded: Take a sacred offering for the LORD. Let those with generous hearts present the following gifts to the LORD:

- gold, silver, and bronze;
- blue, purple, and scarlet thread;
- fine linen and goat hair for cloth;
- tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;
- acacia wood;
- olive oil for the lamps;
- spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;
- onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece.

“Come, all of you who are gifted craftsmen. Construct everything that the LORD has commanded:

the Tabernacle and its sacred tent, its covering, clasps, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases; the Ark and its carrying poles; the Ark's cover—the place of atonement; the inner curtain to shield the Ark; the table, its carrying poles, and all its utensils; the Bread of the Presence; for light, the lampstand, its accessories, the lamp cups, and the olive oil for lighting; the incense altar and its carrying poles; the anointing oil and fragrant incense; the curtain for the entrance of the Tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering; the bronze grating of the altar and its carrying poles and utensils; the washbasin with its stand; the curtains for the walls of the courtyard; the posts and their bases; the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard; the tent pegs of the Tabernacle and courtyard and their ropes; the beautifully stitched garments for the priests to wear while ministering in the Holy Place—the sacred garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons to wear as they minister as priests.”

So the whole community of Israel left Moses and returned to their tents. All whose hearts were stirred and whose spirits were moved came and brought their sacred offerings to the LORD. They brought all the materials needed for the Tabernacle, for the performance of its rituals, and for the sacred garments. Both men and women came, all whose hearts were willing. They brought to the LORD their offerings of gold—brooches, earrings, rings from their fingers, and necklaces. They presented gold objects of every kind as a special offering to the LORD. All those who owned the following items willingly brought them: blue, purple, and scarlet thread; fine linen and goat hair for cloth; and tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather. And all who had silver and bronze objects gave them as a sacred offering to the LORD. And those who had acacia wood brought it for use in the project.

All the women who were skilled in sewing and spinning prepared blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen cloth. All the women who were willing used their skills to spin the goat hair into yarn. The leaders brought onyx stones and the special gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light, the

anointing oil, and the fragrant incense. So the people of Israel—every man and woman who was eager to help in the work the LORD had given them through Moses—brought their gifts and gave them freely to the LORD.

Then Moses told the people of Israel, “The LORD has specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. The LORD has filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft. And the LORD has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others. The LORD has given them special skills as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, and scarlet thread on fine linen cloth, and weavers. They excel as craftsmen and as designers.

“The LORD has gifted Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other skilled craftsmen with wisdom and ability to perform any task involved in building the sanctuary. Let them construct and furnish the Tabernacle, just as the LORD has commanded.”

So Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and all the others who were specially gifted by the LORD and were eager to get to work. Moses gave them the materials donated by the people of Israel as sacred offerings for the completion of the sanctuary. But the people continued to bring additional gifts each morning. Finally the craftsmen who were working on the sanctuary left their work. They went to Moses and reported, “The people have given more than enough materials to complete the job the LORD has commanded us to do!”

So Moses gave the command, and this message was sent throughout the camp: “Men and women, don’t prepare any more gifts for the sanctuary. We have enough!” So the people stopped bringing their sacred offerings. Their contributions were more than enough to complete the whole project.

—from the book of Exodus

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

How do you think it would have felt to be one of the people chosen to work on the Tabernacle? Do you enjoy making beautiful things? Let’s thank God for all the people who help fill our world with beauty.

## DAY 20

# God Makes His Home on Earth

(from *Beginnings*, pages 148-149)

*God’s special home with his people was now ready. It was filled with symbols that showed it represented the heavens and the earth. The ocean, the sky, and the earth were all represented, showing that someday God intended to fill the entire creation with his presence once again. But for now, God would come down and live among his people in this one place—the Tabernacle. The sacrifices made in the Tabernacle showed that the people were unclean because of wrongdoing and sin. They would have to be forgiven and made clean before they could be in God’s presence.*



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Set up the Tabernacle on the first day of the new year. Place the Ark of the Covenant inside, and install the inner curtain to enclose the Ark within the Most Holy Place. Then bring in the table, and arrange the utensils on it. And bring in the lampstand, and set up the lamps.

“Place the gold incense altar in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Then hang the curtain at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the Tabernacle entrance. Set the washbasin between the Tabernacle and the altar, and fill it with water. Then set up the courtyard around the outside of the tent, and hang the curtain for the courtyard entrance.

“Take the anointing oil and anoint the Tabernacle and all its furnishings to consecrate them and make them holy. Anoint the altar of burnt offering and its utensils to consecrate them. Then the altar will become absolutely holy. Next anoint the washbasin and its stand to consecrate them.

“Present Aaron and his sons at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and wash them with water. Dress Aaron with the sacred garments and anoint him, consecrating him to serve me as a priest. Then present his sons and dress them in their tunics. Anoint them as you did their father, so they may also serve me as priests. With their anointing, Aaron’s descendants are set apart for the priesthood forever, from generation to generation.”

Moses proceeded to do everything just as the LORD had commanded him.

So the Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year. Moses erected the Tabernacle by setting down its bases, inserting the frames, attaching the crossbars, and setting up the posts. Then he spread the coverings over the Tabernacle framework and put on the protective layers, just as the LORD had commanded him.

He took the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant and placed them inside the Ark. Then he attached the carrying poles to the Ark, and he set the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—on top of it. Then he brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Tabernacle and hung the inner curtain to shield it from view, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Next Moses placed the table in the Tabernacle, along the north side of the Holy Place, just outside the inner curtain. And he arranged the Bread of the Presence on the table before the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded him.

He set the lampstand in the Tabernacle across from the table on the south side of the Holy Place. Then he lit the lamps in the LORD's presence, just as the LORD had commanded him. He also placed the gold incense altar in the Tabernacle, in the Holy Place in front of the inner curtain. On it he burned the fragrant incense, just as the LORD had commanded him.

He hung the curtain at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and he placed the altar of burnt offering near the Tabernacle entrance. On it he offered a burnt offering and a grain offering, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Next Moses placed the washbasin between the Tabernacle and the altar. He filled it with water so the priests could wash themselves. Moses and Aaron and Aaron's sons used water from it to wash their hands and feet. Whenever they approached the altar and entered the Tabernacle, they washed themselves, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Then he hung the curtains forming the courtyard around the Tabernacle and the altar. And he set up the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard. So at last Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses could no longer enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down over it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

Now whenever the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out on their journey, following it. But if the cloud did not rise, they remained where they were until it lifted. The cloud of the LORD

hovered over the Tabernacle during the day, and at night fire glowed inside the cloud so the whole family of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys.

*—from the book of Exodus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

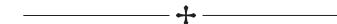
What is the difference between knowing somebody and actually having them live with you? How important is it that God is going to return to us and has decided to make his home with us?

## DAY 21

### Clean or Unclean? Common or Holy?

(from *Beginnings*, pages 157-159)

*While the Israelites remained at Mount Sinai, God gave them more instructions. Many of these might seem strange to us because they were written for people living in an ancient culture very different from ours. But these laws helped Israel stay in close relationship to God so they could be a light to the world. "Unclean" here doesn't mean dirty but compromised or not worthy in some way. "Clean" means restored or made whole. "Holy" means something is clean and is being set apart for special use by God.*



"If you are called to testify about something you have seen or that you know about, it is sinful to refuse to testify, and you will be punished for your sin.

"Or suppose you unknowingly touch something that is ceremonially unclean, such as the carcass of an unclean animal. When you realize what you have done, you must admit your defilement and your guilt. This is true whether it is a wild animal, a domestic animal, or an animal that scurries along the ground.

"Or suppose you unknowingly touch something that makes a person unclean. When you realize what you have done, you must admit your guilt.

"Or suppose you make a foolish vow of any kind, whether its purpose

is for good or for bad. When you realize its foolishness, you must admit your guilt.

"When you become aware of your guilt in any of these ways, you must confess your sin. Then you must bring to the LORD as the penalty for your sin a female from the flock, either a sheep or a goat. This is a sin offering with which the priest will purify you from your sin, making you right with the LORD."

"But if you cannot afford to bring a sheep, you may bring to the LORD two turtledoves or two young pigeons as the penalty for your sin. One of the birds will be for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering. You must bring them to the priest, who will present the first bird as the sin offering. He will wring its neck but without severing its head from the body. Then he will sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering against the sides of the altar, and the rest of the blood will be drained out at the base of the altar. This is an offering for sin. The priest will then prepare the second bird as a burnt offering, following all the procedures that have been prescribed. Through this process the priest will purify you from your sin, making you right with the LORD, and you will be forgiven."

"If you cannot afford to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, you may bring two quarts of choice flour for your sin offering. Since it is an offering for sin, you must not moisten it with olive oil or put any frankincense on it. Take the flour to the priest, who will scoop out a handful as a representative portion. He will burn it on the altar on top of the special gifts presented to the LORD. It is an offering for sin. Through this process, the priest will purify those who are guilty of any of these sins, making them right with the LORD, and they will be forgiven. The rest of the flour will belong to the priest, just as with the grain offering."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "If one of you commits a sin by unintentionally defiling the LORD's sacred property, you must bring a guilt offering to the LORD. The offering must be your own ram with no defects, or you may buy one of equal value with silver, as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel. You must make restitution for the sacred property you have harmed by paying for the loss, plus an additional 20 percent. When you give the payment to the priest, he will purify you with the ram sacrificed as a guilt offering, making you right with the LORD, and you will be forgiven."

"Suppose you sin by violating one of the LORD's commands. Even if you are unaware of what you have done, you are guilty and will be punished for your sin. For a guilt offering, you must bring to the priest your own ram with no defects, or you may buy one of equal value. Through this process the priest will purify you from your unintentional sin, making you right

with the LORD, and you will be forgiven. This is a guilt offering, for you have been guilty of an offense against the LORD."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Suppose one of you sins against your associate and is unfaithful to the LORD. Suppose you cheat in a deal involving a security deposit, or you steal or commit fraud, or you find lost property and lie about it, or you lie while swearing to tell the truth, or you commit any other such sin. If you have sinned in any of these ways, you are guilty. You must give back whatever you stole, or the money you took by extortion, or the security deposit, or the lost property you found, or anything obtained by swearing falsely. You must make restitution by paying the full price plus an additional 20 percent to the person you have harmed. On the same day you must present a guilt offering. As a guilt offering to the LORD, you must bring to the priest your own ram with no defects, or you may buy one of equal value. Through this process, the priest will purify you before the LORD, making you right with him, and you will be forgiven for any of these sins you have committed."

*—from the book of Leviticus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What does this passage teach us about the importance of making things right once they have gone wrong? Why did animals have to be sacrificed? Why did it matter if the sacrificial animals had defects or not?

## DAY 22

### Preparing Aaron to Be Israel's High Priest

(from *Beginnings*, pages 162-164)

The new High Priest Aaron, his sons, and the Tabernacle itself all had to be clean and made ready to be used in special service to God. So God told Moses to have a ceremony to set them apart and make them holy for God's use. The sacrifices and offerings taught the people how pure and holy God himself was. God had to cleanse and restore his

*special people and his special place before he could come and make his home here.*



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Bring Aaron and his sons, along with their sacred garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams, and the basket of bread made without yeast, and call the entire community of Israel together at the entrance of the Tabernacle.”

So Moses followed the LORD’s instructions, and the whole community assembled at the Tabernacle entrance. Moses announced to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded us to do!” Then he presented Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. He put the official tunic on Aaron and tied the sash around his waist. He dressed him in the robe, placed the ephod on him, and attached the ephod securely with its decorative sash. Then Moses placed the chestpiece on Aaron and put the Urim and the Thummim inside it. He placed the turban on Aaron’s head and attached the gold medallion—the badge of holiness—to the front of the turban, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and everything in it, making them holy. He sprinkled the oil on the altar seven times, anointing it and all its utensils, as well as the washbasin and its stand, making them holy. Then he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head, anointing him and making him holy for his work. Next Moses presented Aaron’s sons. He clothed them in their tunics, tied their sashes around them, and put their special head coverings on them, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Then Moses presented the bull for the sin offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bull’s head, and Moses slaughtered it. Moses took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on the four horns of the altar to purify it. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. Through this process, he made the altar holy by purifying it. Then Moses took all the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat around them, and he burned it all on the altar. He took the rest of the bull, including its hide, meat, and dung, and burned it on a fire outside the camp, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Then Moses presented the ram for the burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram’s head, and Moses slaughtered it. Then Moses took the ram’s blood and splattered it against all sides of the altar. Then he cut the ram into pieces, and he burned the head, some of its pieces, and the fat on the altar. After washing the internal organs and the legs with water, Moses burned the entire ram on the altar as a burnt

offering. It was a pleasing aroma, a special gift presented to the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Then Moses presented the other ram, which was the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram’s head, and Moses slaughtered it. Then Moses took some of its blood and applied it to the lobe of Aaron’s right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. Next Moses presented Aaron’s sons and applied some of the blood to the lobes of their right ears, the thumbs of their right hands, and the big toes of their right feet. He then splattered the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar.

Next Moses took the fat, including the fat of the broad tail, the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat around them, along with the right thigh. On top of these he placed a thin cake of bread made without yeast, a cake of bread mixed with olive oil, and a wafer spread with olive oil. All these were taken from the basket of bread made without yeast that was placed in the LORD’s presence. He put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons, and he lifted these gifts as a special offering to the LORD. Moses then took all the offerings back from them and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering. This was the ordination offering. It was a pleasing aroma, a special gift presented to the LORD. Then Moses took the breast and lifted it up as a special offering to the LORD. This was Moses’ portion of the ram of ordination, just as the LORD had commanded him.

Next Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar, and he sprinkled them on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. In this way, he made Aaron and his sons and their garments holy.

Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, “Boil the remaining meat of the offerings at the Tabernacle entrance, and eat it there, along with the bread that is in the basket of offerings for the ordination, just as I commanded when I said, ‘Aaron and his sons will eat it.’ Any meat or bread that is left over must then be burned up. You must not leave the Tabernacle entrance for seven days, for that is when the ordination ceremony will be completed. Everything we have done today was commanded by the LORD in order to purify you, making you right with him. Now stay at the entrance of the Tabernacle day and night for seven days, and do everything the LORD requires. If you fail to do this, you will die, for this is what the LORD has commanded.” So Aaron and his sons did everything the LORD had commanded through Moses.

—from the book of Leviticus

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

Have you ever washed something to make sure it was clean before using it? Why would Aaron and his sons have to be made clean? Why would the Tabernacle itself have to be made clean?

**DAY 23**

## Coming Close to God: The Day of Atonement

(from *Beginnings*, pages 177-179)

*The Most Holy Place was in the center of the Tabernacle. It was the place where God's own presence was. Once a year Israel had a special ceremony called the Day of Atonement. The High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place only on that day. This is when Aaron and his family were made clean once again so they could serve God in the Tabernacle. The people were also made clean so God could continue to live right in their midst.*



The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, who died after they entered the LORD's presence and burned the wrong kind of fire before him. The LORD said to Moses, "Warn your brother, Aaron, not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the inner curtain whenever he chooses; if he does, he will die. For the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—is there, and I myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover.

"When Aaron enters the sanctuary area, he must follow these instructions fully. He must bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He must put on his linen tunic and the linen undergarments worn next to his body. He must tie the linen sash around his waist and put the linen turban on his head. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe himself in water before he puts them on. Aaron must take from the community of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

"Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the LORD. Then he must take the two male goats and present them to the LORD at the entrance of the Tabernacle. He

is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the LORD and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel. Aaron will then present as a sin offering the goat chosen by lot for the LORD. The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the LORD. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the LORD.

"Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the LORD. After he has slaughtered the bull as a sin offering, he will fill an incense burner with burning coals from the altar that stands before the LORD. Then he will take two handfuls of fragrant powdered incense and will carry the burner and the incense behind the inner curtain. There in the LORD's presence he will put the incense on the burning coals so that a cloud of incense will rise over the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—that rests on the Ark of the Covenant. If he follows these instructions, he will not die. Then he must take some of the blood of the bull, dip his finger in it, and sprinkle it on the east side of the atonement cover. He must sprinkle blood seven times with his finger in front of the atonement cover.

"Then Aaron must slaughter the first goat as a sin offering for the people and carry its blood behind the inner curtain. There he will sprinkle the goat's blood over the atonement cover and in front of it, just as he did with the bull's blood. Through this process, he will purify the Most Holy Place, and he will do the same for the entire Tabernacle, because of the defiling sin and rebellion of the Israelites. No one else is allowed inside the Tabernacle when Aaron enters it for the purification ceremony in the Most Holy Place. No one may enter until he comes out again after purifying himself, his family, and all the congregation of Israel, making them right with the LORD.

"Then Aaron will come out to purify the altar that stands before the LORD. He will do this by taking some of the blood from the bull and the goat and putting it on each of the horns of the altar. Then he must sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times over the altar. In this way, he will cleanse it from Israel's defilement and make it holy.

"When Aaron has finished purifying the Most Holy Place and the Tabernacle and the altar, he must present the live goat. He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness. As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land.

"When Aaron goes back into the Tabernacle, he must take off the linen

garments he was wearing when he entered the Most Holy Place, and he must leave the garments there. Then he must bathe himself with water in a sacred place, put on his regular garments, and go out to sacrifice a burnt offering for himself and a burnt offering for the people. Through this process, he will purify himself and the people, making them right with the LORD. He must then burn all the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

"The man chosen to drive the scapegoat into the wilderness of Azazel must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water. Then he may return to the camp.

"The bull and the goat presented as sin offerings, whose blood Aaron takes into the Most Holy Place for the purification ceremony, will be carried outside the camp. The animals' hides, internal organs, and dung are all to be burned. The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water before returning to the camp.

"On the tenth day of the appointed month in early autumn, you must deny yourselves. Neither native-born Israelites nor foreigners living among you may do any kind of work. This is a permanent law for you. On that day offerings of purification will be made for you, and you will be purified in the LORD's presence from all your sins. It will be a Sabbath day of complete rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. This is a permanent law for you. In future generations, the purification ceremony will be performed by the priest who has been anointed and ordained to serve as high priest in place of his ancestor Aaron. He will put on the holy linen garments and purify the Most Holy Place, the Tabernacle, the altar, the priests, and the entire congregation. This is a permanent law for you, to purify the people of Israel from their sins, making them right with the LORD once each year."

Moses followed all these instructions exactly as the LORD had commanded him.

—from the book of Leviticus

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What do you think the word "holy" means? Why would God be so concerned about it? What is needed for us to become holy?

## DAY 24

# How to Live Well as God's People

(from *Beginnings*, pages 182-183)

*Many of the instructions that God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai were to help the people live good lives with each other and with God. God was beginning to teach his covenant people the path toward restoration and life. The instructions covered many different things, showing that God wants everything we do to show our love and respect for him. Of course, we must remember that all of this was meant for Israel in the ancient world, not directly for us today. But with these instructions, God is moving his people toward his ultimate goal of making all things right.*



The LORD also said to Moses, "Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

"Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father, and you must always observe my Sabbath days of rest. I am the LORD your God.

"Do not put your trust in idols or make metal images of gods for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

"When you sacrifice a peace offering to the LORD, offer it properly so you will be accepted by God. The sacrifice must be eaten on the same day you offer it or on the next day. Whatever is left over until the third day must be completely burned up. If any of the sacrifice is eaten on the third day, it will be contaminated, and I will not accept it. Anyone who eats it on the third day will be punished for defiling what is holy to the LORD and will be cut off from the community.

"When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God.

"Do not steal.

"Do not deceive or cheat one another.

"Do not bring shame on the name of your God by using it to swear falsely. I am the LORD.

"Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.

"Do not make your hired workers wait until the next day to receive their pay.

"Do not insult the deaf or cause the blind to stumble. You must fear your God; I am the LORD.

"Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly.

"Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people.

"Do not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is threatened. I am the LORD.

"Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

"You must obey all my decrees.

"Do not mate two different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two different kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven from two different kinds of thread.

"If a man has sex with a slave girl whose freedom has never been purchased but who is committed to become another man's wife, he must pay full compensation to her master. But since she is not a free woman, neither the man nor the woman will be put to death. The man, however, must bring a ram as a guilt offering and present it to the LORD at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The priest will then purify him before the LORD with the ram of the guilt offering, and the man's sin will be forgiven.

"When you enter the land and plant fruit trees, leave the fruit unharvested for the first three years and consider it forbidden. Do not eat it. In the fourth year the entire crop must be consecrated to the LORD as a celebration of praise. Finally, in the fifth year you may eat the fruit. If you follow this pattern, your harvest will increase. I am the LORD your God.

"Do not eat meat that has not been drained of its blood.

"Do not practice fortune-telling or witchcraft.

"Do not trim off the hair on your temples or trim your beards.

"Do not cut your bodies for the dead, and do not mark your skin with tattoos. I am the LORD.

"Do not defile your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will be filled with prostitution and wickedness.

"Keep my Sabbath days of rest, and show reverence toward my sanctuary. I am the LORD.

"Do not defile yourselves by turning to mediums or to those who consult the spirits of the dead. I am the LORD your God.

"Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged. Fear your God. I am the LORD.

"Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or volume. Your scales and weights must be accurate. Your containers for measuring dry materials or liquids must be accurate. I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

"You must be careful to keep all of my decrees and regulations by putting them into practice. I am the LORD."

—from the book of Leviticus

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

We are not sure what some laws in this passage meant for the people in the ancient world. But some things never change! Don't cheat and steal. Take care of the poor. Take a Sabbath rest. Don't gossip. We have much to learn from all of God's instructions.

## DAY 25

### The Year of Jubilee: Freedom and Rest

(from *Beginnings*, pages 192-194)

*One beautiful law that God put into place was the Year of Jubilee. This was a time of restoration, renewal, and freedom for both the people and the land itself. People who had fallen into slavery because of poverty were set free again. Land was given a rest from planting and was returned to its original owners. The point of all this was that God wanted everyone to thrive and flourish in the good land he had given them.*



While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year. For six years you may plant your fields and prune your

vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD's Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. And don't store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you. Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.

"In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all. Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram's horn loud and long throughout the land. Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan. This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don't gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. It will be a jubilee year for you, and you must keep it holy. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own. In the Year of Jubilee each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors.

"When you make an agreement with your neighbor to buy or sell property, you must not take advantage of each other. When you buy land from your neighbor, the price you pay must be based on the number of years since the last jubilee. The seller must set the price by taking into account the number of years remaining until the next Year of Jubilee. The more years until the next jubilee, the higher the price; the fewer years, the lower the price. After all, the person selling the land is actually selling you a certain number of harvests. Show your fear of God by not taking advantage of each other. I am the LORD your God.

"If you want to live securely in the land, follow my decrees and obey my regulations. Then the land will yield large crops, and you will eat your fill and live securely in it. But you might ask, 'What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or harvest crops that year?' Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years. When you plant your fields in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the large crop of the sixth year. In fact, you will still be eating from that large crop when the new crop is harvested in the ninth year. . . .

"If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and cannot support himself, support him as you would a foreigner or a temporary resident and allow him to live with you. Do not charge interest or make a profit at his expense. Instead, show your fear of God by letting him live with you as your relative. Remember, do not charge interest on money you lend him or make a profit on food you sell him. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

"If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell himself to you, do not treat him as a slave. Treat him instead as a hired worker or as a temporary resident who lives with you, and he will serve you only until the Year of Jubilee. At that time he and his children will no longer be obligated to you, and they will return to their clans and go back to the land originally allotted to their ancestors. The people of Israel are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, so they must never be sold as slaves. Show your fear of God by not treating them harshly."

*—from the book of Leviticus*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

When Jesus began his own ministry in Israel, he announced that he was bringing the Jubilee. Do you think the Year of Jubilee idea would work today? Why or why not?

## DAY 26

### Setting Apart the Tribe of Levi

(from *Beginnings*, pages 206-207)

The LORD had assigned Aaron and his immediate family to serve in the Tabernacle as High Priest and priests. But there was too much work for them in caring for the Tabernacle and preparing all the people's sacrifices and offerings. So God also chose the entire tribe of Levi to serve as assistants to Aaron and his sons. They also were set apart for special service to the LORD.

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This is the family line of Aaron and Moses as it was recorded when the LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: The names of Aaron's sons were Nadab (the oldest), Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These sons of Aaron were anointed and ordained to minister as priests. But Nadab and Abihu died in the LORD's presence in the wilderness of Sinai when they burned before the LORD the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. Since they had no sons, this left only Eleazar and Ithamar to serve as priests with their father, Aaron.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Call forward the tribe of Levi, and present them to Aaron the priest to serve as his assistants. They will serve Aaron and the whole community, performing their sacred duties in and around the Tabernacle. They will also maintain all the furnishings of the sacred tent, serving in the Tabernacle on behalf of all the Israelites. Assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons. They have been given from among all the people of Israel to serve as their assistants. Appoint Aaron and his sons to carry out the duties of the priesthood. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the sanctuary must be put to death."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I have chosen the Levites from among the Israelites to serve as substitutes for all the firstborn sons of the people of Israel. The Levites belong to me, for all the firstborn males are mine. On the day I struck down all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, I set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both of people and of animals. They are mine; I am the LORD."

The LORD spoke again to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai. He said, "Record the names of the members of the tribe of Levi by their families and clans. List every male who is one month old or older." So Moses listed them, just as the LORD had commanded.

Levi had three sons, whose names were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The clans descended from Gershon were named after two of his descendants, Libni and Shimei.

The clans descended from Kohath were named after four of his descendants, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

The clans descended from Merari were named after two of his descendants, Mahli and Mushi.

These were the Levite clans, listed according to their family groups.

The descendants of Gershon were composed of the clans descended from Libni and Shimei. There were 7,500 males one month old or older among these Gershonite clans. They were assigned the area to the west

of the Tabernacle for their camp. The leader of the Gershonite clans was Eliasaph son of Lael. These two clans were responsible to care for the Tabernacle, including the sacred tent with its layers of coverings, the curtain at its entrance, the curtains of the courtyard that surrounded the Tabernacle and altar, the curtain at the courtyard entrance, the ropes, and all the equipment related to their use.

The descendants of Kohath were composed of the clans descended from Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. There were 8,600 males one month old or older among these Kohathite clans. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary, and they were assigned the area south of the Tabernacle for their camp. The leader of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. These four clans were responsible for the care of the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the various articles used in the sanctuary, the inner curtain, and all the equipment related to their use. Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, was the chief administrator over all the Levites, with special responsibility for the oversight of the sanctuary.

The descendants of Merari were composed of the clans descended from Mahli and Mushi. There were 6,200 males one month old or older among these Merarite clans. They were assigned the area north of the Tabernacle for their camp. The leader of the Merarite clans was Zuriel son of Abihail. These two clans were responsible for the care of the frames supporting the Tabernacle, the crossbars, the pillars, the bases, and all the equipment related to their use. They were also responsible for the posts of the courtyard and all their bases, pegs, and ropes.

The area in front of the Tabernacle, in the east toward the sunrise, was reserved for the tents of Moses and of Aaron and his sons, who had the final responsibility for the sanctuary on behalf of the people of Israel. Any one other than a priest or Levite who went too near the sanctuary was to be put to death.

When Moses and Aaron counted the Levite clans at the LORD's command, the total number was 22,000 males one month old or older.

*—from the book of Numbers*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

One key idea in the Bible is to set aside a smaller part to stand in for or represent the whole. This could be giving a tenth of what you own to God as a sign that everything you have really belongs to God or dedicating a firstborn son as a sign that God has a claim on everyone. What could we do today to show that all that we have really belongs to God and is a gift from God to us?

**DAY 27**

## Setting Apart the Nazirites

(from *Beginnings*, pages 212-214)

*The LORD also gave instructions to Israel regarding another group of people who were set apart for service to him. This group was known as Nazirites. These rules and guidelines show us how important it was for people set apart for unique work in God's Kingdom to follow God's specific instructions to them.*



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel.

“If any of the people, either men or women, take the special vow of a Nazirite, setting themselves apart to the LORD in a special way, they must give up wine and other alcoholic drinks. They must not use vinegar made from wine or from other alcoholic drinks, they must not drink fresh grape juice, and they must not eat grapes or raisins. As long as they are bound by their Nazirite vow, they are not allowed to eat or drink anything that comes from a grapevine—not even the grape seeds or skins.

“They must never cut their hair throughout the time of their vow, for they are holy and set apart to the LORD. Until the time of their vow has been fulfilled, they must let their hair grow long. And they must not go near a dead body during the entire period of their vow to the LORD. Even if the dead person is their own father, mother, brother, or sister, they must not defile themselves, for the hair on their head is the symbol of their separation to God. This requirement applies as long as they are set apart to the LORD.

“If someone falls dead beside them, the hair they have dedicated will be defiled. They must wait for seven days and then shave their heads. Then they will be cleansed from their defilement. On the eighth day they must bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The priest will offer one of the birds for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way, he will purify them from the guilt they incurred through contact with the dead body. Then they must reaffirm their commitment and let their hair begin to grow again. The days of their vow that were completed before their defilement no longer

count. They must rededicate themselves to the LORD as a Nazirite for the full term of their vow, and each must bring a one-year-old male lamb for a guilt offering.

“This is the ritual law for Nazirites. At the conclusion of their time of separation as Nazirites, they must each go to the entrance of the Tabernacle and offer their sacrifices to the LORD: a one-year-old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering, a one-year-old female lamb without defect for a sin offering, a ram without defect for a peace offering, a basket of bread made without yeast—cakes of choice flour mixed with olive oil and wafers spread with olive oil—along with their prescribed grain offerings and liquid offerings. The priest will present these offerings before the LORD: first the sin offering and the burnt offering; then the ram for a peace offering, along with the basket of bread made without yeast. The priest must also present the prescribed grain offering and liquid offering to the LORD.

“Then the Nazirites will shave their heads at the entrance of the Tabernacle. They will take the hair that had been dedicated and place it on the fire beneath the peace-offering sacrifice. After the Nazirite’s head has been shaved, the priest will take for each of them the boiled shoulder of the ram, and he will take from the basket a cake and a wafer made without yeast. He will put them all into the Nazirite’s hands. Then the priest will lift them up as a special offering before the LORD. These are holy portions for the priest, along with the breast of the special offering and the thigh of the sacred offering that are lifted up before the LORD. After this ceremony the Nazirites may again drink wine.

“This is the ritual law of the Nazirites, who vow to bring these offerings to the LORD. They may also bring additional offerings if they can afford it. And they must be careful to do whatever they vowed when they set themselves apart as Nazirites.”



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:

‘May the LORD bless you  
and protect you.  
May the LORD smile on you  
and be gracious to you.  
May the LORD show you his favor  
and give you his peace.’

Whenever Aaron and his sons bless the people of Israel in my name, I myself will bless them."

*—from the book of Numbers*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

This three-part blessing shows us that, more than anything, God wants the best for us. His love leads directly to his good care for us. May you and your family find rest and peace in God today. Take a few minutes to say this blessing over each other.

### DAY 28

## Spies, Doubt, Faith, and Consequences

(from *Beginnings*, pages 226-229)

*It was not really a very long journey from Mount Sinai to Canaan, the land that God had promised to Israel. Soon after leaving Sinai, the people arrived at a place close to Canaan. So God instructed Moses to begin the preparations for entering the Promised Land, including sending spies there to learn about the land and its people. But when they came back with their report, the people of Israel faced an important choice.*



The LORD now said to Moses, "Send out men to explore the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to the Israelites. Send one leader from each of the twelve ancestral tribes." So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He sent out twelve men, all tribal leaders of Israel, from their camp in the wilderness of Paran. These were the tribes and the names of their leaders:

Tribe	Leader
Reuben	Shammua son of Zaccur
Simeon	Shaphat son of Hori
Judah	Caleb son of Jephunneh
Issachar	Igal son of Joseph

Ephraim	.....	Hoshea son of Nun
Benjamin	.....	Palti son of Raphu
Zebulun	.....	Gaddiel son of Sodi
Manasseh son of Joseph	.....	Gaddi son of Susi
Dan	.....	Ammiel son of Gemalli
Asher	.....	Sethur son of Michael
Naphtali	.....	Nahbi son of Vophsi
Gad	.....	Geuel son of Maki

These are the names of the men Moses sent out to explore the land. (Moses called Hoshea son of Nun by the name Joshua.)

Moses gave the men these instructions as he sent them out to explore the land: "Go north through the Negev into the hill country. See what the land is like, and find out whether the people living there are strong or weak, few or many. See what kind of land they live in. Is it good or bad? Do their towns have walls, or are they unprotected like open camps? Is the soil fertile or poor? Are there many trees? Do your best to bring back samples of the crops you see." (It happened to be the season for harvesting the first ripe grapes.)

So they went up and explored the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. Going north, they passed through the Negev and arrived at Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai—all descendants of Anak—lived. (The ancient town of Hebron was founded seven years before the Egyptian city of Zoan.) When they came to the valley of Eshcol, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes so large that it took two of them to carry it on a pole between them! They also brought back samples of the pomegranates and figs. That place was called the valley of Eshcol (which means "cluster"), because of the cluster of grapes the Israelite men cut there.

After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land. This was their report to Moses: "We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley."

But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. "Let's go at once to take the land," he said. "We can certainly conquer it!"

But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. “We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!” So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”

Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. “If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!” they complained. “Why is the LORD taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?” Then they plotted among themselves, “Let’s choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!”

Then Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground before the whole community of Israel. Two of the men who had explored the land, Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, tore their clothing. They said to all the people of Israel, “The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land! And if the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the LORD, and don’t be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the LORD is with us! Don’t be afraid of them!”

But the whole community began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to all the Israelites at the Tabernacle. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them? I will disown them and destroy them with a plague. Then I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are!”

But Moses objected. “What will the Egyptians think when they hear about it?” he asked the LORD. “They know full well the power you displayed in rescuing your people from Egypt. Now if you destroy them, the Egyptians will send a report to the inhabitants of this land, who have already heard that you live among your people. They know, LORD, that you have appeared to your people face to face and that your pillar of cloud hovers over them. They know that you go before them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Now if you slaughter all these people with a single blow, the nations that have heard of your fame will say, ‘The LORD was not able to bring them into the land he swore to give them, so he killed them in the wilderness.’

“Please, Lord, prove that your power is as great as you have claimed.

For you said, ‘The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. But he does not excuse the guilty. He lays the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.’ In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love, please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”

Then the LORD said, “I will pardon them as you have requested. But as surely as I live, and as surely as the earth is filled with the LORD’s glory, not one of these people will ever enter that land. They have all seen my glorious presence and the miraculous signs I performed both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but again and again they have tested me by refusing to listen to my voice. They will never even see the land I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have treated me with contempt will ever see it. But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land. Now turn around, and don’t go on toward the land where the Amalekites and Canaanites live. Tomorrow you must set out for the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.”

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “How long must I put up with this wicked community and its complaints about me? Yes, I have heard the complaints the Israelites are making against me. Now tell them this: ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say. You will all drop dead in this wilderness! Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older and was included in the registration will die. You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you. The only exceptions will be Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.’

“You said your children would be carried off as plunder. Well, I will bring them safely into the land, and they will enjoy what you have despised. But as for you, you will drop dead in this wilderness. And your children will be like shepherds, wandering in the wilderness for forty years. In this way, they will pay for your faithlessness, until the last of you lies dead in the wilderness.

“Because your men explored the land for forty days, you must wander in the wilderness for forty years—a year for each day, suffering the consequences of your sins.”

—from the book of Numbers

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

The people in this land looked big and powerful. It took strong faith to believe that God would help the people of Israel conquer them. Have you ever faced something that was hard to believe God for?

## DAY 29

### The Rebellion

(from *Beginnings*, pages 231-234)

*One key part of our human rebellion against God is that we are constantly looking out for our own advantage and interests. All too often we are willing to hurt others if we think it will help us. This selfish habit makes it hard to work together in community. This spirit of rebellion also lived within the Israelites, regularly tearing them apart.*



One day Korah son of Izhar, a descendant of Kohath son of Levi, conspired with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben. They incited a rebellion against Moses, along with 250 other leaders of the community, all prominent members of the assembly. They united against Moses and Aaron and said, “You have gone too far! The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the LORD, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the LORD’s people?”

When Moses heard what they were saying, he fell face down on the ground. Then he said to Korah and his followers, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show us who belongs to him and who is holy. The LORD will allow only those whom he selects to enter his own presence. Korah, you and all your followers must prepare your incense burners. Light fires in them tomorrow, and burn incense before the LORD. Then we will see whom the LORD chooses as his holy one. You Levites are the ones who have gone too far!”

Then Moses spoke again to Korah: “Now listen, you Levites! Does it seem insignificant to you that the God of Israel has chosen you from among all the community of Israel to be near him so you can serve in the LORD’s Tabernacle and stand before the people to minister to them?

Korah, he has already given this special ministry to you and your fellow Levites. Are you now demanding the priesthood as well? The LORD is the one you and your followers are really revolting against! For who is Aaron that you are complaining about him?”

Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they replied, “We refuse to come before you! Isn’t it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us here in this wilderness, and that you now treat us like your subjects? What’s more, you haven’t brought us into another land flowing with milk and honey. You haven’t given us a new homeland with fields and vineyards. Are you trying to fool these men? We will not come.”

Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, “Do not accept their grain offerings! I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, and I have never hurt a single one of them.” And Moses said to Korah, “You and all your followers must come here tomorrow and present yourselves before the LORD. Aaron will also be here. You and each of your 250 followers must prepare an incense burner and put incense on it, so you can all present them before the LORD. Aaron will also bring his incense burner.”

So each of these men prepared an incense burner, lit the fire, and placed incense on it. Then they all stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle with Moses and Aaron. Meanwhile, Korah had stirred up the entire community against Moses and Aaron, and they all gathered at the Tabernacle entrance. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to the whole community, and the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Get away from all these people so that I may instantly destroy them!”

But Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground. “O God,” they pleaded, “you are the God who gives breath to all creatures. Must you be angry with all the people when only one man sins?”

And the LORD said to Moses, “Then tell all the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

So Moses got up and rushed over to the tents of Dathan and Abiram, followed by the elders of Israel. “Quick!” he told the people. “Get away from the tents of these wicked men, and don’t touch anything that belongs to them. If you do, you will be destroyed for their sins.” So all the people stood back from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Then Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrances of their tents, together with their wives and children and little ones.

And Moses said, “This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things that I have done—for I have not done them on my own. If these men die a natural death, or if nothing unusual happens, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD does something entirely new and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all

their belongings, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have shown contempt for the LORD."

He had hardly finished speaking the words when the ground suddenly split open beneath them. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the men, along with their households and all their followers who were standing with them, and everything they owned. So they went down alive into the grave, along with all their belongings. The earth closed over them, and they all vanished from among the people of Israel. All the people around them fled when they heard their screams. "The earth will swallow us, too!" they cried. Then fire blazed forth from the LORD and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense. . . .

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to bring you twelve wooden staffs, one from each leader of Israel's ancestral tribes, and inscribe each leader's name on his staff. Inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of the tribe of Levi, for there must be one staff for the leader of each ancestral tribe. Place these staffs in the Tabernacle in front of the Ark containing the tablets of the Covenant, where I meet with you. Buds will sprout on the staff belonging to the man I choose. Then I will finally put an end to the people's murmuring and complaining against you."

So Moses gave the instructions to the people of Israel, and each of the twelve tribal leaders, including Aaron, brought Moses a staff. Moses placed the staffs in the LORD's presence in the Tabernacle of the Covenant. When he went into the Tabernacle of the Covenant the next day, he found that Aaron's staff, representing the tribe of Levi, had sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds!

When Moses brought all the staffs out from the LORD's presence, he showed them to the people. Each man claimed his own staff. And the LORD said to Moses: "Place Aaron's staff permanently before the Ark of the Covenant to serve as a warning to rebels. This should put an end to their complaints against me and prevent any further deaths." So Moses did as the LORD commanded him.

—from the book of Numbers

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever felt that someone else was getting more than they deserved, while you were getting less than you deserved? What can we learn about this problem from this story?

## DAY 30

### Cry and Complain, Argue and Rebel

(from *Beginnings*, pages 238-240)

*As the people faced hardships and challenges in the desert, their immediate response was often to start complaining to Moses. God had shown great love and power by bringing them out of slavery in Egypt, so the people should have known that he would take care of them. But instead they constantly doubted him and cried out to Moses against him. God had to struggle with the people of Israel, but he was committed to the long-term goal. He continued on the journey with them because of his promise to bless all peoples on earth through them.*



In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.

There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. The people blamed Moses and said, "If only we had died in the LORD's presence with our brothers! Why have you brought the congregation of the LORD's people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock? Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!"

Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD said to Moses, "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock."

So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. "Listen, you rebels!" he shouted. "Must we bring you water from this rock?" Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!” This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means “arguing”) because there the people of Israel argued with the LORD, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them....

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The whole community of Israel left Kadesh and arrived at Mount Hor. There, on the border of the land of Edom, the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “The time has come for Aaron to join his ancestors in death. He will not enter the land I am giving the people of Israel, because the two of you rebelled against my instructions concerning the water at Meribah. Now take Aaron and his son Eleazar up Mount Hor. There you will remove Aaron’s priestly garments and put them on Eleazar, his son. Aaron will die there and join his ancestors.”

So Moses did as the LORD commanded. The three of them went up Mount Hor together as the whole community watched. At the summit, Moses removed the priestly garments from Aaron and put them on Eleazar, Aaron’s son. Then Aaron died there on top of the mountain, and Moses and Eleazar went back down. When the people realized that Aaron had died, all Israel mourned for him thirty days....

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Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!”

So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes.” So Moses prayed for the people.

Then the LORD told him, “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

*—from the book of Numbers*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

When we face hard situations, it can be hard not to complain. What might be some better ways to respond when things get difficult or challenging? Are there positive steps to take that might actually help the situations you face?

### DAY 31

## A New Leader

(from *Beginnings*, pages 254-256)

*The time of Moses was coming to an end. He had been the leader Israel needed for their freedom movement and the beginning of their nation. But now it was time for someone new to take over. We see here how important good leadership is in God’s Kingdom. The new leader must be filled with God’s Spirit and follow God’s ways.*

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One day the LORD said to Moses, “Climb one of the mountains east of the river, and look out over the land I have given the people of Israel. After you have seen it, you will die like your brother, Aaron, for you both rebelled against my instructions in the wilderness of Zin. When the people of Israel rebelled, you failed to demonstrate my holiness to them at the waters.” (These are the waters of Meribah at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)

Then Moses said to the LORD, “O LORD, you are the God who gives breath to all creatures. Please appoint a new man as leader for the community. Give them someone who will guide them wherever they go and will lead them into battle, so the community of the LORD will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

The LORD replied, “Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. Present him to Eleazar the priest before the whole community, and publicly commission him to lead the people. Transfer some of your authority to him so the whole community of Israel will obey him. When direction from the LORD is needed, Joshua will stand before Eleazar the priest, who will use the Urim—one of the sacred lots cast before the LORD—to determine his will. This is how Joshua and the rest of the community of Israel will determine everything they should do.”

So Moses did as the LORD commanded. He presented Joshua to Eleazar the priest and the whole community. Moses laid his hands on him and commissioned him to lead the people, just as the LORD had commanded through Moses.

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The LORD said to Moses, “Give these instructions to the people of Israel: The offerings you present as special gifts are a pleasing aroma to me; they are my food. See to it that they are brought at the appointed times and offered according to my instructions. . . .”

“On the fourteenth day of the first month, you must celebrate the LORD’s Passover. On the following day—the fifteenth day of the month—a joyous, seven-day festival will begin, but no bread made with yeast may be eaten. The first day of the festival will be an official day for holy assembly, and no ordinary work may be done on that day. As a special gift you must present a burnt offering to the LORD—two young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. These will be accompanied by grain offerings of choice flour moistened with olive oil—six quarts with each bull, four quarts with the ram, and two quarts with each of the seven lambs. You must also offer a male goat as a sin offering to purify yourselves and make yourselves right with the LORD. Present these offerings in addition to your regular morning burnt offering. On each of the seven days of the festival, this is how you must prepare the food offering that is presented as a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. These will be offered in addition to the regular burnt offerings and liquid offerings. The seventh day of the festival will be another official day for holy assembly, and no ordinary work may be done on that day.”

*—from the book of Numbers*

#### **TALKING TOGETHER:**

Every part of society needs to have good leaders. This includes families, schools, government, businesses, or any other kind of organization. What can you do to support and encourage the leaders you know?

## DAY 32

# Fighting the Battle of the Lord

(from *Beginnings*, pages 259-261, 265)

*As Israel was approaching the Promised Land, the nation had to fight battles against other nations. God was giving the world a new beginning through the people of Israel. He wanted to bring them into a new land and give them his laws and instructions so they could be a light to the world. So when some of these nations opposed Israel or tempted them to sin against God, God directed Israel to fight against them.*

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Then the LORD said to Moses, “On behalf of the people of Israel, take revenge on the Midianites for leading them into idolatry. After that, you will die and join your ancestors.”

So Moses said to the people, “Choose some men, and arm them to fight the LORD’s war of revenge against Midian. From each tribe of Israel, send 1,000 men into battle.” So they chose 1,000 men from each tribe of Israel, a total of 12,000 men armed for battle. Then Moses sent them out, 1,000 men from each tribe, and Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest led them into battle. They carried along the holy objects of the sanctuary and the trumpets for sounding the charge. They attacked Midian as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed all the men. All five of the Midianite kings—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba—died in the battle. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.

Then the Israelite army captured the Midianite women and children and seized their cattle and flocks and all their wealth as plunder. They burned all the towns and villages where the Midianites had lived. After they had gathered the plunder and captives, both people and animals, they brought them all to Moses and Eleazar the priest, and to the whole community of Israel, which was camped on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan River, across from Jericho. Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp. . . .

Then all the generals and captains came to Moses and said, “We, your servants, have accounted for all the men who went out to battle under our command; not one of us is missing! So we are presenting the items of gold

we captured as an offering to the LORD from our share of the plunder—armbands, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces. This will purify our lives before the LORD and make us right with him."

So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from all the military commanders—all kinds of jewelry and crafted objects. In all, the gold that the generals and captains presented as a gift to the LORD weighed about 420 pounds. All the fighting men had taken some of the plunder for themselves. So Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gifts from the generals and captains and brought the gold to the Tabernacle as a reminder to the LORD that the people of Israel belong to him. . . .

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While they were camped near the Jordan River on the plains of Moab opposite Jericho, the LORD said to Moses, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel: When you cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, you must drive out all the people living there. You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines. Take possession of the land and settle in it, because I have given it to you to occupy. You must distribute the land among the clans by sacred lot and in proportion to their size. A larger portion of land will be allotted to each of the larger clans, and a smaller portion will be allotted to each of the smaller clans. The decision of the sacred lot is final. In this way, the portions of land will be divided among your ancestral tribes. But if you fail to drive out the people who live in the land, those who remain will be like splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will harass you in the land where you live. And I will do to you what I had planned to do to them."

*—from the book of Numbers*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The point of God giving the land to Israel was not that he was simply favoring one group over another group. The Creator wants his entire world to be filled with people who love and worship him and who follow his good ways for living. God was giving this land to Israel as a sign of what he wants for the whole earth—to be a place that thrives under God's good rule. Say a prayer today for God's Kingdom to come and for all peoples to love and worship the true God.

## DAY 33

### Preparing the People for a New Land

(from *Beginnings*, pages 273-274, 278-279)

*The book of Deuteronomy is the last set of instructions that God gave to Moses before the people of Israel entered the Promised Land. There was now a new generation of Israelites that had grown up since the time of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt. So just before he dies, Moses presents them with a summary of the covenant that God had made with Israel. He teaches the new generation that they are part of the same story that God had started with their ancestors. God is now going to continue his work in the world through them.*

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These are the words that Moses spoke to all the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They were camped in the Jordan Valley near Suph, between Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab on the other.

Normally it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, going by way of Mount Seir. But forty years after the Israelites left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel, telling them everything the LORD had commanded him to say. This took place after he had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and at Edrei had defeated King Og of Bashan, who ruled in Ashtaroth.

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While the Israelites were in the land of Moab east of the Jordan River, Moses carefully explained the LORD's instructions as follows.

"When we were at Mount Sinai, the LORD our God said to us, 'You have stayed at this mountain long enough. It is time to break camp and move on. Go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all the neighboring regions—the Jordan Valley, the hill country, the western foothills, the Negev, and the coastal plain. Go to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, and all the way to the great Euphrates River. Look, I am giving all this land to you! Go in and occupy it, for it is the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to all their descendants.'"

Moses continued, “At that time I told you, ‘You are too great a burden for me to carry all by myself. The LORD your God has increased your population, making you as numerous as the stars! And may the LORD, the God of your ancestors, multiply you a thousand times more and bless you as he promised! But you are such a heavy load to carry! How can I deal with all your problems and bickering? Choose some well-respected men from each tribe who are known for their wisdom and understanding, and I will appoint them as your leaders.’

“Then you responded, ‘Your plan is a good one.’ So I took the wise and respected men you had selected from your tribes and appointed them to serve as judges and officials over you. Some were responsible for a thousand people, some for a hundred, some for fifty, and some for ten.

“At that time I instructed the judges, ‘You must hear the cases of your fellow Israelites and the foreigners living among you. Be perfectly fair in your decisions and impartial in your judgments. Hear the cases of those who are poor as well as those who are rich. Don’t be afraid of anyone’s anger, for the decision you make is God’s decision. Bring me any cases that are too difficult for you, and I will handle them.’

“At that time I gave you instructions about everything you were to do....

“At that time I gave Joshua this charge: ‘You have seen for yourself everything the LORD your God has done to these two kings. He will do the same to all the kingdoms on the west side of the Jordan. Do not be afraid of the nations there, for the LORD your God will fight for you.’

“At that time I pleaded with the LORD and said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, you have only begun to show your greatness and the strength of your hand to me, your servant. Is there any god in heaven or on earth who can perform such great and mighty deeds as you do? Please let me cross the Jordan to see the wonderful land on the other side, the beautiful hill country and the Lebanon mountains.’

“But the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. ‘That’s enough!’ he declared. ‘Speak of it no more. But go up to Pisgah Peak, and look over the land in every direction. Take a good look, but you may not cross the Jordan River. Instead, commission Joshua and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead the people across the Jordan. He will give them all the land you now see before you as their possession.’ So we stayed in the valley near Beth-peor.”

—from the book of Deuteronomy

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Have you ever faced a challenging, brand-new situation? Maybe moving to a new neighborhood or even a new city? starting a new school? making new friends? These kinds of changes can be hard. But God is with us, even when big changes happen! He also gives us other people—friends or family members—who can help us through these times in our lives.

#### DAY 34

## The Ten Commandments of the Covenant

(from *Beginnings*, pages 281-283)

*In the ancient world, whenever a high king would conquer some other land, he would offer the people there a treaty, or covenant. First, he would remind them of the history of what had happened between him and those people. Then, the high king would spell out how the people could live out their loyalty to him. Finally, the treaty would explain the consequences for the people, based on whether or not they followed the instructions of the king and were loyal to him. The Ten Commandments give us a miniature version of this ancient kind of covenant, or agreement, between the high king and his people.*



Moses called all the people of Israel together and said, “Listen carefully, Israel. Hear the decrees and regulations I am giving you today, so you may learn them and obey them!

“The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Mount Sinai. The LORD did not make this covenant with our ancestors, but with all of us who are alive today. At the mountain the LORD spoke to you face to face from the heart of the fire. I stood as an intermediary between you and the LORD, for you were afraid of the fire and did not want to approach the mountain. He spoke to me, and I passed his words on to you. This is what he said:

"I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.

"You must not have any other god but me.

"You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind, or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

"You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.

"Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

"You must not murder.

"You must not commit adultery.

"You must not steal.

"You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.

"You must not covet your neighbor's wife. You must not covet your neighbor's house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

"The LORD spoke these words to all of you assembled there at the foot of the mountain. He spoke with a loud voice from the heart of the fire, surrounded by clouds and deep darkness. This was all he said at that time, and he wrote his words on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

"But when you heard the voice from the heart of the darkness, while the mountain was blazing with fire, all your tribal leaders and elders came to me. They said, 'Look, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and

greatness, and we have heard his voice from the heart of the fire. Today we have seen that God can speak to us humans, and yet we live! But now, why should we risk death again? If the LORD our God speaks to us again, we will certainly die and be consumed by this awesome fire. Can any living thing hear the voice of the living God from the heart of the fire as we did and yet survive? Go yourself and listen to what the LORD our God says. Then come and tell us everything he tells you, and we will listen and obey.'

"The LORD heard the request you made to me. And he said, 'I have heard what the people said to you, and they are right. Oh, that they would always have hearts like this, that they might fear me and obey all my commands! If they did, they and their descendants would prosper forever. Go and tell them, "Return to your tents." But you stand here with me so I can give you all my commands, decrees, and regulations. You must teach them to the people so they can obey them in the land I am giving them as their possession."

So Moses told the people, "You must be careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God, following his instructions in every detail. Stay on the path that the LORD your God has commanded you to follow. Then you will live long and prosperous lives in the land you are about to enter and occupy."

*—from the book of Deuteronomy*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

The very heart of our covenant with God is to acknowledge that he is the Lord over all things and to follow his instructions for living. It's not about trying to earn his favor or his acceptance—he already loves us! Our faithfulness to the covenant is all about our gratitude to God and our acceptance that he is Lord. How can you show your loyalty to God today?

#### DAY 35

## Loyalty to the One and Only God

(from *Beginnings*, pages 289-291)

*Before the people of Israel enter their new land, God tells them what he requires of them. First and foremost, they are to love and serve God*

above all else. Their loyalty must be to him, for he is the one true God and the Creator of the world. He is giving them this good land so he can bless them and help them to thrive and grow. If they live well as God's people, then the rest of the world will see what it means to worship and serve the LORD.



"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. And you must always obey the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

"Look, the highest heavens and the earth and everything in it all belong to the LORD your God. Yet the LORD chose your ancestors as the objects of his love. And he chose you, their descendants, above all other nations, as is evident today. Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn.

"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. You must fear the LORD your God and worship him and cling to him. Your oaths must be in his name alone. He alone is your God, the only one who is worthy of your praise, the one who has done these mighty miracles that you have seen with your own eyes. When your ancestors went down into Egypt, there were only seventy of them. But now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky!

"You must love the LORD your God and always obey his requirements, decrees, regulations, and commands. Keep in mind that I am not talking now to your children, who have never experienced the discipline of the LORD your God or seen his greatness and his strong hand and powerful arm. They didn't see the miraculous signs and wonders he performed in Egypt against Pharaoh and all his land. They didn't see what the LORD did to the armies of Egypt and to their horses and chariots—how he drowned them in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. He destroyed them, and they have not recovered to this very day!

"Your children didn't see how the LORD cared for you in the wilderness until you arrived here. They didn't see what he did to Dathan and Abiram (the sons of Eliab, a descendant of Reuben) when the earth opened its mouth in the Israelite camp and swallowed them, along with their

households and tents and every living thing that belonged to them. But you have seen the LORD perform all these mighty deeds with your own eyes!

"Therefore, be careful to obey every command I am giving you today, so you may have strength to go in and take over the land you are about to enter. If you obey, you will enjoy a long life in the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors and to you, their descendants—a land flowing with milk and honey! For the land you are about to enter and take over is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you planted your seed and made irrigation ditches with your foot as in a vegetable garden. Rather, the land you will soon take over is a land of hills and valleys with plenty of rain—a land that the LORD your God cares for. He watches over it through each season of the year!

"If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today, and if you love the LORD your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, then he will send the rains in their proper seasons—the early and late rains—so you can bring in your harvests of grain, new wine, and olive oil. He will give you lush pastureland for your livestock, and you yourselves will have all you want to eat.

"But be careful. Don't let your heart be deceived so that you turn away from the LORD and serve and worship other gods. If you do, the LORD's anger will burn against you. He will shut up the sky and hold back the rain, and the ground will fail to produce its harvests. Then you will quickly die in that good land the LORD is giving you.

"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors.

"Be careful to obey all these commands I am giving you. Show love to the LORD your God by walking in his ways and holding tightly to him. Then the LORD will drive out all the nations ahead of you, though they are much greater and stronger than you, and you will take over their land. Wherever you set foot, that land will be yours. Your frontiers will stretch from the wilderness in the south to Lebanon in the north, and from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you, for the LORD your God will cause the people to fear and dread you, as he promised, wherever you go in the whole land.

"Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse!

You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today. But you will be cursed if you reject the commands of the LORD your God and turn away from him and worship gods you have not known before.

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land and helps you take possession of it, you must pronounce the blessing at Mount Gerizim and the curse at Mount Ebal. (These two mountains are west of the Jordan River in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Jordan Valley, near the town of Gilgal, not far from the oaks of Moreh.) For you are about to cross the Jordan River to take over the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you take that land and are living in it, you must be careful to obey all the decrees and regulations I am giving you today."

*—from the book of Deuteronomy*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Moses gives the people their basic choice: Love God and live, or ignore God and suffer exile and loss. How do you think it felt to be in this new generation of Israelites, who were about to enter the Promised Land for the first time?

### DAY 36

## Caring for the Poor

(from *Beginnings*, pages 295-296)

*The people of Israel were being cruelly oppressed as slaves in Egypt when the LORD came down to save them. God always wanted Israel to remember where they came from. They had been foreigners suffering in someone else's land. Because of this, the people of Israel were to be generous and caring toward the poor people and foreigners in their own land. When God blesses his own people, they are to bless others in turn.*



"You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year. Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the

place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored—and eat it there in his presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.

"Now when the LORD your God blesses you with a good harvest, the place of worship he chooses for his name to be honored might be too far for you to bring the tithe. If so, you may sell the tithe portion of your crops and herds, put the money in a pouch, and go to the place the LORD your God has chosen. When you arrive, you may use the money to buy any kind of food you want—cattle, sheep, goats, wine, or other alcoholic drink. Then feast there in the presence of the LORD your God and celebrate with your household. And do not neglect the Levites in your town, for they will receive no allotment of land among you.

"At the end of every third year, bring the entire tithe of that year's harvest and store it in the nearest town. Give it to the Levites, who will receive no allotment of land among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all your work.

"At the end of every seventh year you must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites. They must not demand payment from their neighbors or relatives, for the LORD's time of release has arrived. This release from debt, however, applies only to your fellow Israelites—not to the foreigners living among you.

"There should be no poor among you, for the LORD your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today. The LORD your God will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations but will never need to borrow. You will rule many nations, but they will not rule over you.

"But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them. Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need. Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year for canceling debts is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the LORD, you will be considered guilty of sin. Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do. There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.

"If a fellow Hebrew sells himself or herself to be your servant and serves you for six years, in the seventh year you must set that servant free.

"When you release a male servant, do not send him away empty-handed. Give him a generous farewell gift from your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress. Share with him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were once slaves in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you! That is why I am giving you this command.

"But suppose your servant says, 'I will not leave you,' because he loves you and your family, and he has done well with you. In that case, take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door. After that, he will be your servant for life. And do the same for your female servants.

"You must not consider it a hardship when you release your servants. Remember that for six years they have given you services worth double the wages of hired workers, and the LORD your God will bless you in all you do."

*—from the book of Deuteronomy*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

Are there places in your community dedicated to helping poor people—those without shelter or food or those who are new to this country? How could you help to support them?

### DAY 37

## Showing True Loyalty

(from *Beginnings*, pages 307-310)

The main requirement for the people of Israel in their covenant with God was that they show him the highest loyalty. The laws and instructions God gave to the people were meant to be the way they showed their commitment to God. These instructions covered all sorts of things: how to live and take care of each other and how to worship God the right way. This was how Israel could show that they really were set apart for God as his holy nation.

A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or be given any other official responsibilities. He must be free to spend one year at home, bringing happiness to the wife he has married.

"It is wrong to take a set of millstones, or even just the upper millstone, as security for a loan, for the owner uses it to make a living.

"If anyone kidnaps a fellow Israelite and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. In this way, you will purge the evil from among you.

"In all cases involving serious skin diseases, be careful to follow the instructions of the Levitical priests; obey all the commands I have given them. Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam as you were coming from Egypt.

"If you lend anything to your neighbor, do not enter his house to pick up the item he is giving as security. You must wait outside while he goes in and brings it out to you. If your neighbor is poor and gives you his cloak as security for a loan, do not keep the cloak overnight. Return the cloak to its owner by sunset so he can stay warm through the night and bless you, and the LORD your God will count you as righteous.

"Never take advantage of poor and destitute laborers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns. You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it. If you don't, they might cry out to the LORD against you, and it would be counted against you as sin.

"Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes.

"True justice must be given to foreigners living among you and to orphans, and you must never accept a widow's garment as security for her debt. Always remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God redeemed you from your slavery. That is why I have given you this command.

"When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don't glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command. . . .

"When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you as a special possession and you have conquered it and settled there, put some of the first produce from each crop you harvest into a basket and bring it to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored. Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, 'With this gift I acknowledge to the LORD your God that I have entered the land he swore to our ancestors he would give us.' The priest will then take the basket from your hand and set it before the altar of the LORD your God.

"You must then say in the presence of the LORD your God, 'My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live as a foreigner in Egypt. His family arrived few in number, but in Egypt they became a large and mighty nation. When the Egyptians oppressed and humiliated us by making us their slaves, we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors. He heard our cries and saw our hardship, toil, and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and powerful arm, with overwhelming terror, and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey! And now, O LORD, I have brought you the first portion of the harvest you have given me from the ground.' Then place the produce before the LORD your God, and bow to the ground in worship before him. Afterward you may go and celebrate because of all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household. Remember to include the Levites and the foreigners living among you in the celebration.

"Every third year you must offer a special tithe of your crops. In this year of the special tithe you must give your tithes to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows, so that they will have enough to eat in your towns. Then you must declare in the presence of the LORD your God, 'I have taken the sacred gift from my house and have given it to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows, just as you commanded me. I have not violated or forgotten any of your commands. I have not eaten any of it while in mourning; I have not handled it while I was ceremonially unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God and have done everything you commanded me. Now look down from your holy dwelling place in heaven and bless your people Israel and the land you swore to our ancestors to give us—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

"Today the LORD your God has commanded you to obey all these decrees and regulations. So be careful to obey them wholeheartedly. You have declared today that the LORD is your God. And you have promised to walk in his ways, and to obey his decrees, commands, and regulations,

and to do everything he tells you. The LORD has declared today that you are his people, his own special treasure, just as he promised, and that you must obey all his commands. And if you do, he will set you high above all the other nations he has made. Then you will receive praise, honor, and renown. You will be a nation that is holy to the LORD your God, just as he promised."

*—from the book of Deuteronomy*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What do you think the phrase "true justice" means? How do God's instructions in Deuteronomy help us understand it?

## DAY 38

### Loyalty or No Loyalty

(from *Beginnings*, pages 311-314)

*God's intention in putting Israel into this special place—the Promised Land—was to begin his work of bringing his good rule back to the earth. If Israel would indeed show him their complete loyalty and faithfulness, then he would bring his blessing of life and prosperity to them. This blessing is what God wants to bring to the whole earth and to all peoples. But if Israel did not worship God well and follow his instructions, then things would not go well for them in this land.*



"If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the world. You will experience all these blessings if you obey the LORD your God:

Your towns and your fields  
will be blessed.

Your children and your crops  
will be blessed.

The offspring of your herds and flocks

will be blessed.

Your fruit baskets and breadboards

will be blessed.

Wherever you go and whatever you do,

you will be blessed.

"The LORD will conquer your enemies when they attack you. They will attack you from one direction, but they will scatter from you in seven!"

"The LORD will guarantee a blessing on everything you do and will fill your storehouses with grain. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

"If you obey the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways, the LORD will establish you as his holy people as he swore he would do. Then all the nations of the world will see that you are a people claimed by the LORD, and they will stand in awe of you.

"The LORD will give you prosperity in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, blessing you with many children, numerous livestock, and abundant crops. The LORD will send rain at the proper time from his rich treasury in the heavens and will bless all the work you do. You will lend to many nations, but you will never need to borrow from them. If you listen to these commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today, and if you carefully obey them, the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you will always be on top and never at the bottom. You must not turn away from any of the commands I am giving you today, nor follow after other gods and worship them.

"But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you:

Your towns and your fields

will be cursed.

Your fruit baskets and breadboards

will be cursed.

Your children and your crops

will be cursed.

The offspring of your herds and flocks

will be cursed.

Wherever you go and whatever you do,

you will be cursed....

"The LORD will exile you and your king to a nation unknown to you and your ancestors. There in exile you will worship gods of wood and stone!

You will become an object of horror, ridicule, and mockery among all the nations to which the LORD sends you.

"You will plant much but harvest little, for locusts will eat your crops. You will plant vineyards and care for them, but you will not drink the wine or eat the grapes, for worms will destroy the vines. You will grow olive trees throughout your land, but you will never use the olive oil, for the fruit will drop before it ripens. You will have sons and daughters, but you will lose them, for they will be led away into captivity. Swarms of insects will destroy your trees and crops.

"The foreigners living among you will become stronger and stronger, while you become weaker and weaker. They will lend money to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the head, and you will be the tail!

"If you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and to obey the commands and decrees he has given you, all these curses will pursue and overtake you until you are destroyed. These horrors will serve as a sign and warning among you and your descendants forever. If you do not serve the LORD your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received, you will serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you. You will be left hungry, thirsty, naked, and lacking in everything. The LORD will put an iron yoke on your neck, oppressing you harshly until he has destroyed you.

"The LORD will bring a distant nation against you from the end of the earth, and it will swoop down on you like a vulture. It is a nation whose language you do not understand, a fierce and heartless nation that shows no respect for the old and no pity for the young. Its armies will devour your livestock and crops, and you will be destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine, olive oil, calves, or lambs, and you will starve to death. They will attack your cities until all the fortified walls in your land—the walls you trusted to protect you—are knocked down. They will attack all the towns in the land the LORD your God has given you."

*—from the book of Deuteronomy*

#### TALKING TOGETHER:

What does it mean to be part of a community that is blessed by God? What did this mean in ancient Israel? What do you think it means today?

**DAY 39**

# The Never-ending Love of God

(from *Beginnings*, pages 317-318)

*The Bible tells us the story of God and the world. It tells us of God's intentions for humans and the kind of life he wants to live with them. In the story of Abraham's descendants, the people of Israel, we see a miniature version of God's story with all people. The sorry fact is that humans have struggled to obey God, to worship him alone, and to follow his good ways for living. But the story of Israel shows us that God is going to help his people in this struggle, and in the end, it is his story. He will make sure that his people live in the land with his blessing.*



*"In the future, when you experience all these blessings and curses I have listed for you, and when you are living among the nations to which the LORD your God has exiled you, take to heart all these instructions. If at that time you and your children return to the LORD your God, and if you obey with all your heart and all your soul all the commands I have given you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes. He will have mercy on you and gather you back from all the nations where he has scattered you. Even though you are banished to the ends of the earth, the LORD your God will gather you from there and bring you back again. The LORD your God will return you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will possess that land again. Then he will make you even more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors!"*

*"The LORD your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live! The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate and persecute you. Then you will again obey the LORD and keep all his commands that I am giving you today.*

*"The LORD your God will then make you successful in everything you do. He will give you many children and numerous livestock, and he will cause your fields to produce abundant harvests, for the LORD will again delight in being good to you as he was to your ancestors. The LORD your God will delight in you if you obey his voice and keep the commands and*

*decrees written in this Book of Instruction, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.*

*"This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, and it is not beyond your reach. It is not kept in heaven, so distant that you must ask, 'Who will go up to heaven and bring it down so we can hear it and obey?' It is not kept beyond the sea, so far away that you must ask, 'Who will cross the sea to bring it to us so we can hear it and obey?' No, the message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart so that you can obey it.*

*"Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy.*

*"But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.*

*"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*

—from the book of Deuteronomy

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

God is by far the most powerful of all those who make things happen in the story of our world. Does it give you confidence to know that, in the end, the story of our lives is God's story? Does it give you comfort to know that even if we fail and stumble sometimes God is always ready to take us back and restore us?

**DAY 40**

# An Ending, and a New Beginning

(from *Beginnings*, pages 324, 327)

*Our individual chapters in the great story of God and the world eventually come to a close. Moses did not get to enter the Promised Land, but he did get to see where this journey from Egypt would end. The LORD was becoming King over Israel on his path to establishing his reign over all the peoples of the earth. Moses played his part in the story well, serving God and leading the people.*



That same day the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Moab, to the mountains east of the river, and climb Mount Nebo, which is across from Jericho. Look out across the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to the people of Israel as their own special possession. Then you will die there on the mountain. You will join your ancestors, just as Aaron, your brother, died on Mount Hor and joined his ancestors. For both of you betrayed me with the Israelites at the waters of Meribah at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin. You failed to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel there. So you will see the land from a distance, but you may not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel.”

This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, gave to the people of Israel before his death:

“The LORD came from Mount Sinai  
and dawned upon us from Mount Seir;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran  
and came from Meribah-kadesh  
with flaming fire at his right hand.

Indeed, he loves his people;  
all his holy ones are in his hands.

They follow in his steps  
and accept his teaching.

Moses gave us the LORD’s instruction,  
the special possession of the people of Israel.  
The LORD became king in Israel—

when the leaders of the people assembled,  
when the tribes of Israel gathered as one. . . .”

Then Moses went up to Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab and climbed Pisgah Peak, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him the whole land, from Gilead as far as Dan; all the land of Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; all the land of Judah, extending to the Mediterranean Sea; the Negev; the Jordan Valley with Jericho—the city of palms—as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to Moses, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have now allowed you to see it with your own eyes, but you will not enter the land.”

So Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, just as the LORD had said. The LORD buried him in a valley near Beth-peor in Moab, but to this day no one knows the exact place. Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was clear, and he was as strong as ever. The people of Israel mourned for Moses on the plains of Moab for thirty days, until the customary period of mourning was over.

Now Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him, doing just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. The LORD sent him to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, and all his servants, and his entire land. With mighty power, Moses performed terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel.

—*from the book of Deuteronomy*

**TALKING TOGETHER:**

Because of Moses’ sin, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Can it be true that even when we are forgiven for something we’ve done wrong, there are still painful consequences to face?