

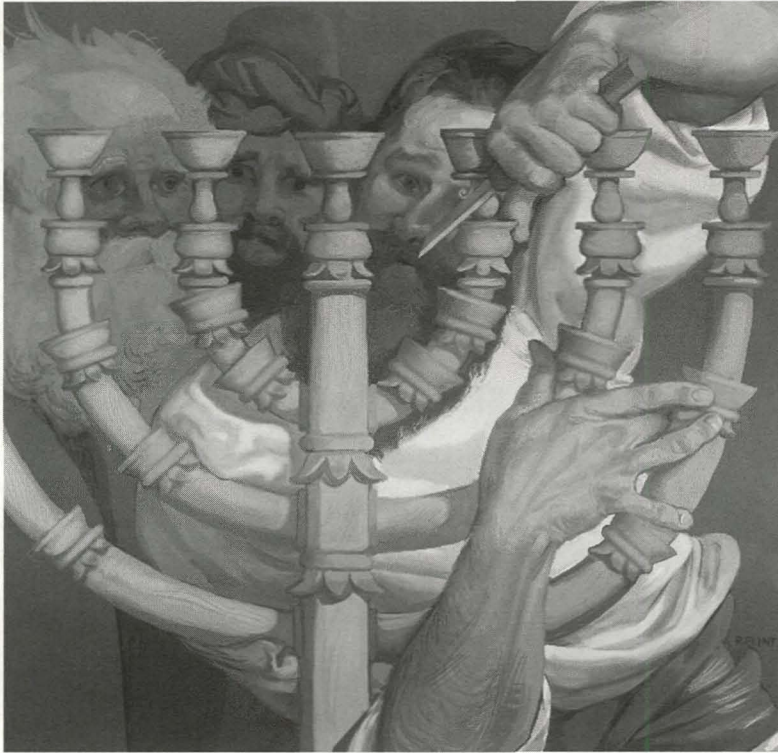
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Exodus, Part 2

**The Lord Covenants
and Tabernacles with His People**

LEADERS GUIDE



From the reed marshes along the Nile to the hardwood acacias in the Sinai Wilderness, the Lord guided His people. He guided the nimble fingers of Moses' mother, who wove a basket for her son. He strengthened the callous hands of Besalel and Oholiab, who gave shape to the tabernacle. And ultimately, with woven crown and splintered cross, He designed your Exodus, your salvation through Christ.

Earl H. Gaulke, editor

Revised from material prepared by Paul Raabe and Leland Stevens.

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for each of the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer) using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 50.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 50);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling

together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use the cassette tape to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The discussion leader will obtain the tape and leaflets from the director. A cassette tape version of the lecture is available for purchase from CPH (see your catalog). Or a congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Exodus 2

Cole, Robert A. *Exodus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972. A popular and generally helpful treatment of the text.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and time lines.

Davis, John J. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus*. 2d edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986. A study of the text, with special reference to the first 12 chapters in the light of recent archaeological and historical studies, with special reference to Egyptian religious and political customs.

Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Vols. 1 and 2: The Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975 reprint.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Wendland, Ernst A. *Exodus*, The People's Bible Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992. A popularly written commentary, referring to the New International Version of the Bible. Contains personal application as well as historical background and explanations of the text.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

The Ten Words of the Covenant

Exodus 20:1–20

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This introductory session ties Exodus, Part 2 with Exodus, Part 1 and discusses the ten words or commandments.

Objectives

That the participant will be led to

1. repent of failure to keep the Law of God;
2. believe in the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus;
3. rejoice in the deliverance from bondage the Lord has given;
4. willingly and gladly follow the instructions of God's Law as one who is empowered by the Spirit working through the Gospel.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 50.

For the Lecture Leader

You have a key role in the process. Your weekly presentation will sum up the study the individuals have done all week at home and in small-group discussion. Because your part is important, you will want to prepare carefully each week.

Step 1 in your preparation: Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance and illumination as you study and present God's Word. This is God's powerful and life-giving Word. It produces repentance and faith so that everything does not depend on your own abilities. That fact makes your work a joyful experience and not a burden.

Step 2: Read and study Exodus 20:1–20 for yourself. Only as the Word produces repentance and faith in your heart can you call others to repentance and faith.

Step 3: Prepare and practice your presentation carefully. If possible, make your presentation in your own words,

using the printed lecture as a guide to follow. Speak the way you speak, and make the presentation your own. It is important to keep eye contact with the people and not to read the text. That facilitates communication.

Step 4: Ask someone in the group to help you by watching and listening to you carefully and then by giving you feedback. Pick someone who will be a positive and helpful critic.

Step 5: Pray again. Thank God for giving you an opportunity to declare His glorious name before others, and pray for His blessing.

For the Director

Before the first assembly confer with the presenter and discussion leaders about specific needs and the arrangement of meeting places.

The assembly area, where the opening worship, lecture, and closing activities take place, should be large enough for all participants to be seated comfortably. See that the area is heated or cooled, as well as ventilated, before the assembly is to begin. Arrange for a musician and instrument to accompany the hymn(s). (If a musician or instrument is not available and the entire group is not large, consider asking a congregation organist or a pianist to record the music on tape.) Ask the presenter how he or she prefers the audience to be seated (around tables, chairs in a circle or semicircle, chairs in rows, etc.). Does the presenter need a podium or lectern? a chalkboard? an overhead projector and screen? a chart stand or map? other items?

The areas where group discussions will take place must be ready also. Again, note heating/cooling and ventilation. How many chairs will be needed? Is a table desired? Are pencils on hand? Do the discussion leaders need special equipment? Discussion leaders will distribute study leaflet 1 at the beginning of the first assembly; arrange to have the needed number of leaflets available in the area where the beginning assembly takes place.

As the director you will also be responsible to see that any small groups meeting at a time other than the

weekly assembly are supplied with the taped worship and lecture presentation (either recorded at the weekly assembly or using the cassette tape available with this course).

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index]. Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 6.)

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

The subtitle of this LifeLight course is "The Lord Covenants and Tabernacles with His People." The Lord is the subject of the sentence and of the whole book of Exodus. Only when we concentrate our attention on the Lord, His words, and His deeds, rather than on ourselves, will we be able to understand Exodus.

"His people." Ancient Israel was not just an ordinary nation like the other nations. Israel was the Lord's people, called and delivered by the Lord. "His people" are the recipients of the divine action.

We, too, as the Lord's people and church in Christ, are the receivers of what God has done. Only when the Lord is seen as the actor and we as the recipients of that action do we rightly understand who we are.

The two verbs in the subtitle are also crucial. "The Lord covenants and tabernacles with His people." Our study together will flesh out these verbs and clarify them for you. Hopefully, by the end of our study you will see that these two powerful verbs provide a convenient summary of the Lord's actions in Exodus 20–40—and with us.

Exodus 20–40 consists of basically two parts. Chapters 20–24 concern the Lord's covenanting with Israel, and chapters 25–40 concern the Lord's tabernacling with Israel. This week we are focusing on the ten words of the covenant.

1 The God behind the Words (Exodus 20:1–2)

We know from Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13 and elsewhere that God gives Israel "ten words." But when Scripture gives us these ten words, they are not numbered, and so we cannot be certain exactly how they are to be numbered. It is not surprising, then, that different religions number them in different ways. Finally, how they are numbered does not matter, except for convenience in referring to them individually.

The text, in verse 1, refers to them as "these words." These words have a unique status. Only these words have a special name—"the ten words"—and they are repeated again in Deuteronomy 5. Only these words were spoken by God from Mount Sinai directly to the Israelites, without the mediation of Moses. After God spoke these words, the people trembled and asked Moses to serve as God's spokesman and mediator (vv. 18–19), which he did from then on. Only these words were written down on the two stone tablets (Deuteronomy 5:22). And a sense of finality sets the Decalogue (a common name for the commandments that means, literally, "ten words") apart from the remaining laws. Deuteronomy 5:22 says, "And He added nothing more." Therefore, these ten commands are special. In fact, most of the other laws are extensions, concrete applications, and clarifications of these ten. We rightly learn them well.

"These words" are statements of what we should and ought to do *and* what we *will* do. In other words, they are both prescriptions and descriptions of Israel's and of our behavior. They are both commandments of what God's people should do and predictions of what they will do. Therefore, they are called not only "commandments" but also "words."

Scripture refers to three purposes, or uses, that the Ten Commandments can have for people. For everyone, the Law serves as a *curb*; its threats curb and constrain human behavior. For example, when we drive, we don't speed lest we get caught and fined. Fear of punishment causes even thoughtless or careless people to obey. Laws prohibiting speeding are concerned with preserving and protecting human life; that is an application to the commandment "You shall not murder." That is the first use of the Law, to restrain behavior.

The second use or purpose of the Law is as a *mirror*. It

shows us our sins. It says, “You shall not covet” and causes us to realize that we *do* covet. By serving as a mirror, the Law sets us up and prepares us to receive the Gospel, the Good News concerning God’s forgiveness of our sins for the sake of Jesus. The Law affects all people in these first two ways, because all people are sinners.

The third use or purpose of the Law, however, is only for believers, because only believers gladly want to obey their loving God. In this use the Law serves as a *guide*. It informs us how God would have us respond to His grace in Christ, and it describes how we, motivated by the Spirit, will—in fact—live. In other words, it describes the good fruit that a good tree will bear. However, because we Christians are still sinners, the Law also has to continue to function as a curb and mirror for us.

We can find these three uses or purposes of the Law in Exodus. The Law curbed Israel’s disobedience when the Israelites saw the power of God and “trembled with fear” (v. 18). The Law as a mirror showed Israel its sin. This is why God later established the sacrificial system so that Israel might make atonement for their sins. If Israel would have been able to keep the Law, no sacrifices would have been necessary. Since Israelites were not only sinners but believers, the “ten words” (the Ten Commandments) guided, informed, and described to Israel how it would respond to its gracious Lord.

This brings us to the most important sentence in Exodus 20: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (v. 2). This verse identifies the speaker. He is “the LORD.” That is the way most of our Bible translations render the original Hebrew word *Yahweh*. Some translations use “Jehovah,” but actually it is pronounced Yahweh (YAH-way). Thus, the original Hebrew reads, “I am Yahweh your God.” The one speaking to Israel from Mount Sinai is Yahweh—that is His name. Notice that He reveals Himself as a *person*, with a personal name. God is not an “It,” not an impersonal force. No, God is a personal being with a personal name, who speaks and acts as a person and who calls Israel (and us) into a personal relationship with Himself.

And this personal God who speaks here calls Himself “your God.” He has graciously made Himself *your* God and has made you His people. He belongs to you, and you belong to Him. God spoke this way to ancient Israel, and He still speaks this way to us. The God of ancient

Israel is our God, who has called us in Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal the one and the same God.

The sentence continues: “who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” The speaker continues to identify Himself by summarizing what He did—events recorded in the first 19 chapters of Exodus. So this sentence serves to bridge the first half of the book with the second half. Israel used to suffer in slavery to Egypt; it was forced to serve Pharaoh and his false gods by building their temples.

By grace, and not because of any merit or worthiness in Israel, Yahweh acted through Moses and delivered Israel from bondage and brought them to Himself into true freedom. As God said in Exodus 19:4: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” Israel did not deliver itself. The Israelites were helpless under Pharaoh’s control in the land of slavery. But Yahweh defeated Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12) and delivered helpless Israel.

The deliverance of ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery was a preview of the greater deliverance from sin, death, and the devil that we all have received by the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. God did the same saving act for us, only in a far greater way, that He did for ancient Israel.

In the following “words” God instructs and describes to ancient Israel (and to us) how they (and we) are to respond to His gracious and saving deed in Christ.

2 No Other Gods (Exodus 20:3–6)

The first “word” has three parts: the prohibition against other gods, the prohibition against images and idols, and the basis of these prohibitions. The first “word” begins, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The phrase “before Me” in the original Hebrew literally says “before (or upon) My face.” Yahweh is not far away from Israel; He is in their midst. He made Himself their God and made them His people (v. 2).

Now He states the implications of this. His people will have only Yahweh as their God and no one or nothing else. In all that they say, think, and do, the God who delivered them and adopted them is to be their God and

their only God. Israel should and will put no other gods before Yahweh's "face," that is, in His presence and before His eyes. Having other gods is never a secret or hidden thing. God is here with us, and He can see plainly what we do. To have other gods amounts to committing adultery and flaunting it right in the eyesight of one's spouse.

Verses 4–5 prohibit making an image or statue of God and then worshiping it. Why would this be wrong? Because Israel did not see God's appearance; they only heard Him speak and saw the cloud that enclosed Him (see Deuteronomy 4:11–24). Therefore, if they fashioned a statue of God, it would be based on their own imagination and reason. And certainly they should not worship such an image. That would be idolatry.

What is to prevent Israel and us from polytheism and idolatry? Two reasons are given in verses 5–6. First, because your God is a jealous God who punishes. It is not that He is at this time angry with Israel. He had recently delivered Israel by grace alone. He says, "I am Yahweh your God." He had, as it were, married Israel; He was the bridegroom, and Israel was His bride. But if His bride went after other "lovers," that would provoke Him to wrath. His "jealousy" is unlike human jealousy in that it is not fickle or irrational or selfish. But it is "jealousy" in the sense that He will not share His bride with other "lovers." If Israel goes after other gods or commits idolatry, that would provoke God to holy wrath and cause Him to punish "the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (v. 5). His punishment would not be unfair. He threatens to punish "those who hate Me." Nevertheless, all of Israel collectively, up to the fourth generation if they continued to hate Him, would suffer. Therefore, Israel was to fear God lest they provoke Him to wrath.

(20:6) Second, your God shows "love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments" (v. 6). God is not by nature angry or spiteful. The Old Testament repeatedly says that He is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Notice that God's "love and faithfulness" outweighs His punishing wrath. God's anger extends to the fourth generation, but God's love and faithfulness extends to the thousandth generation (see Deuteronomy 7:9).

Those who benefit from this grace are those who love

Him and keep His commandments. It is not *because* they love and obey Him; rather the sentence simply designates those who benefit, namely those who receive His grace and favor by faith alone, a faith that is active in love.

3 The Lord's Name (Exodus 20:7)

The next word prohibits misusing Yahweh's name. This refers to invoking God's name as a throwaway remark, not only in a negative way, such as cursing, but also in a neutral and meaningless way. God's name is holy and is to be treated as such. Again, notice the phrase "your God." You belong to Him, and He belongs to you. This relationship motivates you to love and honor His name. But there is also a threat (v. 7): "the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name." We do not want to provoke Him to anger. It is much like a cook's attitude toward a stove. The stove is a good and beneficial thing, but the cook also respects it so as not to get burned. In a similar way God's children do not trifle with God's name lest they anger Him. But more important, they love His name because it is the wonderful name of their loving Father.

4 The Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11)

The third word is a positive one rather than a prohibition. Israel is to observe the Sabbath day as a day of rest and to keep it holy, that is, to set it apart from the other days of the week and dedicate it to their God. Why? Because God worked during the six days of creation but rested on the seventh day. Since Israel's God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, so should Israel. By observing the Sabbath day, Israel was sharing in God's sabbatical rest and was receiving a foretaste of the future heavenly rest that awaits God's people (see Hebrews 3–4).

Although we are no longer bound to worshiping on Saturday (Colossians 2:16), we, too, receive the blessings of God's rest and a foretaste of our future heavenly rest when we hear the Gospel, remember our Baptism, and partake of the Lord's Supper. Of course, we obey this commandment when we attend church on Sundays and at other opportunities and when we take part in Sunday school and Bible classes. But keeping this commandment involves far more than that. We also keep this commandment when we believe the Gospel that we hear and when

we honor and uphold God's Word by living in a way that is in agreement with it and when our own attitudes toward others display the forgiveness, love, and consideration God has shown to us in Jesus.

5 Parents (Exodus 20:12)

The fourth word, like the third, is a positive one. It calls each individual Israelite to honor his or her father and mother. With what result? To this end (20:12): "You may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." The basic unit of Israel is the family. A strong and cohesive family will make for a strong and cohesive Israel in the Promised Land. So also with us. Strong Christian families help the church remain strong in the Lord, to the end that by God's grace we all together inherit the Promised Land where we will dwell forever—God's heavenly kingdom. Canaan, the literal Promised Land God would give to the Israelites, was a foretaste and preview of the new and greater Promised Land that awaits God's people, all those who are in Christ Jesus.

6 Life Together (Exodus 20:13–16)

The fifth through eighth words are all prohibitions. They set the boundaries of the Israelites' life together. The Israelites are not to murder, commit adultery, steal, nor bear false witness against their neighbor. These prohibitions also imply the positive. The Israelites should value and protect the gifts that God has given their neighbor, gifts such as life, spouse, property, and name. Out of faith and love toward the giver, we value the gifts our loving Father has given not only to us but also to our neighbor.

7 Coveting (Exodus 20:17)

The ninth and tenth words are also prohibitions. But notice how they address one's heart and not simply one's actions. They prohibit coveting: selfishly desiring anything of your neighbor's. God's will concerns both the inner motivation as well as external behavior. Again, the concern is that we, who have received from God blessings such as house, spouse, workers, and cattle for ourselves, value and protect the blessings God has also given our neighbor. The same God has blessed us and our neighbor with His creaturely gifts. To honor God is to protect the

gifts He gave others as well as being good stewards of the gifts He gave us.

Conclusion

When we examine our lives in light of God's will, we can see only sin and disobedience. We confess with St. Paul, "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). And to us comes the Good News that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). We have been freed by Christ from an oppressive life under the Law. Just like ancient Israel we have been delivered from slavery and have been brought to God. We are now free to walk in the Law of God. As Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The ten words show us our sin, but they also inform us of the good works in which we are called to walk in response to God's abundant steadfast love in Christ. Empowered by God's powerful Spirit working through the Gospel, we eagerly, happily, from a free and merry heart desire to walk in the Law of God. Why? Because the speaker is our God in Christ Jesus, who delivered us from the land of slavery.

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer asking the Lord to bless this study and make any necessary announcements. Distribute study leaflet 2 and the enrichment magazine. Encourage participants to browse in the magazine and keep it as a helpful reference for coming lessons.

Encourage participants to set a weekly plan for their LifeLight study. A consistent daily schedule works best for most. Some begin or end the day with LifeLight. Others find another time during the day at home or during a break or lunch hour at work. Invite participants to share their practices, especially if your group has some who are new to LifeLight.

The Book of the Covenant

Exodus 20:21–23:33

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This session discusses the Book of the Covenant, a collection of the specific applications of the ten general “words” to the various dimensions of Israel’s life.

Objectives

That the participant will be led to

1. repent of failure to keep the Law of God;
2. believe in the forgiveness of sins through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ;
3. understand more clearly that God wills all of one’s life to be in faith toward Him and fervent love toward one’s neighbor;
4. willingly and gladly follow the instructions of God’s will as one is empowered by the Spirit working through the Gospel.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Your major responsibility will continue to be the presentation of the lecture. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the lecture so you will be able to present it effectively in your own style. If you read the lecture, practice reading it many times, so that you will be able to maintain eye contact with the listeners. Practice presenting the material with enthusiasm and excitement in an effort to make the material fresh and interesting.

The presenter might want to make an overhead that displays the outline of the lecture so that the people can follow along during the presentation.

Session Plan

Worship

Encourage participants to begin each day’s study with prayer. Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index], or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.)

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

In the previous lesson we saw that God spoke the ten words from Mount Sinai directly and immediately to Israel. The people stood far from the mountain because of the thunder, lightning, and smoke that came from its top. We title this section “The Book of the Covenant” on the basis of Exodus 24:7. God spoke the following instructions to Moses on the mountain, and Moses was to relay them to Israel.

In these we find concrete and specific applications of the ten general words to the various dimensions of Israel’s life. Exodus 21:1 calls them “laws.” They do not exhaustively treat every possible situation, but they do illustrate how the ten words should be applied in various typical situations. Unlike the general statements of the ten words, many of the following judgments state the penalty for a given infraction. They are often expressed in a law form: “If so-and-so happens, then do this.”

These judgments or ordinances were addressed to Israel. We saw in the last lesson that the ancient Israelites were God’s people, an assembly called to faith in the true God. But ancient Israel was also a nation and a state. It was, in fact, a nation ruled by God, and so God revealed laws that were to regulate all aspects of life. Therefore, we find here civil laws as well as religious and moral laws all mixed together.

The church today, which the New Testament calls a new Israel (Galatians 6:16), is only a church and no longer

a nation. So these civil laws no longer apply directly to us Christians. The church today does not, for example, exercise the power of punishment for civil crimes. Nevertheless, these laws are still worth studying. We should seek to determine what reason lies behind such laws. In many cases we will see that they are a practical application of one of the ten “words” or commandments.

1 Prologue (20:21–21:1)

The “laws” actually begin in 21:2. This opening section is a prologue. Through Moses God says to Israel, “You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven” (20:22). Then God prohibits Israel from making gods of silver or gold. Instead they are to make an altar for sacrifices.

We obtain several insights from this prologue. First, God is the source of the following laws. Israel is responsible to God and not to a human legislative body or lawgiver. Second, to disobey this law is to disobey God; it is sin and not simply an infraction of a secular law code. Finally, living in conformity with God’s will flows from faith toward God. Just as the ten words began with the vertical dimension of Israel’s relationship with God, so the following “laws” begin with this vertical dimension.

God repeats the prohibition against making idols. The logic is this: since you heard Me speaking, yet saw no visible form or representation, and since I am the God of heaven and not a created being, therefore give up any attempt to embody Me in a created image of silver or gold. Instead of through an image, God promises to meet Israel at an altar. That is where Israel will find God and receive God’s blessing. “Wherever I cause My name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you” (v. 24). While wandering in the wilderness and in the early years in the Promised Land, the Israelites would want to know where they could find God and receive His blessing. Instead of contriving an image, Israel was to build an altar and offer sacrifices. At that place and through that means God promised to come to Israel and bless them.

The same applies to us. People want to know where to find God. They often invent their own devices for meeting God, devices that actually amount to idols. Instead, God has graciously made Himself accessible to us in those places where He has placed His saving name—in

the Gospel, in Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper. Go to those places and receive His blessing there.

Notice that God would “bless” Israel. He promised to bless Israel through the animal sacrifices offered on legitimate altars. The animal sacrifices made atonement for Israel’s sins. They did this by virtue of their connection with the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which they foreshadowed and anticipated. In other words, the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice were given to His Old Testament people through the animal sacrifices. The animal sacrifices offered on legitimate altars were Old Testament means of grace and blessing.

Israel’s altars were to be made of earth or unhewn stones. To work the stone would “defile” the altar, that is, make it common and ordinary. The altar was to be distinct, because God is distinct, unique, and holy. Also, the priest’s nakedness should not be exposed by climbing up steps to the altar. To expose one’s nakedness publicly, which could happen if one wore a loose skirt or tunic and climbed steps, would be shameful, and such shamefulness is not appropriate to the holiness of God’s altar.

2 Slavery (21:2–11)

The first group of “laws” concerns slaves. Slavery was common in the ancient world. But slavery in the Old Testament more closely approximated our own employer/employee relationships. An ancient “slave” was an indentured laborer and servant who lived with the owner’s family. Since one’s land could not be sold, as it was one’s share of the Promised Land and was to remain with the family, the only collateral available to the Hebrews was their labor. To pay off their debts, Hebrews would sell themselves into indentured service. Yet aspects of this system were subject to abuse; therefore, God’s Law spoke to these abuses. The law was intended to limit the control the master had over the servant.

In the seventh year, after six years of service, a male Hebrew slave was released and became a free man, without having to pay for the release. This is the “sabbatical year.” Like the Sabbath day, the sabbatical year reflected God’s resting on the seventh day of creation. If the master allowed the slave to marry one of the master’s female slaves, probably a slave bound to the master permanently (Lev. 25:46), then the male slave either left single or

voluntarily bound himself to the master for life.

The situation of the Hebrew slave-wife was different. She did not automatically go out in the seventh year, because her master-husband still had responsibilities toward her. Three critical situations might threaten her status. If she did not please her master, he had to allow her family to ransom her; he could not sell her to non-Israelites. If she was designated for the master's son, he had to treat her as a daughter. If the son took another wife (in the Old Testament God tolerated polygamy, though He did not endorse it), she had to be maintained with her full marital rights. In all of this the intent was to protect the slaves and uphold their human rights.

3 Capital Offenses (21:12–17)

The next set of laws concerns capital offenses. Human life is sacred, as people are created in the image of God (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9). Therefore, whoever assails human life forfeits his or her own life. Verse 12 states the basic principle, based on the commandment concerning killing: "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death." Verses 13–17 apply and clarify this general statement.

If the killing was unpremeditated, then the killer might seek asylum at an altar or in a city of refuge (Numbers 35:6). But there was to be no refuge for premeditated murder. That verses 13–14 distinguish between intentional and unintentional killing reveals that the life of the accused was also considered sacred. Kidnapping for slavery was common in the ancient world, but for Israel it was tantamount to attacking human life and not simply a crime against property. Verses 15 and 17 reinforce the commandment to honor parents. Not only striking but also cursing one's parents was a capital offense. To curse is to wholeheartedly will and pray for the downfall of the other; it is an attitude that leads to murder. Notice how the life of both parents was equally honored.

4 Bodily Injuries (21:18–32)

The five cases in this section deal with bodily injuries. Again, the concern is with people and the value they possess in God's eyes. The cases are a debilitating injury as a result of two men fighting in a sudden fit of rage (vv.

18–19), a master striking his slave (vv. 20–21), a woman's premature labor induced when hit by two men fighting (vv. 22–25), a permanent injury to a slave (vv. 26–27), and a goring ox (vv. 28–32).

In the first case (vv. 18–19), if the injured party was confined to bed and only later walked with the help of a cane, the assailant did not forfeit his life, but he had to pay the injured person for loss of time and income and care for him until recovery.

The second case (vv. 20–21) reveals that a master had no right to beat his slave to death deliberately, even if the master was legitimately chastising his slave with a rod. If the slave died immediately, that was proof enough that the master intentionally killed him, so the master should be punished, apparently by being put to death. But if the slave lived a day or two after the chastisement, that provided evidence that it was accidental homicide. In that case the financial loss incurred by his master in the death of the slave was considered punishment and lesson enough. Loss of the slave was a financial loss. Yet this law treated slaves as persons and not simply as money. It restricted the master's power over the slave.

For the third case (vv. 22–25), if a pregnant woman was accidentally struck and gave birth prematurely, but both mother and child were unharmed, the offender was fined. But if either mother or child was seriously injured, then the principle of "life for life" applied.

The principle "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth," and so on was intended to restrict the punishment so that the punishment fit the crime but did not disproportionately exceed it. Verses 26–27 apply this principle to the situation of wounded slaves. They were set free. Again, this illustrates that slaves were to be treated as persons and not merely as property.

The final case (vv. 28–32) concerns injuries from animals. The goring ox was stoned, and its meat could be sold or eaten. The owner of the animal suffered a loss without any relieving profit.

5 Property Damage (21:33–22 15)

This section examines five types of property damage: punishable negligence (21:33–34), loss from animals fighting each other (21:35–36), loss from theft (22:1–4), losses from other negligent acts (22:5–6), and losses

when goods are entrusted to another's custody (22:7–15). These cases apply the commandment concerning stealing to specific types of situations.

We can see several concerns in this section. First, property is not on the same value level as human life. Unlike capital offenses, the negligent offender or the thief did not forfeit his own life.

Second, the offending party had to make restitution for the damage done. If the thief had nothing, he became an indentured servant until he paid compensation. Third, the offending party made restitution directly to the party who suffered the loss. The restitution was not paid to a third party or a court to distribute. Even the thief had to conform to this direct restitution. No doubt this helped to promote reconciliation between the two parties. Finally, there is a concern for fairness. The reimbursement differed depending on the circumstances, and the cases distinguish between deliberate theft and inadvertent negligence.

6 Miscellaneous Stipulations (22:16–31)

This section consists of miscellaneous religious and social stipulations. The key statement that underscores the whole section comes in the last verse (v. 31): "You are to be My holy people." Israel was God's "treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5–6). 1 Peter 2:9 indicates that the New Testament church is the new Israel: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." To be a people "holy" to God means to have been consecrated and set apart unto the holy God. We were given this lofty status by being baptized in the name of this same triune God who speaks in the Old Testament.

Because Israel had this holy status, they were to lead a life worthy of their calling. That included worshiping Yahweh alone (vv. 18, 20, 28–30), honoring marriage (vv. 16–17, 19), and acting generously and compassionately toward the helpless, such as strangers, widows, orphans, and the poor (vv. 21–27). Notice the Gospel motivations given in this section. Just as God showed mercy to the Israelites, who were strangers in the land of Egypt, so they show mercy to strangers (v. 21). Because God hears the prayer of the widows, orphans, and the poor, Israel was not to afflict them (vv. 22–27). Because God is a compassionate

God, Israel was to be compassionate also (v. 27).

7 Justice for All (23:1–9)

Where the previous section stressed compassion toward the helpless, this section exhorts Israel to be just. It expands on the commandment concerning false witness. The basis of justice lies in truth telling and impartiality. Therefore, the Israelites were not to slander (v. 1) or be partial toward anyone, either the poor (v. 3) or the rich (vv. 6, 8). Honesty, uprightness, and justice were to be the watchwords in Israel's courts. Even one's enemies were to be helped (vv. 4–5). The Old Testament never teaches us to hate our enemies. And what is the motivation for all of this? It is twofold: God is a just God who does not acquit the wicked (v. 7), and the Israelites knew from their experience in Egypt what it was like to be oppressed (v. 9).

8 Sabbaths and Holidays (23:10–19)

This section deals with Israel's agricultural-religious calendar. It is much like our church calendar in that it specifies certain festivals. This section basically expands on the commandment concerning the Sabbath. The Sabbath day was the day of the week that was set apart to God, much like a tithe of time. On this day Israel would hear the Word of God, receive the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifices, and respond in worship and praise to Yahweh alone (vv. 13, 18).

But the Sabbath day also served a humanitarian purpose. (Mark 2:27) "The Sabbath was made for man." It gave the Israelites, their servants, and even aliens and cattle a day of rest that they might "be refreshed" (v. 12). The Sabbath was also the basis of the Sabbatical year, when the land would rest and lie fallow. Obviously this was good for the land, but it also served to provide gleanings for the poor and for the wild animals (vv. 10–11). All of creation enjoyed a rest that anticipated the future rest of the new creation.

Verses 14–17 concern the three great festivals, when the Israelites in the Promised Land were to go on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary. The Feast of Unleavened Bread came in the spring and is associated with Passover. It commemorated that time when Israel hastily ate unleavened bread before the exodus from Egypt. The Feast of Harvest

(sometimes called the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) came seven weeks later. The Feast of Ingathering (sometimes called the Feast of Booths after the booths or tents Israel dwelt in during the wilderness wanderings) came in the fall, when the agricultural year ended. Each feast corresponded to a harvest activity, the first to the beginning of the barley harvest, the second to the wheat harvest, and the third to the harvest of grapes and olives. The firstfruits belong to God (v. 19).

9 Epilogue (23:20–33)

This last section serves as an epilogue to the Book of the Covenant. In it God promises to bring Israel safely into the Promised Land and exhorts them to remain faithful. Many of the previous laws addressed Israel's future life in the land, and here God promised an angel to bring them there. This is no ordinary angel, since Yahweh's "Name is in him," and He can forgive sins (v. 21). In light of the New Testament we can recognize Him as the pre-incarnate Christ.

God ends the Book of the Covenant where He began, with the First Commandment. The Israelites were to drive out the occupants of the land lest the Israelites make a covenant with them and worship their gods. Yahweh alone, working through His "angel," remains the center of Israel's life. We have seen how His will encompasses all aspects of the life of His people. Not only Sunday morning but every day and every activity centers in faith toward God and fervent love toward one another. So often we sin and are faithless. But God forgives us on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. He comes to us and blesses us through the Gospel and the Sacraments. And Christ goes before us and leads us through the wilderness to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where we will dwell with our God forever.

Closing Activities

Offer a brief prayer, thanking God for guiding us in our own lives through His Word. Make any necessary announcements. Ask whether participants are enjoying the enrichment magazine. Distribute study leaflet 3.