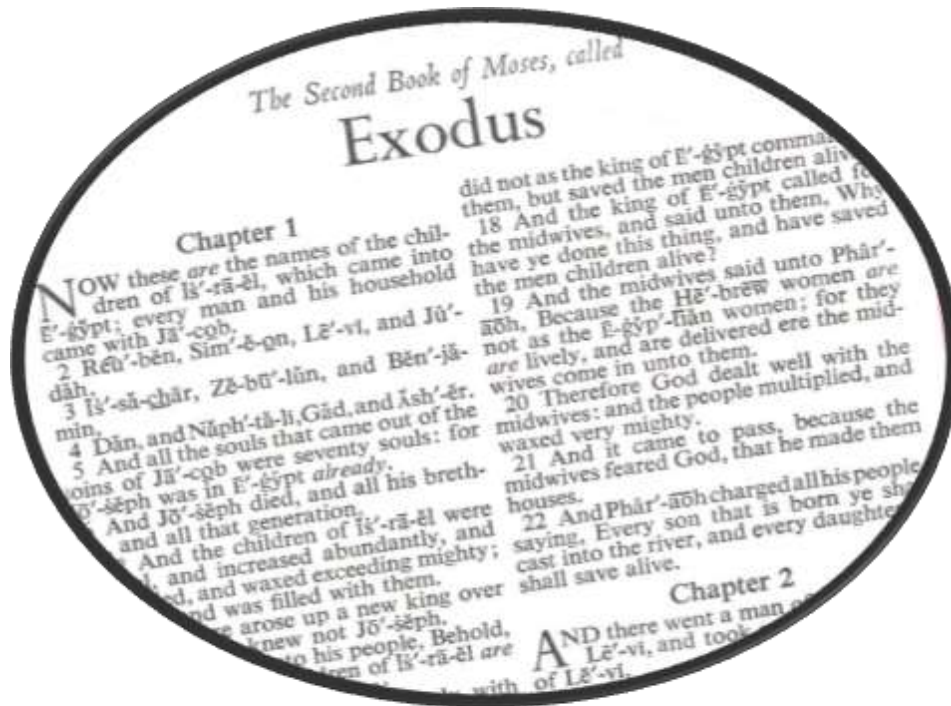


EXODUS – WEEK 10

WEEKS AND SABBATHS



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 15:22–16:36 – Weeks and Sabbaths

Food and water run short and the people complain. God responds by providing water, quail and manna.

But the big news is God's invention of weeks and a weekly Sabbath, which He enforces absolutely.

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Thank you.

Exodus 15:22–16:36 – Weeks and Sabbaths
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1 Exodus 15:22–27 (NKJV)

So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.”

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

After *three days in the wilderness* having found no water they have nearly run out. Then they finally find water and it’s undrinkable. Despite the spectacular miracles they just witnessed – and all the celebration of the LORD’s provision – they *complained* about the situation.

So, what’s wrong with their faith? They understand that God saved them from the Egyptian army; they’re not denying that. So why don’t they expect Him to provide things like water?

It’s a matter of consistency. They know God blessed them but they don’t realize that His provision will be ongoing.

So, God clarifies this – in the form of *statute and an ordinance*. The promise is conditional. If the Israelites *do what is right ... I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians*.

And don’t miss the ending. He says that this is all because, “*I am the LORD who heals you.*” This is really about who He is. It’s always about who He is.

To know more about who He is, spend time with Him and His word. That’s why The Fellowship of Ailbe publishes The DEEP. If you’re reading this, then Bible study is part of your life. Good, but what’s next?

If you haven’t checked out all the offerings at ailbe.org recently, you should. We have a wide range of materials – for everyone from new Christians to pastors.

If you really want to up your game, consider pursuing advanced study. Ailbe.org now includes a seminary. The ailbeseminary.org curriculum features two certificate programs designed to equip you with solid theological instruction for more effective ministry. Browse the offerings there and prayerfully consider where God is calling you.

If that level of involvement scares you, good. Serving Christ is supposed to be scary.

2 Exodus 16:1–8 (NKJV)

And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, “At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD; for He hears your complaints against the LORD. But what are we, that you complain against us?” Also Moses said, “This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the LORD hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the LORD.”

This sounds stupid, but it’s really just primitive and immature. The people of Israel are not used to knowing the LORD, or serving the LORD, or being delivered by the LORD. They’re getting tastes of these things (feasts!) but old habits die hard and they don’t have a believer’s perspective.

So, God decides to let them see *the hand of the LORD* daily. He will feed them supernaturally each day. *At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD.*

But this won’t work. Growing up in Egypt has so poisoned them that they just can’t seem to believe. God will end up waiting until they’re all dead (except for Joshua and Caleb).

Then He will bring a new generation into the Promised Land.

My old habits die hard too. I can’t shake the belief that clever arguments can win someone to Christ. This passage shows the folly of that. Our role in evangelism is limited.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying we shouldn’t have a commitment to excellence in trying to win people over. It’s just that we need to realize that we’re totally dependent. We want to help, and we get excited. That interferes with our listening.

We need to relax enough to hear the LORD’s direction. That takes an advanced skill – patience.

3 Exodus 16:9–15 (ESV)

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”

Notice that it says, “*the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud,*” not, “*a cloud*”. This is *the cloud* that had been with them all along.

And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, – Exodus 14:24 (ESV)

So, when Aaron says to *the people of Israel*, “*Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling,*” they know something’s up. Then they see His glory in the cloud as he speaks.

But it seems that only Moses can hear what the LORD says. He instructs Moses to say to the people of Israel, “*At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.*” The meat turns out to be quail, while the bread is *a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground*. At first this bread, soon to be named manna, confuses them – but they’ll get used to it.

The daily appearance of manna will be the longest running and most obvious miracle in history. It’s almost unimaginable that any party to this event could have less than rock-solid faith.

But that’s exactly what will happen.

There’s something mysterious about the way our faith seems to be the weakest at the worst possible moment. Why do we forget everything we know just when we need it most? It’s like the “brain block” you can get before a big test.

This only seems to be true. Peter’s faith didn’t always fail him. Weak faith moments do happen, just not all the time.

But therein lies a great lesson; weak faith moments are useful. God uses the pain and guilt to teach us.

4 Exodus 16:16–21 (ESV)

This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

Once again, the Israelites are hilariously stupid – only this time I can’t laugh. They’re too much like me. Moses is telling them that they have to rely totally on the LORD. They cannot store up anything for a rainy day – no savings, no 401k, no IRA. That’s hitting pretty close to home.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. – Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)

How can we distinguish being properly dependent on the LORD from plain old irresponsibility?

For a Christian, irresponsibility is not producing fruit. Our responsibility is to serve the Lord. That’s obvious from the definition of the word “Lord.” Christians retire in heaven. The concept of retiring in this life isn’t in the Bible. Roles do change as we age, and the Bible clearly expects people to respect, care for and venerate their elders. But a Christian never really retires.

The problem here isn’t saving; it’s saving more than you need. The Israelites are told to take what they need for today but not for tomorrow. They quickly learn that this rule isn’t a suggestion.

Matthew 6:19-20 is about storing up treasures, not reasonable savings. In Biblical times, the elderly lived with their children and contributed to the household as they were able. Their household was their 401k. Few Americans live like that. Reasonable saving for old age is OK.

Either Jesus is Lord or He isn’t. If He is, our main job is to discern His leading and to do it.

That’s why we have quiet times. The key is silence. The name “quiet time” is designed to center our time on the Lord. We live in a noisy world and that noise drowns out what we need to hear.

Worship God through silence. The prayer is, “What message do you have for me today?” The method is just to get away from distractions. Note: if you are distracted by, say, a phone call, it’s OK to go ahead and address it. Then try again to have a true QT. If your head fills with Psalms or hymns, that’s OK too.

God speaks in many ways.

5 Exodus 16:22–30 (NKJV)

And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.’ ” So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”

Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

The seven day week is the most universal religious practice on Earth. Every nation uses it, though which days are the weekend varies. (It’s Friday and Saturday in Israel.)

The roots of the seven day week are entirely religious. If someone wants total separation of church and state with no religious practice observed by government, let them try to eliminate the seven day week. Good luck with that.

But when did it begin? More importantly, how do we know which day is which?

This passage is the answer to both questions. It’s the first use of the word “Sabbath” in the Bible. Prior to this, no one used a seven day week and no one kept a regular Sabbath. While the Passover lasted seven days, and Noah waited seven days to retest whether the flood was over, there are no prior mentions of seven days as a regular pattern.

The week of creation set the standard, but no one followed it.

How do you keep the Sabbath? I’m not sure I do this properly or completely. I have a list of things I don’t do, but not a complete plan for what I do.

How about you? Do you really rest? Is it the right kind of rest? What would that be, anyway? Ask the LORD to convict you and direct you. Ask how He wants you to honor Him on His day.

Note: yesterday I wrote about making quiet times quiet. I mentioned my method for dealing with distractions – address them and restart the quiet time. Some prayer warriors find that it’s better to avoid distractions in the first place – unplug completely.

Whatever works best for you.

6 Exodus 16:31–36 (NKJV)

And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

Then Moses said, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ ” And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations.” As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. Now an omer is one-tenth of an ephah.

And the children of Israel ate the manna forty years. That’s a long time. The first iPad came out in 2010.

God provides miraculously for the children of Israel all that time. It’s an almost inconceivably grand example of God’s love and providence. In the end, virtually every Israelite has been eating manna all their life. It’s like breastfeeding for 40 years. Your whole life has been dependent on one thing. I can’t imagine the mindset that would produce.

God commands them to keep an omer (about a half-gallon) of the manna *for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

It’s unusual for God to want something like this preserved. The human tendency toward idolatry makes keeping sacred artifacts problematic. People tend to worship such things – plus copycats abound. For example, if you gathered together all the alleged pieces of the cross of Christ, they would fill a house.

But in this one special case, God wants the evidence of an enormous miracle preserved, so that the people can see it for themselves.

And remember.

If you could preserve one thing, or one moment, what would it be? Of all the events of your life, which ones would you say were bucket list awesome? What deserves to be memorialized? Birthdays and anniversaries get celebrated every year, but do we preserve any artifacts?

Yes. Pictures. With social media, everything has become a Kodak moment. We’ve actually witnessed the beginning of “totally recorded history” in our lifetime. We don’t have memories of what happened; we have movies. Of everything.

But in Old Testament times these events were in danger of turning into little more than old folks telling stories.

This needed some hard evidence.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Can you see yourself in a Biblical course of study that includes homework and grades?
2. Have you ever seen a seemingly perfect argument fail to convince someone?
3. What seems to be the big difference between the times when your faith was strong and when it was weak?
4. How do you keep your quiet times quiet?
5. How do you keep the Sabbath?
6. What bucket list level things have you experienced?

Items for prayer: