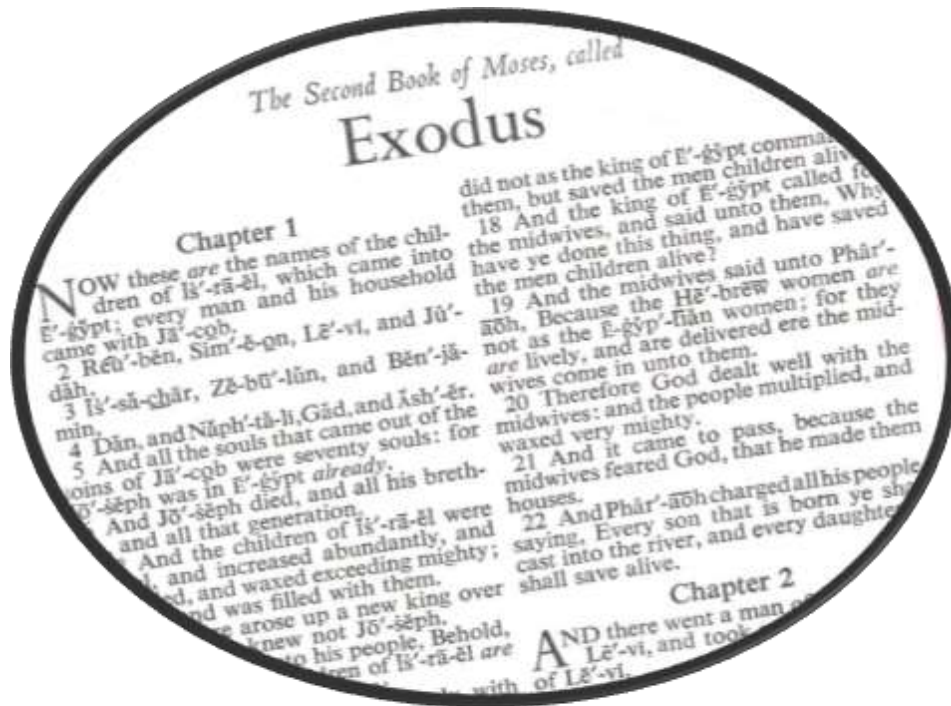


EXODUS – WEEK 16

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 23:23–25:16 – The Presence of the LORD

God starts setting up the mechanism of His personal relationship with His people. First He draws closer to Moses and to the elders and lets them see some of His glory.

Then He begins specifying a focal point for His long term closeness to Israel – the ark and the tabernacle.

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Thank you.

Exodus 23:23–25:16 – The Presence of the LORD

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1 Exodus 23:23-33 (ESV)

“When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

This passage starts and ends with warnings against serving other gods. Good grief, what could possibly possess an Israelite to do something that ridiculous? What’s the temptation here?

The Israelites have seen – and continue to see – signs and wonders that confirm that the LORD is the one true God. They have watched the Egyptian gods get mocked, overwhelmed, and destroyed. Why would they want to worship “gods that are not gods”?

Well, it turns out that the references to other gods not being gods at all will come later in the Bible – specifically 2 Kings 19:18, Jeremiah 16:20, Acts 19:26 and Galatians 4:8. Up to this point the LORD is only described as being dominant. For example:

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” – Exodus 15:11 (ESV)

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” – Exodus 18:11 (ESV)

These people grew up in a polytheistic culture and they’re slowly being peeled away from that mindset.

Our secular culture of hedonism and affluence may be even worse. We need a revival. Political attempts to make marginal improvements haven’t worked. We need radical change brought by the Holy Spirit.

We can’t get this done; only God can. We need to pray for this and be patient. It’s a big project.

2 Exodus 24:1-4a (ESV)

Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.

The vote was unanimous. They all *answered with one voice*.

“All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

And this was after *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules*. They knew what they were agreeing to; there was no fine print.

So *Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD*.

Good. Better to get this in writing. If they had had paper, and if the people were literate enough to write their own names, Moses would have had them sign it. That would have come in handy later.

The Israelites won't just go on to break these rules; they'll forget them. They will even make copies of what Moses wrote down and then lose those copies. Later, they will find them again and get all excited.

And Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ... When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. – 2 Kings 22:8 & 11 (Also 2 Chronicles 34:14 & 19.)

How can this happen?

Complacency. Anything wondrous is exciting at first, but then it gets old.

The wonder of seeing all the miracles of the Exodus hasn't faded yet, but it will.

The same thing happens to us. Newborn Christians are, like newlyweds, full of excitement. But the things that were exhilarating when new become repetitive and boring later. We even get used to answered prayer.

Ask the LORD to rekindle your enthusiasm. The spark can come in many ways. You may think you need a particular prayer request granted to be reenergized, but God is more creative than that. That said, it's OK to ask for a particular sign or a particular kind of sign. Don't pretend you're stronger than you are.

God loves admissions of weakness. He often honors an honest request for what a weak person needs – or even just wants.

3 Exodus 24:4b-11 (ESV)

He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Covenants sure were bloody affairs. Before the invention of contract law people had to make a big show of their covenant promises to give them an aura of legitimacy. Unfortunately, the most they could really achieve was to make it impossible for someone to say, “I didn’t think you were serious.” Enforcement was up to the individuals involved.

But since God is one of the individuals here, enforcement isn’t a problem. If an Israelite breaks this covenant, he sure isn’t going to say, “Yeah, so what are you going to do about it?”

Thus, this yucky ceremony seals the deal. When Israel later disobeys, there won’t be any debate about whether that qualifies as breaking a covenant.

The second paragraph is interesting because we know some things could not have happened. What exactly does, “*they saw the God of Israel,*” mean?

“But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” – Exodus 33:20 (ESV)

The passage only mentions God’s feet and the sapphire stone pavement He’s standing on. Then it notes that *he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel*. This conveys a sense of great size and intimidation – as if they could only see His feet while His head was above the clouds. *They beheld God, and ate and drank*, despite apparently wondering if God might *lay his hand on* them any minute now.

That’s about as unforgettable as an experience can get.

We need something just as unforgettable too. In our cushy, prosperous, free country with all our inalienable rights, we forget how tough life can be for persecuted Christians around the world. If we could actually experience, for just one day, what they experience, it would change our attitudes forever.

But that’s a missions trip no one has figured out how to take. Would you sign up? For just one day?

4 Exodus 24:12-18 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.”

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

It seems that it’s OK for all the others to see the LORD’s feet, but not his glory; only Moses gets to see that. So, what exactly does “*the glory of the LORD*” mean? Some references make it seem that seeing His glory is not far from seeing His face (something man cannot do and live).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. – Exodus 34:29 (ESV)

And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. – Exodus 40:35 (ESV)

Other references are less dramatic.

And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. – Leviticus 9:23 (ESV)

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. – Luke 2:9 (ESV)

The glory of the LORD is always a wondrous, intimidating sight. But it appears at different times for different reasons and purposes. Thus, by choice, it can have different effects.

Life has different effects. We never know what’s in store for us next. That can be exciting or intimidating. Still, our goal must always be to seek God’s direction. That is the great challenge facing every Christian.

Thus, a big part of every Christian’s prayer life should be seeking His will. Every big decision should be laid them before the LORD. If you feel so led, it’s okay to ask for a sign. There is biblical precedent.

But, there’s one possibility that most Christians don’t think of. Sometimes the answer is, “You must choose; I’m not bailing you out on this one.” Making our own choices (even mistakes) may be important.

5 Exodus 25:1-9 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

The Israelites have all these things to offer, because they got them from the Egyptians.

And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. – Exodus 12:36 (ESV)

Since the LORD had effectively delivered this bounty to them, it's fair for Him to expect them to be generous with it. Nevertheless, God is very clear that any contribution must be voluntary. *From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.*

Each contribution must be from the heart. This is one of the key principles undergirding all service to God. If giving isn't voluntary, it isn't giving at all. It's a tax.

Giving is all about the heart. God doesn't need our money, or anything else. If we choose to give something to the LORD (time, money, resources, effort, worship) it's important, but not because He couldn't have gotten along without it.

It's how faith puts its boots on.

Christianity today has a problem with people not giving. The problem isn't laziness or lack of instruction; it's weak faith. Strong faith energizes people and makes them interested in getting things done.

But how do you cure weak faith? You can't just choose to have more faith. What you believe, and how strongly you believe it, is determined by things and events outside of your control.

Or is it? Maybe we can do things that affect our faith. Is there something I can do to stimulate more faith?

Yes. Just start giving. Get involved in kingdom service and your faith will get a boost. God will respond. Things will happen that cannot be explained by simple luck.

Nothing strengthens faith more than living a supernatural life. Throw yourself into serving the kingdom and the twists and turns will knock your socks off. There may be trials. There surely will be challenges.

But when you start serving the Lord with abandon, everything comes alive.

6 Exodus 25:10-16 (ESV)

“They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

God specifies the ark first. The house is being designed around the things in the house, not the other way round. This may seem odd but it makes perfect sense, especially in view of the structure of ancient languages.

Putting something first is a way to emphasize it. In Biblical Greek, a word may be placed first in a sentence for emphasis. This is called prolepsis.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0007%3Apart%3D4%3Achapter%3D51%3Asection%3D126>

Understanding this is crucial to the correct translation of the last part of John 1:1 – “*and the Word was God.*” In the Greek, “God” (Theos) is actually the first word. That’s for emphasis.

Putting the most important thing first isn’t just an ancient practice. Newspaper articles put the most important things first.

The Ark of the Covenant is God’s throne. It is described first because it is the key to the whole tabernacle. Everything else is in support of the ark and God’s presence above the ark.

And inside the ark will be the Ten Commandments – the most precious document in the history of man.

What’s the most important thing in your house? Last year, I’d have been tempted to say, “The heat pump.” The microwave also rates, as does the refrigerator.

But really it’s the Holy Spirit and the angels. Have you ever prayed to expel any evil spirits from your house? This is specifically mentioned by Richard Foster in his best seller – “*Prayer.*”

Consecrate your home. Declare it as holy ground. In the name of Jesus Christ, command all evil spirits to leave. If you’ve been struggling lately, try praying this prayer in every room. The first time I tried that, something happened as I entered the last room that scared me so much I almost screamed.

Really.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What do people do nowadays that's equivalent to worshipping other Gods?
2. What were you most excited about when you first became a Christian?
3. What would be the ideal mission trip for you?
4. Have you ever asked for a sign in prayer and gotten one?
5. How has God shown His hand in your service?
6. Have you ever prayed to consecrate a place?

Items for prayer: