

FORTY DAYS ON THE MOUNTAIN

MEDITATIONS ON KNOWING GOD

STEPHEN E. SMALLMAN

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Forty Days on the Mountain

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INTRODUCTION

I invite you to join me as I try to capture something of what it means to know God. How can mortals like you or me—self-centered, sinful ones at that—actually think about knowing the eternal, immortal God? But that is what Moses, Paul, and countless others have desired and prayed for, and it is an opportunity that is available to us as well. In fact, that is how Jesus defined eternal life: “that they *know you* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

The meditations on knowing God that you are about to read grew out of a very needy time in my life. After almost twenty-five years of pastoring the same congregation (McLean Presbyterian Church, a church in suburban Washington, D.C.), I was granted an extended sabbatical. My wife, Sandy, and I, along with our youngest child, Andrew, went to a home near Denver, Colorado, for six months of rest and reflection. I reasoned that while a change of location and situation might provide physical rest, only the Lord could bring the deeper kind of rest I needed. And I was asking him to give it. To help accomplish this desire, I was drawn to Exodus 32–34, the remarkable passage recording Moses’ meeting with God to intercede for the people of Israel. At the core of his dealings with God was a passion to know him, to know his presence, and even to be shown the glory of God.

Shortly after our arrival, I set apart one day each week to go to the library of Denver Theological Seminary to explore my chosen text through the various commentaries available to me. As you will see, door after door of understanding opened as I tried to enter vicariously into Moses’ experience with God. It also took me all over the Scripture. I began writing down the insights I was gaining as journal entries just for my own benefit. Gradually I became convinced that I needed to find a way that would allow others to share in the blessing of what I was learning. Moses was on the mountain for forty days on two separate occasions. Since the unit of forty is very common in Scripture, I decided to divide up

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my thoughts in a format that would help others meditate on the knowledge of God for that same basic period of time. That is how *Forty Days on the Mountain* was born.

When I returned to the McLean congregation I felt renewed personally as well as having a new heart for the ministry.¹ Several of our members read through the manuscript of *Forty Days* and offered many helpful suggestions. They also expressed enthusiasm for what they learned. We reproduced it for limited distribution as part of our Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee celebration. In the time since then I have returned to the themes of *Forty Days* over and over in retreats and conferences. I never fail to find that my own heart is stirred and renewed along with those who attend. I am grateful that the editors of Crossway Books are also convinced of the value of these meditations and want to pass them along to a wider readership.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

These meditations are written for anyone who is serious about knowing God. Individuals very new to the faith as well as those who are advanced in their knowledge have used *Forty Days*. It has been read by couples for their devotions, and it has been studied in small groups as the basis for training in spiritual leadership. The one thing all have in common is a sincere desire to know God.

Some of you reading this book might consider yourselves *seekers* rather than *believers*. I hope you will find this book life changing. But you need to recognize that I have two basic assumptions in writing. They are: (1) We can know God only because God wants us to know him. “He is there and he is not silent.”² He has made himself known through written Scripture, revelation that was demonstrated by Moses’ being commanded to write what he was told in a book.³ (2) Knowing God ultimately comes as a result of God making himself known through his final Word—God revealed in human flesh. Authentic spirituality is anchored in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I’m not going to try to *prove* either of these ideas—but even if you have unanswered questions (and who doesn’t?) I pray that you will nevertheless patiently work through these lessons and let their truth and reality bear witness to your own heart.

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HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS BOOK?

Obviously, there are any number of settings where these meditations would be profitable for you as an individual or for a couple or a group. But there are three expectations in my mind for those who want to gain maximum benefit from reading and studying them.

THE FIRST EXPECTATION: THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

It is my assumption that *Forty Days* will be read with an open Bible. I am including a portion of the text in the *English Standard Version* of the Bible at the beginning of each meditation as well as when I quote Scripture in the meditation. You will find the meditations even more profitable if you read from the Bible you ordinarily use in reading and study. That means not only using your Bible for the “Reading for the Day” at the beginning of the meditation, but keeping it open before you as you work through my remarks. My objective is that you will try to understand the teaching of the passage before making an application.

Scripture itself is the key. Let the Spirit minister to you through the Scripture with my thoughts provoking you to think about things you might not have noticed before. I hope you will find yourself going back to reread parts of the passage or even reading other places in the Bible.

As we shall see, even at the moment when God met Moses on the mountain in answer to his bold praying, what Moses received was not an experience or a vision, but a *word*. He was then told to write these words for the benefit of the people (Ex. 34:27). The written Scripture must be central if we are to enter into genuine spirituality.

THE SECOND EXPECTATION: THE USE OF TIME

You need to be willing to give these readings and meditations time to sink in. I have tried to make each meditation fairly brief. But this was not done with the intention of a casual thought-for-the-day. Rather I have tried to walk deliberately through a very profound topic—the knowledge of God—one small step at a time. Don't be impatient; try to allow each day's lesson to sink in. Some have told me one meditation every day is too fast. There is certainly no requirement that these be read in forty consecutive days. But they will be more helpful if read in sequence and close enough

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together so that one day will prepare you for the next. I strongly encourage you to find a regular time in your day or week when you can have at least thirty minutes of quiet.

Time also allows you to stop and pray through what you have read and thought about. The entire passage is about Moses' meeting with God—which is the essence of prayer—and every day should end with a time of prayer and reflection. It will also be helpful to make use of a journal to record your own thoughts and prayers. Journal keeping is a time-honored aid to spiritual growth, and for very good reasons.

THE THIRD EXPECTATION: THE USE OF PLACE

For maximum benefit, I want to add a comment about the importance of place. This is, in fact, the subject of a meditation (Day 12). But several readers have encouraged me to include in my introductory words the value of locating a place (a room, a corner, a particular chair) that will serve physically as your “prayer closet.” We are such harried people, and we should make use of any little thing that can aid in bringing quiet to our souls, so it is vital to have a “quiet place.”

I wish I could tell you that as a result of writing these meditations I have entered fully into the knowledge of God for which I pray. But that awaits a better world. Growing up spiritually is a slow process, and I am thankful that I have been able to take a few more steps as a result of the work of preparing *Forty Days*. It is my prayer that your time with this little book and *The Book* will help you do the same.

Stephen Smallman
www.birthlineministries.com

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THE SCRIPTURE



SELECTIONS FROM EXODUS 32-34

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made. . . .

The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward. . . .

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone

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who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. . . .

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." . . .

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to

EXODUS 32-34

Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.” . . .

And he said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. . . .

And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. . . .

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. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he

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would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him. —Exodus 32:30–35; 33:1–23; 34:1–10, 27–35

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THE MEDITATIONS



DAY ONE
THE OVERVIEW

**READING FOR THE DAY: EXODUS 32:30-35; 33:1-23;
34:1-10, 27-35.**

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. . . . And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”

EXODUS 33:11, 14-17

The purpose of today’s reading is to get focused on the basic facts of the story that we will be studying in detail. Did you get a sense of the intensity of Moses’ prayers and the determined and almost reckless way he approached God? He was a man with whom the Lord spoke “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (33:11). He wanted to know God and find favor in his sight (33:13). But that was not enough. Moses would not stop praying until he secured the continued presence of God, not only for himself, but for the people he was leading (33:15). And even that was not enough—Moses went on to make the extraordinary request, “Please show me your glory” (33:18).

As we approach this remarkable passage, focusing in on these few verses gives us more than enough to think about. However, no teaching in Scripture can be taken in isolation. Almost as though retracting a zoom lens, we need to move our perspective back to see how this meeting with God is set into a larger picture. For example, Israel’s sin of dancing around the golden calf (Exodus 32) is basic to understanding the passage. The grace to be revealed shines all the brighter in contrast to the shocking evil in the hearts of the people. But the golden calf incident also needs

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to be put in context. We need to consider the whole book of Exodus to appreciate what is going on between God and Moses.

Exodus is nothing less than the story of salvation by grace alone. That doctrine is stated in the New Testament, but in Exodus it is presented in exciting narrative with dramatic pictures that have been with us from childhood. God Almighty heard the cries of the helpless children of Israel and did battle with the most powerful nation on earth to set them free. God carried them “on eagles’ wings” and brought them to himself at the mountain of Sinai with the intention of making them into his “treasured possession” (19:4–5). There, from the mountain, he spoke to them and gave them ten basic “words” by which they could enjoy the liberty that he had purchased for them. He then not only obligated himself to them by way of a covenant, but he also promised his presence to a degree unknown by any nation of people on the face of the earth. All of these thoughts need to be looked into to make Moses’ meeting with God all the more meaningful.

The final aspect of context that must be appreciated, if our passage is to have its full meaning, is the perspective of the New Testament. Even the exquisite glimpse of the glory of God given to Moses was only prologue to the coming of Jesus Christ and the privileges that are given to those who are in Christ. But it is important to begin our reflection with the basic facts of the passage, as well as an awareness of the larger context. Then pray with anticipation that God will be pleased to teach you experimentally (as the Puritans would say) the realities behind the facts.

DAY TWO
A GREATER GLORY

**READING FOR THE DAY: EXODUS 34:29-35,
2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18**

Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. . . . And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. . . .

EXODUS 34:30, 33-34

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Moses' face was shining as he came down the mountain with the tablets of the testimony. He had to cover his face with a veil because the people were in awe. Did you notice that the apostle Paul gives a very different perspective on Moses' use of the veil from that which comes from a reading of Exodus alone? In Exodus we are struck by the radiance on the face of Moses that came from being in the presence of God. It caused the people to be in awe of Moses and became a powerful reminder of his unique standing before God. Paul, on the other hand, interprets that same incident to demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant ("ministry of the Spirit") over the old. The glory of the old was a fading glory in comparison to the surpassing and permanent glory of the new.

We will consider both passages in detail in later meditations, but it is important to get a taste of the teaching of the New Testament as we begin. We live today in the blessing of the new covenant, or the New Testament, as we call the record of that covenant. All of the shadows and promises that are found in the Old Testament point to the New, and specifically to their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as much as we benefit from the teaching of the Old Testament, it can only be fully understood and

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appreciated in the light of the New. The veil was taken away *historically* with the coming of Christ, and it is taken away *personally* when we turn to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:14–16). This new reality will be illustrated again and again as we proceed through these studies. It is striking to learn how often this incident and the role of Moses are mentioned in the New Testament. In each case, after due respect is given to Moses and the revelation he received, the New Testament writer goes on to show a greater fulfillment in the person of Christ.

The lesson is not only the matter of the primacy of the New Testament witness—it is also the fact that the anchor of our whole existence is found in Jesus Christ. This understanding will keep us from feeling that we are somehow meant to duplicate the experience of Moses in our own lives. There are wonderful lessons to be learned, but invariably they will cause us to focus more deeply on Jesus and the “glory that surpasses it” through our union with him.

Nevertheless, while we recognize that our union with Christ carries us to higher spiritual privilege than that of Moses or any other “saint” of the Old Testament, we must still question the actual reality of this in our own lives. Whether or not the radiance on Moses’ face was relatively transient, the fact is that his time with God had changed him in a way that was apparent to others. Is our relationship with Christ apparent to others? Moses may have known God at a lesser level of revelation than we have in Christ. Yet he sustained that relationship day after day in such a way that he could be bold in his praying. Do we know that kind of boldness in our praying, since Christ Jesus as our high priest gives us even greater access? “We are very bold,” says the apostle (2 Cor. 3:12). Are we? There is obviously a great deal to learn from Moses.

DAY THREE

THE FIRST MEETING

READING FOR THE DAY: EXODUS 3:1-15

And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

EXODUS 3:2-4

Today's reading is the familiar account of Moses' meeting God at the burning bush. It was important as Moses' first meeting with God, but it is also foundational for the meetings that follow. This initial revelation began while Moses was in the desert happily tending the flocks of his father-in-law, minding his own business. I suspect that upon first leaving Egypt, Moses, like many of us who get away from the attractions of a cosmopolitan life, was restless and horrified at the prospect of spending the rest of his life in exile in the desert. But with the passage of time and the coming of his children, he most likely came to love the solitude and unhurried pace of his life and couldn't imagine how he could ever go back to the "rat race" of Egypt.

But God had other plans. The first thing to note in the passage is the fact that this initial meeting came about entirely at God's initiative. God used the burning bush as a device to arouse Moses' curiosity, and then "called" (v. 4) Moses to himself. This initiative on the part of God is the pattern throughout Scripture, from his seeking out Adam and Eve after the fall, to the call that God graciously extends to draw us to faith in Christ ("by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" [1 Cor. 1:9; cf. 1:20–31]). In subsequent meetings it will be Moses' seeking God, but it all goes back to God's coming to him.

A. W. Tozer's classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, begins on this same note: "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an

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urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. . . . And it is by this very prevenient drawing that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him; and all the time we are pursuing Him, we are already in His hand.”⁴ The relationship between the divine initiative and our response will always be mysterious. But a fundamental step to “the pursuit of God,” as Tozer terms it, is to surrender the notion that we are the initiators, that something within us has the power to open heaven and take us into the presence of God.

It all begins with God. We already know that, deep in our hearts, if we have come to trust in Jesus. We know that God sought us, showed us our need, and gave us eyes of faith to behold our Savior. But in the actual practice of the Christian life, we constantly slide back toward the supposed self-sufficiency that took us away from God in the first place.

No matter the spiritual heights to which Moses climbed, he always knew it started when God came to him and called him to himself. We must never forget that same lesson. Reflect on this wonderful hymn of testimony:

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
it was not I that found, O Savior true;
no, I was found of thee.*

*Thou didst reach forth thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea
—’twas not so much that I on thee took hold,
as thou, dear Lord, on me.*

*I find, I walk, I love, but O the whole of love
is but my answer, Lord to thee;
for thou wert long before-hand with my soul,
always thou lovedst me.*

ANONYMOUS (1878)

DAY FOUR
"I AM WHO I AM"

READING FOR THE DAY: EXODUS 3:13-15; 6:1-8

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' . . . This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. . . . Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.'"

EXODUS 3:13-15; 6:6

The first part of today's reading is a continuation of Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush. He obeyed God, returned to Egypt, and spoke to the elders of Israel, and then he and Aaron had their first meeting with Pharaoh. Both meetings were failures in terms of the response Moses hoped for. The workload for the people was increased and the elders complained bitterly. The second part of the reading takes place as a discouraged Moses returns to God for an explanation of what was going on (5:22-23).

God himself initiated the first meeting with Moses when he called him to the burning bush. Now we need to try to understand just *what* God revealed in that meeting. Essentially the purpose of the meeting was for God to reveal his name to Moses (3:13). That sounds strange at first, because we are used to a name being simply a tag that we use to identify one person from another. But in Scripture, as well as in many cultures, a name is in reality a description of a person's features or character. The name is not just who they are, but what they are like. Taking the time to notice what name is used for God will profoundly impact your reading of the Bible.

In this instance God reveals his name as "the LORD."⁵ It is not as

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though he is a new God; he is the same as the God of Moses' ancestors (3:15). But as he explained in the later conversation recorded in chapter 6, there is something that those fathers did not know. "God" or even "God Almighty" (6:3) is a general name for God used by all peoples. On the other hand, when God entered into a covenant with the family of Abraham, the people he had chosen, he used a name that could only be rightfully used within the family. Throughout the Old Testament, this name is used as God deals with his covenant people. However, when Gentiles become involved, the name is no longer used, but the text reverts to the more general name, God. (See this in Daniel 2, for example).

It is important to stop and reflect on this name. The place to start is to note that the Hebrew letters for God's covenant name are YHWH. Because of the sacredness of this name to the Jews, they would not corrupt even the letters by adding vowels to the text as it came later to be copied and recopied. For that reason, the actual pronunciation of the name has been lost. If two vowels are added, it is pronounced Yahweh, which is commonly done today. The more traditional word, Jehovah, is derived by adding three vowels. This gets even more complicated because in most of our English translations this name appears as "LORD" written in the uppercase. Note that this is a different name for God from "Lord" in lowercase letters (which carries the sense of "Lord and Master"). Understanding this will put a whole new light on reading the Old Testament and, in particular, will help make more sense of texts such as "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:1), i.e., "O Yahweh, our Master . . ."

Now look again at 6:2–4, where God tells Moses that he is YHWH ("the LORD"), even though he didn't reveal himself in that way to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when he made his covenant with them. That statement has always puzzled me. In a passage such as Genesis 15 where the LORD made the covenant with Abraham, he does come as "the LORD" and is even called that by Abraham. What does it mean then, to say they didn't know him as the LORD? The answer lies in the words that follow in 6:6–8 where the LORD described what he would do to actually fulfill the promises of his covenant. He would fight for his people to redeem them from their slavery. So Abraham had *heard* the words of the covenant, but the *reality* of the covenant promises was about to be seen in the mighty

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acts of God. Perhaps we could say that Abraham knew God as LORD THEOLOGICALLY, but that Moses and the people of Israel were about to come to know him as LORD EXPERIENTIALLY. It was now time for the revelation of this name in a greater fullness.

In Exodus 33:19 the Lord proclaimed his name, the LORD, to Moses in an even fuller sense. But between the revelation of chapter 6 and that of chapter 33 there had to be time and experiences to allow the earlier revelation to become a reality. Still later there would be an even more profound revelation of that “name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9), the name of Jesus, but that, too, needed to await the proper time.

As we seek to know the Lord in a deeper sense, we have to ask ourselves if this is simply a theological or intellectual quest. Do we know experientially even the more elementary understanding of God that we already have? If not, what value would there be in a greater revelation? Somehow our theoretical and factual knowledge of God has to match up with our experience of him, or we get out of balance. It seems to me that the Lord knows that better than we, which is why he brings us step-by-step to the place where we are ready to take in the deeper lessons.

DAY FIVE
REDEMPTION BY GRACE

READING FOR THE DAY: EXODUS 6:6-8; 12:1-13

Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.”

EXODUS 6:6-8

The great promises of redemption in chapter 6 are demonstrated in the terrible judgment spoken of in the reading in chapter 12 as well as in the actual death of the firstborn (12:29–32) and the crossing of the Red Sea (13:17–14:31). I have a very distinct memory of studying the story of the exodus as a graduate student. Like a light bulb going on, I realized that virtually every detail of God’s deliverance of his people was a picture of “by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:5, 8). It was one of those moments of enlightenment that permanently affected my understanding of God. From that time on I have seen the Bible as a unity, and the God who met with Moses as the same One whom I meet through Jesus Christ. I’m sure I already understood this *theologically* (to use the terminology of the last lesson), but now this great truth became mine *experientially*.

I mention this insight because I continue to meet many Christians who have not taken this step in understanding the Old Testament. They see the Old Testament as full of wonderful stories (and puzzles), but see its teaching as that which relates to a totally different era. There are important differences to be sure, but those differences relate to a very different context, not to the character of God or the way he saves us. Grace is as fundamental to the Old Testament as it is to the New.

FORTY DAYS ON THE MOUNTAIN

Now go back and read Exodus 6:6 with your own spiritual condition in mind. Aren't we also slaves and in such an oppressed condition that we are helpless to change our situation? In Ephesians 2:1–3, we are said to be dead in our trespasses and sins. The hope is not that we somehow resolve to be different, but that “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4–5). Do you see the very same mercy at work in the saving of Israel from its bondage—“I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment” (Ex. 6:6)?

The key word in that statement is the word “redeem.” Redemption is virtually synonymous with salvation. However, it adds the idea of a purchase price or ransom. God did not simply take his people away; he redeemed them, and the price he paid was the blood of the innocent lamb. In the reading from chapter 12, recall that the Lord said Israel was to begin its calendar from the date of the slaying of the lamb. Their life of freedom began with their redemption through the death of the Passover lamb (12:2). Jesus is that Passover Lamb, and, just as Israel returned every year to celebrate their new beginning in freedom from slavery, so we come again and again to the communion table. There we acknowledge that we are free from the curse of sin because of the cross of Jesus.

Return to the reading in Exodus 6 and read verse 7 again. “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God” is the essence of the covenant of grace. The Lord spoke those words to Abraham (Gen. 17:7–8), then again here in Exodus, and again as part of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). God Almighty himself comes to sinful people and obligates himself to be with them and to save them. And there is nothing those people did or do to deserve that level of commitment. That was true for Israel and it is true for us. The only way salvation has ever come has been through the grace of God.

A final thought from this lesson comes from verse 7 where God says, “and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.” We will come back again and again to this word *know*. To know God as the LORD, the God who comes personally to save us and be with us, has many dimensions. But it begins with our acknowledging joyfully and gratefully that we have been saved by grace alone, and however unworthy we may feel, God has

DAY FIVE

been pleased to save us through his Son, Jesus. We contributed nothing to that gracious act, nor can we add anything to it now. If you haven't fully appreciated that in your own experience, you can see it fully displayed in the salvation of Israel. Our God is gracious!

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.*

JOHN NEWTON (1779)

NOTES

1. Read about the remarkable confirmation of God's hand when I returned from the sabbatical, in "Kathy's Story," Chap. 1 of my book *Spiritual Birthline: Understanding How We Experience the New Birth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).
2. A phrase coined by Francis Schaeffer, who wrote a book by the same title, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972).
3. I use the masculine pronoun to refer to God without apology. This is because it is what the Scripture uses for God. This is not to insist that God is male, but simply that our language is limited and it is how God has chosen to reveal himself.
4. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1982), 11–12.
5. See Peter Enns's comment that "I AM" was not intended to be a name for God, but to reinforce the fact that Moses was speaking to the God who had already made himself known to the patriarchs (Peter Enns, *Exodus—The NIV Application Commentary*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000]), 106.
6. *Ibid.*, 491.
7. Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 260.
8. Henri Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* (New York: Image Books, 1990), 30.
9. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 90–97.
10. See my booklet, *What Is True Conversion?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), where I explain that our experience of God is the reverse of our usual explanation of him. We first encounter God in the person of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to saving faith in God the Son, through whom we come to know God as our Father.
11. Peter Enns, *Exodus*, 581.
12. Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 97.
13. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 82–83.
14. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 39–45.