

## **Biblical Overview, II: Moses**

Let us open in prayer.

*Father, as we continue to make our way through the Scripture we pray that You would help us to grasp accurately and appropriately what You have revealed there to Your people in the time of Moses specifically. Help us to know how You want us to appropriately understand and implement the principles of worship that You gave to Your people then and that continue now. Lord, I thank for these students here and those elsewhere who are listening to or reading these lessons. I pray that You would strengthen our hearts and minds so that we would know and love You better as we go through this course. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We will look at Exodus now, in the time of Moses. Quite a bit of time has passed—it has been about 400 years since Joseph went down to Egypt. God calls Moses to be the one who would lead His people out of slavery and bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. We will be looking at Exodus with “worship eyes,” which was for me a new way of looking at Exodus. Let us read Exodus 3:4-12:

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

It is an interesting sign that God promises to Moses when he has accomplished the task he has been called to. But as we will see, that is exactly what happens. God does not just deliver the people from slavery to a land flowing with milk and honey. There is also a sense in which they are being brought into the very presence of God Himself, which is reflected in this sign of worshiping on the mountain near where Moses encounters God here for the first time. This whole unfolding drama shows Moses going to Pharaoh and Pharaoh very reluctantly and gradually becoming convinced after more and more plagues come to actually let the people go. One of the intriguing things is the dominance in Moses' conversations with Pharaoh of this idea of the people leaving for the purpose of worshiping God. The English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible uses the word “serve” instead of “worship,” but both English words are translations of the same Hebrew word. It can be translated as either “to serve” or “to worship” because service was understood as a part of worship. The rendering of “worship” is a little more dramatic and overt in the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. Look at Exodus 7:16—

this is in the context of the plague of blood: “Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened.”’” God sends more plagues, and more conversations are held between Moses and Pharaoh, and so the story develops. Seven days pass after Moses strikes the Nile, turning it into blood. Then Exodus 8:1 says, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “This is what the LORD says: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me.”’” Moses is asking for deliverance for the sake of worshiping God. Then, after more plagues, 8:20 says, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, “This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.”’” After even more plagues 9:1 says, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’”’” Then he tells Pharaoh, “If you refuse, this is what will happen...” And then it happens. Then 9:13-14 says: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, “This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.”’”

We see this theme again in 10:3, but it is expanded 10:8-11:

Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. “Go, worship the LORD your God,” he said. “But just who will be going?”

Moses answered, “We will go with our young and old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the LORD.”

Pharaoh said, “The LORD be with you—if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. No! Have only the men go; and worship the LORD, since that is what you have been asking for.” Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence.

We have seen Moses speaking for the Lord, commanding, “Let my people go so that they may worship me [the Lord].” We have seen this over and over again several times. Now as Moses explains what it will look like when they go to worship God, he describes it as a festival to the Lord. This is an interesting dimension to going and worshiping God. Pharaoh at first says, “Go, worship the LORD your God.” Even Pharaoh understands that this is what it is about, worshiping God. He wants them to go worship God so that there will be no more plagues. But then Pharaoh wants to know who will be going. He is okay with the men leaving because they would come back for their women and children and livestock. But Moses says, “No, all of us will go to celebrate a festival to the LORD.” Then 10:24 says (after the plague of darkness): “Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, ‘Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.’ But Moses said, ‘You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshiping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD.’”

Do you see how this theme is being expanded? We are now able to see more of what it will look like when they finally are able to go out of Egypt and worship God at this mountain in the desert. They will celebrate a festival. Everyone is to be there, not just the men. The livestock need to go because there will be sacrificing of animals. And they will listen to the instruction of the Lord when they get there as to exactly how He wants them to worship Him. This is an implied regulative principle of worship verse right here. We do not know how to worship Him until He tells us, and we will only do what He tells us when we worship Him.

Ultimately Pharaoh lets the people go after the striking down of the firstborn sons. During this final plague God institutes the Passover. Look at Exodus 12:13 for example: “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.” The historical event of the Passover is to be commemorated for future generations as part of celebrating what God in His grace does to deliver them. This is by God’s design. God institutes the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the context of this—in many ways—highest redemptive, saving act of God in the Old Testament. They were in utter and complete bondage to Pharaoh, and God intervened and delivered them, against all odds, by His mighty hand. And He instituted this worship-remembrance called Passover. We can look forward to where we live in the story (after Pentecost and before the Second Coming) and look back 2000 years to the greater exodus that came with *the* Passover Lamb, being Christ Himself. And on the eve of this delivering act of redemption, Christ institutes as a lasting remembrance the Lord’s Supper. There is movement forward from where we have been in the patriarchal period to more specific things. God institutes worship celebrations for remembering His redeeming grace and how He spared them by His grace in the offering of the sacrificial lamb—which is the sacrificial connection to the Lord’s Supper. And now in our time we see the fulfillment of that and the propelling forward of this ultimately most significant redemptive act—the death of Christ for His people.

Finally the people of Israel go up out of Egypt, but Pharaoh pursues them. This makes sense in a way because he is losing most of his work force, or at least a big part of it. The plagues should have very convincingly shown Pharaoh that God was in charge here, not him. But nonetheless he persists after them. The call for the children of Israel to keep trusting God and putting their faith in Him and in Moses, His servant, continues on, even to the point of the parting of the Red Sea and walking through the walls of water that must have been there. They had to continue trusting that this was God’s provision in the face of their doubts—would the army come across and kill them anyway? Would they be drowned in the waters of the Red Sea coming back over them? And when they reach the other side, they do not even wait to reach the mountain before they worship God. They begin to worship God immediately on the other side of the Red Sea. There were thousands upon thousands of people who came through on dry ground and who began to sing to the Lord on the other side of the Red Sea. Before we come to the songs they sing in Exodus 15, let us look at 14:29-31, which leads into chapter 15: “But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.”

God had put on display His mighty power, focused here in redeeming grace to Israel and destruction to the Egyptians. The response of the people was to put their trust in God and in Moses His servant. And then they begin to sing a song. The chapter headings in our English Bibles sometimes interrupt the flow of the story, and I think that is the case here. It is important to start at chapter 14 to see the lead-in into chapter 15. In 15:1-21 we have the songs of Moses and of Miriam, which go like this:

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider  
he has hurled into the sea.

The LORD is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.  
The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is his name.  
Pharaoh's chariots and his army  
he has hurled into the sea.  
The best of Pharaoh's officers  
are drowned in the Red Sea.  
The deep waters have covered them;  
they sank to the depths like a stone."  
"Your right hand, O LORD,  
was majestic in power.  
Your right hand, O LORD,  
shattered the enemy.  
In the greatness of your majesty  
you threw down those who opposed you.  
You unleashed your burning anger;  
it consumed them like stubble.  
By the blast of your nostrils  
the waters piled up.  
The surging waters stood firm like a wall;  
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea."  
"The enemy boasted,  
'I will pursue, I will overtake them.  
I will divide the spoils;  
I will gorge myself on them.  
I will draw my sword  
and my hand will destroy them.'  
But you blew with your breath,  
and the sea covered them.  
They sank like lead  
in the mighty waters."  
"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?  
Who is like you—  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders?  
You stretched out your right hand  
and the earth swallowed them."  
"In your unfailing love you will lead  
the people you have redeemed.  
In your strength you will guide them  
to your holy dwelling.  
The nations will hear and tremble;  
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.  
The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,  
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,  
the people of Canaan will melt away;

terror and dread will fall upon them.  
By the power of your arm  
they will be as still as a stone—  
until your people pass by, O LORD,  
until the people you bought pass by.  
You will bring them in and plant them  
on the mountain of your inheritance—  
the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling,  
the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.  
The LORD will reign  
for ever and ever.”

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider  
he has hurled into the sea.”

Now, most Presbyterians are fine with all of this until you come to verse 20. Then there are some problems for people in our tradition. There is a woman leading worship in some way. She is using a tambourine and she is dancing. What do we do with that? I am not sure what we do with that. I am not sure what all the implications of this event are for our worship as we live in our point in the story, between Pentecost and the Second Coming. But I am certainly not afraid that by affirming what God is doing here in response to the people that we will somehow mess up and violate the regulative principle of worship in our day. Let us let the biblical account say what God wants it to say and then figure out what it means.

I have been a part of some rather interesting discussions in which we read and go through this passage and the first thing someone says is, “The first thing we need to establish is that this is not a corporate, public worship service called by the elders of the church. There were elders of Israel, but it does not say they sanctioned all this. This is not formal worship. It is an informal celebration of God's redeeming grace.” Okay, that is all true. But to say this was not corporate, public worship is sort of missing the point of the text. All of Israel was together having just received the most magnificent redeeming act God has put on display so far in redemptive history. And the songs being sung are not short, repetitive choruses with no real content. Look at what I just read. It describes the Lord majestic in His holiness and unyielding in His love toward His people. The context of the beginning of this passage says they put their trust in God before they sing. Now, my first response to this text is not that we should all have tambourines and dancing in our worship or else we are not really worshiping. But regardless of what you think about tambourines and dancing, we should be overwhelmed with their response, which shows their grasp of this holy and all-powerful God who in His unyielding and undeserved love to His people stretched out His hand to destroy their enemies and save them to bring them into a closer relationship with Him. This response of the people—especially since they understood far less in their time than I have had revealed to me in my time with the rest of Scripture—puts my response to the unyielding love and sovereign grace of God to shame. Part of what I want to do in response to this passage is to say, “Lord, give me a heart to respond to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit in my life today that begins to have this unashamed display of celebration and rejoicing and

singing in a way that is fitting to me in my context.” Even if we stop the discussion there I think we will already have a lot to work through. Far too often I am not overwhelmed by the God of Israel, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, like these people were in the way they responded to His display of grace toward them. Now, they had hardened hearts; problems arise from that later, and so we should not put them on a pedestal that they do not deserve.

Every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper (which, as a side note, I do think this should be every Lord’s Day although there are reasons why that does not and perhaps cannot happen in some contexts) there should be this remembrance of the far greater exodus that has taken place through the person and work of Christ. I think that the point of this passage is not to establish once and for all that tambourines and dancing must be a part of every worship service. But this passage certainly does not seem to disqualify forever the use of dancing and tambourines, either. Later we will talk more about instruments and dancing in worship. But let me just mention one thing that may hint at where we will go with that later. Although the tambourines and the dancing are a part of the celebration, they are not what this passage is about. They are more incidental. This was the manner in which the Israelites expressed their joy and thanksgiving and their confidence in who God is and what He had done for them.

People have used this passage both to call for the use of tambourines and dancing in worship and to say that tambourines and dancing should not be used in worship. Those who are for tambourines and dancing say that since they are used here in public worship then we can also use them, unless that is expressly forbidden in the New Testament. Those who are against tambourines and dancing say it is obvious that the Lord does not want these used in worship and so there must be some other explanation for this passage. I think both these arguments go beyond what we can find in the text. The one side wants to say that this context is completely from our own interpretation and cannot be applied at all, while the other side wants to say that this context completely lines up with ours and we can directly apply everything in the passage. I think there are fallacies on both side.

I do not think we can prove from this passage whether or not God wants tambourines and dancing in worship. I think what He does want are hearts full of love and rejoicing in response to His work of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that is fitting and appropriate for what we do today within the context of reverence and awe and joy and celebration that is fitting for rejoicing in His presence. This will probably look a little different from culture to culture and from generation to generation. I think the dancing was probably a line dance, with the women following Miriam. They were singing what was basically a refrain, the beginning of a song, as in Exodus 15:1. How do you come up with such rich content so quickly? We do not know how soon after the crossing of the Red Sea this took place, but it is the next thing in the story. Perhaps it was a sort of prophetic song that came from Moses and that he is singing and Miriam and the women pick up on the refrain as they dance with their tambourines. I would say that it was fitting to who they were and what was expressive of joy and celebration in their day. In some ways I do not think the tambourines and dancing signify much more—this was who they were and how they expressed rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. This was not intended to be a sign of the Israelites following the evil ways of the cultures around them. In the context it seems like just a natural, spontaneous expression of delighting in God, trusting in Him, rejoicing in what He had done, and recounting His greatness. That is the theme of the song. It is all about God. That is what they are singing as they dance and play the tambourines. They were singing, “Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted.” They were not singing, “Now, men, look at us dancing over here,” or “This is a cool tambourine I am playing?” That does not seem to be going on here.

I think to miss the drama of the larger dynamics that are happening is to miss the message of this passage: who God is, who they are, what God has done for them, and what a right response to all this is.

I think it is unfortunate when we get caught up in some of these other issues and miss the sheer delight in God and rejoicing before Him in awe that is shown in this passage. This is not light worship—this is deep content that they are singing, and at the same time they are rejoicing with all their hearts that God has seen fit to deliver them by His grace. I think there are some key principles there that should inform new covenant worship in our day that we can learn from this. Granted, there is a tangible, physical miracle right before them. But what is the recounting and remembering what happened when Christ died on the cross and rose again on the third day and ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit? We were not there at Pentecost, but still Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:19: “For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain [referring to the Mount of Transfiguration]. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

Then he goes on to talk about having the word of prophecy in Scripture. He is basically saying, “I had the privilege of being on the Mount of Transfiguration and seeing the veil drawn back and Christ’s glory revealed. But you have the word of prophecy made even more sure.” This is because we have the Spirit-inspired Scripture that tells us about the Mount of Transfiguration and many other things. This is our history. What Christ did on our behalf in the crucifixion, the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost—these things are reality for us who belong to Christ. Our union with Him is such that it can be said that we died with Him and rose with Him, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us. These are realities that are as certain and powerful as part of our history as those who have been adopted into God’s family and brought into His presence through Christ as though we were right there when these things were happening. That is why Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper for us. Jesus is linking Himself to us now as He comes to be present with us in the Lord’s Supper. He is sealing to our hearts and minds the benefits that flow from His atoning death and resurrection. He is stirring us to rejoice and to go forward into greater Christ-likeness and advancement of His kingdom. He is looking for that kind of a response. I know for myself that I get wrapped up in routines and do not always let the truth of the Gospel strike my heart in a way that brings a fresh response to these things every Lord’s Day. It almost seems that every time we come together in corporate, public worship it should be as though God has just parted the Red Sea and brought us across on dry ground, destroying His enemies—and we are ready to celebrate that redeeming work. It should be as though that, and even more, has just happened in front of our eyes. Do you need a reason to have your heart stirred to worship? Remember Christ and the Gospel.

One response to this passage is in Revelation 15:2b-4:

They [the heavenly saints] held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the ages.  
Who will not fear you, O Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Apparently in heavenly worship it is appropriate to still sing the song of Moses. You can see traces of Moses' song in this song that the saints sing. Not only themes that reach back to the Lamb who was slain on the cross, but also even those from the song of Moses in the Old Testament are incorporated into the future worship of God's people. These themes have been brought forward to their appropriate fulfillment at that point in redemptive history, which in this case is in the future, but the substance of these themes is not lost in that process.

As we will see in a moment, we have to be careful about making too many one-to-one connections without coming forward through what has happened between, for example, the institution of the sacrificial system and the death of Christ. There are things that are brought forward. But in the way we bring them forward and make use of them in our time we need to keep in mind what has happened in the meantime. Thus our celebration of the Lord's Supper, though it has the backdrop of the Passover (and I think also the peace offerings, as we will discuss later), the Lord's Supper is not a Passover meal. As much as I appreciate from the instructional side movements like Jews for Jesus and their understandings of the Seder meal—the bitter herbs, etc—these things have their fulfillment in Christ. When we gather for the Lord's Supper, we are only celebrating Passover to the degree that it is now incorporated into the Lord's Supper. Passover is not gone, but it is brought forward to where we are in redemptive history, and it is incorporated into and is rather subsumed by the realities it was pointing forward to, namely Christ's death and resurrection. Thus we still understand the bitterness through the bitter herbs that were there, even though we do not eat them as part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Those bitter herbs are still part of that which informs what Christ had to go through on our behalf because of sin. These are deep hermeneutical questions. People will come to different conclusions on these things, and I think we need to give each person room to explore and figure things out. But I think we often rob ourselves of some of the richness of the sacrificial death of Christ by ignoring the aspects of the peace offerings, burnt offerings, sin offerings, and the Passover meal that are incorporated in His death. The New Testament itself uses about five different words to describe what God in Christ did on the cross. The New Testament uses marketplace language, sacrificial language, and other types of language to describe this. It uses many different images and types of language to try to demonstrate the different nuances of something that is beyond our full comprehension. Why rob ourselves of Old Testament anticipatory images and sacrifices that would help us to better understand Christ's sacrifice? For example, exploring the depths of Isaiah's suffering servant passages helps us understand the depth of what happened in the crucifixion. We do not want to shut the door, but we want to keep the door open only to the degree that the Scripture continues to keep it open in this further revelation that we are given in the New Testament.

I will speak only briefly on the Ten Commandments in relation to worship. I do not want to overstate this, but the first four commandments have much to do with our relationship with God, and the last six have more to do with our relationships with each other. Thus there may be a sense in which you could say that the first four commandments have more to do with corporate, public worship. For example, these commandments deal with not coming into the Lord's presence with graven images, not worshipping other gods, not taking the Lord's name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath day holy. And the last six have much to do with all of life as worship. For example, these commandments deal with family, business (not stealing), how we relate to neighbors, and the offering up of our whole lives before Him.

Exodus 24, I think, is a key passage for understanding the dynamics between God and His people in the specific instructions that are given concerning how the people are to approach Him. This ceremony that confirms the covenant with Moses in chapter 24 has many interesting dimensions to it. Exodus 24:1-2 says, "Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.'" This addresses the issue of



approaching God, how close they can come to Him. It also sets up Moses as the mediator. The people must put their trust not only in God but also in Moses as His appointed mediator. The 70 elders are allowed to go partway up the mountain but not all the way, and the people are not even to go up the mountain. Then 24:3-8 says:

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Here the sacrifices are offered and blood is sprinkled on the altar and on the people. The people say, "We want to be all God wants us to be." But in the sacrifices there is still a recognition of a need for this blood covering as well. Thus the people's response is not a denial of remaining sin. Rather their response demonstrates a desire to be shaped by God to be what He wants them to be as He has given them this instruction.

Then 24:9-11 says, "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank." We would expect that God would raise his hand against them, but instead they ate and drank. What is going on here? Almost every commentator I have read on this passage sort of skips over this section. I suppose their attitude is that since they cannot explain it they will not make any comment on it. Of course, there are some commentators who do comment on this—I am not claiming to have the deepest insights here. But there is something going on in this passage. Remember the crucial point in time during which this is happening. God has delivered His people, and now they are at that mountain of which God had spoken to Moses back in Exodus 3:12b: "This will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." He has brought the people to this mountain and given them instruction, and now they worship Him. They worship Him with blood sacrifice. They worship Him by understanding the call toward holiness as a fruit of grace. Remember how He introduced the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2 by saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." He did not say, "Do all these Ten Commandments and then I will be your God." He says, "I am the LORD your God." Grace precedes the giving of the law in this case.

In Exodus 24:9-11 it is as if God says, "I am making you my people and a select few from among you—Moses, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders—will experience something at this point in the story that is rare, unusual, and in a sense should not be." It is as if God is allowing these representatives of the people to experience what we are still looking forward to. We get a greater foretaste of this as we eat and drink around the Lord's Table as the people of God who no longer need the blood of bulls and goats. We are closer to it. But they see God and live. A few chapters later Moses wants to see God but is afraid he will die and thus he only gets to see God's back. But here they see Him and live. In the account it almost sounds like what is being communicated is "We are surprised anyone lived through this." And not only

did they see Him, but they also ate and drank with Him. This is incredible. This is quite a picture of the privileges that are granted by the holy, holy, holy God to His people whom He has redeemed by His grace. You can almost hear what we talked about this morning from Hebrews 2: God is not ashamed to call these men His sons. He says, “Come, eat and drink. You do not deserve it. You are right to think you could be struck dead.” We are to come boldly into God’s presence, holding onto Christ, but we should be aware that if we were not holding onto Christ we could be struck down in the presence of His holiness. To me Exodus 24:9-11 is a high point. I think this is somehow connected to not only the deliverance from the Red Sea, but also to Exodus 3:12—this is the sign that it is the Lord who has brought them up out of Egypt. This must have been a great festival of celebration to the Lord that at least these few were able to experience. The intimacy displayed here between God and these representatives of the people seems akin to the intimacy of God’s relationship with Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall. This is an intimacy that these men are permitted to experience. It is almost as if this event is an exception at this point in the story. But it is reality, and it is where we are headed. It is like a foretaste or first fruits of what comes in fuller measure in the New Testament and what will come fully in the complete renewal and restoration of the new heavens and the new earth. That is the most I can make of that passage at this point.

In Exodus 25-31 there is the establishment of the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants within the tribe of Levi. There are also the instructions for the different types of sacrifices, which we will talk about when we come to the fuller instructions listed in Leviticus 1-7. In Exodus 25-31 there are also the instructions concerning the tabernacles, festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Weeks, etc.). Look at Leviticus 23. I think this is a fascinating description of the festivals. God incorporates right into the sacrificial system and worship of Him things like the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year, the Jubilee year, Passover, the Feast of First Fruits, and the Feast of Weeks. Leviticus 23:37-41 says:

“These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the LORD by fire—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. These offerings are in addition to those for the LORD’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD. So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD.

When God throws a festival, everything else is to come to a stop. This is about God meeting with His people for a festival of celebration. Look at how many times the word “celebrate” is used in this passage. The people are to gather three times annually. They do not simply come, offer a sacrifice, and leave. This might be like people who come to morning worship in our churches and then leave to live their life during the week any way they want. The Israelites are to come celebrate these festivals for a week, as with the Feast of Booths. These festivals are about God’s sustaining, lingering presence with His people, to celebrate who He is and what He has done in their lives. And this is happening right in the middle of the Old Testament. I do not understand when people think the Old Testament is stern, somber,

and about God's holiness without any joy or rejoicing and the New Testament is all about rejoicing, grace, and love. That does not make sense. God calls for reverent joy throughout the Scriptures. This is how it should have been for Adam and Eve in the beginning—reverent joy in the presence of the God who made them and all things, and joyful delight in being naked and not ashamed before each other and Him.

Let me talk a little bit about the regulative principle of worship that is often drawn out from these passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 4:1-2 says: “Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”

I would argue that this is a call to obedience of the law in totality. I do not think this is only related to worship. The Lord does not want us to go to the right or to the left in what He says about marriage, or the way we do business with just measurements and the like. Deuteronomy 12:31-32 is a passage people often cite to “prove” the regulative principle of worship: “You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.” This passage is about the regulating of life and worship. Do not add to what God says, and do not take away from what God says. We find this at the end of Revelation as well. There is a specific example in Leviticus 10:1-3 that is also often cited:

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Moses then said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD spoke of when he said:

“Among those who approach me  
I will show myself holy;  
in the sight of all the people  
I will be honored.”

Aaron remained silent.

Here it seems that Nadab and Abihu creatively, from their own imagination, added some combination to the authorized incense that was to be burned in these censers. They added something God had not told them to do, so in a sense they were adding to what God had said. But from the way it is described here, the emphasis is that they did it in a way contrary to God's command. They were actually directly violating what God had said by what they were doing. Also, it is very clear from what God commands in Exodus 30:9 that what they were doing was wrong: “Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it.” Thus what they did was a direct violation of a command of God. This does not necessarily prove the regulative principle of worship that says, “Only do that which God has required.” Nadab and Abihu added to what God had said, but what they added was in direct violation of what God had said. Therefore I do not see this as a clear, strong proof text for the regulative worship of principle. I think the point of Leviticus 10:1-3 is that we are only to approach God as He prescribes. The detailed instructions that God gave concerning the sacrificial system—which even include what to make the incense out of as a priest, how to cut up the animals, and what the priests were to wear—are not matched in the Old Testament in other aspects of worship done by the Levites. Frame points this out in his book, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*. The regulation of the sacrificial system is far more precise and detailed than the general elements of the reading of Scripture and prayer that were to be done by the Levites. God did not regulate how they were supposed to pray or

the details of the reading of the law or those sorts of things. Steve Schlissel (a former Jew who became a Christian) in his article, “All I Need to Know about Worship, I don’t Learn from the Regulative Principle,” has raised the question: “Is it possible, when you think about the zeal for the detail and not turning to the right or to the left that you have in the Old Testament sacrificial system, where do you see that in the New Testament? You do not see details about prayers, Scriptures, the observance of the Lord’s Supper, or the different elements of worship. But you see the same passion and warning about the fulfillment of the sacrificial system—the person and work of Christ.”

I do not endorse everything this man says, but I think this is a valid point. For example, Galatians 1:6-9 says: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

What does that warning, “let him be eternally condemned,” sound like? It sounds like fire coming out from the altar and consuming Nadab and Abihu. Likewise, John tells his congregation that if someone teaches that Jesus did not come in the flesh then he is the devil, he is a liar, and they should not receive his word. The passion and precision about the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is matched, interestingly, in the New Testament by a passion and precision about the fulfillment of the sacrificial system—the person and work of Christ. The apostles had the same zeal—that we dare not teach other than who He actually is—that God seems to have about the sacrificial system, which pointed forward to Christ. This is something I had never thought about before I read this article. I do not think this throws the regulative principle away. I affirm the regulative principle of worship, and I will show you how I understand it in a way that I can affirm it as we go along.

Finally, I want to talk a little about worship as covenant renewal and sacrifice. Some of you may be familiar with the book by Jeff Meyers, a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) pastor at Providence here in Saint Louis, called *The Lord’s Service*. I read this book when it first came out and have been engaged in many discussions about these sorts of things with even Meyers himself. I appreciate the dialogue we have been able to have. The main thrust of this book is that Meyers is saying essentially this: “New covenant worship is not only based on synagogue worship. It is also based on temple worship.” You will understand this better when we discuss it later. But what he is saying is that an important part of new covenant worship includes the concepts of covenant renewal and sacrifice, and this is a way of structuring and ordering our worship services.

Meyers argues that there are three main sacrifices, and they all have relationship to new covenant worship. One of these is the purification or sin offering, which has to do with cleansing. This is captured in our prayers of confession of sin and pardon or forgiveness of sin. The second is the burnt offering, or the ascension offering. This has to do with the consecration of our whole lives to God in the whole burnt offering. He argues that this sacrifice has to do with us being shaped, arranged, and presented to God. He says this comes across in our worship as we are instructed and built up in the Word. The third major sacrifice is the peace offering or communion offering, which is captured in our celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Here there is both sacrifice and the eating of a meal based on that sacrifice. The peace offering not only takes away our sin and offers up our lives to God like the sin offering and the burnt offering, but it is also an opportunity to eat and drink with God. We saw this in the passage from Exodus where Moses and the elders ate and drank with God on the mountain.

Meyers sees a fivefold pattern of biblical covenants in relation to new covenant worship. First, God takes the initiative in inviting and bringing us into relationship with Himself. In new covenant worship that is the call to worship—God taking hold of us and inviting us into His presence. Second, God separates His people from sin—confession and forgiveness. Third, God speaks to His people—Scripture reading and sermon. Fourth, God gives tangible signs and seals, which in the Old Testament were circumcision and Passover and in the new covenant are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Fifth, God arranges for the succession of the covenant—benediction and sending people out. Basically the pattern is call, confession, consecration, communion, and commission. I think this is a helpful way; it is at least one way to show the relationship of God as our covenant God to the way we enter into His presence and have corporate, public worship.

I really appreciate the way Meyers brings more of what is there in the covenant renewal services from the sacrificial system into new covenant worship. I think we sometimes say, "The sacrificial system was fulfilled in Christ, and the pattern of the New Testament was to follow after the Jewish synagogue, not the temple." I think it is both. New Testament worship is patterned after the synagogue, plus the Lord's Supper. What is the Lord's Supper? It is covenant renewal and sacrifice brought into new covenant worship. I think that is a very valid point. I have a few concerns with this book. I think we need to be careful not to overextend an application from Leviticus as the only acceptable order for new covenant worship today. I do think this is a valid way to worship, but I do not think this is the only valid way to worship. You will hear me say that about people on the other side of this issue as well. My second concern is that we cannot forget about where we are in the story. We are not in Leviticus. Leviticus informs where we are, but it is not necessarily the New Testament order of worship. My third concern is that we need to remember that in Christ we are already accepted by the Father as we come to worship, based on His once-and-for-all sacrifice. It is possible to read Meyers' book and come away with the impression that until we come to the point in the service where we confess our sins and are declared forgiven, we are fully in the presence of God. (In talking to him he has said that this was not his intention at all). I am saying that we come fully into the presence of God based on what Christ has already done. Before the call to worship begins we are fully in the presence of God and accepted by Him. That concerns me because I think someone could come away from reading this book with that impression, even though that is not his intention. My final concern is that it is as important to connect future worship to our present worship as it is to connect past, sacrificial worship to our present worship. I think restoring some principles that have been lost from old covenant worship into our new covenant worship is important. But I do not think this is the whole answer to how we are to worship now. The New Testament is an eschatological book that draws on the reality of the new heavens and the new earth in our present worship of God.