

THE
KEY IDEAS
BIBLE HANDBOOK

RON RHODES



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To my beloved wife, Kerri

Acknowledgments

Having now written more than 70 books over a span of 35 years, I can say without reservation that no author is an island—no author accomplishes his or her task without the continued support of multiple other people. In my case, my primary support team has always been my family—my wife, Kerri, and my two grown children, David and Kylie. With every year that passes I grow in appreciation for these three. As I have stated on many occasions, the sun always seems to shine a little bit brighter with them in my world. What a blessing from God!

I am also hugely appreciative of my ongoing relationship with the fine team at Harvest House Publishers—especially with Bob Hawkins Jr., the president of the company. A special thanks also goes to Steve Miller and Terry Glaspey for their helpful suggestions in the early stages of the book, and to Janelle Coury for her excellent layout and design work on the book. Also...Gene Skinner, where would I be without you? You've edited so many of my books that I've lost count. But all the books are better because of your involvement.

Last but certainly not least, I bow before the Lord Jesus Christ in humble appreciation for the opportunity to serve Him through the written word. What a privilege and joy!

—Ron Rhodes
Frisco, Texas

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The Key Ideas Bible Handbook

Thank you for joining me on this exciting journey through *The Key Ideas Bible Handbook*, a book brimming with the applicational “big ideas” from Genesis to Revelation. By its very nature, this book is designed to help bring about life-change in your walk with God and to produce a spiritual transformation in your daily life. That means you should not read this book thinking it will only fill your head with more intellectual knowledge. It will enlighten your mind, yes, but it will also touch your heart—and *deeply*.

My hope and prayer is that as you read *The Key Ideas Bible Handbook*, you will attain

- a thorough understanding of the power of God’s Word to change your life;
- an appreciation for how the Word of God can be exciting and liberating;
- an awareness that God is a personal being who desires to personally interact with you;
- an awareness that God not only makes promises to you in His Word, but is also a relentless promise keeper;
- a conviction that God will bless you when you choose to live righteously;
- an understanding of the need for unwavering faith in the midst of life’s troubles;
- a thorough understanding of God’s sovereignty in your life;
- a deep appreciation for the wondrous salvation you have in Jesus;
- an experience of daily intimacy with Jesus like never before;
- an ever-increasing understanding of God’s marvelous grace as He

works in your life; and an eternal perspective that will enable you to see life's problems and difficulties from heaven's vantage point.

As you peruse *The Key Ideas Bible Handbook*, you will notice that it sifts a wide variety of applicational concepts from the biblical text. I use the phrase “applicational concepts” by design, for such concepts involve life-changing truths. An example might be this: “It’s not merely *what* you know that brings salvation, but *who* you know—Jesus Christ the divine Savior.” *The Key Ideas Bible Handbook* is loaded with such life-changing truths, from the creation account in the early chapters of Genesis to the eternal state in the latter chapters of Revelation.

To illustrate further, a traditional heading of Philippians 1:20-26 in a study Bible might be something like this: “Paul lives for Jesus Christ.” In place of such a generalized heading, here is an applicational concept: “When Christ is your life, living becomes vibrantly productive and death is nothing to fear.” *That* is a life-changing, transformational truth!

Likewise, a traditional heading of Colossians 1:15-19 in a study Bible might be something like this: “Christ is supreme.” In place of such a generalized heading, here is an applicational concept: “Because Christ is supreme in reality, He must become supreme experientially in your life.” *That* is a life-changing, transformational truth!

A traditional heading of Psalm 1 in a study Bible might be, “The righteous versus the wicked.” In place of such a heading, here is an applicational concept: “God wants to bless you, but you must first become bless-able by being obedient to Him.” Again, *that* is a life-changing, transformational truth!

The Key Ideas Bible Handbook is ultimately a tool that provides an applicational framework from Genesis to Revelation. It will enable you as a Christian to understand not only what the Bible means, but also what the Bible means *to you* in terms of life-changing truths. Used hand in hand with a Bible, this tool can be truly transformational.

I believe this approach to the Bible reflects the nature of God’s intention for Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:16, for example, we are told Scripture is intended to be “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Or, as The Expanded Bible renders the verse, all Scripture “is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives [refuting error; rebuking], for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right [training in righteousness].”

Some Christians might be tempted to think only the New Testament contains the primary applicational concepts for today’s believers. First Corinthians 10:11

reveals, however, that events that transpired in Old Testament times were written down for our instruction. That means the whole Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—contains applicational concepts to guide and enrich us.

You will notice a number of unique features in *The Key Ideas Bible Handbook*. I devote one chapter to each biblical book. At the head of each chapter is a super-concept—a guiding theme that runs throughout the entire biblical book. This sets the context for all that is to come in that chapter. Then, following a brief historical introduction of the book, are thematic summaries, short word studies, quotes from famous Christians, Bible promises, exhortations, applicational ideas, short outline lists of important teachings, verses to remember, and more. It is all designed to yield a truly enriching and uplifting experience in your Bible study. Flipping through its pages before beginning formal Bible study will whet your appetite for what is to come. Exciting times are ahead!

To get the most out of this book, I suggest you pray something like this whenever you use it alongside the Word of God:

Lord, I ask You to open my eyes and enhance my understanding so I can grasp what You want me to learn today [Psalm 119:18]. I also ask You to enable me, by Your Spirit, to apply the applicational concepts I learn to my daily life. I ask You to guide me moment by moment by Your Word [Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:15-17]. I thank You in Jesus's name, amen.

Let's begin our journey!

Genesis

God created humanity. Though human sin caused alienation with God, God’s merciful plan of salvation was set in motion from the very beginning. The plan began with a man of faith (Abraham) who gave rise to a nation of promise (Israel).

Timeline

- 2166— Abram is born.
- 2091— Abram enters into Canaan.
- 2080— Ishmael is born.
- 2066— Isaac is born.
- 2006— Jacob and Esau are born.
- 1915— Joseph is born.
- 1898— Joseph is sold into slavery.
- 1885— Joseph begins ruling in Egypt.
- 1876— Jacob and his family go to Egypt.
- 1805— Joseph dies.
- 1529— Aaron is born.
- 1526— Moses is born.
- 1445–1405— Moses writes Genesis.

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: ‘I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.’”

—Isaiah 44:24

The book of Genesis was written by Moses between 1445 and 1405 BC and is foundational to a proper understanding of the rest of the Bible. After all, Genesis not only tells us about the origins of the universe and humankind, it also informs us of the origins of human sin, suffering, and death. God’s work of redemption, as recorded throughout the rest of Scripture, would make little sense if we did not first understand these foundational truths in the book of Genesis. We might say Genesis sets the stage for all that follows in the rest of Scripture. The word “genesis” literally means “beginnings.”

Following are key applicational concepts in Genesis:

God is your Creator, so have some creaturely respect.

Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God also created human beings upon the earth (1:26-27; see also 5:1; 9:6). As creatures, you and I are responsible to obey the Creator. The psalmist—reflecting back on the book of Genesis—put it this way: “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3). Indeed, “Come, let us worship and bow down;

let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Psalm 95:6-7).

You and I are made in the image of God. Live accordingly!

Genesis 1:27 tells us, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Elsewhere in Scripture, we learn man was created in God’s image in the sense that he is a finite reflection of God in his rational nature (Colossians 3:10), in his moral nature (Ephesians 4:24), and in his dominion over creation (Genesis 1:27-28). In the same way the moon reflects the brilliant light of the sun, so finite man—as created in God’s image—is a reflection of God in these aspects.

My friend, since part of being created in God’s image relates to our rational nature, doesn’t it make sense to fill our minds with God’s Word (Colossians 3:16)? And since part of being created in God’s image relates to our moral nature, doesn’t it make sense to follow the moral injunctions in God’s Word (James 1:22-23)? Let’s do it!

God created you as a social being. Don’t try to go it alone in life.

God affirmed, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). God accordingly gave Adam a wife named Eve. She became his “helper”—a word that carries the idea “one who supports.” When you think about it, all of us need support. All of us need companionship with other people. So don’t try to go it alone in life. We need each other.

Sin brings alienation between humans and God, but confession of sin brings restoration.

When Adam and Eve sensed the approach of God in the garden of Eden after they partook of the fruit, they “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). This hiding was rooted in the shame, remorse, confusion, guilt, and fear that accompany rebellion against God. We tend to respond in the same way.

Of course, there is no place to hide from God (Psalm 139:1-2,7-8). The best step to take after succumbing to sin is to confess it to God so that fellowship with Him can be restored (Psalm 32:3,5; 51:4; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9).

No Hiding from God

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there” (Psalm 139:7-8).

“Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:24).

Sin brings about both spiritual death and physical death.

God warned Adam that he would die the same day he ate of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17). This does not contradict Genesis 5:5, which tells us Adam lived to the age of 930 years. When Adam and Eve sinned, they did not die that day physically, but they did die spiritually. The word “death” carries the idea of separation. Spiritual death involves the separation of the human being from God. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they were immediately separated from God in a spiritual sense—“dead...in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Their spiritual separation from God eventually led to their physical deaths (Genesis 5:5).

“Sin is always at work in the heart; a temporary lull in its assaults means not that it is dead, but that it is very much alive...Sin’s strategy is to induce a false sense of security as a prelude to a surprise attack.”

—J. I. Packer

Good news: Jesus overcame death for us (Hebrews 2:14-15). Those who trust in Him for salvation are recipients of eternal life (John 3:14-16,36; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13,20). Rejoice!

People often make excuses when they sin.

“A sin is two sins when it is defended.”

—Henry Smith (1560–1591)

When Adam was confronted by God about his sin, he said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12). When Eve was confronted by God, she said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (verse 13). Both passed the buck. Both made excuses.

We tend to make excuses as well (Luke 14:16-24). When we sin, let’s be honest with God and admit our failures (Psalm 51:3,4,6; 32:5; 1 John 1:9). Only then will we be restored into proper fellowship with God.

“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

—Micah 6:8

Walk with God each and every day.

“Enoch walked with God” (Genesis 5:22), as did Noah (Genesis 6:9). You and I may not walk with God in the exact same sense as Enoch and Noah, but Scripture says much about our spiritual walk with God. We ought to walk honestly (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), and in a way that is worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10). We should walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). We should have a godly walk characterized by integrity (Proverbs 20:7). We should walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit

(Galatians 6:8) and seek to walk as Jesus Himself walked (1 John 2:6). Walk with God!

God is holy and responds in sudden judgment in the face of unrepentant sin.

We often find sudden destruction falling upon the wicked in the Bible. The unrepentant people living during Noah's time experienced a sudden and catastrophic flood (Genesis 6–9). They had 120 years to repent as Noah preached to them, but they ignored him, and irrevocable judgment suddenly fell (6:3–7).

Sudden judgment is a common theme in Scripture. Proverbs 6:15 issues this warning about the wicked: “Therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.” Isaiah 47:11 warns sinners that “ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing.”

God doesn't mess around. He means business when it comes to sin.

God's favor falls on those who live His way.

Many people in biblical times found favor with God. The Genesis account reveals that “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). A bit later, we are told that “the LORD was with Joseph” and “gave him favor” (39:21).

Elsewhere in Scripture we read that “the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:26). “David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him” (2 Samuel 5:10). The angel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).

How 'bout it, my friend? Do you seek God's favor? If so, then imitate the people I just mentioned by living righteously and in obedience to God (Proverbs 12:2).

God rescues His own people before sending judgment upon the rebellious.

God is often seen rescuing His people before His judgment falls upon the rebellious (2 Peter 2:5–9). Enoch was transferred to heaven before the judgment

Cross-References: God as a Judge

Genesis 16:5 • 18:25 • 30:6 • 31:53
 • 1 Chronicles 16:33 • Psalm 7:8 •
 50:4 • 58:11 • 67:4 • 75:7 • Ecclesi-
 astes 12:14 • Isaiah 2:4 • Micah 4:3
 • 1 Peter 1:17 • Revelation 20:11–15

“It's not great talent that God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus.”

—Robert Murray M'Cheyne
 (1813–1843)

of the flood (Genesis 5:24). Noah and his family were in the ark before the judgment of the flood (Genesis 7:1,6-7). Lot was taken out of Sodom before judgment was poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-22). The firstborn among the Hebrews in Egypt were sheltered by the blood of the Paschal lamb before judgment fell (Exodus 12:7,13). The spies were safely out of Jericho and Rahab was secured before judgment fell on Jericho (Joshua 2). One day, the church will be rescued by the rapture before judgment falls during the tribulation period (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

God is a relentless promise keeper. You can take Him at His word.

Generation after generation, the evidence mounts that God is a relentless promise keeper. The Abrahamic covenant is a perfect example. God in this covenant made unconditional promises to Abraham. Among other things, God promised Abraham and his descendants, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5). Later in Genesis, we read that the Israelites “were fruitful and multiplied greatly” (47:27). The promise was already beginning to be fulfilled.

God also promised Abraham that all the people of the earth would be blessed by one of his descendants (Genesis 12:3). Fast-forward to New Testament times. Jesus is the descendant from the physical line of Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed (Matthew 1:1-2).

All this gives us boldness in believing that all the other promises in the Bible about our Savior are just as reliable. There is good reason to anchor ourselves on the promises of God.

God’s Promises Never Fail

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Numbers 23:19).

“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” (Joshua 23:14 NIV).

God uses flawed human beings in the out-working of His plan of salvation.

God uses imperfect humans to accomplish His purposes. God used Noah even though he got drunk (Genesis 9:21). God used Abraham even though he lied on several occasions (20:2). God used Sarah even though she laughed at the suggestion that God would enable her to have a son in old age (18:12-13). God used Jacob even though he was a deceiver (25:19-34; 27:1-41). This gives us confidence that God can use us too!

Trusting God against all odds brings phenomenal blessing.

A number of the people mentioned in Genesis are heroes of faith. Perhaps the best example is Abraham, who showed unflinching faith when obeying God's command to sacrifice his own son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19). Of course, God stopped him just in the nick of time.

You and I also encounter tests of our faith. James 1:2 urges us to "count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (see also 1 Peter 1:6-7). I urge you: trust God no matter what!

Never forget: with God all things are possible.

Even though Abraham and Sarah were too old to have a baby, the Lord said to Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). God can do anything He desires: "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isaiah 46:10 NIV).

Are you facing an insurmountable problem? Turn to the God who can do the impossible.

Good news: you are justified (declared righteous) by faith alone.

Abram "believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). We call this "justification by faith." The word "justified" is a legal term. Negatively, the word means one is once-for-all pronounced not guilty before God. Positively, the word means one is once-for-all pronounced righteous. You and I are justified by faith in Christ (Romans 3:25,28,30).

Warning: sin can lead to the domino effect.

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:18-36). In so doing, they sinned greatly and then encountered the "domino effect." By "domino effect," I am referring to how one sin can easily lead to another. In this case, the ten brothers initially sinned against their father by selling his beloved Joseph into slavery.

Trusting God When Life Hurts

Joseph trusted God even when his life was full of trouble. God greatly blessed him (Genesis 50:20).

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15).

"Trust in him at all times... God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8).

"Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."

—George Muller (1805–1898)

"In no case must we permit sin to find a lodging in our mind. Learn to say 'no' right in the moment sin approaches you. Only thus is victory possible."

—Erich Sauer (1898–1959)

This quickly led to another sin involving spilling blood on Joseph's coat to deceive their father into thinking Joseph was dead. They allowed the deception to continue for decades.

Sin is like a cancer. Unless checked, it can grow and grow. Better to nip it in the bud.

Never forget: God has the amazing ability to bring good out of evil.

Cross-References: God's Sovereignty

Exodus 15:18 • Deuteronomy 4:39 • 10:14 • 2 Chronicles 20:6 • Psalm 9:7 • 29:10 • 33:8-11 • 47:2 • 83:18 • 103:19 • Isaiah 40:21-26 • 46:10 • Daniel 4:34-35 • Romans 14:11 • Ephesians 1:20-22

God can bring good out of evil. A great example is Joseph's story (Genesis 45:1–50:26). He was sold into slavery by his own brothers. Once he was brought down to Egypt, he was eventually falsely accused by an immoral woman and then thrown into prison. All the while, God was sovereignly working behind the scenes. In the end, He used these circumstances to elevate Joseph to a position of great authority in Egypt so Joseph could then save many people from famine.

Here's a great Bible promise: "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Don't hold grudges. Forgiveness is the better path.

Cross-References: Forgiveness

Genesis 50:17 • Matthew 5:39 • 5:43-44 • 6:14 • Mark 11:25 • Luke 6:27,37 • Romans 12:17,19 • Ephesians 4:32 • Colossians 3:13

Once Jacob died, Joseph's brothers worried that Joseph would seek retribution for the sin they committed decades ago (selling him into slavery). But Joseph urged them, "Do not fear" (Genesis 50:19). He said God was the one who ultimately brought him down to Egypt (50:20). Joseph had completely forgiven his brothers.

My friend, forgiving others is one of the most important lessons we can learn. Colossians 3:13 instructs, "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

A Thought to Anchor in Your Heart

Don't compromise. Walk with God and experience His favor.

Exodus

God does whatever is necessary to bring deliverance and redemption to His people.

Exodus is one of the most loved books in the Old Testament. One reason for this is that it has all the elements of a great story—strong personalities, powerful drama, great dialogue, and victorious underdogs. But more important, it is a true story about how God redeemed His people from bondage.

This book, written by Moses in about 1440 BC, is a continuation of the story that began in Genesis—particularly chapters 37–50. This is clear not only in the fact that the first seven verses of Exodus 1 repeat information from Genesis, but the first word of verse 1 in the Hebrew text of Exodus is the word “And.” This little word connects the books of Exodus and Genesis to each other.

In the Hebrew Bible, Exodus is titled “And these are the names.” This title is based on the opening words of the book (Exodus 1:1). The ancients often titled a book according to its first words.

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek language, the book was given a new title. It was called Exodus, from the Greek word *exodos*. This is a compound word that joins two Greek words: *ek* (meaning “out of”) and *odos* (meaning “a road”). Taken together, the word “exodus” means “a road out of” or “departure.” This title describes the central event in the book: Israel’s departure from Egypt as a result of the ten plagues God inflicted on Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The book also deals with God’s establishment of a theocratic (God-ruled) nation under Moses by means of a new “constitution” called the Sinai covenant (Exodus 16–40). In this covenant, God gave instructions for the ordering of life

Timeline

- 1885**—Joseph begins ruling in Egypt.
- 1876**—Jacob and his family go to Egypt.
- 1529**—Aaron is born.
- 1526**—Moses is born.
- 1486**—Moses flees to Midian from Egypt.
- 1446**—The first Jewish Passover is celebrated; the Jews leave Egypt.
- 1446**—Pharaoh and the Egyptians are defeated at the Red Sea.
- 1445**—The Ten Commandments are given.
- 1445**—The tabernacle is built and dedicated.
- 1444**—Israel camps at Mount Sinai.
- 1440**—Moses writes the book of Exodus.

among the Hebrew people through the commandments given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Exodus also provides detailed information about the tabernacle and the ministry of the priests.

Biblical Covenants

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. In Bible times God made covenants with

- Noah (Genesis 9:8-17);
- Abraham (Genesis 15:12-21; 17:1-14);
- The Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5,6);
- David (2 Samuel 7:13; 23:5); and
- God's people in the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).

From the time of Joseph's death at the end of Genesis to the time of the book of Exodus, nearly 300 years had passed. The Israelites had once been favored and privileged guests of Pharaoh and Joseph, but now they had become a nation of slaves. The ruler who had been favorably disposed toward Joseph had died. And Egypt had forgotten its indebtedness to Joseph.

The new king, unfamiliar with Joseph, departed from his predecessor's graciousness. He introduced a harsh policy against the Hebrews designed to guarantee the national security of Egypt and alleviate fears of a possible Israelite rebellion.

The backdrop of Pharaoh's fear was that the Israelite population had grown at an incredible pace. Pharaoh feared that if a foreign invader made war with Egypt, the Israelites might join forces with them and overrun Egypt (Exodus 1:10). So Pharaoh decided to initiate a policy that would exploit their labor potential (by slavery) while at the same time check their growing population. He did this by consigning the Israelites to hard labor in building treasure cities.

"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"

—Numbers 23:19

God Can Bring Good out of Evil

"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The Israelites suffered cruel bondage in this way for 400-plus years. But God had not forgotten the promise He made to the patriarchs. He "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). He would send a deliverer.

Following are key applicational concepts in Exodus:

God's people are not exempt from bad things happening—even for an extended time.

Bad things sometimes happen to God's people—and sometimes the bad circumstances can last a long, long time. The Lord had previously warned Abraham about this: "The LORD said to Abram, 'Know

for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13). This is a rounded-off number. Exodus 12:40 provides the exact time: “The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.” (See also Acts 7:6.)

We are not exempt from bad things happening today either. In fact, Scripture warns us, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

God cares about the oppressed in the world.

When Joseph brought his family to Egypt, he had no idea a subsequent ruler would end up enslaving them—indeed, his entire people (Exodus 1:1-14). What was intended to be a blessing turned out to be the curse of oppression.

God, of course, does not countenance slavery. From the very beginning, God declared that all humans are created in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). The apostle Paul also declared that we are all “God’s offspring” (Acts 17:29), and that God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

Moreover, despite the fact that slavery was countenanced in the Semitic cultures of the day, the law in the Bible demanded that slaves eventually be set free (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:40). Likewise, servants had to be treated with respect (Exodus 21:20,26). Israel, itself in slavery in Egypt for a prolonged time, was constantly reminded by God of this (Deuteronomy 5:15), and their emancipation became the model for the liberation of all slaves (Leviticus 25:40).

Though the apostle Paul urged bondservants to obey their earthly masters (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22), he was not approving of the institution of slavery but was simply alluding to the *de facto* situation in his day. He was instructing servants to be good workers, just as believers should be today, but he was not commending slavery. Paul also instructed all believers to be obedient to government (even if unjust) for the Lord’s sake (Romans 13:1; see also Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13). But this in no way condones oppression and tyranny, which the Bible repeatedly condemns (Isaiah 10:1; Exodus 2:23-25). We must stand against all forms of oppression in the world today.

One in Christ

Paul declared that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

All social classes are broken down in Christ; we are all equal before God.

Training for serving God can sometimes take a long time.

God heard the cry of His people and raised up Moses to deliver them. Though Moses grew up in Egypt, and was trained and cultured as an Egyptian, he witnessed the unfair treatment of his own Hebrew people and did not like it. After killing an Egyptian taskmaster for treating a Hebrew harshly, he was driven into the wilderness, where he became a shepherd (Exodus 2:11-15). How quickly circumstances changed. This happened when Moses was 40 years old (Acts 7:23-29).

Moses spent the next 40 years as a shepherd in the land of Midian (Exodus 2:11-15). This served to be a time of education for him. Previously, he had studied under the Egyptians. Now God taught him how to survive in the desert and how to be a good shepherd. These are skills he would need in shepherding the Israelites out of Egypt toward the Promised Land.

Eventually God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and commanded him to go to Egypt to deliver His people (Exodus 3:2). Moses was hesitant at first, but God assured him He would be with him and that he would succeed in his task. God had thoroughly prepared him.

When God assigns you to a task, excuses are not acceptable.

When God commissioned Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, Moses responded, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

God responded to Moses, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (Exodus 4:11-12).

God would not allow this or any other excuse from Moses. When God assigns a person to a task, excuses are not acceptable. Obedience is the only option.

Examples of Excuses

- Adam’s excuse—Genesis 3:12
- Eve’s excuse—Genesis 3:13
- Moses’s excuse—Exodus 4:1,10
- A potential disciple’s excuse—Matthew 8:21
- A potential disciple’s excuse—Luke 9:59
- No excuses—Romans 1:20

You can learn much about God by the names He uses for Himself.

In the ancient world a name was not a mere label as it is today. A name was considered equivalent to whomever or whatever bore it. Knowing a person’s name amounted to knowing his essence and being.

With that in mind, God ascribes the name Yahweh to Himself (“the LORD”)

when speaking to Moses (Exodus 3:15). This name indicates God is eternally self-existent. He never came into being at a point in time. He has always existed. He is the eternal God. The name also points to God's covenant faithfulness.

Later in Exodus, God is called Yahweh-Nissi—a term meaning “the Lord Our Banner.” Israel could not defeat her enemies in her own strength. The battles were to be the Lord's because He was Israel's banner—her source of victory (Exodus 17:15).

Today you and I are privileged to call God “Abba”—an Aramaic term of great intimacy, loosely meaning “daddy” or “papa” (Romans 8:15).

God's servants are sometimes thrown into very difficult situations, but God always remains in providential control.

Moses appeared before Pharaoh and proclaimed, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go.’” Pharaoh said he did not know the God of the Jews. Pharaoh then defiantly added to the burden of the Jews by commanding that they make bricks without any straw (Exodus 5). God reassured Moses that He would yet deliver the Jews. Moses communicated this to the Jews, but they were too disheartened to listen (6:1-9). The Lord promised to stretch out His hand against the Egyptians and bend their will (6:10–7:13). But the Jews remained discouraged. This was not an easy experience for Moses.

This brings to mind how the apostle Paul in New Testament times often found himself in uneasy circumstances in service to the Lord. In fact, the Lord Jesus said this of Paul: “He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16).

It is entirely possible that we may be called to serve Christ in some capacity that is way outside our comfort zone and proves to be very difficult. But relax. Jesus has promised, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

God can and does use miraculous power to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

Pharaoh was not about to listen to reason. He was arrogant and prideful, defying the God of Israel. God therefore empowered Moses to inflict ten plagues upon the Egyptians: (1) Nile turned to blood (Exodus

Notable Divine Deliverances

- Daniel's friends were rescued from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3).
- Daniel was rescued from the lions' den (Daniel 6).
- Jesus was rescued from death through the resurrection (Luke 24).

7:14-25); (2) swarm of frogs (8:1-15); (3) swarm of gnats (8:16-19); (4) swarm of flies (8:20-32); (5) diseased livestock (9:1-7); (6) outbreak of boils (9:8-12); (7) hail from sky (9:13-35); (8) swarm of locusts (10:1-20); (9) land engulfed in darkness (10:21-29); and (10) killing of firstborn among Egyptians (11:1-12:36). These judgments brought Egypt to its knees, and the Jews were released from bondage.

Yahweh is incomparable. There is no one like Him.

Two Means of Expressing Yahweh's Incomparability

Negation: "There is no one like the LORD our God" (Exodus 8:10).

Rhetorical questions: "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?" (Exodus 15:11).

In Egyptian religion, the god at the very top of the totem pole was the sun god, Re. Next in line was Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, who was considered to be the son of Re. So Pharaoh was himself considered a god in his own right. Because Re was considered superior to all other gods, his son—Pharaoh, the king—was also considered to possess unmatched power as a god. This adds a whole new dimension to the Exodus account.

It is as though a contest occurs between the true God on the one side and the false gods of Egypt's mystery religions on the other side (see Numbers 33:4).

Pharaoh was unable to turn back the mighty plagues of Yahweh. The Egyptian Nile River god Nilus was unable to respond when Yahweh turned the whole river to blood (Exodus 7:17-21). The Egyptian sun god, Re, was unable to respond when Yahweh turned the entire land dark (Exodus 10:21-22). The Egyptian pantheon was impotent before Yahweh. (This is not unexpected, since other so-called gods do not really exist.)

Today there are many pretenders to the divine throne. Don't be fooled. Truly, there is no one like God in all the universe. He is incomparable.

Victories sometimes entail a level of final resistance that must be overcome.

The Egyptians had let the Israelites go, and God led them into the wilderness near the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-22). The Egyptians then *re-pursued* them (14:1-9). Seeing their sudden danger, the Israelites rebelled against Moses and God (14:1-12). God, however, quickly opened the Red Sea so the Israelites could go across. The Egyptians continued to pursue, but God caused the waters of the Red Sea to close upon and destroy them (14:13-31). The fickle Israelites then thanked God (15:1-21).

Here's an important lesson to remember: we must never give up in our service to God. "With us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chronicles 32:8). God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

God is the Sustainer of the universe. That means He is also your personal Sustainer.

In the wilderness, God preserved His people from thirst (Exodus 15:22-27; 17:1-7), hunger (16), defeat (17:8-16), and from potential chaos through effective governing (18). In short, God took care of His people.

Jesus is the Sustainer of the universe. "He upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

The word "upholds" does not refer to a mere passive support—like an Atlas supporting the weight of the world in his hands. Nor does it merely indicate the idea of maintenance. The word carries the idea of movement toward a final goal, toward an appointed course. Scripture reveals that Jesus sustained the Israelites during the wilderness sojourn following their deliverance from Egypt (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). He also sustains you and me (Colossians 1:17).

God as Sustainer

"If God maintains sun and planets in bright and ordered beauty, He can keep us."

—F. B. Meyer (1847–1929)

God provides His people with behavioral parameters to guide their living day to day.

God instituted a covenant with His people, the Jews (Exodus 19:1-25). This covenant necessitated obedience to the Ten Commandments (20:1-26). The Ten Commandments can be broken down into two basic categories. The first four commandments pertain to the Israelites' relationship with God: (1) Have no other gods; (2) Have no graven images of God; (3) Do not take the Lord's name in vain; and (4) Keep the Sabbath. The next six commandments deal with the Israelites' relationships with each other: (5) Honor parents; (6) Do not kill; (7) Do not commit adultery; (8) Do not steal; (9) Do not bear false witness; and (10) Do not covet.

In view of this, the total content of the Ten Commandments can be summarized in two briefer commandments: (1) Love God; and (2) Love your neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). For this reason, Jesus said the greatest commandment is "Love the Lord your God," while the second is "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

God's commandments were given to Israel not to place a burden on the people, but to set them apart and distinguish them from surrounding pagan nations. They were provided to make the Israelites wise, great, and pleasing to a holy God. Those who obeyed the commandments reaped great blessing. Those who disobeyed brought discipline upon themselves (Exodus 19:3-25).

A Thought to Anchor in Your Heart

Just as Moses delivered the Israelites from physical slavery,
so Jesus—the greater Deliverer—has delivered you
from slavery to sin. Rejoice!

Leviticus

God is holy. He desires His people to be holy as well.

Leviticus was written by Moses between 1445 and 1405 BC. The book contains multiple ceremonial and ritual rules and regulations designed to govern every imaginable aspect of life among the ancient Israelites. Following the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, Israel was called to a new way of life, involving priests, tabernacle worship, sacrifices, and the like, making such rules and regulations necessary. So Leviticus contains laws about offerings and sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7); laws on the appointment and conduct of priests (8–10); laws about ritual cleansing, personal hygiene, and food (11–15); instructions regarding the Day of Atonement (16); and information and laws regarding Israel’s festivals (17–27).

This book takes its name from the Levites, the priestly tribe in ancient Israel. Leviticus literally means “pertaining to the Levites.” It was written essentially for the priests, who were then to instruct God’s people on these laws.

Perhaps the most pivotal statement in the book of Leviticus is this: “I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). A bit later in the book, the Lord repeated, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2). All the laws, rules, and regulations contained in this book are merely an outgrowth of the call to be holy. The Israelites were to be holy (or separate) from the pagan nations around them. And since God, as the divine Ruler, had made a covenant with the Israelites, the Israelites were obligated to obey the holiness stipulations of the covenant.

The regulations regarding the tabernacle and sacrificial system are no longer binding on us today, for Christ’s sacrifice was once-for-all, rendering the entire

Timeline

- 1526—Moses is born.
- 1446—The first Jewish Passover is celebrated; the Jews leave Egypt.
- 1445—The Ten Commandments are given.
- 1445—The tabernacle is built and dedicated.
- 1445–1405—Moses writes Leviticus.

“A true love to God must begin with a delight in his holiness.”

—Jonathan Edwards
(1703–1758)

“I believe the holier a man becomes, the more he mourns over the unholiness which remains in him.”

—Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Old Testament sacrificial system obsolete (Hebrews 9:13–10:18). Nor are the food laws about hygiene binding on us today (Colossians 2:16–17). What *does* remain is God’s holiness and His call on His followers to live in holiness (1 Peter 1:15–16).

Following are key applicational concepts in Leviticus:

God’s holiness has profound implications for how you live.

The underlying theme of Leviticus is God’s holiness: “I am the LORD your God...I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). “I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2).

Biblically, God’s holiness means not just that He is entirely separate from evil but also that He is absolutely righteous. He is pure in every way. He is separate from all that is morally imperfect.

A key ramification of this is that if we want to fellowship with God, we have to take personal holiness seriously. Walking daily with God in fellowship necessarily involves living in a way that is pleasing to Him. And that is the secondary emphasis in the book of Leviticus. Because God is holy, God’s people must be holy: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2).

We find the need for God’s people to be holy repeated in the New Testament:

“As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15). “God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14; see also 1 John 1:5,7). My friend, I urge you to take this seriously. Holiness is a big deal to God.

God Is Holy

- “Majestic in holiness” (Exodus 15:11)
- “There is none holy like the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:2)
- “The Lord our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9)
- His “name is Holy” (Isaiah 57:15)
- “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)
- “The Holy One in your midst” (Hosea 11:9)

There is a right way and a wrong way to worship God.

In the context of the book of Leviticus, the right way of worship hinged on God’s laws regarding offerings and sacrifices—including general laws on the burnt offering (Leviticus 1:1–17), grain offering (2:1–16), peace offering (3:1–17), sin offering (4:1–5:13), and guilt offering (5:14–6:7). We also find *specific* laws on the burnt offering (6:8–13), grain offering (6:14–23), sin offering (6:24–30), guilt offering (7:1–10), and peace offering (7:11–38). Careful attention to these ritual requirements was necessary for all the people.

Today we no longer follow such ceremonial laws on worship, for they passed away with the coming of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4). The New Testament—along with supplementary insights from Psalms—tells us all we need to know about proper worship today.

The New Testament teaches that God alone is to be worshiped—not human beings, not angels, not idols, not anything else (Matthew 4:10; Acts 14:11-18; Revelation 19:10). Worship involves reverencing God, adoring Him, praising Him, venerating Him, and paying homage to Him, not just outwardly in a corporate setting, but in our hearts as well.

The church is a place of worship. The Hebrew word for worship, *shaha*, means “to bow down” or “to prostrate oneself” (Genesis 22:5; 42:6). Likewise, the New Testament word for worship, *proskuneo*, means “to prostrate oneself” (Matthew 2:2,8,11). In Old English, “worship” was rendered “worthship,” pointing to the worthiness of the God we worship. Such worship is the proper response of a creature to the divine Creator (Psalm 95:6). Worship can be congregational in nature (1 Corinthians 11–14) or individual (Romans 12:1). Worship does not stop on earth, but continues in heaven when believers enter into glory (Revelation 4–5).

The backdrop to combining praise and song in worship of God is found in the psalms. Psalm 28:7 says, “My heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” Psalm 69:30 says, “I will praise the name of God with a song.” Psalm 95:2 says, “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!” Psalm 149:1 says, “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song.”

The New Testament continues the emphasis on praise and song. Ephesians 5:19-20 says we should address “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Colossians 3:16 likewise instructs, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

“God is not moved or impressed with our worship until our hearts are moved and impressed by Him.”

—Kelly Sparks

Jesus accepted worship from

- Thomas (John 20:28);
- the angels (Hebrews 1:6);
- wise men (Matthew 2:11);
- a ruler (Matthew 9:18);
- a blind man (John 9:38);
- Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:9); and
- the disciples (Matthew 28:17).

Of course, because Jesus is the heart of Christianity, much of our worship should center on Him. Jesus—as God—is to be worshiped just as the Father is worshiped (Revelation 4–5). He was worshiped (Greek: *proskuneo*) as God many times according to the Gospel accounts—and He always accepted such worship as perfectly appropriate.

The sacrificial system shows the heavy cost to be paid for sin: a life for a life.

The Day of Atonement was annually celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar—the month of Tishri (September/October). Only once a year could Aaron (or the high priest) enter into the Holy of Holies, the innermost part of the tabernacle, where the Ark of the Covenant was located. Before doing this, however, he had to secure forgiveness for his own sins. He did this by sacrificing a bull as a sin offering for himself, and he would sprinkle some of the blood in front of the Ark of the Covenant (Leviticus 4:5; 16; 23:27).

Only after the high priest's sin had been forgiven could he then go on to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people of Israel. He would first kill a goat for the sins of the people. Then hands were laid on a second goat, and the high priest would symbolically transfer the guilt of the people to it, after which it was driven into the desert to symbolize that their sins had been carried away.

Since these sacrifices took place annually, the Israelites were reminded year in and year out that sin cut them off from God, so there was a regular need for atonement. This makes the sacrifice of Christ all the more important, for His sacrifice was once-for-all (Hebrews 9:9; 10:10). He gave His life for us! What an awesome Savior we have in Jesus.

Obedience to God brings blessing. Disobedience brings chastisement.

"It might be well if we stopped using the words 'victory' and 'defeat' to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the words 'obedience' and 'disobedience.'"

—Jerry Bridges

A theme found not only in Leviticus but throughout the Bible is that obedience brings blessing whereas disobedience brings chastisement. In Leviticus, God instructs, "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit" (Leviticus 26:3–4). Other blessings would come as well, including dwelling securely in the land, peace

in the land, and victory over all enemies.

By contrast, dire consequences would result “if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant” (Leviticus 26:14-15). The people would suffer disease, defeat at the hands of their enemies, failed crops, and much more.

Once we get to New Testament times, a primary emphasis is that we show our love for Christ by our obedience to Him. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). Those who obey Christ are even called Christ’s friends: “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

A Thought to Anchor in Your Heart

Make every effort to be best friends with Jesus.