

## **Moses as Leader and Exodus 32-34**

*While Moses was having a “mountaintop” experience with the Lord, the people were sinning in the valley below. Spiritual leadership brings both blessings and burdens.*

### **Moses the Intercessor (32:1-35)**

In the first six verses we see the people sinning, a great offense to God. The Israelites were God’s chosen, redeemed by His grace out of Egypt. He had led them, fed them, and protected them from the enemy, making them part of His covenant. He had given them laws, and the people had agreed to obey in this conditional covenant (19:8; 24:3-7). Here at Sinai, the people had seen the awesome display of God’s glory and had trembled at His power. Yet, despite all these marvelous experiences, they disobeyed the Lord and lapsed into idolatry and immorality.

Moses had agreed to God’s giving him Aaron as a helper (4:10-17), but now Aaron had become a leader in helping the people sin. When did Aaron come down from the mountain? Why did he not rebuke the people and turn to God for help? To say that Aaron made the calf as a symbol of God, stooping to the weakness of the people, does not excuse him; for Aaron knew what the Lord had said about idols (20:1-6).

The basic cause of this sin was unbelief: the people became impatient while waiting for Moses, and without true faith they decided they had to have something they could see. Impatience and unbelief led to idolatry, and idolatry led to immorality (see Romans 1:18-32).

Moses does, thankfully, intercede (vv.7-14) even though the Lord knew what was going on in the Israelite camp. (Also, see Hebrews 4:13) Note how God seemed to “blame” Moses for what had happened, but Moses was quick to remind the Lord that Israel was His people. It was God’s glory that was at stake and not Moses’ reputation, so Moses reminded the Lord of His promises to the patriarchs.

When Scripture says that the Lord “repents,” it is using human language to describe a divine response (Num. 23:19; Jer. 18:7-10; Amos 7:1-6). Twice during Moses’ lifetime, God offered to destroy Israel and use Moses to found a new nation (v. 10; Numbers 14:12), but he refused. The Israelites never knew the price Moses paid to be their leader. How much they owed to him and yet how little they showed their appreciation! God was even going to kill Aaron, but Moses interceded for him (Deut. 9:20).

In His grace, God forgave their sins, but in his government, He had to discipline the people. How many tears have been caused by the painful consequences of forgiven sins! Moses had a right to be angry and to humble Aaron and the people. By breaking the two tables of the Law, written by God, Moses dramatically showed the people the greatness of their sin. Instead of confessing his sins, Aaron made excuses. He blamed the people for their depravity (v.22), Moses for his delay (v.23), and the furnace for the delivery of the calf! After dealing with the people, Moses returned to the Lord on the mountain and offered to give up his own life that the people might be spared. (See

Romans 9:3) When a person dies, his or her name is removed from the book of life (Ps. 69:28; Ezek. 13:9). The book of life (or the “living”) should not be confused with the Lamb’s Book of Life, which records the names of the saved (Rev. 21:27; Luke 10:20).

### **Moses the Mediator (33:1-17)**

As intercessor, Moses stood between the nation and their past sins. As mediator, he stood between the nation and their future blessings. Moses was not content just to have the nation forgiven; he wanted to be sure that God would go with them as they continued their march to the Promised Land. When the people heard that God would not go with them, they humbled themselves and mourned. It is one thing to mourn b/c of God’s discipline of our sins and quite something else to mourn b/c of God’s distance resulting from our pride. In our affliction, God sends grace; in our obstinacy, God serves up humble pie.

The tent described in vv.7-11 is not the tabernacle, for that was not constructed yet. This was the tent where God met with Moses and shared His plans with him (Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 34:10). As a symbolic gesture to show Israel how wicked they had been, Moses moved the tent outside the camp. Some of the people went out to meet with God while others merely watched as Moses went out. Joshua was one who stayed with Moses and kept vigil at the tent of meeting.

Moses asked for God’s grace to bless the people and God’s presence to go with the people, and the Lord granted his request. After all, it was the glorious presence of God that distinguished Israel from all the other nations. Other nations had laws, priests, and sacrifices. Only Israel had the presence of God among them.

### **Moses the Worshiper (33:18-34:35)**

Moses returned for another forty days with God on the mountain (34:28; Deut. 9:18, 25), and God gave him new tables of Law. The Lord’s proclamation in 34:6-7 became a standard “statement of faith” for the Israelites (Num. 14:18; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Jonah 4:2). The earlier declaration in Exodus 20:5 states that God sends judgment “unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” Even though we are not condemned for the sins of our ancestors, we may suffer long-term consequences. Once again, Moses bowed and worshiped as he communed with the Lord.

God reminded Moses that the people of Israel were to be different from the people living in the land of Canaan, and He warned Moses against the sin of idolatry. What is idolatry? It is exchanging (replacing) the glory of the incorruptible God for an image or object (Romans 1:23) and worshipping and serving the creature instead of the Creator (Romans 1:25). God gave Israel His Law so that they might live godly lives and manifest His glory.

*Read 2 Corinthians 3.* What spiritual lessons do you discover today? The glory of the OT Law was temporary and finally faded away, but the glory of the new covenant grace grows brighter. Moses reflected God's glory and had to wear a veil so the people could not see the glory disappear, but God's people today radiate God's glory from within as they see Jesus Christ in the Word (the mirror) and become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). Ours is a transformative experience as we walk with the Lord.

## **Exodus 35 - 40**

### **People Bring Their Gifts (35:1-29)**

Moses had already told the people that God wanted their willing gifts so that the tabernacle could be built (25:1-8). What grace that God would accept gifts from a people who had disobeyed Him and grieved His heart. These were to be willing gifts from the heart (vv. 5, 21, 26, 29), for the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). Most of the wealth probably came from the people of Egypt (12:35-36) –delayed wages for all the work the Jews had done for the Egyptians. It was “the Lord's offering” (vv. 22, 24, 29), and therefore, they wanted to give their best. In fact, they gave so generously that Moses had to stop them from bringing more (36:4-7).

*Longitudinal studies of giving in the Church show that giving patterns are static. The average person (or family) is said to give about 2% of their annual income. This has not changed in decades. What is your definition of generous giving? Or better said, what is your definition of **willing giving**? How do you think an institution like a Church can cultivate cheerful giving?*

### **Gifted People Give Their Service (35:30-39:43)**

The Holy Spirit gave Bezaleel and Aholiab the wisdom to know what to do and the ability to do it. In like manner, God has given gifts to His people today so that the church might be built up (1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:1-17; Romans 12). Bezaleel and Aholiab did not do all the work themselves, but taught others who assisted them.

In succeeding verses, Moses names the various parts of the tabernacle one by one, as well as the garments of the priests. God is concerned with every detail of our work and does not minimize any aspect of it. The smallest hook for the curtains was as important to Him as the brazen altar. If we are faithful in the small things, God can trust us with the bigger things (Luke 16:10). *What do you think some of those small things might be today?*

Scholars have estimated that in the construction of the tabernacle, the people used nearly a ton of gold, about three and quarter tons of silver, and two and a quarter ton of bronze. Expensive! Whoa!

## **The Lord Gives His Glory (40:1-38)**

Israel had arrived at Sinai three months after their exodus from Egypt (19:1), and it was now the first day of the second year of their pilgrimage (40:2); so nine months transpired from the giving of the Law to the dedicating of the finished tabernacle. Nearly three months of that time, Moses had been with God on the mountain (24:18; 34:28). We see then that the construction of the tabernacle took about 6 months.

As he was setting up the tabernacle for the first time, Moses put up the tent, and then, working outward from the holy of holies, he put pieces of furniture in place. When that was done, he set up the outer court. With everything in its proper place, Moses then anointed the structure and its contents (vv.9-11) and set it apart for the Lord. His final act of dedication was the consecration of Aaron and the priests (vv.13-16), which was followed by their presenting the sacrifices to the Lord (Lev. 8-9).

The climax of the dedication service was the revelation of the glory of God in the fire on the altar (Lev. 9:24) and the cloud in the tent (Ex. 40:34-38; see also 1 Kings 8:10). No matter how expensive the tabernacle was, without the presence of God it was just another tent. The glory not only resided in the tabernacle, but it guided the Israelite on their pilgrim journey. When we speak of the “shekinah glory of God,” we are referring to God’s dwelling in the tabernacle or the temple. The Hebrew word transliterated “shekinah” means “dwelling of God,” from the Hebrew word *shakan* which means “to dwell” (Ex. 29:45-46).

## **Questions for Discussion**

*Out of the 40 chapters we studied, which part(s) of the story resonated with you the most and why?*

*What lesson(s) did you learn from the life of the Israelites and Moses that you can apply to your own life?*

*What does the book of Exodus tell you about God’s character?*

*If someone asked you to briefly tell the story of Exodus, how would you “author” it?*