

Exodus:

The redemption of God's people (1-18),
the covenant with God's people (19-24),
the plans for a worship center for God's people (25-31),
the failure and renewal of God's people (32-34),
the worship center of God's people (35-40).

IV. Comment on the Writing

- A. The Redemption of God's People from Egypt, 1:1-18:27
- B. The Revelation to the God's People at Mount Sinai, 19:1-40:38
 - 1. The revelation of the Mosaic covenant, 19:1-23:33
 - a. The preparation of the people for the giving of the covenant, 19:1-25
 - b. The covenant delineated, 20:1-23:33
 - 2. The Ratification of the Law, 24:1-15
 - 3. Instructions for the worship of God, 25:1-31:17
 - 4. The Breaking of the Covenant and the Renewal of the Covenant, 32:1-34:35

Moses' homecoming was not what he expected. The people were in rebellion. Aaron is eloquent, but his character is weak. What should have been one of the greatest moments of Israel's history became one of the saddest.

- a. The breaking of the covenant by Israel, 32:1-33:23

What a sad commentary after much outpouring of God's mercy. "They have quickly turned aside from the way I commanded them (32:8)." The violation centers on the second command and led to a violation of the seventh (I Cor. 10:7), immorality. The event is summarized in Ps. 106:19-23.

- 1) The folly of the people and Aaron, 32:1-6

- a) The demand of the people, v. 1

Forty is the number indication testing; the people failed. Impatience, rooted in distrust, overwhelmed the people. They continually placed more trust in the visible than the invisible! The request of the people was for a tangible manifestation of God; they believed only what they could see and only if they could see it!

- b) The idol created by Aaron, vv. 2-4

The golden calf was a visible, tangible symbol of God's presence. The people in Moses saw God's presence, but his absence caused consternation. The word idol means "something to be seen." Sadly, the people of God found more comfort in the physical than in invisible realities! How many people do you know want a god on their own terms?

Since only one "god" was created by Aaron, though he asked for "gods," it seems that they asked for an image of the true God. This makes some sense because Aaron said, "These are your gods...who brought you up out of Egypt (v. 4)."

Why a calf-image? Mostly likely, it was a symbol of strength and fertility.

- c) The orgy of the people, vv. 5-6
- 2) The disclosure to Moses, vv. 7-14
 - a) The revelation, vv. 7-8

God revealed to Moses the waywardness of the people and in His wrath refused to call them His people ("your people whom you brought out of Egypt").
 - b) The threatened judgment, vv. 9-10

God threatened to destroy the whole nation and raise up a new one through Moses.
 - c) The intercession of Moses, vv. 11-14

After the recognition of the problem, Moses turned to God in a characteristic fashion, prayer. God threatened to destroy the entire nation, but Moses, the great figure of Christ, interceded. He pleaded three points: God's work in the past ("your people...you brought [v.11]), His reputation (v.12), and His promises (v.13). To me, this is Moses' greatest hour showing his true godliness. To plead with God in intercessory prayer shows more about his character than his pleading with Pharaoh!
- 3) The anger and judgment of Moses, vv. 15-29
 - a) The return of Moses, vv. 15-18

The two stone tablets that Moses carried down the mountain were inscribed on both sides!

- b) The righteous indignation of Moses, vv. 19-20
The breaking of the tablets of stone was a symbolic repudiation of the covenant.
- c) The excuse of Aaron, vv. 21-24
Aaron's excuse for his actions were pathetic: he blamed the people (v. 22) and what was created in the fire was not of his doing (an accident of circumstances [v. 24, a lie [v. 4]]).
- d) The judgment upon the people, vv. 25-29
Three thousand died in judgment executed by the Levites, others by a plague (v. 35)
- 4) The intercession of Moses, 32:30-33
 - a) Moses' plea, 32:30-32
Moses interceded for the people even to the point of offering himself as their judgment (premature physical death).
 - b) The Lord's reply, 32:35-33:3
Though God promised a ravishing plague, He restated the promise of the land and the guidance of "an angel" ("my angel" [v. 34]. "I will not go before you" (v. 3). The promise was fulfilled in the second generation, the generation delivered from Egypt died in the wilderness!
- 5) The people's repentance, 33:4-6
When the people heard that God would no longer lead them, they repented (an outward symbol of their repentance is the discarding of ornaments). Moses again pled with God, not to rescind His rejection because He has already agreed to that, but to go before them. Moses received confirmation of God's continued guiding mercies by revealing His glory to him (33:17-23).
- 6) The presence of the Lord with Moses outside the camp, 33:7-11
What a glorious scene; what an affirmation of God's grace. At the Tent of the Meeting, a distance from the people, God spoke to Moses in a descending Pillar of Cloud.
- 7) The plea of Moses for the people, 33:12-13
Moses expressed a two-fold plea suggesting his needs (Who will lead the people if you refuse? You say you know me, but I am ignorant of your ways.) and a request ("Remember...your people").

- 8) The Lord's assurance to Moses of His presence, 33:14-23
 - a) The promise of divine accompaniment, v. 14
 - b) The final plea for affirmation, vv. 15-16

While God promised Moses His presence through the wilderness sojourn, he made the point that the people were also the Lord's. If He did not go with them, how could it be that God was pleased with Moses, their leader?
 - c) The assurance of restated, v. 17

God showed His pleasure with Moses by embracing His people.
 - d) The request for tangible evidence, v. 18
 - e) The cleft-of-the-rock experience, vv. 19-23

As with seeing God "face-to-face" (v. 11), seeing the "back" of God should be seen as figure of speech for the divine presence. Here is grace personified!
- b. The covenant renewed, and fellowship restored, 34:1-35

The renewal of the covenant is evidenced by the re-writing on stone of the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant (24:7, 34:28), Moses' seventh trip to the mountain (34:2, 4). God revealed His marvelous character to His servant (v. 6-7), yet Moses' passionate concern is not himself, but the people (v. 9).

 - 1) The ascension of Moses with new tables of stone, the promise of a covenant renewed, vv. 1-4

Unlike the original stone tables, Moses prepared them, not God, and brought them up the mountain. On them God would write the ten words or commandments as He had previously. Here is divine grace despite human dereliction!
 - 2) The revelation of God to Moses, vv. 5-7
 - a) The context of the divine disclosure, vv. 5-6a

God appeared to Moses in a cloud, passing before him, as promised (32:21-23).
 - b) The divine disclosure of God's person, vv. 6b-7

The Lord is described in seven characteristics beginning with compassion and ending in justice (justice demands the display of wrath for injustice). The initial five deal with His character, two with the implications of His character as it relates to His actions.

Compassionate = genuinely cares.
Gracious= He does what we do not deserve.
Slow to anger= patience with imperfect people.
Abounding in lovingkindness= long term reliability.
[Abounding in] truth= trustworthy.
Maintaining covenant loyalty.
Forgiving and justly punishing.

3) The worship and plea of Moses, vv. 8-9

Moses' genuine piety surfaces once more in crisis; he is concerned with God's presence for the people "Let the people go with us" (v. 8).

4) The covenant reiterated and renewed, vv. 10-26

a) The preamble, v. 10

"I am making a covenant..."

b) The stipulations, vv. 11-26

(1) The general statement, v. 11

The requirement is that of covenant obedience, the essence of divine blessing in the long term. Remember: obedience is the proper response to grace, not the cause of grace; obedience is the path to enjoying the blessings of the covenant relationship, not earning it.

(2) Their relationship to the Canaanites, vv. 12-16

They are to make no covenants or treaties with the peoples of the land they are about to enter because they are alone bound by promise to God (see 32:32). Covenanting with a people meant embracing their gods; covenant infidelity involves idolatry. Idolatry involves feasts, orgies, and prostitution. While intermarriage on ethnic grounds is not discouraged, it is upon religious grounds.

The commandments that follow sample what is found in Exod. 20-23; in all, there are ten listed commandments (two are couplets) worded grammatically in the fashion of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20).

(3) The avoidance of idolatry, v. 17

This is the second commandment (20:4) reiterated.

(4) The observation of Unleavened Bread, v. 18

This verse repeats 23:15 almost exactly. Remember God's past faithfulness!

(5) The ownership of firstborn, vv. 19-20a

The law of redemption of the first born is an expression of divine grace. Through the possession of God, they could be purchased.

(6) The approach to worship, v. 20b

To truly worship God requires open hearts and open hands!

(7) The observation of Sabbaths, v. 21

The fifth commandment.

(8) The observation of the feasts of First Fruits (Pentecost), Ingathering (Tabernacles), and Passover, vv. 22-26

5) The writing of the covenant by Moses, vv. 27-28

Moses was commanded to write what is found between 20:18 and, at this point, without the narrative portions such as 34:10-26.

This is the second time that Moses was on the mount for forty days in the presence of God. The length of this second sojourn is stated in Deut. 10:10 for the sake of interceding for the people (see Deut. 9:18).

6) The return of Moses, vv. 29-35

In Michelangelo's famous sculpture, Moses is portrayed with horns. He based his depiction upon a word that normally means "horns," based upon Jerome's Latin Vulgate. A secondary meaning of the verb is "shone." As God's presence with Moses was seen in the glowing of his facial features, so here you have tangible evidence of God's approbation to dwell among His people.



What is the point of the comment that Moses' face shone? First, it confirmed that Moses had been in the presence of God denoting authority to act and speak. Second, it confirmed the acceptance of God to dwell among His people.

Applications

1. In our passage the nation of Israel is described as an “obstinate people (32:9)” and that is certainly true. They mirror humanity, God’s people. God proved incessantly gracious and merciful in delivering them from bondage through the greatest of OT miracles, destroying their enemies, and carrying them safely to Mount Sinai where He was gracious in revealing His ways. However, the responsive pattern was only unbelief, grumbling, and disobedience. It sinks to a new low in our passage. All of God’s past blessings seemed to have little value in a new and threatening circumstance. Is this not a picture of us?
2. Moses’ reaction to the disobedience of the people is a model for all of us. In times of trouble and distress, he consistently turned to the Lord revealing the depth of his intimacy with God and dependence on Him. Can Moses become a model for you? Do you turn to the Lord in times of distress with deep emotion and dependence? Do you say to God, “I will not go unless you go with me?”
3. The manner of Moses’ prayer is rather instructive as we pray. In petitioning God, Moses pleads for mercy upon his people by reminding God of three things: God’s past faithfulness to His people in delivering them from Egypt (32:11), His reputation before the Egyptians who would think God was fickle in delivering His people only to destroy them later (32:12), and His covenantal promises. As we intercede for friends and loved ones, this is a wonderful pattern (32:13).
4. Because Moses complained of his inadequacy to lead the people of God, God gave him his articulate brother. What a mistake! He may have been strong in rhetorical skill, but he was dreadfully weak in moral resolve. Here is the lesson for all of us that seeking to compensate for our fears may create problems later. Aaron will prove his weakness later when he openly criticizes his brother. When we need to bring alongside those who can help us, the motive should not be fear of personal inadequacy; it should be to form a team to better accomplish a task. The lesson seems to be that we should find strong people to assist us in both talent and character.
5. In looking at Aaron there are some personal lessons for all of us: (1) it is always wrong to do wrong. Aaron did not help matters in quelling the people’s

- fears by facilitating their disobedience. (2) The difficulty of doing right is always exaggerated by the timid. Aaron is a lesson that fearful, weak leadership leads inevitably to disaster, (3) The consequences of doing wrong are always greater than the wrongdoer at first supposed. What Aaron thought would help lead to the death of thousands who sinned through his dereliction experiencing the wrath of God. (4) It is never beneficial to disobey a commandment of God.
6. Often momentary delights and joys have lasting negative consequences. The people relieved their fears with dancing, but only for a short while. That is the way it is with sinful activities; they look attractive in prospect but never retrospectively. When will we learn this lesson?
 7. Quality leadership may not be popular, but it is imperative; weak leadership is promiscuous and ultimately damaging. Being concessive without warrant and in disobedience is not good leadership. This is true in the home, the marketplace, and the nation. Popularity may be the recipe disaster. Aaron is a case study in this.
 8. Moses realized that the greatest, most important of privileges is to have the presence and blessing of God on the journey. Do we recognize this is our wilderness sojourn?
 9. Is there not a tendency in all of us to seek security in tangible things, things we can see and grasp, rather than the invisible things of God such as His promises? Do you have idols, physical and tangible things, in which you find your security and delight? We live in a land full of idols, which are false comforts. What are some of them in your life? Why do you think it is easier to trust what you see than what is unseen when we know that what is seen is temporal at best and the unseen is eternal?
 10. The Lord punishes our sin, but He will never abandon His promises to us through Abraham. This is one of the great lessons in the Bible. God will not abandon His people to whom He has made promises despite their unfaithfulness. Does this not bring you comfort? Does this not create in you a humble spirit of praise to God and adoration that He is God and not like us?
 11. God delights in the forgiveness of a repentant people. Thank God that He allows us to repent of our sin and not judge us for our sin. Is repentance for wrongdoing a regular part of your worship of God? The structure of prayer may profitably be confession, adoration, and then petition!
 12. Moses is a wonderful model of a selfless servant of the Lord. When God said he would destroy his people and start over with Moses alone, he refused the suggestion though it would have made him first among the “new people” of

God. When God relented and spared the people but would only send an intermediary to lead them, Moses dissented pleading for God presence. When Moses interceded for his people, he identified with their sin (“our iniquity and our sin [34:9]”). When God said that He would go before the people, Moses’ pled for a special sign of God’s intimacy. What a wonderful prayer, “Show me thy Glory (33:18).

13. It is the great fact of the Bible, and Christian faith, that God condescends in grace to communicate with His people. Sin has tragic consequences for the children of God, but even idolatry and adultery are not so terrible that the God of grace cannot forgive and restore. As horrible as Israel’s defection was, God’s grace was far greater. There are two obvious reasons for this: first, God is a God who keeps His promises to His people. His promises are not kept because His children are faithful, but because He is faithful to His children. Second, the gift of God, Jesus Christ, has made sufficient payment in His own blood to atone for all our sins (past, present, and future).
14. It is significant in our passage that God reiterates the nation’s religious obligations after He acted in forgiveness. Grace does not produce laziness; it inspires obedience. Grace precedes duty because duty is the heart-felt response to undeserved mercy. Further, grace is not the absence of either stern warnings or judgment for failure to respond with proper obedience (35:7). The lesson, in part, is that we should not curse our children, or grandchildren, who might live with the implications of our failures.