

Exodus 31-32
December 7, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Let me try to summarize where we are in our study of Exodus. You will recall that the Lord told the Israelites that they were His treasured possession, a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests. After delivering them out of slavery in Egypt, God knew that they wouldn't necessarily know how to function as a community in covenant with Him. So God communicated the Ten Commandments to Moses, along with the book of the Covenant, which was a compilation of all the other laws we learned regarding servants, restitution, theft, etc. But it didn't end there. God spent 40 days and 40 nights with Moses to lay out His master plan for the Tabernacle in great detail. This Tabernacle would be a place of worship for the Israelites and a place for God to inhabit.

Transition: Today we're picking up the last part of God's instructions to Moses regarding the builders of the Tabernacle. But then we get to see how the Israelites conducted themselves after a long absence of Moses. I predict that much of today's lesson will be sobering because we are just like the Israelites. As we go through the Scripture passages, I want us to evaluate how they failed, and more importantly, process what they needed to do differently to successfully obey God.

Propositional Statement: In the end, every Christian can successfully obey God by focusing on WHO God is rather than focusing on our circumstances. There are **TRUTHS** about God in today's lesson that will help us avoid the mistakes of the Israelites. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Chp 31:1-11]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.1:

- Then the Lord said to Moses,

V.2:

- “See, **I have chosen Bezalel** son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,

V.3:

- and **I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—**

V.4:

- to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze,

V.5:

- to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.

V.6:

- Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you:

V.7:

- the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent—

V.8:

- the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense,

V.9:

- the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand—

V.10:

- and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests,

V.11:

- and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”

Process Questions/Observations:

- Q: When God calls us to do something for Him, how are we empowered to do it? [He fills us with His Holy Spirit – v.3]
- Notice that God chooses His leaders. He said, “*I have chosen Bezalel...*”

[Read Chp 31:12-18]

V.12:

- Then the Lord said to Moses,

V.13:

- “Say to the Israelites, ‘**You must observe my Sabbaths.** This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

V.14:

- “ ‘Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people.

V.15:

- For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death.

V.16:

- The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

V.17:

- **It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.’ ”**

V.18:

- When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.
- Q: What was the Sabbath to represent about God and His people? [v.16-18]

[Read Ex 32:1-6]

V.1:

- When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this

fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.”

V.2:

- Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.”

V.3:

- So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.

V.4:

- He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

V.5:

- When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.”

V.6:

- So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

[Read Ex 32:7-14]

V.7:

- Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt.

V.8:

- They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

V.9:

- “I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people.

V.10:

- Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

V.11:

- But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “O LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

V.12:

- Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

V.13:

- Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’ ”

V.14:

- Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: What caused the Israelites to depart from God and make a substitute for Him? [V.1-Moses was gone too long]

Q: Who did the Israelites start crediting for delivering them out of Egypt/ [V.4- Golden calf]

Q: What did worship become for a people departed from God? [V.6 – It went beyond burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to revelry, i.e. drinking, immorality.]

Q: What was God’s response to a people who departed from Him? [V.7-10 – Burning anger against a “stiff-necked people” whom He wanted to destroy.] Isn’t it ironic that God spent 40 days and nights with Moses to provide the Master Plan for a Tabernacle and how to worship Him, but because it took Him too long, the people decided to make a golden calf and worship it?

Q: How did Moses convince God not to destroy His children? [v.11-13: You’ll ruin your reputation with the Egyptians by being known as evil to deliver your people and then kill them. Second, you made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...]

Q: How did God respond to Moses intercession? [He relented.]

Q: How are we like the Israelites? [We, too, get impatient when we believe we’re following Him, but when He seems “absent,” we take matters into our own hands and pre-empt the work of the Holy Spirit and the perfect plan God had going for us.]

Q: So if we were to go to school on them, what do we need to do differently when we’re feeling impatient while waiting for God’s plan to unfold for us?

[Read Ex 32:15-24]

V.15:

- Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back.

V.16:

- The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

V.17:

- When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

V.18:

- Moses replied:
- “It is not the sound of victory,
- it is not the sound of defeat;
- it is the sound of singing that I hear.”

V.19:

- When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

V.20:

- And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

V.21:

- He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

V.22:

- “Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil.

V.23:

- They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’

V.24:

- So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: Obviously God burned with anger when He observed His children worshipping another idol, but what was Moses reaction when he approached the camp and saw what was going on? [V. 19-20 His anger burned too! Are you trying to picture all that Moses did in his anger? Threw the tablets, breaking them into pieces; took the calf and burned it in the fire, then ground it to powder, etc]

Q: After listening to the dialogue between Moses and Aaron, what level of responsibility did Aaron take for the Israelites sin? [Zero. 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 its delivery of a calf!]

[Read Ex 32:25-35]

V.25:

- Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.

V.26:

- So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

V.27:

- Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’ ”

V.28:

- The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.

V.29:

- Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

V.30:

- The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

V.31:

- So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold.

V.32:

- But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

V.33:

- The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.

V.34:

- Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

V.35:

- And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: Look at v.25 – What did the behavior of sinful people look like? [Running wild and out of control]

Q: What strategy did Moses implement to deal with the unrepentant Israelites? [v. 26 – **He** rallied before the camp all who had not been involved in worshiping the calf. He called for anyone “who is for the Lord” to come meet with him, which ended up being the Levites]

Observation (v.30): Notice that atonement for sin is necessary.

Q: When Moses asks the Lord to forgive His people’s sin, what was the Lord’s response?

[“Whoever sinned against me will be blotted out of my book. A time will come for me to punish them for their sin.”]

LOOK:

The Israelites are so much like us. We can bask in the presence of God and give Him our word that we will obey Him and follow Him when things are going well. But we are so fickle! No sooner do things start to get a little hard, or we don’t think God is showing up in our circumstances fast enough and all of sudden we’ve turned our back on Him and have placed our trust elsewhere. If God’s plans are always perfect and He knows what’s best for us, then we need to quit being impatient and let Him roll out the red carpet!

Here’s our lesson: Instead of focusing on our circumstances and our perception of God’s presence or lack thereof, we need to fix our eyes on God and lock into the following TRUTHS we know of God based on today’s Scripture:

1. God has a plan already in place for each of us. We may not understand His timing or even know all the details of it. [X-Ref: Jer 29:11-12. God told the Israelites that He would lead them into the Promised Land, yet as soon as He seemed absent, they were fashioning a golden calf to follow.]
2. When God calls us into His kingdom, He fills us with His Holy Spirit, and He equips us with the necessary skills and abilities to accomplish His will. [Remember Bezalel and Oholiab.]
3. God is a Promise-keeper. He made a covenant with His children, and we need to trust that He will continue to fulfill His covenant to us.
4. God is accomplishing His purposes through each of us in all of our circumstances. Rom 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,

who have been called according to His purposes.” When our circumstances don’t make sense, remember that God has sacred intentions underlying all of our circumstances *for good* of those who have been called by Him.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ex 31:1-14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I. The Ability to Work (31:1–11)

Whenever God calls us to do a job for Him, He gives us the enablement we need and the helpers we need. This He did for Bezaleel and Aholiab. Bezaleel means “in God’s protection”; his father Hur we have met before (Ex. 17:10–16; 24:14). God gave these men the ability they needed to follow the heavenly pattern and make the things necessary for the tabernacle. Their wisdom and skill came from the Lord, and they used their abilities in obedience to God’s command.

Artistic skills can be dedicated to God and used for His glory. Not everybody is called to be a preacher, teacher, or missionary. There is also a need for Christian writers, artists, musicians, architects, doctors, gardeners—in fact, in every legitimate vocation we can serve the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31).

II. The Responsibility Not to Work (31:12–18)

There is a time to labor for the Lord and a time to rest, and both are a part of His plan for His people (Mark 6:31). Bezaleel and Aholiab were constructing the holy tabernacle, but they were instructed to be careful not to violate the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not given to the Gentile nations but only to Israel as a sign of their special relationship to the Lord. As we have noted before, the Sabbath commandment is nowhere given to the church, for the church honors the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, the day of His resurrection from the dead. The Sabbath belonged to the old creation (v. 17), but the Lord’s Day belongs to the new creation.

Exodus 32

While Moses was having a “mountaintop” experience with the Lord, the people were sinning in the valley below. Spiritual leadership is not all blessing; there are burdens as well.

I. Moses the Intercessor (32:1–35)

A. God’s people sinning (vv. 1–6).

No matter how you look at this sin, it was a great offense against God. The Jews were God’s people, chosen by His grace and redeemed from Egypt by His power. He had led them, fed them, protected them from the enemy, and made them a part of His covenant. He had given them His holy laws and the people had agreed to obey (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, in spite of all these marvelous experiences, they impudently 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 Jehovah, 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 Rom. 1:18–32).

B. God's servant interceding (vv. 7–14).

Of course the Lord knew what was going on in the camp of Israel. See Heb. 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 Jehovah’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; Num. 14:12), but he refused. The Jews 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).

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.)The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures. (Vol. 1, pp. 154–157). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

31:1–11. Having given **Moses** the directions for constructing the sanctuary as well as instructions for its service (chaps. 25–30), **the LORD** now appointed the artisans who were to do the construction work. **Bezalel** was appointed by God to have general oversight of the project and **Oholiab** (31:6) was to be his assistant. One was **of the tribe of Judah**, and the other **of the tribe of Dan**. Both were skilled craftsmen (vv. 3, 6) by divine gift, which was true of all the craftsmen appointed to the project. Bezalel had numerous abilities; he could work well with precious metals and also do masonry and woodwork.

In verses 7–9 the articles to be made by **the craftsmen** are listed. In verse 10 **woven garments**, not mentioned before, are included with the other **sacred garments**. Some think that these woven garments were undergarments for winter. The craftsmen were also to **make the oil** (30:22–33) and **incense** (30:34–38).

(7) The remembrance of the Sabbath.

31:12–18. In the midst of His instructions on the work to be performed, God reminded **Moses** that obedience is also a religious duty. **The Sabbath** was the **sign** (vv. 13, 17) of the covenant that made Israel a theocracy. It was a test of the nation’s commitment to God; failure to keep it a **holy** day would result in **death** (i.e., separation from the community which would probably result in death). This command, as stated in the Decalogue (20:8), was based on God’s resting after His work of Creation in six days (31:17). Because the nation was in a **covenant** relationship with Him, the people were to do as He had done. **The Sabbath** marked Israel out as God’s people. Observing the Sabbath showed that the Israelites were set apart (i.e., holy) to God.

Now God’s instructions **to Moses** given **on Mount Sinai** (24:12) concerning the tabernacle and its priestly ministry were complete. The Decalogue (the Ten Commandments; also called **the Testimony** because they testify of God’s standards), were somehow inscribed by God on **two ... tablets of stone**. God’s **finger** (cf. 8:19; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 8:3; Luke 11:20) may suggest that this was God’s doing. According to Moses’ account in Deuteronomy 9:12–16 the Lord informed him that the people had become “corrupt” and “stiff-necked,” by casting an idol in the shape of a calf.

Within 40 days they broke their commitment to keep what **God** had already commanded (Ex. 20:4).

B. The failure and restoration of God's people (chaps. 32–34)

1. THE BREAKING OF THE COVENANT BY ISRAEL (32:1–33:6)

a. The idolatry of the people (32:1–6)

32:1. While **Moses** was experiencing spiritual triumph **the people** of God plummeted to a low point spiritually. God had repeatedly manifested His power and compassion, but they were soon forgotten. Repeatedly in the Book of Exodus the Israelites reacted with insensitivity and rebellion to God's marvelous displays of His goodness.

The people became fearful because of Moses' delay (he was on **the mountain** 40 days, 24:18) so they went to **Aaron**, their temporary leader (24:14). Assuming that Moses would not return to guide and comfort them (**We don't know what has happened to him**), they asked for a substitute or surrogate **who will go before us**. In suggesting that Aaron **make** them **gods** they were not asking for gods to replace Yahweh but for a visible, tangible object to follow.

32:2–4. Granting their request, **Aaron** suggested **the people** give him their **gold earrings** (probably acquired from the Egyptians on the day of Exodus, 12:35–36), which he then melted **into an idol cast in the shape of a calf**. Some commentators have suggested that this represented the Egyptian bull-god Apis, but this seems unlikely because Apis was not worshiped as an image. Even so, the bull symbolized fertility and sexual strength. This explicitly violated the second commandment (20:4–6; cf. 20:23), which the people had already received from God verbally through Moses.

Perhaps the people considered the calf-idol an image of God. Since only one idol was made, the word **gods** (32:1, 4, 8, 23, 31) may refer both to the idol *and* to God whom it supposedly represented. It seems unlikely that **Aaron** would attribute the Exodus to anyone but the true God.

32:5–6. **Aaron** then made **an altar**, and the next day in **a festival to the LORD.... the people** offered **burnt offerings and ... fellowship offerings**. But then their activities led to **revelry** (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7; *ṣāḥaḥ* suggests immorality). This violated the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14). Singing and dancing were included (32:18–19) and they were “running wild” (v. 25). Immorality often accompanies idolatry (Rom. 1:22–24). Yet they supposed they were worshiping the true God!

b. The intercession of Moses (32:7–14)

32:7–10. While **Moses** was on the mountain, God told him **the people had become corrupt** (v. 7) and **stiff-necked** (v. 9), that is, stubborn and unresponsive (cf. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27). In His **anger** God refused to claim the people as His own or even to claim that He delivered them from Egypt (**your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt**, Ex. 32:7; cf. **these people**, v. 9). After telling **Moses** what they had done (v. 8), God said that He would punish their rebellion by destroying them and that He would build a new nation beginning with Moses (**I will make you into a great nation**, v. 10).

32:11–14. **Moses** reversed God's reference to Israel as his people (v. 7) and called them **Your people** (cf. 33:13). Then Moses pleaded for mercy on two bases: his testimony to **the Egyptians** (32:12) and God's promises to the patriarchs (v. 13). Such a destruction would vindicate Pharaoh

and the gods of **Egypt** and would cause the Egyptians to mock the true God. Further, God would be viewed as One who breaks promises. He said He would make the descendants of **Abraham, Isaac, and Israel** (Jacob) innumerable (Gen. 15:5; 22:17a; 26:4a; 28:14; 32:13) and would take them into the Promised **Land** (Gen. 15:18–21; 22:17b; 26:4b; 28:13; 32:13). Moses recognized that the people had sinned so he did not seek to justify their actions. As a result God **relented** of His threatened course of judgment. The word “relented” does not mean that God changed His mind but that He embarked on another course of action. The Hebrew word *nāḥam* suggests relief or comfort from a planned, undesirable course of action. God is not inflexible; He responds to individuals’ needs, attitudes, and actions.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 136 – 138). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

31:14–15 For a discussion of why the death penalty for violating the Sabbath does not apply to Christians, see note on 20:8–11.

31:18 The phrase “finger of God” is best understood as an anthropomorphism, that is, a metaphor comparing some aspect of God with the traits of a human being. The phrase does not assert that the Lord God possesses a human body; it affirms that God, and not Moses, was ultimately responsible for the creation of the text inscribed on the stones (cp. 24:12; 32:16; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 9:10). The wording suggests that the means by which the words were recorded was supernatural, but does not indicate the exact method God chose to inscribe them.

32:14 If God never sins, why do some Bible versions translate this verse to indicate that God planned to do evil and then repented? This verse takes its place among a series of passages in the OT that seem to indicate that God does evil (2 Sam 24:16; 1 Ch 21:15; Is 45:7; Jr 18:8; 26:13, 19; Jl 2:13; Jnh 3:10; 4:2). However, the Bible affirms that God is completely righteous (Ps 119:137; Jr 12:1; Jn 17:25; Rv 16:5) and does not repent (Nm 23:19; 1 Sm 15:29). The contradiction is only apparent, and can be resolved by examining the relevant words in the Hebrew language.

The Hebrew word *ra’ah*, translated in some Bible versions as “evil,” actually possesses a broad spectrum of meanings ranging from moral wickedness to “trouble,” without any reference to morality. Applied to the result of God’s action, the term refers to affliction. God will never behave immorally, but He will bring affliction upon those who live in defiance of His will.

Similarly, the Hebrew term *nacham* is translated in some versions as “repent,” as though one is turning away from a sinful action. It is more accurately translated as “relent,” to decide to pursue a different course of action. As people change their actions and wills, God changes His response to them (Jr 18:8; Jnh 3:10). Although He is prepared to bring affliction (*ra’ah*) upon people because of their sins, He is prepared to relent (*nacham*) as they repent.