

EXODUS: Lesson Six, Sinai: Rebellion and Tabernacle Completion

Exodus 32 – 40

Subject: After Moses confronted and interceded for rebellious Israel, the Tabernacle was completed.

Main Idea: God insists that we only worship Him as He truly is.

Principles:

1. *The sin of idolatry is prevalent in every age.*
2. *God's written word (the Bible) and His Incarnate Word (Jesus) are the only true revelations of His being.*
3. *Today, God's glory is revealed through Spirit-filled believers.*

Introduction

Celebrities and politicians are among the most notable public figures with a reputation for portraying false images of themselves. Some seem to have highly developed personas they display publicly, their true selves only known by a small inner circle. Truth be told, all of us mask our identity at times. We may have had a rotten day and feel discouraged, but when we are introduced to our child's new teacher or encounter our supervisor, we smile sweetly with confidence we do not feel. We tell people we are fine, when we are not. Ironically, while we mask our true selves, we become upset when we are misread!

Although we may be inauthentic in presenting ourselves from time to time, God's identity is something He takes very seriously. He jealously guards His reputation (Exodus 20:5). He has revealed Himself in truth and insists on not being falsely represented.

In our last lesson, we learned that Moses received the Lord's instructions for constructing a Tabernacle. It was to be God's "house." God intended to dwell in the midst of the Israelites. He gave Moses a very specific pattern for its construction and furnishings, because the Tabernacle would portray important truths about the proper ways in which He could be approached and worshipped. Moses spent on forty days and nights Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18) receiving these instructions. At the end of that time, the Lord informed him that something was terribly wrong back in Israel's camp. The Israelites had created a whole new persona for Yahweh. They decided upon their *own* approach to God, their *own* way of worship, and God was righteously angry about it. His covenant people, the ones who He had chosen to represent Him, attempted to make Him into the kind of God they wanted Him to be. They were about to find out how seriously God takes misrepresentation and that He insists on being worshipped as He truly is.

I. Israel's Idolatry – Exodus 32

A. Israel's Sin – 32:1-6

- i. The People's Impatience – 32:1: Prior to Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai, we are not given any indication that he had ever remained there overnight. Furthermore, we have no indication that either he or the Israelites expected he would be gone for an extended period when God called him up the mountain to receive the Tabernacle instructions. The Israelites had witnessed the fire on Mount Sinai, had been warned that to touch it would mean death, and had trembled at the sight and sound of the Lord's presence (19:12-25). They knew the mortal risk of approaching God's presence. After weeks without Moses returning, it is not entirely surprising that they concluded something had gone wrong and their leader was not returning.
- ii. The People's Solution: The Israelites approached Aaron, Moses' brother. Aaron, along with Hur, had been left in charge of the camp in Moses' absence (24:14) and asked him to make them a god (sometimes also translated "gods") to "go before them" (implying a presence among them). While it is understandable that they would wonder about Moses' failure to return, their request for an idol is hard to understand. Although the Israelites had not yet received the instructions about the Tabernacle, they did have the Ten Commandments. They had heard God's voice speak to them (Exodus 20:19, Deuteronomy 5:4, 22-27)! They knew the first two commands were to have no other gods than the Lord and not to fashion any images. They knew He was righteously jealous about this (20:5).
- iii. Aaron's Involvement – 32:2-5
 1. Aaron told the people to give him their gold earrings. He then made an idol in the shape of a calf. Egyptians had several deities whose strength and power were represented by calves or bulls. Like all ancient idols, the cow was believed to be the embodiment of a god. Clearly, Egyptian influence still had a hold on the Israelites.
 2. We might wonder how Aaron could have conceded to such a request. Some understand verse 1 to indicate that the people gathered "against" Aaron (rather than "around" him) to make their demand.ⁱ Whatever his initial reaction, Aaron ultimately succumbed to pressure. According to Jewish tradition, the people stoned Hur for opposing the idea. Perhaps Aaron was frightened into compliance, but he should have stood firmly and resisted.

3. Aaron did not yet know what the Lord had revealed to Moses on the mountain about the Tabernacle and his high priestly duty. Ironically, the Tabernacle provided for God's presence to dwell among them, the very thing they sought by creating an idol! Commentator Matthew Henry suggested that the Lord allowed a messenger of Satan to prevail over Aaron in order for him to remain humbly aware of his own sin, once he took on his duties as high priest. "Pride and boasting were forever silenced." ⁱⁱ Moses later reveals an insight that we do not find in Exodus: "The Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time [Moses] prayed for Aaron too" (Deuteronomy 9:20).
- iv. The "Festival to the Lord" – 32:5-6: Once the idol was made, Aaron set an altar in front of it. The text contains more than one suggestion that the Israelites actually associated this idol with the Lord. First, Aaron said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt" (verse 4). It is unlikely that Aaron would have credited anyone but the Lord with bringing Israel out of Egypt. Second is Aaron's declaration that festival would be "to the Lord" (verse 5). Some translations have the Israelites referring to the idol in the plural ("Come, make us gods..." 32:1; "these are your gods, Israel", 32:4). If this is a correct translation, it could be that the "gods" were the Lord *and* the image of Him they fashioned. It seems that Israel had not consciously rejected the Lord, *but nevertheless*, they broke the second commandment of the covenant, forbidding them to fashion any image (Exodus 20:4). What Aaron had hailed a festival "to the Lord" quickly degenerated into such debauchery that, according to verse 25, the Israelites became a laughingstock to their enemies!

B. Moses Informed – 32:7-10

- i. The Lord's Anger – 32:7-10
 1. The Lord informed Moses about what was happening in the camp. He was angry and asked Moses to leave Him alone to destroy the Israelites and start over building a new nation of representatives through Moses. Careful examination of God's words to Moses show that His true intention was not to destroy the Israelites but rather, to rouse Moses to intercede on their behalf. First, in verse 7, He called the Israelites *Moses' people*. Then, in verse 10, He challenged Moses to "leave Him alone" to destroy the Israelites. While it was certainly what they deserved, this was never God's intention.
 2. A dangerous doctrine called "open theism" teaches that God does not know the future and therefore, His will changes. Those who promote this idea use passages like this one, pointing out that God

first said He would destroy Israel but relented (32:14) and did not. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that God is unchanging (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 6:17-18; James 1:17). He did not change His will for Israel. He planned to extend mercy all along. He spoke to Moses of what they deserved, knowing this would awaken Moses' passion to intercede for them.

ii. Moses' Intercession – 32:11-14

1. Chapters 32-34 provide a beautiful picture of the unselfish leader Moses had become. He declined God's offer to make him into a great nation and interceded for Israel instead. This was the first of several occasions on which Moses interceded for Israel (between 32:11 and 34:35).
2. The basis of Moses' intercession was the Lord's reputation. How would the Egyptians perceive the Lord if it appeared that He had taken the Israelites from Egypt only to kill them? Furthermore, Moses also reminded God of His promise to give the Patriarchs' descendants the land of Canaan. Of course, God did not *need* to be reminded of His promises but doing so proved Moses' faith in God's character.
3. The result of Moses' intercession was that God did not carry out the threat of destroying all the Israelites. However, as we later learn, He still punished them.

C. Israelites Confronted and Judged – 32:15-34

i. Initial Judgment - 32:15-29

1. Moses descended the mountain with the tablets God had inscribed for him. Apparently, Joshua had waited part of the way up the mountain and rejoined Moses on his descent. As they grew closer to the camp, they heard loud noises. Joshua thought they were hearing the sound of war, but Moses, considering what the Lord had told him, knew it was the sound of bawdy, drunken singing. When Moses saw the people's wild celebration with his own eyes, he burned with anger and broke the stone tablets, probably intending to show Israel that by breaking the command against idolatry, they had broken the entire law. James 2:10 tells us, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

2. The second thing Moses did was to burn the golden calf to destroy its shape and melt the gold back into a form he could grind to powder. Then he scattered it over Israel's water supply so that they had to drink it. This taught Israel the need to accept the consequences of their sin.
 3. Next, Moses confronted his brother. While Aaron had no excuse, he attempted to rationalize his actions, going so far as to claim that the calf came out of the fire by itself (contradicting previous passages saying Aaron had used a tool to shape it [32:4]).
 4. Finally, Moses rallied those who were "for the Lord." The Levites came to him as a group. It is likely that Aaron was not the only Levite who had participated in the idolatry. The call gave *every* Israelite an opportunity to repent. At the Lord's command (verse 27), Moses instructed the Levites to "go back and forth through the camp," to determine who intended to continue in the idolatry, who had repented, and to kill those who were unrepentant. This must have been a very difficult thing for the Levites to do, but their devotion was rewarded; they were "set apart for the Lord's service." From this time forward, they served as the clergy for Israel.
 5. Moses understood that this punishment alone was insufficient to turn away the anger of a holy God. The Israelites had broken the covenant. They all deserved death. Therefore, he ascended the mountain again, hoping to "make atonement" for their sin (32:30).
- ii. Moses' Offer of Atonement – 32:31-35: What Moses did on the mountain on this occasion displayed an even greater degree of love and sacrifice than anything he had done previously. Moses offered himself as a substitute for Israel, saying, "*Please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.*" Moses offered to pay what Israel owed God with his own life. Scholars disagree about the nature of the "book" from which Moses was willing to have his name removed. Some point to a custom of the day in which towns kept records of their populations by adding names at birth, then "blotting them out" at death. If Moses was alluding to this custom, he may have been offering to die a premature death.ⁱⁱⁱ Others say Moses was referencing the "Book of Life," in which the Lord records the names of all believers (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). If this is correct, Moses was stating his willingness to be eternally condemned to hell in order that the Israelites might be forgiven! The apostle Paul was equally passionate about saving the Jews: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:3-4).^{iv}

iii. The Lord's Answer

1. Whatever Moses intended, God refused his offer. Moses reminds us of Jesus, who came down from heaven to atone for us by offering Himself in our place. However, God could not accept Moses' offer. Moses was a sinner himself. Only Jesus was perfectly righteous and an acceptable sacrifice to God to atone for the sins of others. The Lord told Moses that those who sinned were the ones He would blot from His book and that retribution would occur at a later time (verse 34). This later punishment could refer to the deaths of this entire generation of the Israelites in the wilderness, as recorded in Numbers 26:64-65 and Deuteronomy 2:14.^v It may also refer to the time, centuries later, when all the curses for disobeying the law came on the Israelites and they were carried off to Assyria and Babylon. For now, however, the Lord told Moses to take the Israelites and lead them to Canaan. With these words, Moses gained assurance that the Lord would not destroy all the Israelites.
2. According to verse 35, the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf. No information is given about the nature of the plague or whether anyone died from it. Apparently, it was a deposit on the future judgment that awaited them.

Summary Statement: The Israelites sought to turn Yahweh into a god they could worship and access on their own terms. Little did they realize that while they were creating the golden calf, God was giving Moses instructions for the Tabernacle, the means by which they could *properly* worship Him and experience His presence.

1 Corinthians 10:6-12 tells us that what happened with the Israelites is not merely recorded as an interesting piece of history. It says, "These things occurred as examples to keep *us* from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry' ... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings *for us*, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!"

Principle: *The sin of idolatry is prevalent in every age.*

Still today, people are hungry for a spiritual presence to which they can have immediate access. Since most of the world's religions depict God as being distant, abstract, and unknowable, many who look to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity for answers to the ultimate issues of life (who is God, what happens after death, etc.), see them as irrelevant to the issues of everyday life. For these needs, they seek assistance elsewhere, sometimes from personal spirit-beings (either deceased ancestors or spirits and gods who were not formerly human). They may consult a shaman who communicates with spirits on their behalf. They may also look to impersonal, spiritual energy forces that exist within special objects, words, or rituals, hoping to manipulate these objects in order to get what they want. Those who study world religions categorize these worldviews as "animistic." According to Gailyn Van Rheenen, an expert on animistic religions, at least 40 percent of the world's population is animistic^{vi} and that number is growing!^{vii} Such thinking is increasingly common in the west, popularized through the "New Age Movement." Commenting on this phenomenon in western countries, Dean Halverson says, "Animism puts the mystery back into the secularized, matter-only world."^{viii}

Perhaps you think that this does not pertain to you because you are a Bible-believing and practicing Christian. You may never have physically bowed before an image of a "god" but consider the following definition of idolatry: *offering affection, dependence, or service to any "god" other than the God of the Bible, or entertaining thoughts about the God of the Bible that are unworthy of Him.*

- A "god" is simply "that which one loves, trusts and serves above all else."^{ix} As such, it need not be a physical idol. It can be a "spirit," an "energy force," our spouse, or even our work! We can worship gods of entertainment, personal pleasure, beauty, career, money, or the illusion of control. We worship a god of our own making each time we put our confidence in our resources or our own ideas, rather than in God alone.
- There is yet another way in which we worship gods of our own making according to the second half of the definition, a way that is even more insidious. A.W. Tozer, in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, explains:

The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place... Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true.^x

We are guilty of idolatry when we *think of the God of the Bible in the way we want Him to be*, rather than worshipping Him as He truly is!

- We sometimes do this by making Him out to be a *God who is at our service*: going to Him for help with daily needs, but ignoring His demand that we conform our lives to His holy ways; expecting Him to infuse the moments we set aside for Him with good feelings while ignoring the way we live our lives the rest of the time
- We may formulate a view of God that reflects our own personalities rather than the way the Bible portrays Him. The person who is suspicious and easily angered by others may assume God is always out to get them. The person who treats sin casually may entertain the idea that God also “winks” at sin.
- Or we may pick and choose to entertain the attributes of God that serve our own best interest: such as expecting God to extend mercy to us while demanding justice of others.

Application: If we have ever once done any of these things, we are guilty of idolatry. God insists that we worship Him *as He truly is*. How accurate is your view of Him? Is it possible that you are worshipping a god of your own imagination?

Transition: Moses had interceded with God so that He did not destroy the Israelites, but this did not mean that all was as it had been before they fashioned Yahweh into the kind of God they wanted Him to be. Moses still had much for which to intercede.

II. Moses’ Intercession – Exodus 33-34

- A. **“I will not go with you”** – Exodus 33:1-6: Although the Lord told Moses His angel (32:34; 33:2-3) would *go before* the Israelites so that they could destroy the Canaanites once they reached the Promised Land, He said He would not be *personally present* among them. If He was among them He might destroy them because of their sin. This meant the plans for the Tabernacle were put on hold! One of the things the Israelites had sought in the golden calf was physical evidence that God was among them. Now, it seemed, they might never have that assurance. When the Israelites heard this, they mourned and stripped off their ornaments, an indication that they were serious about their repentance. There was nothing more they could do but wait and see what God would decide to do with them (33:5).

B. Moses' Conversation with the Lord off the Mountain – Exodus 33:7-34:4

i. The Tent Outside the Camp – 33:7-11

1. During this period, before the Tabernacle was built, Moses had a “tent of meeting” with the Lord outside the camp. The Tabernacle is also sometimes called the “tent of meeting” but the tent to which Exodus 33 refers was apparently a private tent where the Lord was willing to meet with Moses off Mount Sinai. Significantly, this tent was located “some distance away” from the camp. The location of the tent reminded them that their sin had distanced them from God. God was unwilling to be among them (33:5).
2. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended in front of it. Then the people knew that God was speaking to Moses. They stood at the entrances of their own tents and worshipped. Anyone inquiring of the Lord would wait at the entrance to the tent of meeting while Moses brought Him the inquiries (33:7). This must have encouraged the Israelites greatly, since it was evidence God had not entirely abandoned them. The Lord spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” The expression “face to face” implies an intimate relationship, not the physical revelation of God’s “face” to Moses. Later in the chapter, God told Moses no one could see Him and live (verse 20).

ii. Moses' Request to Know the Lord - 33:12 – 34:4

1. *The Lord's Agreement to Go with Israel* (33:12-17): In 33:2, the Lord had said “an angel” would go with Moses and the Israelites to Canaan but the identity of this angel isn't clear. Moses wanted assurance that God would personally go with him. The Lord had appointed Moses as Israel's leader, but Moses could not lead the people by himself. He needed God's ongoing presence, so he pleaded with God about this during his visits to the tent. The Lord responded that His presence would go with Moses (33:14, “you” is singular) – a great encouragement, but Moses wanted more. He wanted God to go with Israel as a nation.^{xi} Therefore, he continued his plea, asking, “What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (33:16). Without God's presence, Israel could not be a “kingdom of priests” accurately representing the Lord. The Lord agreed to Moses' request: “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name” (33:17). Moses had successfully interceded for the Israelites: first, so that they would not all die; then, that they would still go to the Promised Land; and finally, that God would go with them.

2. *The Lord's Agreement to Proclaim His Name to Moses* (33:18-23): Emboldened by his success, Moses made an amazing request. He asked to see God's glory. The Lord responded by telling Moses that no one could see His face and live (33:20). However, He agreed to let Moses see His goodness and hear Him proclaim His name. To shield Moses from deadly exposure, He would hide Moses with His hand until His glory passed by. Moses would then briefly see God's back.
- a. *God's Face, Hand, and Back*: We must remember that God is spirit. Therefore, when He spoke of His face, His back, and His hand, He was speaking figuratively (an anthropomorphism: attributing a human quality to something that is not human). We find this throughout the Bible as an aid to understanding something that is otherwise a mystery. *God's face* seems to refer to the full weight of His glory, something we cannot see in our current bodies and survive. It would literally be more than we could bear. *God's hand* shows action on His part and often His power demonstrated either in discipline or in protection and gifting (Exodus 9:3, Joshua 4:24; Judges 2:15; 2 Samuel 24:14; 1 Chronicles 28:19; Psalm 75:8, etc.). Apparently, the *Lord's back* referred to some afterglow of His glory. However, this afterglow, as amazing as it was, was not much of God's glory at all. It is noteworthy that nothing is actually recorded as being seen by Moses. Douglas Stuart says, "In the Hebrew idiom... to see only the back and not to see the face means, in effect, 'to see nothing' or 'to see virtually nothing.'" ^{xii}
 - b. *The Lord's Goodness*: The Lord promised that Moses would see His "goodness." A.W. Tozer writes, "The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men... The whole outlook of mankind might be changed if we could all believe that we dwell under a friendly sky and that the God of heaven, though exalted in power and majesty, is eager to be friends with us. But sin has made us timid and self-conscious, as well it might." ^{xiii}

3. *The Lord's Commitment to the Covenant* (34:1-4): In preparation for this encounter, the Lord told Moses to chisel out two stone tablets like the ones Moses had broken. The Lord promised to write His laws (His “words”) on them. In that day, covenants were generally written out twice so that both parties had a copy. This seems to be why there were two tablets rather than just one. This was a tremendous offer! Israel had just broken God’s law, yet God was stating His willingness to renew His covenant, not unlike a divorce followed by remarriage to the same mate.^{xiv} Moses was to present himself atop Mount Sinai the following day. No person or animal was to come anywhere near the mountain.

C. A Second Forty Days on Mount Sinai – Exodus 34

i. The Renewed Covenant – 34:4-28

1. *The Lord's Name* – 34:5-7: Early the next morning, Moses went up the mountain with the tablets in his hands. The Lord descended in the form of a cloud. It is very instructive for us to note what happened next. Moses had asked to know God (33:13). He had asked to see God’s glory (33:18). The Lord answered this prayer with words far more than with sights. As long as Moses was in his earthly body, the best way Moses could know God was by being instructed about God’s character through His word. It was through what Moses *learned* that he understood and knew God better. As one scholar wrote, “What God mainly did was preach a sermon on his divine attributes.”^{xv} What exactly did God say? He proclaimed His name. This revelation of God’s name is so significant that it is repeated on six other occasions in the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).
 - a. *The Lord* [Yahweh]: “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). His name suggested His relationship with His people.
 - b. *Compassionate and gracious*: The Lord’s compassion and grace were evidenced by His willingness to renew His covenant with Israel.
 - c. *Merciful* (slow to anger): The Lord had not destroyed all the Israelites, as they deserved.
 - d. *Abounding in love and faithfulness*: God is loyal and steadfast. Once He has committed to love us, His love knows no limits!
 - e. *Maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin*: God demonstrates His love by His willingness to forgive sin.

- f. *Just* (not leaving the guilty unpunished):
- i. This quality assures us that sin will not be without consequence. God's justice is essential to His mercy. Where there is no justice, mercy loses its meaning. His judgments are entirely fair. When we rebel against Him, He only gives us exactly what we are demanding: distance from Him. However, by distancing ourselves from Him, we also distance ourselves from all His divine attributes and from everything that is dependent on Him (that results from His attributes). We choose to separate ourselves from life, from mercy, from forgiveness, from love -- in short, from His goodness (33:19a).
 - ii. God's punishment extends to families (34:7). How is this so? The meaning is *not* that innocent people are punished for their parents' sins. God knows that particular sins are often handed down from generation to generation. He was telling us not to expect Him to ignore our sin simply because "we learned it from our parents."^{xvi} He will punish each person who makes the choice to participate in sin.

2. *The Covenant Renewed by Grace* – 34:8-26

- a. Moses bowed and worshipped the Lord in response to His revelation. He appealed to God for His continuing favor on Israel on the basis of the very attributes God had just revealed. In response, the Lord told Moses He would renew His covenant with Israel. 34:17-26 represent a summarization of the terms of the covenant that had previously been given (Exodus 21-23). God made a special point concerning the need for the Israelites to protect themselves from the sin of idolatry into which they had so recently fallen. Binding themselves in any manner with idolatrous people groups would surely cause them to stumble back into the same sin.
- b. We can learn much by studying Moses' approach to the Lord in these chapters. In these verses (34:8-9), we see that Moses worshipped God before he made a request. Second, we learn that Moses based his request on his knowledge and understanding of God's nature. Our prayer lives would benefit greatly from such an approach.

- c. Moses had been on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights the first time he received God's covenant stipulations, written on the stone tablets (24:18). He was also there forty days on this second occasion when the new tablets were given to him (34:28). This time, we are told he experienced a total fast (no food or water). The Lord Jesus also fasted in this way (Matthew 4:2). Deuteronomy 9:18 gives us the reason for Moses' prolonged fast: "I fell prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, *because of all the sin you had committed*" (emphasis mine).
- ii. Moses' Radiant Face – 34:29-35: When Moses returned to the camp, his face was radiant from being in the Lord's presence. This was not merely a happy look on Moses' face. The Israelites were afraid because of his appearance. He was luminous with the afterglow of God's glory, although he did not realize it. After urging the Israelites to come near him, Aaron and the leaders spoke with him and reported to the people all that the Lord had told Moses. The radiance on Moses' face was renewed each time he re-entered the Lord's presence (presumably at the tent of meeting). When he came out and spoke God's message to the Israelites, they saw the Lord's glory reflected in Moses face. Once the message had been delivered, Moses covered his face with a veil.
- iii. Moses' Mediation as a Type of Christ: Moses served as a type of Christ. God said to him what He later said to Jesus, "With you I am well pleased" (Exodus 33:17; Luke 3:22). Although Moses interceded for the people with God, he was unable to atone for their sin. He sacrificially offered himself, but he was not a worthy substitute. Moses would still need to make animal sacrifices. However, Jesus *was* a worthy substitute. He made atonement for us by offering Himself as our sacrifice. God allowed Moses to see a glimpse of His glory. However, Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus *is* the radiance of God's glory. Moses heard God proclaim His name, describing His being. Hebrews 1:3 tells us Jesus *is* the exact representation of God's being. Moses had the privilege of *experiencing* God, while Jesus, our mediator, *is* God.

Summary Statement: Moses successfully interceded with God so that the covenant was renewed and God was, once again, willing to dwell among the Israelites.

We are seeing that God insists on being worshipped for who He truly is. How can we know Him as He truly is? When Moses asked to see God, God *proclaimed* His name. Likewise, God has revealed His true nature to us through His word: His written word, the Bible, and His incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19).

Principle: *God's written word (the Bible) and His Incarnate Word (Jesus) are the only true revelations of His being.*

The Bible tells us that our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). We cannot trust our *own ideas* about what God is like. The only trustworthy standard of truth is in God's word. In it, God has revealed Himself and His Son Jesus. The greatest protection we have against falling into idolatry is by studying the Bible. The more clearly we know God as He truly is, the less likely we will be to misrepresent Him and worship a god of our imagination.

Application: How much do you value the opportunity to hear and read the Bible? Many people in our world today do not have access to a Bible. If this is true of you, will you pray daily that God will send you one (or the means to buy one)? While you wait, will you take every opportunity to hear it read to you and taught to you by those who have Bibles? And will you set aside special time *every day* to meditate upon its truths, as you have heard them?

If you own a copy of God's word, do you realize that you have something that is more valuable than any other physical thing you could possibly possess? There is no habit that is more important than setting aside time every day to read and meditate on it, praying over and recording what you learn. Begin this time by worshipping the Lord on the basis of what He has already revealed about Himself to you in the Bible (a song is a good way to do this). Then ask Him to show you who He really is before you begin to read. Read systematically: choose a book and read it through. Do not merely open to a random page. Close in prayer, asking that what you have learned about God will be reflected in all your thoughts and actions that day so that others see His glory shining through you.

Transition: Once God agreed to Moses' requests and the covenant relationship was restored, the building of God's house, the Tabernacle, could commence.

III. Tabernacle Completion – Exodus 35-40

A. Rest and Giving – Exodus 35:1-36:7

- i. Sabbath Reminder: The Israelites would have been relieved that their lives were spared and exceedingly grateful that God had agreed to renew His covenant. They would have greatly anticipated the Lord coming to dwell among them. Although the instructions Moses received from the Lord concerning the Tabernacle during his first forty days on Mount Sinai (chapters 25-31) ended with the reminder not to neglect the Sabbath, when it was time to build, Moses *began* with this warning. Perhaps he was fearful that in their zeal to honor the Lord by carefully following His exact building specifications and in their eagerness to have the Lord present among them, the Israelites might be tempted to work on the Sabbath.

- ii. The Offerings and the Workers: A description follows of the items and the workers needed to build the Tabernacle. The people responded to the need for supplies with such generosity that Moses had to issue an order to stop further giving (36:5-6). Their generosity reflected their gratitude to the Lord for forgiving their sin, restoring the covenant, and recommitting to dwell with them. God had taken them from Egypt to make them His people, and now He was finally coming to live among them!

B. Tabernacle Building and Priestly Garments – Exodus 35:8 – 39:31

- i. A Repeat? One of the reasons so many of the instructions in chapters 35-38 are repeated virtually word-for-word from chapters 25-31 is to make the point that the Israelites followed God’s instructions *exactly*. The frequent repetition of the phrase “just as the Lord commanded” stresses the point (39:42, 43, etc.).
- ii. The Construction
 1. Each piece was carefully crafted according to the pattern the Lord showed Moses. Remember, this was necessary in order that the symbolism of the Tabernacle would not be marred.
 - a. The Ark and its atonement cover were made. It was God’s throne, the place from which He would reign. The Ark contained God’s covenant (the tablets). It reminded the Israelites that God was holy, that He had a standard they were unable to keep, and of their need for atonement.
 - b. The curtain that shielded the ark reminded Israel that, although He was among them, they were still separated from Him because of His holiness and their sin.
 - c. The Table of the Bread of Presence and the Lampstand spoke to the Israelites of their dependence on the Lord for light and life.
 - d. The Altar of Incense was symbolic of the necessity of prayer and intercession.
 - e. The Bronze Altar and the Washbasin represented the necessity of blood sacrifice for sin and the ongoing need for cleansing.
 - f. The priestly garments reminded the Israelites that they could only access God through a mediator.
 2. Phil Ryken and Kent Hughes point out that although the Israelites may not have understood it, they were laying out the gospel and building objects that symbolized Christ and His saving work:

Recognize the wisdom of this. If He had wanted to, God could have sent Jesus to save Adam and Eve right after they sinned. But He had a better plan that would bring Him more glory. God allowed human history to unfold in all the misery of its depravity. Meanwhile, through the rituals of the Old Testament, He began to show what it would take to deal with the problem of sin. He did this so we would have a fuller understanding of the total salvation that He has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Consider everything the Tabernacle has taught us about holiness, about atonement, about sanctification, and about having a relationship with God. Without the Tabernacle, our understanding of these great doctrines of salvation would be impoverished.^{xvii}

C. Inspection, Set Up, and Filling – Exodus 39:32 – 40:38

- i. Inspection: When all the parts were completed, Moses inspected each piece carefully to ensure it was exactly according to God’s pattern. He was the one who had been given the pattern and it was logical that he would give the final inspection.
- ii. An Anniversary
 1. The Lord instructed Moses to set up the Tabernacle on the first day of the first month (40:1-2), their one-year anniversary of leaving Egypt. The Israelites would have remembered how God had parted the Red Sea for them a year earlier and would have seen the Tabernacle as the culmination of all that had happened since. What a fitting celebration! What a fitting climax to the book of Exodus!
 2. Thus Moses set up the Tabernacle, exactly in the way the Lord had instructed him: the curtains and coverings over the crossbars that gave the Tabernacle its shape, the two rooms within divided by the curtain, and the courtyard surrounding it. The furnishings were put in their proper places with the “Ark of the Covenant Law” (39:36), the most important element, inside the Most Holy Place.
- iii. The Priest’s Ordination: The Lord’s instruction to anoint the furnishings is immediately followed by His direction to wash, dress, and anoint Aaron and his sons as priests. However, their ceremony of ordination did not take place until later (as described in Leviticus 8). The instruction was included as predictive of what was to occur.

- iv. God's Glory: Finally, when everything was finished in accordance with the Lord's instructions, the cloud covered the Tabernacle ("tent of meeting") and the glory of the Lord filled it (40:34). Moses had asked for a glimpse of God's glory on Mount Sinai, but when God's glory actually descended on the Tabernacle, even Moses could not enter it (40:35). The Lord's presence continued in the form it had before, as a cloud by day and as fire within the cloud by night, but from that time forward it settled right within their midst in the Tabernacle. Whenever the cloud lifted, it guided the Israelites on their march toward Canaan (see also Numbers 9:15-23), resettling in the Tabernacle when they were to set up camp.

Summary Statement: The book of Exodus closes with the glory of God entering the Tabernacle in Israel's midst while the people looked on.

Just as He had promised Abraham, God took the Israelites out of Egypt to to bless all nations (Genesis 12:3; 15:13-14). With the Tabernacle complete and filled with God's glory, the Israelites had a visual of the message they were to share. They were to proclaim God's glory!

What is God's glory? The Tyndale Bible Dictionary points out that the Bible uses the terms in two different ways. Primarily, His glory is an *attribute* of God referring to "His majestic beauty and splendor."^{xviii} The Bible speaks of as Him as the "Glorious Father" (Ephesians 1:17), the King of Glory (Psalm 24), and jealous to maintain His glory (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). The Bible also uses the term in reference to "particular *historical manifestations* of God."^{xix} Images of light and fire are often closely associated with these. God's glory settling over the Tabernacle in the cloud is a primary Old Testament example. Ancient Rabbis referred to the pillar of cloud and of fire as God's "shekinah," His "dwelling glory." In the New Testament, Jesus was revealed as God's glory (John 1:14). His glory was witnessed by three of the apostles at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). When He returned to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Glory, to indwell believers. As we learned in our last lesson, we are His Temple. Just as God's glory inhabited the Tabernacle of Moses day, the Holy Spirit now indwells believers so that we can make His glory known.

Principle: *Today, God's glory is revealed through Spirit-filled believers.*

The Israelites were God's representatives to declare His glory; the Church of Christ now has that privilege. We are "walking Tabernacles." In our last lesson, we saw that the privilege of being a living Temple means we can worship and fellowship with the Lord anytime and anywhere. But the privilege of being a living Temple is not only for our benefit. It is for the benefit of others. We are to represent Him and we can only represent Him as He truly is to the degree that we are filled with His glory.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is the Spirit of Glory! He indwells every believer, but we are not always *filled* with Him. This Spirit-filled life is not to be confused with the experience of a few, which the New Testament calls “glossolalia” (or “speaking in tongues”). The Spirit-filled life is defined by moment-by-moment dependence on Him. The trouble is that we do not continually submit to His rule. When we sin, we grieve Him and are no longer filled with Him (that is, completely controlled by Him). The result is our loss of spiritual power to be His witnesses. Thankfully, we can be filled with Him again and again (compare Acts 2:4 and 4:31) by confessing sin and resubmitting our lives to His lordship.

Conclusion

Have you struggled to represent the Lord well recently? Do your attempts to do this drain you, as you struggle in your own strength? Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). The person who is filled with the Spirit is not stressed, but rather, relaxed and at peace. Through their attitudes, words, and actions, they are continuously, and often unconsciously, reflecting the glory of God.

When was the last time you got on your knees and asked the Lord to once again *fill* you with His glory, so that *He* is empowering you as His representative? You will first have to resubmit areas of your life over which you’ve taken control. Once you’ve confessed all known sin in your life to God and offered to allow Him to rule over those specific areas of your life, *ask Him* to refill you with the Holy Spirit. He is eager to do it, for you are His Temple, a walking Tabernacle – a living representation of the Lord. The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, who is slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness; the Judge of the Earth, who alone can forgive sin. That is our message. He takes any misrepresentation of Him seriously. He insists on being known and worshipped as He truly is.

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^{iv} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 471). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^v Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 471). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

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- ^{xvi} Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, p. 717). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ^{xvii} Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (p. 1145). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
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- ^{xix} Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.