
EXODUS 18-40

Lesson 8, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 18 Oct 2011

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OUTLINE

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| 3. The Decalogue (20:1-20) | 11. The golden calf (32:1-35) |
| 4. The Covenant Book (20:21 – 23:33) | 12. Moses sees the face of God (33:1-23) |
| 5. Acceptance of the covenant (24:1-11) | 13. Moses receives the Law again (34:1-35) |
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INTRODUCTION

The first part of Exodus (chapters 1-17) concerns Moses' life and the departure from Egypt. Chapter 18 is a transition as Moses encountered Jethro and reunites with his family. In chapter 19, Israel arrived at Sinai where they would remain throughout the rest of this book, through all of Leviticus, and through the first ten chapters of Numbers—just under a year total (Numbers 10:11).

The chapters of Exodus in this lesson are focused on the giving of the Law, the establishment of covenant, and the building of the Tabernacle. We might read the wonderful miracles in the first chapters of Exodus and think that is the most important message of the book, but the entire purpose of those events was to bring them to the point of receiving and experiencing what is described in these chapters and in the next three books. Ultimately, it's about the covenant, and Exodus contains 'the book of the covenant.'

JETHRO'S VISIT (18:1-27)

INTRODUCTION

Zipporah and her two children had been with her father, Jethro, since Moses and Aaron had left to go back to Egypt. It may have been several months since she had heard from her husband. Jethro took them all out to meet Moses when he heard he was back, and while there, gave Moses some fatherly (in-law) advice.

The only JST change in this chapter is in the first verse, where Jethro is not just a priest but "the **high**

priest of Midian." This makes Jethro the second high priest mentioned in the Bible (starting with Genesis, where Melchizedek is the first). D&C 84:6 teaches that Moses received his priesthood from Jethro, who received his priesthood through a line that goes back to Esaias, "who lived in the days of Abraham, and was blessed by him" (D&C 84:12-13). Jethro was the high priest of Midian, which was named after Midian, one of the sons of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4; several scholars argue (persuasively) that

Midian was the Esaias of D&C 84; see Robison & Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*). It is not clear if Jethro was a descendent of Abraham but he was no local pagan priest—his authority was from God and was the same as that which Moses used to speak and act in the name of God.

Chronologically, the translation work on Exodus likely just preceded the reception of D&C 84, thus leading to the suggestion that the work on Exodus was at least part of what triggered that revelation on the priesthood.

COMMENTARY

Jethro had heard stories coming out of Egypt, perhaps of amazing plagues or of slaves escaping in vast numbers. Determined to return his wife and sons to Moses, he headed out with them and found Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. In this chapter we learn the name of Moses' younger son—"Eliezer" (4), whose name means "God is help." When Moses saw them, he bowed down to his father-in-law "and kissed him" (7), and they caught up on all that had happened. Jethro declared, "Blessed be the Lord [YHWH], who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh" (10). Then Jethro offered a burnt offering and a sacrifice and hosted dinner for Moses and "all the elders of Israel" (12).

The next day, Moses went back to work and Jethro observed. After watching the parade of people coming to Moses for any number of trivial things, he pulled Moses aside and suggests that this is too much for one man and proposed a hierarchy of judgments that would limit what was brought to Moses to just the most serious cases. The record states that "Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said" (24). Choosing "able men" from the various tribes, he appointed captains of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. (Deuteronomy 1:9-15 later attributes this action to revelation from the Lord, which probably came as a confirmation of Jethro's suggestion.) Seeing Moses had implemented his suggestion, Jethro returned to "his own land" (27).

One Protestant commentator I heard on the radio, J. Vernon McGee (MP3 available on

http://www.thruthebible.org/site/c.irLMKXPGLsF/b.4104233/k.BFE1/MP3_Download_of_5Year_Series.htm), felt that Moses made a grave mistake by following Jethro's advice. To him, this was "Moses turning to worldly wisdom, rather than to revelation." Dr. McGee continued, saying, "This was not God's wisdom...This incident reveals how easy it is to accept the wisdom of the world and to follow the pattern of the world and not look to God." Though he calls the suggestions "good ones" and "sincere," believing that Jethro "meant well," but "it was not God's will....if God really loved Moses and cared for him, God would have made this suggestion long ago."

Fortunately, we have other voices who not only acknowledge the wisdom of Jethro's advice but see the Lord's hand in it. For example, Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught in October 2010 (*Ensign*, November 2010) that the incident with Jethro demonstrated at least two things: 1) "Jethro counseled Moses to delegate," and, 2) "Jethro also gave Moses counsel that illustrates the importance of the personal line," meaning that Moses needed to teach the people not to bring every question to a priesthood leader, but "they should work out most problems for themselves." Jethro's contributions to the Saints of his day were "valuable organizational changes" that Moses was only to implement with God's confirmation (Rasmussen 103). That confirmation was acknowledged in Deuteronomy 1:9-15. Thus Jethro's advice was accepted and implemented.

PREPARATION (19:1-25)

INTRODUCTION

After arriving at Mount Sinai, Israel needed to prepare for the reception of God's Law. Through Moses, they were instructed to cleanse and sanctify themselves. Though they were to keep their distance at this time, it was to prepare them for a time when

they would be encouraged to enter God's presence. Thus chapter 19 is the challenge to prepare for the Law which was then given in chapters 20-23, but more importantly to prepare them to be with God.

COMMENTARY

About two months after leaving Egypt, the company arrived in "the wilderness of Sinai" (1). The location of Sinai is not known. The traditional and popular location in the Arabian peninsula, where St. Catherine's monastery is found, is a possibility, but many other mountains are also possible. One important note is from 3:12, where the Lord told Moses that when they left Egypt, "ye shall serve God upon this mountain," referring to Mt. Horeb where Moses has his initial encounter with God. If Horeb and Sinai are the same mountain, then these chapters took place in Midian near where Moses was herding sheep for Jethro.

Wherever the wilderness of Sinai was, Moses wasted no time heading up the mountain to again commune with the Lord, who told Moses to remind Israel how he had freed them from slavery and that now he was promising to make them "a peculiar treasure" (5) if they were obedient. This is "the private property of the king, as distinct from that used for public purposes" (JPS 146). Moses said they would be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (6). So Moses called the elders together and told them what the Lord had said. They replied, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (8).

Moses was told to "sanctify" (10) the people, meaning prepare them, make them holy, separate, dedicated, or washed thoroughly. The Lord promised that on the third day the whole camp would see him on mount Sinai. Meanwhile, clear boundaries were to set around the base of the mountain so people would not inadvertently walk too close. These boundaries were to be strictly enforced—any beast or man who crossed the lines was to be killed.

So Moses prepared the people—clean clothes, repenting, no sexual relations—and on the third day the thick cloud representing the Lord's presence was on the mountain with lightning and thunder, earthquake, and even a loud trumpet. Moses brought all the people to the base of the mountain and prayed to the Lord, "and God answered him by a voice" (19) that everyone heard.

Once more the Lord called Moses up to the mount and charged him to keep the people at a distance. Only Aaron and Moses were to return.

THE DECALOGUE (20:1-20)

INTRODUCTION

We will see in Exodus 34 that the Law Moses received from the Lord here is actually "a law of a carnal commandment (JST Exodus 34:1). Though these next chapters describe the Law Moses received, because of what we learn from the JST, we can recognize that they give us the *second* version, not the first, which was rejected by the people and thus replaced with what we read here.

"Decalogue" is a Latin term that means 'ten words,' which accurately translates the Hebrew name for these items in Exodus 34:28 better than "ten commandments." There are no punishments (though a confirmation of guilt with #3) associated with any of these statements of behavior but some have blessings. There are two clear groups: the first four discuss human relationships with God, summed up

by Jesus by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 (see Matthew 22:36-38). The last six concern our relationships to other people, also summed up by Jesus, quoting Leviticus 19:18 (Matthew 22:39).

The first five have explanations, the last five do not. Historically, various groups have numbered them differently, including Augustine (fifth century A.D.) who combined “no other gods” and “graven image”

into one and divided “Thou shalt not covet” into two. But most groups today accept the list as discussed below. The list is repeated with some variation in Deuteronomy 5:6-17. They are also included in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 12-13) and in latter-day revelation (D&C 76:1-4; 1:15-16; 63:61-62; 59:9-13; 27:9; 42:18-19, 79; 42:22-26, 74-81; 42:20, 84-85; 42:21, 27, 86; 19:25-26; see comparison in Student Manual 135).

COMMENTARY

First: The Lord reminded the people of his unique relationship with them: he was the one who “brought thee out of the land of Egypt” (2). Therefore, they were to have “no other gods” before or besides YHWH. This means that they were to worship nothing except the Lord (Rasmussen 104).

Second; They were not to “make unto thee any graven image” (4). Some have interpreted this to mean no images whatsoever, but the Hebrew word for “graven image” means ‘idol’ or ‘sculptured image’ that is worshipped. Thus the second commandment relates to the first, specifically calling upon them to worship no idols while still allowing for graven cherubim and sculpted oxen in the tabernacle and temple. The Lord is not “jealous” (5) as we might think of the word today but full of zeal and envy for his people. Neither are children punished for the sins of parents; rather, parental sins can facilitate sins among their offspring, who likewise suffer the consequences that a righteous example might have helped them avoid. The other factor to consider is that in ancient households, it was not uncommon for three or four generations to live together, thus making the punishment apply to the household of the person at the time of the sin.

Third: Do not “take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (7), or as in another translation, “swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God” (JPS). Though we appropriately use this as against profanity, the application is perhaps more specific, referring to oaths in a legal or public setting where the Lord’s name was invoked as the one who would punish the person if they were lying (‘May the Lord do such and such to me if I am not speaking the truth’). Thus to take his name in vain is to knowingly speak false testimony in or using his name.

Fourth: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The longest of the ‘ten words,’ the command to treat the Sabbath differently than other days distinguishes Israel dramatically from their neighbors. To make something holy is to treat it differently, to dedicate it to God, and to withdraw it from the normal routines of life. The Sabbath is a great blessing, to be welcomed with joy and thanksgiving and is celebrated at least in part in recognition of God’s rest at the end of creation.

Fifth: The first commandment relative to how we treat others focuses on our first relationships: our parents. “Honour thy father and thy mother” (12), it commands, with a promise that so doing will bring a blessing of longevity—though the ancient meaning likely had more to do with inheritance of land, which would be lost if parents were mistreated.

Sixth: “Thou shalt not kill” (13). This is to murder deliberately.

Seventh: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (14). “This covers the entire field of sex problems...Sexual sins are, next to murder, the most serious of the sins. Sexual immorality is one of the most destructive acts of life for the individual, the family, or the nation (Ludlow, 151).

Eighth: “Thou shalt not steal” (15). This takes into account the taking of anyone else’s property without permission and includes “robbery, burglary, shoplifting, plagiarism, embezzlement, cheating, or any other form of self-aggrandizement at the expense of others” (Rasmussen 107).

Ninth: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (16). Though the Hebrew refers specifically to legal proceedings (Zondervan 236),

modern prophets have interpreted this to include “gossipers and bearers of tales, whisperers, those destitute of truth, liars, quarrelers, [and] deceitful persons” (Ludlow 152).

Tenth: “Thou shalt not covet” (17). To “covet” is to ‘desire greatly,’ to the point of “scheming or maneuvering to acquire it” (JPS 150-151). “Your neighbor’s house” includes not just the physical structure but all that is in it—the items listed next—including spouse, slaves, animals, or any other possession.

After hearing Moses recite the ‘ten words,’ the children of Israel saw “the mountain smoking” (20:18). In fear, they moved back and asked Moses to be their intermediary: “Speak thou unto us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (20:19). Moses told them not to fear, “for God is come to prove [test] you” (20:20) and help them not to sin.

THE COVENANT BOOK (20:21 – 23:33)

INTRODUCTION

The Ten Commandments are a prologue to a more complex series of laws that find their full expression in these chapters and the other books of the Torah, especially Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These three chapters indicate the first summary of the laws, as given to Moses. They are very detailed in many areas

but also say nothing about certain laws that are laid out in the later books.

The last part of chapter 20 and Chapters 21-23 are called “the book of the covenant” (24:7). This is what the Lord told Moses and which Moses wrote down to preserve.

COMMENTARY

The people held back so Moses moved toward the thick darkness representing and surrounding the Lord. When the Lord met with him, he reiterated the command not to make other gods and gave instructions on the proper creation of a ‘field altar’ (made of unhewn stones, no tools involved, no steps).

Handling of slaves (21:1-11)

Slaves were a fact of life in the ancient world. The Lord gave laws that allowed for the institution but set up protections for those involved. Slaves that were of the house of Israel were to be kept for only six years and freed in the seventh. Slaves were allowed to make their relationship permanent, if desired (indicated by the boring of “his ear through with an aul,” 6). Law were given regarding marriage of slaves to other slaves or to free persons.

Smiting and striving (21:12-27)

The book covered several interactions between people and what the penalties should be. Killing another person (the general meaning of “smite”) required being “put to death” (21:12), though a place of sanctuary was provided for accidental death to allow for a fair hearing. But deliberate murder had only one outcome—death of the murderer. Smiting parents or even cursing them carried the penalty of death. Kidnapping (“he that stealeth a man,” 16) was also a capital crime.

Striving or fighting had lesser penalties. The JST makes the penalties for killing a slave also death (not just “punished,” 20, as in the KJV) and acknowledges that if the person recovers there is no crime, since “his is his ~~money~~ **servant**.” If a pregnant woman is injured through two men striving, the man injuring her pays for the crime as the judges determine. The laws of *lex talionis* (laws of retaliation) are laid out in 21:23-25—“eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” Though harsh-sounding to us,

they reflect the Lord's way of curbing retribution; by limiting the punishment to one equivalent to the infliction, it set maximum penalties which cannot be exceeded, though in many cases lesser penalties were certainly used (Zondervan 238-239). As with other laws, these laws did not apply equally to slaves; generally, slaves were freed if they sustained an injury under the master's hand.

Ox laws (21:28-36)

These verses deal with various things that might happen with an ox (or bull), such as goring someone or falling in a pit and what happens to the ox and/or his owner. The outcome depends on various factors, such as whether the ox has a history of aggression.

Theft (22:1-15)

If caught, thieves had many penalties, depending on the crime, ranging from paying five times the amount stolen (animals) to being sold as a slave if he has no money. Thievery included your animals eating another's fields, setting a fire that destroyed property, animals dying shortly after a purchase and borrowing something that is then damaged.

Ethical laws (22:16 - 23:13)

This collection covers a variety of topics, such as a man marrying a woman he has slept with; not suffering a murderer (changed in the JST from "witch," 22:18, in the KJV) to live; sleeping with animals; sacrificing to other gods; afflicting widows and orphans; money lending; eating of animals killed in the field; lying; following the crowd; returning stray animals (even if the owner is your enemy); bribery; oppressing a stranger; and crop rotation.

Annual feasts (23:14-19)

This is the first reference to the three annual feasts required of all Israelites. They are "the feast of unleavened bread" (15) or Passover; "the feast of harvest" (16) or Pentecost; and "the feast of ingathering" (16) or Tabernacles. See BD, "Feasts" for more details. The first two are in the spring (the "harvest" relates to early grain crops), the latter in the fall, thus relating to the agricultural cycle of the year.

At the end of this section a seemingly random law is thrown in: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (19). Modern Arabs will boil a young goat or sheep in milk to make it more tender. Anciently, this may have been part of idol worship practices. Since eating meat was probably fairly rare and tied to the feasts, it would make sense for the Lord to forbid this pagan practice in conjunction with the feasts. This phrase (and others related to it) form the foundation of the Jewish Kosher laws today. This one specifically is what led to the practice of keeping separate cooking utensils for meat and dairy products.

Blessings (23:20-33)

Following these laws led to some marvelous promised blessings, given in these verses. Angels would go before the people to prepare the way and protect them; God will fight their battles and Israel will overthrow their enemies and drive them from the promised land; the young shall not die; and the kingdom of Israel shall expand from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, from the desert to the Euphrates.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE COVENANT (24:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter appears to have the order of some events a bit mixed up. The order presented below

perhaps represents a valid way of conveying the various happenings.

COMMENTARY

Moses told all the people the words the Lord had revealed to him, and they together answered, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (24:3). So Moses wrote it all down and directed "young men" (24:5) to offer both burnt offerings and peace offerings. Blood was saved from the offerings; some was sprinkled on the altar, then some on the people themselves once they heard the words of "book of the covenant" and cried, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (24:7). This ordinance seems to tie the sacrifice to the Lord (represented by the altar) and the people through the blood of the sacrifices.

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (Aaron's sons) and "seventy of the elders" (24:9) went up on the mountain where the text reports that "they saw the God of Israel" (24:10), seeing a road of sapphires under his feet (sapphires are blue; under God's feet in heaven would represent the blue sky). The odd phrase in the KJV, "as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" is better translated, "clear as the sky itself" (24:10). Significantly, in conjunction with this experience, these men not only saw the Lord but "did eat and drink" (24:11) in a covenantal meal with God that sealed the covenant on behalf of all the people (Jackson 132).

MOSES ON THE MOUNTAIN (24:12-18)

COMMENTARY

Following the theophany experienced by the seventy-four men, Moses was commanded to return to the mountain to receive "tables of stone" (24:12) with the law recorded by the Lord himself. This time he took Joshua and left Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp. For six days Moses waited patiently while the "cloud covered the mount" (24:15). Then on the

seventh day, the Lord spoke. The people in the camp saw a "devouring fire" (24:17) on the mountain. Moses remained on the mountain "forty days and forty nights" (24:18). During that time, Moses received what is recorded in chapters 25-32 concerning the construction of the Tabernacle and the preparations needed to use it.

TABERNACLE INSTRUCTIONS (25:1 - 27:21)

INTRODUCTION

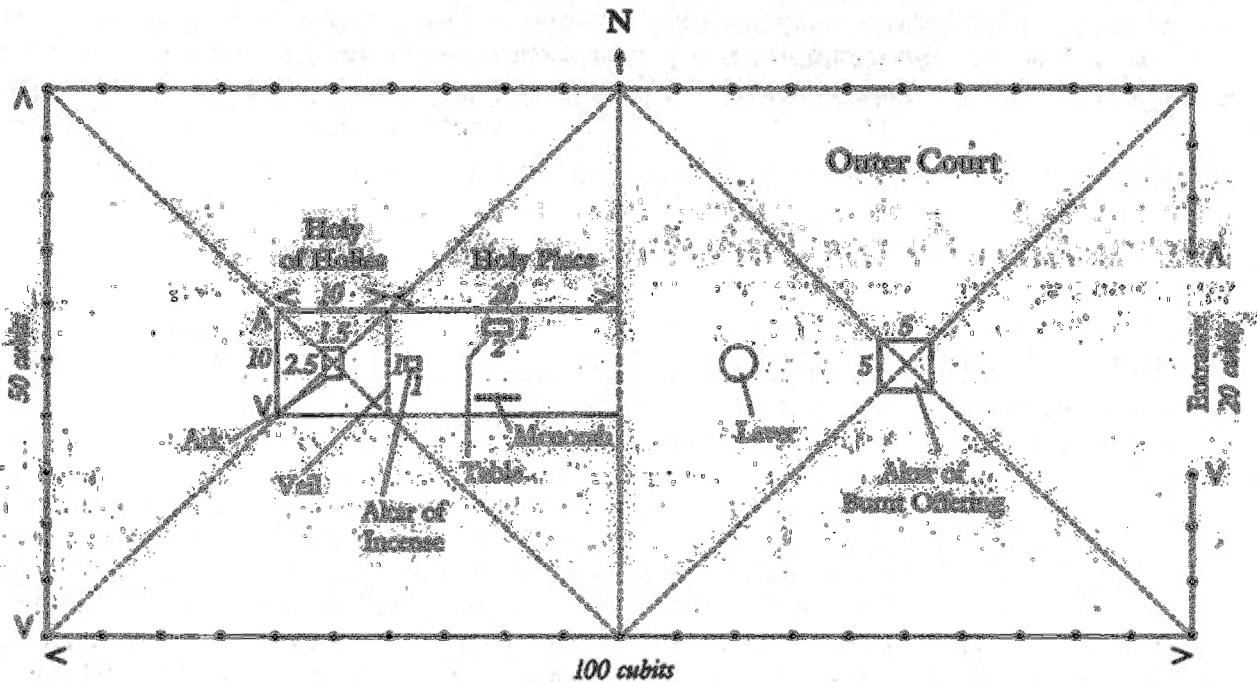
The children of Israel are not very long removed from Egypt before they receive a command to construct a house of the Lord. This house required the sacrifice of all the people and was built according

to detailed instructions provided by the Lord. The instructions are given from the inside out, starting with the most holy place in the structure.

COMMENTARY

This group of slaves that was able to spoil Egypt now has a use for all that gold, silver, brass, and fabric they brought out of slavery with them. They were

commanded to build "a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (25:8).



1. COURTESY
[HTTP://EMP.BYUI.EDU/SATTERFIELDB/TABERNALE/](http://emp.byui.edu/satterfieldb/tabernacle/)

The Ark (25:10-22)

The Lord's instructions start at the center of the holiest place with "ark" (25:10). Though the word in English is the same as Noah's, it is not in Hebrew; here the word is a 'chest.' In other words, this was a box to hold the law of God, the covenant with Israel; putting the commandments in the middle of the holy place instead of the image of a god, as others did, shows the importance of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was 2-1/2 by 1-1/2 by 1-1/2 cubits (cubits are approximately 18 inches), made of "shittim wood" (25:10, probably acacia) and covered with gold. It had four gold rings attached and four gold-covered poles to carry it, when needed.

Next was the "mercy seat" (25:17) or atonement cover (see footnote for 25:17), which was made of a pure gold slab the same size as the ark and with a gold cherub (part animal, part human, winged creatures designed to protect the ark) at each end. The cherubim faced each other with wings that covered the seat. From this seat the Lord promised to "meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (25:22).

The ark was the only thing inside the "most holy place" (26:34), often referred to as 'Holy of Holies,' though that phrase never appears in the scriptures of the LDS Church (some modern translations use that phrase to translate what the KJV typically calls 'the most holy place').

Moving out, the text then discusses two of the three items in the holy place.

The Table (25:23-30)

If you were standing at the door looking in (west), you would see the "table" (called the "table shewbread" in 25:30) on the right hand side or on the north. It was 2 by 1 by 1-1/2 cubits, made of acacia wood and covered in gold. It was to have a border around the top and rings and poles for transporting it. Various implements are also described associated with the table.

The Menorah (25:31-40)

The KJV "candlestick" (25:31) is a menorah or six-branched lampstand. It had almond-blossom shaped cups to hold the oil that was lit, each of which was at the top of three branches on each side and one in the middle. It was made of gold and had implements associated with lighting and snuffing out the lamps.

The Tabernacle Structure (26:1-37)

The structure itself was made with “curtains of fine twined linen” (26:1) that were 28 cubits long and four high. Hooked together by loops and brass clasps, the curtains formed the inside shell of the building. Other curtains made of goat hide, ram skins dyed red, and badger (or dolphin in JPS) skins were put on the outside. All were attached to a frame made of wood walls held up with wooden bars and poles. Finally, Moses was instructed to make a veil of fine linen, blue, purple, and scarlet (or crimson) that had the design of cherubim; this was to be placed between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Another curtain of similar color and material was made for the door into the temple.

The Altar (27:1-8)

In the courtyard outside of the temple but within the outer walls was the altar. It was made of acacia

wood and covered with brass, being square and three cubits high. It had horns on the four corners, signifying the power of the Lord. All the instruments that went with the altar—pans, shovels, basins, and items used for slaying animals—were made of brass. Gold was reserved for the holiest places in the tabernacle, brass for the important but less holy functions outside.

The Courtyard (27:9-21)

Around the tabernacle was a courtyard marked off from the camp by linen curtains hung from pillars. The courtyard was 100 cubits long on the side and 50 cubits wide and five cubits high—half as tall as the Tabernacle itself. On the east side was a screen or gate 20 cubits wide that admitted people into the courtyard.

AARON AND HIS SONS PREPARE (28:1 – 29:46)

INTRODUCTION



2. COURTESY DREAMSTIME ROYALTY FREE

With the instructions for constructing the tabernacle itself received, Moses was next taught by the Lord how Aaron and his sons should prepare to minister within it. The text does not tell why Aaron and his sons received this special privilege of holding the priesthood down through their generations, but modern revelation confirms that Aaron and his descendants were ordained of God (D&C 84:18).

COMMENTARY

Clothing (28:1-43)

Aaron and his four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar—were to serve in the Tabernacle. Aaron’s clothing was described to Moses in detail, consisting of “a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash” (28:4, JPS). Aaron’s clothing was made of fine linen and gold, since he entered into the Holy of Holies once each year. On his shoulders, he had two stones, each engraved with six of the tribes of Israel. The breastplate and ephod seems to have functioned as a single unit, holding

twelve different stones, again representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It was held in place with gold chains. While the underlying tunic was white, the robe itself was blue with pomegranates and bells woven into the pattern, especially around the hem. The hat had a band across the forehead that read “Holiness to the Lord” (28:36).

Aaron’s sons’ clothing was simpler but still elegant. They had coats and sashes and hats, “for glory and for beauty” (28:40). All were to be anointed, consecrated, and sanctified as they acted in their offices. All parties wore “linen breeches” (underwear) when working in the temple to keep their private parts from view.

More important than the clothing, the final verse of this section explains that Aaron and his sons needed to “bear not iniquity” as they come into the tabernacle, so they didn’t have to “die” (28:43)

Actions (29:1-16)

Moses was to “hallow” (29:1) Aaron and his sons. This was done by bringing them to the front of the Tabernacle and washing them, then putting on the clothing just described. Aaron was anointed with oil on his head, and a burnt offering of a bullock was made on behalf of their sins. Then they were to offer a burnt offering of a ram with his blood sprinkled on the altar, and another burnt offering ram whose blood was put on the right ear, the right thumb, and the big toe of the right foot. They were to be given some food, wave it to the Lord, then burn it. Parts of the ram were to be saved for Aaron and his sons, “a statute for ever from the children of Israel” (29:28). This was to be repeated seven times to sanctify the altar.

Each day the priests were to offer two lambs, one in the morning and one in the evening. Some flour, oil, and wine were also offered. These were typically retained by the priests for their own sustenance.

The point of all of this is so that God “will dwell among the children of Israel” (29:45).

MORE TABERNACLE INSTRUCTIONS (30:1 – 31:11)

INTRODUCTION

Why instructions about the Tabernacle was broken into two parts is unclear, but after talking about Aaron and his sons, the text comes back with more

details about the Tabernacle. However, it was all the same revelatory experience to Moses while he spent forty days on the mountain with the Lord.

COMMENTARY

Altar of Incense (30:1-10)

The third item to be placed in the Holy Place is the “altar to burn incense” (30:1). It was one cubit square and two cubits tall, with horns like the bigger altar but made of wood overlaid with gold. Like the other items, it has rings and poles to carry it. This small altar sat just before the veil leading into the Most Holy Place. It was to daily receive fresh incense, just as the menorah was to be replenished daily. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the horns of the incense altar (among other things).

Census (30:11-16)

A somewhat off-topic insertion here is included about the half-shekel temple tax. This was a fee imposed annually on every man twenty years and older to help fund the needs of the temple. Jesus referenced this in the story about Peter fishing to get a coin for both of them (Matthew 17:24-27).

Laver (30:17-21)

A brass basin for washing hands and feet was part of the courtyard, between the Tabernacle and the altar.

Anointing Oil and Incense (30:22-38)

The last instruction had to do with using oil and incense in the Tabernacle. The oil was to be used to anoint everything in the Tabernacle and the courtyard in order to “sanctify them, that they may be most holy” (30:29), meaning set apart for their dedicated purpose. The incense was a combination of frankincense and spices that was to be used only in the temple.

Artisans Named (31:1-11)

The Lord called out two men by name who would be in charge of the construction project. The first was Bezaleel, son of Uri. He would be the overall person in charge, with Aholiab, son of Ahisamach assisting.

TWO TABLETS (31:12-18)

COMMENTARY

The forty-day encounter on the mountain ended with the Lord giving final instructions focused on the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant—a holy time after a discussion of a holy place (JPS 182). The Lord felt strongly enough about Sabbath-keeping that he declared the penalty for violating it was death, just as the penalty for approaching God’s presence

unworthily was death. Keeping the Sabbath is emulating God since he also rested on the seventh day.

Concluding that final instruction, the text notes that the Lord gave “two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” to Moses, capturing the essence of their long discussion.

THE GOLDEN CALF (32:1-35)

COMMENTARY

While Moses was on the mountain enjoying a magnificent training session with God, the people down below grew impatient. They came against Aaron (the Hebrew is not just coming to him but gathering ‘upon’ or ‘over’ him) to “make us gods” (32:1) that could lead them to the Promised Land. It had not been many days since they had all declared they would obey the Lord! Aaron appears to agree to their demands, requesting their gold earrings which he used to them create a calf of gold. He declared, “This is your Elohim” (32:4, alternate translation). Aaron then made an altar and declared a feast for the next day, on which they offered sacrifices but also “sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (32:6), or dance. It was a celebration of Elohim, not a foreign god, but the way in which they did it broke the covenant previously made.

Meanwhile, the Lord told Moses it was time to go back to camp because the people had “corrupted themselves” (32:7), “turned aside quickly” (32:8)

and were worshipping the calf. The Lord reminded Moses of their stiff-necked nature and offered to destroy them all and make of Moses alone a great nation, as he had done with Abraham. But Moses plead on their behalf, saying how bad it would be to destroy them so soon after bringing them out of Egypt and reminded the Lord of the covenants made with “Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” (32:13). He assured the Lord that they would repent (JST 32:12) and the JST records: “And the Lord ~~repented~~ **said unto Moses, if they will repent of the evil which they have done, I will spare them, and turn away my fierce wrath; but behold, thou shalt execute judgment upon all that will not repent of this evil this day. Therefore, see thou do this thing that I have commanded thee, or I will execute all that which ~~he~~ I had thought to do unto ~~his~~ my people” (JST 32:14).**

Moses took the two stone tablets written on both sides and started down, encountering the patient

Joshua who had waited the entire time. Joshua feared the camp was being attacked from all the noise, but Moses sadly told him it was “the noise of them that sing” (32:18). Coming to the camp and seeing the calf and the dancing, Moses threw down the tablets and broke them, thereby annulling the covenant already made (Jackson 134). He then burnt and ground up the calf, put it with water, and made everyone drink it. This was probably to make it clear that the idol was nothing and would end up in the waste area of the camp (JPS 185).

Confronting Aaron, Moses asked how he could allow this to happen. Aaron blamed the people and tried to make it sound like the calf magically appeared out of the fire when he threw the gold in. (Deuteronomy

makes is clear that Moses had to pray specifically in Aaron’s behalf; see Deuteronomy 9:20). Some believe that Aaron was directing the people to the worship of the Lord, though incorrectly through the representation of the calf (Student Manual 141).

Seeing the unruly nature (alt. of “naked,” 32:25) of the people, Moses cried out for those on YHWH’s side to come to him and the sons of Levi (Moses’ tribe) readily responded. Taking their swords, they slew 3,000 of those who participated in the calf worship. Moses then went back to the mountain to “make an atonement for your sin” (32:30). He pled with the Lord to forgive the people or blot out Moses himself from the book of life, but the Lord said the sinners would be removed from the book.

MOSES SEES THE FACE OF GOD (33:1-23)

COMMENTARY

The Lord let Moses know that they could still go to the Promised Land with his support, that he would help them “drive out the Canaanite” (33:2) and the other inhabitants of the land. Verse 7 mentions moving the Tabernacle outside of the camp, even though chronologically it had not yet been built. Perhaps they had a smaller ‘tent of meeting’ already in place at this time before the final Tabernacle was built or perhaps it mentions the Tabernacle anachronistically and it was really the mount Moses went to (which is in the indication in verses 21-23). The point is that the Lord’s presence withdrew from

the camp and Moses had to leave the camp to intercede with God. As he did so, the cloud descended, the people witnessed it, and “the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (33:11). Moses plead with the Lord that his presence would return to the camp because that is what made Israel different from all other people. The Lord’s reply was to symbolically let Moses represent Israel and know he was there by seeing his “back parts” (33:23) but not his face (see JST footnotes on verse 20).

MOSES RECEIVES THE LAW AGAIN (34:1-35)

COMMENTARY

The Lord told Moses to make another set of tablets like the first and he would write the law on them again. Because of the wording in the KJV, the second set of tablets might appear to have the same content as the first. The JST reveals, however, that Israel’s disobedience had a severe consequence on the kind of law the Lord gave them the second time and even how he interacted with Israel as a result of their choice to worship the golden calf. That act was more than idol worship, which he had forbidden, but was a

rejection of the invitation from God to enter into his presence and his rest—which Joseph Fielding Smith defined as “entering into the knowledge and love of God, having faith in his purpose and in his plan, to such an extent that we know we are right, and that we are not hunting for something else, we are not disturbed by every wind of doctrine, or by the cunning and craftiness of men...all doubt and fear have been cast from [such a person]” (Ludlow 157). See the JST changes in verse 1. These changes are a

good example of Joseph Smith's progressive doctrinal understanding as he worked on the JST. In Exodus 18:1, the Prophet learned about Jethro's priesthood. Here he learned that as a result of Israel's sin, the priesthood was taken away along with the ordinances and even the presence of the Lord. The new law given was "after the law of a carnal commandment" (cf. Hebrews 7:16). When Joseph Smith translated Deuteronomy 10:1-2 a few days later, he learned that "the words of the everlasting covenant of the holy Priesthood" were also missing from the second set of tablets. Finally, in D&C 84:5-42, this was all pulled together and put in the context of the Restoration as the Church was instructed about Moses' line of authority, the two priesthoods, the ordinances of the higher priesthood required to enter into the presence of God, and that Moses taught all this to the people but they rejected it. Each successive revelation built on the earlier ones to provide a clearer understanding of these verses in Exodus and the role of the two priesthoods in the Church today.

Interceding for the people, Moses and the Lord renew the covenant under these new terms. The Lord admonishes Israel to destroy all parts of the worship of idols and other gods when they get in the land (which they do not do and is the cause of many problems in the coming years). The Lord summarizes again many of the things already taught—the three feasts, redemption of the firstborn, and the Sabbath—and commands Moses to write it all down. Moses was on the mount "forty days and forty nights" (34:28) again and came down with two new tablets and a shining (or radiant) face which the people all saw (the Hebrew word could also be interpreted 'horned,' a symbol of power in many ancient Near East texts, and which Jerome put in the Vulgate (Latin translation used by the Catholic Church), which led Michelangelo to put horns on his statue of Moses (Zondervan 263; Ludlow 161). He taught the people again and put them under covenant to keep the Law. He began to wear a veil when he taught the people but removed it when he spoke to the Lord.

BUILDING THE TABERNACLE (35:1 – 39:43)

COMMENTARY

With a repentant people and a covenant renewed, it was time to build the Tabernacle so the presence of the Lord could be with the camp of Israel at all times. They appropriately worked six days and took the Sabbath off. The building was then constructed as it had been previously revealed to Moses. The people brought their jewelry, clothing, and animal skins as offerings to help build it. In fact, they brought so many offerings ("much more than enough," 36:5)

that they had to be turned away. Women worked to spin and create the huge panels of fabric required for the inside and outside of the structure (and served at the temple near the gate—38:8) while men worked to build the walls, pillars, and items to go inside. The clothing was made according to instructions and the incense and oil was prepared. In short, all things were done according to the Lord's instructions and readied for the day of dedication.

DEDICATION (40:1-38)

COMMENTARY

"On the first day of the first month" (40:2), just a year after leaving Egypt (40:17), the Tabernacle was complete and set up. Putting the furniture in place and all things in order, each item was anointed with oil to consecrate it for the Lord's service. Aaron and his sons were brought to the door, washed, clothed

in holy garments, anointed, and sanctified, "that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations" (40:15).

When all was in order and everyone prepared, “a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (40:34). Even Moses could not go in because the glory of the Lord was too overpowering. It was a cloud by day and a burning fire by night (40:38), providing light and direction to the camp at all times.

Promised Land, always let the cloud representing the presence of the Lord. When it moved, they broke camp and followed. When it stayed, they stayed. This was only a month and a half away (Numbers 10:11). During those days, Moses was very busy recording Leviticus and the first part of Numbers, which we will study next.

The final verses of Exodus anticipate Israel’s departure from Sinai and forty-year journey to the

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