

EXODUS FROM EGYPT

Apostasy, Renewal, Tabernacle and Worship

Exodus 32-34, 25-31, 35-40

INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the first theophany, Moses marked out the limits of the mountain, for the mountain was sacred ground (Ex 19:12-13). Barriers were set up to make the limits clearly visible to people. No one was to pass through these barriers, except for a few chosen people. As the theophanies take place, three distinct areas become evident.

- 1) **The foot of the mountain.** This is the place, just outside the barriers, where the people assembled to meet God and to receive His word. “Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain” (Ex 19:17). In the design of the future Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting, this area will correspond to the *Outer Court* (in Hebrew, *oulam*), where the people will assemble to pray, to meet God, and to offer Him sacrifices.
- 2) **The mountain itself.** This is sacred ground, just past the barriers. At first, only Moses enters this area (Ex 19:20). Later, Aaron is permitted to enter it together with Moses (Ex 19:24). After the covenant had been ratified with the sprinkling of blood, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders entered this area, from which they beheld the footstool of God (the base of His Throne); and where they partook of the covenant meal (Ex 24:9-10). Joshua also enters this area with Moses (Ex 24:13). In the design of the future Tabernacle, this area will correspond to the *Holy Place* (in Hebrew, *hekal*). Access to this area will be limited to the priests and their service within it.
- 3) **The top of the mountain.** *This is the area that only Moses enters alone, where God speaks to him directly.* At the first theophany, “the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” (Ex 19:20). “He drew near to the thick darkness where God was” (Ex 20:21) to receive from the Lord the covenant ordinances. After the covenant had been ratified, God called Moses upon the mountain once more. The glory (meaning the “light”) of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. The appearance of the “glory of the Lord” was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain, in the sight of the people (Ex 24:15-17). On the seventh day, God called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. “And Moses entered the cloud; and went upon on the mountain” (Ex 24:18). In the design of the future Tabernacle, this area will correspond to the *Holy of Holies* (in Hebrew, *debir*), where God will dwell among His people. Access to this area will be restricted to the high priest only.

It is important to note that the future Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting), will function as a portable Mount Sinai. The people will eventually leave Mount Sinai, but the mountain and the experience of God’s Presence will not leave them.

STUDY AND REFLECTION

Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:12-18)

After the covenant had been ratified, God once again called His servant, Moses, to come to Him on the mountain. The Lord said to Moses: Come up to Me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandments, which I have written for their instruction” (Ex 24:12).

When Moses and Joshua went up the mountain, a cloud covered it. Then the “glory of the Lord” settled on Mount Sinai. This “glory” is the divine light of God’s Presence made visible. The appearance of this light was “like a devouring fire” on the top of the mountain, which could be seen by the people of Israel from below (Ex 24:17). The cloud covered the mountain for six days; and on the seventh day God called out to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. “And Moses entered the cloud; and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights” (Ex 24:18).

During that time, *while in the glory of the Lord*, God revealed to Moses the exact description of the future Tabernacle (Ex 25-31) and how God wishes to be worshipped by Israel.

Although not found in the Bible, in rabbinic literature the Hebrew word *shekinah* is used to refer to the “dwelling,” “inhabiting,” or “settling” of God’s Divine Presence. In the Book of Exodus, God makes His Presence known by appearing in form of a cloud, and in the form of visible light, known as the “glory of Lord” or the “*shekinah* glory.”

When Israel left Egypt, “the Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, that they might travel by day and by night” (Ex 13:21). At Mount Sinai, God’s Divine Presence settled upon it in the form of cloud and divine light (Ex 24:15-17). And finally, when all the work on the Tabernacle will be completed, the presence of God will descend upon it in the form of cloud and light.

The Apostasy of Israel (Exodus 32:1 – 33:14)

When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down the mountain, they became impatient, and quickly forgot the covenant that God has established with them. They gathered around Aaron and said to him: “Come, make us gods, who shall go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Ex 32:1). The people wanted gods to go before them, so that they can perform sacrifices and continue their journey to Canaan.

Aaron gives in to the crowd. He says to people, “Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me” (Ex 32:2). Aaron then took the gold, melted it down, poured it into a mold, and then fashioned it with a graving tool into a golden calf, which represented the Egyptian bull-god Apis, the protector of livestock and cattle, and all the gods that were worshipped in the land of Egypt.

When the people saw the molten calf, they said: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Ex 32:4).

So, Aaron build an altar before the calf, and proclaimed: “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord” (Ex 32:5). And they rose early in the morning and offered burnt offerings, and they also brought peace offerings (communion sacrifices). They sat down to a sacred meal. After they ate and drank, they rose up “to play” (Ex 32:6), which is a reference to non-marital sexual activity that accompanied the worship of pagan deities. Idolatry was spiritual adultery.

In response to Israel’s infidelity, God declares to Moses that He will destroy Israel, which was the agreed upon punishment for breaking the covenant:

“I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation” (Ex 32:10).

It is important to note here again, that God’s declaration is just. He is not being vengeful, but simply following through with the conditions of the Covenant. The sacrificial blood that was sprinkled upon the altar and the people symbolized death as a just punishment for covenant unfaithfulness (Ex 24:8). The party that broke the solemn covenant deserved to die.

So how does Moses respond in the face of God’s justice? He appeals to God’s infinite Mercy. He prays to the Lord: “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them ‘I will multiply your descendants’” (Exodus 32:13). It was an appeal, more specifically, to the oath made by God, when Abraham proved his obedience by his willingness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

God does not relent or change His mind. He is unchangeable and always the same. Moses responded with deep faith, trust, and confident hope, appealing to God’s faithfulness and mercy. With boldness, he intercedes on behalf of his people and prays for God’s mercy and forgiveness; and the Lord hears his prayer.

Moses Returns (Exodus 32:15-35)

Moses came down the mountain with the two tables of the covenant (testimony) in his hands. The tables were the work of God, written by God, graven on both sides (Ex 32:15-16). As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. “And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it” (Ex 32:20).

Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought a great sin upon them?” (Ex 32:21).

Then Aaron blamed the people saying, “You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And I said to them, ‘Let any who has gold take it off; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf’” (Ex 32:22-24).

Really? Does he really think that he can fool his brother, Moses? Aaron does not want to admit to his direct involvement in the apostasy. He was the one who made the

mold and cast the calf out of melted gold. He was the one who build the altar and proclaimed a feast in worship of idols.

What follows is a civil war. Moses stood at the gate of the camp and shouted, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered to him. Then he sent them into the camp to execute the leaders of the rebellion, and those who refused to repent. Three thousand men were killed that day. By this act of faithfulness and devotion, the Levites “ordained” themselves “for the service of the Lord” (Exodus 32:29). What this means is that they have gained for themselves a *priestly status* by defending and enforcing the Covenant, of which the first commandment was: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:1-3).

Moses then returns to the mountain to atone for the sin committed by the people. He says to the Lord: “Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray You, out of Your book which You have written.” Moses is willing to be the sacrificial offering of atonement, so that the people might live.

Repentance and Forgiveness (Exodus 33:1 – 34:9)

The Lord then tells Moses to leave for Canaan. He says, “Depart, go up hence, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt... and I will send an angel before you... but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you in the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Exodus 33:1-3).

When the people heard this news, they mourned. In atonement, they stripped themselves of their ornaments, and would no longer wear them.

Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp, far from the camp. He called it “the tent of meeting.” Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people arose, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak to Moses. When the people saw this, they would rise in prayer and worship, every man at his tent door. In this way, the Lord spoke to Moses, as a man who speaks to his friend.

Then Moses said to the Lord in prayer: *“If Your presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not in Your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and Your people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?”* (Ex 33:15-16).

And God replied: “This very thing you have spoken I will do; for you have found favour in My sight, and I know you by name” (Ex 33:17).

Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory.”

And God answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before, and will proclaim before you My name ‘The Lord’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But” He said, “you cannot see my face; for man shall not see Me and live... Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while My glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will

cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen” (Ex 33:19-23).

So, Moses rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai. As God commanded, he took with him two cut tables of stone as the first. And the Lord descended in the cloud upon the mountain and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before Moses, and proclaimed:

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex 34:6-7).

And Moses bowed his head to the earth in worship before God. And he said: “If now I have found favour in Your sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray You, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your inheritance” (Ex 34:9).

The Covenant is Renewed (Exodus 34:10)

And the Lord God said to Moses: “Behold, I make a Covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation... Observe what I command you today... Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (Ex 34:10-27).

And Moses remained there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. “And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Ex 34:28).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of the testimony (covenant) in his hand, as he came down, he did not know that the skin of his face shone, because he had been speaking with God. And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, they were afraid to come near him.

When Moses called out to them, they returned to him and Moses talked to them. He gave them the commandments that the Lord had given to him on Mount Sinai. When Moses was finished speaking, he put a veil on his face. Whenever he went before the Lord to speak with Him, he took off the veil. And when he came out, and told the people what God commanded, the people of Israel saw the face of Moses shining; and then he would put the veil upon his face again (Ex 34:29-35).

The covenant that took place before the apostasy is often referred to as the “Sinaitic Covenant,” and the covenant renewed after the apostasy is referred to as the “Levitical Covenant.” There are differences between the two.

The first *Sinaitic Covenant* was one made directly between God and Israel (Ex 24:8). There were approximately 40 laws or ordinances in addition to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20-23). The firstborn of Israel continued to serve a royal and priestly role (Ex 13:1; 24:5); and God Himself wrote upon the tables of stone (Ex 31:18). The first covenant was light and direct.

The second Levitical Covenant was one made between God, Moses, and Israel (Ex 34:27). It was mediated through Moses. There were many more laws or ordinances included (Ex 34 – Lev 27). The priesthood became the exclusive privilege of the tribe of Levi (Ex 32:29); and Moses, not God, wrote on the stone tables (Ex 34:28). The second covenant was burdensome and mediated.

The Tabernacle and Worship (Exodus 25-31, 35-40)

The construction of the Tabernacle continued as planned, after the covenant breaking and renewal. The divinely revealed description of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31) and the instructions on how it is to be build it (Ex 35-40) together constitute over one-fourth of the entire book of Exodus. This gives us an indication as to how important it was to God and to Moses, the sacred author of Exodus.

God wanted to prepare a dwelling place for Himself among His people. The Tabernacle or the “Tent of Meeting” was a place to meet with God, to speak with Him, and to worship Him. His Divine Presence would abide over the Ark of the Covenant, within the Holy of Holies. When the Ark would be carried in procession, God’s Presence would go ahead of Israel and lead them. By going with them in this way, God would distinguish Israel from among the nations as His very own. This was the first time since the Garden of Eden that there was a place where God and His children would dwell together.

Materials and Workers (Exodus 25:1-9; 35:1–36:7)

In response to Moses’ request for donations of gold, silver, bronze, materials, skins, acacia wood, precious stones, oil, ornaments, spices and many other items, the people responded with great generosity. “They came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him” (Ex 35:21), and they brought their freewill offerings to the Lord, to used for the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments required for the priests.

In their generosity, the people continued to bring more and more donations, to the point that Moses had to proclaim throughout the camp, “Let neither man nor woman do anything more for the offering for the sanctuary” (Ex 36:6). So, the people were restrained from further giving, since the donations had exceeded what was necessary to do the work.

Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab, skilled workers and designers, and every able man that was gifted by God to come to do the work (Ex 35:1-2).

The Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1-37; 36:8-38)

The Walls. Upright panels or frames were made from acacia wood, which fit together, and were set in silver bases. Twenty panels were made for the left side (south) and twenty for the right side (north). Eight panels were made for the rear of the tabernacle (west side). On the exterior, the panels were reinforced with five acacia bars, that ran

across horizontally through rings. The rings served as holders. Everything was plated with gold.

The Coverings. The frame was then covered with three different layers of material. Each layer was made of separate curtains, coupled to one another with loops and clasps.

The first layer was made of fine linen, woven with blue, purple, and scarlet threads, with skillfully embroidered cherubim (Ex 36:8-13). Blue was the colour of the sky; purple was the colour of royalty; scarlet was the colour of divinity.

The second layer was made of white goat hair (Ex 36:14-18). White was the colour of purity.

The third layer was made of tanned ram's skins, red in colour. Red is the colour of blood, a symbol of life and sacrifice.

The fourth and final layer was made of goatskins, brown in colour, the colour of flesh (Ex 36:19).

*The four layers prefigure the **Mystery of the Incarnation.*** God the Son, who is divine in nature, royal and pure, will take human nature and become a man, flesh and blood. In the Prologue of his Gospel, the evangelist John writes: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt (in Greek, *eskenousen*, literally, "tabernacled" or "tented") among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory (divine light), glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14).

The Veil. Four pillars were made from acacia wood and covered with gold. They were set inside the tabernacle to divide the interior into two parts: The Holy of Holies (a perfect cube); and the Holy Place. A veil made of blue, purple, and scarlet was made, with cherubim skillfully embroidered into it. This was hung onto the pillars with hooks. The purpose of the veil was to separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The cherubim are the ones who stand close to the throne of God in heaven.

The Entrance Screen. Five pillars were made from acacia wood and covered with gold. These were set at the entrance, with bases made with bronze, and capitals covered with gold. A screen was made (like the interior veil) and hung onto the pillars with hooks.

The Tabernacle was set in the very centre of Israel's encampment. He wants to be the centre of their lives.

The Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9)

Bazalel made the ark from acacia wood (2.5 l x 1.4 w x 1.5 h). It was covered with gold, inside and outside. Four rings were made from gold and attached to the four corners of the ark. Poles were made from acacia wood and covered with gold. These were meant to slip through the rings, making it possible to carry the ark. A cover for the ark was made from pure gold, which was called the "mercy seat," where God's presence would come to rest, and from where God promised to speak to His people (Ex 25:22). Two cherubim of hammered gold were made, on the two ends of the mercy seat, facing in towards each other, toward the mercy seat. Their wings spread out above, overshadowing the mercy seat.

The Ark was set in the middle of the Holy of Holies, behind the veil. Into it was placed the stone tables of the covenant (testimony), a jar of manna that remained incorrupt, and eventually, the rod of Aaron.

The Table of Bread Offering (Exodus 25:23-30; 37:1-9)

Bazalel made a table of acacia wood and overlaid it with gold; and made a molding of gold around it. He cast four rings of gold and fastened the rings to the four corners at its legs, which would serve as holders for poles to carry the table. The poles were made of acacia wood and covered with gold. He made vessels of pure gold, which were to be put on the table.

Twelve breads, considered to be holy, would be kept on this table. Only the priests could eat them. Every Sabbath, the breads would be replaced with twelve fresh ones. A bowl of incense was placed in the middle, between the two trays of bread (Lev 24:5-9).

The Lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24)

Bazalel made the seven-branched lampstand of pure gold. There were six branches going out from the central branch, three on each side.

The lamps would burn continually before the presence of the Lord.

The Altar of Incense (Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25-28)

Bazalel made the altar of incense of acacia wood (1 L x 1 W x 2 H). Its horns were one piece with it, and he made a molding of gold around it. He made rings of gold and attached them under the molding, to serve as holders for the carrying poles. The poles were made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold.

The Altar of Incense was set in the Holy Place before the Veil. According to Old Testament worship, a sacrifice of incense was offered twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. The incense was a symbol of prayer rising towards heaven.

Olive Oil, Chrism Oil, and Incense (Exodus 27:20-21; 37:29)

The people we commanded to bring pure olive oil, to be kept the lampstand in the Holy Place burning continually. Bazalel also made special holy anointing oil (chrism) (Exodus 30:22-33); and the pure fragrant incense (Exodus 30:34-38), blended as prescribed by the perfumer (Exodus 37:29).

The Altar of Burnt Offering (Exodus 27:1-8; 38:1-7)

The altar of burnt offering was also made of acacia wood (5c L x 5c W x 3c H). Horns were made for the four corners, one piece with the altar. Everything was overlaid with bronze. Bazalel made the utensils, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the firepans; all the utensils were made of bronze. He made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extend halfway down. He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze gratings as holders for the poles. The poles were made from acacia wood and covered with bronze.

The Laver of Bronze (Exodus 38:8)

Bazalel made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze. There was an upper basin filled with water for the washing of hands; and a lower basin filled with water for the washing of feet. Priest would wash their hands and feet before serving in the Tabernacle area.

The Court (Exodus 27:9-19; 38:9-20)

Bazalel then made the court. For the left side (south) he made twenty pillars with silver hooks and bronze bases and set them up; for the right side (north) also twenty pillars; and for the back side (west) he made ten. In the front (east), there were three pillars on one side of the gate, and three pillars on the other side of the gate. Then, he hung fine twined line with hooks onto all the pillars.

The entrance screen for the gate of the court was embroidered with needlework with blue, purple, and scarlet threads, with linen. This screen was hung on four pillars.

All the pegs for the tabernacle and the court were made of bronze.

The fence that marked out the area of the court was about seven feet tall, above eye level, so people were not able to look over the fence into the court area. There was only one entrance, as a sign there is only way of approaching God – His Way.

God is the Shepherd of Israel. The court is like a sheepfold for His sheep, who hear His voice. He calls them by name, and they enter in through the one sheep door. In the New Testament, in John 10:1-18, Jesus will proclaim that He is the door of the sheep. He who enters by Him will be saved; and will go in and out and find pasture. Jesus is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

Priestly Garments and the Ephod (Exodus 28:1-44; 39:1-29)

For Aaron, the high priest, they made the following garments for ministering in the holy place.

The *ephod* was a short tunic, which made of gold leaf, hammered out and cut into threads, and woven into the four sacred colours of the Temple: the blue, the purple, the scarlet, and fine linen.

Attached to the ephod was the breast piece, which was made using twelve precious stones: sardius, topaz, carbuncle; emerald, sapphire, diamond; jacinth, agat, and amethyst; beryl, onyx, and jasper. The names of the twelve tribes were engraved onto the stones.

The robe under the ephod was woven all blue. On the skirts of this robe they made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen. They also made bells of pure gold and put the bells in between the pomegranates upon the skirts of the robe round about.

For Aaron and his sons, they made robes, woven of fine linen. They also made turbans and caps from fine linen. The robes were tied with a girdle made from fine linen, purple, blue and scarlet threads.

The turban worn by Aaron, the high priest, was made from blue linen. A gold plate was set in the turban with the inscription, "Holy to the Lord."

Everything is Consecrated

Once everything was made, the Tabernacle was set up with the court, and all the furnishings were put in their proper place. The furnishings formed a cross.

Then chrism was used to anoint and consecrate the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and the court round about, together with the screen for the gate.

Aaron and his sons first washed at the laver. Then they were robed in their sacred garments, and then anointed and consecrated with the chrism to serve as priests (Exodus 4:9-15). (This prefigures the future New Testament washing in Holy Baptism, the clothing in white garments, and the anointing with holy Chrism in Holy Chrismation).

The Presence of God Descends

Once everything was ready and set it in its place, "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord (His Divine Light) filled the Tabernacle" (Ex 40:34). Moses was unable to enter because of the cloud and the presence of divine light.

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