Free Bible Study Notes on Exodus 32-40

Introduction: While Moses is on the mountain receiving the laws of God, the Israelis in the camp below, although they have so recently seen the awesomeness of God, quickly turn away from him and begin worshiping a calf-idol. Moses, when he sees the revelry in the camp, throws down and breaks the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. The wrath of God falls on Israel and a number of the leading idolaters are killed. Moses returns to the mountain where God again writes the commandments on stone tablets. Moses gathers a free will offering from the people for the making of the tabernacle. The tabernacle and priestly garments are made. After the priests are consecrated and the tabernacle is set up with its furnishings, the glory of God comes down and fills the tabernacle.

Notes on Exodus 32-40

32:1 - make us gods - It is amazing how fickle these people were, who had just seen God's power and glory, had entered a “marriage” covenant with him, and were now yearning after other gods like an unfaithful bride.

32:2 - Take off the gold earrings - It is also amazing that Aaron, God's chosen high priest, so quickly gave in to the pressure of the people and cooperated in something abominable to God.

32:4 - calf - The Israelites had absorbed this idea from the Egyptians who worshiped bulls. So soon after receiving them, Israel broke the first and second commandments. Pagan worship was in the people's consciousness, ready to emerge at any opportunity. What they had taken into their minds earlier now became their downfall.

It still happens. We think we can listen to anything, watch anything, fantasize about anything, and it will not hurt us as long as we don't do the thing ourselves. But when we take evil into our minds, it lies there ready to rise up when the situation is right, making it much easier for us to succumb to temptations which we did not foresee. Whatever we put into our minds and hearts becomes part of us. Brain surgeons discovered years ago that if they stimulated different points in the memory part of the brain with a stylus, the patient relived past events in vivid detail as if he were going through them again. What we put into the mind will always be there.

32:5 - Festival to the LORD - Aaron knew how wrong it was to make an image and worship it. He tried to salve his conscience by calling this Yahweh-worship. Many more times in future the Israelites would try to mix idolatry with service to God. But God is a jealous God and will not share his glory with idols, any more than a husband would want to share his wife with another man.

32:6 - eat and drink...revelry - Idolatry often involved immoral revelry, breaking the seventh commandment as well. Paul uses these people as a warning to Christians, 1 Corinthians 10:6-8:

Now 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." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.

The latter reference is to Israel joining in immoral idol worship at Baal Peor, Numbers 25.

32:7 - become corrupt - God knew exactly what the people were doing down below.

32:10 - destroy them - The people were so blatant in their spiritual adultery that they provoked severe wrath from God.
make you into a great nation - This shows the high regard God had for Moses.

32:11 - Moses sought the favor of the LORD - Moses loved the people in spite of their waywardness. In interceding for the people, Moses was acting like a shepherd and like a servant. Moses makes two arguments: 1) What the Egyptians will say; and 2) What God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

32:14 - repented [KJV: repented; NASB: changed his mind] - How do we reconcile this with what is said of God in Numbers 23:19: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" That passage merely says that God is not dishonest or unfaithful; he keeps his word. Some of God's purposes are unconditional and unchangeable, but some are conditional and God can be influenced by our pleas and prayers and penitence.

32:19 - threw the tablets - Moses had poured out his life for these people and had arranged their marriage covenant with God. He had every right to be angry and disgusted.

32:20 - burned it...ground it - Moses dealt with evil decisively. If we are not that serious about putting evil away from us, like a cancer it will always grow back.

32:24 - out came this calf - This was both a lie and an evasion of responsibility. People have been doing that ever since Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (and Adam blamed Eve). We cannot get well until we are honest about our sins and take responsibility for our wrong behavior instead of blaming our parents, our mate, circumstances, etc.


32:26 - Whoever is for the LORD - There are situations where we have to decide or know plainly who we are and what we are not. Jesus said, Matthew 12:30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

32:28 - three thousand...died - Probably these were the hard core idolaters.

32:30 - You have committed a great sin - Part of healing and saving people is truthfully confronting what they have done.

32:32 - blot me out - Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" - John 15:13. Moses is willing to put his own life on the line to save the people he loves. This reminds us of Paul's love for Israel who are lost in unbelief: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers..." - Romans 9:13. It is not actually possible for one of us to volunteer our own soul to be lost in place of a lost person. Only Christ can do that. God will only blot out the one who has sinned- verse 33. But we can live sacrificially so that our life will be as redemptive as possible.

33:1 - Leave - It is time to begin traveling toward Canaan, the Promised Land.

33:2 - angel - This would not be the "angel of the LORD" who was like the presence of God himself.

33:4 - mourn - The aftermath of sin is never good like the foretaste is.

33:4 - take off...ornaments - A sign of solemn penitence. Compare James 4:8-10.

Verses 9-23 are a beautiful description of Moses' relationship with God.
33:10 - stood and worshiped - Showing respect for Moses and reverence for God with whom Moses would meet.

33:13 - Teach me your ways... - This prayer is one of the finest in scripture. We should copy it out and keep it before us. Knowing God is the most important thing in life. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" - John 17:3.

33:14 - My Presence will go with you - God has relented from his anger and disappointment with the people.

33:15 - If your Presence does not go - We should feel this way and not go in any way where God will not go with us.

33:18 - Show me your glory - We see from this that although Moses and the elders had "seen" God in some limited sense, they had never seen God as he really is, in his full glory - compare John 1:18; 6:46. Because Moses loved God, he wanted to know him more and more. So it will be with everyone who hungers for God.

33:20 - No one may see me and live - Compare 1 Timothy 6:16: [God] "who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see."

34:1 - Chisel out two stone tablets - The covenant is to be renewed. We should be grateful to serve a God who will still love us and receive us back even when we have been very foolish and have done outrageous things.

34:7 - forgiving...punishes - Paul wrote, "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God" - Romans 11:22. God loves and wants to save sinners but hates sin and has to deal with it because he is a holy and righteous judge. Part of God's goodness is that he always upholds righteousness and destroys evil. Love cannot abide sin, because sin destroys. We would not really want God to become confused about who he is and what he stands for. His unchanging righteousness is what keeps the universe sane.

34:9 - forgive - Confession and intercession are effective and God restores his covenant good will toward Israel.

34:12 - not...make a treaty - The Canaanite culture was saturated with evil and God's people are not to become entangled with evil.

34:13 - break...smash...cut down - Israel was to be ruthless in destroying Canaanite pagan objects of worship--removing the occasions of stumbling before they themselves were enticed away from God by these things. Compare Deuteronomy 7:2-6. So in our lives today. It is hard enough to live faithfully, going upstream in a world sold to evil. We must not give the devil opportunities and footholds in our lives - Ephesians 4:27. Not everything in the world that we can enjoy or which gives satisfaction is bad. But there are some things that may be dear to us which are nevertheless weakening us and drawing us into sin. Jesus says, Matthew 18:7-9,

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

The repentant sorcerers in Ephesus burned their books of magic, cutting off the way to their sinful past - Acts 19:19. There may be friendships, dating relationships, things we enjoy, viewing, listening or reading
habits, websites, chat rooms, a job environment, a place we live, even sometimes a church tie, which are working against God in our lives. We could save ourselves so many struggles and setbacks in our life for God if we dealt decisively with causes of sin. An athlete who is determined to win the games disciplines himself and gives up things that weaken him. We should be at least that serious about seeking the kingdom of God.

34:15 - **jealous God** - Israel was God's bride and when she went after idols, she committed adultery spiritually (as well as literally when she mingled with the Canaanites in their rites).

34:16 - **wives** - God is particularly strong about his people not intermarrying with unbelievers - compare Deuteronomy 7:3; Genesis 24:3; 28:1; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. (But if you already are married to an unbeliever, scripture teaches you to honor your marriage vows - 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.)

34:19, 26 - **first offspring (verse 19)**... **firstfruits** - The first and best of everything belongs to God as a sign of the honor we owe to him.

34:28 - **forty days** - This was a time to forget the desires of the body such as food and concentrate completely on the holy meeting with God.

**wrote** - Apparently this refers again to the LORD.

34:29 - **radiant** - People should also be able to tell when we spend regular time with God.

34:33 - **veil** - Because the people were afraid to look on his face. So often we resist and are afraid of manifestations of God. We pray for God to be with us and do great things for the church, then can't stand it when he does.

35:21 - **willing** - This was a free will offering, the best kind because it shows love for God.

36:5 - **more than enough** - Not many churches have this problem. But this can happen when the love of God overflows among people. Paul writes of the Macedonian Christians who, although they were poor, gave abundantly to help the poor in Judea. They did this, Paul says, because they had first given themselves to the Lord - 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

One reason the people gave was that they were giving to accomplish a concrete project, not just giving in abstraction. People will give when we appeal to them on the basis of specific things that need to be done, things they can get excited about, rather than just to meet a budget. It is also a mistake to keep congregational projects and finances secret. It all should be shared with the congregation so that they can take emotional "ownership" of what is being done.

38:8 - **women who served** - Parallel to deaconesses in the early church?

39:43 - **just as the LORD had commanded** - Obedience. If they had changed the pattern to fit their preferences, they would have had a tabernacle less than perfect and would have shown disrespect for the LORD's authority. We cannot improve on the wisdom of God. Where God has specified something, that should settle it for us. We do not need legalism in the church, but we do need obedience, respect for the Spirit's wisdom. The church will be better and will show more respect to God if we are careful of his revealed will in respect to worship, organization, etc. The most important obedience of all is in fundamental matters of the spirit. The church has often neglected inward issues in its preoccupation with outward correctness. But the pendulum swings. In our reaction against outward formalism, we may have come to think that forms have no importance at all. But nothing God has revealed or specified is without importance.

40:32 - **washed** - Showing reverence.
40:34 - glory of the LORD - This is known as the "shekinah glory" of God and this glory appears on a
number of occasions in the Old Testament. God's glory also filled the newly-built temple of Solomon.