

Gleaners Bible Studies c 11

MOSES AND THE EXODUS - A NATION EMERGES

Study 1

WRITTEN ON THE STONES



Exodus chapters 20 and 24

There are very few people who have not heard of the Ten Commandments. Did you know that they have become the foundation of many of the legal systems of the world? You will notice that many other laws were given (**chapters 21-23**) for the legal code of Israel was quite complicated. Beside the laws of conduct, there were laws for cleanliness and also for ceremonies of worship. The people were truly *“under law”*. But the ten clear commands of God, which were written on two tablets of stone, form the centre of His law. In many respects this was the law. You will notice that when a certain lawyer came to Jesus, he was asked the question, *“What is written in the law?”* He gave answers from these Ten Commandments. (**Luke 10: 25-28**) To him this was the law and the Lord did not contradict him. He gave His confirmation of them, *“do this and you will live”*. What really was it that made these commandments so important and gave them such authority?

Look at **Exodus 31: 18**. This verse is important. It gives us the reason why the ‘declogue’ (the Ten Commandments) were so vital to the nation. They were God-given, *“written with the finger of God”*. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of other codes of law which existed in the time of Moses. Many of their ideas were similar to the law of Moses. In fact, some have wrongly said that Israel merely brought these codes into their own life. To those who have compared carefully, however, there has been the conviction that the laws given to Israel demanded a much higher moral standard than those of surrounding nations. Given by God to Moses, these commands formed the foundation of righteousness for the nation.

We can say as we look at the laws in detail that they dealt with life from two standpoints:

1. Laws 1-4 Man's relationship towards God.
2. Laws 5-10 Man's relationship towards his neighbour.

1. ‘GOD FIRST’. This is the message of the Ten Commandments. *“You shall have no other gods before Me”*. (**20: 3**) This great command was designed to make Israel different from the nations around. No images or idols must be made or worshipped. (**verse 4**) God's name must never be used irreverently, in oath or in blasphemy. (**verse 7**) His day, the Sabbath must be kept holy. No work must be done and they must keep it totally as a rest day. (**verses 8-11**)

Are you aware of what God was doing? Were these just harsh laws given by God to make life rigid and restricted? To even suggest this is to give a wrong impression of God's character and purpose. What God desired was the love and loyalty of His people. All around them were ‘gods’ belonging to people who in some form or other engaged in pagan worship. In the later history of Israel the well-being of the nation was measured by its allegiance to God and obedience of His law. The law ‘in a nutshell’ was *“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.”* (**Deuteronomy 6: 5**) Although as Christians we are not *“under law”* (see **Romans 6**), it is true for us that happy life is bound to follow a determination to put God and His commands first.

2. MAN AND HIS NEIGHBOUR. In **Luke 10: 27**, the Lord Jesus reminded the lawyer that the second great commandment which embraced the law was: *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”*. The final six laws of the declogue concerned man's relationship with others. Notice that the fifth commandment has to do with family life. (**verse 12**) It really laid the foundation for a happy home. The national life of Israel had healthy family life at its centre. We could well do with more of the keeping of this law in our nation today.

Looking at the remaining five commandments, they are representative of many ills in our society. These are wrong and the law that forbade them is right. The law tells us, its commands that deal with men's behaviour, that God is righteous - absolutely right.

Chapter 24 is important in several ways. Notice that the people said quite clearly as they heard God's demands, *“All the words which the Lord has said will we do.”* (**verse 3**) It is obvious from **chapter 20: 18-21** that the whole scene was one full of awe-inspiring power. The people looked on from afar. God was hidden by darkness. In order to live, God's law must be kept. Sadly, it was proved in a very short while, just how incapable the people were of keeping their promise - they soon broke the law and paid the penalty.

We notice, too, that Moses and Aaron and the elders were able to draw near to God and see something of His glory **chapter 24: 9-11**. But it was only after the blood of the burnt offering had been put upon the altar. As we draw to the close of this rather serious study, we can reflect upon the value of the blood of our Lord Jesus. He paid the penalty of the law to the full at Calvary; the law which we had broken in our sin, and deserved to pay for ourselves.

So now we can be forgiven and know the peace of the presence of God in our lives.

Study 2

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE



Exodus chapters 25 and 26

It is interesting to look carefully at God's dealings with the nation so far. They began as slaves in cruel bondage but through the Exodus they are brought out to freedom. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are instituted and their pilgrimage proceeded until they came to the "**Mount Sinai**." Here the law was given and God made the great covenant with them as His people. Remember that these were stages in the formation of a nation which was to have a unique place in the history of the world. However much the people sinned and lost God's blessing, but in time things never lost their importance.

The point of our study is to consider the fact that God said that He would dwell among His people. **Chapter 25: 1-9** is an important passage. It begins a section of the Exodus which deals mainly with the building of the TABERNACLE. We could say that the people of Israel lived a nomadic life - living in tents and constantly on the move. Their goal was "**the promised land**." They were pilgrims passing through the wilderness and yet, even in this way of life, God wanted them to enjoy His presence. The Tabernacle, or 'Tent of Meeting', was designed to provide a place where they could know the experience of God's dwelling with them. You will notice that it was built with journeying in mind, for it could be dismantled and carried with ease.

The building was the product of the GIVING of the people. Notice **verses 1-2**. The materials were taken from willing-hearted people - those who gave willingly from their wealth. This is really significant. It was their way of saying that they wanted God to be with them, in response to God's desire to be with His people. How good it is to show by our response that we want the Lord to have His way in our lives. Notice the wonderful collection of real wealth that was given by willing hands to provide God's dwelling-place. (**verses 3-7**)

Look carefully at **verses 8-9**. The Tabernacle was to be a SANCTUARY. The meaning of this is "**holy place**". While the fact that God wanted to be with His people was wonderful, there was also something awe-inspiring about it. Because God was there it was a most holy place. It was no ordinary matter for the God of the great Universe to be willing to make His presence felt among sinful people. You will notice that when Israel sinned, it was through the cloud about the Tabernacle that God made them aware of His displeasure.

Notice now **verse 9**. Moses had to make sure that he built according to the pattern that God had given him. He could not use his own design. Just as for today's builders, there is an architect's plan, so for Moses the detailed plan was provided. Even the pins which held the curtains together had to be made "**according to the pattern**". (**Exodus 25: 40**) This shows us that God is a God of order. Those who wish to enjoy His presence must obey His Word. This is true in every aspect of life. If you read the subsequent chapters of Exodus you will find how clearly the instructions for building were given.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TABERNACLE.

There were three Sections in the Tabernacle. The Outer Court, The Holy Place, The Holy of Holies. Each section

had its special furniture and was used for a particular purpose. We cannot deal with this in detail here (there are many good books on the subject), but it is necessary to understand the main details of the building. Notice that God started with the Ark in the Holy of Holies and made His way out to man and the place of sacrifice.

1. **The Holy of Holies (most Holy Place) containing**
The Ark. **Chapter 25: 10-22**
2. **The Holy Place containing**
The Table of Shewbread. **Chapter 25: 23-30**
The Golden Lampstand. **Chapter 25: 31-40**
The Altar for Incense. **Chapter 30: 1-8**
3. **The Outer Court containing**
The Laver. **Chapter 30: 17-21**
The Brazen Altar. **Chapter 27: 1-8**

Each area of the Tabernacle had its own importance and each item in it illustrated something about being in God's presence. In this way God was able to teach the nation of Israel what it really meant to have Him dwelling with them.

ALL the people could come with their sacrifices into the Outer Court. It was on the Altar of Burnt Offering there that the various sacrifices were offered. ALL the people needed to know God's blessing and forgiveness in the value of the sacrifices.

Only the PRIESTS were allowed into the second section of the Tabernacle. They would wash at the Laver and then go in to do the daily service of the Holy Place. But into the Holy of Holies only the High Priest went just once each year, with the blood of a sacrifice. This took place on the Day of Atonement, the day when the nation acknowledged its sin and the great atonement was made. (**Leviticus 23**)

Think about these things. Perhaps you find them rather obscure and difficult to understand. Remember that they have no meaning unless they direct us to the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not need the Tabernacle now because the Lord Jesus came and offered one sacrifice for us at Calvary. Because of this, as we accept Him and what He has done, we can know God's presence in our lives. And we can enter by faith into the presence of God in prayer. (**Hebrews 10: 19-22**)

Study 3

THE GOLDEN CALF



Exodus chapters 32-34

It is impossible for us to study all the details of the history of the emerging nation of Israel as shown in the book of Exodus, so we have tried to select the main events, which played the greatest part in the development of God's people. We hope you will read the details more closely in your spare time.

The event which we now study is very important. It is the story of the failure of Aaron and the people while Moses was up in the mountain with God. **Chapter 32: 1** tells us that Moses had shown to them the worth of true leadership, and it is very sad that they could so doubt his reality. Yet this was only one of the many times that they showed their faithlessness and lack of loyalty. The worship of the Golden Calf shows us how people slipped into idolatry.

The importance of this incident lies mainly in the way in which it reveals the characters of those who were involved. This is the standpoint from which we are going to study it. We see the fickle character of the people and the tremendous strength and love of Moses as a true leader of the nation. And, perhaps more than anything else, the real attitude of God to idolatry is made clear as His character is revealed to us. We have noticed before in our studies that **CRISES** revealed **CHARACTER**. This is so with the events of the Golden Calf.

Look first at the PEOPLE. Was there any real reason for their action? The excuse given was that Moses and Joshua delayed their return from the mount. The credentials of Moses were questioned. Perhaps we can detect a note of panic in their words. It may have been that for a moment they felt like a ship at sea without a captain. But did the situation demand that **“a god”** should be made? The great words of the first commandment were **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** Nothing could alter this. God must be their only God even if Moses did disappear. Aaron’s mistake is clear. He pandered to the whim of the people and out of their jewellery made the Golden Calf. This action was very sad, especially as Aaron was to be the High Priest of the people. Think of the slight on the love and power of God as these people danced in a frenzy around their idol, giving glory to these gods as their deliverers from Egypt! There is a madness here that is baffling. Yet many times in the future life of Israel such behaviour was repeated. You will find it happening in the book of **Judges**, and also in the book of **2 Kings** when the captivity took place.

When the Lord Jesus came, He found just the same conditions. The covenant that God had made with His people was shattered time and time again by the people themselves, but God remained faithful. So, early in the history of the nation, we have an attitude, which developed to such an extent that God eventually cast off His people. Let us beware that the same spirit never affects us as Christians. The Lord Jesus must be the absolute Lord in our lives at all times.

Now look at the Character of MOSES. The picture we receive of him as the shepherd and leader is one of the most beautiful in the Bible. We feel that Moses really cared for God’s people. However in **32: 10** the Lord was ready to blot out the nation altogether because of its sin. He was ready to begin again with Moses as the founder of the new race. But instead of having any consideration for himself and the future, Moses pleaded the cause of God’s People. **“Look how much You have done for them.” (verse 11)** **“What will the Egyptians say?” (verse 12)** **“Remember the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel.” (verse 13)** Later on in **verses 31-32** he returned to the Lord and began to plead again. He asked that rather than refuse to forgive them, that he himself might be blotted out of God’s records. This was real sacrificial love and care. Moses did not take this action because he thought lightly of what the nation had done. Read carefully **chapter 32: 15-35**, and you will see that he was very angry indeed, He broke the two tablets of stone, just as the people had broken the Commandments! We can learn here that the marks of a true godly leader are that he cares for God’s honour and he truly loves and cares for those whom he leads.

Finally, we look at the way in which GOD’S CHARACTER is shown to us. Remember that the sin of the people was against God. Spend time reading these chapters with this in view. Then notice two facts about God. He is **HOLY** and this sad event made His holiness more clear. Look at **chapter 34: 14. “The LORD, whose name is JEALOUS, is a jealous GOD.”** Strange language, which is full of meaning. God will not give His honour to others. Idolatry questions God’s right to be God, and sin dishonours Him. Let us be careful that we allow only right things to control our lives. Through the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we can find power to do this. The other fact that we see is this: God is gracious. Look at **chapter 34: 4-8**. They are lovely verses. God is willing to forgive those who sin against Him. It eventually meant the death of Jesus on the cross, but it is true all the way through the Bible that the God who is **HOLY** is **GRACIOUS** as well.

There is much to be learned from this event. Make sure that you understand its lessons clearly.

Study 4

THE GLORY OF THE LORD



Exodus chapter 40

A nation emerges! Think of the beginning of the nation in Abraham. Now look at the character of the nation in **Exodus 40**. There is a sense of triumph in this chapter. There is also something special about it. I wonder if you have noticed the main features which characterise the children of Israel? Look at them together and decide which is the most important. You will notice that this chapter has to do only with the erection of the Tabernacle. It seems that everything else is forgotten. Of course this is not so, but it does give us a clue to that which mattered more than anything else to the nation. **GOD DWELT AMONG THEM.** Note this! When the people recognised this and lived in the good of it, they were a happy and triumphant nation. When, through sin and idolatry, they forgot it, they fell from God’s favour and suffered the consequences. The sad thing about it was that when the nation’s history was written, there was far more sadness and defeat than joy and victory. God never intended it to be that way.

“On the first day of the first month you shall set up the Tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting.” (verse 2)

“Thus Moses did; according to all that the Lord had commanded him, so he did.” (verse 16)

“So Moses finished the work.” (verse 33) “And the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.” (verse 35)

1. ERECTION - The various items of furniture were all completed separately. Many people gave materials for the construction. **Chapter 35** tells us all about this. We read that they gave willingly. First of all they gave those valuable and precious things that were needed to make a wonderful dwelling-place for their God. They gave cheerfully and in abundance; in fact Moses eventually had to stop them giving! (**chapter 36: 5-7**)

It makes us feel that they really wanted the Lord to be amongst them and were willing to make the building worthy of Him. Then the wisest and most skilful workmen amongst the people were chosen by God to construct the various parts of the building, **chapter 36: 1 & 8**. The best materials and the best of talents were used to build God's dwelling-place. He certainly deserved it. We must always be prepared to give to God our very best, if we are to enjoy His presence.

2. OBEDIENCE - Moses worked to a pattern when he gave directions for the building of the Tabernacle. The details or 'blueprints' were given to him on the mountain. God was the architect, and the plans were drawn up so that every detail would show God's wisdom and greatness. **Chapter 25: 9** shows the necessity of following the pattern. Each detail was important. Notice how often in our chapter these words appear **"as the Lord commanded Moses."** It has been said that 'God's work done in God's way is sure to bring God's blessing.' The building of the Tabernacle demonstrates this. Moses was entirely obedient in all that he was instructed to do. **Hebrews 3: 2** tells us that **"Moses also was faithful in all his house."** So much depended upon obedience. The Lord Jesus stands as an even greater example of obedience in God's work. **"He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (**Philippians 2: 8**)

3. COMPLETION - **"Moses finished the work". (40: 33)** Look at the details of this chapter. Every item of furniture was built to the pattern, and then it was brought to its proper place. God always wanted things done **"decently and in order."** (**1 Corinthians 14: 40**) You will notice that after the Tabernacle was erected the Ark was put in first. This was the very heart of God's dwelling. It was the most sacred spot on earth for Israel. Every other item of furniture was positioned in relation to the Ark. God could only be really pleased with work that was absolutely complete. Does this remind you of something else? The last cry of the Lord upon the cross was **"It is finished."** (**John 19: 30**) We must realise that, as Christians, our salvation rests upon the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gives us peace and assurance. Everything that God does is perfect; that is why Moses has to be so careful to finish all the work of the Tabernacle according to God's plan.

4. GLORY - **"The glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle."** (**40: 34**) Notice the covering of the cloud and the filling of the tent with God's glory. In some of the things we have considered in this study we have collected points that have been mentioned before. But here is something completely new. Only when everything was right and complete could the Lord make His presence known. It is important that we learn from these verses that the PROTECTION and PROGRESS of the nation depended upon the enjoyment of the PRESENCE of the Lord. We can apply this to ourselves, for only when our lives are right before the Lord can we know His presence with us. This fact will make us secure and enable us to grow in our Christian lives.

The nation of Israel had emerged. It was the nation of the cloud and the fire, as we see from the last three verses of the book of Exodus. God dwelt amongst His people.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (Exodus 20: 1-17)

Man's relationship with God

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself any carved image.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Man's relationship to Others

5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet.

Questions

Study 1 - WRITTEN ON THE STONES

1. Why were the Ten Commandments so important to Israel?
2. Which commandment is the most important of all and why?
3. Why was the Sabbath so important to Israel?
4. What do the commands which deal with man's behaviour tell us about God?
5. What value has the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Study 2 - GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

1. What was the goal of the people of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness?
2. Moses had to build **"according to the pattern"**. What does this teach us about God?
3. What furniture in the Tabernacle was found in the Holy Place?
4. How often did the High Priest go into the Holy of Holies (most Holy Place), and what did he take with him?
5. Why do we not need the Tabernacle today?

Study 3 - THE GOLDEN CALF

1. Why did the people want the Golden Calf?
2. What kind of character do we see in the people as they did this evil?
3. How did Moses show that he was a true leader of people?
4. What did Moses ask God to remember, as he pleaded for the people?
5. What two great facts do we learn about God from this lesson?

Study 4 - THE GLORY OF THE LORD

1. What did the people of Israel demonstrate by their readiness to give for the building of the Tabernacle?
2. Why was it necessary for Moses to be obedient to God in his building of the Tabernacle?
3. What great blessing comes to us through the 'finished work' of the Lord Jesus?
4. What was shown by the fact that the Tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord?
5. What did the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire mean to the people of Israel?