
Day 31 - January 31

Establishment of a Nation (1525 - 1400 BCE)
The Covenant Broken and Renewed

Readings: *Exodus 32:1-34:35*

Reflections:

- This whole passage is interesting because it appears that God changes his mind when talking to Moses. God has an ultimate goal of establishing a nation but it appears that he is open to wiping the Israelites out at this point and starting over. Was it a test for Moses or was God serious? We don't know. It appears though that Moses as God's friend plays a role in saving the Israelites. Here we see again the reality, importance and potential influence of being a friend of God.
- When Moses is away the people turn back to the familiar. They forget what God has done and forget what God has said to them. And it only takes days, it appears, before they want to go back to their unbelief and desire to save themselves. For them, this looks like turning to what they have trusted in the past, the gods of Egypt.
- Note that both boys and girls were wearing gold earrings. Some religious people today would freak out to read this.
- It is interesting how Aaron called this worship of the calf a festival to the Lord. It was like he was rationalizing that this must be acceptable to the Lord. They even sacrificed to the Lord and then worshipped other gods. It shows how we are so quick to turn away from the Lord and what he has said to us when: 1) what he has said doesn't make sense; 2) it is taking longer than what we expected; and 3) when we are no longer listening to people of faith (Moses wasn't there with them) but rather people of unbelief.
- God knows what is happening, gets angry and wants to start over with Moses. Moses pleads with God by reminding God of his own words and his reputation. It is funny that it portrays God as being so angry he forgets these things. We see that God reveals himself in very understandable and accessible ways. He isn't this robotic being we can't relate to but a person that has real emotions. This makes sense as Scripture indicates that we are made in his image.
- Moses obviously does not realize how bad it is. He is pretty objective when talking with God. When he actually sees how bad it has gotten, he gets incredibly angry. He breaks the stone

tablets and then destroys the golden calf and makes the people drink it. Aaron makes up a pathetic excuse, one that is very similar to Adam before God.

- The people are out of control so Moses commands the Levites, the future priests of Israel, to execute the worst of the worst. Three thousand are killed. Wow! Moses then goes and intercedes again for the people, asking for his life to be taken instead of the people. This is one of those Christ-like moments where we see in the past what God would one day do through Christ. Well, Moses' death will not suffice as a sacrifice so the people remain under judgment. God uses a plague to surgically kill all those who have sinned.
- God then states he will not go with the people but will only send an angel because he knows he would kill them all in his anger. This again is an interesting thing for God to say. Is this a test of Moses to reveal Moses heart as a leader? Is it a word of judgment that was meant to bring the people to repentance, those that survived the other judgments?
- Repentance is shown by them taking off their ornaments. These were the ornaments they used for Egyptian worship.
- In this next section, we see how close of a friend Moses is with God. Moses is clearly God's friend and speaks to him face to face. No one heard God or spoke to God, only Moses. Again, this is an example where in the past we see something that would one day be for all Christ-followers. God knowing you by name and speaking as a friend speaks with a friend. We also see how Moses had an exceptional relationship with God that transcends all of the religious ideas of the Tabernacle and priesthood. The Law Giver is apparently exempt from the Law. This should be a clue to us that God has a higher purpose than simply trying to manage people through fear and rules.
- Moses expresses his need for God to go with them again. He has Joshua and Aaron, but he knows they can not move out from there without God going with them. God promises him that God will give him his presence and lead him to rest. Our security comes from being close with God and from nothing else.
- God's own character, even in the midst of this judgment, is still "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Exodus 33:19) God is still a God of great mercy and grace.
- God does not reveal his full glory (his face) but only a part of his glory (his back). This suggests that the veil between humanity and God that Christ will one day remove was still in place even for Moses.
- God calls Moses back to the mountain for forty days. Fortunately, this time the people sit tight and simply wait as they were supposed to the first time. He gives Moses new stone tablets for the covenant and declares his character again: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the

fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7) Here we see both a clear description of God’s heart for mercy and yet also lasting consequences of sin. When God announced the curses to Adam and Eve, the consequences for their sin carried on to all future generations of the human race. God here declares a solemn warning that the consequences of sin is felt beyond a single human life but carries onto future generations. This may cause the reader to wonder how merciful God can be for punishing grandchildren for sins they didn’t commit. It is probably better to see this as a both a strong warning to the people (“your sins will have generational consequences”) as well as an accurate description of what actually happens (sin is relationally systemic and so a parent that lives a dysfunctional, selfish and sinful life will set an unhealthy pattern that will probably carry down two or three generations of their own family). Normally parents will do anything to protect their children. Sadly, even with this strong warning, we will see that Israel cares nothing for the impact of their sin on their children or future generations.

- God renews his covenant with Moses and promises his protection again. God describes himself as a jealous God, not wanting the people to trust in any other gods or become involved in the sin of the nations around them. God’s love for us is intense and he longs for an exclusive, deeply personal relationship with us.
- Moses fasts this entire time, all forty days. This forty day fast is a sign of complete surrender to God and physically demonstrating to God that all you want is God and nothing else. Jesus at the beginning of his ministry will fast for forty days and nights as well.
- Although we see in this passage that God wants the people to understand his heart for mercy over judgment, his judgment is still present and a reality for this nation. God's mercy is ultimately and most fully displayed in Christ. One of the themes that unfold in the story of Israel is that consequences, even severe consequences, do not keep people from doing terrible things. Unless the human heart is changed from the inside out, it continues to sin even though it may suffer disastrous consequences. This sets the stage for Jesus to come and bring the Spirit to change people from the inside out. Although the Israelites came under judgment in this account, now in Christ all of our punishment has been laid on Christ so that all we receive is grace and mercy and his Spirit to transform us so that we don’t live enslaved to sin and selfishness. What great news!
- Moses literally radiates from being with God! It is an amazing image of how God transforms us as we are close with him. This transformation from being intimate with God is not something we may not be able to perceive, but only others will see. This should make us bold in faith. 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 says, “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces

all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

- Summary of the key lessons from this passage? Wait for God's best. Don't forget what God has done or said and turn back to old ways of thinking or taking care of yourself. Remain strong in faith by waiting for God to fulfill his word. Celebrate his mercy and grace in Christ. God is a God of great love and compassion. Even before Christ, he was still so compassionate. Now in Christ we see the fullness of his grace and so we should be confident and full of joy! Be confident that God is transforming us into his likeness. That although we can not see it for ourselves, his glory is radiating through us as we remain close to him.