

## Reformation Fellowship Notes • September 24, 2017

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Handout #28

Exodus 31:12 to 32:20

### I. Introduction

#### A. My plan

1. I have a little to finish from last week.
  - a) This will finish up the passage describing God's instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai.
2. Then I will start the incident with the golden calf.

### II. Exodus 31:12-17

#### A. A reminder to keep the Sabbath

1. A sign between God and his people
  - a) Reminder?
2. "That you may know that I am the Lord, who sanctifies you"
  - a) The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that God is the one who makes his people holy.
    - (1) They need to be holy in order to be God's people; to play the role God wants them to play.
3. Anyone who violates the Sabbath will be put to death.
  - a) And cut off from his people
4. Work for six days and rest on the seventh
  - a) Perpetual commandment
  - b) Throughout your generations
5. Because God worked for six days and rested on the seventh and was refreshed
6. Sabbath is the first thing God made holy (Genesis 2:3).
  - a) It predates the Tabernacle.

#### B. Why the Sabbath here?

1. Because the people are about to build the Tabernacle
  - a) They must not disobey God's law even to build God's tent (Cassuto, p. 403-4).
2. The Tabernacle and the Sabbath have much in common.
  - a) They are both reminders of two very important truths.
    - (1) God is holy.
    - (2) God makes holy.
3. After the incident with the golden calf, Moses reminds the people to keep the Sabbath.

- a) So, the incident with the golden calf is sandwiched between two calls to keep the Sabbath

### III. Exodus 31:18

- A. When God had finished speaking, he gave Moses the two tablets.
  - 1. Written in stone (permanent)
  - 2. Written by the finger of God (unmediated transmission from God)

### IV. Introduction to the incident of the golden calf

- A. I have found the next three chapters especially powerful.
  - 1. I will slow down.
    - a) My outline for this chapter is very long.
    - b) I don't know how far I will get.
    - c) I will finish it next week.
  - 2. My two most significant discoveries
    - a) The incident of the golden calf is more subtle and more heinous than I had previously understood.
      - (1) It must be seen in the full context of the book of Exodus.
    - b) What this incident tells us about Moses makes him an amazing figure.

### V. Exodus 32:1-6

- A. What is the situation?
  - 1. After the people sealed the covenant with YHWH, Moses went up on the mountain
  - 2. The people are trying to figure out why Moses has been gone so long.
    - a) He could be dead.
      - (1) Gone 40 days
      - (2) Took no food or water
      - (3) He went into a scary environment.
    - b) This is not an unreasonable guess.
- B. They approach Aaron.
  - 1. The wording suggests a hostile approach.
  - 2. "Make us a god."
    - a) They want Aaron to make some kind of religious image.
      - (1) They use the term *elohim*.
        - (a) Could refer to YHWH (plural of majesty),
        - (b) But they use a plural verb in the next clause.
          - (i) This is not unprecedented because *elohim* is a plural form.
          - (ii) But it is very unusual to use a plural verb with *elohim* when it refers to YHWH.
      - (2) This all suggests that they are, at least, thinking very paganly.

- b) “who will go before us”
  - (1) They want divine guidance and protection.
    - (a) Instead of Moses

“The people’s request for elohim on the grounds that Moses has now disappeared is notable in that it implies that the elohim are a replacement, in some sense, for Moses.” (Moberly p. 46)

- (b) Moses was the unique mediator for the people to God.
  - (i) But he was not appreciated by the people and is not missed.
- (c) The calf is seen as a preferable means of procuring divine assistance.
  - (i) There is security in the conventional.
  - (ii) These issues will be touched upon at end of section, forming an inclusio (cf. 34:29 ff.).

- 3. “This Moses”
  - a) Disrespectful?
  - b) He is the one they say brought them out of Egypt.
    - (1) They don’t credit YHWH.
  - c) “We don’t know what happened to him.”
  - d) They don’t appreciate what YHWH or Moses have done.

#### C. Aaron capitulates.

- 1. He has people bring him their rings.
  - a) Aaron tried to dissuade them from doing this.
    - (1) Tear the rings out.
      - (a) From wives and children
    - (2) Collect them.
      - (a) An attempt to delay?
    - (3) This is the rabbinic tradition.
  - b) He cast and fashioned a calf from the metal.
    - (1) How idols were made.
      - (a) Cassuto p. 412
    - (2) They proclaimed this to be their god who brought them out of Egypt.
      - (a) So, the people appear to want to exchange YHWH for another, better god.
- 2. Aaron wants to recast what is happening as worship of YHWH.
  - a) The people call the calf the god who brought them out of Egypt.
    - (1) Aaron says, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord (YHWH).”
- 3. Aaron built an altar.
  - a) What happened corresponds to what happened when they first made the covenant with YHWH (Exodus 24:4-11).
    - (1) They rose early.
    - (2) Offered burnt offerings
    - (3) Offered peace offerings
    - (4) Ate and drank

- b) They rose up to play.
  - (1) This is a difference.
  - (2) This could indicate that they engaged in the practices associated with the fertility cults.
  - (3) The word has the connotation of committing adultery.
    - (a) This event is very adultery-like.

## VI. Exodus 32:7-10

- A. God tells Moses to go down.
  - 1. God disassociates himself from the people.
    - a) “Your people”
      - (1) Can they continue to be God’s people?
      - (2) In verse 14, the author describes the Israelites as “His people” suggesting that they can indeed continue to be God’s people.
    - b) “Whom you brought out of Egypt”
      - (1) Underscores Moses’ relationship to the people and downplays his own relationship to them
- B. God gives his response to the people’s sin.
  - 1. God charges them with several acts of wrongdoing.
    - a) They have corrupted themselves.
    - b) They have turned away from the way I commanded.
    - c) They have made a molten calf.
      - (1) They worshipped it.
      - (2) They sacrificed to it.
      - (3) They said this is your god who brought you out of Egypt.
    - d) They have done all this quickly.
  - 2. God resolves to destroy them.
    - a) God has seen this people—they are obstinate.
    - b) God’s three-part plan
      - (1) Tells Moses not to interfere.
        - (a) This suggests he is in danger of relenting from his anger.
          - (i) Moses probably took note of this.
      - (2) God will destroy this people.
      - (3) He will make Moses into a great people.
        - (a) Same as the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2; Exodus 32:10)
    - c) This is God’s Plan B.

## VII. Exodus 32:11-14

- A. Moses tries to get God to change his mind.
  - 1. Why are you so angry at a people for whom you have done so much?
    - a) Moses calls them “your people.”
  - 2. The Egyptians would say that God just brought them into the desert to kill them.

3. Remember the patriarchs—remember your promises.
    - a) You made promises swearing by yourself.
    - b) You promised to make them numerous.
    - c) You promised to give them the land.
      - (1) You will inherit it forever.
  4. Nothing is said about any redeeming qualities of the Israelites.
    - a) God's relenting is solely due to his graciousness and his commitment to his promises.
    - b) Only the intervention of Moses was able to trigger this graciousness.
- B. God changed his mind.
1. However, this is not a complete restoration of the relationship.
    - a) All God has changed his mind about is destroying the people.
  2. It takes God quite a while to come to the place where he is willing to restore the relationship fully.
    - a) Moses will broach this issue two more times.
      - (1) Each time God will come a little closer to reconciliation.
      - (2) But there are indications all along that a full reconciliation will come.

### VIII. Exodus 32:15-20

- A. Moses returned to the camp.
1. He had the two tablets.
    - a) Of the testimony
    - b) Written on both sides
    - c) God's work
      - (1) Engraved by God
        - (a) The calf was engraved by Aaron.
        - (2) The law reflects who God is that is authored by God himself.
    - d) The tablets constitute a representation of God that he fashioned by himself
    - e) A lot of words are dedicated to describing the tablets.
      - (1) This creation of God is being contrasted to the calf.
- B. Joshua heard the people.
1. This is the first time we learn that Joshua was with Moses for those 40 days.
  2. Joshua hears the people shouting and thinks it is war.
    - a) It sounds more like conflict than celebration.
      - (1) There is a spiritual conflict taking place that is very war-like.
    - b) The sounds mark the arrival of the holiness of the top of the mountain to the wickedness of the foot of the mountain.
  3. Moses says it is not the sound of war.

- a) It is not triumph.
- b) It is not defeat.
- c) It is singing.

C. Moses is angered.

1. He sees the calf and the dancing.
  - a) Singing and dancing is not necessarily wrong (Ex. 15:20-21).
  - b) But it is clear to Moses and to God that what is happening is not good.
  - c) An old form of the word for “shouting” is used here so that it has the same consonants as the word for “with evil intent” in verse 12.
    - (1) Apparent play on words
2. He threw down the tablets.
  - a) Why?
    - (1) The covenant had been effectively broken.
      - (a) He broke the tablets right where the covenant had been made.
      - (b) “In Akkadian legal terminology, the term “to break the tablet” (*tuppam hepu*) means to invalidate or repudiate a document of agreement.” (Sarna p. 219)
3. Moses destroyed the idol.
  - a) Burned it
  - b) Ground it into powder
    - (1) “It is now clear from the Ugaritic myth that recounts the destruction of the god Mot by the goddess Anath that the same cumulative series of destructive acts presents a picture of total annihilation. Similar oblitative exercises are featured in both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources, and there can be no doubt that the purpose was to reduce the obnoxious object to absolute nonexistence.” (Sarna p. 219)
  - c) Strew it on the water
  - d) Had the people drink it
4. Why did Moses have them drink it?
  - a) Four options have been offered.
    - (1) Like test for adultery, as in Numbers 5:11-31
      - (a) Terminology suggesting adultery is used in this passage several times.
        - (i) Three times it is called a great sin. This term is used in Akkadian and in Egyptian texts to refer to adultery. (Sarna p. 220)

“It is pertinent to point out that our narrative contains more than a hint of this same metaphor. Three times it stamps the making of and worshipping at the calf a ‘great sin.’ It so happens that this phrase is a legal term found in Akkadian documents from Ugarit and in Egyptian marriage contracts, and it always refers to adultery. . . . Otherwise, all biblical usages of the ‘great sin’ refer to idolatry. It is reasonable, therefore, to perceive in Moses’ action a strong intimation of a parallel with the suspected adulteress. Quite likely, the potion administered to all the Israelites

had as its purpose to determine the guilty ones, presumably the three thousand who subsequently lost their lives.” (Sarna p. 220)

- (2) As a punishment
  - (3) As a cleansing ritual, like the Red Cow in Numbers 19
  - (4) To punish the calf—people ingest and expel it as waste; the gold that constituted the idol is effectively gone.
- b) I think the first option is the most likely.