

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 4, 2018

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Handout #31

Exodus 34:1-35

I. Introduction

A. Moses was able to completely reconcile the people with God.

1. Now everything will be restored.
 - a) Covenant is reaffirmed with a new ceremony,
 - b) But ceremony is different in certain respects.
 - (1) Why?
 - (2) Is it different in content?

II. Exodus 34:1-9

A. God tells Moses to make new tablets for the people.

1. Moses is instructed to cut out two stone tablets and come up the mountain.
 - a) The first time God provided the tablets and did the writing.
 - (1) “I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction” (Ex 24:12).
 - (2) “He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Ex 31:18).
 - (3) “Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on the one side and the other. And the tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing engraved on the tablets” (Ex 32:15-16).
 - (4) It is very clear that these tablets were God’s doing.
 - (a) I think the fact that they were written on both sides is significant, but I don’t know the significance.
 - b) The second time Moses plays a role.
 - (1) “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets.”
 - (a) Very clearly Moses is supposed to do this.
 - (2) “I will write on the tablets . . .”
 - (a) It would appear that God was going to do the writing this time like last time.
 - (b) But later is says, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write down these words . . .’” (Ex 34:27).
 - (i) It could be that in verse 1, God was saying, “I will make sure the words will be written . . .”
 - (3) Moses certainly cut the tablets, and he may have written the words.
 - c) This is a noteworthy difference from the first time.
 - (1) We will talk about this more later.

- B. Moses is told to go up on the mountain.
 - 1. He is to present himself to God at the top.
 - a) No man comes with him.
 - b) Not even livestock may be on the mountain.
 - c) Moses did as he was told.
 - (1) He gets up early and goes up the mountain.
- C. YHWH descended in a cloud as Moses called upon the name of the Lord.
 - 1. Moses had asked to know God's ways and to see God's glory.
 - a) God had told Moses how this would happen.
 - b) This is a record of it actually coming to pass.
 - 2. God coming to earth by means of the clouds is a common image.
 - a) In response to Moses calling on the name of the Lord
 - 3. The Lord passed by.
 - a) Description of God offered by himself

“The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;... (Ex 34:6-7)

- b) The traits mentioned are all qualities of character rather than physical traits.
 - (1) These are the traits already exhibited by God in Exodus.
 - (2) God of the Old Testament is often contrasted with Jesus.
 - (a) But these qualities are the ones we associate with Jesus.

...yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Ex 34:6-7).

- (3) Despite God's compassion and grace, he does not allow sin to go unpunished.
 - (a) What does it mean when he says, “visiting iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren”?
 - (i) Does God punish future generations for sins of fathers?
 - (ii) Is he talking to Israel as a nation?
 - (iii) God will punish the nation even if the punishment is delayed.
- 4. Moses was both humbled and reassured.
 - a) Moses bowed down in respect.
 - b) Moses once more repeated his request that God go with them.
 - (1) On the basis of Moses' status with God,
 - (a) Despite their obstinance and sin,
 - (b) God would take the people as his inheritance.
 - (2) God does not repeat that he will go with them.
 - (a) Ultimately, I don't think this is significant.
 - (i) We will talk more about this at the end.

III. Exodus 34:10-17

- A. Having been fully reconciled, God renews the covenant.
1. God highlights some things he talked about before.
 - a) This section corresponds to Exodus 23:20-33.
 - (1) Most of the wording is the same.
 - (2) Some sentences are moved around.
 2. In the process of carrying out his terms of the agreement, God is going to do some astounding things.
 - a) Unprecedented miracles
 - (1) The surrounding peoples will witness these wonders.
 - b) Exodus 23 has a fairly long section talking about God sending his angel to help them along the way and to help them drive out the Canaanites.
 - c) Exodus 23 also has a long section about how God will bless them in the land.
 3. Things they must not do
 - a) They had demonstrated that they were vulnerable to this.
 - b) Don't make covenants with the people in the land.
 - (1) They will tempt your people to adopt their beliefs and practices.
 - c) Destroy their religious sites.
 - (1) God is a jealous God.
 - d) Don't be seduced into—
 - (1) Sacrificing to their gods
 - (2) Eating meat sacrificed to their gods
 - (3) Intermarrying
 - (4) Exodus 23 has no corresponding section.
 - e) Don't make any molten gods.
 - (1) This is very plainly something they had done when they made the Golden Calf.
 - (2) Exodus 23 has no corresponding section.

IV. Exodus 34:18-24

- A. Things they must do
1. This section repeats a section that appears earlier in Exodus 23:10-17.
 - a) Almost identical wording
 - b) Some changes in the order of the sentences
 2. God reminds people to celebrate Passover.
 - a) Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - (1) Because God brought you out of Egypt
 - b) Feast of First Fruits
 - (1) And redeem all your first-born.
 - (2) This Feast was not identified in earlier passage.
 - (a) It was seen as part of Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 23.
 - (b) More detail here than Exodus 23

3. Keep the Sabbath.
 - a) No mention of Sabbath year is in this section.
 - b) Sabbath year was included in Exodus 23.
4. Feast of weeks (Pentecost)
5. Feast of Ingathering (Sukkot)
6. Three times a year you are to appear before God.
 - a) Don't worry about leaving your villages at this time; God will drive out your enemies and protect you from them.
 - (1) Concern about national security is not a valid reason to not celebrate the feasts.
 - (a) This was not included in Exodus 23.

V. Exodus 34:25-26

- A. Three special prohibitions are repeated.
 1. Almost identical to Exodus 23:18-19
 2. Apparently Canaanite practices

VI. Purpose of this section (Exodus 34:10-26)

- A. It is nearly a repetition of what God had said earlier (Exodus 23).
 1. However, the order is reversed.
 - a) Exodus 23
 - (1) Things you should do
 - (2) Things you should not do
 - b) Exodus 34
 - (1) Things you should not do
 - (2) Things you should do
 2. These things were said as the last part of the law God gave to Moses before the covenant was consummated.
 - a) These are the only part of the law reiterated before the covenant is reaffirmed.
 3. Clearly this reiteration was deemed necessary because of the incident with the Golden Calf.

“It seems probable that the demands of the covenant that are reiterated here have been selected because they refer to offenses already committed by the Israelites in their apostasy” (Mckay, p. 566).

4. How does this instruction help the people avoid idolatry?

- a) We will talk about this later.

VII. Exodus 34:27-28

- A. Moses was instructed to write down all that was spoken about the covenant.
 - 1. Moses did the writing.
 - 2. To remember
 - 3. The covenant is with both Moses and the Israelites.
 - a) Is this different from the first time?
 - 4. Moses did not eat or drink for 40 days.

VIII. Exodus 34:29-35

- A. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face is glowing.
 - 1. Moses is unaware that his face is glowing.
 - 2. Aaron and the people are afraid to get near Moses.
 - a) Moses called the leaders to him.
 - (1) They came.
 - (2) Moses reported what God had told him.
 - b) Moses called all the people to him.
 - (1) Moses reported what God had told him.
 - 3. After he has reported what God said, he covers his face with a veil.
 - a) He is apparently trying to spare the people of the scary appearance.
 - b) This becomes standard procedure.
- B. After this, Moses adopted a regular practice.
 - 1. He uncovered his face when speaking to God.
 - 2. But covered it when he spoke to the people.
- C. This did not happen (apparently) when the covenant was first made.
 - 1. This is a difference between when the covenant was first made and this reaffirmation of the covenant.

IX. Conclusion

- A. How was the instruction God gave in the reaffirmation helpful in avoiding idolatry?
 - 1. God wanted them to celebrate his festivals and sabbaths.
 - a) Historical reminders of what God has done
 - (1) This is very important.
 - (a) Something concrete that they can hold on to
 - (2) The Feasts serve this purpose particularly well if they are all map onto the Exodus event.
 - (a) I think this is the case.
 - b) Theological reminders of who God is and what life is about
 - (1) Important food for thought

- c) A substitution for the Canaanite equivalents
 - (1) The three feast times all have an agricultural aspect.
 - (a) If the scholars are right, they correspond to Canaanite agricultural festivals.
 - (b) Israelites were to celebrate at the same time but celebrate differently and before a different God
 - 2. God wanted to establish cultural taboos.
 - a) Practices that it would not even occur to one to do
 - (1) These can be very helpful.
 - (a) Good taboos can take the power out of temptation.
 - (i) Wisdom without reflection
 - b) Taboos need a lot of cultural support.
 - (1) Taboos are strongest when there is unanimity.
 - (2) Taboos can be eroded away.
 - (a) My generation has seen a science of taboo erosion come into being.
 - (i) Least offensive forms of x are highlighted.
 - (ii) Most sympathetic practitioners of x are publicized.
 - (iii) Lots of people do x.
 - (iv) People who say x is bad are narrow-minded bigots.
 - (v) x is seen as commonplace.
 - (vi) x is no longer taboo.
 - 3. This is not the recipe for a righteous society.
 - a) People can keep the festivals and the taboos and still be rebels against God.
 - b) But good cultural parameters can encourage spiritual health.
 - (1) The cultural pressures are very difficult to withstand.
- B. What do we make of the differences between the covenant and the reaffirmation?
- 1. Why did it even occur to me to think about this issue?
 - a) I noticed an obvious difference.
 - (1) Moses made the tablets this time.
 - (a) “Now the Lord said to Moses, ‘Cut out for yourself two stone tablets. . . I will write on the tablets. . .’ (Exodus 34:1).”
 - (b) “So he cut out two stone tablets. . .” (Exodus 34:4).
 - (c) “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write down these words. . .’” (Exodus 34:27).
 - (2) God made them last time.
 - (a) “I will give you the stone tablets. . . which I have written” (Exodus 24:12).
 - (b) “He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18).
 - (c) “Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on the one side and the other. And the tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing engraved on the tablets” (Exodus 32:15-16).
 - (3) Why would this be?

- (a) I decided to look at the other differences between the original ceremony for the covenant and the reaffirmation.
2. Some things were not repeated.
 - a) Building an altar, making a sacrifice, sprinkling blood, having a meal together, etc.
 - (1) These things were done when the covenant was made, but the covenant still exists, and this did not need to be done again.
 3. But there are several differences.
 - a) Moses makes tablets.
 - (1) See above.
 - b) No indication that the elders were present
 - (1) “Then he said to Moses, ‘Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him’ (Exodus 24:1-2).
 - (2) “And no man is to come up with you, . . .” (Exodus 34:3).
 - (3) This may or may not be a difference.
 - c) God appears only to Moses.
 - (1) “Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. . .” (Exodus 24:9-10).
 - (2) “And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, . . .’ (Exodus 34:5-6).
 - d) Moses’ face glows.
 - (1) No indication of this in first covenant.
 - (2) “And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai. . . that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him” (Exodus 34:29).
 - e) Covenant this time is made with Moses and the Israelites.
 - (1) It is not explicitly stated with whom God made the covenant originally.
 - (a) It would appear that it was made with the Israelites.
 - (2) The reaffirmation is made with Moses and Israel.
 - (a) “. . .with these words I have made a covenant with **you** and with Israel” (Exodus 34:27).
 4. Moses has been greatly elevated.
 - a) He is more important now than he had been before.
 - b) The covenant is now made with Moses as the cosigner.
 - (1) It would not have been made with the Israelites alone.
 5. Israel’s status is all due to Moses.