

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 34:1-16

To understand more about the remaking of the stone tablets.

Read the Text:

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. 3 No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain." 4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. 5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." 8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. 9 And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance. 10 And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. 11 Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 12 Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. 13 You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." (Exodus 34:1-16, ESV)

Study the Text:

Covenant Restoration, Pt. 1

Chapter 34 picks up right after Moses interceded on behalf of Israel following their idolatrous worship of the golden calf. God re-established His covenantal commitments to His people, and now they would need a new set of tablets upon which the Law of God would be engraved. Recall that after Moses came down Sinai and saw Israel worshipping the golden calf, "Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 32:19). Below is a breakdown of the key details included in the re-crafting of the tablets and the first part of the covenant restoration process.

A REPEAT PROCESS

Much of what occurs in chapter 34 is a repeat of what has already happened. However, there is a sense of real restoration that takes place. God reminds Moses of the first tablets "which you broke," and thus the need for a new set. The tablets in some way represent the whole of the covenant, which Israel "broke" when they fashioned the golden calf and began to worship it. Thus, the refashioning of new tablets symbolizes the refashioning of the covenant between the LORD and His people after Moses' intercession. Again, like the first two tablets, these two tablets are copies of one another, one belonging to God as the "suzerain" and the other

to the people as the “vassal” in this covenant relationship.¹ Moses “cut two tablets of stone like the first,” and brought them to the LORD to inscribe upon them the law.

Just as the LORD first said in Exodus 20:5-6, He reiterates here in 34:7 His intention to keep “steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” The idea of generational blessings and curses is also found in Numbers 14:18, and all three of these passages hinge on the premise of keeping the commandments of God as an act of love for God. This is reiterated to some degree by Jesus Himself in John 14:21, thereby reinforcing the deity of Jesus since only God can make statements like this. Verse 10 concludes: “And he said, ‘Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.’” The LORD re-establishes the covenant with Israel and promises to do “awesome things” that had never been seen before, which He partially fulfills throughout the Old Testament and fully fulfills in the birth of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The covenant terms are then also restated. God begins by reminding the Israelites of His oath as the suzerain to drive out the “Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Ex. 34:11). He also reminds them of their duty to “tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim,” which are all objects of worship to their false gods (Ex. 34:13). There is no place for dual religions in the midst of the LORD. Any and all objects of worship that are not Him and Him alone are acts of idolatry and must be eradicated.

Which Tablets Are Inspired?

One of the more interesting details that emerges from this story is the reality that there were multiple sets of the exact God-written words. When it comes to *Divine Revelation* (the inspired Word of God), Christians today struggle to answer questions concerning which sources of revelation are trustworthy and which should be questioned. One such question involves the Old Testament, but a little background is needed before we can even ask the question, much less answer it.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. However, we do not possess any original copies of those manuscripts. However, we have what is known as the *Masoretic Text* (MT). This is what most of the English translations utilize as the Old Testament source material. The Masoretic Text takes shape between the 7th and 10th centuries AD, though the Hebrew tradition goes back to at least the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (which can be dated back to mostly the 2nd century BC, though some manuscripts are even older). Compared to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Masoretic Text aligns extremely closely.

A Greek tradition of the Old Testament is also formed in the Septuagint (LXX), which dates back to the 2nd century BC. The differences between the MT and the LXX are not so substantial that they impact central doctrines. Still, there are notable differences in the manuscript traditions, particularly in Esther, Daniel, Psalms, and Jeremiah (about 1/8 shorter in the LXX than the MT). Beyond that, there are some different word selections in specific passages. So the question is this - “Which one is the inspired Word of God?” Passages like Exodus 34 help us answer this, albeit with not the most satisfying answer: “Why can’t both of them be inspired?” In Exodus 34, we have evidence that God created a second set of tablets that were like the first, yet both are from God.

¹ See the section titled, “Two Tablets” in Session 80 for more on the suzerain-vassal treaty.

Now, this might not be too convincing because it seems clear that the words on the second set of tablets are *identical* to the first set of words, and yet we have already determined that the words in the MT *are not identical* to the words in the LXX. However, Jeremiah 36 provides an additional answer. In Jeremiah 36:2, the LORD tells Jeremiah: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today.” The scroll was an indictment against “Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah” (Jer. 36:1). Verse 4 tells us that Baruch wrote all that Jeremiah dictated according to the word of the LORD, and then the scroll was given to Baruch to be “read in the house of the Lord” (Jer. 36:6). Upon hearing the reading, however, the king’s officials notified the king and they requested Baruch to deliver the scroll to the king’s secretary, which was then brought to the king by a man named Jehudi. And verse 23 states: “As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.”

After the scroll was destroyed, the LORD came again to Jeremiah and instructed him to do the same thing he did the first time: “Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned” (Jer. 36:28). But verse 32 includes an interesting note: “Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.” The second scroll was identical to the first one except it also included “many similar words.” So the question, again, is: “Which one was the inspired Word of God?” The answer clearly is “both.” In the same way, both sets of tablets in Exodus are equally inspired words of God.

What About Now?

The central theme of this passage is, surprisingly, grace. The Israelites had egregiously violated the terms of the covenant the LORD made with them, and He had set out to punish them accordingly. Because of Moses’ intercession, the LORD relented and re-established His covenant with them, though they did not deserve it. He gave them an undeserved gift, which is, by definition, grace. The LORD, even in the Old Testament, is a God of grace. Under the covenant of grace, how much more do we rejoice in God’s grace every time we sin?

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 34:1-3. What did the LORD command of Moses? Who was allowed to come with him?

2. Read Exodus 34:4. What did Moses do? What did He bring with Him when He went up the mountain?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 34:5-7. What did the LORD restate to Moses? According to the notes, where else is the idea of “generational blessings and curses” found?

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2. Read Exodus 34:8-9. What did Moses do? What did Moses say?
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Day Three

1. Read Exodus 34:10. In your own words, summarize what God says to Moses and the Israelites.
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2. Read Exodus 34:11-12. What is the first thing God restates in re-establishing this covenant? Why?
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 34:13-14. Further, what are the Israelites commanded to do?
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2. Read Exodus 34:15-16. What is prohibited concerning the other nations?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 84 Discussion: Grace

The New Testament reveals that Jesus is “the mediator of a new covenant” of grace (Heb. 9:15). And this covenant of grace is “a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22). If God demonstrated grace to His people in Exodus, how much more will He give grace to us in Christ? Talk as a group about how amazing grace really is.

1. Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “grace?”
2. Read Romans 11:6. Can grace ever be considered a “work?” Why or why not?
3. How does the grace of God interact with our sin on a day-to-day basis?
4. How should God’s grace in your life influence the grace you give to others?
5. Is grace “attractive” to non-believers? Why or why not?
6. Kid Talk (For Home): The next time your child breaks the rules and should receive a punishment (no play time, no screen time, etc.), tell them you are going to give them “grace” and let them play anyway. Then, explain that, because of Jesus, this is what God does for us, though we still sin and “break the rules.”

Takeaways:

1. The covenant is re-established by God through Moses on Sinai.
2. The terms of the covenant are restated.