

Lesson 11: The Desert Experience – Part 2

Reading Preparation:

- Exodus 21-25; 31-34

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Lesson Notes:

[1. Journey to the Promised Land – Part 2](#)

This chapter is a continuation of the tutorial experience the children of Israel were undergoing. It was not an easy process as was noted by their continual murmuring. Moses also had to be taught by his father-in-law, Jethro, that he need not do everything himself. The preparation involved learning to trust that the Lord would meet their temporal needs, and He would bless them spiritually. The Lord called Moses to Mount Sinai where he was given a set of tablets written by the Lord's finger. They contained the higher law of the Lord specially designed to assist them in their conduct to become a Holy People.

[2. Moses and Seventy Elders](#)

At the time the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to the people, there was a tremendous upheaval upon the mount that was both seen and heard by the children of Israel.

Exodus 20:18

18 And all the people saw the thundering, and the lightings and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

The people were so frightened by the display of nature, their faith was overcome by their fear. Rather than have a personal experience with the Lord, they made the following request of Moses.

Exodus 20:19

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

Moses is invited to come up the mount and to meet with the Lord. He is also to bring others with him.

Exodus 24:1

1 And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.

Upon their return, Moses gave an announcement to the people.

Exodus 24:3

3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.

And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord in a book (Exodus 24:4), which will be called the book of the covenant.

Exodus 24:7

7 And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.

For a second time, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel (see Exodus 24:9) ascend the mount. The record records that “they saw the God of Israel,” (Exodus 24:10). They also did “eat and drink,” in God’s presence (Exodus 24:11). You may ask what does it mean to “eat and drink?”

David P. Wright states,

“This brief description seems to be that of a covenant meal (cf. Gen. 31:46; Ex. 18:12). If so, this appears to be the final sealing of the covenant between God and the people’s leaders.” (“Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai,” in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 132).

The “Covenant Book” or law of Moses or Mosaic Law are terms used to designate the revelation Moses received.

Exodus 24:13, 18

13 And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God.

18 And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.

It is unclear whether Moses continued up the mount himself or returned to the base of the mount to place the children under covenant to obey the instructions of the Lord and then in their presence returned alone to commune with the Lord for forty days and nights. While the sequence is unclear what is of importance for us to understand is that it was during this extended period of time Moses has with the Lord he will receive the law of Moses with all its details, all information necessary to construct and to furnish the tabernacle and he will receive the Ten Commandments written on stone. It is extremely likely he also received further instructions regarding his calling as prophet and leader of God’s people.

Exodus 31:18

18 And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

[3. The Lord’s Laws of Order](#)

During the forty days and nights Moses communed with the Lord, he received further revelation regarding the laws of order by which the people would conduct themselves.

David P. Wright notes,

“The revelation which he received covers Exodus 20:22 — 23:33, and has been termed by Modern scholars the “Covenant Book” or “Covenant Code,” from the term in Exodus 24:7 (in its strictest sense, the term Covenant Book refers to the laws in Exodus 21:1 -23:19).” (“Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai,” in Studies in Scripture , Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 130).

The “Covenant Book” or law of Moses or Mosaic Law are terms used to designate the revelation Moses received.

Victor L. Ludlow notes,

“The law of Moses encompasses hundreds of laws, rules, and regulations. The Jews have identified 613 particular laws as recorded by Moses in the books of the Torah (or the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).” (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 27).

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“It is unfortunate that many people, some even in the Church [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], think of the Mosaic law as a substitute for the higher law of the gospel. We call it a lesser law, and so it was, if the word lesser

is used in the sense of progressive steps. But some people assume that lesser means of lower importance and significance, or of a lesser level of truth and righteousness. Such is not the case... The law of Moses was highly symbolic, being filled with types and shows, all of which pointed toward Christ and His future atonement.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 137).

As we come to understand the law of Moses was given in order to bring the children of Israel to Christ, we come to appreciate and value its importance. Note the words of the Paul to the Galatians.

JST, Galatians 3:24-25

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster until Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

In other words, it was not necessary to keep the Law of Moses after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Him, who gave the law to Moses on Sinai, it was fulfilled. He had offered himself as the sacrifice upon the altar. We read in the Book of Mormon, what is required of us.

B/M, 2 Nephi 2:7

7 Behold he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

Let us return to the law Moses received on behalf of the children of Israel for until Christ's coming, this will be the law for God's chosen people for those on both continents.

Rousas John Rushdoony observed,

“The law, then first, asserts principles, second, it cites cases to develop the implications those principles, and, third, the law has as its purpose and direction the restitution of God's order.” (The Institutes of Biblical Law. N.P. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973, 12).

The law of Moses also applied to those who lived on the American continent. They were to also keep the law of Moses until the sacrifice of Christ. (re-word, how about: The Law of Moses applied to those who lived on both continents. The people who lived on the American continent were also required to keep the law of Moses until the sacrifice of Christ. Through one of their prophets we learn the purpose of the law of Moses.

B/M, Mosiah 13:29-30

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

It would seem to me today the attitude of many regarding religion, is like the children of Israel in that we are “quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God.”

Victor L. Ludlow states,

“...there are two major types of commandments within the law of Moses—eternal and temporary. The eternal laws are those divine commandments that have been given to most, if not all, of the gospel dispensations. Included among these eternal laws are:

- 1. First principles and ordinances of the gospel (faith, repentance, baptism, gift of the Holy Ghost).*
- 2. Tithing.*
- 3. Offerings and charity for the needy.*
- 4. Legislation for justice, brotherhood, fairness, and so on.*
- 5. Simple sacrifice (in similitude of the Only Begotten; our sacrament fills this purpose today).*
- 6. The Ten Commandments.*

“The temporary laws were given for a particular dispensation. However, similar laws or “carnal commandments” were usually given to other dispensations to fulfill similar purposes. Sometimes these peculiar laws were to test the obedience of God's children, but they usually had symbolic, physical, and social values as well. Included among them would be the following types of laws:

1. Religious festival and holy days (comparable to Easter, Christmas, general conference, and Thanksgiving).
2. Elaborate system of special sacrifices and offerings (comparable to the multitude of meetings, callings, and responsibilities within the Church today).
3. Particular ordinances, usually symbolic of ceremonial cleanliness (comparable to the baptism and temple work today).
4. Dietary laws (the ancient "Word of Wisdom").
5. Laws of purification and sanitation (city and government bodies usually regulate similar affairs in contemporary society)." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 27-28).

It is important we not become sidetracked by the details of the law of Moses that we, like the children of Israel, then miss the true purpose for which the law was given.

Joseph Fielding McConkie states,

"The law was replete with daily reminders that Israel was to be a people set apart and consecrated to the Lord and that in all things they must keep themselves clean and pure. Virtually all aspects of their lives were drawn upon a types of reminders and who and what they were to be...The law also contained a host of sacrificial rituals that served to keep constantly before them their dependence on the great sacrifice yet to be offered by the Son of God...Together the carnal law and the lesser portion of the gospel law enjoyed by Israel constituted a 'preparatory gospel,' its purpose being to prepare them to accept Christ and receive once again the gospel in its fullness." (Gospel Symbolism. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985, 77).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"It is not the keeping of the law that will bring salvation to the Israelites, as the Pharisees will later learn, but the acceptance of Christ and his atoning sacrifice. Succinctly stated, 'Salvation is in Christ, not in law.'" (Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, 217).

The law of Moses was given in order to lead them to look to Christ and his sacrifice which was yet to come.

[4. The House of the Lord in the Wilderness](#)

As previously stated, while Moses was on the Mount for a period of forty days and nights (Exodus 24:18), he received every detail needed for the construction of a tabernacle, a house of the Lord (Exodus 25:8).

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"At the tabernacle, Israel could come and receive the keys of salvation and exaltation...Deep meaning is associated with the physical dimensions and plan of the tabernacle. They were meant to reflect spiritual patterns that are also reflected in [Latter-day Saint] temples today....It is significant that, before revealing the pattern of the tabernacle itself, the Lord told Moses that Israel had to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice to build His sanctuary (Ex.25:2)....Unless Israel had the right attitude about the sacrifice of their materials, it would do them no good" (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 147).

We will now address three specific items found in the tabernacle and then we will examine the tabernacle itself and its three major divisions. We will also note their counterparts as found in the temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[4.1. Ark of the Covenant](#)

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"The ark of the covenant was a chest, or box, of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was approximately three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide, and two feet three inches high. Staves, or poles, on both sides allowed the priest to carry it without actually touching the ark itself. Inside, the tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai were placed (Ex.25:16). Hence, it was called the ark of the testimony or ark of the covenant. Later, a pot of manna and Aaron's rod, which miraculously bloomed, were also placed inside the ark (Heb.9:4). The ark was placed inside the inner room of the tabernacle known as the most holy place, or Holy of Holies" (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 148).

The Ark of the Covenant was not to be touched by human hands. We will later learn of an incident when an individual attempted to steady the ark so that it would not fall, and he lost his life! (see 1 Samuel 6:6-7; 1 Chronicles 13:9-10).

[4.2. The Table of Shewbread and Its Instruments](#)

Old Testament Institute Student Manual observes,

“The second article of furniture described by the Lord was the Table of Shewbread (Ex.25:23-30; 37:10-16). Like the ark of the covenant, it too was to be made of shittim wood with a gold overlay (Ex.25:23-24). It had a crown and border (probably a rim) of gold on the top, or surface, of the table and rings and staves to provide for easy transport. It was about three feet long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. Various vessels of gold, called the spoons, dishes, covers, or bowls in the King James Version of the Bible, were made for use with the table. The table got its name from the twelve loaves of bread which were placed upon it...The loaves were placed into two stacks, and upon each pile was placed pure frankincense that was later burned on the altar of incense “an offering made by fire unto the Lord” (Leviticus 24:7). The bread was changed each Sabbath and the bread that was removed was eaten by the priests (Leviticus 24:8-9)...Most scholars and old Jewish traditions agree that wine was also placed on the table along with the bread...The spoons were actually cups...and were probably the containers for the liquid. (See Fallows, Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. ‘shewbread,’ 3:1576, Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. ‘shewbread,’ p.847.) The items placed on the table of shewbread have distinct parallels in the emblems of the sacrament.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 149).

If, in fact, wine was placed on the table along with the shewbread, the similarities to the present sacrament are without question. The importance of the sacrament today in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to renew the sacred covenants the individual made at baptism. In this manner the individual commits him/herself weekly to keeping the commandments and striving in their daily life to become more like Christ.

4.3. The Golden Candlestick

Old Testament Institute Student Manual describes the Golden Candlestick as follows,

“The source of light for the tabernacle was the sacred candlestick. Called menorah in Hebrew, which means the “place of lights,” it held not candles but rather seven cup-shaped containers filled with pure olive oil into which a wick was inserted and lit...The number seven has sacred significance in the Old Testament, connoting wholeness or perfection...Thus, the light provided in the house of the Lord symbolized the perfect light...The sacred menorah was a type or symbol of the true source of spiritual light, namely the Holy Ghost as he bears witness of the Father and the Son.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 149-150).

The symbolism of the Golden Candlestick is to teach the Israelites regarding the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost, unlike the Father and the Son, does not have a body of flesh and bones, but is instead a spirit. His primary responsibility is to bear witness of the Father and the Son. His message comes more by feeling than by words, but as the individual becomes sensitive to the whispering, the message is clear. Prior to baptism, the Holy Ghost bears witness to the investigator of spiritual truth. Following baptism and the laying on of hands to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost will then serve as a reliable source of comfort and guidance as long as the individual is worthy (see Holy Ghost. The Guide To The Scriptures. Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2001).

4.4. The Tabernacle

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“Because the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness at this time, the tabernacle had to be portable. The walls were formed of panels that could be joined together (Ex.25:15-16). Then the walls and open ceiling were covered with four different layers of fabric.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 150).

As previously noted, the importance of the Tabernacle is that Israel had a physical location where they could come and be taught in an elementary manner the requirements of salvation and exaltation that are necessary for them to receive in order to return back to God’s presence.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual notes,

“There are three major divisions or areas in the tabernacle: the outer courtyard where all Israelites could enter; the first room of the tabernacle proper, or holy place where only the priests could serve; and the inner room or Holy of Holies where the high priest alone could enter and that only once per year—on the Day of Atonement.

“The outer courtyard [World today or Telestial room]. The first thing encountered as one entered the main gate was the altar of sacrifice. Here the various animals and other offerings were slain and offered to the Lord. Strict obedience and sacrifice were thus required as the first step in the symbolic progression toward perfection and entry into God’s presence. The first step could be likened to having faith in Christ (looking to the Great and Last Sacrifice) and repentance.

“Directly in line next in the courtyard was the laver, or basin of water, which was used for washing and cleansing (see Exodus 30:19-20)...when Solomon built a permanent temple, he placed the laver on the backs of twelve oxen (see 1 Kings 7:25), a symbolism carried on in modern temples and clearly related to baptism.

"The holy place [today's](terrestrial room)...which is symbolic of the peace that may be attained by men as they overcome their fallen condition through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel...The table of shewbread which had the bread and wine changed each Sabbath day, was a symbol similar to the sacramental emblems of today. They typified the body and blood of the Son of God, of which the spiritual person partakes consistently so that he can have spiritual life in Christ (see John 6:53-54).

"The Holy of Holies [today's] (celestial room)...symbolizes the eternal joy and peace found in the presence of God... The only article of furniture in this inner room was the ark of the covenant, which the Lord himself said was the place where He would meet Moses and commune with the people (Ex.25:22).

"In summary, the tabernacle and its plan and the ordinances thereof illustrate the grand and glorious symbolism of man's upward progression from a state of being alienated from God to one of full communion with him." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 155-156).

We might liken the Tabernacle to a university of the Lord where the children of Israel could come and be taught. Here they would learn the progressive steps to take from where they were to being able to return and live with Him. In the process it would be necessary for them to become like a little child humble, submissive, and obedient to word of the Lord as spoken through his prophet. Being obedient appears to have been as great of challenge to them as it is to us.

5. The Golden Calf

This incident stands out as one of the darkest moments in the history of the children of Israel. It seems incredible to the observer that an event like this could even occur. They had so much to remind them that God had not forgotten them and left them to die in the wilderness. Still they doubted and like slaves in Egypt turned once again to the worship of idols! As difficult as it had been to get the children of Israel out of Egypt, it appeared that it was going to be even more difficult to get Egypt out of them!

David P. Wright states,

"Moses was to remain on the mountain for forty days...While he was up there, the cloud of God was visible to the all the people below...though God's presence was visible to them-they knew He was watching and had a witness that He had not forgotten them-they apostatized!" ("Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai" in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 133-134).

The record recounts the event.

Exodus 32:1

1 And the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot [know] not what is become of him.

"Moses delayed." How long had he been gone? Whether it was the beginning of the forty days and nights, the middle, or near the end, their anxiety demonstrates their lack of patience and dependence upon their leader. Their demand of Aaron to "make us gods," demonstrates how imbued they had become with idol worship while in Egypt. They needed an external object to which they could assign powerful intervention and protection. How was it possible that they had so quickly forgotten that God provided food for them morning and night, an external source of his ability to nourish and care for their physical needs. They referred to, "This Moses," instead of their prophet, leader and intermediary between them and the Lord. How disrespectful they were of him referring to him as, "The man that brought them out up out of Egypt." It would appear that they would prefer to be back in Egypt serving as slaves to the Pharaoh! How quickly they had forgotten!

Exodus 32:2, 4

**2 And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings;... and bring them unto me.
4 And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.**

Aaron, how could you comply with their unholy request? Were you frightened for your life? Did they threaten to kill you if you stood your ground and said, "No, I will not break the commandment of God: Thou shalt not make thee any graven images!" Were you also inflicted with the idolatry of Egypt? Was there also too much of Egypt inside of you? I don't know, but how I wish you had stood your ground and been true to what you knew in your heart.

David P. Wright states,

“(a) They had received commandments not to worship any other gods but the Lord Ex. 20:3;22:20;23:13,24;32) and not to fashion images (Ex.20:4-5); but this they did anyway.

“(b) While Moses was on the mountain receiving commands about the building of the sanctuary, part of which included asking the people to make a contribution of precious materials for the building of the portable shrine (Ex.25:2-8; 35:4-9;20-29), Aaron was asking for a contribution of previous materials to build the calf (Ex.32:2-4).

“(c) God was the one who brought the people out of Egypt (Ex.19:4; 20:2), but the people declared of the calf, ‘Behold, your god, who brought you from the land of Egypt’ (Ex.32:4).

*“(d) The people had just celebrated a covenant ceremony where burnt and well-being offerings were offered at an altar Moses built, and where the leaders ‘ate and drank’ (Ex.24:4-11). Here the people celebrated a festival to the Lord represented by the calf, offered the same type of offerings at an altar built by Aaron, and ate and drank. One feature they added was licentious revelry (Ex.32:5-6,25; the verb translated in KJV as “to play” is found with a sexual connotation in Gen.26:8; 39:14).” (“Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai” in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 134-135).*

6. The Reaction: God and Moses

The Lord, after viewing the reaction of the children of Israel to Moses absence and their building of the golden calf, spoke to Moses while on the mount.

Exodus 32:7-10

**7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:
8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:
10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.**

God's reference to the children of Israel as being a "stiffnecked people" may be illustrated by an experience shared by James E. Talmage,

"A wild bee from the neighboring hills once flew into the room; and at intervals during an hour or more I caught the pleasing hum of its flight...When ready to close up the room and leave, I threw the window [open] wide, and tried at first to guide and then to drive the bee to liberty and safety, knowing well that if left in the room it would die...The more I tried to drive it out, the more determinedly did it oppose and resist my efforts...

"Then it caught me off my guard and stung my hand—the hand that would have guided it to freedom. At last it alighted on a pendant attached to the ceiling, beyond my reach of help or injury. The sharp pain of its unkind sting aroused in me pity rather than anger. I knew the inevitable penalty of its mistaken opposition and defiance; and I had to leave the creature to its fate. Three days later I returned to the room and found the dried, lifeless body of the bee on the writing table. It had paid for its stubbornness with its life.” (The Parables of James E. Talmage. Compiled by Albert L. Zobell. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973, 29-30).

Here we find an example of Moses greatness as he responds to God's anger against the children of Israel. God's wrath is so great against this people that He is ready to completely destroy them and raise up a "great" nation out of Moses seed.

JST, Exodus 32:11-13

**11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?
12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath. Thy people will repent of this evil; therefore come thou not out against them.
13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, they servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto**

**them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven,
and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto
your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.**

Moses is not being disrespectful to the Lord nor is he offering a solution the Lord did not already know. What we are possibly viewing is an example of the Lord tutoring his prophet. The children of Israel, according to the law of justice, deserve to be put to death. The law of mercy states, however, if “they will repent,” they may gain forgiveness even for this evil which they have done. It is mercy that Moses is requesting, for the Israelites, based upon their repentance!

JST, Exodus 32:14

**14 And the Lord said unto Moses, If they will repent of
the evil which they have done, I will spare them, and
turn away my fierce wrath; but, behold, thou shalt
execute judgment upon all that will not repent of this
evil this day. Therefore, see thou do this thing that I
have commanded thee, or I will execute all that which I
have thought to do unto my people.**

Moses offering of mercy for those who will repent is accepted by the Lord. If they choose not to repent, however, then the law of justice will apply to their sins, and they will pay the full cost themselves.

As Moses leaves the mountain with the stone tablets in his hands, he meets Joshua. Joshua has been waiting for his prophet during the time that Moses has been on the mount (see Exodus 32:17).

Moses and Joshua continue down the mountain “in the direction of the noise of the people,” that Joshua had heard, however he did not know the reason why.

Exodus 32:19

**19 And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the
camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’
anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands,
and brake them beneath the mount.**

God had been angry upon learning of the actions of the children of Israel during the time Moses was on the mount. Now it is Moses’ turn to express his anger as he, observing the actions of the people, throws down the tables upon which are written the Ten Commandments, and they are broken! It is striking that these tables contain the very commandments that the Israelites are at the very moment in the process of breaking.

7. Consequences of Transgression

There are both immediate and delayed consequences for Israel’s sinful behavior.

7.1. Immediate

Exodus 32:20

**20 And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it
in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed
[strewed] it upon the water, and made the children of
Israel drink of it.**

This action, besides the immediate destruction of the object of their worship, caused the Israelites to see the idol which they had constructed had no power.

Next, Moses issued an order to the people. He required them to respond to his dictum: “Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me.” There were “three thousand men,” who did not respond to his inquiry. Moses then ordered the “sons of Levi” to put them to death (see Exodus 32:26, 28).

David P. Wright notes the actions of the sons of Levi,

“Because of their act of valiancy, Moses declared that that day they had become dedicated to God, i.e., they had shown themselves worthy to serve God as priests.” (“Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai” in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 136).

The sons of Levi are rewarded for their obedience to their prophet and God, even if their actions required the death of those whom they knew.

7.2. Delayed Punishment

At a later time, after Moses had returned from meeting with the Lord, the following punishment came from the Lord. This action infers there were more than the initial three thousand men whose actions required further punishment.

Exodus 32:35

35 And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.

Next, they will lose the opportunity to hold the higher order of the Priesthood.

JST, Deuteronomy 10:2

2 And I will write on the tables the words which were on the first tables, which thou breakest, save the words of the everlasting covenant of the holy priesthood, and thou shalt put them in the ark.

The Guide to the Scriptures states,

"The Melchizedek Priesthood is the higher of greater Priesthood...[that] includes the keys of the spiritual blessings of the Church. Through the ordinances of the higher priesthood, the power of godliness is made manifest to men... [It] administers the gospel...[and] holds the rights to administer spiritual blessings." (The Guide to the Scriptures. Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve Inc., 2001, 67-68).

We might ask, "What priesthood authority did the children of Israel have, once they lost the "holy priesthood" or "higher priesthood?"

Doctrine and Covenants 84:25-27

**25 Therefore, he took...out of their midst,...the Holy Priesthood...;
26 And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;
27 Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John...**

The Doctrine and Covenants contains revelations the Prophet Joseph Smith received from the Lord Jesus Christ as part of the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ upon the earth. The loss of the "Holy Priesthood," meant among other things, no temple ordinances can be performed that extend beyond this life; none of the offices and authority of the higher priesthood are to be held by the general members of the church; there is no bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost following baptism. There can be no Church of Jesus Christ organized in the desert! What remains is the "lesser priesthood," which provides for the administration of angels as necessary to both leaders and members; the preparatory gospel which contains the principles of faith, repentance, and baptism, and a strict law of carnal commandments and animal sacrifices are designed to effect all parts of the daily lives of the Israelites in order to prepare them for the coming of Christ and his atonement.

To those in both the Meridian Church as well as in the Restored Church in the latter days who have experienced the blessings of the "Holy Priesthood," its loss would be catastrophic. To the children of Israel because they never did have what was taken from them, the "lesser priesthood," would be seen as a great blessing by them.

Kent P. Jackson states,

While "it is clear that the Melchizedek [Higher] was not commonly possessed in Israel[,] [p]erhaps only the prophets possessed it—or some few others who proved worthy enough to be granted privileges that were otherwise withheld from the House of Israel in that day. Because of Israel's rebellion, the higher priesthood was taken, and Israel was governed thereafter by the Aaronic order...The ancient Aaronic Priesthood system was the hereditary priesthood hierarchy of Israel under the Law of Moses." ("The Law of Moses and the Atonement of Christ" in Studies in the Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 158).

We may ask what punishment did Aaron receive for his part in this sinful action?

Deuteronomy 9:20

**19 For I [Moses] was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you [Aaron] to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.
20 And the Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time.**

It appears the Lord was ready to put Aaron to death for his part regarding the golden calf, however, Moses prevailed upon the Lord. The condition was that if he would repent, his life would be spared. We may be assured that Aaron's repentance was complete and that he did receive the Lord's forgiveness.

8. Moses Again Meets With the Lord

Moses returns to the mount and tells the Lord what the children of Israel had done and the disciplinary actions he had taken.

Exodus 32:31-32

**31 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.
32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.**

Moses is willing to take upon himself the sins of Israel in regard to the serious sins they have committed. He feels personal contrition for their actions, and is willing to suffer for them.

Exodus 32:33

33 And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

The Lord is teaching Moses an important principle of the gospel. Each of us is ultimately responsible for our own sins. In order to receive forgiveness, individually, we must approach the Lord or his appointed servants and follow the process of repentance. There is only one who can take upon himself the sins of another and that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. No mortal man meets the required conditions, not even a prophet of God.

9. God Visits Moses in the Tabernacle

Prior to Moses receiving the second set of tablets, the Lord visited him in the tabernacle.

Exodus 33:9

9 And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses.

It is during this visit that Moses seeks to see God's glory.

Exodus 33:18

18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

David P. Wright asks,

"Why Moses would ask this at this point in the narrative is unclear. Perhaps Moses wanted to be reassured of God's favor toward him." ("Revelations in the Wilderness of Sinai" in. Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 138).

This explanation is congruent with the prior verses as Moses is seeking reassurance from God after all that has gone forth, that he is still His prophet and that "the people continue to have found grace in his sight (see Exodus 33:16). It appears that he had good reason for his doubts, as we learn from the Joseph Smith translation.

JST, Exodus 33:20

20 And he said unto Moses, Thou canst not see my face at this time, lest mine anger be kindled against thee also, and I destroy thee, and thy people; for there shall no man among them see me at this time, and live, for they are exceeding sinful. And no sinful man hath at any time, neither shall there be any sinful man at any time, that shall see my face and live.

The Lord continues to be angry at his prophet and his people. Their repentance, at this time, must not have been sufficient to allow them to endure the presence of God!

It is my opinion the Lord's anger is predominately regarding the actions of the Israelites, rather than the actions of His prophet. The one area of transgression by Moses for which the record is absent involves Moses' anger and his breaking of the original set of tablets. By destroying the sacred tables he had just received from the Lord, Moses was manifesting his lack of respect for that which was most sacred. It is possible this was the action for which Moses had not yet demonstrated his complete contrition.

It is important to note Moses is commanded by the Lord to hew out two tablets that he is to bring with him the next morning when he will again meet with the Lord on the mount. In the Joseph Smith Translation, we gain important insight regarding the second set of tablets.

JST, Exodus 34:1-2

1 And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two other tables of stone, like unto the first, and I will write upon them also, the words of the law, according as they were written at the first on the tables which thou brakest; but it shall not be according to the first, for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them; for my presence shall not go up in their midst, lest I destroy them.

2 But I will given unto them the law as at the first, but it shall be after the law of a carnal commandment; for I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage...

10. Moses Receives a Second Set of Tablets

As Moses returns to the mount for the second set of tablets, he offers an appeal to the Lord for forgiveness regarding his transgressions and those of the people.

Exodus 34:9

9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

The Lord accepts Moses request and renews his promise to be with his prophet and his covenant people.

Exodus 34:10

10 And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord:...

Moses converses with the Lord for another forty days and nights during which time he does not eat or drink water. Following this period of fasting and instruction, Moses received the second set of tables.

Exodus 34:28

28 ...And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

11. Moses Returns With the Tablets

During this forty days and nights, the children of Israel have learned their lesson. They go about their daily activities, knowing their prophet will return. When Moses returns, he appears different.

Exodus 34:30

30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

This shine upon Moses faces was the direct result of his having been in the presence of the Lord. In order for an individual to be in the presence of the Lord, it is necessary for him to be “transfigured.”

The Guide to the Scriptures states,

“Transfiguration: The condition of persons who are temporarily changed in appearance and nature-that is, lifted to a higher spiritual level-so that they can endure the presence and glory of heavenly beings.” (Transfiguration. The Guide to the Scriptures. Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc, 2001, 59).

We learn at this time, the glow from his face was so bright that it was necessary for him to veil his face until he had finished speaking with them (see Exodus 34:33). We can conclude that being in the presence of the Lord had a residual effect upon Moses, a righteous prophet.

12. Conclusion

During this chapter we have followed the journey as the children of Israel have progressed toward becoming a Holy People. It seemed “as if” it was one step forward and two steps backward. Moses received instructions from the Lord to build a tabernacle so they would have a place to worship and offer sacrifice while in the desert.

We noted it's similarity to the temples constructed today by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Then, as now, it is important for us to continue our progression to becoming like Our Lord and Savior.

We suffered with Israel as they took a drastic step backward in their progression and returned to idol worship. Their prophet was so upset by their "backsliding" that in his anger he broke the original set of tablets!

Once again, we were grateful for the principle of repentance which was offered to those who recognized the seriousness of their actions, and humbly sought the Lord's forgiveness. We also saw what happened when their pride did not allow them to take advantage of the Lord's mercy and they suffered death for their actions. Nor was all lost for once Israel had fully repented, a second set of tablets was given.

Each of us are also striving to become a more holy person, however, we too stumble and at time go backwards rather than forward. Pride is also the enemy we must overcome in order for us to qualify for the Lord's tender mercies toward us. Only when we are truly submissive to His will can we benefit from the forgiveness He offers us. May we add, "Thank you Israel for keeping your record, for you have so much to teach us".