

Ki Tissa

פי תשא

“When you take”

Exodus 30:11 – 34:35

Torah Together



While the previous two *Torah* portions focused in some detail on the construction of the Tabernacle and its associated articles, this portion returns to the story of the Israelites and describes a key event which occurred as they were encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Also, we will witness a meaningful encounter between Moses and God from which much can be learned about the character of our God.

1. Atonement Money - 30:11-16

When were the Israelites to pay their atonement money? How much did they pay? What aspects of this command of God do you find interesting?

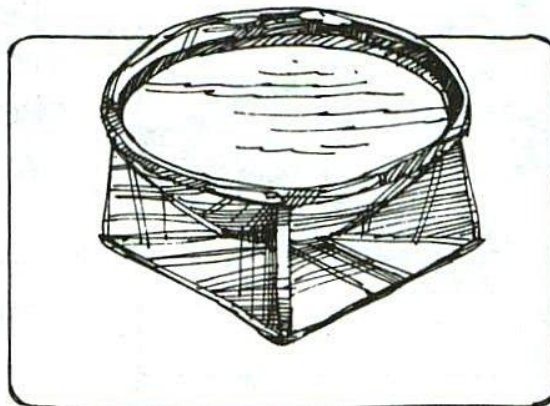
The atonement money was paid whenever a census was taken. It was a half shekel (less than \$1) per person over 20. Every life is of equal value to God. A census was usually associated with conscription in preparation for war. A census was to be taken only at the command of God.

2. Bronze Laver - 30:17-21

What was the purpose of the bronze laver or wash basin? Why was it necessary? What significance does this have in the life of the believer today?

The laver was placed between the altar and the entrance to the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle “so that they will not die” (verse 29).

God’s holiness was such that if anyone entered the tabernacle without having first cleansed themselves, they would die. Although our sins have been paid for by Yeshua, we still must be cleansed by the Word of God.



Census and Atonement

In this passage, God ties the paying of atonement with the taking of a census. In ancient times, taking a census was typically done in preparation for war. Only able-bodied men were counted and the purpose was to assess an army’s ability to defeat an enemy. By counting the money received in this way, Israel’s leaders knew how many soldiers they could take to battle.

Scripture Link:

The requirement to be “cleansed” before meeting with God is made clear in the *Torah*. The Apostles also understood this need as it applies to believers in *Yeshua*. See **Ephesians 5:26, John 15:3** and **I John 1:9** for more insight into the need for cleansing before meeting with God.

Secret Recipes

The Torah gives precise recipes for the making of anointing oil and incense to be used in worship. By including the command, "Do not make any other oil (or incense) using the same formula," God was assuring that these items would not become commonplace. He wants our worship of Him to be special and unique.

Sabbath Observation

Can you see why God would reiterate the command to observe the Sabbath at this place in the story? Perhaps He was trying to point out that even though constructing His Tabernacle was important, it was not more important than observing the Sabbath, setting it apart by doing no work.

3. Anointing Oil - 30:22-33

What were the ingredients used in the anointing oil? How was it used? What did God command to assure that it was sacred? Do you see any symbolism here?

The anointing oil was composed of liquid myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia in olive oil. It was used to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony and other furnishings, as well as Aaron and his sons. No one was to make any oil using these ingredients for any other purpose. Oil is often symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

4. Incense - 30:34-38

What were the ingredients used in the incense? Where was it to be used? What did God command to assure that it was sacred? Do you see any symbolism here?

The incense was to be made from gum resin, onycha (believed to be obtained from a mollusk), galbanum (resin from a native middle eastern plant), and pure frankincense. It was to be used on the altar of incense, which was before the curtain separating the Most Holy Place. Again, no incense was to be made using these ingredients for any other purpose. The incense rising up to God is symbolic of believers' prayers. Obviously, our prayers are to be directed to God and God alone. (Revelation 5:8)

5. Bezalel and Oholiab - 31:1-11

Who did God choose to carry out the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings? From what tribes were they? What did God do to assure their success?

God chose Bezalel, of the tribe of Judah, and Oholiab, of the tribe of Dan, to carry out the construction of the tabernacle. God "filled them with his Spirit" to equip them for their tasks.

6. The Sabbath - 31:12-18

a) Why does God say that the Israelites are to observe the Sabbath?

Observing Shabbat is a sign between God and the Israelites for generations to come to show that He has set them apart as holy (verse 13).

b) All of chapters 25 through 31 describe what God told Moses when he went up into the cloud on Mount Sinai. According to 31:18, what did God do when He finished speaking to Moses?

God gave Moses the two tablets of the Testimony, inscribed by His finger.

7. The Golden Calf - 32:1 - 33:6

a) How long had the people waited for Moses to come down from the mountain? What were their reasons for wanting a physical image to worship? What role did Aaron play? What insights into his character do you get from this?

Moses had been on the mountain for 40 days. The people thought that he must surely be dead. They probably desired a physical object because it was familiar to them from Egypt. Aaron, not willing to stand against the people, formed the golden calf idol from gold donated by the people. (A golden calf is the form of the Egyptian god Apis, a symbol of sexual fertility.)

b) How did Moses learn of the people's activities? What proposal did God make to Moses in verses 9-10? Why do you think God needed Moses to "leave" or "go away" from Him in verse 10?

God told Moses of the people's sinful activities. God offered to wipe out the Israelites and to start again, making a great nation of Moses. While this was an obvious test of Moses' character, God would still have needed Moses to leave Him because He couldn't destroy the Israelites while Moses was interceding on their behalf.

c) Analyze Moses' response to God's proposal. What arguments did he use to "change God's mind"? How was God's proposal a test for Moses? Can you identify other instances where God "changed" His mind?

Moses first pointed out that God's miraculous efforts to bring the people out of Egypt would be for nothing and if He destroyed the people, His reputation in the eyes of the Egyptians would suffer. He next reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. God knew that Moses was not the kind of man to take Him up on His offer. God has "changed" His mind on several occasions: Jonah and the destruction of Ninevah (Jonah), the destruction of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18), and others.

d) From the exchange in verses 17-18, what can you infer about Joshua's whereabouts while Moses was on the mountain? Do you see any significance in what Moses did with the stone tablets? What did he do with the golden calf idol?

Joshua had not been with the people in the camp and he was not at Moses' side. He must have been waiting for Moses part way up the mountain. Since the people had broken God's covenant, Moses broke the tablets in front of them. Moses burned/melted the idol, ground it into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it. (It was thus turned into human waste.)

(For extra insight, compare the punishment of Israel with the "test for an unfaithful wife" given in Numbers 5:11-31. Who is the wife in this case?)

The Golden Calf

The idol that Aaron fashioned for the Israelites was probably not a pagan god. The last part of **Exodus 32:4** can be translated "This is your God, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." However, God had made it very clear in **Exodus 20:4-5** that "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath ..." and "You shall not bow down to them or worship them." So even if the Israelites identified the statue of the golden calf with YHWH, it was still a violation of one of His commandments.

Scripture Link:

The idea that God would "change his mind" is intriguing. We know that God is omniscient, knowing all things. Since He knows from the beginning how events will unfold, He would have no need to change his mind. Most scholars believe that these words are used of God to reinforce the idea that though He is an all-knowing God, He still has feelings and emotions like humans. It helps us relate to Him better. Another interesting case of God changing His mind is contained in the short Book of **Jonah**.

Set Apart

Notice that the Levites were the only ones to respond to Moses' command, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." (**Exodus 32:26**) These Levites then proceeded to exact the punishment of God on the people, killing 3,000 fellow Israelites. In **Exodus 32:29**, Moses tells the Levites, "You have been set apart to the LORD today ... and he has blessed you this day." God blessed the Levites by choosing them to serve Him as priests and scribes.

The Glory of God

In **Exodus 33:18**, Moses asks God, "Now show me your **glory**." The Hebrew word translated as "glory" is *kavod*, which means literally "heaviness." The word has a military connotation and alludes to battle armor, which was heavy and indicated the power and might of the wearer. Thus Moses was saying, "Show me your battle armor," or "Show me your power and might." Moses wanted to see the **power** of God. However, God's reply to Moses in the next verse was "... no one may see me and live." Perhaps it would be a bit like staring at the Sun.

e) What was Aaron's explanation for the people's sin? Who separated themselves to Moses as "for YHWH"? Who carried out the punishment for the people's sin? Considering how many people died, what conclusions can you draw?

Aaron said that the people feared Moses had died and wanted "gods" that would lead them. Aaron said the golden calf just "came out" of the fire. The Levites separated themselves for God and slew 3000 of their friends and relatives, those who had sinned. Although 3000 is a large number, it seems that a small percentage of the people were involved.

f) The following day, Moses went back up the mountain to try to make atonement for the sin of the people. What did he offer to God for atonement? Did God accept Moses offer? What was God's punishment for the people's sin?

Moses offered himself as atonement ("blot me out of Your book"). God did not accept Moses offer, although He did accept Yeshua's similar offer. (Paul also made a similar offer in Romans 9:2-3.) A plague struck the people because of their sin (verse 35).

g) How did God indicate that He had not forsaken His people or His promise? Why did God say that He would not accompany them? What was the people's response?

God restated His original promise to the Israelites, but said that He would not go with them because He "might destroy you on the way." (33:3) The people mourned at these words and took off all their bodily ornaments as a sign of mourning "until God decided what to do with them."

8. The Tent of Meeting - 33:7-11

Do you think the "tent of meeting" described here is the same as the Tabernacle? Why or why not? How did people know that God was speaking to Moses "face to face"? Who aided Moses at his tent?

Some people think this was the tabernacle. However, at this point in the story, the tabernacle had not yet been constructed. It seems likely that this was Moses' tent which he erected outside the camp. When the people saw the "pillar of cloud" on the tent, they knew God was conversing with Moses. Joshua stayed at the tent and served Moses.

9. Moses and the Glory of YHWH - 33:12-23

a) In verses 12 - 17, what three things does Moses ask from God? Do you think these are unusual things to ask for? What was God's response?

Moses asked God, (1) "...teach me your ways so that I may know you...." (2), to send His Presence with the people when they go, and (3), "Now show me your glory." Moses wanted to know God intimately and completely. God agreed to the first two and granted part of the third request.

b) What was Moses asking for in verse 18? What did God say He would do in response to Moses' request? What do you think is meant by the last half of verse 19?

Moses wanted to see God's face. God said that "no one may see me (my face) and live." However, He agreed to hide Moses in a rock and pass in front of him. The last of verse 19 is a common phrase that God uses to reinforce His sovereignty. He is God and can choose to be merciful with whom He will.

c) Why do you think that no one may see the face of God and live?
God's perfection and sinlessness cannot co-exist with our sinful nature.

10. The New Stone Tablets - 34:1-28

a) What does God instruct Moses to take with him when he goes back up on Mount Sinai?

God told Moses to bring two new stone tablets back up the mountain.

b) When God passed in front of Moses, what did He say? Do you find anything significant about God's words? How did Moses respond?

God "indulged" Moses by passing in front of him. Verses 6-7 expound on God's primary attributes of perfect justice and loving compassion and mercy. Moses immediately bowed down and worshiped.

c) What did Moses ask of God in verse 9?

Moses asked God to forgive the people and to continue to go with them.

d) Analyze God's response to Moses' request. How were the Israelites to treat the people who currently occupied the land? What other commands did God restate?

God restated much of what He had told Moses before. He specifically instructed the Israelites not to make any treaties with the people in the land and not to worship any other gods.

e) Who wrote what on the tablets? What did God call these words?

From this passage it's not clear who wrote on the tablets, but from Deut. 10:4, it's clear that God wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets.

11. The Radiant Face of Moses - 34:29-35

How long did Moses spend this second time on the mountain? Of what were the people afraid when they saw Moses at his return? What did Moses do about it?

Moses spent another 40 days on the mountain. When he came down, his face radiated with the glory of God and scared the people. He wore a veil to hide his radiant face from the people.

Michelangelo's Moses

Michelangelo's statue of Moses is on display in Rome, Italy. If one looks closely, one can see what look like horns on Moses' head. These were put there by Michelangelo because of a mistranslation of **Exodus 34:29-30**. The word "shone" or "radiated" is from the Hebrew word *qaran*, meaning "he radiated." However, in the Latin Vulgate Bible of Michelangelo's time, the word was thought to be *qeren* which translates as "horns." So Michelangelo was being faithful to what he thought was an accurate translation of the Bible.



Digging deeper

1. Can you see any connection between **Exodus 32:10** and intercessory prayer? Can you think of any other places in the Bible where a similar thing occurred?

It seems to be difficult for God to carry out His wrath if a righteous person is interceding on behalf of the object of His wrath. Thus, praying for the unsaved is necessary for their salvation. A particularly interesting story is that of Hezekiah in as told in II Chronicles 29 - 30.

Scripture Link:

In **Exodus 32:32**, Moses offers himself as atonement (that is, payment) for the sin of the Israelites. God, however, does not take Moses up on his offer. Instead, "God presented the Messiah *Yeshua* as a sacrifice of atonement" (**Romans 3:25**) because of His love for us (**John 3:16**). In **John 15:13** we read, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." This is the love that Moses offered to demonstrate and that *Yeshua* actually demonstrated for us as believers.

2. Compare Moses' offer of atonement in **Exodus 32:31-32** with the atonement provided by *Yeshua*. Why was *Yeshua*'s atonement acceptable whereas Moses' would not have been?

Both Moses and Yeshua offered their lives for the lives of the people. Yeshua's offer was more acceptable because he was sinless whereas Moses was not. Furthermore, Yeshua's sacrifice was for all of mankind whereas Moses was just for the people of Israel. Both, however, typified Yeshua's definition of love, i.e., "...than a man be willing to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

3. Analyze Aaron's part in the sin of the Golden Calf. It seems that given his position of leadership, his sin was particularly grievous. Why do you think Aaron "got off so easy"? What role do you think Hur may have played in this affair?

One must trust that God, who knows the heart, judged Aaron appropriately. Perhaps there was more coercion to aid in the people's sin than is apparent from the text. Legend has it that the people killed Hur for not being willing to go along with their sin.

For further study, see

Haftarah : 1 Kings 18:1-39

Brit Hadashah : Luke 11:14-20; Acts 7:35 – 8:1;

1 Corinthians 10:1-13; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18