

## EXODUS

### Lesson 30 - Chapters 31 and 32

We continue in our study of Exodus 31 this week with the section beginning in verse 12 concerning the Sabbath....in Hebrew, Shabbat.

Let's re-read this rather short section to refresh our memories.

#### RE-READ EXODUS 31:12 to end

The Sabbath is God's Law about observing sacred time, just as the Tabernacle is God's Law about observing sacred space. Now, this might sound a little philosophical rather than spiritual but it truly is not. Let me explain, so hang in there with me as this might seem complex but it really isn't.

A scientist would, rightly, say that we live in a universe that consists ONLY of space and time. Space consists of 3 dimensions. Time is one more dimension giving us a total of 4.. The first 3 dimensions (space) are very easy to grasp because we can simply look at the room in which we meet (this **space** that we've acquired for us to congregate) and see it's length, width, and height. What is not as easy to grasp is time. We can't SEE time, or touch time, but we can observe its effects. It is especially observable to me every morning in my mirror, because I look at this wrinkled face with a ring of gray hair around the crown of my head and ask, "who is that?" That image sure doesn't look like what my mind expects. I don't FEEL like that reflection looks. Aging is the effect of time.

But, WHAT is time? Just as an inch or a meter is a measurement of the first 3 dimensions we talked about (length, width, and height), time is actually a **measurement** of decay as expressed in the 2nd law of Thermodynamics. All physical things decay, but they decay at differing rates. Time measures the rate of decay. A rock decays much slower than a human, but not all rocks decay at the same rate nor do all humans decay at exactly the same rate. In fact our most accurate time measuring devices, atomic clocks, actually use the nearly perfectly steady rate of decay of certain atomic particles to make them work.

No, this not a science lesson; it is a lesson to help us understand at least part of God's apparent rationale behind Sabbath. Since our God created a universe of 4 dimensions consisting of space and time, so has He ordained a means of enshrining the holiness of all 4 dimensions of His Creation; the Tabernacle is representative of the 3 dimensions of space, and the Sabbath is representative of the dimension of time. God sanctifies the Tabernacle by setting it apart from all other human space and dwelling in it, and He sanctifies the Sabbath by

setting it apart from all other blocks of time and declares this specific block of time, Shabbat, as holy. No other piece of space (at the time of Moses and then for several hundred more years) was set apart as holy to embody the holiness of space, and no other block of time has ever been set apart as holy for the purpose of embodying the holiness of time. Certainly other blocks of time (other days) have been ordained and set aside to honor OTHER things God wants honored (the Biblical Feasts for example); but none of those had the specific purpose of honoring God's creation of time.

So the Sabbath is God's designated day to give tangible glory to His creation of the 4th dimension, time. Together the Tabernacle and Sabbath enshrine the holiness of God's creation. Keeping this in mind, let's see what we can glean from these last few verses of chapter 31 about the Sabbath.

The ending words of vs.13 is another of those interesting, but usually overlooked, little phrases that carries a large meaning....and the significance of it is explained in vs. 14. At the end of vs.13 it says, "so that you may know that I am the Lord who makes you holy". Your Bible version may say, "sanctifies you", or "consecrated" or some such thing, in place of "holy".....it's all the same thing. The word "holy" or "sanctify", is translated from the Hebrew root word "**kadash**", which indeed means "holy" or "be holy"...to be set apart (which is what the English word sanctified means). But pay attention to what God SEEMS to be saying here: He says that the PURPOSE for Israel keeping the Sabbath is....what? To make them, you, **holy**! That is no small thing and it carries rather large implications.

In vs. 14, there is another interesting phrase that works in conjunction with the one we just looked at in vs. 13; and it is most meaningful if we accept what it means in its most literal sense.....which is usually the best way to study the Bible. It starts out like this: "Keep the Sabbath for it is holy to you..." What I want to look at is the word that is translated as "holy" in THIS verse (I'm in vs. 14, NOT 13). In Hebrew, the word used here is "**kodesh**"; although it is taken from the root word **kadash**, it has a slightly different meaning. **Kodesh** does NOT mean holy.....this is poor scholarship. In Hebrew "**kadash**" means holy. So if **kodesh**, which is the word used here in verse 14, does not mean "holy".....what does it mean? It means "holi-ness". Most literally this verse reads "Keep the Sabbath because it is holiness for you".

So what's the difference? Am I splitting hairs? Not really. The way it is **normally** translated vs. 14 means to our minds: "I want you to keep the Sabbath, because I made it holy and therefore you are to consider it holy, and are to observe it BECAUSE it is a holy day". Right? Ah. But, that's **not** the meaning.

Here's what it DOES mean: "I want you to keep the Sabbath, because not only did I declare it holy, but the Sabbath clothes YOU in a state of holiness in my eyes when you obey me and observe it." Do you see the difference? The first way is, I want you to do this because I made Sabbath holy, and I want you to respect the holiness of the Sabbath. The second way is, by observing the Sabbath; YOU take on the holiness of the Sabbath. It's the holiness of the Sabbath that when imputed upon you, transmitted to you, makes you holy. So, vs. 13 says, I'm going to make you holy.....and vs. 14 says, I'm going to do this by transmitting the holiness inherent in my Sabbath to YOU....IF you obey and observe My Sabbath.

This concept really shouldn't sound strange to us at all. For, we are told that in order for us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, we must be righteous according to God's standard. But, it is utterly impossible for a man to attain that state of **saving** righteousness on our own. So, by faith in Jesus, we are clothed in HIS righteousness. Yeshua's righteousness is imputed upon us. Yeshua's righteousness is transmitted to us. God is laying out the principle here in Exodus that, by means of His Grace, He will impute upon Israel, He will assign to Israel, a state of holiness that cannot be achieved any other way.

This also goes a long way towards helping us to understand what Christ really meant when He said: "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". You see, He was saying that it was NOT necessary for the creation of Man in order to bring holiness to the Sabbath, but it WAS necessary that the Sabbath be created in order that holiness might be brought to Man.

The seriousness of the Sabbath ordinance is underlined when vs. 14 continues by saying that whoever profanes the Sabbath is to be cut-off.....they are to be separated from God. Cut off can mean that they are destined to die short of a normal lifespan, or it can mean, like in this instance, that they are to be executed for failure to observe the Sabbath. And, later in the Torah, we'll get an example or two of the death sentence being applied to someone who did not PROPERLY observe Sabbath.

How long is this Sabbath ordinance to last?.....verse 16 says it is forever.

God says the Sabbath is a **sign** between He and Israel. In Hebrew the word for sign is **owth** (oth). The sense of the word is an affirmation, or a proof, a mark of distinction. The Sabbath is a mark of distinction that sets the relationship between God and Israel apart from everyone else. And, further on in vs. 16, he makes this connection between the creation of the universe (as we spoke of at the beginning of our lesson) and the observance of Shabbat.

Now, let me see if I can illustrate something for you. I said that the Sabbath is a very specific block of time (the 7th day) that is set apart from all other blocks of time to embody the holiness of time as the 4th dimension of God's Creation. I was born on November 26th. So my birthday is on November 26th each year. What if I decided that I preferred to remember my birthday on March 15th? How about if when March 15th came around I just declared it in my home to be November 26th, my birthday? While there certainly is no law against it, with equal certainty it doesn't make much sense and sort of ruins the whole purpose of having a birthday. March 15th is NOT November 26. Each are very specific and different days.

Friends, the Bible.....not me but the Holy Scriptures....DEFINES Sabbath as the 7th day of each week. The set apart, sanctified, block of time that the Lord has established as representative of the 4th dimension of His creation is the 7th day of a 7-day week. It's not ANY block of time of our choosing. We can no more choose our own definition of Sabbath than we can choose our own definition of Messiah.

God is now through, for the time being, with giving Moses and the people of Israel His ordinances and principles. And so Yehoveh inscribes on two stone tablets, supernaturally by His own hand, the 10 principles from which all Law, ordinance, appointed times and festivals,

observances and rituals, even the sacrificial system will be based.

We have now completed 4 of the 6 divisions of Exodus, and are ready to begin the 5th division, which Everett Fox calls "Infidelity and Reconciliation".

### **READ CHAPTER 32 all**

Chapter 32 is all about the infamous Golden Calf incident. The key to understanding the scriptures about the Golden Calf is that Israel was breaking the Mosaic Covenant at the same moment Moses was up on the mountaintop receiving it. Remember, this is a conditional covenant.....Israel has its obligations to keep, because the covenant has stipulations about what happens if they don't. God sees what Israel did by building that calf, as adultery, and therefore, infidelity. Why adultery? Because they were supposed to be in union with Him, and then they brought another "god" into the picture.

It's chapters like these that mark the Bible as the most remarkable piece of literature (obviously its far more than mere literature) in all of mankind's history. God has set apart a people from all other people in the world to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation to Him. And, rather than try to paint Israel, now, as somehow BETTER than other humans, less susceptible to doing wrong and evil, above the temptations of sin and immorality, a bunch of people that just whistle a happy tune and go about God's business praising Him all the live-long day, we're shown the reality of the human condition. Our fickleness, our selfish and rebellious nature are vividly on display here in this chapter, as a stark contrast to God's character AND His expectations of us.

For the last several weeks of our study of Exodus it's as though we have been eavesdropping on God's conversation with Moses. From on-high, at the summit of Mt. Sinai, all that is good, and true, and perfect.....the heavenly spiritual ideal....has been spoken and explained to Moses. Well back at the ranch the reality of everyday physical life as it conflicts with God's standards greets us head-on.

We shouldn't sidestep the irony here: DURING the very time Moses is receiving incredible revelations from Yehoveh, standing on the summit, the Holy of Holies.....DURING the time God is lowering Himself to send a love letter to humanity that beckons the Hebrews to reconciliation with Him.....the people of Israel are scheming to do the very things God has prohibited. Translation: yeah, we know there's a God, we know He is loving and powerful, we know He has standards of good and evil, right and wrong, but we're anxious and stressed so we'll take matters into our own hands, thank you very much. Oh, how very human.

The first few verses of chapter 32 set about explaining the people's rationale for breaking the second commandment. The one that says, "Thou shall have no other gods before me. You are not to make a carved image....." And basically that rationale is that they're impatient and a bit afraid. They want answers and they want them NOW! Of course, I think last week it hit many of us squarely between the eyes that adultery was also at the heart of the Israelites great offense against God. Adultery, because what the Mosaic Covenant created was a union between Israel

and Yehoveh. And, by mixing the union with Yehoveh with the worship of the calf, by bringing another god into the picture, the union became corrupted and defiled. Actually, the union became broken.

And whom do the Israelites recruit to lead them in this worst of all possible offenses against God but the man who is about to become their High Priest! Moses' 2nd in command, the one who bore the staff of Moses and spoke the miracles of God before Pharaoh, Moses' own brother....Aaron. One could roll around the floor in laughter, if it weren't all so tragic and typical.

We're told that Aaron agreed to build for Israel a god image, and he instructed the people to give him the gold from their earrings. I'm not sure what significance there is to it, that it was ONLY earrings from which the gold was gathered.....but one thing's for sure.....there would have been an enormous number of earrings necessary to make this Golden Calf, so an awful lot of people agreed with what they were about to do.

Once the calf was made just what did the Hebrews think they had done? What was it that they thought that they had made and just whom did it represent? The answer is in the last few words of vs. 4, and then into vs. 5. "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt". And Aaron announced that tomorrow they would build an Altar and sacrifice an animal to the Golden Calf and hold a "festival to Yehoveh". Your Bibles most likely say a festival to the Lord. That is an incorrect translation. This has led many a commentator to suggest that the Israelites had an entirely different "lord" on their minds, one of their old Egyptian gods. But, the original Hebrew doesn't say "lord", Adonai; it says YHWH.....Yehoveh, God's personal name. The people thought they were making a suitable image of the God of Israel, Yehoveh, when they built that calf!! BTW: maybe we all better examine the images and icons we use.....because there's a ton of them, and I'm not at all comfortable that our rationale for using them makes it right in God's eyes.

There are so many lessons just under the surface here, that we could spend an awful lot of time with them. So, let me just outline a couple for you.

First, the Golden Calf itself was a common animal image used by almost every Middle Eastern culture. In Egypt it was called the Apis Bull, a very high deity indeed. It represented strength and authority, and the Hebrews would have been MORE than familiar with it. Now we can't know for sure that it was the Egyptian Apis that they used as a model for the Golden Calf.....it could have been some other Middle Eastern Bull god. But it really doesn't matter. The point is that despite the incredible miracles they had personally witnessed, after hearing Yehoveh's own VOICE tell them His 10 Commandments, at the first sign of trouble their instinct was NOT to believe God, NOT to trust God, NOT to be obedient to God, but rather to behave as they always had. The funny thing is had worshipping other gods back in Egypt EVER liberated them from Egypt or brought them anything good? Apparently not, for they were slaves for at least 2 centuries when God rescued them. But it didn't matter; they just went back to what was familiar, and turned their backs on what was right. People haven't changed much, have we? When push comes to shove we tend to fall back on what is traditional and comfortable. We love the things we're familiar with, the things that seem to validate the lifestyle we've chosen;

we'll compromise or rationalize God's principles in a heartbeat if it satisfies our emotions or our wants. I've heard it said that the true definition of insanity is believing that if you keep doing the same things you'll eventually get different results. There's not one of us hearing this lesson that doesn't have to fight, daily, the urge to hang on to, return to, our old ways even though we know the truth.

Second, why did the people feel they needed a god image at all? I mean what's the big attraction here? Interestingly it's the human need for visible, tangible evidence of God's presence that drove them to this horrible deed. And it's for that same HUMAN need.....the need to see it with our own eyes.....that God was in process of providing by means of the Tabernacle. God knew, and knows, that we need visible reassurance and evidence of His divine workings in our lives. Israel needed it, too. God didn't NEED an earthly tabernacle. And, He certainly didn't NEED human hands to build one. The Tabernacle, like almost all else, was for Israel's sake, our sake, not His. The Tabernacle was a physical demonstration of some heavenly principles as well as the enshrinement of God's principle of sacred space.

There is a parallel, a link, between the Golden Calf and the Tabernacle, as they both were intended to satisfy man's need to have visible proof of God's presence. It might do us well to think of the Golden Calf as a sort of anti-Tabernacle. The Golden Calf is man's perverse idea of deity. It was made from Israel's best and most sincere religious imaginings and efforts. Conversely, The Tabernacle was a heavenly model.....it was God ordained. But, it would also come in God's timing, not theirs.

Man ordained, versus God ordained. This is the battle humanity has been in practically since the moment Creation ceased, and it will go on until the end of the Millennial reign of Christ in the future. Probably within some of our lifetimes we'll see this battle played out in most dramatic fashion, in the finale of the history of the world, as we watch mankind install the anti-Christ as the head of World Government to rule over us. And why will man install him? For the same reasons that the Israelites molded their image: impatience, fear and anxiety, and the need for visible proof that God is present. Already the world is crying out for somebody to build that new Golden Calf. To do something to stop the violence and terror that has gripped the world, but there seems to be no solution. And, soon, very soon, I believe that the apostate portion of the church will join the effort of the world, if not lead the way, to identify and install the end-times Golden Calf, the anti-Christ. And just as in Moses' day this will occur as God is in process of readying the world for a visible display of God's true presence in the form of Messiah Jesus. But it'll be in His timing; sadly we already know from the Bible (primarily Revelation) that most of the world, and all but a remnant of the Church, won't wait for God's solution. We'll take matters into our own hands with devastating results. That's what Israel did when they built that Golden Calf.

Beginning in vs. 7, God informs Moses of what "YOUR" people are doing. I think that's kinda funny that God calls Israel "YOUR" people. In a way, for a moment there, it seems God disowned them because He HAD been calling them MY people. And guess what: legally that's exactly what He did, He disowned Israel. The Covenant **was** broken and Moses would demonstrate that when he arrived back to the valley floor. Further, it would be necessarily to re-establish the covenant, which we will also find Moses do as he fashions two more blank stone

tablets to take with him back up to the summit of Mt. Sinai.

As the Lord is instructing Moses He tells Moses to hurry back down that mountain and put a stop to the Calf worship. And, BTW, Moses, while you're gone, I'm going to sit here and think of ALL the ways I can destroy those stiff-necked people. In fact, I think I'll just start all over again with you as the new Father of a special people for me.

Moses, in a most noble gesture, pleads for mercy for those Israelites and God relents.

Now, a couple of things to think about: Was God going back and forth here...indecisive.... between destroying them and not? No, of course not. Yehoveh, as always, is in "teaching mode".....Torah mode. He's showing Moses just how serious disobedience to The Almighty can be. He's showing Moses that indeed those people are his responsibility. He's demonstrating that it didn't have to be Israel that is His chosen people; it could be anybody He selects. Moses, in the position of mediator, is the one who bears on his shoulders the sins of what is now described as YOUR people because the covenant that makes Israel God's people has just become invalidated.

In something akin to an episode of Seinfeld, here are the people of Israel, down at the foot of the mountain, partying like mad, worshipping and sacrificing to this Golden Calf, just so proud of their little selves for solving their own problems.....while at that very moment God is telling Moses that by the time he gets back down there these people are probably going to become little piles of human toast anyway. And these foolish rebellious Hebrews have absolutely no idea that their fate is being decided, up on that summit, as they go on in their blissful ignorance down below.

I also think that Moses really had yet to grasp his own importance in Yehoveh's eyes, as well as in the eyes of the people. Moses had always been reluctant about taking this job in the first place. He was a humble man, an introvert, and had a hard time understanding why people would look upon him as their leader. Bu, as we saw when God spoke the 10 Commandments by means of a thunderous and frightening sound directly to the people of Israel their response was generally: WOW! That was really cool; now PLEASE don't EVER do it again! Moses, you talk to God for us, and have Him talk to you. They were certain that if they were ever again in God's presence, or heard His voice, they would die. They saw Moses as the one and only channel between them and Yehoveh, which of course is the very definition of what he indeed was: their Mediator.

The people of Israel depended on Moses as that mediator. And after a considerable time, when he hadn't come back down that mountain, they did what people do when leadership vanishes: they panicked. When they didn't see what they expected to see, **when** they expected to see it, they lost faith; the result was the Golden Calf. I'm not sure I've ever made a good decision when I was in panic mode, which is one reason why God constantly reminds us to "fear not" for fear leads to poor judgment and irrational behavior.

As Moses was making his way back down the mountain, he runs into Joshua.....the same Joshua that would eventually take over for Moses. Apparently Joshua went part way up the

mountain with Moses and then stayed and waited for him for Joshua didn't seem to know what was going on back at the encampment....but he could hear all the ruckus and knew something not good was occurring. Joshua says, "Moses! I think there's a war going on!". Moses replies, "no Joshua, they're just having a giant block party!"

Moses finally gets to see what is happening and it infuriates him, as he's never been before. He throws the tablets on the ground, and they explode into hundreds of pieces. He took the calf, had it melted down, ground to dust, and then sprinkled into their drinking water. Then, he made the people of Israel drink it.

This act of breaking the tablets was significant; in the Middle East, whenever a covenant was made, written down, and then violated, the clay tablets it was written on were ceremonially thrown down and shattered to signify that the covenant was indeed broken. So, this wasn't a moment of rage in which Moses lost it for a second and in doing so threw down the tablets of the Law. It was a custom.....and the people knew immediately what it meant when he did it. The hours-old covenant with God was broken...gone.... already!

Moses asks Aaron, in vs. 21, what happened that would make him agree to do such thing as to build that idol. Aaron's answer: **they asked me to do it**. Peer pressure, social pressure. A desire to be all things to all people in place of Godly leadership; do I please God or my friends? Aaron chose unwisely.

Then Moses threw down the gauntlet: he called all those who stand with him, and in so doing stand with God, to come to him. Moses is doing what God demonstrated to us since the moment He separated darkness from light: He divides and separates to create unity. I know that this principle that **God divides** flies in the face of the typical modern day Church doctrine that God unites. But the "unity at any cost" doctrine simply doesn't square with Holy Scripture, primarily because it's too simplistic. God divides and separates **in order** to achieve unity. My goodness, here in Exodus He is well into the process of dividing Israel, setting Israel apart, from all the rest of the world as His People. And here in Exodus 32 we have Moses dividing and separating the people of Israel in order to achieve God's kind of unity. Division, separation, and election are God's ways to achieve ideal unity. Sadly the world and too much of the Church have fallen into the trap that defines unity as a compromise to achieve consensus. God's unity has nothing to do with consensus or unanimity or conformance...and most certainly not with compromise. Unity is a **oneness** with His Spirit.

It was the Levites, those destined to be priests and attendants to Yehoveh, who rallied around Moses. Now, please remember, the priesthood has YET to be established. These Levites who came to Moses were NOT declared priests, yet. But, we don't have to work too hard to figure out why, even from a purely human standpoint, it would be **only** the Levites who rallied around Moses: he was kin. Moses was a Levite and my means of his current station the head of the Levite tribe. This is the essence of Tribalism; blood is thicker than water or anything else for that matter.

Each of the Levites took a sword and went about killing 3000 of the calf worshippers. And, the wording makes it appear that they must have killed not only non-Levites, but fellow Levites as



well who had succumbed to idol worship. And then in vs. 29 Moses makes a startling statement to those who did the killing: by sparing not even your own SONS you have consecrated yourself to God. That is given the choice between obeying Yehoveh and executing your own child for idolatry at His command you chose obedience to God above your own desires. That sets you apart. These Levites at this moment were divided away from the rest of Israel, consecrated, to become God's priests. This would be confirmed in a formal ceremony soon.

BTW: the Levites are an interesting contradiction of character. Back in Genesis when Jacob was pronouncing his deathbed blessing upon his children he told Simeon and Levi that violence would follow them. But he also told them something else that was now coming true.

**READ Gen.49:5-7**

***“Shim'on and Levi are brothers, related by weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let my honor not be connected with their people; for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they maimed cattle. Cursed be their anger, for it has been fierce. I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel.”***

It was Levi and Shimon, Simeon, who led the raid on the helpless city of Shechem in revenge for the King's son raping Jacob's daughter (their sister), Dinah. They slaughtered all the males, killed the cattle, and made slaves of the women and children who were spared. As a result of this atrocity Jacob said that Simeon and Levi would find their destinies as constantly dealing in blood and violence.

But Jacob pronounced even more that concerned those 2 sons: here the meaning of “I will divide them in Jacob” now comes to light. Right here in Exodus 32 the Levites are divided from the rest of Israel....that is, they are divided in Jacob (remember Israel and Jacob are synonymous). And then their violent natures are put to good use as they kill many of the calf worshippers, even their own children. The second part of Jacob's prophetic blessing whereby Levi will be scattered in Israel, will occur at the end of the 40 years in the Wilderness when the land of Canaan gets divided up among the tribes of Israel.....but the Levites do NOT get any land. Instead they are to be scattered throughout the territories of the other tribes, given 48 cities to live in, but under the charity of the various tribal authorities.

I think its also interesting that the Levites, many who are about to become the priests, will be the ones to deal with blood and killing on a daily basis.....but this time it'll be sacrificial blood. You see the killing that God calls JUST is not murder. But killing outside of what God calls just IS murder. God creates all life. How it ends is entirely His to choose. What the Levites did at Shechem was unjust, it was murder, and they were under God's curse for doing it. But when they stood by Moses side, obeyed God, and killed those 3000 people it was counted to them as a blessing just as it says at the end of vs.29. The overall fate of the Levites would not change from what Jacob pronounced, but the NATURE of how it would be manifested DID change. They would indeed deal in blood and killing; but instead of it being unjust killing, against God, it would now be as God's servants, carrying out not merely justified killing.....but

killing that brought justification and atonement before God on behalf of Israel. God declares what is holy and just.....all else is not and it is not our position to alter His choices.

After the mass execution of the idol worshippers, Moses made it clear that Israel had sinned against Yehoveh, broken the covenant and he, as mediator, now needed to approach God to see if there was a way to atone for this corruption, and more importantly, re-establish the Mosaic Covenant.

Moses climbs back to the summit of the mountain, and begs God to blot him out of the book of life forever, if that is what is necessary for the people to be forgiven for their great sin.

In response the Lord lays down the principle that a man is responsible for his own sins, and so declines Moses offering of his own life as atonement for Israel's sins. Sin must be punished. There is no alternative. Those 3000 that were put to the sword by the Levites were just the tip of the iceberg. The number of those who willingly participated in calf worship was much greater and so God sent a plague as a punishment and many more Hebrews died of illness.

We'll follow Moses back up the mountain next week in chapter 33.