

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • October 1, 2017**  
**Teacher: David Crabtree**  
**Handout #29**  
**Exodus 32:21-35**

**I. Exodus 32:21-24**

A. Moses confronts Aaron.

1. What were you thinking?
  - a) You brought great evil on them.
    - (1) Aaron has lesser culpability, but is culpable.
2. Aaron blames the people.
  - a) Don't get mad at me.
  - b) They are prone to evil.
    - (1) Aaron levels this criticism against the people.
  - c) Most of what Aaron says is word-for-word perfect.
    - (1) Except when it gets to the production of the calf.
      - (a) Vs. 24: "So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."
        - (i) He phrases his answer so as to avoid saying who created the calf.
        - (ii) Verse 4 emphasizes the role Aaron played in creating the calf.
    - d) Some blame is clearly being assigned to Aaron.
      - (1) But the people are at greater fault.
      - (2) Aaron tried to temper the evil
        - (a) As we saw, he tried to spin the act as worship of YHWH.

B. Big contrast between Moses and Aaron

"Aaron saw the people 'bent on evil', Moses defended them before God's hot anger (v.11). Aaron exonerated himself from all active involvement; Moses put his own life on the line for Israel's sake. Aaron was too weak to restrain the people; Moses was strong enough to restrain even God." (Childs as quoted in Moberly, p. 54)

1. The buck-passing of Aaron resembles that of Adam in the garden.

**II. Exodus 32:25-29**

A. Regaining control

1. Aaron let the people become untethered.
  - a) This appears to be the nature of Aaron's wrong.
    - (1) He did not provide leadership; he followed the people's lead.
    - (2) At risk to his own life, he should have resisted the mob.
      - (a) It is difficult to stand up to popular opinion.
        - (i) This was Saul's weakness.
2. Aaron allowed the people to become a derision among their enemies.

- a) God led them into the desert only to devolve into an unruly mob.
  - b) God had freed them from slavery just so that they could become lawless.
3. Whoever is for YHWH, come to me.
- a) Moses clearly is referring to the one true YHWH rather than a pagan god on whom they can slap the name YHWH.
4. The sons of Levi were the ones who responded.
- a) Go through camp and kill brother, friend, and neighbor.
  - b) They killed the guilty.
    - (1) Those they knew were involved.
    - (2) Those shown to be guilty when they drank the gold in water?
  - c) 3,000 were killed.
  - d) Those who carried out this punishment were blessed.

“[P]recisely because you evinced, by your action, that your zeal for the Lord’s honour superseded your natural human affection for your kith and kin.” (Cassuto p. 422)

“The primary significance of the story is to show that death is the penalty for unfaithfulness to Yahweh and the covenant, whereas blessing (v. 29b) is the reward for faithfulness.” (Moberly, p. 55)

“It is loyalty to Yahweh that for this writer is the crucial factor in assessing the worth of an action.” (Moberly, p. 56)

5. How do we make sense of this?
- a) This is abhorrent to modern sensibilities.
    - (1) They were carrying out a judgment from God.
      - (a) Like an earthquake or a disease
    - (2) It was exceptional.
      - (a) It is hard to imagine circumstances in our time where this kind of killing would be appropriate.

### III. Exodus 32:30-35

- A. For a second time Moses goes to God with his concern about reconciliation.
  - 1. How will the people experience God’s presence as they move on to the Promised Land?
    - a) God already relented from destroying the people or disowning them.
    - b) But will God look out for them as they go to the Promised Land?
- B. God has already relented from his anger somewhat. Apparently, Moses would like a more complete restoration of the relationship between the people and God.
  - 1. You have committed a “great sin.”

- a) This sin is adultery-like.
  - b) Moses is going to approach God.
  - c) He wants to make atonement.
2. Moses' appeal to God
- a) He makes an admission that the people committed a great sin.
    - (1) They made for themselves a god of gold.
      - (a) The wording is very similar to wording of prohibition in 20:23.
  - b) But please forgive them.
  - c) If not, blot me out of thy book.
    - (1) Rabbinic tradition holds that God has three books.

“This request seems to reflect a well-rooted and widespread Near Eastern popular belief in the existence of heavenly ‘books.’ The Hebrew Bible differentiates three types. There is the book of life, mentioned in Psalm 69:28, in which God is thought to inscribe the names of all living. This notion undoubtedly drew its inspiration from the civil census lists that were kept by municipal or state authorities. Then there is the book of divine decrees, in which the destinies of men and women and of peoples are recorded. Lastly, there is the book of remembrance in Malachi 3:16 in which the deeds of human beings, both good and evil, are written up. This last must have its origin in ancient court procedure. It is hard to decide whether or not the notion of heavenly books was taken literally in ancient Israel. Maimonides unambiguously emphasizes the figurative, nonliteral nature of the biblical phraseology. . . . In the present instance, Moses’ request is framed in the figurative language of the book of life, so that he is really asking to die if Israel is not forgiven.” (Sarna, p. 210)

- (2) Is this manipulation?
    - (a) Depends on the attitude of Moses
      - (i) I don't think we are to see it as manipulation.
  - (3) He is making a powerful argument.
    - (a) Moses so completely identifies with the people of Israel at this point that it is fitting that he suffers the same fate as the others,
      - (i) Even though he did not participate in their sin.
    - (b) But God won't destroy the truly righteous with the wicked.
      - (i) This we learned at Sodom.
    - (c) Because of Moses, it makes no sense to condemn the people as a whole for eternity.
3. God's response
- a) Two ways to interpret the response
    - (1) God simply restates his position.
      - (a) God is a just and righteous God who does not tolerate wickedness and will not relent.
      - (b) There will be punishment for those who have done wrong.
      - (c) However, there will be a slight concession, in that God will not completely destroy the people.
    - (2) God gives in somewhat to the appeal of Moses.
      - (a) God will destroy only the guilty.

- (i) They will be removed from the book of life.
- b) Either way, God relents a little bit more.
  - (1) The Israelites are told to continue their journey.
  - (2) God will continue to lead them.
    - (a) But through an angel rather than doing it himself.

“However one interprets the precise emphasis of v. 33, the point at issue seems to be that Israel is to have some future yet is subject to God’s disfavor.” (Moberly, p. 58)

- 4. We feel a tension here that becomes stronger in the next chapter.
  - a) How can a holy God draw close to a sinful and rebellious people?

“This is the Old Testament dilemma. God wants to reveal himself to humanity, and humanity needs to have a revelation of God. God’s presence is our life, as the Aaronic blessing well shows. But in the Old Testament that presence must be partly an absence. The self-revelation of God must also be a self-concealment of God.” (Niehaus p. 224)

“There was a tragic irony in the episode of the golden calf. The people wanted to provide themselves with a reassuring symbol of God’s continued presence in their midst; yet that very symbol became the instrument of their alienation from God. Although Moses’ intercession saves the people from annihilation, Israel has not yet secured full pardon and reconciliation with God.” (Sarna, p.210)

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. What was the sin in what they did?
  - 1. They came with a demand to Aaron, rather than presenting their concern.
    - a) They had been told to check with Aaron and Hur in case a “legal matter” arose.
      - (1) They did not come for advice and counsel.
      - (2) They came demanding a specific solution to their problem.
  - 2. At the very least, they were guilty of insubordination.
- B. The people seem to want an idol.
  - 1. That is what the culture of their upbringing would have wanted in this situation.
  - 2. They are willing to have the idol represent the god who brought them out of Egypt.
    - a) But they are going to think about that god in pagan terms.
      - (1) A god that is manipulable and approachable
      - (2) A god that is responsive and available
- C. Aaron seems to want to conceive of what they are doing in more theologically acceptable terms.
  - 1. It is Aaron that fashions a bull instead of some other figure.

- a) Aaron does not want to make an idol—that would be in direct violation of what God had commanded.
- b) But a bull was thought to be a place for God to stand.
  - (1) This was a common notion in Egypt especially.

“... the calf made by Aaron was not at all intended to represent the Deity, but was to function as the pedestal of the invisible God of Israel. Here again, we can adduce any number of examples from the art of the ancient Near East wherein gods stand upon animals, mostly bulls and lions. The pedestal elevated the god above the human level, and the particular animal might be suggestive of the god’s attributes. Aaron’s calf would then be one more example of this practice, in which case Aaron would have followed accepted artistic convention, except that since the God of Israel may not be represented in material form, His Presence on the calf would be left to human imagination. This brings us back once again to the Tabernacle parallel, to the function of the cherubim, as we have explained it. The calf serves the same purpose as they do.” (Sarna, p. 218)

- (2) In this sense, the bull was just an invitation for the god to come down and be present.

### **Digression:**

This perspective appears to have been resurrected at a later time in the history of Israel:

- I Kings 12 (See discussion of this in Cassuto.)
- This becomes the “Aaronic” theology.
- Even the priests’ names are reflective of the errant sons of Aaron.

### **D. Was that wrong?**

- 1. Sarna says it was wrong because it still “put God back into nature.”

“In the popular mind, the image-pedestal could not but be endowed with divinity. God was put back into nature. The fundamental, distinctive idea of the religion of Israel was thereby violated and nullified. Instead of the unique, revolutionary idea of the Divine Word enshrined in the Holy of Holies as the token of the immediacy of the Divine Presence, there was a profane, plastic image which could easily be recognized as falling within the orbit of paganism. The situation in the wilderness thus produced two different, contradictory, and mutually exclusive responses: the one illegitimate and distortive, the Golden Calf; the other legitimate and corrective, the Tabernacle.” (Sarna p. 219)

- a) The dominant view seems to be that what they did wrong was to create an idol/image.
  - (1) I think it is a little more subtle.
- 2. Thought experiment: What if they had built, instead of a bull, the ark of the covenant? Would that have been good?
  - a) This is what God had just instructed Moses to do.
  - b) Would this have been right?
    - (1) I think not.

- E. There are several aspects to their sin.
1. Impatience
    - a) They freaked out, instead of trusting God to take care of them.
  2. They came up with their own solution rather than asking for help.
    - a) To request something of God is appropriate.
    - b) To demand something of God is insubordination.
  3. They wanted to conceive of God as a pagan god.
    - a) The safety of the conventional
      - (1) Any practice that has wide acceptance must be okay, effective, etc.
        - (a) People are very sheep-like.
        - (b) Worshipping a pagan god seems to work fine for most people.
    - b) But to worship the pagan version of YHWH is to worship another god.
      - (1) In that sense, what they did was adulterous.
        - (a) It was a breach of trust in their marriage-like relationship.
    - c) Pagan gods were there to be used.
  4. God wants us to relate to him as the righteous, transcendent Creator-God that he is
    - a) He wants us to relate to him in total subservience.
    - b) And to value what he values
- F. Nature of Aaron's sin is a little different.
1. I don't think he was worshipping another god.
  2. He lacked courage.
    - a) Caved to the mob
    - b) Tried to steer them rather than confront them
      - (1) He ended up compromising his values.
- G. It was all so silly.
1. God had already been addressing the very problem they were struggling with.
 

“The whole account of 32:1-6 can be seen as heavily ironic. This is clearest in the juxtaposition of 32:1-6 with 25:1-9. Not only is there irony here but also theological reflection on the nature of sin. The people want a symbol of Yahweh's presence. In their impatience they demand and make for themselves what Yahweh has already made provision for and is about to give them. What Aaron and the people do is in many ways similar to what Yahweh has specified. Yet because they push ahead without waiting for Yahweh's directions through Moses their work is but a parody which, far from assuring Yahweh's presence and accompaniment, simply forfeits it. Likewise the people's attempt to affirm the identity of the calf with Yahweh by echoing Ex. 20:2 is to be seen as a parody of the true nature and purposes of Yahweh.” (Moberly, p. 48)
  2. It only *appeared* to them that God was not attentive to their needs and concerns.

- a) They couldn't see God's attention, so they assumed he was not attending to their needs.

#### H. The transformation of Moses

1. The role of Moses should not be minimized.
  - a) Moses plays a very significant and noble role in this passage.
2. Moses has changed.
  - a) When he fled Egypt, he wanted to separate himself from his people.
    - (1) They had turned on him.
      - (a) The near-death experience
      - (2) The people continue to be fickle.
  - b) But he is now willing to give his eternal life for them.
    - (1) He has a deep love for this intransigent people.
      - (a) He identifies with them and their foibles.
      - (2) He does not hold their disrespect for him against them.
        - (a) This shows great humility.

#### I. Feast of Trumpets and Yom Kippur

1. I am taking a minority view.
  - a) I will just explain my view and the reasons for it.
    - (1) You will have to decide for yourself whether I am right.
2. There are seven feasts that God commanded the Israelites to celebrate.
  - a) The Bible contains astonishingly few details about what the feasts mean and how they are to be celebrated.
    - (1) Passover is a notable exception.
    - (2) We will come back to this.
  - b) My assumption is that these feasts had some kind of significance.
    - (1) They were meaningful.
    - (2) And if they were meaningful, there is value in understanding them.
  - c) Having the Israelites celebrate feasts marking the key events in the story of the nation's flight from Egypt could serve that purpose.
    - (1) The first year of Israel's time in the wilderness (the Exodus) is the most important in the history of the nation until the coming of the Messiah.
      - (a) It says a huge amount about who YHWH is and what kind of people the Israelites are, and how those two interact.
  - d) My view
    - (1) The seven feasts are designed to be an annual review of the key events of the Exodus.
      - (a) They constitute a reminder of the key truths that can be learned from reflecting on that first year.
      - (b) Therefore
        - (i) Each feast commemorates a distinct event in Exodus.
        - (ii) They are in the same order as those events.
        - (iii) They *may* be celebrated on the day that corresponds to the event.

- e) What makes me think this is the case?
- (1) Passover seems to be paradigmatic.
    - (a) It is specifically said to be the beginning of the religious year.
    - (b) It is specifically said to be a commemoration the Passover event.
      - (i) This was the beginning of the Exodus year.
    - (c) How this feast was to be celebrated was prescribed in great detail.
      - (i) The celebration was all designed to relive the event.
  - (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread
    - (a) The Israelites are instructed to eat unleavened bread for a week.
      - (i) In remembrance of having to leave Egypt in a hurry
  - (3) Feast of First Fruits
    - (a) The first grain harvested is given to God.
    - (b) Corresponds, apparently, with the crossing of the Red Sea.
  - (4) Pentecost
    - (a) Offering to God of the first of the second harvest
    - (b) Later this became a celebration connected with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai.
      - (i) It corresponds within a day or two of the Exodus chronology.
  - (5) Feast of Trumpets
    - (a) Celebrated by a blowing of trumpets
      - (i) As a memorial (But what is it a memorial of?)
    - (b) How is it celebrated?
      - (i) Mourning and repentance till Yom Kippur

The Feast of Trumpets heralded the arrival of that seventh month. It also began what is known as the Ten Days of Awe between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, wherein the penitent humble themselves in preparation for the great Day of Atonement.

- (c) What did the trumpets signify?
  - (i) The coming together of the holy with the profane
  - (ii) Usually in judgment
- (d) What event in Exodus does this map onto?
  - (i) Joshua and Moses coming down from the mountain
- (e) The chronological information in Exodus is too sparse to determine when this event happened.
  - (i) But it could have corresponded to the date of the Feast of the Trumpets.
- (6) Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)
  - (a) Day of fasting and repentance
  - (b) Again, the chronological information is not adequate to pinpoint.
    - (i) But it could correspond to the third time Moses asked for God to reconcile with the people of Israel.
- (7) Feast of the Tabernacles (Sukkoth)
  - (a) The most celebratory feast
    - (i) More about this when I continue in Exodus



Additional notes (all from Wikipedia):

### **Pentecost (Shavuot)**

According to Rabbinic tradition, codified in the Talmud at [Shabbat 87b](#), the [Ten Commandments](#) were given on this day.

Nevertheless, there are a number of widespread customs observed on Shavuot. During this holiday the [Torah](#) portion containing the Ten Commandments is read in the synagogue, and the biblical [Book of Ruth](#) is read as well.

### **Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)**

According to [oral tradition](#), **Rosh Hashanah** (**ראש השנה**) (lit., "Head of the Year") is the Day of Memorial or Remembrance (**יום הזכרון**, *Yom HaZikaron*),<sup>[17]</sup> and the day of judgment (**יום הדין**, *Yom HaDin*).<sup>[18]</sup> God appears in the role of King, remembering and judging each person individually according to his/her deeds, and making a decree for each person for the following year.<sup>[19]</sup>

The holiday is characterized by one specific [mitzvah](#): blowing the [shofar](#).<sup>[20]</sup> According to the Torah, this is the first day of the seventh month of the calendar year,<sup>[20]</sup> and marks the beginning of a ten-day period leading up to Yom Kippur. According to one of two Talmudic opinions, the creation of the world was completed on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>[21]</sup>

Morning prayer services are lengthy on Rosh Hashanah, and focus on the themes described above: majesty and judgment, remembrance, the birth of the world, and the blowing of the *shofar*. [Ashkenazi Jews](#) recite the brief [Tashlikh](#) prayer, a symbolic casting off of the previous year's sins, during the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah.

The first ten days of Tishrei (from the beginning of Rosh Hashana until the end of Yom Kippur) are known as the **Ten Days of Repentance** (**עשרת ימי תשובה**, *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*). During this time, in anticipation of Yom Kippur, it is "exceedingly appropriate"<sup>[23]</sup> for Jews to practice [teshuvah](#) (literally "return"), an examination of one's deeds and repentance for sins one has committed against other people and God. This repentance can take the form of additional supplications, confessing one's deeds before God, fasting, self-reflection, and an increase of involvement with, or donations to, [charity](#).

### **Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)**

**Yom Kippur** (**יום כיפור**) is the holiest day of the year for Jews.<sup>[Note 12]</sup> Its central theme is [atonement](#) and [reconciliation](#). This is accomplished through prayer and complete fasting—including abstinence from all food and drink (including water)—by all healthy adults.<sup>[Note 13]</sup> Bathing, wearing of perfume or cologne, wearing of leather shoes, and sexual relations are some of the other prohibitions on Yom Kippur—all of them designed to ensure one's attention is completely and absolutely focused on the quest for atonement with God. Yom Kippur is also unique among holidays as having [work-related restrictions](#) identical to those of Shabbat. The fast

and other prohibitions commence on 10 Tishrei at sunset—sunset being the *beginning* of the day in Jewish tradition.

The seventh day of the Sukkot is called [Hoshanah Rabbah](#), the "Great *Hoshanah*" (singular of *Hoshanot* and the source of the English word [hosanna](#)). The climax of the day's prayers includes seven processions of *Hoshanot* around the synagogue. This tradition mimics practices from the [Temple in Jerusalem](#). Many aspects of the day's customs also resemble those of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Hoshanah Rabbah is traditionally taken to be the day of the "delivery" of the final judgment of Yom Kippur, and offers a [last opportunity for pleas of repentance](#) before the holiday season closes.