

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS –

### PART EIGHT – THE PLAN FULFILLED

The heavenly plan had been revealed for a giant visual aid which would continue to teach the message of salvation to generations of Israelites. Bezalel, the man to carry out the plan, with artistic flair and skilled craftsmanship so that the tabernacle would also be an object of beauty, had been commissioned to work and teach others. The future looked exciting but the whole project was about to fail. The 73 leaders who had met, and eaten and drunk with God before being sent back to encourage their people, lost their way because they forgot what God was like. When the people, without Moses for 40 days, demanded a god they could see, the leaders who should have been able to teach them, caved in under pressure. Aaron collected everyone's gold ear-rings, melted them down and shaped them into an image of God, a cow! Why on earth would he think God looked like this when he had actually met Him on the mountain? Back in Egypt, one of the local gods was the bull calf of Memphis. When we forget to let the Holy Spirit teach us what God is like we will revert to memories from early life, however twisted. He built an altar for sacrifice to his cow-god and planned a service for the following day, which turned into a wild party.

God reacted with righteous anger, washing His hands of the people and handing them over to Moses. The heart of sin is to worship something or someone other than the God of the Bible. If we do, we are on our own. It is idolatry and unbelief in the end which God will judge.(Jn.16:9; Rom.14:23) Sins, in this case whatever happened at the party, are only the consequences of having a different god. While threatening to judge the people, God, at the same time, made a wonderful promise to Moses, to make a great nation from him. Moses panicked and urged God to change His mind, questioning God's wisdom, worried about what the Egyptians would say, and reminding God of what the Bible said! It was hardly a prayer of faith. God changed His mind but in reality it was only a delay, because that generation never did enter the Promised Land. Moses stormed down the mountain, carrying the Ten Commandments which contained the answer to the problem he would find. Instead of sharing their message, he smashed them in anger, ground up the golden calf, and compelled the people to swallow it. He then bullied Aaron into a half-hearted confession in which he blamed everyone else. Finally he surrounded himself with the Levites, his own tribe, who should have know better as the priests in training, and led them on an indiscriminate slaughter of anyone too slow to get out of their way. He now went before God hoping that he could somehow make atonement for the people's sin, if necessary with the sacrifice of his own position in eternity. It was a noble gesture – but wrong. Only Christ can take our place in sacrifice.(32)

The Israelites could only count on God's presence and blessing if they repented and trusted Him again. For the moment they did. Moses would meet God on behalf of the people and share what he was told. He had to rediscover that nothing worthwhile could be accomplished unless God did it. He needed to get to know God again through the picture of a cleft in a rock in which he was hidden from the glory of God, as Christ was the Rock struck for us, (1 Cor.10:4; Judg.15:8) to save us from the judgement of a holy God.(33)

Moses was now summoned to go back up the mountain to collect a new set of Ten Commandments to replace the broken ones. God had not changed His mind about how He changes human behaviour. He repeated and expanded His promise to give them victory in the land of Canaan, if they trusted Him uncompromisingly, and no other god. To keep clear in their minds what their new life was about, God gave them 3 annual feasts, the Feast of Unleavened Bread which pictures the cross and the resurrection, the Feast of Weeks which foreshadows the

giving of the Holy Spirit, and the Feast of Ingathering which looks forward to the Christian life until Christ returns.(Lev.23) Every Sabbath they were to take time to think about resting in Christ's work for them. Each time Moses left the presence of God, he was radiant with the light of God, but it rapidly faded. He wore a veil to hide its temporary nature. Paul would later use this in II Cor.3:12-18 to picture how much better it would be for the Christian who did not have to go into God's presence and leave again, but would have His presence continually in him. For us the light need not fade.(34)

In the chapters which follow, Moses taught the people the commandments that he should have read them in chapter 32, and the work of building the tabernacle was carried out. The plan was executed exactly as God had instructed down to the tiniest detail. First people gave freely out of a love for the Lord, not out of compulsion. Bezalel and his helpers carried out their work with all the practical skill God had given them, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Again they gave their time and skill willingly. Their freewill giving was so abundant that Moses had to tell people to stop because they had brought more than enough. This is the way it is when believers first give themselves to the Lord.(II Cor.8:3-5) First the tent itself was constructed and then its contents, the ark to contain the 10 commandments, with the mercy seat above it, the candlestick, the table to carry the bread of the presence, the altar of incense, the altar for the burnt offering, and the bronze laver for washing. They carefully produced Aaron's garments with their various attachments. Chapters 35-39 seem like a pointless repetition of chapters 25-31 but this is a deliberate exercise to impress on us the importance of carrying out God's plan down to the last detail, not simply choosing the bits we like, as we so often do. When the work was finally complete Moses did a last quality check and was thrilled to see a superb, faithful piece of work.(35-39)

At last Moses was allowed to install each piece in place in the tabernacle, anointing every part as well as Aaron and his sons with oil, picturing the empowering of the Holy Spirit for the service which was to be performed.(Acts 10:38) The first burnt offering was made representing the death of Christ on the cross. Only now would God move into His house. His glory filled the tabernacle and the pillar of cloud and fire settled over it. Everyone knew God was in residence, waiting to guide His people on every step of their journey. Today the tabernacle is us.(I Cor.3:16) On the basis of the cross, God moves into us, ready to lead us in every step of our lives.(40)

#### SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How is the story of the golden calf a warning to us about what can go wrong in our Christian lives?(chapter 32)
2. Compare Moses' prayer and its outcome in chapter 32 with his prayer and its result in chapter 33.
3. How does chapter 34 foreshadow Jesus' time on the Mount of Transfiguration,(Matt.17) and Paul's instruction to us in Rom.12:2?
4. Why is it so important that we follow God's instructions down to the finest detail?(chapter 35-39)
5. What is the practical link between the cross, Christ living in us, and the guidance of God in our lives?(chapter 40)