

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 34:1-28 **“New Tablets”**

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Exodus 34:1-28

Verse 1-3

YHWH said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on the top on the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.

- Moses is commanded to chisel out of stone two new tablets, like the first tablets which he broke. The first tablets were given to Moses after God had written the words of the covenant on them. They were entirely the work of God. Moses did nothing to fashion them.
- Moses broke the first two tablets when he came down the mountain and found the people worshipping the golden calf. Since Moses was responsible for breaking the first tablets, he must chisel the new ones out of the rock himself. He must work to re-coupe what was lost through his action.
- Moses is then summoned to appear before God on the mountain. He is to come into God’s presence alone. No other being, human or animal, is to come near the mountain while Moses and God are in conference.

Verse 4-7

So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as YHWH had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then YHWH came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, YHWH. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming “YHWH, YHWH the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes

the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

- Moses did as he was commanded to do. He chiseled out the two stone tablets and, the next morning, carried them up on the mountain into the presence of God. True to his word, God met Moses there.
- As God had promised, he passed before Moses and allowed Moses to see his glory. See Exodus 33:12-25. In so doing, God told Moses his sacred name, YHWH. Then, God told Moses the meaning of all that Moses had learned about God. Moses discovered that God was compassionate. The Hebrew word is used to designate the kind of caring that a mother has for her child. It refers to the way a mother's body cares for a child before it is born. It is natural and selfless love. Moses discovered that God is gracious. The Hebrew word refers to favor or status conferred upon the undeserving. God gives favor to those who do not deserve it. Moses learned that God is slow to anger. Literally, the Hebrew phrase means "long-nosed." This apparently referred to fire breathing dragons that blew fire out of their nostrils when angered. God's nose is long allowing his fire to cool before it reaches the end of his nostrils. Moses learned that God is abounding in love and faithfulness. The Hebrew word for love means "to put up with a great deal" to be "forbearing." It means that God bears with many faults and bad attitudes over a long period of time. He stands with his people. The Hebrew word translated "faithfulness" is a synonym to the word translated "love." It means that God can always be counted on because he is always reliable. Moses learned that God "maintains love to thousands." The Hebrew text says, "to the thousandth generation. It means that love is endlessly reliable. It means that he can always be counted on. Moses learned that God is forgiving. The Hebrew word means "to lift." The idea is that God lifts the sin and transgression from his people as a nation and as individuals.
- At the same time, Moses was shown the other side of God's nature. There are two terms used to show the other side of God's nature. The first is translated "punishes." While God forgives and lifts away the sin of his people, he also punishes sin. The second term is caught in the punishment of sin to the third and fourth generation. Later texts explain that God does forgive the transgression. The charge is dropped. However the consequences of bad behavior, bad thought, bad action is not lifted and these consequences may reach into future

- generations. The revelation is that God will not free his children of suffering the consequences of their sin.
- This fuller revelation of the true nature of God is God's response to Moses' request in Exodus 33:18. Moses is shown God in all of his glory.

Verse 8-9

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. "O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

- Moses' response to the fuller revelation of God's nature is absolute awe. He falls down on his knees with his face to the ground in worship.
- Moses prayed that God would forgive Israel and abide with her. His appeal is delivered in the most intense passionate way. He begs God to forgive and inherit Israel.

Verse 10-17

Then YHWH said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, YHWH, will do for you. Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for YHWH, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. Do not make cast idols."

- These verses are the beginning of God's deliberate response to Moses' impassioned plea on behalf of the nation. God decides to offer covenant in response to Moses' prayer. He will make covenant, bind himself to Moses and to Israel, regardless of how Israel might act.

- Moses is the central figure in this reiteration of covenant. In this second offer, the people are not consulted. The deal is reached between God and Moses. In this way Moses becomes a type, or picture, of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is in Jesus' blood. It is offered by God without reference to any human. We are invited to enter it or not, but the deal is made between God and his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, both the Old Covenant and the New become expressions of God's grace. There is no merit or favor involved. Covenant is always an expression of divine grace.
- On behalf of the people, God will do wonders and signs. He will deliver the land into their hands. However, they are bound to keep certain promises to God if they would enter the covenant God offers. Even though covenant is an act of grace, it binds the parties to particular actions and behaviors.
- The first of these obligations is absolute loyalty to YHWH. Israel must have no association with the worship of other gods or become bound to people who do. Their first loyalty must be to YHWH. This section echoes the command not to have any gods but YHWH.

Verse 18-26

“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock. Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest. Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign YHWH, the God of Israel. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before YHWH your God. Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of YHWH your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.”

- God commands that Israel observe five rituals that demonstrate her dependence on him and argue against self-sufficiency. The rituals are:
 1. The observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Passover, by which Israel acknowledged YHWH to be her deliverer/savior.
 2. The Offering of the Firstborn by which Israel acknowledged the right of YHWH to claim everything that was firstborn.
 3. The Keeping of the Sabbath by which Israel acknowledged YHWH's right to govern her use of time.
 4. The observance of the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Ingathering by which acknowledged that all provision came from YHWH.
 5. The Offering of the Firstfruits by which Israel acknowledged YHWH's right to all the produce of the land.

By keeping these rituals, Israel acknowledged that YHWH was her supreme lord. This was what Israel had denied by worshipping the golden calf.

Verse 27-28

Then YHWH said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with YHWH forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant -- the Ten Commandments.

- Just as he had done before (Exodus 24:4), Moses recorded the terms of the covenant. The task took forty days and nights as it had done before. Moses was supernaturally supplied during that entire time. It was not necessary for him to stop to eat or drink.
- The "words of the covenant" and "the Ten Commandments/Words" are synonymous terms. At God's command, Moses recorded all the terms of the covenant exactly as they had been recorded on the first set of tablets.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *New Tablets*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)