

Seeing Jesus in Every Story

**“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.”**

John 5:39

Act 6

Moses: Intercession and Atonement

Exodus 24–25, 32–34

Prologue

A large part of Exodus is devoted to the intricate details of the Tabernacle’s construction and how the service of priests and sacrifices would be conducted. Truth be told, most of us would prefer to skim through Exodus for the action scenes unless we happen to enjoy reading blueprints or watching *Antiques Road Show*. But what if you learned that an old family heirloom was, in fact, priceless? For believers, the Tabernacle *is* a family heirloom. It is the blueprint drawn by God to build the way for His children to come back home to Him.

The back story . . .

We left off in Exodus 19, when the children of Israel first came to Mt. Sinai. Moses climbed the mountain and God spoke to him. Then God sent Moses down to prepare the people so they could hear Him speak to Moses. God set boundaries for the people so that no one would come near the mountain. This was for their protection since they didn’t yet know how to approach God. But the people were afraid. They said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19).

Cast

Moses

Aaron and the Israelites

Read Exodus 24:1–18 & 32:1 – 34:1–10. Briefly note what stands out to you at first reading. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

1. Moses went up the mountain and God spoke the covenant He would make with Israel (Exodus 19–23). Then Moses came down and read it in the hearing of the people. What was their response to the covenant God made with them?
2. It didn’t take long for the people to break their word. What did Moses pray for them? How did the Lord respond?

Scene 1: Patterns with Purpose – Exodus 25

God's covenant with the newly formed nation of Israel set them apart from all other people. But this bond was much more than rules to live by—it was God's promise to dwell with them. They would be His people and He would be their ever present God.

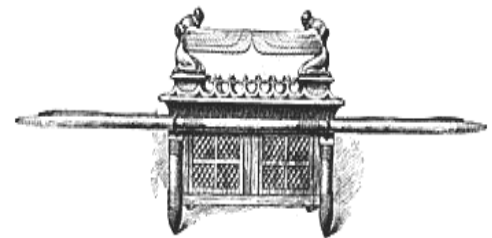
In this scene, Moses has gone up the mountain again. Aaron, his sons, seventy elders and Joshua go part way with Moses where they are granted an indescribable glimpse of God. Joshua accompanies Moses a little further until he, too, must wait while Moses goes up into the Glory-cloud. For the next forty days, God will give Moses detailed instructions for the tabernacle.

1. Why was this portable tent in the desert going to be so significant?

- Who was asked to contribute to this project? Think about it: what does this stipulation indicate about God's desire from those who worship Him?

2. Exodus 25:10–22 describes the Ark of the Covenant which would go in the Most Holy Place. This was roughly a 4x3 ft. box made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The mercy seat was a solid slab of gold with two cherubim fashioned from the same piece; it fit perfectly like a cover on top of the ark. According to the scriptures:

- What would be put inside the ark?
- What was the purpose for the mercy seat?
- What did God say would happen here?



3. God gave Moses detailed instructions for furnishing the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. Next to the description given for each, read the scripture and briefly note how it points to Jesus.



Twelve loaves of bread represented the 12 tribes of Israel. This was a reminder that Israel was always in God's presence; it also reminded the people of how God provided bread for them.

- How this points to Jesus: John 6:32–33, 52–58



The lampstand, fashioned out of one piece of pure gold to resemble an almond tree, provided light in the tabernacle; it was to be kept burning continually.

- How this points to Jesus: John 1:4–5, John 8:12



The altar of incense (Exodus 30:1–10) stood just outside the veil in front of the Most Holy Place. Incense was burned each morning and night by a priest to represent the prayers offered on behalf of the people.

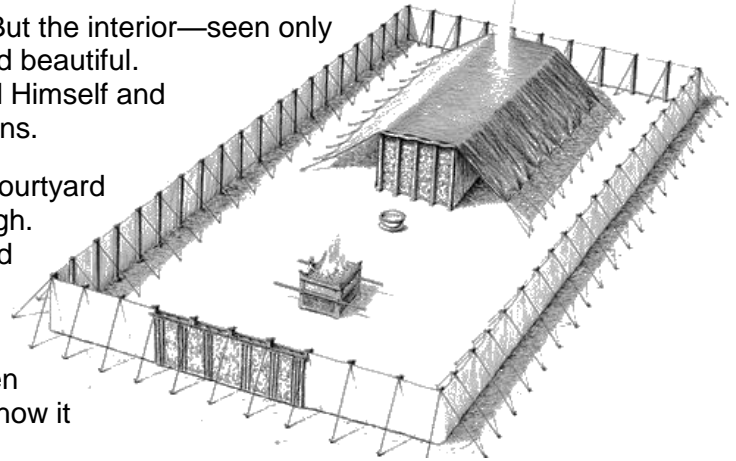
- How this points to Jesus: Hebrews 7:25, John 14:12–15

4. The tabernacle was 45 ft. long, 15 ft. wide and 15 ft. high. The framework was made from wood overlaid with gold. It was covered by four layers of cloth and skin (Exodus 26:1–14).

Outwardly, it was humble and practical. But the interior—seen only by ministering priests—was elaborate and beautiful. Every design detail was specified by God Himself and painstakingly crafted by God-gifted artisans.

The fence that enclosed the tabernacle courtyard was 150 ft. long, 75 ft. wide and 7½ ft. high. Finely woven linen curtains were fastened to 60 wood pillars overlaid with bronze.

God gave instructions for two items used in the courtyard. Read the scriptures given next to each description and briefly note how it points to Jesus.



- The bronze basin (Exodus 30:17 & 38:8) was for the priests to wash themselves before serving in the tent or at the altar for burnt offerings. It was made from highly polished brass mirrors given by women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting. In what way does this basin point to Jesus? 1 Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:5, 1 John 1:9.
- The bronze altar (Exodus 27:1–8 & 38:1–7) was 4½ ft. high and 7½ ft. square. This fire was to be kept burning continually and sacrifices were offered here to atone for sin. In what way does this altar point to Jesus? Hebrews 9:12–14, 10:11–12.

Scene 2: Go Down at Once – Exodus 32

Broken. God's commandments. Israel's promise. Moses' heart. It happened immediately after the covenant was sealed. It happened while the cloud of God's glory, still visible from the camp below, covered the mountain. To her shame, Israel became a harlot on her honeymoon. In this scene, Moses intercedes for Israel.

1. What reason did the people give for needing an idol?

- Just to review, in what ways had the Lord shown Himself faithful to Israel? Check all that apply:

He brought them out of bondage ____ He protected them ____ He fed them ____

He led them day and night ____ He made a covenant to go with them and bless them ____

2. Here is something to consider. Aaron chose to appease the people by giving them what they demanded. When they credited their idol for delivering them out of Egypt, Aaron built an altar and proclaimed a day of celebration to the Lord. For additional insight, review what the Lord said in Exodus 20:22–24 and briefly share your thoughts:
 - What do we have to gain and/or lose by compromising our obedience to the Lord?
 - Who are we fooling when we try, as Aaron did, to spin sin into something God will bless?
3. Even while Israel was blatantly disobeying God, He demonstrated mercy. Think about it. God could have struck them all without a word of warning or explanation to Moses. But God allows Moses to intercede for the people and He relents from destroying them. As you read Moses' prayer and God's response (vs. 11–14) consider the following:
 - How does Moses ask God to act according to His own faithfulness? Please explain.
 - In what way does Moses show that he cares about God's glory and Israel's well-being more than his own personal interest?

When Moses reached the camp he did three things. He destroyed the golden calf. He rebuked Aaron for indulging the crowd and allowing such wickedness. Then he took his stand in the main gate of the camp and cried out, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come stand with me!" That call went out to everyone, but some rejected it. The purging that followed was painful but necessary.

4. At the Lord's command, the unrepentant were dealt with. Painful as it was, even those closest in affection must not be spared. Is there a lesson here for us? Consider this: what could be closer—and more dear to us—than our own human nature? What does God's Word command us?
 - Romans 6:11–14
 - Galatians 5:19–22, 24

Additional Thoughts and Observations

- "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord . . ." (v.29). The word *consecrate* means "fill up your hands." Moses told the people that it was time to give themselves completely to the Lord. The half-heartedness and rebellion that plagued the camp must go, for they could plainly see how much pain it had caused. How do we consecrate ourselves? For additional insight, read Ephesians 5:1–4 and Titus 2:11–13. Answer briefly in your own words.

Moses pleaded with the Lord not to destroy the people. He knew the Israelites didn't deserve mercy—and neither do we. So he went up to the Lord, hoping to atone for Israel's sin. But God told Moses to lead the people and assured him that "My Angel will go before you" (vs.34). The Lord also told Moses that a day of punishment was coming. When would that day be? We will come back to that question later.

Scene 3: Show Me Your Glory – Exodus 33–34

Moses could not imagine going forward without the Lord's presence. How could he lead the people if God Himself wasn't there to show him the way? How could they be known as God's people if He wasn't present with them? This scene invites us in and compels us to participate. Are you ready? Let's begin in the camp, go up the mountain with Moses and then we'll come back down to Israel's camp.

In the Camp — Read Exodus 33:1–11 to set the scene in your mind.

1. What did the Lord instruct Moses to do?
 - Who will God send to go with them? (Compare with Exodus 14:19 & 23:20–23)
 - Briefly note what God instructs Moses to tell the people.
2. The tent of meeting wasn't the tabernacle—that wasn't built yet. What was the purpose of this tent and who was allowed to approach it?
 - From the description in vs. 8–10, what are the people waiting for and hoping to hear? Why are they keeping their distance?

Someone else is waiting...see him there by the tent of meeting? Every time we see Joshua, he's in the right place—vigilant, obedient, and ready.

3. Moses' prayer was heartfelt and urgent, but it wasn't blind. He knew the people were sorry but still stubborn. It troubled him to think of going it alone. As you read vs. 12–23, note what stands out to you about:
 - Moses' requests:
 - God's response:

Up the Mountain — Read Exodus 34:1–4 to set the scene in your mind.

Can you see it? Moses steps out of his tent just before sunrise. He is tired and his shoulders ache. Chiseled stone tablets are heavy in his arms. It will take several hours to reach the summit. The path starts smooth and easy, but experience has taught Moses what to expect. The trail will rise so sharply he will have to maneuver on his knees to keep from slipping. Eventually he'll reach solid rock again—by that time the desert floor will be far below him and the white hot sun will be climbing the sky.

What compelled Moses, an 80 year old man, to make this lonely climb? By now you know the story well but read it again with fresh eyes that long to see God's glory.

4. Moses asked God to “show me Your glory” and the Lord said He would proclaim His name and make all His goodness pass before him.

‣ What does the Lord declare about Himself?

‣ What is He filled with?

‣ What does the Lord say He will forgive?

‣ What does the Lord say He will not excuse?

Does God punish innocent children for their parents’ sins? Some have taken it to mean this. But this is not a threat from God to punish families—it is a *warning* from God that persisting in sin will cause families to suffer.

Back To Camp — Exodus 34:29–35

After renewing His covenant, God reminds Moses that His people must be different from the nations around them. He renews His promise to bless them and warns against idolatry. After being on the mountain another forty days and nights, Moses returns to the camp.

5. When Moses came back to camp, what was visibly different about him? How did Aaron and the people respond?

‣ What would normally happen every time Moses would spend time in God’s presence? What would cause it to diminish?

‣ While we don’t expect to literally glow, in what way does spending time in God’s presence change your countenance and outlook?

Intermission: Pause – Ponder – Pray

**He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him,
since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)

As you memorize this passage, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea . . . satisfying as it is savored. So give yourself time to savor God's Word. Write the scripture in the space provided and meditate on what it says.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and increase your understanding. Jot down what He points out to you; keep returning here and adding your thoughts throughout the week.

Ponder what this says about God. Consider His character, attributes, work, promises . . .

Consider that Jesus Himself is—right now—interceding for you. What can you trust Him to do?

Write your response to Him in worship and praise . . .

Epilogue: Seeing Jesus in the Story

Search to See . . .

History can be a fascinating subject—but without any relevance, all the details get a bit tedious, right? In our study we haven't just been looking at history, we've been looking for His story. Every detail of the Tabernacle (and the priesthood and sacrifices we didn't have time to go into) points to Jesus. There is so much more to see and perhaps we'll come back for another look some other time. But for now, there is one treasure you don't want to miss. We've hinted at it through this lesson, so let's look closer to see Jesus in what the mercy seat represents.

1. God designed the innermost part of the Tabernacle—the Most Holy Place—for the Ark of the Covenant. Every detail was meant to show how God would make it possible for sinful people to draw near to Him. The Ark contained God's law. As we have seen, the people broke their promise even before Moses could come back with the tablets.

Above the Ark, surrounded by two cherubim, is where God's presence would dwell. And between God's holy presence and His law was the symbolic representation of God's heart: the mercy seat. The only one who could go into the Most Holy Place was the high priest, once a year. He would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for his own sin and for the sins of the people. In this way, when God's presence came down He would set His gaze on the mercy seat. God's people would be spared through the blood sacrifice.

Where is our mercy seat? In a thought or two, simply explain how this points to Jesus and what it means for you.

2. In scene 2, we wondered about that “day of punishment” (Exodus 32:34). In scene 3, God proclaims that He will “forgive iniquity, rebellion and sin” but “I do not excuse the guilty” (Exodus 34:7 NLT). Give this some thought. How can it be that God will forgive sin and yet not leave the guilty unpunished?

For additional insight, note what you find in the following scriptures:

- Isaiah 53:4–7
- Matthew 26:28
- Hebrews 9:11–12

Make it personal . . .

- It's been said that *mercy* is not getting what we deserve and *grace* is getting what we don't deserve. We receive both when we come to the cross, our mercy seat. Let the promises of Hebrews 4:14–15 sink into your soul...what will you come seeking mercy for today?
- For you personally, what is the most significant insight you've gained from reading the story of *Moses: Intercession and Atonement*? How will you apply this insight in your life?

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