

EXODUS 24; 31–34

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Exodus 24; 31–34.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

In these chapters, Christians and LDS will find significant differences in their beliefs about the purpose of the law. LDS believe that

There was reason to be hopeful that the children of Israel would remain true to God after He revealed His law to them (see [Exodus 20–23](#)). Even though they had murmured and wavered in the past, when Moses read the law at the foot of Mount Sinai, they made this covenant: “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient” ([Exodus 24:7](#)). God then called Moses onto the mountain, telling him to build a tabernacle so “that I may dwell among them” ([Exodus 25:8](#); see [chapters 25–30](#)).

But while Moses was at the top of the mountain learning how the Israelites could have God’s presence among them, the Israelites were at the bottom of the mountain making a golden idol to worship instead. They had just promised to “have no other gods,” yet they “turned aside quickly” from God’s commandments ([Exodus 20:3](#); [32:8](#); see also [Exodus 24:3](#)). It was a surprising turn, but we know from experience that faith and commitment can sometimes be overcome by impatience, fear, or doubt. As we seek the Lord’s presence in our lives, it is encouraging to know that the Lord did not give up on ancient Israel and He will not give up on us—for He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” ([Exodus 34:6](#)).

Biblical Focus

God taught his people that their sin had separated them from him throughout the Bible. In the closing chapters of Exodus, God used the visuals of the tabernacle, sacrifices, blood/death, and commandments written on stone tablets to show the people the severity of their sins.

The Bible as a whole and Exodus specifically show us that God is a God who is by nature apart and other than we are when it comes to holiness and perfection. In these closing chapters, the people learned much about the God who had chosen to dwell among them and what life without his presence is like.

EXODUS 24

Like a clanging bell, the Israelites kept repeating their commitment to God, promising to do everything he said. Consider again all that they had experienced in the last few months. God had sent the plagues to annihilate their enemies, parted the waters of the sea to bring them to safety, and miraculously provided water and food daily. Not only had God shown his commitment to them, but he had also revealed his terrifying judgment upon sin. Who throughout history had more reason to obey God than this people group?

Knowing what is about to happen in the coming chapters, we can't read this without our stomachs turning into knots. Their commitment to obedience will result in extreme failure worthy of annihilation.

The people boldly said, "Everything the Lord has said we will do" (24:3). Then, acting at God's command, Moses conducted a sacrifice and offered it on behalf of the people. The fellowship offering symbolized peace and communion with God through the shedding of blood. Moses placed half of the blood on the altar, indicating a connection to God. The other half of the blood he sprinkled on the people. The blood *first* touched God *before* it touched the people. This blood had been connected with God himself and was full of life and blessing. The gift of blood, sprinkled like that, is unforgettable and tangible. In so many ways and at so many times, God wanted his people to know that sin meant death and that sacrifice, one that he would provide, was necessary.

The death and blood of the animal pointed forward to what would ultimately unite God and humanity, the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus bled on the altar of the cross, and we are sprinkled with his blood every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, unforgettably and tangibly.

Hebrews 10 teaches that Christ is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system and reminds us that sinful hearts are cleansed by the sprinkling of Jesus' blood through faith.

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" ([Hebrews 10:19-22](#)).

Conversation Starters:

- **Why did the blood of the fellowship offering need to touch God before it touched the people?**
- **How does the blood of Christ cleanse us of a guilty conscience?**
- **Why can we confidently approach God?**

Sharing Personally:

Blood is always disturbing.

Blood means trauma, pain, or death.

When God set up the Tabernacle system in Exodus, bloodshed was central. The Israelites could not have fellowship or peace with God without blood and death.

What kind of God is this?

It is a God who is serious about sin and its penalty.

Sin separates humanity from him so severely that blood—death—is the only option.

This need for death to pay for sin is why Jesus was called “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”

He was the sacrifice that gave us complete peace and fellowship with God.

EXODUS 25–30

Although they are not part of the assigned *Come Follow Me* readings for the week, the LDS resources provide substantial commentary on the tabernacle and its place and purpose in the lives of the people of Israel. The supplemental tabernacle commentary closes with the following:

The symbolism of these rituals pointed to the way God has provided to bring us back into His presence—Jesus Christ and His Atonement. The Savior has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” even “the iniquity of us all” ([Isaiah 53:4, 6](#)). He stood in our place, gave His life to pay the penalty of sin, and then conquered death through His Resurrection (see [Mosiah 15:8–9](#)). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the “great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast” but rather “an infinite and eternal sacrifice” ([Alma 34:10](#)). He was the fulfillment of everything the ancient sacrifices pointed toward.

For this reason, after His sacrifice was complete, He said, “Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices ... shall be done away. ... And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” ([3 Nephi 9:19–20](#)).

So when you find passages in the Old Testament about sacrifices and the tabernacle (or later, the temple)—and you’ll find a lot of them—remember that the primary purpose of it all is to strengthen your faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Let your heart and your mind turn to Him. Ponder what He has done to bring you back into God’s presence—and what you will do to follow Him. ([Thoughts to Keep in Mind: The Tabernacle and Sacrifice](#))

What? That all sounds so Christian, doesn’t it? So what’s the problem here?

First, we must consider what LDS theology means by the [ATONEMENT](#) and what it teaches about what it takes to come into God’s presence. Review what Mormonism teaches about the [ATONEMENT here](#).

How does understanding the LDS view of the atonement change the interpretation of the paragraphs above?

Second, we must also consider what LDS theology teaches about [FAITH](#) in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Review what Mormonism teaches about [FAITH here](#).

How does understanding the LDS view of FAITH change the interpretation of the paragraphs above?

“Faith is a principle of action and power...You can exercise faith in Christ when we have an assurance that He exists, a correct idea of His character, and a knowledge that we are striving to live according to His will” (True to the Faith, p. 54).

Conversation Starters:

- **What was the purpose of the Old Testament tabernacle?**
- **What did the tabernacle teach God’s people about sin and its relationship to death and sacrifice? What did the tabernacle teach about Jesus and what he would be and do?**

Additional Resources:

For a deeper dive into the tabernacle and temple, check out [this article](#) on TILM.org and [A Humanitarian at the Temple](#), from the study of *God—The Ultimate Humanitarian* on BeYePerfect.org or [chapter 6 of the book by the same name, available in our online store](#).

EXODUS 31

Although the Sabbath is an essential concept in Mormonism, and Exodus 31 talks much about the Sabbath, the LDS resources for this section are brief, focusing on what one must “do” on the Sabbath. Yes, there is irony there. The Sabbath is all about God teaching about “not doing but trusting.” However, since there are plenty of other topics to cover this week, the Sabbath and how to use it for witnessing to Christ will be covered at a later time.

EXODUS 32

You would think that the people who had witnessed so many miraculous events would be committed to the Lord. But the people thought that Moses, the mouth of God, had been gone for too long on the mountain. So, feeling the void of his absence, the people created something else to worship.

God designed all humanity for worship, and worship is what we do, whether we realize it or not. If one does not worship the Lord, they will worship someone or something else. An idol can be an icon of a false religion or anything that consumes our thoughts or holds our ultimate devotion.

The Israelites’ idolatrous sin is perhaps unrelatable without careful thought and self-reflection. But, just like the Israelites, there is a God-sized hole in our hearts that cannot remain empty. Worry proves this hole exists.

As soon as the Israelites worried that Moses would never return with words from God, they quickly filled the void with the golden calf. So likewise, Satan uses worry to cause us to turn to anything that will calm our fears, even if it is just temporary. As a result, we worship the idols of money, control, power, success, approval, sex, and even the perception of our goodness. Understanding and acknowledging how idolatry manifests itself in your own life will help your LDS friends understand humanity’s inability to keep this and all commandments.

God expressed his wrath over the people’s sin right away. First, as he spoke to Moses, he denied them by calling them “*your*” people instead of “*my*.” Then he told Moses he would destroy them.

Who could say that the Israelites didn’t deserve this?

Think back to Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham’s prayer. Abraham requested God spare the towns for the sake of the righteous. God agreed, but who could claim to be righteous?

Moses’ prayer was different. He didn’t appeal to who the people were but to who God was and always will be. He held up the promises God had made. The promises saved the people.

When the guilt of our sin weighs us down, holding up our righteousness is not an option. But we can always cling to the certainty of God’s promises and the alien righteousness that is ours through Christ.

Moses then confronted Aaron about the idol. Just as Adam blamed Eve for the first sin, so Aaron blamed the people. His excuse, “*I threw in the gold and out came a calf*,” sounds foolish and desperate. The

point is that guilt makes us feel shame, and in shame, we try to cover up or shift blame for our sin. Without mercy, we are desperate to shove the guilt onto anyone else but ourselves.

Guilt shifting plagues us all.

- *"I raged at my children because they deserved it."*
- *"I hurt my brother because he was annoying me."*
- *"I ignored someone in need because I'm busy with important things."*

Excuses are fig leaves for our shame.

Conversation Starters:

- **What kinds of idolatry do you see around you?**
- **Can good things (family, health, reputation) become idols? How so?**
- **What reasons did Moses give to the LORD to spare the nation?**
- **If you were before the throne of God, what could you say in your defense?**
- **How do you and the people around you guilt shift?**
- **What sets us free to fully confess our guilt? To whom do we get to shift our guilt?**

Sharing Personally:

The Israelites' golden calf sin in Exodus 32 is unrelatable without careful thought and self-reflection. But, just like the Israelites, there is a God-sized hole in my heart that cannot remain empty. Worry proves this hole exists.

As soon as the Israelites worried that Moses would never return with words from God, they quickly filled the void with the golden calf.

Likewise, Satan uses worry to cause me to turn to anything that will calm my fears, even if it is just temporary. I worship the idols of money, control, power, success, approval, and even the perception of my own goodness.

Seeing my idolatry, as Moses did, I hold up God's promises, praying, "Dear Lord, remember your covenant with me through your Son. You have promised to remove and forget my sin for Jesus's sake. Fill the hole in my heart with confidence in you and you alone. Amen."

EXODUS 33

Consequences of Idolatry

After Moses' call to repentance, 3,000 unrepentant Israelites died by the sword. God also punished Israel by sending a plague. Death is the consequence of sin. But, the more significant outcome had not yet taken place. Because Israel had broken their covenant of obedience to God, God would no longer go with them. Sin results in separation from God.

God's response to the Israelites' sins demonstrated that the commandments were not a checklist for them to achieve, but instead, they were a mirror that showed their sinfulness. Their once naive, optimistic faith was gone. What remained was sorrow over their sin and a desperate need for God's grace and mercy.

In distress, the Israelites mourned their separation from God. Moses, as their mediator, went before God to plead on Israel's behalf. God, the compassionate and gracious, abounding in love and forgiveness God of Israel, gave his presence back to his people.

God promised Moses, his friend, that he would go with him and give him rest. Moses then asked God to show him his glory. God allowed him to see his goodness, but he hid Moses in the cleft of a rock so that his holiness would not obliterate his mortal servant. Moses then got to experience the presence of God powerfully and profoundly.

Conversation Starters:

- **What did Israel learn about her abilities to be obedient and committed to God?**
- **What did Israel learn about God's commitment to them?**
- **Was God bending his own rules? How does Christ help us make sense of God's judgment and mercy?**

EXODUS 34

The LDS resources for chapter 34 provide confusing commentary on Moses' second set of stone tablets, emphasizing the difference between a "lower and higher law" in the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods. But, again, since there is plenty of other content for good conversation starters in these chapters, commentary on witnessing to Christ from the priesthood will be saved for another time.