

Exegetical Paper Number One
Review and Analysis of Exodus 32:15-16 & 25-29

Ron Braley
Regent University
November 19, 2016

Contents

Introduction 1

Dedication 2

Definition 2

3,000 Souls 3

Covenant 3

Shema & the Law 4

Dedication through Self-Control 5

Implications 6

Conclusion 7

Bibliography 8

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. . . . — Exodus 32:15-16.

*. . . Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control . . . then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel . . . kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor." So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, "**Dedicate** yourselves today to the LORD--for every man has been against his son and against his brother--in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today." —Exodus 32:25-29.*

Introduction

God demands complete devotion to him in his reconciliatory covenant with humankind. The theme reverberates throughout his marriage-like “*I will be yours if you will be mine!*” arrangement Israel enjoyed through God’s agreement with Abraham¹. And, the same was true in Jehovah’s covenant renewal through Moses after rescuing his chosen people from Egyptian domination and resting them in the Sinai desert.

In Exodus Chapter 32, Moses paints an incredible picture of choice and consequence including death, life, promise, and dedication that will persist until God inserts himself into human history to finish restoring his creation. In the chapter, Moses returns from God’s penning the covenant between him and Israel to find the forgetful nation engaged in idol worship after believing Moses to be dead. He followed God’s commandments by destroying the idol and demanding dedication to God; those who refused died by the sword. Therefore, I purport that

¹ Examples include Genesis Chapters 15 & 17 and Exodus Chapter 19 (New American Standard Bible - NASB).

covenantal commitment comprising the agreement itself and obedience/choice is Moses' thesis in this portion of the Exodus. We'll begin its exploration with a look at *dedication*.

Dedication

“*Then Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD . . ."*”² What did the command mean, and why was a commitment to God necessary?

Definition

Dedicating oneself implies a devotion to God's service³. And, in that service, the loyalty “*says in the fullest form: 'to fill someone's hand for Yahweh.'*”⁴ In God's covenant, there could (and can) be no middle ground or partial devotion or consecration – only an emphatic choice to serve the Lord in full commitment or suffer consequences.

By the time of Exodus Chapter 32 events, Abraham and God had entered a covenant that birthed the nation of Israel. As with the contemporary ‘Lord/Servant’ agreement, it required complete dedication to the Lord God or face the consequences. Our first stop before delving further into the covenant itself will be a look at the result of disobedience in Exodus Chapter 32 and an exciting restoration twist.

² Exodus 32:29 (New American Standard Bible - NASB).

³ As defined by the Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.

⁴ Ibid.

3,000 Souls

The outcome of disobedience and an unwise choice when Moses demanded that the Israelites align with God [per their covenant] was death - 3,000 people, in this case⁵.

God in his mercy will eventually restore creation to perfection; I wonder if we may see manifestations of this normalization in the meantime. For example, 3,000 people who rejected God's covenant at Mount Sinai around the time of the original Pentecost died for their unfaithfulness. Conversely, 3,000 people gained their lives so-to-speak by embracing the covenant through baptism during the post-resurrection Pentecost celebration (cf. Acts 2:36-41). Again, the thrust of the Exodus message is around covenant and dedication to its Lord God. As such, we'll now look at the agreement in which Jehovah and Israel (and now all humankind) engaged.

Covenant

Israel's covenant with God was a "*Solemn agreement between two or more parties, made binding by some sort of oath.*"⁶ It mirrored a contemporary pagan 'Suzerain/Vassal' arrangement, included pledges, and is represented by the Hebrew word *berit*⁷. Of this, Hebrew scholars agree⁸. This something of a call-and-response and "*I will be yours if you will be mine*" proposition contains conditions, and it demands obedience and dedication to the Lord.

⁵ Exodus 32:28 (New American Standard Bible - NASB).

⁶ Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible, 288.

⁷ Ibid., 288-289.

⁸ Ibid., 291.

As we've learned, the covenant to which God required commitment through Moses included pledges and consequences for obedience (or the lack thereof). The second-century BCE Suzerain/Vassal arrangement called for documenting the agreement and regular recital to ensure its conditions would remain foremost in the thoughts and intent of its adherents. For Israel, God recorded his covenant with them in the form of a Law written in stone and a prime directive to honor the Lord of the agreement. The Law, known in part as the Ten Commandments, and the directive known to Israel as the 'Shema,' were to be remembered and recited regularly.

Shema & the Law

*“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”*⁹ Reading on, we learn that the Israelites were to teach this covenantal command and remember it continually; binding to person and marking property in dedication and as a sign was also part of the agreement¹⁰.

Documenting and repeating the Shema were critical to Israel's covenant with God. Equally important was the Law containing conditions and pledges of honor through obedience and the care of humankind¹¹. Interestingly, and in keeping with the pagan covenant practice, God duplicated the conditions (or the Law in this case) on two stone tablets – one copy for each participant, God and Israel here. Conditions set, the latter now had to dedicate herself to God as reinforced through Moses in Exodus 32:29.

⁹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (New American Standard Bible - NASB).

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 6:6-9(NASB).

¹¹ Exodus 20:2-17 (NASB).

Dedication through Self-Control

As already defined, dedication is a complete devotion to God's service. As such, it requires self-control in righteousness – right actions by the covenant or standard. However, the Israelites had *lost control* by the time Moses returned to the camp¹². We see the same rebellious anti-covenantal behavior and Hebrew word *pr* in Proverbs 29:18¹³ where the people had cast off moral restraints. As we see in the case of Exodus Chapter 32, the loss of control and casting off moral restraints resulted (and will result) in death. What *should* dedication in self-control and right action look like considering the covenant in which the world participates with God?

James, the half-brother of Jesus, teaches that the perfect man would be able to bridle, or control, the whole body including the tongue¹⁴. And, the Apostle Paul informs us that we are to present our “*bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*”¹⁵ Because we are to assign worth to our God whom we value (worship) through right action, the words of James and Paul make sense. In fact, the Shema reiterated by Jesus as the “*greatest commandment*”¹⁶ reminds us that true, actionable love for God and humankind is a necessary response to God's covenantal command.

Hebrew word *ahav* represents the love we should have for God as stated in the Shema¹⁷; we see the same concept in Jesus' reiteration as the greatest commandment. There, the Greek verb *agapao* compels moral action. We find other examples of the moral compelling to do good works as well as the works themselves (noun *agape*) in Jesus' teachings about our loving as he

¹² Exodus 32:25 (New American Standard Bible - NASB).

¹³ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 480.

¹⁴ James 3:2-12 (NASB).

¹⁵ Romans 12:1 (NASB).

¹⁶ Matthew 22:36-37 (NASB).

¹⁷ As defined by the Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.

has loved and obedience as reflected in that love¹⁸. By now, we should understand that a lack of commitment to God and his covenant will result in death (physical, spiritual, or both). Let's look at other implications of the Exodus passage.

Implications

Implications within Exodus Chapter 32 include the need for choice, dedication, and consequence in the context of our relationship with God. I'm still amazed that many who knew of God's covenant and the requirement of dedication chose to rebel and reject God's ways and protection! The wrong choice and lack of commitment cost the rebellious their lives. The consequence will surface again in the last days¹⁹.

A less-apparent implication in Chapter 32 is that no matter how much time passes or things change, they seem to stay the same. Or, in King Solomon's words: "*There's nothing new under the sun.*"²⁰ In the Exodus case, Aaron swore the golden calf formed itself out of the fire²¹. Our contemporary version? The Atheist or Evolutionist declares life created itself out of inorganic matter from the fire of lightning.

¹⁸ For example, John 13:34-35, 14:15, and 15:12-14 (New American Standard Bible – NASB).

¹⁹ For example, Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelation 20:11-15.

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NASB).

²¹ Exodus 32:24 (NASB).

Conclusion

God demanded, and still demands, complete dedication to him and the covenant to which humankind has agreed from Abraham's time. Just as the Israelites in the Sinai camp had to choose to align with God and remain in his service or die, we're presented with a choice and must choose wisely or suffer the consequences.

“. . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”—Joshua 24:15.

Bibliography

David Noel Freedman et al., Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible, ISBN 978-0-8028-2400-4

Ernst Jenni et al., Theological Lexicon of the OT, three vols. (Hendrickson, 1997)

Frank E. Gaebelein et al., The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 2, Zondervan, ISBN 0-310-36440-X (v.2)

John F. Walvoord et al., The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, ISBN 978-0-88207-813-7