

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit www.UjimaChurch.org

Copyright © 2018 by Dr. J.R. Norwood * All Rights Reserved

*May be copied in its entirety and distributed for the purpose of Christian Education
with appropriate citation credit*

7. Highlights from Exodus 24 – Numbers 12, "The Tabernacle and Priesthood"

Moses wrote down the words of the Lord he had received on the mountain. God had promised to give the Israelites the land promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to bless them if they obeyed His law. But, God also said they would be punished if they disobeyed His law. The people agreed to obey and honor the covenant God had granted.

At the Lord's invitation, Moses brings his brother Aaron, Aaron's older sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, part of the way up the mountain. They saw the Lord who was higher up on the mountain (Ex 24). The Lord called Moses to come up to Him to receive, the tablets of stone, God's law and commandments. Moses was on the mountain with the Lord for forty days and nights. The Lord also gave Moses instructions on worship and the construction of furnishings for a special place for worship, called "the tabernacle" (Ex 25-27, 30). The tabernacle would be a beautiful tent structure that could all be packed up and taken with the people on their journey to the Promised Land. Moses is told that Aaron and his sons, and their male descendants after them, are to serve as priests. Special garments are to be made for the priesthood (Ex 28), and a special ceremony is to be conducted, designating them for holy duties (Ex 29). The Lord has even blessed certain craftsperson to make the tabernacle, furnishings, and garments for worship (Ex 31).

While Moses was with God on the mountain, the people had become impatient. They told Aaron to make them idols to worship, and he did. Aaron told the people to give him their gold jewelry and he fashioned it into a golden calf. Aaron even declared that the golden calf was the god that brought them out of bondage and he then built an altar for it (Ex 32). The people made offerings to the idol Aaron made and worshiped it. Knowing all that was happening, God's anger burned against the people, and Moses interceded, praying for the Lord's mercy. As Moses returned to Joshua, who was faithfully waiting for him, they heard the noise of the idolatrous worship coming from the camp. When they saw what was happening, Moses broke the tablets God had given him as a sign that the people had already broken the covenant with the Lord. Furious, Moses destroyed the golden calf with fire, ground it into

powder, sprinkled it in water and made the people drink it. His fellow Levites joined him in striking down those who had turned against the Lord and were unrepentant. The Lord also sent a plague on the people for their idolatry and covenant breaking. Moses went into a special tent, called the "tent of meeting," and the pillar of cloud rested upon it (Ex 33). God told Moses to cut new tablets and to come up the mountain again. The Lord wrote the law on the front and back the new tablets and even allowed Moses to come close to Him and see His glory pass by while shielding Moses from the danger of seeing Him in His fullness. In His mercy, God renewed the covenant with the unfaithful Israelites. The Lord was determined to work his plan, in spite of the sin of the Israelites.

When Moses came down from the mountain, and whenever he would meet with God in the tent of meeting, his face would shine, reflecting the glory of God (ex 34). Because the people were frightened by this, Moses would put a veil over his face.

The people followed the instructions of God and gave all that was needed to construct the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priest's garments (Ex 35-40). The tabernacle's innermost section was called the "Holy of Holies," where the Ark of the Covenant was to be placed. When the tabernacle was finished, it was filled with the glory of the Lord.

As the Lord had commanded, Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests (Lev 8). Aaron made his first offering as high priest, carefully following the instructions that the Lord gave to Moses, and God accepted Aaron's offering (Lev 9). However, Aaron's two older sons, Nadab and Abihu, attempted to make an offering in a manner that was not in accordance with the Lord's instruction, and the fire of the Lord consumed them (Lev 10)!

The duties of the priests are written in the book of "Leviticus," which contains ritual instructions, hygiene instructions, rules about feasts and offerings, and so much more. The priests represented the people before the Lord and conducted rituals that point to the future and the ultimate and final atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross. We are reminded that the Lord is Holy, and is not to be taken lightly (Lev 19). We also see how the Israelites are ritually set apart from other nations, they are to be distinct and not given to the wicked practices of those around them (Lev 20). They are designated by God for a special purpose, one that culminates over a thousand years later in Christ.

Moses takes a census of the warriors of each of the tribes (Num 1). He arranges the camp with the tabernacle in the center and the tribes in a circle around it (Num 2). The Levites, the people of the tribe of Moses and Aaron, have special duties to the tabernacle and are not counted as warriors (Num 3, 8).

A presumably widowed Moses takes another wife, a Cushite. The marriage is opposed by his sister and brother, who speak against him and even challenge his leadership. God's punishes Miriam with leprosy and affirms Moses by healing her upon his prayerful intercession.