

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church**

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DHW

**LESSON 25**

**THE BOOK OF EXODUS**

**Chapter 32**

**INTRODUCTION**

The account in Exodus 32 chronologically continues with the account that ends at Exodus 24:18 – *And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up unto: the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.* Moses was still on Mount Sinai. If after reading chapter 24, we go on to read chapter 32, the intervening chapters of Exodus 25 to 31 are therefore an interruption to the flow of the narrative. This was done, as we realize is in order to give a detailed account of what happened up on Mount Sinai. Up on the mountain God gave Moses specific instructions and commandments concerning how

the people of Israel might worship and serve Him.

What happened up on the mountain where Moses was, and what happened down below where the Israelites were encamped were distinctively contrasting and instructive. What happened down below was very sad and it shows the depraved nature and character of man, even though they were the people of the covenant. These incidents were recorded for our learning.<sup>1</sup> We learn about the character of God, about God's faithful servant Moses, about Aaron, and the Israelites.

The outline of this chapter is as follows:

- 1) The Israelites called Aaron to make them gods which shall go before them (Exodus 32:1-6);
- 2) The LORD'S wrath was upon His people intending to destroy them but Moses

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<sup>1</sup>1 Corinthians 10:11 *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

- interceded on their behalf (Exodus 32:7-14);
- 3) Moses broke the Two Tablets of Testimony and chided Aaron for making the golden calf in rebellion against the LORD their God (Exodus 32:15-24);
  - 4) Moses then stood at the gate of the camp calling the people whether they wanted to be on the LORD'S side (Exodus 32:25-29);
  - 5) Moses prayed for the people and made atonement for their sin (32:30-35).

### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### **Aaron Makes the Golden Calf**

Moses was up in the mountain for a long time insofar as they were concerned. They had not seen Moses for forty days and had not heard from him too. The divine author used the word *delayed*, not disappeared. Delay

means that Moses would eventually come down from the mountain to be with them again. It does not mean that Moses would never return to them. But they were tired of waiting. They were restless and this affected their faith. They began to forget about the LORD (Yahweh) and the commandments God had given to them. They lacked sustaining faith in order to wait for the return of Moses.

The restless and faithless Israelites told Aaron to make them gods. Before Moses went up the mountain, he had appointed Aaron and Hur to take charge while he was up in the mountain to meet with God. The Israelites were tired of waiting. Shockingly, Aaron did not protest, instead he encouraged them to sacrifice their golden earrings to him. They brought to Aaron and he made a *molten calf* for them (32:4). Was Aaron right in his action? What should he have done? Aaron should have stood up to them. He should have protested and pointed

to them that it was a terrible sin to make *the molten calf* and worship it. That would be violating the very first and second commandment which God had given to them (Exodus 20:2-4): *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

But alas, Aaron feared man more than he feared God. It became a snare to him (Proverbs 29:25).<sup>2</sup> Aaron did not stand up to them because he feared them. After making it, Aaron encouraged their worship of the *molten calf* by erecting an altar!<sup>3</sup> He further proclaimed *a feast to the LORD*. Aaron regarded the *molten calf* as their *gods which brought thee up*

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 29:25 *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*

<sup>3</sup> The calf is better understood as a young bull, one of the Egyptian gods, the Apis, the golden calf.

*out of the land of Egypt* (32:4). The next day, observe that they rose up early in the morning. They were very excited and expectant. They offered burnt offerings, they *sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play* (32:6). The word *play* means that the Israelites indulged in merry making and sporting by dancing. It is also used euphemistically to mean to indulge in sexual orgies.<sup>4</sup> The people so soon forgot the LORD their God, rebelled by being disobedient to His commandments, and sinned a great sin.

### **God's Anger & Moses' Intercession**

God commanded Moses to get down to *thy people*, whom he had brought them out of Egypt. The LORD charged them for turning aside so quickly from the way as He had commanded them. In addition they had made a molten calf, worshipped it and offered sacrifices to it, and acknowledged

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<sup>4</sup> Isaac was "sporting" (fondling and caressing) with his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26:8). It is the same word used here.

that these gods had delivered them from the land of Egypt. They had rebelled against the LORD. They had apostatized.

Can we sense how God would have felt? God had gone to great length to deliver them from slavery and bondage in Egypt. He delivered them from Pharaoh's charioteers at the crossing of the Red Sea when the Israelites crossed on dry land. He led them through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire, protecting them from the scorching sun by day and the darkness and cold by night. He provided them food and water. He gave them good laws for their own welfare and spiritual growth. In spite of all these, they had forgotten the LORD their God, and sinned against Him. God was angry. He rejected them as His people for He called them Moses' people (32:7). God described them as *a stiffnecked people* (32:9) – a people who would not bow to the LORD but who worked according to their own self-will. God's wrath was upon them with

the intent on destroying them. God promised that when He had destroyed them, He would make a great nation through Moses.

### **Moses' Intercession**

Moses' response to God's intention to *consume* (to destroy) the children of Israel was immediate. He interceded on behalf of Israel. This is a salient mark of a leader. He cared for his people and was ever ready to bear the sin of his people before the LORD God. Moses appealed to the LORD. What are the grounds of his appeal? There are three. Firstly, he put to God that the children of Israel were not his people (32:7). They were God's people for He had brought them out of Egypt in a great and mighty way from the Egyptians. The LORD should not be angry with them and consume them. Secondly, Moses appealed to the honour and name of God. The Egyptians would say that God had brought them out of Egypt in order to destroy them. Moses pleaded with the LORD not to destroy

them. Thirdly, Moses reminded God of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob). He had sworn by His own Name that He would multiply their seed *as the stars of heaven*, and would give the land to their generations forever. Moses appealed to the faithfulness and integrity of God's oath. The one prevailing element of Moses' intercessory prayer is the centrality of the LORD God; God by His grace had delivered Israel from Egypt; God's Name is at stake; and God who is true must keep His promises. Moses' prayer was effective because God relented after hearing him. Moses teaches us how to pray to God and prevail.<sup>5</sup>

The text states that *the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people* (32:14). The Hebrew word translated is *nacham*. It conveys the idea *repented* of "breathing deeply", therefore displaying one's

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<sup>5</sup> **James 5:16** *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

feelings, usually of sorrow, compassion or comfort.<sup>6</sup> When it is used with God, it is an *anthropopathic* expression. It does not mean that God had made a mistake and later acknowledged His error. The word conveys only the idea of deep grief and sorrow. God does not change His mind. He changed His dealings with His people when Moses interceded on their behalf. However, God mentioned that He would *visit their sin upon them* later (32:34). God would temper His intention. This truth is a great comfort and encouragement to every Christian for when we pray rightly God would be moved to temper His dealings with us.

### **Moses' Anger Rebuking Aaron**

Moses came down from the mountain with the Two Tablets of Law in his hand which were written on both sides by God. He was rejoined by Joshua on the way down. They heard loud noises, and

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<sup>6</sup> Harris, Archer, & Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, #1334.

Joshua thought that it was the sound of war cry. But Moses said that it was the sound of singing and revelry. When Moses saw the golden calf and the people dancing and were naked (32:19, 25); he was enraged. He smashed the tablets on the ground. He took the golden idol and cast it into the fire to melt it in a shapeless lump, then ground it into powder, scattered into the river that flowed from the mountain and caused the children of Israel to drink of it (Deuteronomy 9:21).<sup>7</sup> This act of causing the people to drink the polluted water served as an object lesson to the children of Israel demonstrating the powerlessness and worthlessness of the idol which could not save itself let alone come to the rescue of the worshippers.<sup>8</sup>

Moses then confronted Aaron, his brother, because he was put in

charge of the people while he was up in the mountain. Aaron was asked why he had brought a great sin upon the people. Moses put the responsibility squarely on Aaron's shoulder. Aaron responded (32:22b): . . . *thou knowest that the people, that they are set on mischief* (Hebrew, evil). Aaron blamed the people excusing himself that Moses knew how evil the children of Israel were. He continued by recounting how the whole affair got started. They approached him. They did not know where Moses was and what might have happened to him. So, he collected gold from them, and Aaron said, *I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf* (32:24). The phrase, *and there came out this calf*, was most ridiculous. There was no confession of his active part in this great sin. He was not remorseful, there was no regret. He simply put the blame on the people. Then he blamed the furnace saying that the golden calf came out of the fire! Aaron was deceiving himself, or

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<sup>7</sup>Deuteronomy 9:21 *And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.*

<sup>8</sup> John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 289.

otherwise, Moses was dumb and stupid. Aaron was not willing to face up to the truth. He was the one who fashioned the golden calf (32:4).

There is a precious lesson to be learned here. Most of the time, when we are caught in doing something wrong, we resort to deceiving others. We hardly try to face up to our sin. We try to be evasive by giving all kinds of excuses. We blame others except ourselves. This is a familiar story which has its origin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Such conduct serves no purpose. We learn nothing from it as it encourages us to do the same in the future. But when we own up by facing the music, we will learn. We will try to save ourselves from such embarrassment and disgrace in future. Honesty is the best policy which still holds true.

### **Who is On the Lord's Side**

Moses saw that the children of Israel were *naked*, losing restraints on their morality. Moses

rose up to the occasion and called on the people to take sides (32:26): *Who is on the LORD'S side, let him come unto me?* Moses was standing at the gate of the camp. The sons of Levi responded and stood together with Moses – only the tribe of Levi out of the twelve tribes! Now a sad thing happened. Moses conveyed to them the commandment of the LORD God that they should arm themselves and slay their fellow brethren (32:27). This was the real test of their faith and consecration to the LORD.

This order might seem harsh to some, but in the warfare between good and evil, between worshipping and serving the living and true God and idols, there is no room for neutrality.<sup>9</sup> Either, one is on God's side or one is on the side of man or the devil. Christ Himself said (Matthew 12:30): *He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.* One cannot serve God and self or the devil, or

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 291.

anything that usurps the position of God in our lives. In this regard even family ties and friendships take second place. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminded his disciples that in serving Him we should not allow our family ties to stand between Him and us.<sup>10</sup> About three thousand men died that day. Not all of them were killed. Probably, when the people saw what was happening, many of them stopped sinning against God. Then Moses called on them to do the next right thing. He asked them to consecrate themselves to the LORD, and He would bestow upon them a blessing that day.

### **Moses' Plea for the People**

Moses told the people that they had *sinned a great sin*. He told them that he would go up unto the LORD to make atonement for their sin (32:30). Moses returned to the mountain and met with God. He acknowledged on behalf of the

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 10:37: *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

people that they had sinned a great sin against God. He pleaded with God to forgive them, and if God would not, he was willing to give his own life for the people. He told the LORD to *blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written* (32:32). The identity of this book is best understood as the Book of Life or the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8).<sup>11</sup> What is most significant and important is that Moses was willing to give up his life for his people. Moses was sincere and honest. He meant it. Moses seemed to understand now the meaning of salvation. When the people sin, one man chosen by

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<sup>11</sup>Revelation 3:5 *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

Revelation 13:8 *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

Revelation 17:8 *The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

God could die and atone for the sin of the people.

The LORD God accepted his plea. Complete destruction of the children of Israel was averted, but God warned Moses that He would visit the people with judgment because of their sin (32: 34). God repeated His commandment to Moses to go and lead the people to the land which He had promised them. He also assured him that His Angel would go before him.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had come down to earth and gone up back to Heaven promising to return and to take His disciples to be with Him (Acts 1:11). Almost two thousand years had passed since the promise that He would return soon. Are we tired of waiting for Christ like the Israelites in this chapter? Do we echo the scoffers' attitude and words "Where is the promise of His coming?" There are some who give up believing that the Lord Jesus Christ would ever come

back. Others think that He might not come in their life time or many more years later. Not so soon. In the meantime, eat, drink, and be merry. It is sad indeed that these people are becoming faithless. They begin to doubt their faith in Christ. Such Christians give Satan an opening or a foothold on them. Soon they rebel and forget what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for them. They turn away and begin to trust in their jobs and career, in their bank accounts and their own successes. God sees these things and happenings. Let us not sin against Him.

It takes a lot of courage to stand up for God against two million people. But if we *know* the LORD God, we can have the courage and strength to stand on the side of God. This knowledge of God can only be gotten through reading and obeying His Word. According to Paul, *If God be for us who can be against us* (Romans 8:31). No one! We must beware of ourselves that we do not fear man as we serve the Lord in the

church. If we fear man, as God says, we will be trapped. We will find it difficult to faithfully carry out the work of God. Fear God and not man.

We understand in this chapter that God is compassionate and merciful. He would listen to our cry for ourselves or for others, and deal with us in a compassionate way. We learn how to pray effectively. In order to do so we need to know about the nature and character of God, His promises and His will. Pray in view of these revelations and we would prevail in our prayer. We learn that sin against God is a terrible and horrible thing. God does not tolerate sin. We need to repent and God would forgive our sins. We learn that when we sin, we must be honest and courageous to own up our sin, and not to blame others. We need to make a firm commitment to serve God and that there is no half-measure about our allegiance and loyalty to God. We learn to pray for others and even be prepared to make

sacrifices on their behalf for their spiritual growth. AMEN