

Exodus Chapter 32 Continued

Exodus 32:15 "And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony [were] in his hand: the tables [were] written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other [were] they written."

The “two tables of the testimony”:

This refer to the Ten Commandments.

Moses, after pleading for the lives of the children of Israel, quickly went down the mountain to stop them from doing these things that were so displeasing to God.

The two stone tablets were carried in both of his hands.

They had carvings on both sides of each one.

They had been done by the hand of God.

These were the sacred laws that God intended to give the Israelites.

Exodus 32:16 "And the tables [were] the work of God, and the writing [was] the writing of God, graven upon the tables."

We know now that both tablets had all Ten Commandments on them.

When ancient nations made treaties, the stipulations were entered onto two original documents, with each party taking one home to its temple of observation “by the gods.”

For Israel, the two complete tablets would stay together as a sign of their belief in one God.

This was not some message that God had given Moses and Moses wrote them down.

This was altogether done by God.

This was very similar writing to the time when God's hand wrote on the wall in the book of (Daniel 5:5).

Exodus 32:17 "And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, [There is] a noise of war in the camp."

Joshua’s presence with Moses in the mount has not been indicated since (Exodus 24:13).

But it would seem that when Moses was summoned up into the cloud (Exodus 24:16), his faithful “minister” remained where he was, waiting for his master.

He may have found shelter in some "cleft of the rock;" and the manna may have fallen about him, and sufficed for his sustenance during the forty days and nights of his master's absence.

"The noise of the people as they shouted":

"Shouting" was a feature of idolatrous rites (1 Kings 18:28; Acts 19:34), and was in part a cause, in part a result, of the physical excitement which prevailed during such orgies.

Joshua, unsuspecting of the real nature of the shouting, supposed, naturally enough, that the camp was attacked by an enemy, and that the noise was "a noise of war."

But Moses, forewarned of the actual state of affairs (Exodus 32:7-8), had probably a shrewd suspicion of the real nature of the sounds.

He contented himself, however, with negating his minister's conjecture.

Joshua had not been in the camp and did not realize what happened.

He had been waiting at a distance for Moses to come down the mountain.

All of this shouting and dancing and carrying on in front of this false god had worked them up into such a frenzy that it probably did sound like war.

Exodus 32:18 "And he said, [It is] not the voice of [them that] shout for mastery, neither [is it] the voice of [them that] cry for being overcome: [but] the noise of [them that] sing do I hear."

Not Joshua, as Saadiah Gaon thinks, but Moses, in answer to what Joshua had said.

"It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery":

That have got the better of it, and have obtained the victory, and shout on that account.

Or, "not the voice of a cry of strength", or "of a strong cry"; that is, of men who have got the victory, and are in high spirits, and shout with a strong voice.

And so the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan, "not the voice of strong men that overcome in battle".

"Neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome":

Which is not a voice of shouting, but of howling.

Or, "not the voice of the cry of weakness", or "of a weak cry."

Who being unable to stand their ground are conquered, and make a bitter outcry on falling into the enemy's hands, or being wounded shriek terribly.

And so the above Targums, "not the voice of the weak who are overcome by the enemy in battle".

"But the noise of them that sing do I hear".

As at a merry entertainment, either on a civil or religious account.

Moses, who knew what the children of Israel had done, and what they were about, could better judge of the nature of the sound he heard than Joshua could.

Who knew nothing of what was transacting.

Moses already knew that it was not war.

God told him what was going on before he pled for them.

Moses didn't really realize how bad it was until he saw it for himself.

This was just a drunken orgy that was going on.

Verses 19-28

This passage reveals how serious sin is to the LORD.

Moses angrily "broke" the stone tablets to symbolize that Israel had broken the covenant.

Although Aaron shifted blame ("the people are set on evil"), Moses was right to confront him before confronting the people.

Purging the sin from the Israelite camp required the slaying of 3,000 men by the "sons of Levi."

Exodus 32:19 "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount."

"Brake them":

Moses pictured the nation breaking God's commandments by actually breaking the tablets on which they were written.

Moses had never dreamed that the sin was so great.

Moses suddenly realized how unworthy these children of Israel were to receive these tablets of commandments.

In his anger, he threw them down and broke them.

We need a few like Moses in our churches today.

Some of the things that are being done and said should anger those who truly love God.

This teaching of false doctrines in the church is our golden calf.

The entertainment that some churches call worship borders on the very type of revelry that angered Moses, here.

There is far too much pleasing of the flesh going on in many of the churches of today.

God is a holy God.

Where is the respect and reverence for Almighty God?

Take a good look at your church, if God came to visit, would He feel comfortable?

We must have a healthy, godly fear of Almighty God.

There are far too many ministers of God who are compromising to please someone in the congregation.

Don't be an Aaron, more eager to please the people than to please God.

Be a Moses who would not tolerate the world in the church.

Exodus 32:20 "And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt [it] in the fire, and ground [it] to powder, and strawed [it] upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink [of it]."

Melted it either into one great mass, or rather into different little fragments, which afterwards he, by the help of others, might soon grind to powder, or dust of gold.

"Strawed it upon the water":

Upon the brook which came out of the rock Horeb (Exodus 17:6).

"The children of Israel":

Not all, which would require a long time, but some in the name of the rest.

And most probably either the chief promoters of this idolatrous design, or the chief rulers of the people, who should by their power and authority have restrained the people from this wickedness.

"To drink of it":

Of the water into which that dust was cast; partly to make them ashamed of their madness in worshipping a god which now must be drunk, and cast out into the draught.

And partly to fill them with terror and dreadful expectation of some ill effect or curse of God to come upon them, either by this draught, or by other means.

The very first thing Moses did was destroy this idol.

I see Moses as a very strong man and he could easily break this idol apart.

The fire had to be pretty hot to melt the gold.

Probably it was around 2000 degrees Fahrenheit.

He wasn't even satisfied to have melted it.

He then ground it into dust and strew it over the water.

An idol cannot even save itself.

Just the fact that Moses could go in and destroy this false god shows just how powerless it really was.

I believe this drinking of the contaminated water shows that we taste of our sins, even if God does forgive us.

Exodus 32:21 "And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?"

The second step was to inquire how the idolatry came about; and here Moses very reasonably addressed himself to Aaron.

Aaron had been left in charge of the people (Exodus 24:14), to advise them, direct them, control them, if necessary.

How had he acquitted himself of this charge?

He had allowed the people to commit a great sin.

What excuse could he offer for his conduct?

Had the people injured him in any way?

The question is asked ironically.

This was correct for Moses to jump on Aaron.

Moses had left the people in Aaron's care.

They did not force Aaron on threat of death to make this idol.

Aaron perhaps was put upon in filling their wishes to furnish a visible god for them to follow.

A leader should be strong enough to tell them no.

It wasn't their idea to make the golden calf.

That was Aaron's idea, all by himself.

Moses went to the root of the problem (Aaron), before he approached the people with their sins.

Verses 22-24

Aaron, held responsible by Moses for what had taken place in the camp (verses 21 and 25), endeavored to avoid responsibility for the people's actions by shifting the blame to their propensity to do evil, and also for the presence of the golden calf by ridiculously representing it as having just popped out of the fire all by itself!

Exodus 32:22 "And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they [are set] on mischief."

Aaron's conduct was really without excuse; but he attempts two pleas, the first insufficient, the second false and fatuous.

(1) The people compelled him; they were "set on mischief;" they made the proposal, they would have it so;

(2) He threw the gold into the furnace, and "it came out a calf," as if he had not ordered the construction of the mold.

In Deuteronomy, Moses informs us that Aaron's whole conduct so angered God that God would have destroyed him but for his own intercession (Deut. 9:20).

Exodus 32:23 "For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for [as for] this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."

Which was true (Exodus 32:1).

But then he should have told them, that gods were not to be made.

That what were made with hands were no gods, and could not go before them.

That the making of any image, similitude, or representation of God, was forbidden by him.

As they had lately heard from his own mouth.

He should have dissuaded from such idolatry, by showing them the evil nature of the sin, and the ruin they exposed themselves to by it.

"For as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him":

Their words he truly recites, and perhaps might choose the rather to mention them, because they carried in them some reflection on Moses for staying so long in the mount.

And as if that contributed much to this affair, and which put the people on forming such a scheme, they concluding he must be dead through famine.

Or, as the Targum of Jonathan, be burnt with flaming fire from the LORD (see Acts 7:40).

We see the guilt and humiliation of Aaron, as he calls Moses lord.

He was saying, you are my boss and you know how dead set on committing sin these people are.

He was telling Moses that he was afraid of them.

He was not being a leader at all.

He was trying to please the congregation.

Does that sound familiar in the church today?

Most of the preachers are preaching to itching ears, preaching what the people want to hear.

The job of the pastor is to preach the Word, whether the people want to hear it or not.

2 Timothy 4:1-4 "I charge [thee] therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;" "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;" "And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Exodus 32:24 "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break [it] off. So they gave [it] me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."

That is, any ear rings of gold let them take them off their ears.

"So they gave it me":

Of their own accord, as if unasked by him, though he had bid them bring it to him (Exodus 32:2).

"Then I cast it into the fire":

To melt it, but says nothing of the mold the melted gold was poured into.

"And there came out this calf":

He speaks of it as if the gold became in the form of a calf without any design, or without using any methods to put it in this form; but that it was a matter of chance.

Or rather something preternatural and miraculous.

He speaks of it as if it was alive, and came out of itself.

And indeed the Jews represent it as done by magic art, and by the operation of Satan.

And speak of it as coming out alive, bellowing and dancing.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "and I cast it into the fire, and Satan entered into the midst of it, and out of it came the likeness of this calf."

Aaron says not a word of his fashioning it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf.

But Moses learned this elsewhere, and has recorded it.

What Moses thought of this apology is not said; it could not be satisfactory to him: and it is certain the conduct of Aaron in this affair was displeasing to God.

And it seemed as if he would have destroyed him, had not Moses prayed for him (Deut. 9:20).

Now Aaron had added a lie to his other sin.

One sin usually requires another to try to cover up the first sin.

This really was a half-truth.

They did bring the gold to Aaron, but Aaron graved it.

Exodus 32:25 "And when Moses saw that the people [were] naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto [their] shame among their enemies:)"

Part of leadership's responsibility is to protectively restrain their people from doing what will bring them harm or judgment.

Aaron's failure to do this brought "shame" on the LORD and His chosen people in front of their enemies.

Exodus 32:26 "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who [is] on the LORD'S side? [let him come] unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him."

"Who is on the LORD's side":

Only the tribe of Levi responded to the call to take action in response to this situation which demanded judgment be inflicted.

They had understood that neutrality could not exist in the open confrontation between good and evil.

Family and national ties were superseded by submission to the LORD to do His will, which in this situation was to wield the sword of God's judgment to preserve His honor and glory.

Moses saw that this orgy was still going on.

He had already gotten rid of the idol and he had already reprimanded Aaron, and now he turns to the idolaters.

Their nakedness, whether physical or not, was a shame.

I really believe this nakedness was physical.

Many idol worship services contained sensual activity.

Aaron was truly responsible, because he made the calf that started all of this.

Now Moses was trying to separate those who were involved, and called those who worshipped the LORD to come to him, so that the idol worshippers would be separated out.

There are actually some churches today involved in sensual services and God is calling His people to come out of them.

The sons of Levi loved God and came to Moses.

The next verse shows the purpose for the separation.

God was going to destroy these wicked through the actions of Moses.

Exodus 32:27 "And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, [and] go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."

The following orders are given by Moses, not of himself the chief magistrate, and as the effect of heat and passion, but they were from the LORD, who was Israel's God and King.

He had them expressly from him or by an impulse on his spirit, or in such a way and manner that he knew it was of God, and this was his will.

"Put every man his sword by his side":

Girt there, ready to be drawn upon order.

"And go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp":

Not into the tents, where good men might be bemoaning the sin committed, but throughout the streets, where many were loitering, it being a holy day with the idolaters.

"And slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor":

Who were idolaters; none were to be spared on account of relation, friendship, and acquaintance.

Exodus 32:28 "And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."

They apparently killed those who persisted in idolatry and immorality (Num. 25:6-9).

What this said was go throughout this group of people and anyone you find reveling, kill them.

They were told that even if they were related to the person, they were to kill them, if they were involved in this idolatry.

These Levites, in a sense, had been called to serve God in this.

Moses was acting in behalf of God ("Thus saith the LORD God of Israel").

Three thousand men were killed.

Exodus 32:29 "For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day."

To the Levites, when he first gave them their orders.

"Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD":

Devote yourselves to his service by obeying his orders, slaying those, or the heads of them, who have cast so much contempt upon him as to worship the golden calf in his room.

And which would be as acceptable to him as the offerings were.

By which Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the LORD.

And as these Levites were consecrated to his service this day, on this account.

"Even every man upon his son, and upon his brother":

Not sparing the nearest relation found in this idolatry, and for which the tribe of Levi is commended and blessed in the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:8), and as it follows.

"That he may bestow a blessing upon you this day":

Which was their being taken into the service of God to minister to the priests in the sanctuary.

To bear the vessels of the LORD, and for their maintenance to have the tithes of the people.

This day was, according to the Jewish writers, the seventeenth of Tammuz, or June, on which day the Jews keep a fast upon this account.

Their faithfulness in carrying out these orders that Moses gave them in behalf of God, would be like a dedication to God.

They would receive a priestly position with God by their faithfulness and the stand they took for God.

If you take a stand for God, you will be richly blessed of God.

Verses 30-32

Moses interceded for the people he loved so much, hoping he could atone for their sin (see Paul's similar words respecting the salvation of the Jews in Romans 9:3).

Of course, as a sinner himself, Moses could not do so, but his words convey the picture of the sacrifice of Christ, which was able to make atonement for humanity (Mark. 10:45).

Exodus 32:30 "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin."

The eighteenth day of Tammuz it was, the same writers say, that Moses implored the mercy of God for Israel.

Jarchi (on Exodus 32:11), says it was on the seventeenth day the tables were broke, on the eighteenth the calf was burnt, and on the nineteenth that Moses went up to intercede for them.

"That Moses said unto the people, ye have sinned a great sin; the sin of idolatry (see Exodus 32:21).

From whence it appears, that all that were guilty of it were not slain, perhaps only some of one tribe.

And there was great reason to fear, that as wrath was gone forth it would not stop here, but others would fall a sacrifice to the divine displeasure.

Wherefore it is proposed by Moses to make application to the LORD on their behalf, that they might obtain mercy.

"And I will go up unto the LORD":

On the top of Mount Sinai.

"Peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin":

Not by any sacrifice offered, but by his prayers prevail with God to forgive their sin, and not punish any more for it.

He had by his first prayer obtained of the LORD not to consume them off of the face of the earth, and utterly destroy them as a nation.

But that he did not hinder but that resentment might be shown in a lesser degree, or by parts.

As not 3000 men had been cut off, chiefly out of one tribe, if not altogether, the rest of the tribes might expect to be visited, according to the number of their delinquents.

As we said before, Moses felt responsible for these people.

He was their advocate with the Father, just as our advocate with the Father is Jesus Christ.

Moses did not cover up the fact that they had committed a terrible sin.

He would try to seek God's forgiveness for them.

Moses would try to atone for their sins.

Moses would now go back up the mountain to meet with God.

We see in this, that this seems to be a more serious sin than some sins, because Moses called it a great sin.

Exodus 32:31 "And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold."

On the mount where He was in the cloud.

"And said, oh, this people have sinned a great sin":

Which to following words explain; he confesses the same to God he had charged the people with (in Exodus 32:30).

"And have made them gods of gold":

The golden calf, which they themselves called "Elohim", gods.

Moses told God of their evil, but God already knew.

The first place of forgiveness is to admit your sin.

Moses was admitting it for the people.

Exodus 32:32 "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

"Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou has written":

Nothing more strongly marked the love of Moses for his people than his sincere willingness to offer up his own life rather than see them disinherited and destroyed.

The book to which Moses referred, the palmist entitled "the book of life" (Psalm 69:28).

Untimely or premature death would constitute being blotted out of the book.

The Apostle Paul displayed a similar passionate devotion for his kinsmen (Rom 9:1-3).

The identity of this book has been the subject of considerable debate.

Some take it as a reference to the Book of Life in which the names of believers are recorded.

Others see it as a register of living men, with reference to only earthly life.

Thus, to be blotted out would entail an untimely death, to die prematurely.

A third view is that it refers to those who would enter the Promised Land.

Some see Paul's reference in (Romans 9:3-4), as being similar to Moses' request, that is, to be separated from God forever for the sake of his Israelite countrymen.

Note that in (Romans 9:3), the phrase "I could wish" faithfully brings out the idiomatic construction use here for the stating an impossible wish.

Paul could not actually become anathema from Christ, since (Romans chapter 8), proclaims that impossible.

The statement by God (in verse 33), would seem to indicate that the reference is to temporal life and not eternal, in addition to the context in which three thousand men fell in that day.

Note: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

Here we see Moses offered to be the substitute for these people, if God had to have vengeance.

Here is one of the first mentions of God having a book.

This is the book of life.

Moses offered God the option.

Moses was willing if necessary, to give his life for these sinful people to save them.

Exodus 32:33 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

(Compare Ezek. 18:4). "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

A mere man cannot take other men's sins on him and cannot relieve them of the penalties attached to sin.

The worst of which is the depravation of the soul itself.

Sin persisted in, blots one out from God's book by the absolute contradiction that there is between evil and good.

Even Christ's merits cannot avail the sinner who does not put away his sin, detest it, abhor it, and revolt from it.

Only One who can implant a principle of life in man can save from death.

God did not allow Moses to be the substitute.

God spoke of judgment here.

Each person would be judged separately.

Each person is responsible for his own actions.

Exodus 32:34 "Therefore now go, lead the people unto [the place] of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them."

I.e., continue their leader until Palestine is reached (see Exodus 3:8; 3:17; 6:4-8).

"Mine Angel shall go before thee":

So far as the form of the expression goes, the promise is, as nearly as possible, a repetition of the original one, "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared" (Exodus 23:20).

But the meaning of the promise is wholly changed, as we learn from the opening paragraph of the ensuing chapter (Exodus 33:1-3).

The "angel" now promised as a guide is not to be God Himself ("I will not go up in the midst of thee"), but a creature, between whom and God, the distance is immeasurable.

"In the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them":

All sin is followed by suffering; the sequence is inevitable.

God had now consented to spare His people, and to take them back into favor.

But they were not to expect that matters would be with them as if their sin had not taken place.

It would still be "visited upon them".

Not, indeed, by instant death, but still in some way or other.

The weary waiting in the wilderness for forty years may have been a part of the punishment (Num. 14:33).

But it may also have been inflicted on different persons in many different ways.

Exodus 32:35 "And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made."

That is, continued so to do at certain times, with the pestilence, or other calamities.

For this seems not to refer, as some think, to the slaughter of the 3000 men.

The reason follows:

"Because they made the calf which Aaron made”:

That is, they provided him with materials to make it; they urged and solicited him to do it, and would not be easy without it.

So that the making of it is ascribed to them; or they served it.

As Onkelos; or bowed unto it, as Jonathan; with which agree the Syriac, Arabic, and Samaritan versions.

Which render it, they served, or worshipped, or sacrificed to the calf which Aaron made.

God was still angry about this terrible sin.

He would not bless those who were unfaithful to Him.

He was sending an Angel in His stead.

Plagues would descend on those who were involved in this sin against God's person.

This plague could possibly have been part of the reason why this generation did not enter the Promised Land.

Exodus Chapter 32 Continued Questions

1. What was Moses carrying in his hands as he came down the mountain?
2. How were they written?
3. Who was the writer of the law on the stones?
4. Where was another mention of the handwriting of God?
5. What did Joshua think was going on in the camp?
6. What did Moses tell Joshua the noise was?
7. What feeling did Moses have when he saw the golden calf?
8. What did Moses do?
9. What is the golden calf of our day?

10. What attitude must we have toward God?
11. Which do we need today in our churches today, an Aaron or a Moses?
12. What did Moses do to the calf?
13. What was meant by them drinking this powdered calf of gold?
14. What was Moses' first attack on?
15. What did the destruction of this idol show these people?
16. Where was Moses' next attack?
17. What did Moses ask Aaron?
18. What feeble excuse did Aaron make?
19. Who did Aaron blame?
20. How did he add to his sin?
21. What was Aaron really trying to do?
22. How does that resemble our churches today?
23. What lie did Aaron tell?
24. When Moses saw that they were _____, he stood in the gate.
25. Who did Moses call to him?
26. What did Moses tell those on the side of the LORD to do?
27. How many died?
28. Who came to Moses?
29. As they did what Moses said, what happened to the Levites?
30. What did Moses tell the people about their sins?
31. What would Moses try to do for them?
32. Would God accept it?
33. Who was responsible for sin?
34. What did God tell them that He would no longer do?

35. What was Moses' brave offer to God?

36. God brought a _____ on them.