

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

12-16-20

Exodus 32

The people and Aaron make a golden calf and sacrifice to it - Verses 1-6

¹When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

² Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." ⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

32:1 Idols again! Even though Israel had seen the invisible God in action, they still wanted the familiar gods they could see and shape into whatever image they desired. How much like them we are! Our great temptation is still to shape God to our liking, to make him convenient to obey or ignore. God responds in great anger when his mercy is trampled on. The gods we create blind us to the love our loving God wants to shower on us. God cannot work in us when we elevate anyone or anything above him. What false gods in your life are preventing the true God from living in you?

32:4-5 Two popular Egyptian gods, Hapi (Apis) and Hathor, were thought of as a bull and a heifer. The Canaanites around them worshiped Baal, thought of as a bull. Baal was their sacred symbol of power and fertility and was closely connected to immoral sexual practices. No doubt the Israelites, fresh from Egypt, found it quite natural to make a golden calf to represent the God that had just delivered them from their oppressors. They were weary of a god without a face. But in doing so, they were ignoring the command he had just given them: "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (20:4). They may even have thought they were worshiping God. Their apparent sincerity was no substitute for obedience or excuse for disobedience. Even if we do not make idols, we are often guilty of trying to make God in our image, molding him to fit our expectations, desires, and circumstances. When we do this, we end up worshiping ourselves rather than the God who created us—and self-worship, today as in the Israelites' time, leads to all kinds of immorality. What is your favorite image of God? Is it biblical? Is it adequate? Do you need to destroy it in order to worship the immeasurably powerful God who delivered you from bondage to sin?

God alerts Moses to the problem and tests him - Verses 7-10

⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' ⁹ "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

32:7 Why do you think God calls them "your people": when before he called them "My People.? Perhaps it was His holy nature distancing Himself from the people or the fact that they were sinners like Moses. Notice that God says they "quickly" turned aside from God's commands. Just 40 days before, when Moses had not yet gone up the mountain, the people affirmed their complete commitment to following God's commands. Yet here they are just over a month later basically completely rejecting God and disobeying three of the most important commandments.

32:7-8 Why do you think they fell so far so fast? It is definitely a reminder to us not to live in the past trusting in a past commitment. Just because you promised to follow God yesterday or even did follow God yesterday doesn't mean you will today. It only takes one moment of weakness, one bad decision, one loss of self-control and we could completely fall away from God (I don't mean lose our relationship, but our fellowship) as well as destroy our testimony. No one is immune and it can happen fast. Therefore we have to be alert all the time because Satan is roaming about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

32:9-10 God threatens to destroy this rebellious people. Notice He doesn't make a divine decree that He will destroy them. Also there is a condition too, What is the condition? "Let Me alone, that..." God's action appears to be at least partially conditional on Moses' response. Keep in mind that doing this would not have nullified God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses was their descendant too, so all of God's promises would have still been alive. It definitely appears that God is testing Moses. He called the people Moses'. Now it is time to see if Moses will stand up for the people, or if he will give up on them and celebrate God's judgment. This test could have definitely appealed to Moses' pride. Now he could be the patriarch and he could be rid of these annoying complainers all at once!

Moses intercedes for the people - Verses 11-14

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" ¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

32:11-14 God was ready to destroy the whole nation because of their sin. But Moses pleaded for mercy, and God spared them. This is one of the countless examples in the Bible of God's mercy. Although we deserve his anger, he is willing to forgive and restore us to himself. We can receive God's forgiveness from sin by asking him. Like Moses, we can pray that he will forgive others and use us to bring them the message of his mercy.

32:14 In what way could God "relent," or change his mind? God did not change his mind in the same way that a parent decides not to discipline a child. Instead, God changed his behavior to remain consistent with his nature in a changed situation. When God first wanted to destroy the people, he was acting consistently with his justice against his unrepentant people. When Moses interceded for the people, God "changed" in order to act consistently with mercy toward those who ask his forgiveness. God had often told the people that if they changed their ways, he would not condemn them. They changed, and God forgave them as he had promised.

Moses discusses with Joshua what is going on - Verses 15-18

¹⁵ Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. ¹⁷ When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp." ¹⁸ Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear."

32:115-18 As Joshua and Moses descended the mountain loud noises like the sounds of war rose up from the camp. This shows just how wild and crazy things had gotten. The entire camp was in chaos and disarray. No self control remained. The people were following their fleshly impulses with no restraint. Alcohol was likely one contributing factor.

Moses is angry and judges the camp -Verses 19-29

¹⁹ When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. ²¹ He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" ²² "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" ²⁵ Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. ²⁶ So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. ²⁷ Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" ²⁸ The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of

the people died. ²⁹ Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

32:19-20 Overwhelmed by the actual sight of the blatant idolatry and revelry, Moses broke the stone tablets containing the commandments which had already been broken in the hearts and actions of the people. There is a place for righteous anger. However angry Moses might have been, God was angrier still—he wanted to kill all the people. Anger at sin is a sign of spiritual vitality. Don't squelch this kind of anger. But when you are justifiably angry at sin, be careful not to do anything that you will regret later.

32:21-24 Aaron's decision nearly cost him his life. His absurd excuse shows the spiritual decline in his leadership and in the people. Those who function as spokespersons and assistants need to be doubly sure their theology and morality are in tune with God so they will not be influenced by pressure from people.

Moses again intercedes for the people - Verses 30-35

³⁰ The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ³¹ So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." ³³ The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." ³⁵ And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

32:30-35 Moses calls it a great sin. The work of ministers is to show people the problems that come as a result of sin. The great evil of sin appears in the price of pardon. Moses pleads with God for mercy; he came not to make excuses, but to make atonement. We are not to suppose that Moses means that he would be willing to perish for ever, for the people's sake. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and not more than ourselves. But having that mind which was in Christ, he was willing to lay down his life in the most painful manner, if he might thereby preserve the people. Moses could not wholly turn away the wrath of God; which shows that the law of Moses was not able to reconcile men to God, and to perfect our peace with him. In Christ alone, God so pardons sin as to remember it no more.