

God On Our Terms

Vs. 1-6: Moses' Absense

- Because Moses was absent for a few weeks, the Israelites asked Aaron to make gods to go before them in his place. Aaron listened to the people, took their gold, and made a golden calf. The people identified it as the gods who brought them out of Egypt. Aaron instructed them to keep a feast to Jehovah, and they made offerings, sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.
- Exodus 32:1, 4 (ESV) When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." . . . And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"
- Exodus 32:1, 4 (NASB) Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." . . . He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."
- Exodus 32:5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord."
- Psalm 106:19-23 They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. Therefore he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.
- 1 Kings 12:28 So the king (*Jeroboam*) took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."
 - *I lean toward the idol being a substitute for God, so that the sin blended into something more than merely making an image. In the ancient Near East, divine images could function as localized representations or embodiments of a deity. Either way, it seems they weren't simply abandoning Jehovah; they were trying to claim Jehovah while retaining old pagan ways of approaching and worshiping deity. They wanted Jehovah, but on pagan terms.*
- "Play" of vs. 6. The Hebrew verb used here, *tsachaq*, commonly refers to laughing, joking, or mocking (Gen 17:17; 18:12; 19:14; 21:9). In this context, it may refer to dancing (Exod 32:19). However, usage of *tsachaq* in other contexts suggests that sexual connotations are possible (Gen 26:8; 39:14, 17). *Faithlife Study Bible*

Vs. 7-14: The Lord & Moses

- God instructed Moses to return after the initial 40 days and nights. Notice how it reads, "your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt." They had distanced themselves from God through their idolatry. God acknowledges this reality in how He refers to them. He was ready to consume them (and Aaron, as described in Deut. 9) and start over with Moses alone.
- Moses pleaded with the Lord not to destroy the people for two reasons: 1) The Egyptians will think you saved them only to bring them out to destroy them. 2) He made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel that He would multiply their offspring and give them land. God relented and did not destroy the nation.

Vs. 15-35: Moses, Aaron, Levites, & God

- Moses descended the mountain with the two tablets and met Joshua, who thought the people's noise meant war. Moses revealed it wasn't war, but singing. He saw the calf and dancing and became very angry. He broke the tablets (probably because Israel had broken the law) and destroyed the idol. He ground it to powder, mixed it with water, and made Israel drink it.
- Moses confronted Aaron, but he wasn't ready to admit his guilt. He said the people pressed him to do it, they gave him the gold, and "out came the calf" as his excuse.

- Moses asked who was on the Lord's side, and all the sons of Levi gathered around him. He instructed them to go throughout the camp and kill their brother, companion, and neighbor. They did as commanded, and 3,000 people fell that day. Moses told them they had been ordained for the service of the Lord that day, and that doing so brought God's blessing.
- Moses told the people they had sinned greatly, so he would ascend to the Lord and perhaps make atonement for their sin. Moses confessed their sin before God and asked Him to forgive. If the Lord was not willing, Moses asked the Lord to blot him out of the book He had written. The Lord said He would blot out those who had sinned against Him. He instructed Moses to lead the people away, saying His angel would go before them. However, He would visit their sin upon them, which He did by sending a plague on the people because of the calf.

What we can learn:

- A God We Can't See:

- Where was their leader, Moses? Or we may ask, "Where is the Lord?" *Assumption can lead to impatience. Impatience can lead to taking control. They manufactured something they could see.* I think people get "stir crazy." We tend to become irrational when we feel stuck and get impatient. We can panic and say/do things we wouldn't normally.
- We don't typically think we reject Jehovah (though we are). *We're trying to keep Him on our own terms and that doesn't work. You can't seek the privileges without the commitment.*

- Anger & Priorities:

- *God gets angry.* God has emotions. We can discuss God's hurt, jealousy, etc., but this portion is about His anger and wrath. He was ready to destroy the people, including Aaron (Deut. 9). *This was no longer "His people whom He delivered." It was Moses'.*
- Notice how Moses' plea didn't appeal to the people's goodness, *but to God's reputation among outsiders and His character and previous promises.* We need to care about God's character and how He is represented. *Moses' concern for people and his concern for God's glory aren't competitors. Moses cared about what happened to Israel, but he cared even more that what happened to Israel reflected truthfully upon God.*

- Dealing With Reality:

- *Moses didn't lack a spiritual pulse. His love for God's people was not greater than His love for God's holiness.* He had skin in the game. Sin should bother us, and we need to acknowledge rebellion. *We shouldn't make excuses for rebellion.* Yet, through all of this, Moses asked the Lord to blot his name out of His book if God chose not to forgive the people. This heart of Moses reminds us why *God spoke to Him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (33:11).*
- The Levites shared Moses' heart. They repented and killed their own kin. *Moses reiterates their role towards Jehovah because of their actions. Jesus said that we must love Him more than our own family.* I use this as an analogy to remind us. God is watching. He knows our hearts.
- Aaron made excuses: "Out came the calf." *Sin doesn't just rebel; afterward, it rewrites the story to minimize our responsibility.*
- *God sent a plague among the people, but ultimately He did not immediately destroy them or Aaron.* He cared for them over several more decades, and Aaron served as His High Priest. But we need to see God and care about what He "goes through." Reading ch. 33 is interesting. *At one point in vs. 5, the Lord tells Moses to tell Israel to take off their ornaments so that he "may know what to do with you."* He eventually went with them, but it wasn't immediately clear what He would do. *We tend to think about what our sin does to us. Exodus 32 forces us to think about what our sin means in our relationship with God. His grace is not a right or a given.* We cannot just assume our rebellion will be forgiven or overlooked without penitent hearts. *Praise God for hearts like Moses, and ultimately for Jesus, who didn't merely offer Himself, but actually gave Himself for sinners. We want to love God for exactly who He is, and say in our heart, "If God isn't going with us, we aren't going."*