

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 23

EXODUS

CHAPTER 32

INTRODUCTION

Exodus 32 continues 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.

The narrative account flows logically if after reading Chapter 24, we go on to Chapter 32. Exodus 25 to 31, is an interruption to the flow of the narrative. This was done in order to give a detailed account of what had happened up on Mount Sinai. Up on the mount God gave Moses specific instructions and commandments concerning how the people of Israelites might worship and serve Him.

What happened up on the mount where Moses was, and what happened down below where the Israelites were encamped is distinctively contrasting and instructive. What happened down below was very sad and it shows the depraved nature and character of man, even the people of the covenant. These incidents were recorded for our learning. We learn about the character of God,

about God's faithful servant Moses, Aaron and the Israelites.

OUTLINE

1. The Israelites Sinned Against the LORD God by Making a Golden Calf and Worshipping It (32:1-6).

- a. The people became restless and told Aaron to make them gods (v.1).
- b. Aaron made the golden calf (vv.2-6).
 - Aaron told them to contribute gold to make the golden calf (v.2).
 - The Israelites gave Aaron their golden earrings (v.3).
 - Aaron made the golden calf (v.4).
 - Aaron built an altar and instructed Israel to have a feast unto the LORD (v.5).
 - The Israelites offered sacrifices and indulged in revelry (v.6).

2. The LORD'S Anger was Kindled Against Israel, But Moses Interceded for Them (32:7-14).

- a. The LORD saw the moral corruption of the people and told Moses to get down (vv.7-10).
 - The LORD commanded Moses to get down for the people had apostatised (v.7).
 - The LORD informed Moses that the people had made a golden calf and worshipped it (v.8).
 - The LORD charged the

people for being stubborn and intended to destroy them (v.9-10).

slay all those who refused to consecrate before the LORD. (vv. 27-29)

b. Moses interceded on Israel's behalf (vv.11-14).

- Moses reasoned with the LORD to spare Israel (v.11-12).
- Moses reminded The LORD of His covenant oath He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 13)
- The LORD granted Moses' prayer request (v.14).

3. Moses Broke the Two Tables of the Testimony (32:15-18).

- a. Moses went down the mountain with the two tables of the testimony in his hand (v. 15).
- b. The two tables were written by God (v.16).
- c. Joshua was mistaken for the noise of war (v.17).
- d. Moses corrected Joshua's mistaken opinion (v.18).

4. Moses was Angry and Broke the Two Tables (32:19-29).

- a. Moses saw and was angry and broke the two tables (v.19).
- b. Moses melted the golden calf and ground it and made the children to drink it (v.20).
- c. Moses chided Aaron who gave a lame excuse (vv.21-24).
- d. Moses called for those who would be loyal to the LORD (vv.25-29).
 - Moses saw the nakedness of the people (v.25).
 - Moses asked who would be on the LORD'S side (v.26).
 - Moses instructed the Levites to

SUMMARY

The Lack of Faith

Moses was away up in the mountain for a long time insofar as they were concerned. They had not seen nor heard from Moses for forty days. The divine word is "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 Yahweh and the commandments God gave to them. They lacked sustaining faith in their wait for the return of Moses.

Do we not see a similar situation with the New Testament Christians? Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has come down to earth and gone up back to Heaven (Acts 1:11). Almost two thousand years have passed since the promise that He would return soon. Are we tired of waiting for Christ? 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 will come back. Others think that He might not come in their lifetime or many more years later. It would not be 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 in 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.

The restless and faithless Israelites told Aaron to make the gods. Before Moses went up the mountain, he appointed Aaron and Hur to take charge while he was up in the mountain to meet God. The Israelites were tired of waiting. Aaron did not protest, instead he encouraged them to bring their golden jewellery to him and 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, protested and warned them that it was a terrible sin to make the idols and worship them. That would be violating the very first and second commandment, which God gave to them:

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: (Exodus 20:2 - 4)

But alas, Aaron feared man more than he feared God. It became a snare to him (Proverbs 29:25). After making it, Aaron encouraged their worship of the

young bull by erecting an altar! He further proclaimed a religious feast “to the LORD”. Aaron referred the young bull as Yahweh the LORD who had delivered them out of the land of Egypt. The next day, observe that they woke up early. 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. The people so soon forgot the LORD their God, rebelled by disobeying His commandments, and sinned a great sin.

It takes a lot of courage and moral strength to stand up for God against two million people! But if we know the LORD God, and this knowledge of Him is only through reading His Word and obeying Him, we can have that courage and strength. Paul could declare, 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.

God's Response

God commanded Moses to get down to the people, for He had seen that they were rebelling against Him. They had apostatised. Can we not think how God would have felt? God had gone to great

length to deliver them from slavery and bondage in Egypt. He saved them from Pharaoh's charioteers by enabling them to cross the Red Sea on dry land. He led them through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire, protecting them from the scorching heat by day and the darkness and cold by night. He provided them with food and water. He gave them good laws for their own welfare and spiritual growth. In spite of all these, they forgot the LORD their God, and sinned against Him. God must be both grieved and angry. God described them as "a stiffnecked people" (32:9) – a people who bow not to God but who work according to their own self-will. God was intent on destroying them and to make a great nation through Moses.

There is no let up in the teaching that God is love. This truth has been constantly emphasised whenever we speak of the nature and character of God. But very little is spoken of the holiness and righteousness of God. God is holy and because He is holy, He hates sin and will punish the sinner. The penalty of sin is death. All sinful and rebellious people against God will be punished for sure. There is no escape, not even beyond the grave. Man's only escape route is to repent and confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in his heart that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead to be saved (Romans 10:9). There is no other way of escape.

Intercessory Prayer

Moses' response to God's intention to "consume" the children of Israel was immediate. He interceded on behalf of Israel. This is a salient mark of a leader. He cares for his people and is ever ready to bear the sin of his people before the LORD God. Moses' prayer was effectual because God relented after hearing his intercession. Moses' prayer is an example of what James said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (5:16). Moses teaches us how to pray to God and prevail. What are the grounds of Moses' prayer? There are three. First, he put to God that the children of Israel were not his people (32:7). They were God's children for God had brought them out of Egypt in a great and mighty way before the Egyptians. Moses reasoned why 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. Thirdly, Moses reminded God of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob). They were His servants whom He swore by His own Name that He would multiply their seed and give the land to their generations forever. Moses appealed to the faithfulness and integrity of God's oath. The one common element in Moses' prevailing 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.

So, God “repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (32:14). The Hebrew word translated “repented” (KJV) is *nacham*. It conveys the idea of “breathing deeply”, therefore displaying one’s feelings, usually of sorrow, compassion or comfort. When it is used with God, it is an anthropopathic expression. It does not mean that God has made a mistake and later acknowledges 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 in their behalf. However, God mentioned that He would “visit their sin upon them” later (32:34). God tempered 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.

Righteous Indignation

Moses came down from the mount 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 Joshua thought that it was the sound of war cry. Moses deferred and mentioned that it was the sound of singing and revelry. When Moses saw the golden calf and people dancing and were naked (32:25); he was enraged. He smashed the tablets on the ground. He took the golden idol and cast it into the fire to melt

into a shapeless lump, then ground it into powder and scattered it into the river that flowed from the mountain (Deuteronomy 9:21).

Some commented that Moses’ breaking of the two tablets was a rash act done in a fit of anger. On the other hand, the disobedience of the Israelites in violating the very basis of the covenant by the worshipping of the idol shattered the covenant that God made with man. It was an appropriate action on the part of Moses. Then Moses ground the gold into powder and cast it into “the water”. Then he caused the people to drink the polluted water served to demonstrate the powerlessness and worthlessness of the idols which could not save itself let alone come to the rescue of the worshippers.

Moses then confronted Aaron. Aaron’s defence was no defence at all. He told Moses not to be very angry. Aaron blamed the people, excusing himself that Moses knew how bad the children of Israel were by recounting how the whole affair got started. They approached him, denying their knowledge of where Moses was, and he collected gold from them and “I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf” (32:23). “And there came out this calf,” was most ridiculous. There was no confession of his 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, unless

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 doing something wrong, we resort to deceiving others. We hardly try to face up to our wrong-doing. 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 and behaviour serves no purpose. We learn nothing from it, instead it encourages us to do the same in future. But if we own up, face the music, we learn. We will try to save ourselves from such embarrassment and disgrace in future. Honesty is the best policy still holds true.

Who is On the Lord's Side

Moses rose up to the occasion and called on the people to make a commitment: "Who is on the LORD'S side, let him come unto me" (32:26). The sons of Levi responded and stood together with Moses. Only the tribe of Levi out of the twelve tribes! The saddest thing happened. Moses told them to arm themselves and slay their fellow brethren. This was the real test of their faith and consecration to the LORD. Moses' order might seem harsh to some, but in the warfare between good and evil, between worshipping and serving the true living God and idols, there is no such thing as neutrality. Either one is on God's side or

one is on the side of man or the devil. Christ Himself said, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Luke 11:23). One cannot serve God and self or the devil, or anything that usurps the position of God in our lives. In this regard even family ties and friendships were ignored. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminded his disciples that in serving Him, we should not allow our family ties to stand between Him and us—"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" (Matthew 10:37). About three thousand men died that day. Then Moses called on them to do the next right thing. He asked them to consecrate themselves to the LORD, and the LORD would bestow upon them a blessing that day.

Making Personal Sacrifice

Moses told the people that he would intercede for them before the LORD and "make an atonement for your sons" (32:30). Moses returned to the mount and met with God. He acknowledged on behalf of the 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—"blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (32:32). The identity of this book has resulted in much debate. There are those who identify this book as the Book of Life or the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8).

Another view suggests that this book contains the list of people who would enter the Promised Land. A third view postulates that this book contains the names of those who are presently living on earth and to be blotted out of this book means to meet an untimely or premature death. Scripture does not indicate any thing to come to a conclusive resolution. But what is most significant and important is that Moses was willing to give up his life for his people. Moses was sincere and honest.

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 judgement because of their sin (32: 34). God repeated His commandment to Moses to go and lead the people to the land that He had promised them. He also assured him that His Angel would go before him.

Summary

There are so many precious lessons that we can learn in this chapter. 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 will forgive our sins. We learn that when we sin, we must be honest and courageous to face up to our sin, and not to blame others. We need to make firm commitment to serve God and that there are no half-measures about our allegiance and loyalty to God. We learn to pray for others and even to be prepared to make sacrifices in their behalf for their spiritual growth. Read the chapter again and be impacted by the Word.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Exodus 32:1-6; John 14:1-3;
1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

TUESDAY: Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm
106:19-21.

WEDNESDAY: Exodus 32:15-20;
Philippians 2:3-11; 1 John 5:20-21.

THURSDAY: Exodus 32:21-29;
Proverbs 29:25

FRIDAY: Exodus 32:30-33:3; Galatians
6:5-10; Ezekiel 18:1-4

Discussion Questions

1. What led the Israelites to make the
golden calf?

2. Why was it such a great sin in
making the golden calf?

3. What should Aaron have done when
he was asked to make an idol?

4. What is meant by the expression “the
LORD repented”?

5. How would you describe Moses’
response to the idolatrous worship of
the Israelites?

6. Were the ways in which Moses reacted to the Israelites' idolatrous worship appropriate?

7. What does this chapter reveal about Aaron?

8. How was God's judgement against idolatry carried out?

9. What does this chapter show most about the character of Moses?

10. What do you would you say is the most important thing each of the following learn in this chapter:

a. Aaron:

b. Moses:

c. The Israelites:

d. I, Me:
