



Lesson 31 – Idolatry at Sinai

Based on Exodus 32 - 34

While Moses was absent it was a time of waiting and suspense to Israel. The people knew that he had ascended the mount with Joshua and had entered the cloud of thick darkness which could be seen from the plain below, resting on the mountain peak, illuminated from time to time with the lightnings of the divine Presence. They waited eagerly for his return. Accustomed as they had been in Egypt to material representations of deity, it had been hard for them to trust in an invisible being, and they had come to rely upon Moses to sustain their faith.

- 1) How long was Moses gone from the Israelites?

Exodus 24:18 And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount _____ days and forty nights.

Day after day, week after week passed, and still, he did not return. Notwithstanding the cloud was still in view, it seemed to many in the camp that their leader had deserted them, or that he had been consumed by the devouring fire.

They were impatient to be on their way to the Land of Promise, the land flowing with milk and honey. It was only on condition of obedience that the goodly land was promised them, but they had lost sight of this. There were some who suggested a return to Egypt, but whether forward to Canaan or backward to Egypt, the masses of the people were determined to wait no longer for Moses.

- 2) What did the mob tell Aaron?

Exodus 32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us _____, 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.

- 3) What transpired?

Exodus 32:2-4 And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the _____ earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten _____: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Among the objects regarded by the Egyptians as symbols of deity was the ox or calf; and it was at the suggestion of those who had practiced this form of idolatry in Egypt that a calf was now made and worshiped. The people desired some image to represent God, and to go before them in the place of Moses. God had given no manner of similitude of Himself, and He had prohibited any material representation for such a purpose.

Such a crisis demanded a man of firmness, decision, and unflinching courage; one who held the honor of God above popular favor, personal safety, or life itself. But the present leader of Israel was not of this character.

- 4) What made things worse?

Exodus 32:5-6 And when Aaron saw it, he built an _____ before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to _____.

- 5) What had they agreed to just a few days earlier?

Exodus 20:2-3 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of _____. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.



Only a few days had passed since the Hebrews had made a solemn covenant with God to obey His voice. They had stood trembling with terror before the mount, listening to the words of the Lord. The glory of God still hovered above Sinai in the sight of the congregation; but they turned away and asked for other gods.

6) How did the Psalmist tell it?

Psalms 106:19-20 They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten _____. Thus they changed their _____ into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

How could greater ingratitude have been shown, or more daring insult offered to Him who had revealed Himself to them as a tender father and an all-powerful king!

7) What did God tell Moses?

Exodus 32:7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee _____; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

Moses in the mount was warned of the apostasy in the camp and was directed to return without delay. God might have checked the movement at the outset; but He suffered it to come to this height that He might teach all a lesson in His punishment of treason and apostasy.

8) What did God tell Moses?

Exodus 32:9-10 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of _____ a great nation.

9) Who interposed on their behalf?

Exodus 32:11-12 And Moses _____ the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For _____ did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

Exodus 32:13-14 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the _____ of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD _____ of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

During the few months since Israel left Egypt, the report of their wonderful deliverance had spread to all the surrounding nations. Fear and terrible foreboding rested upon the heathen. All were watching to see what the God of Israel would do for His people. Should they now be destroyed, their enemies would triumph, and God would be dishonored. The Egyptians would claim that their accusations were true, instead of leading His people into the wilderness to sacrifice, He had caused them to be sacrificed.

As Moses interceded for Israel, his timidity was lost in his deep interest and love for those for whom he had, in the hands of God, been the means of doing so much. The Lord listened to his pleadings and granted his unselfish prayer. God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love for that erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial.

10) What did Moses return to the camp with?

Exodus 32:15-16 And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the _____ 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. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

11) As Moses met up with Joshua on their descent, what did they hear?

Exodus 32:17-18 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of _____ in the camp. 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 _____ do I hear.



As they drew near the encampment, they beheld the people shouting and dancing around their idol. It was a scene of heathen riot, an imitation of the idolatrous feasts of Egypt; but how unlike the solemn and reverent worship of God! Moses was overwhelmed. He had just come from the presence of God's glory, and though he had been warned of what was taking place, he was unprepared for that dreadful exhibition of the degradation of Israel. His anger was hot.

12) What did he do?

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

13) And then...

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

14) What did Moses sternly demand from his brother?

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

15) Aaron replied:

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

Aaron endeavored to shield himself by relating the clamors of the people; that if he had not complied with their wishes, he would have been put to death.

16) What crazy thing did Aaron try to tell Moses?

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 _____ this calf.

His excuses and prevarications were of no avail. He was justly dealt with as the chief offender.

17) Who saved Aaron's life?

Deuteronomy 9:19-20 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also. And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I _____ for Aaron also the same time.

In answer to the earnest intercession of Moses, his life was spared; and in penitence and humiliation for his great sin, he was restored to the favor of God.

If Aaron had had courage to stand for the right, irrespective of consequences, he could have prevented that apostasy. If he had unswervingly maintained his own allegiance to God, if he had cited the people to the perils of Sinai, and had reminded them of their solemn covenant with God to obey His law, the evil would have been checked. But his compliance with the desires of the people and the calm assurance with which he proceeded to carry out their plans, emboldened them to go to greater lengths in sin than had before entered their minds.

18) What punishment was meted out on them?

Exodus 32:26-27 Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S _____? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. 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 _____ every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.

Though God had granted the prayer of Moses in sparing Israel from destruction, their apostasy was to be signally punished. The lawlessness and insubordination into which Aaron had permitted them to fall, if not speedily crushed, would run riot in wickedness, and would involve the nation in irretrievable ruin. By terrible severity, the evil must be put away.



19) What happened?

Exodus 32:28-29 And the children of _____ did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, _____ yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.

Those who had not joined in the apostasy were to take their position at the right of Moses; those who were guilty but repentant, at the left. The command was obeyed. It was found that the tribe of Levi had taken no part in the idolatrous worship. From among other tribes there were great numbers who, although they had sinned, now signified their repentance. But a large company, mostly of the mixed multitude that instigated the making of the calf, stubbornly persisted in their rebellion.

Moses now commanded those upon his right hand, who had kept themselves clear of idolatry, to gird on their swords and slay all who persisted in rebellion.

God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin.

20) What did Moses do for those who were repentant?

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 _____ for your sin.

21) In asking God's forgiveness on them what did he say?

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

22) God answered?

Exodus 32:33-34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my _____. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine _____ shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them.

In the prayer of Moses our minds are directed to the heavenly records in which the names of all men are inscribed, and their deeds, whether good or evil, are faithfully registered. The book of life contains the names of all who have ever entered the service of God. If any of these depart from Him, and by stubborn persistence in sin become finally hardened against the influences of His Holy Spirit, their names will in the judgment be blotted from the book of life, and they themselves will be devoted to destruction.

The intercession of Moses on behalf of Israel illustrates the mediation of Christ for sinful men. But the Lord did not permit Moses to bear, as did Christ, the guilt of the transgressor.

23) What did Moses have done at the LORD's command?

Exodus 33:7 And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it _____ the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which _____ the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.

This was still further evidence that God had withdrawn His presence from them. He would reveal Himself to Moses, but not to such a people. The rebuke was keenly felt, and to the conscience-smitten multitudes it seemed a foreboding of greater calamity.

They were not left without hope. The tent was pitched without the encampment, but Moses called it ***"the tabernacle of the congregation."*** All who were truly penitent, and desired to return to the Lord, were directed to repair thither to confess their sins and seek His mercy.



- 24) What sign was given to the repentant?

Exodus 33:9-10 And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar _____, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and _____, every man in his tent door.

- 25) What request did Moses make for extra strength to carry on?

Exodus 33:12-13 And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, _____ now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.

- 26) God replied:

Exodus 33:14 And he said, My _____ shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

- 27) Was Moses serious in asking God this?

Exodus 33:15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us _____ hence.

- 28) After some discussion, what bold thing did Moses ask?

Exodus 33:18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy _____.

- 29) Did God rebuke him?

Exodus 33:19-20 And he said, I will make all my goodness _____ before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my _____: for there shall no man see me, and live.

Exodus 33:21-22 And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my _____ passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will _____ thee with my hand while I pass by:

The unveiled glory of God, no man in this mortal state can look upon and live; but Moses was assured that he should behold as much of the divine glory as he could endure. Again, he was summoned to the mountain summit; then the hand that made the world, that hand that ***“removeth the mountains, and they know not”*** (**Job 9:5**), took this creature of the dust, this mighty man of faith, and placed him in a cleft of the rock, while the glory of God and all His goodness passed before him.

This experience, above all else, the promise that the divine Presence would attend him, was to Moses an assurance of success in the work before him; and he counted it of infinitely greater worth than all the learning of Egypt or all his attainments as a statesman or a military leader. No earthly power or skill or learning can supply the place of God's abiding presence.

Forty days and nights Moses remained in the mount; and during all this time, as at the first, he was miraculously sustained. No man had been permitted to go up with him, nor during the time of his absence were any to approach the mount. At God's command he had prepared two tables of stone and had taken them with him to the summit; and again, the Lord ***“wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”***

- 30) What was one of the results of Moses' time with God on the mount?

Exodus 34:29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face _____ while he talked with him.

The glory reflected in the countenance of Moses illustrates the blessings to be received by God's commandment-keeping people through the mediation of Christ. It testifies that the closer our communion with God, and the clearer our knowledge of His requirements, the more fully shall we be conformed to the divine image, and the more readily do we become partakers of the divine nature.

Can you see that we can't be in the presence of God until we are changed?
Would you like to take that journey? **When is it time to take holiness seriously?**