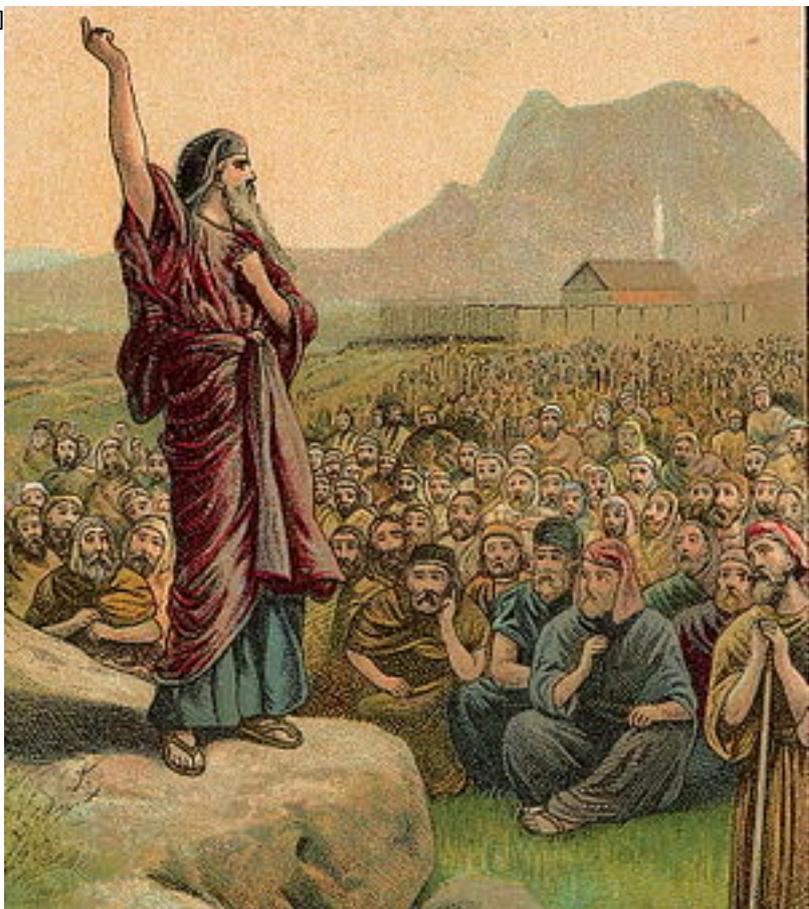


## Exodus Lesson 9

### Exodus 32-33, Moses' Bad Day

In Exodus 20, the Israelites had pleaded with Moses not to let God speak directly to them again--it was just too fearsome for them to live. Therefore, Moses went up on the mountain to receive further instructions from God and also to have God give him a written copy of the Ten Commandments written in stone. On the 40th day on the mountain God informed Moses of events down in the camp that would make it the worst day of his life. That is certainly revealing since Moses had had a pattern of getting no respect from Israel going back to Exodus 5:21.

[caption id="" align="alignright" width="300"]



English: Moses Pleading with Israel, as in Deuteronomy 6:1-15, illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

The people blamed Moses for Pharaoh's harsh treatment. Then in 6:9, they did not listen to Moses. After all the miracles, the people still cried out against him in Ex 14:10 when they saw the Egyptian army. Then again after witnessing the parting of the Red Sea, walking across on dry land, and seeing God destroy the Egyptian army, they still complained about the water in 15:24, and the food in 16:2, and disobeyed God in 16:20. In 17:2, the people continued to quarrel and grumble against Moses. Nevertheless, the situation that developed in the camp in Ex.32 was the worst of all. Moses had been gone for 40 days and again the people began their grumbling. I think the boredom and monotony of being camped out in the wilderness for about 130 days made them restless and aroused their sinful passions. What do men want after 130 days of bad food, only water to drink, no action for 40 days, and no illicit sex? Suddenly they remembered the great parties/orgies in Egypt. Like all people they wanted their cake and eat it too. They had gotten their freedom from Egypt, but they still missed the great parties in Egypt that were held in "worshipping" the golden bull, Apis, the fertility god. They were hungry, thirsty, and their "passions"

were aroused.

Joshua 24:14 tells us that the Israelites had previously in Egypt "served the gods of Egypt", meaning they had participated in the idol worship. In Acts 7:39, Stephen was giving the history of Israel and said, "Israel was unwilling to be obedient but repudiated Moses and in their hearts turned back to Egypt...they made a golden bull...and were rejoicing in the works of their hands".

Moses had left His brother Aaron in charge while Moses went up the mountain. In Ex.32:1, the people "assembled" threateningly around Aaron and demanded that he make them a god "who will go before us". In other words, make us a god of our own choosing who likes to party. Why did Aaron agree to it? I think he was like most political leaders who fear losing their job, and their power and authority. He probably rationalized, "We have to make concessions because the people demand it". From our perspective this whole episode seems crazy because they had seen the glory of God, heard the awesome voice of God, so why now would they want an idol? Theologian F.B. Meyer commented, "They wanted something they could see and touch which appealed to their senses, their pride, and rewarded the passions of their flesh". R.C. Sproul wrote, "The bull gave no law and demanded no obedience. There was no wrath or holiness to fear. It would not intrude on their fun, but instead promote an orgy." Under pressure, Aaron folded like an army cot, and he collected all their gold earrings they had brought from Egypt. He melted down the gold and reshaped it into the Egyptian god Apis. The irony here was that God had given them all that gold in order to build His Tabernacle, but they used it to be disobedient and commit idolatry. Their idolatry led to a drunken orgy in the pursuit of pleasure.

### **Meanwhile up on the Mountain**

In Exodus 32:7, God told Moses the bad news "Go down, your people have corrupted themselves". I have a question--Since God knew it was going to happen, and knew when it happened, why didn't He prevent it? I think God knew it was inevitable anyway, and if in their hearts they turned away to idolatry, then that was their free will decision. Also there was a lesson to be learned by them and us. God is completely faithful, but mankind needs to know the true nature of man which is fickle, and subject to change according to our passionate desires. We don't always even know what we want, but we are sure we don't have it, and thus man is forever searching for fulfillment. The New Testament says that the law of God acts as a teacher that we might understand ourselves and our great need for God, and our great need for a Savior.

The human race has always demanded that if there is a God, He should appear visibly, act to end evil, and give us clear instructions about what He expects of us. One guy even told me, "If God would just show Himself, intervene against evil, and let me know exactly what He expects--then I would believe in Him and obey Him". Really? Based on the stories in Exodus, that totally happened, yet the people still were disobedient and went their own way. What would happen under ideal conditions whereby God revealed Himself, delivered His people from slavery, and then let them know exactly what He expected of them? Apparently, the problem is not with God hiding from us, but the problem is with the rebellious nature of man.

### **The Dilemma of God**

Their great sin in breaking the first two and most important of the Ten Commandments broke the covenant they had made with God. From God's perspective of absolute holiness, their sin demanded their absolute destruction. They deserved it and justice demanded it. If God's justice did not punish this sin, surely the giving of the Law would have been useless. Yet even in God's threat of judgment to wipe them out, there were signs that God would show mercy. God left room for the intercession of Moses when He said in verse 10, "let Me alone that my anger may burn against them". God put a condition to His threat that if Moses interceded and they repented, God would show mercy. Don't forget that God had sent Moses down to see what they had done, and basically said that if Moses didn't intercede then God would destroy them. Think of the temptation for Moses to get rid of these people who constantly complained against him, and then start over from Moses. One commentator said, "It was a dictator's dream--the cloning of an entire nation from himself". Nevertheless, Moses did intercede in Ex.32:11-14, through a prayer that particularly appealed to the righteous God. Moses did not minimize their sin, gave no excuses, no defense, and there was no appeal to the merits of the people. Instead, Moses appealed to God's love, God's past investment in bringing them out, and God's worldwide reputation. How would it look to the Egyptians and the world if God brought them out only to destroy them? Moses then appealed to God's merciful compassion, and finally to the covenant promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The English translation of the Hebrew in v.14. says that God changed His mind about destroying His people. This gives many concerns of a contradiction of God's omniscience plus the many passages that say that God doesn't change His mind like fickle mankind. God does not change His mind, but He has determined to adjust His decrees according to our response. Throughout the Scriptures, God changed His mind based on people's confession and repentance. In 2 Chronicles 29, King Hezekiah prayed a prayer of confession and repentance, so God spared Jerusalem, and in Jonah 3:1-10, Jonah had pronounced destruction on Nineveh, but when the people of Nineveh repented, God spared them. The covenant would continue based on the intercession of a deliverer, the offer of a sacrifice, and the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God. Yet like any pardon, it must be accepted and received. Amazingly in Exodus 32:28, about 3000 people rejected God's mercy and grace, and therefore they died that day.

### **Application for Us**

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Moses was a type of Christ, and this story in Exodus can be compared to our salvation. What we needed was for God to send someone down to intercede for us just as God sent Moses down to the Israelites. We needed someone who is able and capable of turning away God's wrath, and we needed to formally receive and accept God's forgiveness by believing and then repenting. In our case it was Jesus Christ who interceded for us, and His perfect sacrifice on the cross is the basis of our salvation. Those who reject God's intercessor, will suffer judgment. Obviously, the big difference between Moses and Christ is that Moses intercession was for their physical lives and possibly later their spiritual lives, but Christ's intercession for us is unto eternal life.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

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