

# Exodus 32 • Learning from the golden calf incident

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Open your Bibles to Exodus, chapter 32 and we will get into it. It's almost fitting that we're coming back after almost a month of doing Exodus because it was that and a little bit longer that Moses was up on the mountain. When we left off our study in Exodus, we left Moses on the mountain talking to God, receiving the law on tablets, and receiving much more as it relates to the building of the tabernacle and several other things.

And if it feels like a long time to you since we've been into Exodus, I want you to think about what it felt like to the Israelites being where they were in their camp for 40 days, and no sign of Moses. And that's really where we pick up here.

It begins in chapter 32 by saying in verse 1, *“When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, ...” (ESV)* Stop there, please.

That's what they're dealing with right now, and what they're essentially saying to Aaron is, we had expectations and our expectations have not been met. We thought he was going to go up there and talk to God and then he was going to come down and we would, whatever we thought was going to happen next. And then we're going to move on or whatever. And so that didn't happen and so they're getting restless.

And when people get restless, it creates a dangerous situation. And particularly when that restlessness begins with not having our expectations met or facing the unknown.

Have you ever been there? I'm sure you have. We've all gone through situations where we expected something. We expected life to be some way and it wasn't that way, or we were facing the unknown, something we can't explain. That's what they're going through right now.

Whatever expectations they had about Moses, those have not been met. They don't know what is going on with this guy? Has he fallen while he was up on the

mountain and died? How would we know? Has he been attacked by a wild animal? Up there on the mountain and killed? Did he simply decide to run off? Maybe he got a better offer and he just ran off and abandoned them. They don't know.

I'm trying to set the stage for you. I'm trying to set this up in such a way as to help us understand a little bit of the dynamic that these people are going through as it relates to what is happening right now?

Because again, when your expectations aren't met, when you're facing a situation that is just full of the unknown, and then when you begin to get restless, what happens is we are tempted to go back to what we knew before. Now we call that backsliding, but you call it what you will, it's just going back to what I was comfortable with, or what I knew before.

And in this case with Israel, it was precipitated because the people recognized that Moses wasn't coming down the mountain and they don't know what is going on. And so here they are, they're restless, they're looking for answers.

And when God doesn't seem to be providing answers for you and me, it's common, natural thing for us to go back and to do what we knew before or to take matters into our own hands. And what Israel had known before was paganism. That's what they'd been, they'd been living in a pagan culture for the last 400 years or something like that. And that's all they knew was paganism.

Well, so here's Moses, we don't know where he is or what happened to him. He started off good, but it's been 40 days. We got to come up with a new option. We got to come up with a new leader. Good grief. I think we might just have to come up with a new god.

And you'll notice that's exactly what they say to Stephen, or excuse me, to Aaron, when they said, "*make us gods who shall go before us.*" And the reason I said Stephen, as I was just thinking about the fact that when Stephen was recounting Israel's history, just before they stoned him to death, he talked about this.

This attitude that the people had because of their restlessness because of Moses delaying coming down. Let me put this on the screen from Acts chapter 7. It says,

**Acts 7:39-40 (ESV)**

*Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'*

*Our fathers refused to obey him, (and look at this phrase) but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we (have no idea) do not know what has become of him.'*

Isn't that interesting though? I think that phrase that they thrust him aside is very interesting and very telling.

And that's what happens people when we backslide. We basically thrust aside what we know, we thrust aside God, and obedience to God, and faith in God, and trust in God, because we're tired, we're restless, we're scared, and we don't know which way to turn.

And so we basically just take matters into our own hands, and we say, well, I guess I'm just going to have to make this happen myself, so let's make our own gods. We're going to manufacture some gods now. Aaron, manufacture us some gods, will you?

Let's keep reading. Verse 2 says, *"So Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.'"* <sup>3</sup> *So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.* <sup>4</sup> *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, (notice the plural reference even though it's just one golden calf) who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"*

Now, that's a particularly interesting statement for them to make. Here *"...are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."*

What is the very first thing that God said when He began to echo from the mountaintop the Ten Commandments, which, by the way, all Israel heard? They heard it with their own ears. Let me put this on the screen, Exodus, remember this from chapter 20.

### **Exodus 20:2-4 (ESV)**

*“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”*

*“I am the LORD (I am YAHWEH) your God, (look at this) who brought you out of the land of Egypt, (it was me who brought you) out of the house of slavery. (and then He went on to say) You shall have no other gods before me. (and then he said) You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”*

And that's exactly what is going on. And verse 5 tells us that, *“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.””*

Now I think at this particular point Aaron is trying to win back the crowd because he knows that they've been out of control. He knows that he already created this calf, which he shouldn't have done And so you'll notice what he does when he makes this altar and this proclamation.

What does he say? He says, *“tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.”* But would you look in your Bible how, *“LORD”* is spelled? It's either in all capital letters or it's in what we call small caps, right? And that means that's the tetragrammaton. That means that is the divine name that is YAHWEH.

Notice that Aaron didn't say, all right, tomorrow we're going to have a party and we're going to make sacrifices and offerings to this golden calf. He didn't say that. I think Aaron's trying to get back some of the ground that he's already lost, but things are quickly getting out of hand.

And it goes on to say in verse 6, *“And they rose up early the next day and (they did) offered burnt offerings and (even) brought peace offerings. (but after that, it says) And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”*

And that word, play, in the Hebrew is a very interesting one. I looked it up. It can actually mean lots of things. It can mean to laugh. It can refer to the physical act of caressing someone. It can refer to just simply being entertained. It can refer to joking and it can refer to mocking. All those things can fall under the usage or the translation of that particular word.

But if you're wondering exactly what was going on when it says they got up to play, I'll tell you exactly how the Jews interpreted it because Paul actually quotes this passage when he writes to the church in Corinth. Which, by the way, was very prone to sexual immorality because of where they lived. Corinth was a very sexually immoral place to live.

And here's what he said up on the screen from 1 Corinthians, chapter 10. He said,

**1 Corinthians 10:7-8 (ESV)**

*Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.*

*Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." (there he is quoting this very passage in Exodus, and then he goes on to make this statement) We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.*

You can see exactly how Paul interpreted the word, play. They got up and they were sexually immoral because that is what was common in the worship of pagan deities. Most pagan deities had some element of fertility connected to them in some way shape or form. Whether it was the fertility of the earth, or whatever, or the fertility of human beings.

And they would believe they believed that by engaging in acts of fertility and which usually meant sexual immorality, they were somehow honoring these gods of fertility so that there would be a greater fertility above the, in the land, in the people, and so on, and so forth. And it was a very convenient way of basically being immoral and saying we're doing it to serve our gods. But this is what was going on.

And verse 7 tells us. if you look with me in the text, "*And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. <sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. (and of course, stiff necked means stubborn) <sup>10</sup> Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may*

*burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”” Stop there.*

Let me explain here what God is saying to Moses. He's essentially saying, in other words, that, He says, I'm going to destroy them. I'm going to destroy them. And I'll start over with your family, Moses, we'll just start over with you.

I don't know how you would have felt about that, but I want you to see how Moses responds because in verse 11, it says, “*But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O LORD, (and I want you to take note of the things that he says, he says, O LORD) why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.*”

*<sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”*

And then verse 14 says, “*And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*” If you have an old translation, your Bible might even say, the Lord repented of bringing the disaster. And that word has messed with a lot of people's hearts and minds because they wonder what God has to repent of.

And they're wondering, was God suggesting that He was going to do something sinful and that is why Moses said, repent. Because that's the earlier usage of the word, relent, here in the ESV, it can also be translated, repent. He's basically telling the Lord to turn away from this particular plan to destroy the people of Israel.

And this is a very interesting passage because if nothing else, it proves that Moses had finally understood the heart of God, because you'll notice how he begins to intercede on behalf of the people. He does it by connecting to the heart of God, and that's really interesting people, and I want you to take note of that.

This is something that we took note of many times in our study of the Book of Psalms. But when we pray most of the time, when we pray, we're connected to

our own hearts, and that's it. And we're not really thinking about God or how our prayers might affect His name, His reputation, the way people look at Him.

We're not usually thinking about that. We're thinking about ourselves. We're thinking about our own comfort, our own circumstances, our own convenience. And that's the essence of our prayers and why we pray, and we honestly pray very selfishly.

Even James told us that he said, when you pray that you might just spend what you get on your own passions. (James 4:3) We'll paraphrase there, but I want you to notice these areas where Moses speaks to the Lord.

And did you notice, first of all, that two times in verses 11 and verse 12, Moses refers to the people of Israel as, "*your people*." I think that's particularly interesting because that puts the responsibility back on to God.

He says, why are you angry with your people? I mean, is this, you didn't know that this was going on with them. You didn't know that they just came out of so many hundreds of years of paganism. You didn't know any of this. These are Your people. These are the people You chose. These are the people that You've had your hand on. These are the people that You've been watching.

What is he doing? He's putting the responsibility back onto God. This is something that I find Christians have a hard time doing and I think this is really interesting that I don't know, we just we feel weird or eerie about doing this, and calling Him to account

And it's not like you're scolding God necessarily, but I don't think there's anything wrong with simply reminding God, You made a promise and I expect You to keep it. These are Your people. These are not my people These are Your people. You called them and You made promises to these people. I think that's really interesting,

And you'll notice that he says, you're the one who delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. These are your people that You delivered. You brought them out here for this very reason.

And then did you notice how he spoke of how the Egyptians would perceive this whole thing? Well, it's like, okay, God, let's talk this thing through. And that's not to say that Moses is talking God out of something. I don't want to suggest that, but as if it were going on like that, it's almost like Moses is saying, how would the Egyptians perceive this if they come to find out that they tried to

destroy them in the wilderness. You destroyed their whole army in the Red Sea, but then You simply get them out here into the wilderness just to kill them all. Because the word is certainly going to get back to them that this is what happened.

And so what is Moses doing now? He's appealing for God's reputation. He cares about how God is perceived among the people and he says, Lord You wouldn't want the Egyptians to gloat over this and to perceive that you had that evil intent against your people.

And then finally, Moses brings up the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And again, this is holding God accountable in that sense of saying, you made a promise and I trust you to keep your promises. And that's what he's saying.

That's the kind of stuff, David would say. If you go through the Psalms and you know when David was going through the most difficult times of his life, he would remind God of His own faithfulness. God's faithfulness. He would say things during his prayers. He first of all would tell about all the rotten things that was going on in his life, and then he would say, but you O, Lord, are faithful.

You, O, Lord, are the rock who delivers me. You, God, are the one who forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. And he would make declarations to God that were true and that he was standing on by faith. As if to say, this is You and I'm trusting You to be faithful and to be You. I like that. It's like this holy audacity to hold God to His Word.

Have you ever thought of saying that to the Lord in prayer. Lord, I'm holding you to Your Word. I think God delights in that, I do.

Now you try to hold me to my word and I might get upset with you because I'm not in charge of all my circumstances, and sometimes circumstances get away from me. And I might give my word to you, and then later on be embarrassed and find out I can't keep it because of this, that, or the other thing that happened. Hey, Paul, what about that? You said you were going to do this. Yeah, I know, but I can't.

Well, you know what that never happens to God because He's the sovereign ruler of the universe and He's never a victim of random circumstances. And so He can always keep His promises.

The question is, do you have the faith to hold Him to His promises because that's what Moses is really doing in this particular situation. And so he implores the Lord to relent. And when he says that, *“relent from this disaster against your people.”* What Moses is asking the Lord to do is to simply accept His intercession and to show the mercy that he knows God is full of.

It's the other thing we brought out when we were going through our study of the Book of Psalms, David knew that God was merciful and he kept coming to God and imploring him to be the merciful God that he knew Him to be.

And sometimes I wonder if we allow our circumstances to change our opinion as to whether or not we believe God really is merciful. When you're going through the Old Testament Book of Micah, there's a statement about God that goes along with this same idea. Let me put this on the screen. Micah chapter 7. Look what it says here. It says,

**Micah 7:18 (ESV)**

*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.*

*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, (but look at this) because he delights in steadfast love.*

In other words, He delights in continuing to love us. If you have an NIV and you read this verse, it says, *“but delights to show mercy.”*

Here's these statements in the Bible that make these declarations about God that I believe we should factor into our prayers when we're praying for people. When we're praying for circumstances, for situations and saying, Lord, I know that You delight in steadfast love, and therefore I ask this of You. And I ask you to be the merciful, loving God that you are.

Verse 15. Look with me in your Bible. *“Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written.*

*<sup>16</sup> The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.”* Wouldn't have that been cool to see? Unfortunately, they're not going to last very long.

*“<sup>17</sup> When Joshua (who was at least partway up the mountain with Moses) heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” <sup>18</sup> But he said, “It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.” <sup>19</sup> And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.”*

Like I said, the tablets of stone written with the hand of God didn't last for very long. They were broken there at the foot of the mountain. And most people think that this was an appropriate action on Moses's part because it accurately reflected essentially what the people had done, which was to break the law that God had given to them in the Ten commandments.

And then in verse 20, we're going to see Moses taking some other action. *“He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.”*

We find out from Deuteronomy that he actually threw it into the river, and there was a stream of some kind, and the people drank from that water. And most likely, we're not told, we're not told why Moses did that, but most likely this act of making the people drink the very water that this calf had been ground to pieces in and sprinkled in there was a symbolic way of suggesting that they would bear the consequences for their actions, because you'll read elsewhere in the Word of God where it is referred to as, drinking the cup.

Even in the New Testament Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, Lord, if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me. (Matthew 26:39) And so the cup was a picture of what we were made to bear, made to drink in terms of difficulty, tribulation, trouble, whatever. And I think that's probably what's behind these actions by Moses.

And then Moses is going to deal with his brother. *“<sup>21</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?””* In other words, he's saying to Aaron, what's your excuse, pal? What exactly happened here? What kind of a whammy did these people put on your brain that you would allow this to all happen?

*“<sup>22</sup> And Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil.”* The first thing he does is he throws the rest of the people under the bus. Well, I mean, it's not that it's not that it's untrue necessarily, but what he's doing is he's shirking his own personal responsibility.

*“<sup>23</sup> For they said to me, ‘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.’ <sup>24</sup> So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out (popped) came this calf.”*

It just came, it magically appeared out of the molten gold that we were melting down, this thing just appeared. And it doesn't say here in Exodus just how angry God was with Aaron for what he did, but you got to know as a leader, you bear responsibility.

Those who lead they don't get as much grace as those who are being led. And we find out as many years later when Moses is recounting this event of the calf and the backsliding and so forth. He talks about Aaron. Let me show you this on the screen from Deuteronomy chapter 9. He says,

**Deuteronomy 9:20 (ESV)**

*“And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.”*

*“And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready (kill him) to destroy him. And (he says,) I prayed for (him) Aaron also at the same time.”*

And I was praying for the rest of the people too, but I had to pray for Aaron too. God was ready to kill him because he was a leader and he didn't restrain the people. In fact, he helped them go astray.

Verse 25 says, *“And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (take note of that word right there or that phrase) (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies),”* We're not really sure what that means or which enemies. We're aware or we're mocking because that's what derision means

*“<sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him.”*

Pause there for just a moment again I want you to take note of this statement that Where the sinful actions of the people of Israel are described as, breaking loose. If you have a New King James Bible your Bible says that they were,

“unrestrained.” Your New American Standard Bible says that the people were “out of control,” and Aaron let them be out of control.

And I want to remind you that control is something that the Lord has given to us through His Holy Spirit. These people had broken loose, they had literally gotten out of control. And that's what we expect to see in the world but in those who are believers, we have what are called, the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Have you heard of them, Fruit of the Holy Spirit? Let me show you the passage where they are mentioned. It's in Galatians, on the screen, chapter 5.

**Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, (oh, look at this one) self-control; (in fact, Paul goes on to say that) against such things there is no law.*

Self-control. The people of Israel got out of control, they broke loose, but the people of God should walk in a modicum of control. What do we expect to see in the people of the world? Look at 2 Timothy on the screen. Here's Paul writing to Timothy and he says,

**2 Timothy 3:1-3 (ESV)**

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control...*

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people (are going to) will be lovers of self, (they're going to be) lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, (and look at this last one) without self-control...*

And so you see this one area where believers should be completely set apart from the world is in the area of self-control. But let me encourage you not to be confused by the term self-control. We use the term self-control to describe the control of the person, but it's not as if we're saying that the power to control us comes from self. because it doesn't come from self, it comes from the Holy Spirit. As we've already mentioned, it's a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Right? And so

it's not you controlling yourself. It's not me. If you're freaking out, it's not like me walking up to you and saying, get ahold of yourself. That's not what we're saying.

What it is ,it's walking in the power of the Holy Spirit to be under control. Did you get that? Walking in the power of the Spirit to be under control, not breaking loose when times get tough, when situations get scary, when expectations are not met. When you don't know what's going on and you're facing the unknown, not to break loose, but to remain under control, the control of the Holy Spirit.

And that means continue to trust the Lord. It's like, Lord, I'm going to allow You to bring control into my life because I can feel what's going on in my flesh. My flesh wants to break out. My flesh wants to lose control, but I'm praying now for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to bring the control of self that comes through the Holy Spirit that will help me not freak out, not flesh out, not break out, and lose control. It's what we should expect in our lives.

Now, do we expect it perfectly? No, we don't expect it perfectly. Can I just tell you something? You all, and you all know this, but whatever you give into in this life, whether it's giving into your emotions, whether it, if you come from a home where people yell, you're going to find it very difficult not to do that when you start your own home, there's going to be a lot of yelling because that's what you were raised with. And it has become a habitual addiction in your life. And there are such things as addictions. We've become addicted to certain behaviors. And there are times that we react in a very fleshly way, because that's the way we've always reacted.

But as believers, we need to start thinking differently and we need to start saying, wait a minute, that's the old man, that's the flesh reacting that way. And I need to start reacting after the pattern of the Holy Spirit who lives within me, because you see, I've received a new nature. Yes, the old nature is still very much there, I know. I get it, but I'm supposed to die to self and I'm supposed to allow the work of the Holy Spirit to begin to take hold in my life.

And again, that's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult at times, and I'm not always going to do it perfectly, but I want to get there. I want to react differently to life than I used to react.

I want to allow the Holy Spirit to bring control so that I don't break out and break loose, and backslide, because that's where backsliding comes.

Now, the other thing I wanted you to take note of here in the verses we just read, were the fact that the Levites, in other words, the descendants of the man Levi, were the ones who stepped forward when Moses said, who's on the side of the Lord?

And they were called to stand beside Moses, but to do more than stand, verse 27, look what it says. *“And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you (look at this) kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’”* <sup>28</sup> *And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell.”*

And so what are we reading here? We're reading that the men of the tribe of Levi proceeded to slay people that they knew, who refused to repent, who were the initial and major instigators of this backsliding, and the ones who were just completely out of control and they did what they were told to do.

*“<sup>29</sup> And Moses said (responded by saying), “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”*

In other words, you made a sacrifice of even family. Did you catch that? You made a sacrifice of even your family, that you might bring a blessing from the Lord.

What we're talking about here is a devotion that was shown that day by the Levites that was beyond family and friends. A devotion that rose above the love and devotion to family. And that's hard for us in America to think about because we think so much, and we should, we thought we should think highly of family. There's no question about that. I love my family. I would never do anything to harm my family. And I'm sure you feel the exact same way.

And passages like this are shocking and troublesome to our hearts when we hear about people taking a sword and killing brothers, and fathers, and nephews, and uncles, and whoever else, because these people just refused to maintain any sort of control.

But you know what's interesting about this? This devotion that Moses asked of these Levites in the name of God, it wasn't Moses asking for that devotion. He was asking for them to do that in, for the Lord. Okay. But you know that Jesus did the same thing. He said the same thing. And frankly, this statement by Jesus

is one of the most troubling things Jesus said, not the most. Let me show you this. Matthew chapter 10, on the screen.

**Matthew 10:37 (ESV)**

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Yeah, put that in your pipe and smoke it. That's hard, isn't it? That's hard to hear. It's hard to hear Jesus..., you're like Jesus, why would You say that? Why would You even say that? I mean, it almost sounds like Jesus is telling us not to love family, but of course, that's not what He's saying. Not at all.

What He is trying to communicate though, is that devotion to Him should eclipse every other human relationship. And that still is hard to hear, but here's the reason that Jesus said it. You ready for this? Because He had the right to say it. No other human being on the face of the earth could ever have the audacity or the arrogance or vanity to say, you need to love me more than anybody. Father, mother, sister, brother, daughter, son.

That's how much..., you can't get away with that sort of stuff. You know why? You don't deserve that kind of devotion. None of us does. None of us deserves that level of devotion. Guess who does. Guess who deserves it? And that's the point of the statement. He's not telling you to go around and do things that are ugly to the people that you ought to be loving. Not at all.

He's simply saying, I have the right to demand that level of devotion from you. I have the right to do it. Because you see, I am your God, I am your Creator, and I Am above all, and I can make that claim. It's not a selfish claim for Him. It would be for you or me, a selfish, self-centered claim. It's not for Him. It's a true claim. It's a right of His. As difficult as we may find it, it is His right.

Verse 30, look with the in your Bible. It says, *“The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”* <sup>31</sup> *So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold.”* <sup>32</sup> *But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”*

And this is a very interesting statement that Moses is making and although the major instigators of this sin have already died at the hands of the Levites, there is plenty more guilt to go around, and so Moses begins to intercede for the people. And in verse 32, you'll notice he literally offers himself as a means of securing the people's forgiveness.

But I want you to notice God's response. *“<sup>33</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.””*

Now, there's two things I want to say about that. First of all, what He's saying without saying it is to Moses. Sorry, you can't do that. You can't offer yourself for the sins of others. We'll talk about that.

But the other thing He says here is just simply what He says, *“Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.”* Now I want you to be very careful here when you hear that. I don't want you to hear him saying that if you sin against God, He's going to blot your name out of the Book Of Life because that's not what He's saying, because we know that there is forgiveness.

We know that we all sin. We know that we all mess up, and we know that there's forgiveness and even John, the apostle talks about this. We've looked at this before. Look at this on the screen. 1 John chapter 2, he says,

**1 John 2:1-2 (NIV84)**

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.* (in other words, I don't want you to sin and so I'm giving you here the Word of God that you would not sin) *But if anybody does sin,* (and then it's going to happen, he says) *we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense.* (yes) — *Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* (the ESV says, *we have an Advocate with the Father* and then he goes on to say) *He is the atoning sacrifice* (your Bible may say *propitiation*) *for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

And so what John is saying here and reminding you and me about, is the forgiveness that is perpetual in our relationship with Jesus Christ through faith in His finished work on the cross. There is a perpetual forgiveness and that doesn't give us freedom to sin. It, however, gives us hope that when we do sin, we have forgiveness, right? That's very important.

And that's why He, it's why he turned Moses down when Moses made the offer. Look, if you're not going to forgive them, then just blot me out of your book. No, Moses, that's not the way it works. You can't stand in for somebody else. Why? Because to stand in for somebody else, you yourself have to be perfect.

You see, you can't say, I couldn't say to the Lord, please take my life in the place of this person over here. He'd say, you can't do that, Paul. Why not? Well, because if I'm going to take your life for anybody's sin, it's going to be your own. You're a sinner yourself. Oh, yeah, that's right.

See, the only way I can stand in for you is if I'm perfect. The only way I can stand in for you is if I've never sinned. Oh, who's that remind you of? Look what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*For our sake he made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

He's the only one who could stand in for anyone else and become that sin offering. And the only reason He could do that is because He knew no sin. He Himself Had no sin so He could bear your sin, see.

Verse 34 says, *"But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."* In other words, this isn't over yet.

*"<sup>35</sup> Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made."* And we know from elsewhere in the Word that many people died from that plague.

Before we wrap up here, I just want to reflect on this chapter a little bit because, I started off this study tonight by trying to get you to see through the eyes of the people, and the fact that Moses had been 40 days up on the mountain, and they didn't know if he was even still alive. And there's something of their needs that we understand. The needs that they expressed. They need protection, they need hope, they need guidance, but they weren't getting it because Moses was gone and they didn't know if he was coming back.

Here's the point. The needs that they had were not the wrong thing. Okay. We're not criticizing the people of Israel because they were scared necessarily. We're not criticizing the people of Israel because they were needy or because they were like, hey where's Moses, we need to be guided. We need to be led. Where's the man whom God raised up to lead us? He's not here and we don't know if he's coming back.

Do you understand people, that was not a sin to have needs like that. Because, and we all have needs we all have needs for protection. We all have needs for guidance and when something happens like what happened to them. And that is that Moses was gone for over a month. Those needs get unmet what happens to us when our needs are unmet, well, we quickly give in to fear.

I don't care how big and tough you think you are. If your needs go unmet for a protracted period of time, you will begin to give in to fear at some point. And that's what happened to the people. Now, even the fear wasn't a sin yet because they had not yet acted upon that fear.

Had the people turned to God in the midst of their fear? It would have been completely different. God certainly would have met their needs if they would have cried out to the Lord with all their hearts. If Aaron would have responded to the people when they said, we don't know where this Moses is. We have no idea what happened to him.

If he would have said, we're going to cry out to the Lord, all of us together, and we're going to tell the Lord about these needs that we have that are going unmet. I am convinced that the Lord would have met those needs and brought them comfort.

But instead of turning to the Lord, and this is important people, because this applies to our own lives. And instead of waiting on the Lord to meet those needs, they sought to meet those needs on their own. Make us a god. If God won't meet my needs, I'm going to manufacture a way of getting them met myself. See, that's what we do. We do that all the time, and we're not even aware of it sometimes.

But let me just say, real faith, and we talk a lot about faith in church, and let me tell you something, real faith requires depending on God when you're scared, and you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. You don't know how things are going to turn out, and your expectations have gone unmet. This is not what I signed up for.

But you come to God and you say, I choose to trust You. I choose To trust You and I ask You to meet my needs. I've mentioned this many times before, but I've encouraged you guys to pick up a copy of the autobiography of George Mueller. Some of you have, I'm sure, but in that autobiography, he lists ways to bolster your faith and he lists 4 things. Let me put these up on the screen. We'll close with this. He says, here's what you need to do.

- Carefully read the Word and meditate on it daily
- Maintain an upright heart and a good conscience
- Do not shrink back from opportunities where faith may be tested
- Wait for God and do not try to fix your own programs on your own

Carefully read the Bible, the Word of God and meditate on it daily. Secondly, maintain an upright heart and a good conscience. Thirdly, don't shrink back from opportunities where faith might be tested. Don't run away from those situations. And then lastly, lastly, wait for God and don't try to fix your problems on your own.

Now, that's a paraphrase. I'm paraphrasing. George Mueller lived in the 1800s and he didn't talk like I talk, he was much fancier. He talked about not trying to bring about your own deliverance, wait for the deliverance of the Lord, and that's what the Israelites should have done.

They should have waited for the deliverance of the Lord to deliver them from their fears, and to meet their needs, and their expectations that had gone unmet and so forth. But unfortunately, they didn't.

And what happens when we don't? Backsliding, breaking loose, rather than control. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for the reminders from Exodus chapter 32. We're so thankful, Lord, that You've given us Your Word to study, to look into. And Lord, You've told us that You've given us these things as examples.

And Lord, we see these many examples of how to walk with You and trust You and not to resort to our own means of working out our own deliverance, fixing our own problems, but rather to wait on the Lord.

Lord, we confess to You today, waiting is really hard and we don't like to do it. And so we ask You, God, to give us the courage and the strength, to wait. To

wait for the deliverance and the comfort of the Lord. Thank You. We worship You. We rejoice in You. Through Jesus, our Savior, amen.