

## Exodus 32

### Week Six: The God People Want

February 9-10

**TEACHERS NOTE:** The Chronological Reading of Exodus 31 is on Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup> / Exodus 32 on Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>. Please let your class know that what we are teaching will be what they will be reading on Sunday and Monday. And we will finish Exodus on Thursday, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, then we will begin Leviticus which is still part of the Exodus Era.

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

If you have been doing the daily reading in the Chronological Bible, you have seen Pharaoh's hardness of heart against the LORD which brings about the ten plagues, by which God destroys the infrastructure of Egypt and brings Israel out of Egypt into the Wilderness of Sinai on their way to the Land of Promise.

Even though they were God's people, whom He had faithfully delivered from bondage, there were consequences to their actions even as delivered people. What should have been an eleven-day journey ended up taking 40 years because of Israel's unbelief and rebellion.

Instead of acting in faith when faced with "seemingly" impossible circumstances, Israel often threatened to go back to Egypt. Instead of being grateful for being set free, they were complaining and blaming Moses, God and each other along the way.

To bring us to where we are today in our lesson:

- God has freed the Israelites from slavery after the 10 plagues (February 2<sup>nd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup>)
- God has provided their daily needs on the journey (February 6<sup>th</sup>)
- God has established the Ten Commandments as well as other parameters for being a free people (February 7<sup>th</sup>)
- God makes a Covenant with Moses which is accepted by the Israelites (February 8<sup>th</sup>)
- God has given plans for the Ark of the Covenant, the Table, Lampstand, Tabernacle; all items that will bring focus to their Worship of God. The One True God, Jehovah. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (February 9<sup>th</sup>)
- God is very specific on the elements, craftsmanship, and reverence for the Tabernacle, worship and observing the Sabbath. (February 10<sup>th</sup>)

Today our lesson will be the Daily reading of Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Just as a reminder, sometimes our lessons will be based on what you have read the previous week, sometimes what you are reading during the weekend of our bible study, other times it will be the day or week after our bible study.*

In our readings we have seen all these things be established in specific ways. God has been communicating to His people through Moses on the mountain. There were times when the people could hear thunder, see lightening and even smoke come from the mountain.

Moses has been going up the mountain to talk to God and coming down the mountain to talk to the people. Up the mountain to talk to God and down the mountain to talk to the people. That

had become a pattern; an “anticipated pattern” of God’s people as they watched Moses go up and come down.

I know if I get accustomed to something happening in a specific order, or in a specific time period, I get a bit concerned when it doesn’t happen as planned or anticipated. My expectations go unmet.

### **Setting the Scene:**

As we look at Exodus 32 Moses is still up on the mountain talking to God.

The expectations of the people are that Moses should be coming down any moment now, any day now, but Moses is still up on the Mountain. This is the same mountain on which they had seen fire and smoke, they had heard thunder and saw lightning. They knew that God was on this mountain in a significant way and had been delivering specific messages.

They also knew that Moses had a connection with God that was unique and powerful, they had seen this first-hand as they crossed the Red Sea and received water and manna from heaven. They were standing where they were, at the foot of the Mountain, because of the leadership of Moses under the guidance and authority of God.

They understood the first part; the Leadership of Moses. But I’m not sure they grasped the second part; the guidance and authority of God. They were looking and waiting; waiting and looking, day after day, and yet there was no sign of Moses.

Let’s begin today by looking at the end of Exodus 31.

**Exodus 31: 18** And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (*Pg. 160, February 10<sup>th</sup>*)

Moses was still on the mountain. God had been giving Moses all the instructions for the temple, the commandments and instructions about the Sabbath. God had been communicating clearly and consistently with Moses. And now in the hands of Moses were the two tablets.

We have no idea how big they were, other than what Cecil B. DeMille showed us in the movie starring Charlton Heston. The Ten Commandments, which for some reason they tend to show on Easter Sunday night each year. Notice how it is described in Exodus 31: 18 “Written with the finger of God”. That is power. That is authority. That is extraordinary creativity.

The fingers of God have been at work since the beginning of creation, as we saw in the Creation Era. And now the fingers of God have put in a very tangible form instructions on how to live as a covenant people in relation to the God of creation; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the Patriarchs).

Moses was holding that which God Himself had written upon. Talk about intimacy with God; Moses encountered God in such a unique, personal, intense, and extraordinary way; even from the initial interaction at the burning bush which we looked at last week in our lesson.

So, Moses was still on the mountain and the people were down below in the wilderness. Now before we go to Exodus 32:1, jump quickly to Exodus 32: 15

Ex. 32:15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in his hand. The tablets *were* written on both sides; on the one *side* and on the other they were written. <sup>16</sup> Now the tablets *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets. (pg. 161, February 11<sup>th</sup>)

I wanted you to see that verse before we continue because it bookends today's story. Moses was on the mountain and had not "yet" come down from the mountain, which had been his habit, and expected by the people.

At the end of Chapter 31 Moses is on the mountain with the two tablets written by the fingers of God. Exodus 32: 15, Moses turns and goes down from the mountain with the two tablets.

We are told this journey of Moses on the mountains was 40 days and 40 nights (Ex. 24: 18, pg. 150, February 8<sup>th</sup>) So somewhere in this 40-day period the people of God had expectations that Moses should be back because that is how it had always happened in the past.

Moses was on the mountain with the two tablets in his hands that had been written by the fingers of God. And the people in the valley had unmet expectations. We all have been in those kinds of situations.

On a spiritual level God has always worked "this way" in the past; this kind of timing, using this person or making me feel a certain way to know I was on the right track. But this time its different, not as I had expected. This time there is nothing but silence, stillness, and quietness. And there is nothing as deafening as the silence of God.

Let's look at what happens between the time God handed Moses the two tablets written by the fingers of God and the time Moses actually turned and walked down the mountain to the people.

### **The 'god' Israel Wants:**

**Ex. 32: 1** Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *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." (pg. 160, February 11<sup>th</sup>)

We don't know how long this "delay" was, though we know it was less than 40 days. I would submit several days less than 40 days based on what happens in the next few verses. But nevertheless, the expectations of the people were that Moses should be back already, down from the mountain.

Perhaps a natural thought of the people would be, "I hope Moses is alright." Remember they had seen the mountain on fire, seen the smoke, experienced the thunder, lightning and yet no Moses. However, there was no concern shown by the people in any form or fashion.

Rather we are told the people "gathered together". The word here is more than just people hanging around on a back porch; it was a gathering with intentionality. It was not a prayer meeting gathering, nor was it a riot. However, it was gathering of intentionality for action and response.

And we see that very quickly in the words they use in speaking to Aaron.

**Ex. 32: 1b** “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *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.”

It was not a request, but a demand. COME! MAKE US!

Aaron was the brother of Moses. Aaron had been 2<sup>nd</sup> in command. Aaron was a leader. In fact, Aaron was a priest. And yet the people assembled to make a demand, for “the god the people wanted.”

COME! MAKE US!

Aaron, as a leader could have “nipped it in the bud” right there on the spot after those three words. But Aaron let them continue to speak, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us.”

Aaron even let them continue beyond that initial demand.

” as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

Aaron could have countered, “The man who brought you up from the land of Egypt?”

“You mean MY BROTHER?”

The arrogance of the people amazes me; no concern, no worry, no compassion for Moses. No concern, worry or compassion for Aaron whose brother is the one “missing in action.” These people gathered together and made a demand.

They wanted a “god who will go before us”, which means they wanted:

- A “god” that would “Pave the Way”
- A “god” who would be “Proactive”
- A “god” who would “Produce Results”

The ironic thing is they were demanding a “man-made god.” A “man-made god” would by definition be an “inanimate object”; not a living, breathing, moving “god” that would be able to pave the way, be proactive and produce results.

This would be a “god” that they would have to maneuver on their own. They would have to pick it up and carry it. They would “arrive” before this “man-made god” would “arrive”. And all of this was happening simply because the people of God did not wait for the will of God.

I’m sure none of you have ever been in that situation where things aren’t happening as quickly as you would like or at a different pace than in the past. Perhaps you have been seeking God but there is still a silence that is deafening.

We each have found or perhaps even today finding ourselves in this time where our expectations are not lining up with the timing of God.

- Do we become Demanding?
- Do we become Defiant?

The people of God had become both demanding and defiant when they commanded Aaron to make for them a ‘god’ to go “before them.”

Let's Continue....

**Ex. 32:2** And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.”<sup>3</sup> So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron.<sup>4</sup> And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, “This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

In three short verses we see the fall and the failure of a leader. Aaron did not push back at all:

- Aaron did not stand up for Moses
- Aaron did not stand up for God
- Aaron did not stand up for Patience

With seemingly no hesitation, Aaron made a demand of his own for the gold rings of their families. Aaron was a leader, a spokesman, and a craftsman. With tools and apparently fire Aaron molded and shaped this gold into a calf.

And the people saw this calf as a “god” giving it credit for bringing them out of Egypt. No matter how many times I read this story, it baffles my mind. It could be argued they wanted something “tangible” to represent God.

However, God had already expressed to them they should have:

- 1) No other gods before me.
- 2) Not make for themselves an idol or any likeness of anything in heaven or earth
- 3) Not worship or serve them.

1, 2, 3, right off the Bat: three strikes and you're out. They had 3 strikes.

Regardless of how they may have tried to rationalize or justify it; they were wrong.

Well, certainly this would be “over the top” for Aaron; and even though he had hand crafted the calf himself, enough is enough...or is it?

Let's Continue...

**Ex. 32: 5** So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD.”<sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Aaron continues to disappoint, taking a very “hands on” approach to this scenario. The latter part of vs 5, the word “LORD” is “Jehovah”; the One True God. Maybe Aaron was trying to get them “Back on Track”; if we want to give him the benefit of the doubt; though something he does later does not lend itself to giving him the benefit of the doubt. The next day the people “partied” before this new “Golden Calf” and made an abomination of the Lord.

I say that because they did some “religious” things with the offerings that should have been reserved only for the True God; but when it says they “rose up to play” the NIV says, “Indulge in Revelry.”

Let's Pause and think of how quickly things went wrong.

- We know that Moses is still up on the Mountain, he has the two tablets in hand (Ex. 31: 18) but he has not started down the mountain yet. (Ex. 32:15)
- He was on the mountain 40 days and nights. (Ex. 24:18)
- They had time to collect all the gold; burn/ melt the gold; shape it into the shape of a Calf; announce a festival for the next day; and then the festivities commence that become an abomination to the Lord.

Let's just say it took three days for all this to happen, which could have been longer; but if it were just three days; it had only been 37 days since Moses had gone back up the mountain. Basically 5 weeks. There are times when we get caught up in slow motion, turning away from God over a period, gradually step by step.

But there was not anything gradual about this. Bam, it happened! They were restless, they were impatient, and they were taking matters into their own hands. And it did not go unnoticed, it never does. "The God who Is" responds to the sin of His people.

### **The God Who Is:**

Ex. 32: 7 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*.<sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people!<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

God noticed and was NOT happy. I'm sure God was grieved, considering all that He had done for these people; and in a 5-week period they "*turned aside from what God had commanded them*". (vs. 8a)

God knew these people. And not unlike us, they were obstinate, inflexible, and stiff necked. (vs. 9b---The Hebrew word used is: *Qasheh*) God was hurt, mad and ready to destroy.

As we continue, remember Moses is still UP on the Mountain.

**Ex. 32: 11** Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "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 speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath and relent from this harm to 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 descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.' "<sup>14</sup> So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Verse 11 is interesting in various translations for the word "pleaded".

NASB---Entreated

NIV---Sought

NLT---Pacify

ESV—Implored

KJV---Besought

HCSB---Interceded

Regardless of which word is used in English, Moses stood up for the people. Moses became an intercessor in this delicate situation. Moses stood up for both the people and God Himself. I love this intimacy between Moses and God; so much dialogue, so much trust, so much raw emotion.

Moses saw it from both sides, but as he stood up for the people, he was also standing up for God; even reminding God of the Patriarch Era (*The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob vs. 13*)

The people who had done this were already an embarrassment to God, Moses knew God didn't need any more "bad press" if you will. God obviously chose not to destroy all of them. And this brings us to Verse 15 where Moses turns and goes DOWN the Mountain.

As Moses was walking down the Mountain, he heard the noise and it wasn't worship; it wasn't a war cry; it was the noise and sound of a sinful people. (*summary of vss. 15-20*)

- Moses saw the golden calf
- Moses saw them irreverent behavior
- Moses saw the sin of the people

Moses couldn't believe his eyes. When Moses saw all that was going on with his own eyes, he threw down the stone tablets crushing them. Symbolically it showed what the people had done to the teachings of God. Moses took the golden calf, melted it down to powder, put it in the water and made the people drink it.

Now look at vs. 21

Ex. 32: 21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought *so* great a sin upon them?"<sup>22</sup> So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil (*prone to evil*).<sup>23</sup> For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'<sup>24</sup> And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it* off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

Unbelievable. No personal responsibility. No ownership of the decisions and actions. In Aaron's words, it just happened: Poof...a golden calf!

### **Application:**

An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Pastor named Robert Robinson wrote a Hymn (*Come Thou Fount*) that is one of my favorites. There are two lines that remind me of this story each time.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;*

Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee:  
*prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;*  
here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
seal it for thy courts above.

None of us are exempt from making poor choices. We are prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love. It can happen in a very short amount of time as we have seen.

But we must come to the point where we say, "I've messed up, here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above."

The "god people want" today tolerates everything the golden calf stood for; immorality, selfishness, irreverence, impatience, and a rejection of God's teaching. The "god people want" was not and is not the God Who is.

The rest of that story in Exodus 32 is that some repented and were drawn back to God; others did not and there were severe consequences, including loss of life. Sin reduces God into a created image, scaling Him down to make Him subservient to man so that man can remain "in charge."

The God of the Creation Era, the God of the Patriarch Era, the God of the Exodus Era, is the One True God who is sovereign in power, judgement and redemption, remaining faithful to His people even today. Our response should be one of confession, repentance and remaining faithful to Him.