

Message #63**Exodus 32:1-14**

We have had, in the past, fellowship dinners in which about eight different people gather at someone's home for dinner and fellowship. At those dinners we talk about many different things. One of the subjects I like to bring up at our dinners is have you ever been in a situation where you actually thought you were going to die. It is interesting to hear people tell different stories of times when they thought they could really die.

Well, this is a story here where an entire nation came real close to dying and being exterminated by God. In fact, had it not been for Moses, this nation would have been totally destroyed.

We come now to one of the most famous stories in the book of Exodus. In fact, this has been called the most **“famous incident of idolatry”** in all of Scripture. This story is so famous that it is featured in a hymn in Psalm 106:19-23. In that hymn, in Psalm 106:21, the text says God's own people “forgot God their Savior.” Think of this; these people actually so forgot about the God who saved them just a few months prior that they plunged into evil, rebellious idolatry.

Really it is a very sad story because this is the story of the ultimate example of God's people acting in a manner of total rebellion.

GOD'S PEOPLE SO REBELLED AGAINST GOD THAT GOD ALMOST DESTROYED THEM ALL AND HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES, HE WOULD HAVE DESTROYED THEM.

While we were traveling to and from Tybee Island, we had pretty much smooth sailing. It is 1017 miles from our garage in Schoolcraft to my brother-in-law and sisters' parking garage in Tybee Island. We only had one real close call. The way you get to Tybee from here is simple; jump on I-75 for about eight hours and turn left onto a couple of other expressways for another eight hours and you will be there.

We were coming back from Tybee and we were at the spot where you merge onto I-75 to come north to Michigan. There is a network of expressways that merge right there. I was driving and I was carefully watching my mirrors and I began to merge onto I-75 and all of a sudden Chris, who was riding in the seat behind me, yelled. There was a vehicle in my blind spot and I did not see him and he did not see me. Well, when Chris yelled, I immediately eased back over to the right and everything was fine. But it was a very close call. We were just inches away from a very serious accident.

In this text, Israel is just inches away from being totally destroyed. She wasn't paying attention to God or His Word and God just about destroyed her right here.

Now the best way to handle this text is to march straight through the facts. There are six main facts:

FACT #1 – Moses delayed coming down the mountain so the people went to Aaron. **32:1a**

When **verse 1** says they “assembled about Aaron,” there has been some discussion concerning the Hebrew text as to whether it means “they gathered around Aaron” or “gathered against Aaron.” This is a rare Hebrew construction.

Frankly I am not enough of a Hebrew scholar to solve this. I think it is fair to say that they went to Aaron and were putting some negative pressure on him because Moses had been gone for a while.

Now the thing that prompted these people to go to Aaron was the fact that Moses “delayed” in coming down from the mountain. The word “delay” in Hebrew is interesting. It is one that means that the time delay of Moses, in coming down the mountain, caused the people to be disappointed, troubled and confused (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 109). The flare of this word would suggest that they thought this time delay was shameful, and they became very emotional. **The people were beginning to panic.**

So the first thing we learn here is that the thing that caused the people to get involved in serious sin is that God was not operating on their time schedule, and they decide to emotionally react. Moses was not the one determining how long he was supposed to be on that mountain; God was.

Apparently, if God does not move in accordance with His own people’s thinking, it can cause them to do horrible things if they are not careful. That is what happens here.

FACT #2 – The people asked Aaron to make a god for them because they did not know what had happened to Moses. **32:1b**

It is important to remember that these Israelites had come out of Egypt and the Egyptians were known for featuring all kinds of tangible idols. They had been brainwashed into believing that some tangible idol was a “god.” So what is actually happening here is that the Israelites are reverting back to their old religious way of thinking, which was contrary to the Word of God. We have seen that before. We have seen people come to this church, learn about the grace of God, and then leave the church and revert back to a system of legal law. It is the same principle.

The people wanted Aaron to make them a tangible idol/god. Now you would logically think that Aaron would say, “Are you out of your mind?” “Have you gone insane”? But their arguments seem to wear him down.

When the people say that Moses brought them out of Egypt, they are not avoiding the fact that God used Moses to do this. In fact, this is part of the problem. They apparently felt if Moses were gone, they still needed some god to be with them.

It is clear from this text that they thought they could, in some ways, get along without human leadership as long as they had some “god” with them.

Now 40 days and 40 nights seemed like a long time to these people (Ex. 24:18). Moses had been up on that mountain for quite a while and apparently the people thought he might not be coming back down.

God's people can get a little jumpy if the key leader is gone too long. When we go on vacation for 14 days, we do worry and have concerns about what is going on with the flock. In fact, one of our elders said you know how it is "when the cat is away the mice will play."

FACT #3 – Aaron had the people bring him their gold and he made a golden calf and said this is now your god. **32:2-4**

Aaron decided to give in to the pressure of the people. Apparently about everyone in this nation wore golden earrings—wives, sons and daughters. It is interesting to observe that he does not ask the men to get rid of their earrings. Many Bible scholars suggest that the men typically did not wear earrings. Only the women and children wore them.

We live in a culture in which many men think it is real fashionable to wear earrings. People today put rings in their ears and nose and lips and cheek and think it is just the mark of one who is with it. But frankly I have never known of any deeply-minded spiritual person who ever did that.

Aaron took all of the gold earrings and melted them down and constructed a golden calf. He must have had some wooden form made, perhaps of acacia wood, and then covered it with gold.

If that is not enough, after he made this, he said, "These are your gods." Aaron actually told the people that this golden calf was the god who brought them out of Egypt. **The plural "these are your gods" means that Aaron is saying this golden calf is the embodiment of all of your gods.**

How pathetic is this. There is only one true God and this one true God is the only God who is to be worshipped. This is clearly a violation of commandment #2 that says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4). This is a blatant disregard of God's Word. The people are disregarding the Word of God and so is Aaron. This group is one big spiritual mess.

Now let us not forget that these are the same people who said we will do everything God wants us to do (Ex. 24:3, 7). Apparently they had just drifted away in their thinking from what God wanted them to do.

FACT #4 – Aaron built an altar before the Lord one day and offered burnt offerings the next day. **32:5-6**

Aaron constructed an altar and declared that the next day would be a feast to the Lord, so the next day they rose up early and they offered their burnt offerings and peace offerings and they sat down to eat and to drink and play.

This was fun worship. This was like one big party. The people were gathered for their worship and the music was playing and it was good fun.

People were eating and drinking and playing. This almost sounds like some of the church services that people attend—they have the loud music and the lights and the coffee and pop and there is laughing and they call it worship.

That Hebrew word “play” means there was laughing and joking and singing and good fun (William Gesenius, *Ibid.*, p. 707). Now when you have a bunch of joking and laughing and drinking and you say this is our worship, that is a tip-off that something is drastically wrong. When God gave His specifications for worship, it is clear that it was systematic, serious, sacred and very spiritual. Real worship was not some back-slapping happy hour. But that is what these people had turned to for worship.

Now the building of this altar was not authorized by God and it had nothing to do with the sacred sanctuary and the altars pertaining to that sanctuary. Aaron and these people had just invented their own system of religion.

FACT #5 – God tells Moses to go down to the people because He is angry and is about to destroy them. **32:7-10**

It is interesting in **verse 7** that God begins with Moses by telling him these are “your people.” The reason he says this is because they were not acting like “His people” and Moses was their leader and needed to get back down that mountain.

He tells Moses that they needed to bring a halt to their meeting on top of Mt. Sinai. Moses needed to go down the mountain. Now the reason that Moses needed to get down this mountain is because they had corrupted themselves. They were acting in a very corrupt manner.

According to **verse 8**, God tells Moses they have turned away from Him and His Word and have worshipped a golden calf and said this is their god. In **verse 9** God says I have seen these people and they are “obstinate.” This particular word means they are in stubborn, obstinate rebellion in opposition against Him and His Word.

He tells Moses in **verse 10** that He has three options that He is considering:

Option #1 - God would unleash His anger against Israel—the anger and wrath of God.

Option #2 - God would destroy Israel.

Option #3 - God would make a new nation starting with Moses.

Now what this would actually mean if he started a new nation with Moses is that He would nullify the promises to Abraham in which He said He would make of him a great nation. He would start all over with Moses and destroy the Abrahamic seed.

Now this would be pretty flattering if you were Moses. Most people would let their egos get in the way here and say think of how great my name will be if God does this. But not Moses. Moses had absolutely no desire to replace Abraham. In fact, when this story all started, he didn't even want to be the one to go get Israel.

FACT #6 – Moses asked God not to destroy His people and God listened to Moses. **32:11-14**

Now Moses intercedes in behalf of Israel and he presents a series of intercessory arguments to God:

Intercessory Argument #1 - Why should God nullify the result of His Divine Power? **32:11**

Intercessory Argument #2 - Why should God grant the Egyptians delight to see God destroy His own people? **32:12**

Intercessory Argument #3 - Why should God go back on His promises to Abraham? **32:13**

This was a very logical prayer.

Now God never really wanted to destroy His people. But in response to the direct prayer of Moses, we read in **verse 14** that “the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

The Lord changed His mind concerning what He intended to do to His own people. God's people are very special to God.

The fact that God changed His mind has caused some to question things. There are many passages in Scripture that reveal God does not change His mind (Ex. 32:10-14; Jonah 3:10; Malachi 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). What most people don't realize is you cannot equate “don't change” with “don't move.” God does not change but He will move and He has structured His relationship with people in such an unchangeable way that He will move in conjunction with the prayers of His people.

For example, He says, “you do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Obviously there are things that we may ask God for that will prompt God to move to give us; but if we don't ask, He will not move. This is not a question of immutability; this is a question of immobility.

God does not change in His Person because of immutability, but He does move in regard to the prayers of His people, which is a question of His mobility. God has structured an unchangeable principle in His Word and that is when My faithful people pray, I hear and I answer. God says I move in regard to the prayers of righteous people.

Moses prayed and God answered the prayer. Had not Moses prayed, we may assume that He would not answer the prayer.

Parting Thoughts:

- 1) When God is not moving in regard to our time, we must make sure we do not regress back into a former worldliness and sin and emotionally react.**
- 2) God will not ignore rebellion.**
- 3) Prayer is a critical factor in our relationship with God.**