

## **EXODUS 32:15-35 THE GREAT SIN IS EXPOSED**

In the story of the Exodus, God was so gracious and merciful to the Israelites in delivering them out of their bondage in Egypt. What great signs He did in showing His glory in saving His people. One of the objects of God was to have the people to worship Him. For over 40 days on the mountain, Moses was receiving the instructions from God on how the people were to approach God as He would be in their presence. Right at the end of the instructions from God, Moses finds out from the Lord a tragic story. It involved rebellion, sin, apostasy, and idolatry on the part of the Israelites. They had heard the Ten Commandments from God, and they broke the first two in a short amount of time. Their first act of worship was idolatry. That is staggering they would do this. This would plague Israel throughout the centuries. God was very angry and threatened to destroy the nation, but we saw that Moses interceded for them and God relented from his earlier decision. Moses played his key role as a mediator and saved Israel from being obliterated. Had it not been for Moses, this would have happened. Moses pled on behalf of the people. He based it on God's promises and the glory of His name. This gives us a picture of the great Mediator, Jesus Christ, who interceded for us as we were rebellious sinners. People are always in the need of a mediator. We now pick up the story as Moses heads down the mountain.

### **1. MOSES CATCHES ISRAEL IN THEIR SIN VV15-20**

Moses had been told by the Lord that the nation was sinning. Now, Moses takes his trip down the mountain and sees for himself what terrible sin they were involved with.

#### **A. THE TABLETS**

God had spoken the Ten Commandments. He then elaborated on them to Moses and wrote these down on tablets of stone.

The writing was on the front and back

#### **B. THE WORDS WRITTEN BY GOD**

God not only spoke the Word but also wrote it with His own Finger.

#### **C. MOSES MEETS JOSHUA**

As Moses nears the bottom of the mountain, he runs into Joshua.

Joshua went up so far on the mountain. 24:13 tells us that.

He was faithful for the 40 days as he waited patiently for Moses.

Joshua is not aware of what is really happening in the camp below. Moses knows, but Joshua was not given any warning.

Joshua thought there must have been war in the camp with all the noise. Moses then told him it was not war, but singing.

What kind of singing could this be, as it is mistaken for war?

This singing might be an allusion to the singing after the

victory at the Sea. The celebration of this god probably had

the same kind of singing. The parody is there.

#### D. MOSES ANGRY AT THE SIN

As they get to the base of the mountain Moses saw sin the way that God sees sin. His anger burned like God's anger was described. Moses saw the ugly reality of sin. Before, he represented the people before God, now, he is representing God to the people. He realizes what exactly had taken place.

#### E. MOSES INVALIDATES THE COVENANT

The smashing of the tablets with a crash, tells the Israelites the party is over. Their own creation of worship has failed. The breaking of the tablets is more than just a graphic, depiction of hot anger. There is symbolism here as the tablets are smashed and the law is symbolically undone. By Moses doing this, the Israelites get the picture that if they are not prepared to obey the law, they don't deserve to have it. The tablets are a sign of the covenant relationship between God and the people. The breaking of the tablets was like a ceremonial action. Anyone in that culture would have known what that meant when he threw them down. Israel had broken the covenant when they broke the law of idolatry. God would have been right in wiping them all out if He would have done that because they violated the relationship in the most fundamental way.

This action must have shocked them to understand the seriousness of their sin. This sin was of extreme gravity. Moses' action of breaking the tablets stressed that like nothing else could have.

#### F. THE ADULTERY TEST

Moses was not done with his breaking. Not only was the covenant violated, but now Moses was going to violate the idol. Exodus 23:24 God tells Moses that His people were to utterly smash idols, to annihilate them when they run across them. That is what Moses did here. Moses pulverized it out of existence. He smashed the golden bull into powder and then mixed it in the water.

What happened next seems to be rather odd. Why would Moses force the Israelites to drink this concoction? They are forced to ingest their homemade god. Whatever would pass through their urinary tracts would never be used again for the making of an idol.

Numbers 5:11 This section describes a ceremony whereby a woman suspected of adultery is made to drink a mixture of water and dust from the tabernacle floor in order to determine her guilt or innocence dealing with adultery. Israel is being treated as an adulteress and she is being brought in before God to be judged for her spiritual adultery. This seems to be the significance of their act.

#### G. DISLOYALTY TO THE LORD

God is angry because His relationship of a marriage has been violated. In the second commandment God says there are to be no idols. In Exodus 20:5, He says He is a jealous God. God takes cheating on Him personally. Disloyalty to the Lord is infidelity. What God demands from everyone is loyalty. They had been spiritually unfaithful. They had their own desires. James talks about lusting and desiring for things that do not represent God. In verse

four of chapter 4 of James, there is an address to adulterers and adulteresses saying that friendship with the world is enmity with God. When we make the things of the world our friend, we are enemies of God. Verse 5 says the Spirit yearns jealously in us. Friendship with the world is a misplaced loyalty. The problem is relational. Desires that are not godly take us away from God. This is the language of marriage. It is relationship.

If we, as the spouse of God, are disloyal to Him, it is if we are as His enemy. Adultery in a marriage is very harmful and usually destroys a marriage. That is how serious it is. With our covenant with God, we are to take seriously our desires of the heart because if the desires are not of God, we are disloyal.

## **2. MOSES INTERROGATES AARON                      VV21-24**

Moses asks Aaron how could he had ever let this happen? What did the people do to you for this to be done. It surely wasn't your idea. They must have forced you, somehow. You didn't volunteer to do this did you? Aaron, you know better, they must have done something to you. There might have been some sarcasm here by Moses.

### **A. THE GREAT SIN**

This language was used as a legal term in the ancient Mid-East. It was also used for marriage contracts and it would be referring to adultery in the marriage. Gen 20:9 and 39:9 are biblical usages. This verse would be referring to spiritual adultery. In the Old Testament, this great sin also referred to idolatry. Moses is saying to Aaron, "How could you lead them into idolatry?"

### **B. AARON'S 3 PART ANSWER**

This section in some senses is laced with humor. If this sin was not so serious, it could be very funny how Aaron responds. He is trying to appease the anger of Moses like Moses appeased the anger of God.

#### **1. True statement for self justification**

Aaron responds in a way that is relaying to Moses how the people are prone to evil and prone to wander. He gives a statement on the depravity of man. He actually is putting the blame on them, denying his responsibility. But God had him in that position to keep them back from doing such things. Even if it meant his death, he should not have gone along with this in any way.

#### **2. Mitigation**

Aaron might be saying that this wasn't designed to be an idol, but was to be a physical representation of the true God's presence with them. The people thought it was time to worship God and were tired of waiting on you, Moses.

#### **3. Lie or idiomatic expression**

This is where the humor really comes into play. This is ridiculous. Hey don't look at me, I don't know how it got here.

Aaron had the audacity to say that all he had done was to put the gold in the fire and poof, out came the calf. This could be just a postposterous lie or it is a near east expression exposing his

embarrassment. He knew he messed up big time, so he said what he said, I threw it in, and out came the idol. Even the ridiculous seemed justified. He wanted to keep from being punished. What a lame answer and it serves no other purpose than to picture Aaron as a weasel and exposes the utter madness of the act. Moses doesn't even give a response as if to say he will not even dignify it with an answer.

How ridiculous it is when we try to justify our sins. We have so many lame, Aaronic excuses in our own lives.

### **3. WHOEVER IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE      VV25-29**

#### **A. GOD'S VIEWPOINT OF THE INCIDENT**

We have seen the nonsensical waffling of Aaron and now we get the perspective of God. He clarifies it and shows how it really was. The people were out of control because of Aaron.

#### **B. MOSES' CHALLENGE**

Moses now asks the people, "OK, what side are you going to be on?" He calls for loyalty. There is still faithfulness in the midst of chaos. The Levites responded and they demonstrate that God's house is still in order. The rebellion is grievous but not the final word. The guilty parties are to be put to death by the Levites to maintain order in the community. Somehow the ringleaders were going to be made known to the Levites. Maybe these were openly unrepentant and could be identified easily. Whatever it was, they strapped on the swords and killed 3000. Some of them were friends or neighbors, or even family.

The Levites demonstrated covenant loyalty that God demanded. It is interesting to note that Aaron was not killed. Maybe he was spared because of his relations to Moses and God had already chosen him to be high priest. Mercy was given to him.

#### **C. VISITATION OF JUDGMENT**

God shows how important it is to worship Him and Him alone.

This sin was the ultimate act of betrayal.

This death penalty is not extreme. If the ringleaders had been allowed to continue to influence the people, they would have been like all the other pagan nations around them. The calf had to be utterly removed and so the ones who led worshipping it had to be utterly removed.

That is the way it is with sin in our lives. We are to mortify sin, to choke it, starve it, kill it, whatever it takes to get rid of the sin that is in our hearts. We are to be ruthless with lingering sin and remove every cancerous cell like a surgeon with his scalpel. Leave no room for the enemy to retain a foothold.

### **4. THE HEART OF THE MEDIATOR      VV30-35**

#### **.A. ATONEMENT FOR A GREAT SIN**

The heart of the mediator is revealed as Moses entreats the Lord. He speaks to the Lord for the whole nation as violators of the covenant. He confesses their sins and namely *the great sin*. He knows the weight

of this sin and does not take it lightly in any way and hopes that there is some chance for forgiveness of sin.

#### B. PLEA

Moses knows that God had said that He would make a people out of Moses. Lord, forgive them, but don't destroy them. But if you do blot me out. Moses, the mediator, identified with his people, even though he was not part of this sin. This makes you think of the great Mediator, Christ. He took on our guilt and sin and was actually punished and killed for it, so we could have His righteousness. That is the glory of the new covenant.

#### C. THE LORD'S PUNISHMENT

God said that He would punish the people who deserve it. By His mercy and grace God would save the rest of the people. But these sinners were to be blotted out. Moses was to continue on leading them, but God would not forget this and in due time He had the right to punish. In the meantime they would survive and experience covenant promises. Moses, with the angel leading them, would lead the people on.

God forgives sin, but sin carries consequences. In this case a plague would be given to Israel because God would cause it in some manner. Guilt would not be swept under the rug.

God demands your loyalty. Where is *your* loyalty? It is so easy to commit spiritual adultery and so we ask what hope do *we* have?

God demands our loyalty to Him but we see that every act of sin is a desire of the heart which is disloyal to the Lord. We need His grace to be loyal. God gives a greater grace and that is where our hope lies.