

## Exodus Chapters 32 John Karmelich

1. If you asked me what is the most difficult chapter in Exodus to comprehend, this is it!
  - a) Personally, I don't have a problem with the 10 plagues on Egypt.
    - i) If God can create the heaven and the earth, he certainly can do the plagues.
  - b) Further, I don't have a problem with God giving Moses a set of "blue-prints" to build the tabernacle. Nor do I have a problem with God speaking the 10 commandments audibly to the Hebrews. God can do anything.
    - i) Like I've said many times, "If you can handle the first sentence of the Bible, the rest is easy. That is: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth."
  - c) So why do I struggle with this passage? Glad you asked! ☺
    - i) I'll explain further as I go.
2. If you've seen the movie "The Ten Commandments", you are familiar with this part of Exodus. Moses went up to the mountain for 40 days to receive all the instructions. Today, in Chapter 33, while Moses was gone, the people committed idolatry and built a "golden calf". The Hebrew people panicked because they haven't seen Moses for 40 days and assumed he must be dead. Therefore, they wanted a new "god" to lead them into the Promised Land.
3. This is the part of Exodus that is difficult for me to comprehend.
  - a) Put yourself in the mindset of one of the 2 million Hebrews.
    - i) They knew that after 400 years of slavery, God made them a promise to rescue them out of Egypt.
    - ii) They saw the 10 plagues performed on Egypt and Pharaoh.
    - iii) They saw the parting of the Red Sea.
    - iv) They were preserved in the dessert by the cloud covering, the "pillar of fire", the *daily* manna, the water coming out of the rock, etc.
  - b) Yet despite all of this evidence, they disobeyed God's 10 commandments, which was given to them audibly less than 40 days ago.
  - c) To me, this is one of the hardest things to accept about Exodus.
    - a) How can you give somebody all this evidence of the existence of God, and yet turn his or her back on the same God so quickly?
    - ii) After a few days of prayer, reading & mediation about this, the answer hit me:
      - a) I can't relate to this passage, because I'm not from that background.
      - b) I didn't spend my whole life in slavery, in a culture where the "golden calf" was a serious god.
      - c) Basically, this wasn't a temptation that I could relate to.
  - d) Which gets back to you and me. While we *can't* relate to the golden calf, we *can* relate to the concept of compromising with God. When you read Chapter 32, you don't sense a complete turn-back from God, just a series of compromises that got worse and worse.
    - i) I heard one sermon on this topic ask the question "What is your "golden calf" that you turn back to, when you get your focus off of God?"
    - ii) There is a danger to us. Especially those of us who became a Christian later in life. We've had other "other gods" prior to becoming a Christian. (A "god" is any interest/passion/sin that becomes the primary focus of your life. Everybody has a "god". Look at where you spend your discretionary income and time and you'll find your god.
    - iii) All of us go through times where we don't hear from God. This is a test on God's part to test our faithfulness. The danger to turning back to our old ways during those times. Maybe not all at once, but compromising a little at a time.

- iv) One of the greatest books in the Bible on prayer-life and keeping our focus on God is John's first letter (1<sup>st</sup> John). The last sentence/conclusion is:
  - a) "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21 NIV)
    - (1) Compromise with the world leads to us building a "golden calf".
- 4. If Chapter 32 were just about building the golden calf, it would be one of the most depressing chapters in the Bible. The good news is the second half of Chapter 32, is one of the greatest lessons on prayer in the Bible.
  - a) God knows our sinful nature. It is no accident that this chapter is placed here right after a 7-chapter description of the tabernacle, which are lessons on worshipping God.
  - b) The Hebrews committed a horrible sin. But God also provided a remedy for the process of forgiveness. That's what the rest of Chapter 32 is all about.
    - i) There are a lot of lessons here on prayer and forgiveness. Despite the horror of the sins, God is willing to forgive them, as He forgives us.
    - ii) This prayer, giving by Moses as an intercessor for the people, is a marvelous model for our prayer life.
- 5. With that, let's get to the text. Chapter 31 ended the 7-chapter construction notes given by God to Moses on the mountain. Moses is alone with God. Moses' assistant, Joshua, was probably halfway/quarter way up the mountain during the instruction time. The remaining two million Hebrews were down in the Valley. Moses' brother Aaron was left in charge.
  - a) The people haven't seen nor heard from Moses (and Joshua) for 40 days.
  - b) They still had the daily manna come down from heaven.
  - c) They still saw the "cloud cover/pillar of fire".
  - d) There was some sort of physical separation that prevented the people from going up Mt. Sinai to see what happened to Moses.
  - e) The first few verses of Chapter 32 takes place while Moses is still gone, but a few days prior to his return.
- 6. **32:1** When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered together around Aaron and said to him, "Get up, make us gods that will go before us. As for this fellow Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him!"
  - a) Aaron had his strong points. He was not afraid to face Pharaoh with Moses. He was a good speaker. Aaron had one major fault: Aaron feared man greater than God.
    - a) This weakness lead to the great tragedy we are about to read about.
  - ii) Aaron probably knew what he was doing was wrong, but was afraid of being lynched by the crowd.
    - a) There are times as a Christian we may have to stand up for God, especially when it makes us unpopular with those around us.
    - b) "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." (Proverbs 29:25 NIV)
  - b) This lesson is also about the danger of idolatry on a group level. There are many stories throughout history of individual Christian churches going into some sort of idolatrous practice. Whenever a church gets its primary focus away from 1) Worshipping God, 2) Studying the *whole* Bible and taking it seriously 3) Working as a team, praying for, and being accountable to each other, these sort of dangers set in.
    - i) Here is a fairly recent example. There was/still-is a popular movement called "The Holy Laughter" movement.
    - ii) This is where Christians are taught the Holy Spirit wants us to be so joyful, we are going to laugh out loud, roll over on the floors in laughter, and even bark like dogs! This movement became popular in a good number of churches.
      - a) It sounds ok, but it's not scriptural, which is the final test of authenticity.

- iii) Thank God for “watch-dog” ministries that expose movements like this for what they are!
    - a) Again, the simple test for idolatry is does it stand with, or stand against, the whole council of God, which is the Bible.
  - iv) Dr. J. Vernon McGee made a similar comment many years ago: “Can you imagine these people lapsing into idolatry this quickly? It would be inconceivable to me if it were not for the fact that I have watched the church lapse into apostasy that I never dreamed I would live to see.”
  - v) As Christians there *are* debatable issues. There are issues like “how should you be baptized?” or “when does the rapture occur?” that could be argued a number of ways. I don’t have a problem with any argument that can be supported *scripturally*. As far as my own views, I’m sure I’m right on some things, and wrong on others. I keep an open mind on all opposing viewpoints that can be supported by the Bible. It is the *essentials* in which we can not compromise.
    - a) I take the view that there is the “gospel”, and the rest is debate.
      - (1) “In essentials, clarity, in all other things, charity”.
        - (a) (unknown author)
    - b) OK, off my soapbox and back to the text! ☺
7. So the people threaten Moses that they want another god to lead them. Here is Aaron’s response. **32:2** So Aaron said to them, "Break off the gold earrings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." **32:3** So all the people broke off the gold earrings that were on their ears, and they brought them to Aaron. **32:4** And he received them from their hand, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molten calf. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."
- a) The calf was one of the main Egyptian gods. They believed that a god-like spirit lived within the calf. Other historians comment on the fact that earrings in that culture are often associated with idolatry.
    - i) This wasn’t the last time the gold calf was associated with idolatry. Centuries later, the Nation of Israel split into two (after the death of King Solomon). The Northern Kingdom followed this idolatrous practice when King Jeroboan installed two golden calves. (1 Kings 12:28).
  - b) I suspect that in this chapter, it was not the entire 2 million people walking up to Aaron. You are probably looking at a large group of “self-appointed” leaders who approached Aaron. They probably were influencing the crowd.
    - i) This is how idolatry starts in a church. A group or a self-appointed leader creeps in. The one-chapter Book of Jude deals with this issue
      - a) “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” (Jude 1:4 NIV)
    - ii) “Idolaters spare no expense; there is many a worshipper of a good of wood or mud who gives more to that idol than professing Christians give to the cause of the one living and true God”. Charles Spurgeon.
8. **32:5** When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it, and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow will be a feast to the Lord." **32:6** So they got up early on the next day and offered up burnt offerings, and they brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.

- a) A technical note that may help: The Hebrew word for “rose up to play” implies drunkenness, orgies and sexual play. Once the Hebrews started worshipping the golden calf, it followed with sexual, drunken parties.
    - i) “Lascivious games were sure to accompany idolatrous worship, for idolatry always leads to filthiness in some form or other, as if it were inevitable.”  
Charles Spurgeon
    - ii) Sometime, check out a church that has gotten away from the Word of God for a long time. The Unitarian Church comes to mind. They believe in Christianity, equally as much as other religions, other “great men of history”, etc. Their personal beliefs have an “anything goes as long as its ok for you” mentality.
  - b) I’m sure Aaron’s thought was not to totally abandon God. It was probably some sort of compromise, as in “Let’s worship Jehovah *through* this golden calf”. The problem is that it was a direct violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment (not make any false images).
    - i) This story can be compared today to “liberal Christianity”, or as the buzzword is used today in Christian marketing packages: “A seeker friendly church”. This is where one feels it is “ok” to compromise with the Bible, its teaching etc. in order to please the crowd.
    - ii) As a pastor-friend used to say sarcastically “You don’t like page 203 of the Bible? No problem, we’ll just tear that out and read the rest of it.” The common view of liberal churches is to accept the grace of God *without the repentance*.
9. Meanwhile, back up on the Mt. Sinai, God has a few words to say to Moses about what’s happening down in the valley: 32:7 And the Lord spoke to Moses: "Go, descend, because your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have acted corruptly. They have turned aside quickly from the way that I commanded them-they have made for themselves a molten calf, and have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'"
- a) God did not say, “Look at those idiots down there, stand back while I wipe them out?”
  - b) Notice the focus here is on *God and Moses*. Read verse 7 again. The first thing God said to Moses was “Go”.
    - i) This is the message to our leaders. God is saying, “lead the flock”. Address the problems. Stop the sin before it gets worse. Moses, *you* deal with it.
    - ii) God is saying to Moses in effect, “I appointed you leader. I, God raised you to learn leadership skills as a Pharaoh-in-training. I, God, watched you in the wilderness for 40 years working under your father-in-law to learn humility. I, God *gave* you the skills to stop a rebellion. Now get going Moses!
    - iii) The point to you and I is, God is working on us all our lives. He gives us talents and skills he expects us to use for His glory!
  - c) God refers to the Israelites as “your people” *as if* God has abandoned them. Remember the focus here is on Moses. If God *wanted* to talk directly to Aaron, he easily could call Aaron. The point here is Moses-in-training and the God is focusing on Moses.
10. **32:9** Then the Lord said to Moses: "I have seen this people, that they are a stiff-necked people. **32:10** So now, leave me alone so that my anger can burn against them and that I may consume them; and I will make from you a great nation."
- a) God is testing Moses. God is saying in effect, “This is a rotten bunch, through and through. Tell ya what Moses, let me wipe them out and I’ll make you a better group.”
  - b) Does this mean God hated the Israelites here? Of course not. God is aware of all things. He knew the Israelites were going to sin before the foundation of the world.
    - i) (If God is perfect, he must know all things. If God knows all things, then God can not learn. Remember God *created* time. He exists *outside* of time.)

- c) The more I read this passage, the more I'm convinced the whole purpose is to test Moses. To see what Moses would do. That is part of God's nature. God wants to mature us. Part of the maturation process is to test us. It is for *our* sake, not God's.
  - d) The interesting thing to speculate about is "What if Moses said, OK God, wipe 'em out and make me a new nation". If Moses gave in to that, we may not be here right now.
  - e) Many commentators talk about Moses as a "type" of Christ as an intercessor. The book of Hebrews emphasizes this:
    - i) "Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Heb. 7:25 NIV)
    - ii) This is what we are beginning to see here. Moses interceding on behalf of the people.
11. I stated at the beginning of this lesson that it is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible on prayer. Here Moses gives us a great example of how to pray on other's behalf: **32:11** But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. And he said, "O Lord, why does your anger burn against your people, whom you have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?
- a) Moses is saying, "Don't harm them. Remember all the trouble you went through to bring them out of Egypt."
    - i) Is God aware of this? Of course. Prayer is for our benefit as well as God's.
    - ii) When we see Christians in sin, we have to remember that God saved them to bring God glory. Our job is not to condemn them, no matter how bad the sin. Our job is to pray for them.
  - b) Next time, someone you know who trusts in Jesus in sin, try a prayer like this: "Dear Lord, our brother/sister is in trouble. They have failed and turned their back on you. Lord you have called that person to serve you and they have committed their life to your service. Help them to see the errors of their ways. Help the innocent people who were hurt by this event.
    - i) Prior to this prayer, remember to examine your *own* life first. Remember how Jesus teaches:
      - a) "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Mat. 7:3 NIV)
      - (1) Jesus is giving an exaggeration to make a point about hypocrisy.
      - b) The last note on this little prayer to remind us not to spread rumors. If we become aware of someone else's sin, take it to *God*, not others.
12. Moses' intercessory prayer request #2. **32:12** Why should the Egyptians say, 'For evil he led them out to kill them in the mountains, and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger, and relent of this evil against your people.
- a) We are called to be a witness to the outside world. Moses appeals to God on the basis of God's reputation. When we sin, we become a bad witness to the world around us.
    - i) Jesus said: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16 NIV)
    - ii) Next time that same friend has sinned, here is an intercessory prayer to try:
      - a) Lord, you have called us to be a good witness to you. The sin caused by (fill-in-the-blank) will/has an affect upon how others see Christians. Help us to be a good witness. Help that person (or me) to repent, and let the Spirit work through me/them to be a good witness to others.
      - b) "At the same time Lord, let me be of service to *repentance* and not condemnation. Next time, it could be *me* in the same situation. Help me to have your grace in dealing with that person and that sin."

13. **32:13** Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, and spoke to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens, and all this land that I have spoken about I will give to your descendants, and they will inherit it forever.'"
- a) The final appeal of Moses is on God's promises. God made promises to these patriarchs that God would make a great nation out of them. That prayer is good for us too.
    - i) Here is an example. "Dear Lord, right now, I don't know what is happening. But you made a specific neither promise to me that you would never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Right now, Lord, I need to claim that promise to get me through the pain.
    - ii) Here is another. "Lord I have committed a great sin. You promised that if I confess the sin (sincerely, with the attitude of repentance and a desire to change) that you would forgive me, no matter what, no matter how many times I've made the same mistake in the past (1 John 1:9). Your word has taught me that you have forgiven me, and help me to let go of the guilt and lay it at the feet of the cross. Next, let the Holy Spirit work through, to remedy the situation as much as possible, and make me into the person you want me to be!"
  - b) Back to the verses, there is a bit of trivia that you may not catch. In Genesis, God changes Jacob's name to Israel. Despite that, God often refers to the Israelite people as the "sons of Abraham Isaac *and Jacob*". Other times, the Bible will say "the sons of Abraham Isaac *and Israel*". Why does the Bible go back and forth on this?
    - i) Most scholars have deducted that whenever the Israelites are doing something good, God uses the name "Israel" to describe him. When the Israelites are messing up, God uses "Jacob". Therefore a "clue" of God's attitude at the moment is whether or not God is using the name "Jacob" or Israel".
      - a) Knowing that, notice that Moses says "Abraham, Isaac *and Israel!*"  
It's a direct appeal to how God has changed Jacob for the better.
14. **32:14** Then the Lord relented over the evil that he had said he was going to do to his people.
- a) There is a classical debate in Christianity whether or not God has the ability to change his mind. I take the view he can not. Here is my support:
    - i) "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." (Malachi 3:6, NIV, emphasis added)
      - a) (Again, notice the use of "*Jacob*" as opposed to "*Israel*". In Malachi, God was angry at the Israelites. He refers to them as the "sons of *Jacob*".)
  - b) The focus here is on God and Moses. God wanted to remind Moses of what God called him to do. To be a leader and to be an intercessor for the people.
  - c) The prayer *did* make a major difference. As we will learn from the next section of the text, the people felt remorse for their sin. I am convinced prayer did make a difference in how people repented in how they acted to Moses.
  - d) We tend to think of prayer as request to help our own lives, or some generalities like a major disaster, or praying for our government leaders. That is all good and important. Our prayer life is *also* to pray to influence the lives of those around us. Pray for your family. You would be surprised how much this helps in dealing with them, as Moses will learn. Pray for those who you have an influence upon, be it at home or work, for the same reason.
  - e) Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies. The idea is to help develop our attitude about those hurt us. The world *expects* us to retaliate when someone is our enemy. Jesus is teaching us to go "one level higher", and ask God for the strength to forgive.

- i) Remember the Proverb: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." (Proverbs 16:9 NIV)
  - ii) Here is a proverb Moses could relate to here: "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart." (Proverbs 17:3 NIV)
- 15. After Moses' has interceded in prayer, it is time for direct confrontation. **32:15** And Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. The tablets were written on both sides-on the one side and on the other they were written.
  - a) Remember that it is a long walk down that mountain. I'm sure Moses' gave time to think about all that happened on the mountain. All the discussion about the tabernacle. What he was going to say when he got to the bottom.
  - b) If you've ever carried a heavy object for a long time, that object seems to get heavier as you get tired. Here was Moses carrying these two tablets of stone, written on both sides. Moses probably kept staring at them, while he was walking down the mountain. Those stones probably gained weight during the trip. Think about "the burden of keeping the law" with all that in mind!
    - i) Moses did break them when he met the people. I bet the weight of those things gave him the idea! ☺
- 16. Before confronting the people, its time to pick up Joshua on the way down the mountain. **32:16** Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. **32:17** When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "It is the sound of war in the camp." **32:18** And Moses said, "It is not the sound of those who shout for victory, nor is it the sound of those who cry because they are overcome, but the sound of singing I hear."
  - a) Joshua was a "military guy". He led the battle against the Amalekites back in Exodus Chapter 17. When you read the book of Joshua, it is mostly about battle campaigns. While God was training Moses for leadership, Joshua's training was primarily on military leadership. So when Joshua heard the sounds coming from the camp, his first instinct from Joshua's perspective was that "It is the sound of war".
    - i) The lesson to be learned from that?
      - a) First of all, watch out for personal bias when making presumptions!
      - b) A positive note is that our bias may be an indication of what God calls us to be. God called Joshua to be a military-type leader, and gave him the skills and "thoughts" to be as such.
- 17. **32:19** And when he drew near the camp he saw the calf and the dancing, and Moses became extremely angry. He threw the tablets from his hands and broke them to pieces at the bottom of the mountain. **32:20** And then he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and poured it out on the water and made the Israelites drink it.
  - a) "Now that's leadership! Not only did Moses successfully get the Israelites to stop the idolatry, he single handedly destroyed the calf and made the people eat it!" (Jon Curson)
    - i) Jon Curson told a cute joke here too. "Moses made the people have a cow!"
  - b) Here's something to think about. Supposed Moses didn't pray on the people's behalf before he went down there? Those same people who threatened Aaron could have threatened Moses. Do you think the "golden-calf-leaders" would have repented *if* Moses hadn't prayed?
    - i) Now think about Peter right before he denied knowing Jesus. The night before, Jesus asked Peter to pray with him, and Peter, essentially, fell asleep. It makes you wonder *if* Peter would have joined the all-night prayer vigil, would the Holy Spirit have given Peter the strength to not deny Jesus?!. (Remember this is speculation, but it does give us something to think and pray about!)

18. **32:21** And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought on them so great a sin?" **32:22** And Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they tend to evil. **32:23** And they said to me, 'Make us gods that will go before us, for as for this fellow Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.' **32:24** So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and this calf came out."
- a) Whoever says the Bible doesn't contain good humor has obviously never read it. Aaron's excuse in Verse 24 is so pathetic it's very funny. Part of what makes it funny is that we can all relate to it. When we "dig ourselves in a deep whole", we will come up with the worse excuses to try to talk our way out of it."
  - b) Pride is considered the greatest sin in the Bible. Pride, in this instance is refusing to humble yourself and accept responsibility for your faults. Most arguments we get in have to do with pride and refusing to admit our faults.
    - i) When Eve ate the apple, she blamed the serpent and not herself.
    - ii) Adam blamed Eve for eating the Apple.
    - iii) Aaron blamed the people versus 32 and 33.
    - iv) Every adult, when refusing to give in to their pride, can relate to these actions.
19. **32:25** And Moses saw that the people were running wild, for Aaron had let them get out of control, to the derision from their enemies. **32:26** So Moses stood at the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites gathered themselves to him. **32:27** And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, 'Each man fasten his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and each one kill his brother, his friend and neighbor.'"
- a) First of all why did the Levites do this? Isn't that a cruel punishment for idolatry?
    - i) First of all, God already announced idolatry to be a capital offense, and the people agreed.
    - ii) I suspect the people who were killed were those who refused to repent. It was probably the people who wouldn't drink the water containing the golden calf.
    - iii) As it relates to us, sometimes we have to ex-communicate from our churches those who refuse to listen. The procedure for this is discussed by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17. (Basically, approach somebody yourself, if they refuse to repent, approach them with one/two others. If that doesn't work, they are to be out-cast from the church until they repent.)
    - iv) Sin can be like a cancer. Sometimes for the good of the rest of "the body", one has to do damage to the cancer-infected area.
      - a) Does that mean we are to commit capital punishment for idolaters? Of course not. Nothing in the New Testament teaches this. But it does call for us to outcast those who refuse to repent.
    - v) Many commentators notice a "pun" here. The Levites were to kill the sinners with "the sword" (Verse 27). Ephesians 6:17 teaches us that the "sword" is used as a "nickname" for the Word of God.
      - a) "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12 NKJV)
  - b) Second issue: Why "The Levites?"
    - i) For starters, Moses and Aaron were Levites. They may have been looking out for their own. At this point, God did not yet call the Levite tribe to be priests.



- ii) The Levites *became* associated with the priesthood. There is the possibility that God is calling *upon* the priesthood (that's us folks) to be *discerners* of idolatry. He calls on us to be on our guard against false teaching and false doctrine.
    - a) The corollary of course, is not to be "Bible police". God wants to be gentle and have a loving attitude, not bash Bibles over people's heads.
    - b) Like all other aspects of life, there is a balance.
- 20. **32:28** And the Levites did what Moses ordered, and that day about three thousand men of the people died. **32:29** And Moses said, "Your hand was filled today to the Lord, for each of you was against his son or against his brother, so he has given a blessing to you today.
  - a) Sin has consequences. God did repent from wiping out the nation, due to Moses' intercession. This doesn't mean the Israelites were free to go on their life as if nothing happened. That is what sin is like today. God will forgive us, but we still have to deal with the consequences.
    - i) This is why I don't have a problem with the death penalty and jail sentences. Can and will God forgive them? Of course. That doesn't mean they can avoid the punishment set by society.
  - b) Many commentators make a neat comparison about the 3,000 who were killed and a New Testament story.
    - i) In Exodus, 3,000 were killed for disobeying the law.
    - ii) In Acts 2:41, 3,000 were converted and added to the church through grace.
    - iii) "The law kills, but we are saved by grace".
- 21. **32:30** And on the next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a very serious sin; but now I will go up to the Lord-perhaps I can make atonement on behalf of your sin."
  - a) This seems confusing. Before Moses went down the mountain, Moses interceded on behalf of the people to not have God wipe them out.
  - b) Now that the action is over, and the people *appeared* to have repented, Moses *goes back* up the mountain to intercede *again* on the people's behalf.
    - i) After studying Chapters 32, 33 and 34. I suspect the people felt *remorse* for what they did, but not necessarily *repentance*. It is like a thief feeling remorse *after being caught*. They may realize its wrong, but the desire to repeat the action is still there.
  - c) Remember that "atonement" means covering up for sins. It does not take away from sins. The sins could only be taken away by having faith in what God *was going* to do (Old Testament perspective) and what God *did* do (New Testament perspective) through Jesus on the cross.
- 22. **32:31** So Moses returned to the Lord, and he said, "Alas, this people has committed a very serious sin, and they have made for themselves gods of gold. **32:32** But now, if you will forgive their sin..., but if not, blot me out from your book that you have written."
  - a) This is powerful stuff. Moses is saying in effect "I am willing to spend eternity in hell if you just forgive these people.
    - i) Paul himself tried that same request in the Book of Romans:
      - a) "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, (Romans 9:3 NIV)
      - b) Paul is requesting of God to send him to hell in exchange of his fellow Jews being aware that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
  - b) Here is God's response to Moses and Paul's request.

23. **32:33** And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me-that person I will blot out of my book."
- a) What is God's response to both Moses and Paul? Nope. Can't do. Why?
    - i) You can't bargain with God, even with your own soul. Both Moses and Paul were trying to make a deal with God saying "Listen God, I love my people. I am willing to spend eternity in hell if you will just do the following...".
    - ii) As noble as that sounds, God doesn't bargain. Imagine how many people would be willing to say the same thing for the sake of their spouses/children.
  - b) This is why we have to work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12). God accepts us into salvation based on our *own* commitment to Jesus Christ. We can pray for others to have their heart open to Jesus, but we can't bargain with what we have on their behalf.
  - c) Remember, when you commit your life to Jesus, you are saying, I'm yours. Nothing I have belongs to me anymore. Therefore, you have *nothing* to bargain with!
24. **32:34** So now go, lead the people to the place I have spoken to you about. Indeed, my angel will go before you. But on the day that I visit, then I will visit their sin on them. **32:35** And the Lord plagued the people, because they had made the calf-the one Aaron made.
- a) God is saying in effect: "I made a promise to the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I intend to keep it. Despite your blatant rebellion, my grace is greater!
    - i) "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more," (Romans 5:20b NIV)
  - b) Here's the "flip side": There *will* be a day of judgement. God knows all, but we don't. God *does* hold us accountable for our actions. The key is we putting our faith in what Jesus did *for* us, or are we trusting in our own self-discipline to not sin. *Next*, are we willing to let the Holy Spirit work *through* us to make us better Christians? That is what is meant by obedience.
  - c) Verse 25 mentions a "plague". It may refer to the 3,000 who were already killed or it may refer to some additional punishment. Commentators are divided on this one.
    - i) The reason God likes to be called "Father" is that God uses the family relationship (father/child) as a model of how we are to work together.
    - ii) Like a good parent, the father rewards us for good behavior, and punishes us for bad behavior. The punishment is to *remind* us of what we did and make us a better person. The primary responsibility of the parent is to *raise* the child. This is why the "plague" was necessary.
25. This story continues in Chapter 33. Since we're on page 10 already, we'll pick it up next time.
26. Let's Pray. Father, we thank you for these wonderful lessons on idolatry, prayer and repentance. Like the Israelites, we all have our "golden calves" that we turn to when we don't consider your presence. It is so easy for us to turn away from you and compromise. Help us to keep focused on you, and not the world. We also thank you for these wonderful lessons about our prayer life. Help us to be intercessors for others in prayer as Jesus is our intercessor. We know, father that *your reputation* is displayed through our actions. With that, lead us and change us to be witnesses for your Glory. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.