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**C0716 – April 25, 2006 – Ex 32:15-35 – The Mosaic Covenant  
Broken**

By making the golden calf and worshipping the golden calf they were breaking the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment “You shall have no other gods before Me”. They placed the calf before God and said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” This made God burn hot with anger. He threatened to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation. Moses wrestled with God in prayer over this people and God relented from His proposed course of action. Sometimes a translation says “God changed His mind” and this bothers a lot of people because other verses say “God doesn’t change” and it seems to contradict God’s attributes of immutability and omniscience. After studying this it is better to translate it “God relented”. That is, God relented from His proposed course of action. I do not think the open theistic answer that God changed and chose a course He did not anticipate before. Open Theism violates the biblical teaching on God’s immutability and omniscience in order to preserve libertarian free will. Nor do I think the Classical Theistic answer of anthropomorphism is correct. Classical Theism violates the biblical teaching on God’s imminence in order to preserve God’s sovereignty. My answer is that God has built enough flexibility into His overall plan that He was able to take another course of action that was consistent with His character and His overall plan. I think this answer preserves both divine sovereignty and human freedom within God’s overall plan.



God's character is immutable and God is omniscient. But God is also imminent. He does interact with His creatures in a genuine way *within history*. He does respond to human prayer in time. Being omniscient He knew from all eternity everything that would happen; the people's sin, His anger, Moses' prayer and His response. This does not mean He determined it. Knowing what would happen and determining what would happen are two different things. Calvinists err when they say that God knows because He determines. All Calvinists I have ever read say this but biblically it is not true. God knows things He did not determine (Matt 11:20ff). The bottom line is that God has a plan and God built flexibility into this plan to allow for genuine interaction between God and man. Such interactions will never change God's revealed plan. Everything He has said is certain to come to pass just as He has revealed in His word. But *some* things (not all) are open to alternative courses of action. Now, after relenting...

## 5. Moses Descent from Mt Sinai (32:15-20)

### a. The Descent of the Tablets (32:15-16)

**Exodus 32:15-16** Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one *side* and the other. <sup>16</sup>The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.

Moses had been on Mt Sinai for forty days and forty nights. He had seen the heavenly tabernacle and heard verbal instructions to accompany the building. In light of the golden calf incident he **turned and went down from the mountain** carrying with him **the two tablets of the testimony**

**in his hand.** We have learned several things about the **tablets.** *First*, there were **two tablets.** *Second*, the **tablets** were made of stone (Exod 24:12). Tradition says God took the stone from Mt Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac and where the Ark of the Covenant sat in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple. *Third*, they are called the **tablets of the testimony** because they are a testament or witness to Israel's faithfulness to YHWH. As a testament they constitute a legal document containing Israel's responsibilities to YHWH, Israel's responsibilities to man and Israel's responsibilities to nature. They contain the Ten Commandments in the Hebrew language. *Fourth*, the two tablets are small enough to fit in one of Moses' hands. *Fifth*, the tablets **were written on both sides.** There are two views as to what was written on both sides. Jewish Tradition holds that commandments 1-4 were written on one tablet and commandments 5-10 were written on the other tablet. Others suggest that the Ten Commandments were written on each tablet so there were two copies; one for the Suzerain, YHWH, and one for His Vassal, Israel. YHWH's copy was kept *inside* the Ark of the Covenant (Deut 10:5) and Israel's copy was kept *beside* the Ark of the Covenant (Deut 31:26). The latter view would be in keeping with ancient Suzerainty-Vassal treaties *Sixth*, the writing on the **tablets** was **God's writing.** Of course, the key doctrine taught here is the Doctrine of Revelation. Within the Doctrine of Revelation there are two modes of revelation. The first mode is called general revelation. General Revelation is revelation of God available to all men through things. God reveals Himself to all men through four things: 1) nature, 2) providence, 3) preservation and 4) conscience. The second mode is called special revelation. Special Revelation is revelation of God available to some men through words. God reveals Himself to some men through words in six ways: 1) by theophanies, 2) by miracles, 3) by direct communication, 4) by angels, 5) by the incarnation and 6) by the scriptures. Since the **tablets** were **God's writing** they are under the category of Special Revelation. Since God directly revealed Himself then the way He revealed Himself was, #3) "by direct communication". Since God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments this section is a totally unique section of Scripture. The rest of Scripture has dual authorship, both God and man. God is the primary author and man is the secondary author. But the Ten Commandments have single authorship, God alone. This does not mean it is more authoritative just unique. *Seventh*, God's writing was an engraving. God engraved the Ten Commandments on the **two tablets.** This is what Moses carried down the mountain.

**b. The Meeting with Joshua (32:17-18)**

**Exodus 32:17-18** Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a sound of war in the camp.” <sup>18</sup>But he said, “It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; But the sound of singing I hear.”

Where was **Joshua**? **Joshua** was up on the side of the mountain but not inside the cloud which covered the mountain. Originally, Moses and Joshua had gone up the mountain and then they waited six days until God spoke out of the cloud. When God spoke to Moses he went into the cloud and Joshua stayed outside of the cloud. So, it seems that both Moses and Joshua fasted for forty days and forty nights. Joshua remained on the side of the mountain until Moses came out. He did not go down to the base camp each night. Moses had set Aaron and Hur over the people in the absence of himself and Joshua (Exod 24:13-18. **Joshua** was stationed somewhere on the mountain out of sight of the people but close enough to hear them because verse 17 says **Joshua heard the sound of the people**. What Joshua thought he heard was **a sound of war in the camp**. But Moses knows it is not war because God has already told him what was happening (Exod 32:7-9). Moses says it was **the sound of singing**”. In other words, a celebration of singing to accompany the orgiastic dance in honor of the golden calf.

**c. The Breaking of the Covenant (32:19)**

**Exodus 32:19** It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

**Moses** and Joshua descended to base **camp** and **saw the calf and dancing**. And **Moses’ anger burned**. It is ironic that the same Hebrew words are used of God’s anger burning in verse 10. Both God and Moses’ anger burned when they saw what the Israelites were doing. Moses **threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain** in the sight of the people (Deut 9:17). The prophets often used visual actions to

portray spiritual truths. Here Moses throws and shatters the stone **tablets** to portray the fact that the Israelites had broken the Mosaic Covenant, specifically the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment “You shall have no other gods before Me”.<sup>i</sup> They had agreed to do all the commandments but just weeks later they broke them (Exod 19:8). The fact they broke the Mosaic Covenant tells us two things. *First*, it tells us that the Dispensation of the Law had already begun with the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exod 20:2ff. The dispensation did not start later when the Shechinah Glory entered the Tabernacle (Exod 40). *Second*, it tells us the Israelites needed a new heart. The old heart, the old man, the old sinful nature is not able to keep the commandments of God. The Israelites must be given a new heart, a new man, a new sinless nature which is able to keep the commandments of God. God did not promise a new heart in the Mosaic Covenant but He did in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

**Jeremiah 31:31-34 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup>not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup>“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup>“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”**

Hebrews 8 shows us that Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant and is enacted on better promises than the Mosaic Covenant (Heb 8:6). Under the Mosaic Covenant God found fault with Israel. But under the New Covenant God will find no fault with Israel because it promises a new heart. If the Old Mosaic Covenant was good enough there would have been no reason to replace it with a New Covenant. But because it was inadequate, Christ came and died and became the mediator of the New Covenant. As such the Old Mosaic Covenant was obsolete and was about to disappear when this was

written in 67AD (Heb 8:13). He was right, three years later the Temple was destroyed. When Christ came and died in 33AD the Mosaic Covenant was made obsolete. This means the Mosaic Covenant is not the rule of life for the Church age believer. We are not required to follow the Ten Commandments, much less the other 603 commandments. We are required to follow the Law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) which consists of over 1,000 commandments. The New Covenant has not yet been fulfilled but will be at the Second Coming of Christ.

So, the throwing and shattering of the stone tablets portrays Israel's need for a new heart which God knew in advance they would need (Deut 5:29). The place Moses shattered the tablets is the same place the covenant had been made in Exodus 24:4ff.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "When Moses shattered the two stone tablets, it was a clear sign that Israel had broken the covenant." (Sailhammer, 313).

<sup>ii</sup> At this point the account in Deuteronomy adds a significant feature. We already know that when God threatened to destroy the Israelites Moses prayed. Moses wrestled with God in prayer for this people. When Moses recounts the story in Deuteronomy 9:8-29 he indicates that he went down the mountain, saw the orgiastic dance and idolatry, smashed the tablets and then prayed for Israel and for Aaron for forty days and forty nights (Deut 9:18, 25). So, it appears that Moses fasted for 80 days and 80 nights. Then the story here picks up after that 40 day period of prayer.

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