

REBELLION, PART 4

EXODUS 32:15-35

Now that Moses “convinced” Yahweh to spare the people’s lives, he went down Mt. Sinai in order to deal with the situation below. It’s kind of ironic that Moses, who just pleaded with God to spare the Israelites from death, would oversee God’s judgment on the people and he would see to it that 3,000 of them die. That is obviously a far cry from wiping out the whole nation, but a bit ironic nonetheless.

Exodus 32:15–16 ¹⁵Then Moses turned [פָּנָה] 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. ¹⁶The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing engraved on the tablets.

During this time on the mountain, Moses had been in the presence of God in a most intimate manner. What we don’t know is exactly how this encounter took place. The Scriptures say God met Moses face to face and later we will discuss the issue of what it meant when it was revealed that God met both Moses and the Israelites face to face. For now, it is sufficient to realize Moses met God in a way that no other human being has ever experienced except Adam and those who were in the presence of God the Son during the Incarnation. The difference is Moses knew exactly who He was encountering, but many of the people who encountered Christ didn’t realize who they had in their presence. In the history of mankind after Adam, Moses stands alone as a man blessed to have such an intimate experience with His Creator God.

At this point in the narrative, something terrible has happened in the Israelite camp and it is something that demands leadership to rectify. Moses turned away from God and began his trek back down the mountain. Turned, פָּנָה, simply means Moses turned away from his position in the presence of God to depart and go back down the mountain to deal with the situation. It is simply a directional word.

Moses took the tablets of the testimony, the Ten Commandments, down the mountain with him. They were written on both sides and each tablet would have had all ten written on it. That was according to the prevailing manner in which covenants were enacted in that day. Each party to the Covenant received a copy; therefore, one tablet went to the Israelites and one was God's copy. The tablets were God's work and He wrote the words on the tablets. Some commentators want to deny the possibility that God wrote the words on the tablets. The skeptic's claim is when the Bible says God wrote the words on the tablets, that is figurative language signifying the superlative nature and importance of the Ten Commandments. Presumably, God also cut the stone tablets out of rock in preparation for writing on them. If so, that's interesting because the second time God ordered Moses to cut the replacement stone tablets out of stone before He wrote the commandments on them again (Ex. 34:1).

The commandments were written on stone because that was the most permanent method of preserving something whether it was art or messages, and stone was used for the highest levels of official use. Clay tablets, leather,

and papyrus were also used, but they were not as durable and therefore less permanent than stone. The tablets were not so large they could not be carried by one man. They were also small enough to be easily broken.

Joshua was the only person who accompanied Moses back up the mountain to get the stone tablets.

Exodus 24:12–13 ¹²Now the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.” ¹³So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.

There is no record that Joshua went all the way up the mountain with Moses and met God with him, but there is also no record that explicitly records the fact he stayed on a lower part of the mountain. Moses alone was called to go up and receive the tablets which at least implies Joshua didn't go all the way up with him. The text specifically reveals that “Moses went up to the mountain of God” which also seems to imply he went up to the summit alone and left Joshua at a lower elevation. I don't think there should be any doubt that Moses went on up to the summit of the mountain alone. I'm simply suggesting the text does not explicitly reveal that fact.

Exodus 32:17–18 ¹⁷Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a sound of war in the camp.” ¹⁸But 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 [צִנּוֹת] I hear.”

Joshua heard the din going forth from the camp and he thought it signified an attack on the camp. Moses, however, realized it was not the sound of war either in the form of victorious celebration or the sound of humiliating de-

feat. It was noise. It is not clear the translation should refer to singing although every major translation translates it that way. It can refer to speech and noise going back and forth as people respond to one another and/or to making noise or howling. It can refer to singing as well, but it may be referring to some kind of noise and/or speech emanating from the camp. It was just a lot of noise, the noise of a boisterous crowd engaging in out of control behavior. Joshua apparently didn't think it was singing because he didn't mention that at all. Whatever it was, it was apparent to Moses it wasn't about warfare and it wasn't good. Stuart translated the last clause of verse 18 in this way: "He [Moses] said: It is not the noise of victory and it is not the noise of defeat—the noise that I hear."¹ This word is difficult to translate because the consonants are used to make several different words the meaning of which is dependent on the vowel pointing. Given the fact they were dancing which implies music and possibly singing, it is possible that music of some sort is the focus of this verse. My thought is it refers to noise of some sort possibly the noise of idol worship, rather than singing, but I wouldn't be dogmatic about it. It is a lot of racket creating a level of noise that must have sounded like boisterous human interaction and not like warfare.

As Moses approached the camp and could see what was actually going on, he became very angry. Up on the mountain, he didn't know exactly what was going on below; God had to tell him and God was angry about it. Once Moses saw for himself what was going on, he lost his temper as well. Hearing

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 676, n. 53.

about it was one thing, but actually seeing it with his own eyes was something else. Seeing it made it all too real.

Exodus 32:19–20 ¹⁹It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned [אַף תָּרַה], and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰He took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

Moses immediately knew what the people were up to. He could see the idol and the people dancing around it. He knew exactly what that meant. It meant they had forsaken Yahweh and returned to idolatry.

The fact that Moses shattered the tablets at the foot of the mountain is quite significant. These things were written by the hand of God and Moses destroyed them in a second. This was very serious business. It signified the breaking of the Mosaic Covenant by the people and nearly led to their almost total destruction. This was the very place where the Covenant was presented to the people in the first place and where they agreed to abide by its stipulations. It was also immediately below the summit of the mountain where God's glory had been burning for the last forty days. What they were doing was literally right in God's face. In fact, the word for anger, אַף, means nose or face referring to one's countenance when angry. This was the place where the proper altar was built and sacrifices were carried out to worship Yahweh. They had just experienced amazing encounters with Yahweh in this place. This couldn't have been a more in your face type of rebellion if they had tried to make it worse. No wonder God

continually referred to them throughout their history as stubborn and stiff-necked.

Moses broke the tablets in the sight of the people. Given their knowledge of covenants and how they worked in that time, this should have been a serious and frightening thing for Moses to do.

Some commentators want to criticize Moses for becoming angry with the people. There is no indication in the text that Moses lost control of himself. Breaking the tablets was a deliberate demonstration of the fact the Covenant was broken and it may have implied judgment was imminent. We have to assume that as God's prophet, Moses was doing exactly what God wanted him to do in this situation.

His anger burned, *אָף תָּרַה*, which means to be angry, to burn with anger, or even to be enraged, but it doesn't have to indicate out of control behavior due to that anger. These words are used 52 times in the Old Testament, and they frequently refer to God who cannot be accused of losing control of Himself in anger. For example, Numbers 11:33 and Deuteronomy 31:17 use the same grammatical construction.

Numbers 11:33 ³³While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled [*אָף יהוה תָּרַה*] against the people ...

Deuteronomy 31:17 ¹⁷"Then My anger will be kindled [*אָף תָּרַה*] against them in that day ...

Obviously, God is not a man that He should get out of control, but the point is we shouldn't assume Moses was acting irrationally as a result of his anger

at the rebellion. His anger was justified and as a prophet who was intimately attuned to and connected with Yahweh, he was expressing Yahweh's anger at the rebellion as well as his own anger. This was a justified anger and it demanded action. Even Jesus experienced anger during His ministry, but it was a righteous anger directed at the unrighteous Jewish leadership (Mark 3:5). The Lord even made a whip out of cords and drove the corrupt money changers and merchants out of the Temple compound (John 2:15). There is a difference between righteous, decisive action and actions that flow from irrational, emotional, out of control anger. Moses was engaging in righteous, decisive action; that's what real leaders do.

Moses took the idol and he destroyed it by burning it. Presumably, this left behind the charcoal from the wooden form which he ground into powder and threw into the water. This was probably the water flowing from the rock God opened for them at the beginning. How much he was able to grind the gold into powder and throw into the water is not known, but the text indicates that is what he did. We do know it is possible for gold to be turned into powder, so that's not an inconceivable act. I would think it would be a bit difficult to do, but I don't work with gold so my knowledge is scant to say the least.

What is the meaning behind making the people drink it? This was a symbolic act with a purpose. This idol would not have provided enough for everyone to actually drink a bit of it and the flowing water probably carried most of it away; therefore, it had some sort of symbolic relevance. Garrett wrote, "I have

no idea how fast the stream was running, and in any case that is not significant. As a stream, it carried away the remains of the idol; as a body of water, it served the purposes of the drinking ritual. Whether the waters literally carried away the dust of the idol or whether every person literally ingested rubble from the tablets is not the point. The acts were rituals, and it is the symbolism that mattered."² This commentator thought the broken stone tablets were also ground up and thrown into the water, but the text doesn't indicate that happened.

Moses burned the bull idol and ground what was left into powder. The powder was thrown into the water which was probably the water flowing from the rock Moses struck at the beginning (Ex. 17:6). In Deuteronomy 9:21, Moses wrote this water was "the brook that came down from the mountain." Obviously, there would not have been enough powder for all the people to drink a bit of it and it would have been carried away in the flowing water. There was a point being made about the worthlessness of an idol that can be ground up into powder and discarded as so much garbage. The god the idol represents can't be all that powerful if he or she allowed that to happen to his or her representation. Drinking the powder would eventually reduce it to waste which renders it useless for building other idols and it also speaks to its worthless state as any sort of representation of a supposed god. That message is true and accurate whether or not everyone actually drank some of the powder. It is possible Moses

² Duane A. Garrett, *Kregel Exegetical Library: A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 631.

had the people file by the water supply in order to insure everyone drank of the contaminated water.

Some theologians believe drinking the powder in the water was similar to the situation revealed in Numbers 5:11-31 involving the test for adultery. In this way, the culprits in the rebellion could be identified and punished because the water would reveal their guilt. The problem with this is, the text never says this was used as a test to identify the rebels. Reading the Exodus account would never lead someone to suggest such a thing. If that test had never been used as a test for adultery, no one would have thought of that in connection with this incident. That's a position that can only be taken in hindsight which makes this assertion suspect. It is true, however, that Israel's rebellious nature and proclivity to embrace idolatry was continually, throughout their history, compared to adultery. There was a point being made about drinking the powder from the water supply, so perhaps this played a role in it, but that seems to be injecting something into the text that isn't there.

This may also have been an act of humiliation pointing out the futility and folly of worshiping worthless idols. Centuries later the prophet Isaiah would compare idolatry to eating ashes.

Isaiah 44:18–20 ¹⁸They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot comprehend. ¹⁹No one recalls, nor is there knowledge or understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire and also have baked bread over its coals. I roast meat and eat *it*. Then I make the rest of it into an abomination, I fall down before a block of wood!" ²⁰He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has

turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

The burning and grinding up of idols and the scattering of the ashes was not uncommon at the time. For whatever reason, pagans did the same thing to some idols. Josiah did something similar during the reforms he instituted in Jerusalem and Bethel.

2 Kings 23:6 ⁶He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD outside Jerusalem to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and ground *it* to dust, and threw its dust on the graves of the common people.

2 Kings 23:15 ¹⁵Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah.

Moses next turned his attention to Aaron, his brother, who was supposed to be leading the people in Moses' absence.

Exodus 32:21 ²¹Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin [גְבוּלֵי חַטָּאָה] upon them?”

It is interesting to note that Moses told Aaron he, Aaron, brought this great sin upon the people. Leadership has responsibilities and Aaron failed to exercise those responsibilities. As a result, the people committed a foolish, rebellious sin and they would suffer the consequences for it. Aaron's sin of nonfeasance was a very egregious mistake that cost the nation some serious harm. Moses rebuked Aaron for allowing that to happen because Aaron had the leadership responsibility to stop it before it got started—and he failed to do it.

Three times in this pericope Moses related the rebellion to a “great sin” (vv. 21, 30, 31) emphasizing the seriousness of what just took place. These words are only used in two other places in the Old Testament. One was in Genesis 20:9 where Abimelech accused Abraham of causing him and his kingdom to commit a great sin. The other was in 2 Kings 17:21 where it was revealed that Jeroboam committed a great sin by driving Israel away from serving the Lord. This latter sin parallels our Exodus pericope because Jeroboam also erected the bull idols for Israel to worship in place of Yahweh and proclaimed the bulls to be Israel’s god who led them out of Egypt.

Moses also acknowledged, or at least allowed for the possibility, the people pressured Aaron into allowing it. He asked Aaron, “What did this people do to you?” We noted the fact the grammar indicates the crowd was a hostile crowd. The best translation was “assembled against,” which indicates a hostile situation. This implies Aaron was intimidated into acquiescing to the demands of the people. People can be intimidated by individuals few in number threatening them; this was more than a few people. Whether it was many people or just the instigators of the rebellion challenging Aaron isn’t known, but it was probably enough of a crowd to frighten Aaron into compliance with their demands. Even if Aaron felt pressured into allowing the rebellion, that was no excuse and both men knew it.

In the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 9, we learn that Yahweh was angry enough with Aaron to put him to death along with the other rebels.

Deuteronomy 9:20²⁰“The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time.

Whether or not Aaron tried to steer the people back to worshiping Yahweh, which it appeared he may have done, the Lord viewed his failure to lead the people and his participation in the rebellion as sufficiently serious for him to forfeit his life. The same situation existed for the Israelites as a whole. Even if there was a faithful remnant who didn't rebel, which may or may not have been present, all of them were subject to forfeiture of life for the rebellion. It was a national rebellion demanding national punishment. When we study Israel, we have to keep in mind the fact there is individual salvation and there is national salvation at the same time. Israel has always been a mix of individual believers and unbelievers.

Aaron attempted to mount a defense of his actions, but it was a pretty pitiful, shift the blame, self-serving defense.

Exodus 32:22–24 ²²Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord [אֲדֹנָי] burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. ²³“For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ²⁴“I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

Aaron first attempted to sweet talk Moses by calling him “my lord,” אֲדֹנָי, which was a recognition of Moses' authority as the prophet of God and the leader of the people. That is somewhat unusual in that culture because of the prestige held by the eldest son, which, of course, was Aaron not Moses.

Aaron also attempted to placate Moses by reminding him that he knew full-well how evil the Israelites were at heart. That's true, but it doesn't mitigate Aaron's sin by abrogating his leadership responsibilities in Moses' absence and allowing the people he knew were evil to do this evil thing. The fact he tried to downplay his leadership role into that of simpleton bystander reveals his culpability. He knew what his responsibility was; he just didn't do it. Aaron may even be accusing Moses of overreacting; after all, Moses, according to Aaron, already knew how fickle the Israelites could be. That sounds like a theology of low expectations; if believers are so evil and so rebellious, then why bother to resist them? It's easier to simply go with the flow and not interfere. The problem is that is not the way God's leaders are called to lead. They are to guide and protect the flock, even from themselves, no matter the personal cost to the leader. It's called faithfulness. At this point, Aaron had proven to be somewhat less than faithful. Moses wasn't about to let him off the hook. Moses did, however, intercede on Aaron's behalf before Yahweh just as he interceded on behalf of all the Israelites. The picture we get here on the part of Yahweh and Moses, is one of anger at the rebellion but love for the people who rebelled. Correction and restoration are the ultimate goal. In terms of the Israelites and history, that hasn't changed. To this day, the goal is still correction and restoration. The evidence of that is the current preservation through the Diaspora and restoration back into the land in preparation for future discipline in the time of Jacob's trouble followed by the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

Aaron also tried to blame Moses by repeating the words of the people. Their thinking was Moses apparently abandoned them and they didn't know whether or not he was coming back. They needed a god to lead them. At least some of them seemingly thought Moses was with Yahweh and he wasn't coming back. If Moses didn't come back, then Yahweh wasn't with them either.

Aaron made the ridiculous claim this idol just sort of happened all by itself. Aaron tried to say he had no part in it whatsoever. That argument is silly and juvenile and wouldn't fool anyone. Obviously, it didn't fool Moses either.

Moses realized what a terrible situation the Israelites had put themselves into and he called for help from faithful Israelites to rally to him and assist him in quelling the rebellion in order to right this terrible wrong.

Exodus 32:25–26 ²⁵Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control— [פָּרַעַ] for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision [שְׂמֵצָה] among their enemies— ²⁶then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.

Out of control, פָּרַעַ, means to let go, to let loose, to unbind, and to be out of control. It is state in which a mob or group has no restraint in activities implying open defiance of a known standard or authority. Moses knew where the blame lied for that condition and it was on the man who was supposed to be leading them which was his brother, Aaron.

Derision, שְׂמֵצָה, is a word used only once in the Old Testament and its meaning is unclear. It is variously translated derision, shame, weakness, laughingstock, and menace. Menace doesn't seem to fit the context. Why would Is-

rael's enemies viewing them as a menace who should be feared be a problem? Every strong nation wants to be feared by its enemies and Israel would have welcomed being feared by her enemies. On the other hand, if Israel's enemies were viewing them as weak, Israel would be at risk. That seems to fit the context. Moses was worried not only about the physical preservation and future of the nation, but he was also worried about their status as a people set apart by and for Yahweh. That exalted position was in serious jeopardy.

Moses issued a call for any man who was for the Lord to answer to respond to him and be a force used to put an end to the idolatry. The only men who responded were Levites. Whether or not they had participated in the idolatry, and it seems likely many of them did, they were forgiven and restored to service at that moment. Some theologians believe this proves the Levites did not participate in the rebellion but that seems unlikely. Possible, but unlikely; participation seemed be widespread among the people. Since Moses and Aaron were Levites, we can't discount some sense of familial loyalty in play, but hopefully they were, in fact, being loyal to Yahweh in answering Moses' call. At any rate, they would be rewarded for their faithfulness by means of their eventual appointment to service in the Tabernacle.

Yahweh apparently ordered the death of some of the people. This command was not recorded in the Scripture apart from what Moses revealed in this verse. This was a command communicated to Moses by Yahweh who dutifully relayed the command to the men who responded to his call.

Exodus 32:27–28 ²⁷He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” ²⁸So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

This might give the impression they were out indiscriminately killing people, but that cannot be the situation. If they were doing that, a lot more people would have perished. If they only killed the people who participated in the rebellion, then it was a very small rebellion in comparison to the total population; therefore, that seems unlikely. Whether this was the leaders of the insurrection or people who refused to cease their idolatrous worship or both, they were to seek them out and slay them. They were not to give any regard to personal feelings about these people; they were to do the Lord's business and remove the idolaters from the nation. The fact is the particulars about the slain Israelites is not known. We are not told the timing of these events. Were the people still participating in the pagan worship when the Levites began their work, or did they disperse when Moses returned and broke the tablets in their sight? Their revelry should have been at least somewhat around the altar but the Levites went throughout the camp.

This was the point where the appointment of the Levites to their role as the servants of the Tabernacle was established although that is not explicitly stated.

Exodus 32:29 ²⁹Then Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”

The Levites were commended and rewarded for their faithfulness to God without consideration for their own personal circumstances. The blessing seems to have been their appointment to service the Tabernacle as they assisted the priests in their duties but that only becomes apparent in hindsight. Moses seemed to allude to this situation and to their worship duties in the blessing he bestowed on the Levites shortly before his death. Moses already knew the priesthood had been assigned to the line of Levi through Aaron and his descendants (Ex. 27:21-28:1), but that assignment had not yet been revealed to anyone.

Deuteronomy 33:8–11 ⁸Of Levi he said, “Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; ⁹Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Your word, And kept Your covenant. ¹⁰“They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, And whole burnt offerings on Your altar. ¹¹“O LORD, bless his substance, And accept the work of his hands; Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, And those who hate him, so that they will not rise *again*.”

It is possible Christ Jesus had this Exodus situation in mind when He spoke to a large crowd following Him concerning discipleship. He was certainly referring to a calling that transcends our human, temporal relationships. Obviously, the Lord was using figurative language, but He was talking about priorities. That day at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Levites prioritized what was important.

Luke 14:26 ²⁶“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

What did the Levites accomplish on that day? What did that say about their relationship with Yahweh. “After killing three thousand ... people, the Levites succeeded in ending the idolatry at Sinai. Their willingness to kill all the committed idolaters, regardless of whether or not they were Levites or family members or friends was evidence of their own devotion to Yahweh and further confirmation of their appropriateness as the clergy tribe of Israel (‘today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD’). The Hebrew of the verse can be literally translated ‘consecrate yourselves today to Yahweh’ since the verb involved is an imperative. Whatever the Levites may have been expecting about their role as the clergy/priestly tribe prior to this point, they now knew that through Moses’ instruction God was setting them aside for that special purpose. What they did in killing friends and family members must have been agonizingly difficult for most of them; but it was faithful to God’s will and therefore earned them his blessing. Israel was once again—however tentatively—free of idolatry, and Yahweh was once again Israel’s sole focus of worship.”³

I wouldn’t agree with all of Stuart’s conclusions. I doubt they killed all the idolaters. In a moment, we will note many more were killed by Yahweh which must mean the Levites did not eradicate all of them. They also did not know at that point they were being appointed to service the Tabernacle. I don’t think Israel was completely free of idolatry even at that moment. It may not have been public, but the Israelite heart was stubborn when it came to false worship.

³ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 682.

Nevertheless, his point concerning devotion to God is completely correct and it's a point we would do well to emulate.

Moses told the people he was going to intercede for them. They probably didn't know he had already done so and saved their lives.

Exodus 32:30 ³⁰On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

The point of this time of intercession was not to save the people's lives but to make atonement for them, that is, to restore them to fellowship with Yahweh. This isn't about saving in terms of justification salvation; they were already saved—or at least the vast majority was saved. This was about restoring fellowship among the members of the family of God. That is a crucial distinction which still applies today. Once we are saved, we can't be removed from the family of God; we are always members of the family. Faithfulness within the family is another issue altogether and that's what was happening in this rebellion. The Israelites fractured their relationship with the Father and needed restoration in order to reestablish familial harmony.

Exodus 32:31–32 ³¹Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. ³²"But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"

Notice Moses did not say "they have made of You a god of gold;" he said "they have made a god of gold." That is another bit of evidence they were not worshiping the calf as a representation of Yahweh. They turned back to idolatry.

Moses asked God to forgive the people, but if not, then rather than being the father of a new people, Moses would rather be blotted out of the book which God has written. This cannot be the book of life as we know it in this dispensation which is an account of the saved. Because we are almost out of time, I will discuss the nature of this book next week. Moses was apparently willing to be removed from the community along with all the other Israelites if God was not willing to restore them.

God holds people accountable for their own sin, then and now. Ezekiel 18 deals with this issue in depth.

Exodus 32:33 ³³The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

Deuteronomy 24:16 ¹⁶"Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

The Lord accepted Moses' entreaty on behalf of the people, but that didn't mean the people wouldn't be held accountable for their behavior not only in this instance, but in the future.

Exodus 32:34 ³⁴"But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin."

God promised Moses He would provide angelic guidance for the nation as they travel to the place God already revealed to Moses. Yahweh never promised to let the Israelites live any way they thought fit. They were to

live according to His precepts and if they didn't, they would suffer disciplinary consequences.

This not only has an immediate application concerning the rebellion at Mt. Sinai, but it also refers to the future. God was still going to further punish the Israelites for their return to idolatry. There also seems to be an eschatological element to this promise. The Israelites would face numerous instances of temporal judgment throughout their history and they would also face some major, even catastrophic, judgments far into the future. The Assyrian destruction of Israel was one and the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the subsequent captivity was another. The Roman destruction of Israel and the diaspora is a judgment that is ongoing to this day. Finally, the Tribulation will be the last judgment levied against Israel and it will result in complete restoration of the nation and everlasting fellowship between the Jewish people and Yahweh.

In addition to the justice administered by the Israelites, the Lord also inflicted some punishment on them for their rebellion.

Exodus 32:35 ³⁵Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

Exodus doesn't say anything more about this judgment, but Paul referenced it in his first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 10:6-8 ⁶Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." ⁸Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

