

- Let's consider why the Lord chose to share this news with Moses in this way, while they were meeting on the mountain.

1. The Lord could have waited for Moses to learn on his own, but the Lord wanted to invite Moses into a conversation now.

First... we've already noted how the Lord pointedly called Israel Moses' people, not His own people.

- Vs.9... the Lord declares that the Jewish people are an obstinate people
 - The word obstinate literally translates as the back of the neck.
 - God is saying that they are stubborn and stiff-necked.
- God uses the neck as his description of the people is because the neck controls the attitude of the head.
 - When the head is submitted, it bows.
 - When it is resistant, it remains upright.
 - The neck that's stiff refuses to submit to God's authority.
 - These people are have not submitted to His authority.
- The Lord is leading Moses to a conclusion.
 - The people haven't submitted to the Lord's authority.
 - They are following Moses, yes, but they aren't following the Lord in the hearts.
 - Which is why the Lord called them Moses' people.

Second... Moses knows what it means to resist the Lord's will.

- He saw the effect in Egypt, as the nation was crushed.
- And he saw it in his own life when the Lord sought to take his son's life for Moses' disobedience.
- So Moses knows that the Lord is willing to bring judgment for failure to submit.

Finally... Moses realizes that something must be done or the people will perish and he is the only one to do it.

- The Lord has allowed Moses to become the hope of Israel in this moment.
- If Moses is willing to intercede, the nation can be spared.
- The key to understanding this scene is noticing the Lord says "let Me alone" so the Lord's anger may destroy the people.

2. The Lord is testing Moses

- The Lord has given Moses a opportunity to intercede.
- The Lord prepared to act in judgment over these people, but He is also willing to forgo punishment for the sake of His servant Moses.

3. So then Moses responds in the expected manner.

- Instead of leaving God alone as the Lord asked, Moses does the opposite.
 - He petitions the Lord to save Israel.
 - Moses intercedes for Israel as their representative.
 - Moses makes his appeal based on three arguments.

First... Moses appeals to God's love and compassion.

- He says these are the people you brought up out of Egypt.
- Moses is implying that the Lord's prior actions demonstrate His care for the nation, and so He can't reject those He has chosen.

Second... Moses appeals to the Lord's name and reputation

- Should the Lord destroy Israel, then the testimony of the Exodus would be entirely different than it is today.

- Instead of a story of the Lord rescuing His people from slavery, it would be a story of God destroying His people.
- And God enemies could use this to impugn God's character.

Finally... Moses reminds God of His promises to Abraham

- Moses was descendant of Abraham, so the Lord could have restarted the nation with Moses
- Moses is one of Abraham's descendants himself, no different than the rest of Israel.
- So why would there be any likelihood that Moses' descendants would do any better than the rest of Israel?
- The problem of sin in Israel isn't going to come to an end just because the nation starts again with Moses.

4. Vs.12... Moses tries to close the deal by asking God to change His mind.

5. Vs.14... we're told that God responds to Moses' request by agreeing to change His plans.

- This statement commonly causes students some concern, since we know that other scripture tells us that God does not change His mind... 1Sam. 15:29
- ***How do we understand what's happening here then?***

First... remember how this conversation started

- The Lord told Moses to "let me alone" and if Moses complied, then the Lord would destroy Israel.
- This was a clear invitation for Moses to intervene and advocate for the sake of Israel.
- The Lord expected Moses to intervene, and he did.
- So clearly the Lord didn't intend to destroy His people.
- God wanted Moses to assume the role of intercessor for Israel.

Second... students of Genesis should notice a striking similarity between this moment and the moment when God visited Abraham before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18.

- In that situation, the Lord intended to destroy wickedness and gave Abraham a chance to spare the righteous.
- God revealed a plan in advance.
- Abraham interceded for Lot and his family desiring to change God's plan.
- God agreed to Abraham's request.
- But Abraham's intercession confirmed the very thing God intended to do in the first place.
- From Abraham's point of view he thought he had influencing the outcome and changed God's mind.
- Nevertheless, his intercession went according to God's plan, which is why the Lord revealed His plans in advance.

Third... This moment in Exodus 32 plays out in a similar fashion

- The Lord invites Moses to act as an intercessor to save Israel from the destruction they deserve.
- From man's point of view, God changed His mind.
- But from God's perspective, everything went as planned.

The Lord accomplished 3 things...

1st... the Lord sets the expectation that as the individual Jew goes, so goes the nation under the covenant.

- The Lord was prepared to wipe out all Israel because of the sins of a few who participated in this debauchery.
- If any in the nation sin under the agreement, then the entire nation has broken the covenant.
 - This principle becomes the basis for the Lord setting the entire nation outside the land in a future day because of sins of the leaders.
 - This is why the entire nation lost opportunity to receive the Messiah when the Pharisee's rejected Jesus, though some Jews accepted Him.

- But this is also why the Bible says the Lord will save all Israel on earth in the last day
- God will always treat the nation of people who are Israel as a nation because of this covenant

2nd ... the Lord prepares Moses to act as His representative.

- As God's representative, Moses must know God's wrath and intolerance for sin.
- And Moses must be prepared to act as judge when necessary
- Yet Moses must also maintain a heart of compassion and understanding interceding on behalf of the people when inevitable sin comes along.
- Like the Lord, Moses must judge the people, but he is not called to destroy the people

3rd ... the Lord used Moses to yield a powerful picture of Christ in this exchange.

- Moses is the representative of God's people before the Lord.
 - He must intercede on behalf of the people to save them from God's wrath for sin.
 - And because of Moses work, the Lord will not bring His wrath against the people.
 - The people deserve destruction, but because of the work of another on their behalf, they can be spared from the wrath of God.
 - Jesus acts as both intercessor and judge.
 - Today, Jesus is serving as our representative to the Father, interceding on our behalf in the face of our sins.
 - But in a future day, the Father will assign all judgment to the Son and He will bring judgment against all sin.

Verses 15 - 19... Moses returns carrying the two tablets

- As we discussed earlier in the study, the tablets were written on front and back in duplicate
 - Each tablet contained a complete set of God's commands.
 - And they were written by the finger of God.
 - We also know that angels were involved in the delivery, so it's likely that the angels attended to the preparing of the stones in some way.
 - But the handwriting was God's
 - The only other time we hear of God's finger writing was when Jesus wrote in the dirt in John 8.
 - This has led some to think that Jesus was writing the Law again to make a point
 - I have my own theory, which you can learn in the teaching on the Adulterous Woman in John 8.
- As Moses descends, he meets back up with Joshua, who has been enjoying an extended period of alone time on the mountain.
 - Joshua was left here for the same 40 days Moses was above.
 - When they meet up, Joshua remarks that the sound in the camp below sounds like war taking place.
 - What he probably meant was that sounds of men and women shrieking or crying out sounded like that of men and women dying or in distress.
 - But Moses knew better

- He says it's not triumph or defeat in battle.
 - It's singing.
 - Once Moses gets within sight of the camp, he finds quite a scene.
- 3. First, he saw the calf.
 - This idol was intended to replace Moses and lead the people.
 - Ironically, the calf was to stand for God but it actually represented Satan.
 - In fact, Baal is a pagan god associated with Satan worship in the form of a bull.
- 4. Next he witnessed dancing.
 - Dancing isn't itself a problem.
 - There is a holy form which is praise to God.
 - The problem is when dancing becomes an alcohol-fueled prelude to sexual activity...that's sin.
- 5. In response to what he saw, Moses reacts in anger.
 - He throws the tablets down on the ground and they break.
 - In that instant, Moses created a perfect symbol of the moment.
 - The people of Israel had broken the ten commandments.
 - And they had broken the covenant they had made with the Lord.
 - Moses then takes several steps to correct the situation.

Verses 19 - 20... Moses breaks up the festivities, seizes the calf

1. Then Moses proceeds to destroy the calf.
 - First he burns it.
 - Then he ground it into powder.
 - Then he scattered the powder on water so that the Israelites drank it.
2. This descriptions raises a number of questions
 - Like how can gold be burned?
 - Why did Moses want the people to drink it?
3. **First...** the construction of the calf was not pure gold.
 - In v.4 the description of Aaron's actions suggest carving took place.
 - In Egypt, statues and idols were commonly made of wood and covered in layers of gold, which is probably what Aaron did.
 - So the idol could be burned to remove the wood leaving only the gold behind.

Second... the gold slag was ground into powder, presumably through laborers.

 - Moses scattered the gold dust on the Israelites' water supply.
 - The water supply at the base of the mountain was a lake formed from the flow of the water from the rock.
 - Moses didn't line up the nation to drink the gold.
 - He merely scattered the gold over water supply so that every Israelite couldn't help but consume the idol eventually.
4. The point in this action was not as a punishment for Israel nor for atonement.
 - The point was to destroy the idol fully and then pollute it so that it could never be reconstituted
 - Assuming the gold dust could have even be collected and melted down again, it had gone through the digestive tract of the people and become refuse
 - It was unclean now

5. This same approach to destroying idols is repeated at other times in Israel's history.
2 Kings 23:6

Verses 21 - 24... Moses begins his inquiry by assuming that Aaron must have been forced to go along with this plan

1. In trying to defend himself, Aaron only proceeds to convict himself with a bad excuse.
 - Generally speaking, anytime you hear an excuse begin with the phrase "Don't be angry..." you can be sure that when all has been said, you will have good reason to be angry
 - Aaron immediately places the blame on the people
 - Aaron reminds Moses that he knows these people are prone to evil
 - Wouldn't that be the reason Moses left Aaron in charge?
2. It's interesting that we have Moses' account in the first part of this chapter given already
 - So now we can contrast it with Aaron's own account
 - If Aaron had known Moses was going to be writing all this down later, he might have chosen his words better.
 - The differences between what Moses reported and what Aaron said are apparent
 - Aaron says men came to him asking for a god to go before them, since Moses wasn't coming back (true)
 - Aaron says he replied by asking for gold (true)
 - Then he placed the gold in the fire (true)
 - Behold, out popped a calf - a miracle! (silly lie)
 - Aaron does everything he can to remove himself from any decisions.
 - Others asked, he participated against his own will...the result was out of his hands.
 - Moses' question suggests that Moses saw the situation differently
 - As if to say, "I can't imagine any good reason why you would have voluntarily allowed this to take place."
 - Moses expected Aaron to lead Israel away from this situation

Spiritual Truth...

1. When leaders are corrupt or incompetent, the people will always suffer!

- Bad leadership simply gives opportunity for group sin to emerge
- The sheep are given shepherds because it's better than allowing sheep to oversee themselves, as this scene demonstrates.

2. God expects leaders to give account for the results of those under their charge.

Hebrews 13:17

- The scripture commands us to obey and respect our leaders, because they tasked with watching over our souls.
 - Watching over souls means shepherding our spiritual development.
 - That is the role of a spiritual leader in the church.

3. We are to make that job as easy as it can be, because the easier it is for a leader to shepherd us, the more we have opportunity to learn and mature.

- This truth is predicated on the assumption that our leaders are teaching and leading us in Biblically appropriate ways.
- We should make their job easier, not harder.
- They will give an account (or report) of our souls.

3. Aaron's *coup de gras* was claiming that he played no part in forming the golden calf.
 - His explanation is so absurd, Moses doesn't even dignify it with an answer.
 - Clearly Aaron was party to the sin, and Moses left it at that

Verses 25 - 28... Moses then moves to make an example of the leaders of this rebellion

1. In v.25 we're told Moses saw the people out of control because Aaron allowed them to get this way.
 - The phrase "*out of control*" is literally the word "*unfastened*" in Hebrew, referring to the way their clothes had come off.
2. We remember from the earlier part of this chapter that the rebellion was instigated by a group of men within the camp
 - these men led the rest of the nation into sin
 - Aaron's fault was in not standing up to these men
 - Perhaps he was intimidated by the number of them
 - So here we see Moses begin with judging the men who committed this sin against the Lord
3. Moses begins by asking for men who would stand with him
 - Moses was asking for volunteers to perform the necessary justice against the men who committed the crime.
 - He's asking for an impromptu executioners force, and everyone knew this is what Moses wanted.
 - In the face of this request, only the tribe of Levi volunteered for the duty, perhaps because they wanted to stand with another member of their tribe.
4. So the Levites are called upon to kill the 3,000 men who instigated the rebellion in the camp.
 - This required the men kill people they knew.
 - This was a merciless punishment
 - Why does God ask for death in this case?
 - Simply because His word required this penalty.
 - Furthermore, the penalty for sin under the Law is death.
 - And the nation had yet to see God's justice in their own camp.
 - They needed to understand the penalty that sin requires.
 - They needed to appreciate the seriousness of the covenant.

Verses 29 - 35...

1. For restored fellowship... there must be a price paid and an atonement made for the sin
 - In this case, the Lord doesn't choose to make a substitute available.
 - Instead, He requires the life of every man who led the rebellion.
 - They will pay the price for their own sin.
2. How will the nation's sin under the covenant itself be addressed?
 - Moses needs to seek the Lord's forgiveness for the nation
 - The next day, Moses tells the people he is going back up the mountain to make his appeal to God.
 - Then Moses asks the Lord to forgive the people for their sin under the covenant
 - And if the Lord will not forgive them, Moses asks to be condemned in their place