



LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 4: Exodus 32

Relapse

October 9, 2016

Before you begin this study, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God is saying in these scriptures.

Day 1: read Exodus 32: 1-6

- In verse 1, what did the people “see”?** The people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain. **How long was Moses on the mountain and what was he doing (Exodus 24: 15-18)?** Moses is on the top of Mt. Sinai as this chapter begins. He has been there 40 days and nights. **How did the Israelites respond to his long absence? Why did they respond this way?** The people are wondering where he was and what had happened to the person who had brought them out of Egypt. Has he abandoned them? Has he died? Moses was their recognized leader and was also their chief intermediary with God, so it was natural for them to be concerned about a lengthy absence.

What other times did Moses go up to the mountain? (see Exodus 19:3-7; 19:20-25; 24:1-2, 9-18; and 31:18) Note who goes with him, when he goes alone, and what happens. In Exodus 19:3-7 and 31:18, Moses goes up the mountain alone. The first verses are about God giving Moses a covenant. The people, if they obey Him, will be his treasured possession, a holy people, a kingly people. The second is the giving of the Tablets of the Law (the first time). In Exodus 19:20-25, Moses goes up with Aaron. God gave instructions about the people not going onto the mountain. In Exodus 24: 1-2 and 9-18, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu (sons of Aaron), and 70 elders went up the mountain for instruction and consecration to their desire to follow the covenant.
- What did the Israelites want Aaron to make? Why? What do you think they were really searching for?** The people ask Aaron to “make gods” for them. They are looking for a god that they can see, quantify and understand. They probably also remembered the many gods in Egypt, and were perhaps searching for some stability in their lives.
- In verses 2-3, what did Aaron ask the people to do? Why do you think Aaron did this?** Aaron asks the people to bring him their gold earrings. In Genesis 35:4, we see that earrings at that time were considered to be associated with idolatry, used as good luck charms. The Egyptians also associated earrings with their idolatrous beliefs

What was Aaron’s leadership role among the Israelites? Aaron was given to Moses to be his spokesperson when Moses felt that he would not be a good leader because of a speech problem. After 40 years in Midian, Moses would not have known the Israelite leaders. Aaron would have introduced him and convinced the people to accept Moses as their leader. He stood with Moses before Pharaoh. When the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur held Moses’ hands aloft with the staff of God. When the tabernacle was established, Aaron was ordained as the first High Priest. He was the one allowed to commune with God in the Holy Place. His garments “bore the means of making decisions for the Israelites” (Exodus 28:30). He and his descendants were to be the priests in a lasting ordinance. He was given instruction for how he was to care for the tabernacle and perform all sacrifices. When Moses went up the mountain to meet with God for an extended period, he left Aaron in charge, and the people saw him as their leader at that time. His reaction to the people asking for him to make them gods shows that although Aaron was a tremendous help to Moses in his leadership, Aaron was not an especially good

leader. He was swayed by the will of the people and could not hold fast to God's will. This weakness led to great wrath on the part of God.

4. **In verses 4-6, what did Aaron do with the gold jewelry?** Aaron made a golden calf, which he cast and fashioned with a tool. **Why do you think he made a calf?** The calf was probably not chosen as a random being to idolize. Bull worship was very common in Egypt and among the Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians and Phoenicians. In Egypt, the people worshipped live animals as they do in the Hindu religion today. Many of the cultures did worship gold or gilt images. The bull was usually worshipped for strength and/or reproduction. When the kingdom of Israel divided, the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, had two golden calves formed. He placed them at Bethel and Dan for the purpose of worship (see I Kings 12:26-30). **What was involved in their worship of the calf?** They ate, drank, and engaged in revelry (immoral orgies). **Compare verses 4-6 with Exodus 20: 4-6. How does the golden calf violate God's commandments?** In Exodus 20:4-6 and 22-23, God makes it crystal clear that we should not make images for ourselves of anything in heaven, on earth, or in the oceans that we would revere or bow down to. We are not to make any gods of silver or gold. So, what Aaron did was in complete and total defiance of God's law.
5. **What idols have you created? At what times in your life did this happen? Why do we create idols? How do we craft our own substitute God-presence?** Sometimes God may have seemed distant, and we wanted a god we could see or touch. Sometimes we may have been rebellious, wanting to forsake the traditions of our families. Sometimes our dependence on or love for something may have grown beyond our ability to control. We would not necessarily make a conscious choice to create or worship an idol, but over time we gradually become more attached to and dependent on the objects of our affections.

Digging deeper: Israel and idols

The story of the golden calf is not, unfortunately, the only example of the Israelites worshipping idols, despite repeated warnings from God and from their leaders. Sometimes they worshipped idols from the surrounding nations. For example, Numbers 25 reports the worship of Moabite gods. Judges 2-6 describes how a new generation of Israelites after Joshua's death served gods of neighboring nations. I Kings 11 notes that even Solomon and his wives worshipped idols. Other times, the Israelites worshipped idols they themselves had made. For example, I Kings 12 reports that King Jeroboam made calf idols at Bethel and Dan. Despite this long history of idol worship, there were times when the Israelites forsook their idols, often under the leadership of righteous kings and judges; see II Chronicles 31:1 (Hezekiah), Judges 6 (judges), I Samuel 7:3 (Samuel). The nation of Israel also heard repeated warnings about idolatry from their leaders; see the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, Moses's address to the people in Deuteronomy 32, Samuel's warning in I Samuel 7, and Joshua's speech in Joshua 23-24. Several Old Testament passages, like the story of the golden calf, emphasize God's righteous anger at this idol worship (see Psalm 78: 58, Judges 3-6).

The NIV Study Bible (p. 519) describes four ways in which idols are appealing, both to Israel and now to us. Idols give a sense of power and control. Idols give a sense of pleasure and often sensuality. Idols involve a sense of passion. And idols provide a sense of praise. Each of these appeals is false, and we must resist idolatry with all of our might, through God's strength. God alone is the true God, and our worship must be focused entirely on Him. May God give us the strength to resist these appeals, to resist the attractions of false gods, and to serve the God of creation and redemption.

Day 2: read Exodus 32: 7-14

1. **What does God tell Moses in verses 7-8?** God tells Moses that “your people” made an idol shaped like a calf and have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it. **Why do you think God responded this way?** God responds to the calf with great wrath. Not only had God just told the Israelites not to make any graven images, but God had also provided special care for the Israelites during their time in Egypt and throughout their exodus out of Egypt. This was definitely not the first time that the Israelites had disappointed God.
2. **Note what God called the people of Israel in verse 7.** He tells Moses that the Israelites are “*your* people whom *you* brought up from out of Egypt”. **What does God call the Israelites in verse 9? Why did God call the Israelites a “stiff-necked people”? What does this mean?** He refers to the Israelites as “stiff-necked” which indicates stubborn or obstinate, like an ox or a horse that will not respond to the reins. Too often the Israelites were ungrateful for what God had done for them and unwilling to accept God’s promises for the future. **In what ways are you “stiff-necked”? Why? With what results or consequences?**
3. **In verse 10, what does God propose to do to the Israelites?** God speaks of His anger burning against them, destroying these people, and making the great nation through Moses alone. **Why would a loving God, who had rescued the Israelites from slavery, now burn with anger and want to destroy them? What does this tell us about God?** God is righteous, unwilling to accept human behavior that seeks to replace God. God is just, knowing that wrongful thoughts and deeds must be punished. God is faithful, disappointed with those who forget or reject God’s promises.
4. **In verses 11-13, Moses intercedes for Israel. What arguments did he make about why God should not destroy Israel?** Moses challenges God, and in so doing teaches us a valuable lesson about prayer. He is able to move the hand of God when he implores him: These are *your* people, whom *you* led out of Egypt; the Egyptians will love this – they will believe that you took them out of Egypt merely to slay them; and you promised the patriarchs that their descendants would number as the stars and that they would inherit the land you promised to Abraham.
5. **In verse 14, how did God respond?** God relented and did not destroy Israel. **Why do you think God changed His mind? Are there other times when God seems to have relented or changed His mind and shown mercy in a situation of anger? Do you recall situations when intercessions by people appeared to make a difference in the outcome of a situation?**

Day 3: read Exodus 32: 15-20

1. **In verses 15-16, what did Moses carry with him when he went down the mountain? Whose work were these tablets (see also Exodus 31:18)? What happened to the tablets?** The two tablets of testimony with the ten commandments – the original tablets were made and written by God. The second set were prepared by Moses (hewn), but God again wrote on them. The Israelites were instructed to place the tablets into the Ark of the Covenant.
2. **In verses 17-18, how do Moses and Joshua each describe the noise they hear from the camp? Why do you think Moses said what he said in verse 18?** Joshua thought that the people sounded like they were warring. Moses instead thought that they sounded like they were singing. He perceived the sounds to be those of revelry. God had told him that that was happening in the camp.
3. **In verse 19, how did Moses respond when he saw the golden calf? How does this compare with God’s response earlier in the chapter (vs. 7-9)?** Moses’s anger burned white hot at their lapse. He was so mad that he threw down the tablets and broke them. His sudden fury was much like that of God.
4. **What does Moses do with the calf?** He burned the calf to powder, sprinkled it on the water and made the people drink it. **Why do you think that Moses made the Israelites drink the water with the gold dust in it?** When Moses immediately destroyed the idol, scattered it on the water and made them

drink of it, he may have had several reasons. One reason was surely to show them that their idol was no true god if it could so easily be destroyed. Perhaps he thought this would shame the people or even cause fear when the magnitude of their sin was realized. Perhaps he wanted the Israelites to realize that this false god would not satisfy any of their needs.

5. **When is anger an appropriate response to what others do? When is it not appropriate as a response? Think about your own experiences with anger; what have you learned from your own experiences? How can we be more like God in how we respond to situations and people?** Anger is thought to be a negative emotion which can cause us and the people around us harm. However, the scriptures differentiate between anger which destroys or breaks relationships and anger that is directed at wickedness. Jesus was angry with the moneychangers in the temple who were making a profit at the wicked expense of others (John 2:13-17). He was angry with the Pharisees when they attempted to trap him regarding healing on the Sabbath. Their hard heartedness and lack of compassion caused anger (Mark 3:5). Ephesians 4:26 cautions us "in your anger do not sin". We are not to be angry in such a way as to destroy people. If we can be productive, we can mend relationships and perhaps build up the Body of Christ. James 1:19-20 provides a similar caution. Anger AT sin is not evil. Anger because we are being selfish is a problem.

Day 4: read Exodus 32: 21-29

1. **In verses 21-25, what does Moses ask Aaron? What does Aaron say about the people? What does he say about how the calf came to be? How convincing is Aaron's response?** Moses asks Aaron what the people did to him that he should lead them into sin. Aaron in turn blames the people for his lapse, that he only was doing what they wanted him to do, and that the calf just appeared out of the flames. This was a patent lie, and does sound ridiculous. Note in verse 25 that Moses holds Aaron responsible. **When have you tried to make excuses for your own behavior? What results did that have?** From the time we were little children, we tried to put the blame on others rather than ourselves. Even as adults we are tempted to avoid taking responsibility for our actions, particularly when challenged by others. Often, parents, friends, or family members could easily see through these excuses, holding us accountable for what we had done. And hopefully even our God-given sense of honesty would have caused us to see that we could not hide from our responsibility.
2. **In verse 26, what challenge did Moses give the Israelites? Who came to him? Why do you think that only the Levites responded positively?** Moses offers a challenge that whoever is for the Lord should come to him. The Levites were the ones to respond. Scripture does not reveal if Aaron, a Levite, was one of these. So, were these people who had not participated in the idolatry, or did they include some who participated but clearly saw the errors of the practice and repented?
3. **In verse 27, what did Moses command the Levites to do, indicating that this message came directly from the Lord, the God of Israel? Why do you think the punishment was so severe? Does this seem fair? Why or why not?** They are called upon to slay others, no matter how closely related they are. It is a severe punishment. Sometimes, in order to rid a body of cancer, radical treatment or surgery is necessary for health to be restored. **Have you ever felt that God was asking you to do something dramatic, that you would not ordinarily do? How did you respond?**
4. **In verse 28, the Levites obeyed Moses. How many people were killed?** (Remember that there were close to 2 million people in the Exodus journey.) 3000 men were killed that day. It is thought that these were the leaders of the rebellion. **What did Moses tell the Levites in verse 29?** Moses then told the Levites that they had been set aside by God and were blessed.

Day 5: read Exodus 32: 30-35 and Exodus 34: 4-7

- 1. What did Moses tell the people in verse 30? In verses 31-23, how did Moses try to mediate between God and the Israelites? Can you think of other people in the Bible who interceded (mediated) on behalf of others?** Moses reminds the people of their great sin. He tells them that he will see if he can make atonement for the sin. The Bible offers other examples of people who interceded or sacrificed for others. Abraham tried to mediate on behalf of Sodom in Genesis 18:23-33. Jonathan mediated for David to Saul in I Samuel 19:4. Jonah confessed that he was the reason that the sailors were likely to die in a great storm and asked to be cast overboard in Jonah 1:12. The Great Mediator and the only one capable of atonement for our sins was Jesus.
- 2. What did Moses offer to God so that God would forgive the Israelites? Moses asks God to forgive the people but if God will not forgive the people, he (Moses) asks to be blotted out of God's book. How is this a picture of Jesus' mediation for our forgiveness? In what ways are we like or unlike Moses?** We, like Moses, are merely mortal. Jesus, because He is divine, can cover our sins because He alone is righteous in His own being.
- 3. In verses 33-34, how did God respond to Moses? What characteristics of God are demonstrated in this encounter with Moses? What does God say about individual responsibility for sin? Who is the one who punishes? When does He punish? What is the punishment (verse 35)?** God says that He will deal with our sins as individuals. He will blot out those that sinned in His own time. He did send a plague to punish the people. This again reflects God's righteousness and His justice—there must be a punishment for sin.
- 4. In Exodus 34: 4, what does Moses do according to God's command? What characteristics of God are described in Exodus 34: 5-7?** Moses is instructed to chisel out new tablets and bring them up the mountain to meet with God. He tells Moses that He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, faithful, loving and forgiving. He will not however leave sin unpunished. He is holy.

Digging deeper: The sins of the fathers – what does it mean to punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation? See Exodus 20:5; 34:6-7; Numbers 16:1-34; Joshua 7

This is a punishment to those who hate God. It is linked with idolatry in the second commandment. Examples of such punishment are seen in Numbers 16 and Joshua 7 with the rebellion of Korah and some Reubenites and Achan's sons.

From the NIV Study Bible Footnote, God saw His covenant with Israel as analogous to a marriage contract. Idolatry is the equivalent of prostitution and adultery. God will not put up with any rivalry or unfaithfulness. He saw His claim on Israel as an exclusive claim on her love and allegiance. Those Israelites who blatantly violate God's covenant showed that they reject the Lord as their king and thus bring down judgment on themselves and their households. Households in the Old Testament were usually made up of 3 and 4 generations. There was a tight bond among the generations and opportunity for influence on each other. This is unlike our current nuclear families in Western cultures. The importance of the household idea is seen in Genesis 18:19, God's choosing of Abraham; and in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the directions from God through Moses to the fathers. In these verses, it is the responsibility of the head of the household to teach and direct their children to love and obey God. So, as the head of the household disobeys, the rest of the household will follow their lead. The sad consequences of ancestral sin can be passed from one generation to the next.

Those who worship idols reject God's ownership, rule and moral base. Obedience to God formed the foundation of their worship. A unique God is zealous for exclusive devotion to Him. "Absence of such dedication is sin and has its effect on future generations." (Walvoor and Zuck)

Each of us carries these same responsibilities and influences within our own households and within our families. May we be found faithful to the Lord and to our families to influence them in God's ways.

Day 6: DeGroat's Leaving Egypt, Chapters 7 and 8

(If you have the book Leaving Egypt, read chapters 7 and 8. If you do not have the book, consider how you might respond to these questions based on your own experiences and understanding.)

1. DeGroat writes on page 100: "When the Israelites left Egypt, they left behind much of what gave them security. But they had Moses.... Moses was God-in-the-flesh, the earthly embodiment of God's presence... And so when Moses disappeared for forty days, so did Israel's sense of security." In their anxiety, they took matters into their own hands and created their own versions of God. The Israelites had a hard time coping with Moses' absence and what seemed to be God's absence. We too must wait at times in the midst of our difficulties. **How do we try to cope when God seems absent from our lives? What do we turn to for a sense of power, control, or comfort in our waiting?**
2. DeGroat writes this about idols: "Our idols are touchstones of the transcendent. They give us a sense of control, of access, of intimacy and connection. It would be easy to point the finger at Israel if we didn't have a hundred different ways of manufacturing a sense of security in our own lives" (p. 101). On idolatry, he writes: "Idolatry is, in fact, a form of self-rejection. It is human self-sabotage, a rejection of our dignity and a rejection of the One who bestows it. It is bigger than our destructive habits and patterns because at its core it annihilates *us*, destroying our capacity to love, to trust, to hope" (p. 105). **What idols have we created? What idols are we tempted to create? How have these idols revealed our own insecurities?**
3. In chapter 8, DeGroat explores various aspects of obedience to God. Some people feel a real or perceived oppression in God's laws. People outside the community of faith just see rules and restrictions. Often even those within the faith community find the rituals of worship and even service to others to be obsessive and even overwhelming. Many are serving human guidelines more than what God actually intended. A closer study of God's word and His laws reveal the true freedom and protection that God wants for His people within them. When people realize this, they often leave oppressive, ritualistic political or faith traditions to find the real freedoms and joys that can be experienced in service to God and in following Christ. In Exodus 20 – 23, God gave us laws that would help us with relationships between people, including human rights of respect and freedom. Basic rules of decency and morality serve to protect His beloved children from physical and emotional harm. **What are some examples of an exodus-like journey of a group of people who have left a political or religious authority that defied laws and were considered "disobedient," but were actually following God's laws of obedience?** Some examples may include early pilgrims in the colonial United States, and even many immigrants of today. Other examples include the early religious reformers in the Reformation movement, and civil rights leaders who helped reform slavery and change repressive laws. **Have you ever had to disobey a law or go against a personal or professional obligation in order to obey God?**
4. On pages 118-119 DeGroat writes, "The whole intent of God's law is to restore people into a loving relationship with God and with one another." Sometimes we misuse the law by relying on the rules, resulting in an externalized ritual, like the Israelites and the Pharisees. It becomes a form of self-justification and self-salvation that does not really heal the heart. Thus we have an outward appearance of spirituality, yet with an inner vacancy and emotional conflict. **Reflect on your own life. How has this been true? Can you honestly admit your failure and self-deception in this regard? Are you ready to open yourself to God's grace and to obey God's law in love?**