

OpenTheo

Exodus 32



Exodus - Steve Gregg

Exodus 32 describes the Israelites' creation of a golden calf, which led to idolatry and violated the second commandment. Moses intercedes with God to spare the Israelites, showing humility and concern for God's honor. While ultimately forgiven, the incident resulted in the deaths of over 3000 men as a punishment for their guilt in the idol worship. The chapter serves as a warning against idolatry and immorality, and is referenced by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10.

Transcript

Our studies in the book of Exodus have brought us through the giving of the law, which was in chapters 20 through 23, and then through chapter 24, also, which was the ratifying of the covenant when certain sacrifices were made, and blood was sprinkled on the book of the covenant and on the people, as they said out loud for the third time, all that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient. In chapter 24, verse 7, they said that they had said that already before two other times. And so this was a ceremony of marriage, as it were, between God and his people.

Now, almost the rest of the entire book of Exodus, with the exception of about three chapters of the remainder, are occupied with the tabernacle and its furnishings and its rituals. And the tabernacle is extremely important, but we have a lot of repetition in the remaining chapters. What I have done in the past when teaching Exodus is slavishly follow the verse-by-verse procedure, so that I would go through the next seven chapters, which are chapters 25 through 31, verse-by-verse, and then, when we came to the same information again in chapters 35 through 40, or 35 through 39, anyway, I would go through it again, just because I wanted to stick to the plan, verse-by-verse.

Obviously, that is one way to do things, and that is the way the material is actually presented to us, in the book of Exodus. However, the tabernacle has great lessons for us, but the details of it are not essential to us in the same way that they were to the children of Israel, to whom the book was written. Namely, they had to build it.

They had to make sure they knew all the measurements, and they knew all the metals to

use, and what color, and what fabrics, and so forth they had to use. And this had to be driven through their head, because it was extremely important for them to do it right. Whereas for us, we can just go over the material one time, I think, and get the information that's relevant to us today.

But the tabernacle isn't really the next thing that happens. Moses has gone up on the mountain in chapter 24, and while he's on the mountain, God gives him the directions concerning the making of the tabernacle. Then some more action happens, and that is going to be what we're going to study in this session, the golden calf.

After that whole thing has run its course, and Moses has interceded, and God has restored the covenant with people, then they actually build the tabernacle. So the building of the tabernacle does not happen at this point. Only the blueprint is described at this point, and then it is built in the final five chapters.

In chapters 35 through 40, we have the building and the erecting of the tabernacle. And since that is the chronological order of things, I'm going to wait until we talk about the building of the tabernacle to talk about these seven chapters that describe it, because we will find the description given essentially twice of many of the details. Which means I'm going to skip for the moment over chapters 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31.

All of that is descriptive of the tabernacle, its furniture and of the priest's garments and the consecration of the priest. All of that will come under our scrutiny, but only in its chronological place, because all of those things actually are instituted after the golden calf incident. So we'll skip over the descriptions at this point and come back to them when we're going to look at the tabernacle and its construction.

And so we want to skip over to chapter 32, where there are three chapters, 32, 33 and 34, that are the main action remaining in the book. And Moses is on the mountain receiving these instructions for the tabernacle and in 32, verse one, it says now, when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together Aaron to Aaron and said to him, come and make us God that we should go before us for as for this, Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt. We do not know what has become of him.

Now, Moses spent 40 days up on the mountain, hidden within the cloud, and you have to remember what this looked like to this place. There's this tall mountain. And then at the top of it, the top was obscured from their view by heavy clouds, thunderings, lightning, fire was seen in there.

Moses kind of disappeared into that mess 40 days earlier and didn't ever emerge again. They might readily think, well, you know, how do we know he's even alive? You know, you go up into a forest fire up on the top of a mountain and you could be asphyxiated or you could be burned. I mean, we received no message back from him.

We ought to keep moving. We ought to move along on our journey to the promised land. But we need some kind of a God.

We need some kind of a lead. And so why don't you make us a God? And Aaron, apparently either just being very spineless or else being persuaded that they may be right, said to them, break off the golden earrings which are in your ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them to me. So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

This gold probably was among the things that they had gotten from the Egyptians when they were leaving Egypt as slaves in Egypt. They probably did not have valuables. And so when they were leaving Egypt, as we know, they they asked for people to give them silver and gold and all kinds of things like that.

So they all were wearing earrings these days of gold, probably very proud of them since they haven't had any jewelry or anything of value for centuries before. So they broke off their earrings. And gave them to Aaron.

So the people did this and he received the gold from their hand and he fashioned it with an engraving tool and made a molded calf. Now, the calf was molded. It was, in other words, a cast gold cast thing made from a mold.

But apparently there was a lot of fishing work done. It was engraved with a tool to put the details on it. So it was an elaborate golden calf.

Now, these people, you know, had spent hundreds of years in Egypt and in Egypt, one of the chief deities was a cow, the god of all kinds of things. I think of the livestock. But the bull was a very common god in many pagan religions because the bull was strong and powerful.

It was revered. It was also the fact that bulls pulled plows and helped farm and therefore they were very useful and very valuable and very revered. In Egypt, by the way, there was not much distinction made between humans and animals.

Some of their gods had human bodies and animal heads or bird heads. Some of their gods were just animals. And so the calf probably was a familiar image from Egypt.

Whether it was supposed to represent Apis or not, we don't know. We do know that Aaron tried to associate it with Yahweh so as to keep these people from being too unfaithful to Yahweh. Aaron wanted to pretend that the calf represented Yahweh, and therefore he probably thought he was doing something that was not so bad, not choosing another god other than Yahweh.

And so then they said, this is your god, Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt. Verse 5, So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it, and Aaron made a

proclamation and said, Tomorrow is a feast to Yahweh. So the thing was a clear violation, at least of the second commandment, that you should not make any grave an image or bow down and worship it, which was a commandment that was indicating that God did not wish for himself to be represented by an image.

He had already said, don't have any additional gods to me. That was in the first commandment. But the second commandment was don't make any grave an image.

And that would suggest to represent God himself. So this was a violation, at least of that. And yet Aaron tried to whitewash it by saying, well, we're going to worship Yahweh tomorrow at this altar in front of this image that represents Yahweh.

Then they arose early on the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. Now, this statement they rose up to play has often been understood to mean they had some kind of an orgy, and that would not be too unusual for pagan worship.

Lots of pagan worship involved not only feasting, but also orgies. But this is not necessarily to be understood that way. They may have just gotten up to have fun and not necessarily to commit fornication.

The reason I say that is because Paul quotes this verse. In First Corinthians 10, and he's listing several different mistakes, the Israelites made in the wilderness, warning the Corinthians to avoid making those same mistakes. And he says.

In First Corinthians 10, verse seven, do not become idolaters, as were some of them, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. But then in the next verse, Paul says, nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did. And in one day, three thousand fell.

Now, verse eight, when he wants to illustrate them committing sexual immorality, he looks at the incident of Baal-peor, which we have not studied yet in the Book of Numbers. But it was a time where the Midianites and the Moabites, apparently jointly seeking to destroy Israel under the council of Balaam, sent women in to seduce the Hebrew men and to lead them to worship their false gods. And this brought a plague upon them.

But Paul wants us to avoid idolatry and immorality. And when it comes to the immorality part, he uses the Baal-peor incident. He does not use this one.

This one at the golden cap, he simply says, don't commit idolatry like they did. And so rose up to play, it might be that they rose up to play instruments and music and so forth and dance and things like that before the image of the golden cap. We do not know that they had an orgy, although they may have, because later on, it says when Moses came down, he saw that the people were unrestrained.

And that's not exactly a term that is self-explanatory. It may be that they were not restraining their behavior in any way. In any case, they did worship this golden cap and they sat down to eat and drink, which was part of the ceremony of worship ritual meal.

And they rose up to play, at least have a good time. We don't know whether they were at that time having a sexual orgy or if they were just dancing and carousing and celebrating as heathen people do. And Yahweh said to Moses, go get down for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

Now, this is indeed humorous, because God at this point does not want to only feel and he tells Moses that they're Moses's people that Moses let out of Egypt as if Moses's idea. Moses didn't even want to go. Moses never wanted the job.

And now he's the one who's given the responsibility. But I think that this is that God says it this way deliberately to test Moses, as we shall see. He says, they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.

They have made themselves a molded cap and worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, this is your God, Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt. So God up in the mountain talking Moses also is elsewhere and he sees what's going on down there. Moses didn't know that was going on down there.

Moses was so high up in the mountain that he couldn't even hear the music and the dancing. But Joshua could. Joshua was about halfway up the mountain and he could hear music and dance.

But he couldn't tell what he just heard a din. He just heard a noise. He actually thought it was a sound of battle.

He didn't think it was a party. But Moses, so happy he didn't know anything was going on down there. And God had to tell him they've made a golden cap.

They're worshipping it down there. Then you always said to Moses, I have seen this people and indeed it is a stiff neck people. Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them and I will make of you a great nation.

Now, here's where I believe that. God was actually testing Moses. Motivation, Moses now had the opportunity to become what Abraham was to these people.

The ancestor of the whole nation. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the ancestors of the whole nation and they were revered patriarchs. Moses was just one member of the tribe of Levi.

His as far as the biological relationship that he had to the rest of Israel, he was just one of their brothers or cousins. But he was not their their their ancestor, their patriarch. But

God was saying, I want to destroy all these people who worship in the gold cap and start a new nation from you, Moses, you'll be the new Abraham.

The new nation will come out of you for all generations. We'll look back to you as the ancestor of the nation. You'll be the founder.

Well, Moses was indeed the founder of the nation, but it was sort of a different kind of honor that was being offered to him to be the patriarch of everybody in the nation. That Moses had two sons at this point. We don't know where they were or what they were doing or how old they were, but God is suggesting that from those sons, God could raise up a nation greater than Israel.

And that honor was being offered to Moses. He could have accepted it, presumably. But I don't think God really wanted him to.

I think God would have kept his promise and done it had Moses chosen. I think that God was actually pleased that Moses, as it turns out, was not willing to have that arrangement. God said to him there in verse 10, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.

Now, God's acting like he cannot do that. His wrath cannot burn hot against them and he cannot consume them unless Moses permits him, unless Moses let him alone to do it. Now, what is the other alternative? Moses doesn't let God alone.

God intercedes for the people. I mean, Moses intercedes for the people and does not let God just go by and say, OK, go ahead, God, go take him out and I'll be the next Abraham. Instead, Moses intercedes and the word intercession, we saw the phenomenon of intercession taking place with Abraham and God when he was interceding for the city of Sodom because his nephew Lot was there.

And Abraham stood between Sodom and God. That's what intercede means, to stand in between and to plead so that when Christians are praying or interceding for other people, it's as if God is in one place and the people for whom we're interceding is in another place. And they're not on good terms with God.

And we stand in between on their behalf and plead on their behalf, standing, as it were, between. So you kind of have to go through me, God, if you're going to take them out, you have to take me, too. There's a sense in which a person intercedes, puts himself in the line of fire from God on behalf of somebody else.

Abraham did that with reference to Sodom, his intercession in, of course, the 18th chapter of Genesis. And now we see Moses is going to do the same thing for Israel. And Moses pleaded with the Lord, his God, and said, Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt? Notice the contrast with verse seven.

Now, this is important, because when God said to Moses, these are your people that you brought out of land of Egypt, he was allowing Moses perhaps to consider that, that he's the one who gets the credit for this. He is the hero. He is the great leader.

These are the people of Moses. These are the people that Moses is the great leader of. And Moses has delivered them.

God spoke as if in that way, and Moses could have bought that, except he didn't buy that. He wanted to make sure that he God knew that he didn't want that honor for himself. These are God's people.

God's the one who brought around the land of Egypt. God is the one who's made a commitment to them. Moses is just a servant standing by, getting in trouble through no fault of his own, because he was selected by God for the position.

But he says, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak and say he brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Now, Moses is perhaps realistic in this. That if God had wiped them all out there and the news got back to Egypt, the Egyptians would say, oh, that God of Israel. He's a treacherous one.

You know, he acts like he's on their side. He delivers them out of Egypt, but he just leaves them out to an ambush where he just slaughters them all out in the wilderness. And Moses is saying the Egyptians will misunderstand who you are.

This is really appealing to God's reputation, to God's glory. And it's interesting, because God, in saying to Moses, I'll make a great nation from you, is appealing to Moses's vanity, as it were. Moses will take that bait.

But Moses isn't thinking about his own honor. He's thinking about God's honor. God, what will people say about you? What will this do to your reputation? And that apparently is Moses's sincere concern.

It's not just that Moses is a shrewd negotiator and able to sort of appeal to God's vanity in some way here. But rather, Moses's real concern, I mean, God would not hear his prayer if he knew he was being insincere. Moses's real concern is not about his own honor, but about God's honor.

And he does not want the Egyptians to be able to think badly of Yahweh. Turn from your fierce wrath and relent or repent from this harm to your people. Now, the word is repent.

But throughout the New King James, they always stick in the word relent when it refers to God repenting. Repent means to change your mind or to turn around. And Moses is urging God to do that.

But in the King James, it does say repent. But the idea of God repenting is somehow because of the associations, the word repent with repenting from sin. And the modern translators often try to find some other way to translate that rather than repent.

But Moses is calling God to repent that that is simply to change his mind about the harm that he intends to do. He says, turn from your fierce wrath and relent from this harm to your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and all this land that I've spoken, I will give to your descendants and they shall inherit it forever.

So the Lord repented or relented, it says in the New King James, from the harm which he said he would do to his people. Now, this prayer of Moses is really something to observe because it is it's a prevailing prayer. God was angry.

God is going to wipe out a whole nation. That's a lot of anger. And yet Moses, through his prayer, was able to dissuade God about this, to turn God away.

Now, some people say, well, then did God change his mind? Did God not know that he's going to change his mind when he said, I'm going to wipe these people out? Was God mistaken? Did he not know that Moses was going to do all this? Well, that issue doesn't really need to come up. There are people who believe that God does kind of experience things as they occur and does not necessarily know what we're going to do next. But he simply adjusts his plan or his reactions to what we choose.

That view is called openness theology. There's also the view that God, of course, does know what we're going to do before we do it. But he nonetheless accommodates through his anthropomorphic dealings with us.

He takes on a human-like form in communicating with man and acts like he's ignorant about things. And we know that God does that sometimes because he said to Adam, where are you? When Adam was hiding in the bushes, as if God didn't know. He said to Cain, where's your brother? As if God didn't know.

He said, I'm going down to Sodom to see if it's as bad as I've heard. And if it is, I'll know. As if he didn't know.

He said to Abram when he offered Isaac on the altar, now I know that you fear me. As if God didn't know that. You see, many times God does speak as if he's ignorant of things when he is relating to man and when he is kind of coming down to man's level for the sake of communication.

It is possible that God, of course, knew that Moses was going to intercede like this and yet acted as if he didn't know. He acted as if he's going to go ahead and wipe those people out. And then he's just waiting for Moses to either step in front of him or step

aside.

When God says, leave me alone that I can go and consume them. God is going to step aside out of my way. Now, that's a command of God.

But Moses didn't accept that command of God. Moses didn't step out of the way. Moses stepped in between him and Israel and interceded for them.

And that's apparently what God really wanted him to do. If Moses had not done that, God probably would have taken Israel out and done exactly what he said, made a great nation for Moses. But Moses showed his modesty, his humility, his lack of concern about his own reputation, his own honor and concern about God's honor.

This is the kind of prayer that mattered to God, one that is concerned about his honor. We see a similar prayer, a very powerful prayer in the book of Acts in chapter four. And I'd like you to observe in this prayer in Acts the same thing I'd like you to observe in this prayer of Moses.

And that is how many times in the prayer addressed to God, the praying person say you, you and your to God. You see, on this occasion in Acts chapter four. Peter and John had been arrested, beaten and released and commanded to not speak any more in the name of Jesus or on pain of death.

And of course, they were not the least bit intimidated or if they were, they ignored it. And it says in verse twenty three of Acts four and being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders have said to them. So when they heard that they raised their voices to God with one accord and said, and here we have a prayer that the church prayed on the occasion when their chief leaders, Peter and John, were threatened with death.

Now, think about that. If the pastor of one of our major churches or if Billy Graham or or some other evangelical leader was threatened by the government and that if he doesn't stop preaching the gospel, they're going to kill him. And he makes it very clear to his congregation, I'm not going to stop.

So what's that mean? I mean, you're going to die. And so the church is called to prayer. What would we pray? We pray, Lord, please protect our our pastor.

Please cause this persecution to go away. Please give us freedom to preach the gospel without molestation. Please help us, us, us, us, us, because that's the way we always pray.

We always pray about us. Look how they prayed and notice how many times they they spoke about God's interest. They said, Lord, you are God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, who by the mouth of your servant, David, have said,

why did the nation's rage and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against Yahweh and against his Christ for truly against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done.

Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word by stretching out your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. It's all about God. Yes, they ask that God will do something for them, not that he'll protect them from persecution, but that he'll give them the boldness so they will not be intimidated by these threats.

But even when they speak about themselves, they say, your servants, it's never about us, it's always about God. This is your program. Our concerns about us are only because we're your servants and what happens to your servants is your concern, your servant, Jesus, your servants, us, your word.

Your hand, your prophecy. The prayers were God directed, not us directed. And notice it says in verse 31 and when they had prayed the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

So the prayer was answered for the boldness. They didn't pray for production, but they were given that too. And they Peter and John were not killed.

But the interesting thing is that their prayer was powerful. The whole place was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit after this prayer.

Why? Because it was a God centered prayer. Now look at Moses prayer again and notice how many he how often he refers to God, not himself, not Israel, not but to to God himself there in Exodus 32 11. Then Moses pleaded with the Lord God and said, Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of Egypt with great power and mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say he brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn your fierce wrath, turn from your your fierce wrath and relent from this harm to your people.

Remember, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants to whom you swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, et cetera. Then so we see that Moses appeals to God on the basis of God's own honor, God's own interests. And that's how we're taught to pray to your kingdom come.

Your will be done. This is what prayer is. It's it's people petitioning God to look out for his own interests.

And Moses is concerned about God's reputation. First of all, what are the Egyptians going to say about you? Secondly, you made a promise and your reputation and your integrity is on the line here. Now, it really wasn't in the sense that I mean, if God had indeed wiped out all the Israelites and made a great nation from Moses.

Well, Moses was from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, too. So in that nation would also be the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God could still fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by bringing a great nation through Moses, who was descended from them.

It would just set things back several hundred years of growth of the nation, but God was willing to do that. But he's saying, remember, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and remember these people here, they are descended from them. And you swore you're going to give these people your land.

Well, this prayer apparently pleased God and impressed him, so the Lord relented or repented of the harm that he said he was going to do to his people. Now, although Moses had placated God's wrath against people, Moses' wrath against the people was something to be considered now because Moses had put himself on the line for them. But he was going to be angry at them for their own apostasy and disloyalty.

In verse 15, Moses turned and went down from the mountain and the two tablets of the testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides, on one side and on the other. They were written.

Now, the tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. In this case, God had actually carved the tablets out of the stone, apparently, and written out there with his own hand. These tablets were going to be broken, and then the next set of tablets grabbed out of the stone by Moses himself, although God would write on them, too.

Now, as he came down the mountain, he encountered Joshua, who apparently for those six weeks that Moses had been up there, had been up on the mountain, too, but halfway up. He wasn't allowed to go up into the cloud. But Joshua is seen to be a remarkable character.

We've only seen him once prior to this in the narrative, and that was in chapter 17, when the Amalekites had attacked Israel as they came out of Egypt. And Joshua was set to lead the armies. And Moses and Aaron and her went on the mountain and Moses put his hand up in the air.

And Joshua was the leader of the armies on that occasion. Now, for the rest of Moses' life, we find that Joshua is Moses' personal servant. Or what we might call his aide de camp.

And he when Moses is up on the mountain, Joshua is sitting there halfway up the

mountain waiting for Moses to come down. He doesn't have any good reading material or anything. He's just sitting there for six weeks patiently waiting for the next assignment.

And now the assignment is to come down the mountain with Moses. Later on, we'll find that Moses sets up a tent, not the tabernacle, but an earlier tent that was he called the tent of meeting. And it was put outside the camp and Moses would in the daytime go in there to meet with God.

And Moses would leave and come back to the camp. But Joshua would stay at the tent of meeting, apparently as sort of a guard for the place. Not that God needed a guard because the pillar of cloud was there, too.

But Joshua was simply a guy who just his his definition of his own duties was simply to be available to to stay where he is until the next assignment. You know, if Moses wants to sit on the mountain until he comes down, that's what he'll do. He wants him to camp out at the door of the tent of meeting.

Even when Moses has gone home to bed, Joshua is like, you know, a faithful soldier and a humble servant. And of course, he eventually became Moses' successor because later on in the book of Numbers, God tells Moses, you lay your hands on Joshua in front of all the people and put some of your authority on him that I've given you. And so Joshua then becomes the leader.

But you see, he starts out as a humble servant. That's how Elisha became the successor of Elijah. Also, he was a servant.

He poured the water over the hands of Elijah, the Bible says. He like washed his hands and feet. He was a humble servant to the prophet.

And then when the prophet was taken up, God put a double portion of his spirit on Elisha and he became the successor so that the man that God raises up to great honor is often the person who's done absolutely nothing to bring honor to himself, but it simply made himself the servant. And that's what Joshua was. Here we have Joshua.

Moses meets him coming down the mountain and verse 17, when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, there is a noise of war in the camp. He just assumed the shouting and the noise was because of them being under attack. Perhaps the Amalekites had come back or some others.

But Moses said, it is not the voice of those who shout in victory, nor the voice of those who cry in defeat, but the voice of those who sing that I hear. This is not the sounds of war and sound of a party. So it was as soon as he came near the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing.

So Moses anger became hot and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Now, it's not ever explained whether this was just an act of rage on Moses part. He just lost his temper and threw down the tablets and they're all they broke.

You know, I should have been more careful or whether he did this as a symbolic action that these people had broken the covenant. They had broken the commandments and Moses, by breaking the tablets, is giving sort of a visual message that that is what has happened. They have essentially broken the covenant.

So he breaks the law and he breaks the stone tablets of the law in order to depict that they had broken it. It's not ever that point is never made or explained that way. But it could be that that was his deliberate choice is to break these tablets.

And verse 20 says, then he took the calf, which they had made and burned it in the fire and ground it to powder. So he he melted it down and then once it was cooled and solid, he ground it up into powder and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel to drink it. Now, this action is never explained, although we find it by the end of this chapter in verse 35, because the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf, which Aaron made.

So they drank this water that had the gold dust on it and then they were plagued. This is reported without any commentary about, you know, what its meaning was. But if you look over at Numbers chapter five, you find that there was a very strange law made, which could be called the ordeal of jealousy.

And it's in Numbers chapter five, beginning of verse 11, said the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the children of Israel and say to them, if any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him. As Israel, of course, was doing at this point against God and a man lies with her carnally and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and it is concealed that she has defiled herself and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife who has defiled herself or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself. Then the man shall bring his wife to the priest.

He shall bring the offering required for her one tenth of an eighth of barley meal and she'll pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it because it is a great offering of jealousy and offering for remembering for bringing iniquity to remembrance and the priest shall bring her near and set her before Yahweh and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it in the water. Then the priest shall stand the woman before Yahweh uncover the woman's head and put the offering for remembrance in her hands, which is the grain offering cetera and verse 19 the priest shall put her under oath and say to the woman if

no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray to unclean this while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you, then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse and he shall say to the woman, Yahweh make you a curse and an oath among your people when Yahweh makes your thigh rot and your belly swell and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach and make your belly swell and your thigh rot and the woman shall say Amen.

So be it. Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, etc. And then he shall make the woman drink verse 24, the bitter water that brings the curse and the water that brings the curse shall enter her and become bitter.

And then, of course, it goes on to say if she's innocent, nothing will happen if she's guilty. Her thigh will rot. Her belly will swell.

Now, this is indeed a very strange law, but the purpose of it is that the law that says that an adulterer and adulteress shall be put to death would be a hard one to enforce in most cases because adultery is usually committed secretly, privately. And when it is done, of course, generally there are no witnesses. Very rare thing to catch people in the act.

And yet it's an important thing to be punished, according to God. And therefore, if a spirit of jealousy is, he puts it, comes upon a man and actually says this could happen whether she's guilty or not. Just because a spirit of jealousy comes on a man does not mean she's guilty.

She might not be guilty. He's just for some reason jealous. He suspects her of unfaithfulness.

Well, there is a way for her to be vindicated. She could go to the temple. They do this ritual.

If nothing happens to drink that water, then he has no more grounds for suspicion of her. She should welcome this. If she's innocent, she should welcome the vindication that this will provide.

On the other hand, if she's guilty and there were no witnesses, but God, God will make her guilt known by causing this strange swelling of the belly and rotting of the thigh when she drinks this water. Now, there are some people, skeptical people, who believe that this is sort of like, you know, the alleged way that witches were treated in the Salem witch trials, you know, tie an anchor around her ankle and throw her in the water. If she floats, you know, she's innocent.

You know, otherwise she's a witch. Well, obviously that if that if that was ever really done, that's silly because she's presumed guilty and nothing but a miracle could show

her to be innocent. And that's not what is true here.

Some people say, well, there was something in the in the ground that when they put the dust from the tabernacle floor in the water and she drank it, these microorganisms came in. And of course, they made her get this sickness. And it would take a miracle of God to cause her not to get it.

So she's going to end up looking guilty unless God miraculously keeps her from having this happen. Well, that is, to my mind, a ridiculous suggestion. First of all, I do not know of any particular ailment that causes the thigh to rot and the belly to swell.

If there is such an ailment, no one could guarantee that that particular microbe would be in the soil that the tabernacle is built upon. If it was, then all the children of Israel would get that because they would eat with, you know, little little kids are always putting dirt in their mouth and eating. I mean, you can put dirt in your mouth.

It's not going to be very tasty, but you're not going to have your belly swell and your thigh rot as a result. Eating dirt doesn't bring these symptoms, generally speaking. And if there was indeed something that was known to be in the desert sand there that caused that, then people would be having this happen all the time because of their unsanitary situations.

That microbe would be in their diet all the time. Children would be getting this malady continuously because that's in the soil. Furthermore, if there was such a thing in the soil generally, it would be less likely to be in the soil of the tabernacle floor, which was only walked on by people who had washed their feet first and was a protected area, whereas people, you know, soil from outside would be more contaminated, one would think.

Anyway, it seems obvious to me that the belly swelling and the thigh rotting is a miraculous intervention of God, probably symbolic. That since in the act of adultery, a woman's thigh is invariably touched by the man she's committed adultery with by his thigh, and her belly is that which is supposed to, you know, sex is supposed to be for reproduction, and her womb apparently would be adversely affected, inflamed or something, I don't know, by this ritual. We'll have more to say about it some other time, but the point is it resembles somewhat closely what Moses did when he ground up the calf, which represented the sin of the people, put it in the water, the dust and made them drink it.

And interestingly enough, they were committing spiritual adultery. God, you know, God was jealous over them. And so there's a sense in which what Moses did was almost a precursor to this ritual of jealousy or was a precursor to it.

It wasn't exactly the same ritual, but it had a resemblance. And we do find in verse 35 of chapter of Exodus 32 that the Lord plagued the people, which could have been, you

know, connected with him having drunk that water with the dust of the calf in it. Anyway, it looks very similar to me.

Now, Moses confronted Aaron, as you would expect that he would have right away, in Exodus 32, 21, Moses said to Aaron, What did these people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Do not let the anger of my Lord become hot. You know the people that they are set on evil. For they said to me, Make us gods that shall go before us.

As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And I said to them, Whoever has any gold, let him break it off. So they gave it to me and I cast it into the fire.

So far, he's telling the truth. Everything up to that point is exactly what we were told by the narrative. He's being completely honest until this part.

I threw it in the fire and this calf came out. Well, in other words, his greatest culpability was that he actually shaped the calf. We're told that in verse four, that he received the gold from their hand and he fashioned it with an engraving tool and made a molded calf.

He didn't just throw the gold into the fire and a calf came out. He made it, but that's the part he can't bring himself to report. He's going well initially saying this is what happened.

They said this, I said that and this happened. And but then he gets part where his own culpability is most blatant and he just can't bring himself to confess that. And so he says, well, I put in the fire and this calf resulted.

Just kind of happened. Now, when Moses saw that people were unrestrained for Aaron had not restrained them to their shame among their enemies. Then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp and said, whoever is on the Lord's side, Yahweh's side, let him come to me.

And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. Now, it may be that the Levites, as a tribe, were generally more faithful. They certainly acted like it on this occasion.

And it may be that they were so. It may be that the Levites were less involved with this calf worship, but we had not been told so before. Or maybe they were involved and they they were smitten in their conscience and repented for the others were still unrestrained and continuing, even with Moses there.

In any case, the Levites came over to Moses when he said, who's on Yahweh's side? Come over here. And so he is drawing a line in the sand and saying, OK, we've got two gods, you're going to be loyal to one or the other. You've got this calf over here and

you've got Yahweh.

I'm on Yahweh's side. Who's with me over here? And the Levites come over there, possibly because Moses was a Levite, possibly because of the family connections, but probably not entirely so. It may be that the family connections made them more inclined to be influenced by Moses, but their inclination was actually toward God, even though for whatever reason, Moses may have influenced them that way.

They God later rewarded them for this and made them the priesthood. And he said it was because of this event that he did so, and so the Levites gathered to Moses and he said to them, thus says the Lord God of Israel, let every man put his sword on his side and go in and out from the entrance to entrance throughout the camp and let every man kill his brother, every man, his companion and every man, his neighbor. So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses and about 3000 men of the people fell that day.

Then Moses said, consecrate yourself today to Yahweh that he may bestow on you a blessing this day for every man has opposed his son and his brother. Now, this sounds pretty gory to us. These guys going in and slaying even their sons and their brothers.

But that's exactly the prescribed penalty for idolatry. You see, idolatry was adultery against the covenant that Israel had made with God. And even adultery of a woman against her husband was punishable by death.

How much more against God and these people have been warned about this and the death penalty accrued to the committing of idolatrous worship by Israel. Now, they didn't go and wipe out all the idolaters in other countries because the people in those other countries didn't have a relationship with God. They weren't in a covenant with God.

Just like a man may divorce his wife or in biblical times even have his wife killed if she commits adultery. He wouldn't do the same thing for some other woman committing adultery. That was not his business.

That was his wife. But Israel had made a covenant with God like a marriage covenant. And then they broke it.

It's like a woman cheating on her husband on their honeymoon. And that was something that all who participated in it were culpable and were guilty of something worthy of death. That the Levites became the executioners and apparently in some case had to kill people who were close relatives of theirs.

Which would be very much against their own sentiments. Showed that their loyalty to God was extreme. Remember, Jesus said, whoever loves father or mother, a wife or children more than me is not worthy of me.

And although the Bible does encourage strong family connections. It encourages even

more that people are loyal to God even against their own families if necessary. Over in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 13 and verse 6. It says, if your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom or your friend who is as your own soul secretly entices you saying, let us go and serve other gods which you have not known.

Neither you nor your fathers of the gods and the people which are all around you near or far from you. From one end of earth to the other end of earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him. Nor shall you spare him or conceal him, but you shall surely kill him.

Your hand shall be the first against him to put him to death and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies because he has sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God. And brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage.

And so all Israel shall hear and fear and not again do such wickedness as this among you. Now, it's very clear that this is how God wants people to feel in Israel. That if somebody leads them into idolatry, that person should be killed, even if their own brother or their child or their best friend.

That is, say, your loyalty to God has got to so exceed your loyalty to anyone else, your natural loyalties that. If somebody is worthy of death for this kind of a crime, God wants you to be the first one to throw the stone at him. And so the Levites acted pretty much on this, according to such sentiments as this.

And they are commended for it. They are later rewarded for it. Notice 3000 people fell under that judgment.

And it's been sometimes pointed out that on when the old covenant, the Sinai covenant was established, 3000 people died because it was a covenant of death. It was a covenant of condemnation, according to 2 Corinthians 3. It is the ministry of death and the ministry of condemnation that Paul refers to the old covenant as, because the law kills and the law condemns. And these people were killed because they violated the law.

Therefore, the institution of the old covenant was marked by the death of 3000 violators, whereas the institution of the new covenant on Pentecost was marked by the salvation of 3000 converts. Each covenant had an impact, which had an impact on 3000 people immediately. One was the death of these violators in the old covenant, and the other was the conversion in life of actually violators who had crucified Christ.

But because they repented and God forgave them, we see that the new covenant is marked by grace and the giving of life to the guilty, whereas the old covenant is marked by condemnation and the slaughter of the guilty. Same number of people in both cases.

Now, verse 30, and it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, you have sinned a great sin.

So now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said, oh, these people have sinned a great sin and have made for themselves a God of gold.

Yet now, if you will forgive their sin. Now, he starts there, but breaks up because he's not quite sure how to finish that sentence. If you will forgive their sin.

Well, I can't actually make any any arguments for you to forgive their sin. So let me take it in another direction. If you will not forgive their sin, I pray blot me out of your book, which you have written.

Now, I know you like me. And so I'm going to put myself between you and them, between your wrath and the guilty parties and say you're going to take them, take me, too. And you're going to have to wipe them out over my dead body, as it were.

And this is what an intercessor essentially is doing, standing between the wrath of God and the guilty parties and saying, I'm I'm here to stand for them. And you'll have to kind of take me as well. If you can take them.

Blot me out of your book, which you've written. And Yahweh said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. No, not you, Moses.

I'm not going to blot you out of the book. I'm going to blot them out because they've sinned and you haven't. And but he says, now, therefore, go and lead the people to the place which I have spoken to you.

Behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin. So Yahweh plagued the people because of what they did with the calf, which Aaron made.

So besides the three thousand men who were slain by the sword for their infraction, God also sent plagues among the people. Probably many others died as a result of that. And so he said to Moses, I'm not going to wipe them all out.

I mean, he said that earlier. He shows mercy to the people and in the sense that he doesn't, you know, slaughter them all. But he does judge those who were sent who had sinned, perhaps the plague, perhaps even the three thousand who died were those who were the instigators, perhaps the heads of families that led their families into idolatry.

God didn't wipe out the whole nation. So I'm going to let you take them into the promised land, like I promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I'm going to let you keep that promise.

But he still plagued those who were guilty, I said, I will blot out those who have sinned. Now, blotting out of his book presumably means killing them. Now, we might say, but wait a minute, doesn't the book of life in Revelation represent those who have eternal life? It doesn't say in Revelation 20 that as many as were not written in the book of life, whose names were not written in the book of life, were cast into the lake of fire.

So the book of life in the New Testament seems to be relevant to salvation beyond the grave. Who has eternal life, and it's possible that that is referred to here also, but it's also possible that it has a different meaning here than in the New Testament. We don't know that Moses had been told by God, he may have been, that there is eternal life.

God had not revealed it, at least in writing, and we don't know that God had ever mentioned the subject of eternal life to Moses or whether Moses had that concept. Being blotted out of God's book probably would mean being blotted out of the book of the living, that meaning a figure of speech, dying, being killed. It may or may not have anything to do with the afterlife.

Although maybe it does. We don't, we can't really say because there's no other confirming Old Testament information about that. But God said, listen, Moses, I'm not going to blot you out of my book because you're innocent, but I will blot out those who are guilty, but I'm not going to wipe out the whole nation.

He apparently assigned greater guilt to certain parties than others, and it may well be that some of the Israelites did not participate in the worship of the golden calf. We don't know that every last one did. And among those who did, there might have been young people or gullible people who were influenced by more aggressively guilty idolaters.

And God might have helped those gullible people somewhat less guilty than the ones who were the instigators. We don't know. But there were certain people did die.

Other people were spared. And God said that he would blot people out of his book based on their guilt, not in a random sense, not just blotting out people without reference to their guilt. And therefore, he would not blot out Moses because he was not guilty.

All right, now we're going to take a break here. And I think in the next session, we will probably take chapters 33 and 34, and that'll leave only the consideration of the tabernacle for us in the remainder of our study of Exodus. But we'll we'll see how far we get in the next one.

I'm pretty sure we're going to finish out 34 by the end of next session.