

Exodus 32

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 25-40 **Presence – Rebellion and Forgiveness**)

Last week we were in chapter 20 with the giving of the ten commandments, which acts as the introduction to the teachings (Law Code). Then there are seven chapters outlining God's plans for how and where he will dwell among his people. Instructions have been given for the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle, the process for mediating priests and sacrifices. All of this to express God's resolve to be in the midst of his people – an astounding desire!

Current Text: Themes and Background

Sinai sits between Egypt and the Land of Inheritance. It is a reminder that God will take as long as needed to form the people into who they are designed to be. But now the process is taking a long time. Moses has been on the mountaintop in the presence of God for a long time.

We get to our chapter and as the readers experience shock and dread. What will the people do? What is driving their actions? Why does Aaron participate? And think of the context of these ancient people. There were visual representations of gods everywhere you looked. Don't forget, the Israelites are in a vulnerable position without protection in a stark and barren land. What would you crave in that context? God has proven he will protect and guide them, yet everything around them visually says they are in danger. They create something they can use as a crutch to believe God is present with them.

A new wrinkle appears in the story. We make the false can no longer make the conclusion that Pharaoh with his hard heart was the only character resisting God's sovereignty. We now see God's own people become "stiff-necked." What will God do with these sinful people?

This is where we need to figure out how to think about how God is portrayed here. We can think of him as an indifferent God who does not need to reveal himself through prophetic revelation because he is devoid of personality and feeling. Or we can think of him as a personal God who has a full blown personality. We often do not want the former, but we also do not always grapple with the idea of one God whose power is absolute, judgment is absolute, and love is absolute...because then if the love is frustrated, then the reaction of God is absolute anger. THUS there needs to be a mode of soothing divine anger and reminding God of his more infinite mercy and compassion. This becomes a crucial aspect of the character of the prophet (seen in Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.). Intercession is key.

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. This story works like a warning to later generations (see Psa.106, 1 Cor 10, etc.). The

challenge of the story is to ask: what circumstances could lead us to substitute the presence, guidance, and authority of God for lifeless idols? Impatience waiting for God's instructions? Discontent with the moral demands of complete loyalty to God? What do you see in this story and then in our own lives today?

3. Idols are not always golden statues. They can be our greatest priorities around which we organize our lives. They are our addictions to the good things God has created. They are what we turn to for comfort, security, or a sense of control. What do you identify as common idols in our lives now? What does it take to reject such idols because willpower is not always enough?
4. Re-read the conversation between God and Moses and including the continuation of the negotiations that were not in this week's sermon (32:7–14; 32:31–33:3). Psalm 106:23 emphasizes the crucial role that Moses played in preventing the annihilation of the people. This brings up the question of whether and how intercessory prayer can "change God's mind." What do we learn about prayer and the character of God? What does it say about God's relationship with humans?
5. What is the text telling us about God's character, God's revelation, and God's mission in the world?

Read for Next Week: Exodus 33