

EXODUS 32:11-24 (THE GOLDEN CALF - THE TESTING OF MOSES)

Exodus 32 is logically divided into three main sections, with several subsections. Today's passage fills the second main section and has three individual subsections. Last week we saw the testing of Aaron and his failure to stand fast against the pressures of the people. The hint of Moses' testing was then introduced in anticipation of today's passage.

He was entrusted with an office, he has faithfully carried it out so far, but he has not been placed in a position which could truly lead to pride, arrogance, or greed for more than what he has. Will he accept the fading glory of temporary fame at the expense of his people, or will he, through humility and love of his people, seek the glory of the Lord alone?

The lesson of Moses is one that we all should pay heed to. Fame is a great temptation and quite often it leads people to go from bad to worse. Humility among the famous is rare, and yet we all are said to have at least ten minutes of fame. Will those ten minutes prove us humble and gracious, or haughty and self-aggrandizing?

It's probably good to continuously evaluate ourselves, just in case that ten minutes comes along when we aren't expecting it. And should it last for more than ten minutes, we can always look back to the life of Moses. He was a man who had so much and yet he was willing to set aside the thought of more, and defer to that which is for the Lord's glory and for the sake of his people.

Text Verse: "They made a calf in Horeb,
And worshiped the molded image.

²⁰ Thus they changed their glory
Into the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot God their Savior,

Who had done great things in Egypt,
²² Wondrous works in the land of Ham,
Awesome things by the Red Sea.
²³ Therefore He said that He would destroy them,
Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach,
To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy *them*.” Psalm 106:19-23

Greatness and humility are not opposed to one another. Rather, they are intricately connected. And there is a difference between false humility and true humility. It isn't always evident, but the true colors normally shine forth enough for those who have discernment to be able to tell which is which.

Moses was a humble man, a faithful mediator, and a great leader. To this day he is revered by both Jew and Gentile for his amazing qualities. Today's passage is one which highlights his greatness. He was willing to speak openly and frankly to the Lord about what was right and proper. He was tested and his test is set forth for our instruction. It's all to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Pleading of Moses (verses 11-14)

¹¹ Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God,

The word for “pleaded” in this verse is *khalah*. It is just the second time it has been seen in the Bible. It is normally translated as being afflicted or put to grief, even regarding an infirmity. In this case, it means to beseech, but it is a petition which is certainly one of grief or anguish.

The very last words were those of the Lord speaking to Moses. They closed out our sermon verses last week. In them, there was a two-fold aspect to the Lord's

words. The first was that the Lord was ready to destroy Israel, and the second is that the Lord would then make Moses a great nation -

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰ 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.’”

The resolve of Moses is being tested. Will he yield to human ambition, or will he demonstrate the leadership qualities of humility and fidelity to those he leads? The word *khalah* shows that the test has afflicted him in his soul and he is looking to the Lord for the remedy to that affliction.

Further, in the Hebrew of these words it says, *v'khal Mosheh eth pene Yehovah elohav* – “And beseeched Moses the face of the Lord his God.” To seek the face of someone is to seek their favor. Moses is seeking the favor of the Lord while in a state of distress. From these few words, we can already glean a clue as to how Moses will respond to the test.

And even more, the emphatic use of the words “the Lord **his** God” shows that even though Israel had lost their interest in seeking the true God, and had sought another through false worship, Moses had not. He still sought the Lord **his** God.

The Lord had said, “Let me alone,” but Moses was unwilling to do so. Instead, like his forefather Jacob, he entered into the wrestling match. One was by a river, this is on a mountain, but the dust begins to fly as Moses seeks to obtain a blessing, not for Himself, but for his people Israel.

Their destruction is promised, but Moses stands in the gap between the Lord and them. On the surface, the words “Let me alone” seem to be an order for Moses to

depart and let the Lord take out His vengeance, but the actual intent is far different. It is to spur the man in a different direction; one Moses is faithful to follow.

^{11 (con't)} **and said: “Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people**

The word “wrath” here is the same word that was used in verse 10. It is *aph*, and it means a nostril or nose, and hence it speaks of the face or even the whole person. It is translated as “wrath” because when a person is angry, their breathing becomes rapid in passion. The mental imagery is clear. The Lord’s anger is so evident in His words to Moses that it is as if His nostrils are fuming with rage.

Moses’ question to the Lord concerning his wrath is ingeniously phrased. “Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against **Your people.**” In verse 7, this we read this

—

“And the Lord said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves.*”

The Lord had distanced Himself from Israel, calling them “your people” when He spoke to Moses. Moses now returns that sentiment to the Lord. He will use this relationship with the Lord as an argument for their continued favor in His sight.

^{11 (con't)} **whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?**

Again, this goes back to verse 7. The Lord said to Moses that **he** (meaning Moses) brought them up out of the land of Egypt. However, Moses defers again to it as

the Lord's work, and he explains it by saying that it was done with *bekoakh gadol ubeyad hazaqah* – “by power great and by hand mighty.”

Moses may have been the human leader, but his actions were accomplished by the power and might of the Lord. Again, Moses shows his humility. He was, in essence, offered the right to boast of having brought Israel out of Egypt and he refused it. Instead, he magnified the greatness of the Lord.

¹² 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’?

Moses has established first that Israel is the Lord's people. He demonstrated that through their miraculous deliverance. He now gives a second reason why He should turn from His anger. It is for the sake of this people who bear His name.

The reproach of the Egyptians against Israel would thus become a reproach against His name. It would show that He was fickle in choosing them and then destroying them. Moses is first and foremost concerned with the honor of the Lord, even above the state of his beloved family in the flesh.

This implicitly goes to another point which is not readily discernible, but which is evidenced throughout the pages of the Bible. As the Lord is the only God, then His honor is necessary not just for Israel's sake, but for the sake of all people.

If God's people are destroyed, even if it is justly deserved, in turn it would lead to the destruction of all people on earth. If there is no hope for the fallen and wayward people of God, then there could truly be no hope for those who were not called as His. There is much more tied up in the preservation of Israel than simply that which is seen at the surface.

The same is true with Israel of today. Although Christ has come and the nations are saved through Him, God's faithfulness to His unfaithful people named Israel still bears on His name and on His ability to preserve that which He has committed to.

¹² (con't) Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

Verses like this one often bring a charge that the God in the Bible cannot be the true God. How could God change His mind? This is the same sentiment that is seen at other times in Scripture. It appears that He is going in one direction and then changes and goes in another. This is not the case.

The idea of God's relenting or repenting of an action is not the same as a human doing so. The record of Scripture indicates that God is working towards an ultimate end. When He does something, it is to accomplish meeting that end. In the case of what is occurring here, there are at least two reasons for the verbiage employed.

The first is that which we have already seen. Moses is being molded and tested for his learning and growth, not the Lord's. The second is that Israel will learn that they cannot assume to be the Lord's people and not be subject to the Lord's wrath. If they are His people, they are more subject to it, not less. To those whom much is given, much is required.

¹³ 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 have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'"

Another reason is now given by Moses for the Lord to turn from His anger. It is based on the covenant He made with his fathers before Him. The promise was made, and for Israel to be destroyed would at least delay this promise. It would also make Moses, not Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, appear to be the true source of this peculiar people of God.

Further, Moses also sees that if this occurs to them now, then it would be that much easier to repeat it in the future. Even if the Lord promises to make Moses a great nation, how could that promise be any more reliable than what was previously spoken to the fathers? And so his words indicate that the Lord swore by His own self. As there can be no greater vow than this, then it must stand. This is reflected in the words of Hebrews 6 –

“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” ¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, ¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*.” Hebrews 6:13-18

¹⁴ So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

The word “relent” or *nakhm* comes from a primitive root which means “to sigh.” Thus by implication it gives the idea of letting up or giving in to a matter. The Lord has tested Moses concerning the situation, which He was fully aware of all along, and He in essence gives a sigh... “Ok Moses, you have convinced me.” But in reality it is Moses who has changed and grown, not the Lord.

In the process of what has occurred, the Lord gave an intended action, but it was conditional. After His purpose in giving that was met, He then announced another action. There is not fickleness; rather there is wisdom in what has occurred.

*Remember Your promises, O God
Remember what You have said in days of old
When we stray from the correct path which we should tread
From the holy path of which you have told
Remember Your word to Your servant
Upon which You have caused me to hope
Help me again to be observant
And towards Your precepts help me always to cope
Forgive my transgressions, those of my youth
And of my failings even in later days
Help me to walk in sincerity and truth
And to abide in Your precepts now and always*

II. The Sound of Singing (verses 15-18)

¹⁵ And Moses turned and went down from the mountain,

Moses, having received the assurance that Israel will not be destroyed, turns to go. The delay from the admonition of verse 7 could not have been a long one, but it was one which resolved a great deal concerning Moses and how he would continue to lead Israel in the future.

15 (con't) **and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand.**

This goes back to the last verse of chapter 31 –

“And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” Exodus 31:18

The detail given here that Moses had these tablets is not unnecessary. In fact, it is critical to understanding the nature of the word of God, the Person of Jesus Christ, and man’s relation to both. This will be seen as the account progresses.

At this time it says they are in Moses’ hand, singular. Later it will say they were in his hands, plural. There is no problem with this. The singular here stands for the plural. Having something in one’s hand means having possession of it, regardless of whether it is in one hand, both hands, or neither. This is seen, for example, in Genesis 39:3, when speaking of the exceptional work performance of Joseph where the same term, *b’yadow* is used –

“And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.” Genesis 39:3

15 (con't) **The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written.**

The words here are highly debated among scholars. Some say that this means the words were deeply carved, through the stone. In this, they would be visible from both sides. However, this would mean they would be in reverse on the back.

Further, certain letters which form a full enclosure like our modern “o” would fall out.

Others believe that this means that some of the commands were on the right on one tablet and on the left on the other, not on both sides of each tablet. It is known that Assyrian and Babylonian tablets were written on both sides, but Egyptian tablets rarely were. The specificity here tends to favor that it was written on both tablets and on both sides.

In that they were written on both sides, it would prohibit anyone adding to them in the future. What was written filled the tablets and thus formed the basis of the law. It was from God, and man could not add to it.

¹⁶ Now the tablets were the work of God,

What this means is that the tablets themselves were made by God. This may seem obvious, but when a second set is made, they will be made not by God, but by Moses. The specificity is given for a reason because specificity will be given later for the second set –

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones*, and I will write on *these* tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. ² So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. ³ And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.’

⁴ So he cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones*. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.” Exodus 34:1, 2

The first set was made by God; the second set will be made by man. However, both sets will be consistent in another area...

¹⁶ (con't) **and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets.**

The word “writing” is a noun, *miktav*. It will be used just nine times in the Bible and it means “writing” as in “a thing written.” It comes from the more common verb *kathav* which is the act of writing. The writing here however is defined by a verb, *kharath*, meaning “to engrave.” This is the only time it is used in the Bible. There is a marvelous contrast to what occurs here and what happens in the Gospel of John 8:2-11 –

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.”

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

The same God who wrote with His finger on the stone, engraving it so that it could not be erased, also wrote in the sand that which was soon swallowed up by footfalls and wind. We know what was written in the stone and it is what condemns us. We have no idea what was written in the sand, but it freed a sinner.

On Mount Sinai, God made the first tablets, and He also wrote the law on them. Later, Moses will make the second tablets like the first, but God will still be the One to write on the second set.

It should be especially noted that the term “Lord,” meaning Yehovah, is used 14 times in this chapter. The term “Elohim,” meaning “God,” and referring to the true God, is used only four times. However, two of those times it is in connection with the term “Lord.” In other words, Yehovah Elohim, or “the Lord God.”

Only in verse 16 does it say, “Elohim” when speaking of the true God, but without the term “Lord.” One might think it would say both the tablets and writing were done by the Lord, but it doesn’t. Instead, it says only “Elohim.” There is obviously a reason for this.

¹⁷ And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “*There is a noise of war in the camp.*”

Joshua has not been mentioned since Exodus 24:13 –

“So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ¹⁴ And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed, Aaron and Hur *are* with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them.” ¹⁵ Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain.” Exodus 24:13-15

This was over seven chapters and twenty-four sermons ago, and yet, enigmatically, they both left the camp together, to go up the mountain, but then only Moses is mentioned as going up into the mountain. Now, Moses has turned to go back down the mountain, and enigmatically, Joshua is there with him once again.

Joshua is mentioned only seven times in Exodus, five of those times, the verse in which he is mentioned includes the concept of war or fighting in battle. The book of Joshua continues with this theme of him being the one who fights the Lord's battles. His name means "Yah is Salvation." The question is, why is he mentioned out of the blue once again, just as he was in Exodus 24? It goes back to what was said in Exodus 17 –

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this *for* a memorial in the book and recount *it* in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'" Exodus 17:14

Moses, or "He who draws out" has pictured Christ, the one who has drawn out the law; having received the law from God while on the mountain. Joshua is now reintroduced here because the spirit of Amalek has infected the camp.

The name Amalek is derived from the word *am*, or people, and from the word *malaq* which "...means to nip or wring off the head of a bird with or without severing it from the body." (Abarim)

Thus, they are the "The People Who Wring Off." They are those who are disconnected from the body and strive to disconnect the body. Aaron has been led astray by this same deceiving spirit by those who would sever the head from the body. However, Joshua, or "Yah is Salvation," is returning to the camp with Moses where this will be corrected.

Moses, or “He who draws out,” is the one to receive and in turn give the law to the people. Joshua, or “Yah is salvation,” is noted as the one to defend the law and to save his people from the consequences of violations of the law. Both then are pictures of Christ in redemptive history. Joshua’s enigmatic introduction is no mistake. Instead, it is given to form a picture for us.

However, in the historical context, he has been with Moses the entire time, but he was not privy to the conversation which the Lord had with Moses concerning the idolatry which was taking place in the camp below. Because of this, the noise to him is disturbing in that he assumes that a battle is taking place.

¹⁸ But he said:

***“It is not the noise of the shout of victory,
Nor the noise of the cry of defeat,
But the sound of singing I hear.”***

Two new words are introduced here, *geburah* or “might,” and *khalushah*, or that of “being overcome.” The second will only be used this one time in the Bible. A battle has its own sound. Some men are on the advance and their sounds rise in strength. Others are on the retreat or worse, and their voice is that of anguish as their strength fades and their lives come to ruin.

In the final clause, the word rendered as “singing” is a repeat of the same verb as in the previous two clauses. The word is *anot*, and it means to sing, shout, or testify. A literal translation would say, “It is not the voice of them who raise the **cry** of victory, nor is it the voice of them who raise the **cry** of defeat - the voice of them who raise a **cry** do I hear” (Pulpit Commentary).

A reason for translating it as “singing” is because Moses had stood above the battle which Joshua engaged in against the Amelekites, and he was familiar with what such a sound was like. He had also been on the shores of the Red Sea after

Pharaoh and his armies were defeated, and he had listened to the sounds of Israel as they sang the song he had penned for them.

The sound he now heard was the latter. And yet, a war was also being waged in the camp, but the inhabitants didn't know it. Instead, they sang as if their victory was complete. The silence of the enemy, however, did not mean his defeat, but theirs. Moses' words here show us that the voice of those who raised a cry were certainly confused.

What a sad picture of all who would depart from the word of the Lord to that which is false. It appears that there is freedom and victory, but in fact, there is only temporary joy followed up with great anguish. What is perceived to be a point of jubilation turns out to be a point of shame and folly.

*How great are Your deeds O Lord our God!
Wonderful! Splendid! Majestic! We cry to You
Our eyes have seen glory as our feet have trod
You have brought us out to a life brand new
But we have turned aside from our pure devotion
And have let our hearts be seduced away from You
To false gods we have danced with emotion
Turn our hearts back to the path that is true
And in the place, O Lord, which You have furnished
For Your own dwelling we too shall dwell, leaving never
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established
The Lord shall reign forever and ever*

III. So Great a Sin (verses 19-24)

¹⁹ So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing.

The calf and the dancing are both specifically noted, as if being singled out. The last time that *mekholah*, or dance, was mentioned was in Exodus 15 when the people danced before the Lord, celebrating His victory over the armies of Pharaoh.

Here they are dancing to an idol, a calf. The mountain smoked where the Lord had descended, but their eyes were turned away from Him and toward the work of their own hands. It would have been evident, even from some distance, that the Lord was the last thing on their minds. Because of this, the anger which the Lord had previously exhibited before Moses now fills him...

^{19 (con't)} So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Later in Deuteronomy 19, Moses will tell the people that he threw the tablets and broke them before their eyes. They must have seen him coming at some point, and jointly looked towards him. At this time, and because of his anger at what he saw, he threw them down in their sight.

This signifies the annulment of the covenant. It was a lesson that in their breach of the words they had uttered, the word of God was made of no effect. But just as important, the breaking of the tablets demonstrated that Moses did not see the law as a law of curses. If he did, he would have brought it to them and held it over them, showing them where their punishment lie. Instead, the law was a gift from

the Lord to the people. They were found unworthy of the gift and thus the law was broken.

However, that the law is not a law of curses, it does not mean that the law doesn't *bring* a curse. Paul explains this in Galatians 3. The breaking of the tablets here is never mentioned in the negative by God later. In other words, it is to be considered as an act of justifiable emotion by Moses.

However, and as I have explained in a previous sermon, a picture is being made in the breaking of these tablets. It is a picture of our spiritual state. The laws are permanent, but are capable of being broken. In this, God knew that Moses would break them.

This first set of tablets pictures Adam. The tablets were made by God and engraved by God. Adam was created by God and he was given a law by God, but he broke that law.

The second set pictures Christ. They were made by Moses, but the words were still engraved by God. Jesus came from man, and was born under God's law. He never broke God's law. In both, the law was written by God, but only in Christ does the law remain unbroken. This is why the term "God" was used twice in verse 16. God's law was broken by Adam; it remained unbroken by Christ.

²⁰ Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder;

This verse logically comes after verse 24 in time, but in terms of importance it logically comes now. The tablets were broken and the next thing to be highlighted is the destruction of that which caused the offense. And so it notes now that the calf was burned and then ground down.

The word “ground” or *takhan*, is introduced here. It will be used eight times and it signifies the act of grinding. What probably is the case is that after the calf was burned, millstones were used to grind up the gold into the finest of powder.

That which was supposedly a “god” was reduced to powder in a common grinding device that was used by the women of the house, the lowest of slaves, or even as in the case of Samson, a lowly prisoner. After that, it was dispersed where it would not quickly be overlooked.

²⁰ (con’t) **and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*.**

Deuteronomy 9:21 tells us that he cast the powder into the brook that descended from the mountain. Their source of drinking water would become the reminder of their sins. Each time they went there, it would be as if they were drinking in a reminder of what they had done to offend the Lord.

The Lord their God, their true Source of life, was at the top of the mountain in smoke and fire. Their false idol, and the source of their shame, was there at the bottom of it drowned in the water they had to come to daily in order to drink and stay alive. What a remarkable contrast between the two!

²¹ **And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?”**

The words of Moses to Aaron show that he holds Aaron as chiefly responsible for what occurred. He was left in charge of the people, and he failed in controlling them. However, there is a hint of excuse allowed for Aaron by asking what the people did to him.

The words “What did this people do to you” are to be taken in a negative sense. Moses knows, before hearing the facts, that Aaron was not the initiator of what has happened. However, if he was weak, he was still responsible, if he was threatened, he was still responsible. But, the fact that Moses asks for a reason allows that Aaron can yet be forgiven of his offense.

²² So Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil.

There is a slight note of commendation for Aaron here, not much, but there is a little. He doesn’t argue. Rather, he submits to the authority of Moses. Further, he calls him - his younger brother Moses - *adoni*, or “my lord.” This is the only time he is recorded as saying this, and it shows that he knows he is in the weaker position and is liable for the full measure of the consequences to come.

However, that is as far as commendation can go. He next does exactly what Adam did when he was faced with his sin. First Adam blamed the Lord directly and then he kicked the can down the road to Eve. When she got the can, she just kicked it further –

“And He said, ‘Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?’

¹² Then the man said, ‘The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.’

¹³ And the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What *is* this you have done?’”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”” Genesis 3:11-13

Aaron is found to be no different than his first parents. He even implicitly blames Moses for what occurred. He proceeds with two separate excuses for what

happened The first is not sufficient for the outcome, and the second will be an outright lie which is absurd on the surface.

The first is *ha'am ki bera hu* – “The people, they are in evil.” He says it as if it is their defining characteristic. Not only are they intent on evil, they dwell in evil. It is their nature. So how could he be blamed for this? He implies that Moses already knew this and he shouldn't have expected any less. The failings of Adam are found reoccurring in Aaron, 28 generations later.

²³ For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

This is almost word for word what was said to him by the people. Aaron is precise here, even to the fact that they gave the credit of bringing them out of Egypt to Moses, rather than to the Lord. However, our verses today finish on a sad note; Aaron's second, and highly lame, excuse...

²⁴ And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it* off.'

Aaron fails to give the specifics here. In verse 2, he asked for the golden earrings of the wives, sons, and daughters. As these were the precious items which he thought they would never part with, it shows that he was afraid of admitting that he had misjudged the situation entirely.

In order to not look like even more of a failure than he already was, he omits these words and simply makes it look like a general appeal for gold was made. However, he still uses the rather rare word for “break” which is *paraq*.

Instead of saying, “take them off,” he uses this stronger word which almost gives the idea of violence. He takes credit for challenging the people, but not in the same degree as that which really took place when he was approached by them.

Finally, in verse 2, after asking for the gold, he told them to bring it to him. Here, it says they simply gave it to him. It is as if he had tried to get them to make their god, but they forced the job on him. Poor Aaron... With each step of his excuse, he digs himself a little bit deeper into trouble with the Lord.

***24 (fin) So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.”**

This is the most ridiculous aspect of all. First, he notes that the people brought the gold to him, as if he was now made responsible for it. But being the noble and faithful soul he was, he simply threw the gold into the fire, knowing that nothing could ever come out of it except a blob.

But lo and behold! A calf came out. Thus, Aaron has shown himself to be free from guilt because forces beyond his control fashioned the thing. However, as was seen in verse 4, it was fashioned with an engraving tool. The absurdity of his claim is seen in what was there before him as the people worshipped.

His weakness, disrespect for the Lord, suppression of the truth, and his outright lies have angered the Lord to great measure. In Deuteronomy 9, we will read this

—

“And the Lord was very angry with Aaron *and* would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.” Deuteronomy 9:20

Aaron was tested and he failed. Even after his failure, he proved himself unworthy of being restored through his continued negative behavior. However, where his sin did abound, grace towards him will abound much more. Thank God for the grace of God in Christ.

The ongoing lesson of this incident is that each of us is susceptible to failure, but each of us can overcome it as well. Aaron succumbed to it, Moses has thus far prevailed. These people and the things that they have done have been given to us as examples of what is right and proper to do.

The record of their achievements and failures has been given to us as goals – goals to attain the good, and goals to rise above the bad. How many churches have gone the way of Aaron and have succumbed to the pressures of their surroundings, eventually bowing to the golden calf of idolatry.

As we will see with Aaron, the Lord is gracious and will provide forgiveness, but His patience is not without limits. The seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation give commendation, encouragement, and hope, but they also give warnings and rebuke.

Let us individually, and as a congregation, pay heed to the Lord, be attentive to His word, and never allow anything but the worship of the true God to permeate our gatherings. Let us lift our eyes to the Lord and fix them there so that when He comes, we will stand approved and rewarded for the lives we have lived.

And should there be a person who is listening today that has never discerned the difference between the false gods of the world and the true God who transcends the world, please give me a moment to introduce Him to you...

Closing Verse: “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?”

² My help *comes* from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1, 2

Next Week: Exodus 32:25-35 *Their test is next, will they score high?* (The Golden Calf – The Testing of the Sons of Levi) (91st Exodus Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. Even if a deep ocean lies ahead of You, He can part the waters and lead you through it on dry ground. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Testing of Moses

Then 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, of this help me to learn
With great power and with a mighty hand
This I surely wish to understand
Why should the Egyptians speak, and say
He brought them out to harm them in this place
To kill them in the mountains
And to consume them from the earth’s face

Turn from Your fierce wrath; do not let it be spent
And from this harm to Your people, please relent

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel
Your servants, to whom You swore and did not lie
By Your own self, and said to them; you did tell
I will your descendants as the stars of heaven multiply
And all this land that I have spoken of
A promise that I will not sever
I give to your descendants
And they shall inherit it forever

So the Lord relented from the harm; He bid it adieu
Which He said to His people He would do
And Moses turned, as we understand
And went down from the mountain
And the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand
The tablets were written on both sides, words so pure
On the one side and on the other written they were

Now the tablets were the work of God, as we understand
And the writing was the writing of God
Engraved on the tablets; given from God's hand
And when Joshua heard the noise
Of the people as they shouted
He said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp
Of this he could not have doubted

But he said, in frustration complete
“It is not the noise of the shout of victory
Nor the noise of the cry of defeat
But the sound of singing is heard by me
So it was, as soon as he came near the camp
That he saw the calf and the dancing too
So Moses’ anger became hot
And he cast the tablets out of his hands
Yes, out of his hands the tablets he threw

And broke them at the foot of the mountain
His anger came forth as a streaming fountain
Then he took the calf which they had made
Burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder
And he scattered it on the water
And made the children of Israel drink it like golden calf chowder

And Moses said to Aaron
“What did this people do to you?
That you have brought so great a sin upon them?
What was going on in the mind of you?
So Aaron said, yes even so
“Do not let the anger of my lord become hot
Surely these people as you know

That they are set on evil; it hasn't changed in this spot

For they said to me, even thus

"Make us gods that shall go before us

As for this Moses

The man who brought us out of Egypt the land

We do not know what has become of him

Of where he has gone we just do not understand

And I said to them

"Whoever has any gold, let them break it off, so I did shout

So they gave it to me

And I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out

Lord God, the failings of others are the same as our own

Facing our sin is a most difficult thing to do

Help us to each and every sin bemoan

And to walk on the path which is holy and true

Keep us from the offenses which divide

Our devotions to You, turning them aside

Help us to walk always in stride

With Your precepts only, never in haughtiness or pride

Lord God, we thank You for your guiding hand

We thank You for Your Spirit, which You have given to us

Thank You for the promise of a heavenly land

Granted because of what was done by our Lord Jesus

Until the day we are there, O God

Keep us from turning aside from the holy path we should tread

And on this path we will give You all of our praise

Seeking Your face throughout all our days

Hallelujah and Amen...