

EXODUS 32:25-35 (THE GOLDEN CALF – THE TESTING OF THE SONS OF LEVI)

Three sets of testing are found in Exodus 32. The first was Aaron's testing. He did poorly. The next was Moses' testing. He did well. The final note of testing is that of the sons of Levi. What is unknown is how many of them participated in Aaron's failure at first. The Bible is silent on this.

However, what is known is how they responded to their testing when confronted with the need to stand up and act on behalf of the Lord. They will do well. In Matthew 21, Jesus gave us this parable –

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’²⁹ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went.³⁰ Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.³¹ Which of the two did the will of *his* father?”

They said to Him, “The first.” Matthew 21:28-31

A shadow of this thought is seen in today's verses. Regardless of what the sons of Levi did at first, they did what was right in the end. They were willing to stop and evaluate the situation around them and then go about doing that which was right to do.

Because of their actions in today's passage, they will be bestowed an honor which singled them out as a special tribe, dedicated to the Lord throughout all their generations. In the Song of Moses, their deeds at this time were remembered –

Text Verse: “And of Levi he said:

'Let Your Thummim and Your Urim *be* with Your holy one,
Whom You tested at Massah,
And with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah,
⁹Who says of his father and mother,
'I have not seen them';
Nor did he acknowledge his brothers,
Or know his own children;
For they have observed Your word
And kept Your covenant.'" Deuteronomy 33:8, 9

Each one of us is bound to falter in our daily lives at one time or another. But this doesn't mean that all is lost. What we do with ourselves after our initial failings often overshadows what we initially messed up. This is true in family matters, in our work environment, and in our walk as Christians before the Lord as well.

Sometimes our failings may even highlight our successes. And so we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves, unless our failings remain failures. If not, then let us use the lessons we learn to continuously improve ourselves and to do that which is morally right as we walk in the presence of the Lord each day.

The lesson of the golden calf is one which still hangs over Israel to this day. A friend of mine was reading this very passage at the same time that I was typing these sermons. She said, "How could they have done this after all the Lord had done for them; after all they had seen and experienced."

My answer was that Israel is just a microcosm of the world at large. We have seen God's hand do the miraculous both in His word and in our lives. We have seen the ancient promises fulfilled, even during our lifetime, and yet we fail just as Israel failed. But we can overcome our failures if we look to the Lord and to His honor in our lives. This is a lesson which is 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 Testing of the Sons of Levi (verses 25-29)

²⁵ Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies),

The word for “unrestrained” which is found twice in this verse is *para*. It is from an unused root meaning “to loosen.” One can get the mental picture that the people were simply loosed, like wild oxen, to dance about in a completely unrestrained manner. They were running amok and out of control.

This word is found only 16 times and 6 of them, more than any other book in the Bible, are found in the Proverbs. One proverb which fits what occurs here at Sinai is found in Proverbs 29 –

“Where *there is* no revelation, the people **cast off restraint**;
But happy *is* he who keeps the law.” Proverbs 9:18

Solomon may have been reading this account in Exodus and contemplating what occurred here when he wrote this particular proverb. This word is variously translated here. Other versions say running wild, out of control, broken loose, were naked, were stripped, and unbridled.

Those translations which say “stripped” or “naked” may be taken literally, as if the people had actually torn off their clothes and committed outright indecency, or it may be taken figuratively in that they left themselves naked and exposed. If so,

then their enemies would have the ability to overtake and destroy them. This is most likely the true sense as the same word is used that way in 2 Chronicles 28 –

“For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he **had made** Judah **naked** and had completely rebelled against the LORD.”

2 Chronicles 28:19, 20

Sounds like our president today! Judah’s morals degraded so greatly that they became naked and exposed to their enemies. Such is the pattern of rebellion against God. We have failed to learn from the past, and we now face the same state of moral decline and nakedness.

As seen in the last passage where Joshua was noted, the enemies of God, represented by Amalek, would be the most likely to take advantage of this naked state. Whether it was the spirit of Amalek within the camp, or the actual group of Amelekites who could view the open and exposed flanks of Israel, the people had left themselves in a state which was unacceptable.

The word translated as “to their shame” is a verb, *shimtsah*. It is only found here in the Bible, and it means scornful whispering (of hostile spectators), and thus “shame.” It is the same as a rare noun, *shemets*, meaning “to whisper.”

The idea is that God’s people had so degraded themselves that their enemies had opportunity to scornfully whisper about them. In turn, their actions would then reflect on the Lord. To bring shame upon self is to bring shame upon one’s God. This is evident every time a pastor, preacher, priest, or pope acts in a disgraceful manner. The God they profess is maligned along with them.

But this is not limited to clergy alone. Anyone who claims to be a follower of the Lord will bring disgrace upon Him when they act in an unrestrained manner. We need to remember always that our actions don't just harm us. Family, friends, congregations, and above all the name of our God, all are affected by our immoral behavior.

²⁶ then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp,

In the Bible, the *shaar* or "gate" of a camp, town, or city, was the place of judgment. It is where the elders would congregate to decide matters and to determine laws and their enforcement. This camp, despite being just that – a camp – was set up as a city, with a makeshift barrier around it and points of access. It is certain that there were at least two, and maybe several, points of access from the wording of the next verse.

This was probably the principle gate where Moses now stood, maybe the camp was aligned to face Sinai. Whatever the case, a judgment was now to be rendered at the place of judgment.

^{26 (con't)} and said, "Whoever *is* on the Lord's side—*come* to me!"

The Hebrew basically says, "Who for Yehovah? And come to me!" In verse 5, upon seeing the golden calf, Aaron had said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the Lord." He thus equated the golden calf with the Lord, and the people had acknowledged it as such.

Now what is happening is that a divide is being set. Those in the camp who were feasting to the calf had set up their standard of who the Lord was to them. Moses now sets up the unseen Lord in opposition to them. By standing in the gate of the camp, he was calling out for those who were faithful to come outside the camp as

an act of declaring themselves sanctified for the service of the Lord. This is similar to the thought of Hebrews 13 –

“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” Hebrews 13:12, 13

Were there any in the camp who were willing to sanctify themselves to the Lord by acknowledging that He was not reflected in the idol, but rather in the commandments which had preceded the idol? This is what he calls out for.

²⁶ (con’t) **And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.**

As was seen in verse 3, and at many other times throughout Scripture, not every “every” means every and not all “all’s” mean all. In the case of “all the sons of Levi,” it is speaking of a greater portion of them. It can be inferred from verse 27, that there were Levites who didn’t come to the side of the Lord.

However, those who did probably came first out of loyalty to Moses, and thus the brotherhood of the tribe itself. This deep-seated loyalty can be traced all the way back to the account of Genesis 34 where Simeon and Levi both defended the honor of the family against the rape of their sister Dinah.

Moses, calling for the honor of the Lord, then stirred up that same loyalty in his brothers who quickly came to his side. Whether any or all of them had been a part of the feast is not the consideration here. What is being considered is their willingness to turn from the crowd and to the honor of the Lord. As one turned to Moses, another turned, and then another. Eventually, a great portion of Levi had come to his side.

27 And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel:

Moses is speaking as the prophet of God. There is no indication in Scripture that the Lord told him to say this, with the exception of this verse itself. And yet, the silence concerning any condemnation of what follows, and even the approval of it, shows that Moses was speaking as the Lord’s prophet. And therefore, what transpires is not to be considered inappropriate, rash, or unauthorized.

27 (con’t) ‘Let every man put his sword on his side,

The word translated here as “side” is *yarek*, and it properly means “thigh.” The swords used would be thigh swords which were small and easily maneuvered in close-quarter fights.

27 (con’t) and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp,

Here we see that the camp was set up with multiple entrances. For a tent type of city, it would have been a rather well defended encampment, and it would have had points where the people could quickly go in and out if enemies came to attack them. The verses here show discipline and contemplative arrangement by the leader, meaning Moses.

However, at this time, these gates would not be a place of safety and life for those inside, but rather they would become the place where death came upon them through full and unmerciful force.

²⁷ (con't) **and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.”**

The words here are given as an all-encompassing command. Regardless of how a person was known to one of the Levites, whether through blood relation, close friendship, or nearness as a neighbor, they were to kill and not hold back.

As they are told to go throughout the camp, the idea surely does not mean indiscriminate killing, but rather those who had not stopped their reveling at the return of Moses. Any continued offender would be subject to death. This is certain because out of a group of perhaps two million people, only a small fraction will actually die.

The obvious purpose of this command is to stay the wrath of the Lord against a greater destruction of life. This is seen at other times in the Bible. The zeal for the Lord, and the taking of action in regards to His wrath, is what saves the people from greater wrath. Each of these precepts is seen again in Numbers 25 –

“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. ²They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.’

⁵So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.’

⁶And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the

congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷ Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; ⁸ and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. ⁹ And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.” Numbers 25:1-9

²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses.

Of this, Matthew Henry states –

“Those are marked for ruin who persist in sin: those who in the morning were shouting and dancing, before night were dying. Such sudden changes do the judgments of the Lord sometimes make with sinners that are secure and jovial in their sin.” Matthew Henry

What is important to understand here is that a type of amnesty was offered to all people with the words of verse 26. When Moses called out, “Whoever *is* on the Lord’s side—*come* to me!” it meant that those who came to him had been obedient, and for any who had not, their guilt remained. The only people who were actually not guilty were these faithful Levites. All others were rendered guilty by association, if nothing else.

²⁸ (con’t) And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

The number to die in comparison to the number in the camp is exceedingly small. Though all bore the guilt implicitly, only 3000 died. However, it was a sufficient amount to demonstrate that the Levites had been faithful to the task to which they had been called.

For whatever reason, the Latin Vulgate of this verse reads 23,000 people were killed, that along with another Catholic version, the Douay-Rheims both state this without any textual support. They are in error and need a red letter correction penned in here.

²⁹ Then Moses said, “Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord,

The words here, *v’yomer moshe milu yedkem hayom l’Yehovah* literally say, “and said Moses fill your hands today to Yehovah.” The idea of filling the hand brings to mind that of consecration, just as when the priests would fill their hands with the ordination sacrifices, thus consecrating themselves to the Lord.

The deed of the Levites was considered as such a filling of the hand. They had filled their hand with the sword of the Lord, and they had then used that sword to avenge the honor of the Lord. Thus their actions were considered as acts of consecration. It is exactly what was seen in the passage from Numbers concerning Phineas. After his noble deed, this is recorded –

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ¹¹ ‘Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. ¹² Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; ¹³ and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.’”

The destruction of the enemies of the Lord is called a sacrifice elsewhere in Scripture, thus, their deed is considered as if a sacrifice which fills the hand. In such a sacrifice, there is something which is then returned upon the person...

29 (con't) **that He may bestow on you a blessing this day,**

The opposite of a curse is a blessing. The blessing to be bestowed upon Levi for their zeal will be the distinction of a people who are set apart to serve the priests in Israel. What has occurred here is the reversal of a curse. As I said earlier, Simeon and Levi had defended the honor of the family when their sister Dinah had been raped. However, Jacob saw this as a reason to curse their zeal. On his deathbed, he pronounced these words over them –

“Simeon and Levi *are* brothers;
Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.
⁶ Let not my soul enter their council;
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.
⁷ Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel.” Genesis 49:5-7

In Levi’s zeal, he had violated the precepts of truth and justice in regards to a false connection to obtaining a blood relationship through the covenant of circumcision. Now the descendants of Levi had restored truth and justice, and had upheld the covenant at Sinai by avenging the Lord against their own blood relationships. Thus, their curse had been changed into a blessing.

Both Simeon and Levi would still be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel, but for the Levites it would be in a positive sense. Whereas Simeon would scatter into obscurity in Judah, Levi would continue to be held in high honor in Israel. Even to this day, the name of Levi remains well-known. Nobody wears Simeon blue jeans, do they? But Levi’s are the standard.

29 (con't) **for every man has opposed his son and his brother.”**

Of these words, the Geneva Bible says –

“In revenging God's glory we must have no partiality to person, but lay aside all carnal affection.” Geneva

This tenet remains unchanged. To what point will you be willing to stand for the honor of the Lord? What will you do if your son or daughter tells you they are a homosexual? What will you do if your brother joins a cult? When will you say, “I’m going to ignore this part of the Bible because it conflicts with my interpersonal relations?” Be prepared now to stand and defend the honor of the Lord – at any and all costs.

*How high will you hold up the honor of the Lord?
To what level will you go to defend it before another?*

*How precious to you is His sacred word?
Will you stand against your friend, or even against your brother?*

*How sacred is to you the faith that you profess
And how willing are you to stand upon every precept*

*What if your life is threatened? Will you still confess?
Or in your resolve will the Lord faltering detect?*

*Be steadfast in your proclamation
Be willing to stand for the Lord before any and all*

*Be one of the greats in your generation
When the times of testing come, be sure not to hesitate or stall*

II. Accursed from Christ (verses 30-33)

³⁰ Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin.

After the slaying of the people by Levi, even on the next day, Moses spoke to the people concerning what had occurred. His words, “You have committed a great sin” follow on from what was said in Exodus 20, at the time of the giving of the law. At that time, there was the great display of thunderings, flashes, the blast of the trumpet, and smoke. The people then asked that the Lord would no longer speak to them lest they die. Moses’ response was –

“Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” Exodus 20:20

They had forgotten this, and they had, in fact, committed a great sin, directly against the laws found in the Ten Commandments. The word “You” is emphatic. “**You** people have committed a great sin.” Because of this, Moses’ next words are given...

^{30 (con’t)} So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

Of these words, several scholars state pretty much what Charles Ellicott says –

“When Moses had, on first hearing of God’s intention to destroy the people, interceded for them (Exodus 32:11-13), his prayers had received no direct answer—he had been left in doubt whether they were granted or no. Having now

put an end to the offence, and to some extent punished it, he is bent on renewing his supplications, and obtaining a favourable reply.”

This is incorrect. Verse 14 shows that the Lord relented against destroying all of the people during his testing of Moses. Therefore, Moses’ ascent to the Lord now is not one of seeking His wrath to be stayed. It is a different level of restoration which he seeks.

The people have nullified the covenant through their deeds. They are, in essence, cut off from being the people of the Lord. This is what Moses is looking to restore. When Peter betrayed Christ, he received pardon for that betrayal in the death of Christ. However, he was not restored to his position as an apostle until later, on the shores of the sea of Galilee.

Israel has received general pardon from God for their idolatry; they will not be destroyed. However, their sin has separated them from their God as to being counted as the people of the Lord; His representative nation. This is the atonement which Moses will seek. He will now act as the mediatorial priest for Israel.

It is the greatest such act recorded of him. In the future, with the construction of the tabernacle and the service of the law, this duty will be conducted by Aaron and his descendants after him. That they have lost their status as the Lord’s people is now seen in the words of the next verse...

³¹ Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold!

After ascending the mountain once again to seek the Lord, Moses begins his petition with the word *an-na*. It is a contraction of two other words, *ahava*, meaning “love,” and *na*, meaning “please.” In essence, “I beg of you.”

After this, he does not say, “Your people” as he did in verse 11. He says “these people.” They have distanced themselves from the Lord by the worship of a false god which they called “the Lord.” It has removed from them the position which they had been accepted to in the ratification of the covenant in Exodus 24.

As a further stress, Moses says that the people have made *elohe zahav*, “gods of gold.” The plural is given for the singular to show the utterly contemptible nature of what had occurred. It is comparable to us saying, “He is engaged in sins of the flesh” when speaking of any illicit behavior a person may have been caught in.

Moses has laid bare the *situation*, and now seeks for a sign of mercy and *restoration* concerning what has transpired...

³² Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—

This phrase is what is known as an aposiopesis. It is the sudden cutting off a speech to make a point. One must insert a thought, guessing what the rest of the phrase should be. Normally the continuation is obvious. In this case, it would be something like, “If you will forgive their sin, then great...” However, those words are left off in order to make the contrasting statement more poignant...

^{32 (con’t)} but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”

The words here are often taken to unintended extremes, even to the point of saying that people can lose their salvation and that this is a proof of it. This is not

what this is speaking of, and the context here has nothing to do with the context of salvation after the cross of Christ.

The “book which you have written” is the book of the living. The idea is similar to that of a registry of people in any city. There are those who are alive and who are thus accounted on those roles for all of the purposes of the living. These can include school, taxes, being drafted – whatever.

In the case of Israel, there was a book of the living for those who are a part of the covenant people. This was agreed to in Exodus 24. The people were inscribed in the book as subjects of the kingdom. It could even be that it was compiled during Moses’ 40 days on the mountain while receiving the details of the previous chapters.

To not have their sins forgiven means that they would be blotted out of that book. It would then mean that they would have no inheritance in the land of Canaan to which they were headed. This is what Moses has in view as he petitions the Lord.

Moses has tied himself to his people. They are either the people of the Lord, or he desires to be counted among them when they are no longer His people. He is expressing his highest desire that they remain the people of the Lord, despite having broken the covenant. John Lange details this –

“He would rather be blotted, with the people, out of the book of life, of theocratic citizenship, than without the people to stand in the book alone. As mediating priest he has come as far as to the thought of going to destruction *with* the people, but not *for* them.” John Lange

There are quite a few verses in Scripture which point to this idea of inclusion in the theocratic citizenship of the Lord. Two of them will help explain what is going on –

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
And not be written with the righteous.” Psalm 69:28

“And it shall come to pass that *he who is* left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.” Isaiah 4:3

This is an earthly kingdom leading to the Messiah. In Christ’s coming, the kingdom moves into a new phase where the Mediator will not be just willing to go to destruction *with* the people, but *for* them. In His act, the true book of life is seen and realized. When one puts their faith in Christ, receiving Him as Savior, they become a part of His eternal theocratic rule. Revelation says –

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3:5

Paul shows us the state of those who have rejected this spiritual kingdom of Christ. It is a state of being accursed and cut off from God. In his love for his people, we find words reminiscent of those of Moses –

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law,

the service *of God*, and the promises; ⁵ of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.” Romans 9:1-5

In Moses, there is a petition for “grace or judgment.” In Christ, there is the realization of, “Through judgment the highest grace” (Lange). Paul could not seek the first for his people collectively, and so they are obligated to seek the latter individually.

*Gods of gold fashioned with our hands
We pray for them to save, but they do not hear
Gods of gold, it seems no one understands
Instead of life and peace, they bring only death and fear
Lord, forgive our hearts and turn us back to You
Give us wisdom to seek out that which is right
Help us to be ever faithful and true
And to pursue only Jesus with all of our might
Let our names be inscribed forever in Your book
Through Christ’s shed blood alone do we overcome
Towards heaven’s riches forever shall we look
To no more gods of gold will our hearts succumb*

III. Promises and Punishment (verses 33-35)

³³ And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

Cambridge states, "Jehovah replies that He will blot out of His book not the righteous, but those only who have sinned against Him." However, there is the truth recorded later in Romans that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23) Further, Romans says, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10).

In Ezekiel 18, it twice says, "The soul who sins shall die." It is certain that Moses sinned, and Moses died. Further, Moses could not die for the sins of others. The Bible makes it known that such a vicarious punishment is unacceptable.

And yet, we as Christians can rightly make the assumption that though Moses died, he is also considered a righteous saint, along with many others of the Old Testament. And so how can we reconcile these two contrasting thoughts – that of being blotted out if a soul has sinned against the Lord, and that of being considered righteous before the Lord?

The answer, as always, comes down to faith. Faith in God's provision, which is Christ, is what brings a person to the Throne of God. This is why Hebrews 11 highlights the saints of old and proclaims that they were deemed acceptable to God. It was by faith in what lie ahead.

Only in Christ is there found One who never sinned. And yet He died. However, it was not for His sins, but for the sins of others. Only in Christ is a vicarious punishment deemed acceptable. The Bible shows us such marvelous truths!

In the immediate context though, Moses is being told that the one who has sinned against the Lord will be blotted out of the book. This is referring to the sin of the golden calf and the book of the theocratic rule which is to be realized in the land of Canaan.

Those who failed to live by faith, and instead trusted in the work of their hands, would not receive the promised inheritance. This is seen in the words of the next verse...

³⁴ Now therefore, go, lead the people to *the place* of which I have spoken to you.

It is the promised inheritance, the land of Canaan, which is being dealt with – life in Canaan under the theocratic rule of the Lord. Moses is instructed to lead the people there in fulfillment of the promise which was made.

³⁴ (con't) Behold, My Angel shall go before you.

There are two views on what these words mean. Is “the Angel” referred to here a created being, or is it referring to the Angel of the Lord who is Christ?

These words are very similar to Exodus 23:20 which was speaking of the Lord. However, based on the words of the next chapter, most scholars see this angel here is not the Lord, but a created angel. In the next chapter, it will say –

“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”
Exodus 33:3

For this reason, it seems that this is not the Angel of the Lord, but a created angel. However, the words “in your midst” are the antithesis of the words of Exodus 33:7 –

“Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass *that* everyone who sought the LORD went out to the tabernacle of meeting which *was* outside the camp.”

The Lord was no longer *in the midst* of the congregation, but a far way off. Thus, there is no reason to assume that this verse is not still the Angel of the Lord, meaning Christ. This is further supported by the term *malaki* or “My Angel,” rather than merely *malak*, or “an angel.” Only the “angel” of verse 33:2 is not speaking of the Angel of the Lord. This appears to be borne out in the chiasm which spans these chapters.

³⁴ (con’t) Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.”

The words here in Hebrew read, “when I visit, then I will visit on them their sin.” The word is *paqad*. It comes from a root which means to visit, either with friendly or hostile intent. In the case of this visitation, it will be with intent which is hostile. Those who sinned and were spared by the sword will still not find relief.

***³⁵ So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.**

The chapter ends with these sobering words. The Lord promised to visit the people with punishment and these words confirm that this took place. The word used here means to strike. It can be in a plague or some other way. Nothing more is said about what occurred in their being stricken. Nor is there any note of those that repented and mourned over what they had done.

Instead, the verse is left up to the divine discretion of the Lord and to His righteous justice to decide what occurred with each person who sinned. The congregation was spared, but the soul that sinned was brought into judgment. What is to be considered of particular note is the contrast between this account today and that of what occurred in Acts 2.

At Sinai, which according to Galatians 4 symbolizes the temple in Jerusalem, the law was received and it was written on tablets of stone. Those tablets were given to Moses but were broken at the base of the mountain because of the people's turning from the Lord to a false God. After this, 3000 people *died* because of their sin. In Acts 2, we read this –

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:40-42

There at the temple in Jerusalem, the word of the Lord was again given, but this time it was written on the tablets of the hearts of the people, as Paul calls the work of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:3. At that time, 3000 people were *saved* because of their faith in Christ.

The two accounts are given to show the superiority of the fulfilled law in Christ to the giving of the law by Moses. One was written on stone and it leads to death. The other is written on the heart and it leads to life.

It was a perverse generation who followed after the golden calf, having rejected the Lord on the mountain at Sinai, and it was a perverse generation who rejected Christ and sought to seek their own righteousness apart from Him. For those 3000

who died at Sinai, they died *in sin* because of their deeds. For the 3000 who received Jesus in Jerusalem, they died *to sin* because of His deeds.

For all the rest, in both places, and for all who have come since, the truth is that the soul who sins shall die. The question for each of us is, “When the Lord comes to visit us for punishment, will it be punishment *in us* for the sins we have committed in this life, or will it have been *in Christ* for those same sins?” These are the only two options available to man.

If our sins have been judged in Christ, our names are written in the book of life and they shall never be blotted out; we have overcome. If our sins have not been dealt with through Him, then another fate awaits –

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 20:11-15

Of this passage today, Matthew Henry says –

“But having that mind which was in Christ, he was willing to lay down his life in the most painful manner, if he might thereby preserve the people. Moses could not wholly turn away the wrath of God; which shows that the law of Moses was

not able to reconcile men to God, and to perfect our peace with him. In Christ alone, God so pardons sin as to remember it no more.” Matthew Henry

Isn't that the most marvelous news. In Christ, God so pardons sin as to remember it no more! The world doesn't even want to hear about sin. But it is a reality which cannot be denied when considering the holiness of God.

Today many large churches are full of worshippers quite often because the church is geared towards the carnal man. There are promises of health, wealth, and prosperity, but there is no heart for the grace of God which frees us from sin. The sin is passed over, not dealt with.

It is the rare church which is both large and filled with worshippers who praise God not for what He can give us in this life, but what He has given us for eternal life. Sin is not a popular subject, but it is one of the defining subjects of Scripture. If God simply wanted to plop down prosperity upon our heads, He would have skipped over the brutal death of Christ. But He didn't.

Today, if you are wanting a true and right relationship with Christ, come to the foot of the cross and call out your need for the Savior. After that all else will fall into its proper place. If you have never come to do this, please make today the day...

Closing Verse: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:6-8

Next Week: Exodus 33:1-11 *As you all listen, none of you should be bored* (Everyone Who Sought the Lord) (92nd 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 the Sons of Levi

Now when Moses saw that the 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—come to me. Do, please

And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him
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 entrance to entrance, as well
Throughout the camp, let these words be applied

And let every man kill his brother
Every man his companion, and every man his neighbor
So the sons of Levi did according to as Moses did say
And about three thousand men of the people fell that day
Then Moses said, yes he did say
“Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord

That He may bestow on you a blessing this day
For every man has opposed his son and his brother according to His word
Now it came to pass on the next day
That Moses to the people said
“You have committed a great sin, in your wicked way
So now I will go up to the Lord instead

Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin
Otherwise you are surely done in
Then Moses returned to the Lord and said
“Oh, these people have committed a great sin
And have made for themselves a god of gold!
Surely your patience is wearing thin

Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray
Blot me out of Your book which You have written, blot me out today
And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me
I will blot him out of My book, this is how it shall be

Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place
Of which I have spoken to you
Behold, My Angel shall go before your face
Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment
I will visit punishment upon them for their sin, the debt shall be paid
So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did

With the calf which Aaron made
Here we are Lord, really no different than Israel
We are unrestrained in in our lives each and every day
It is a sad, sad story to tell
But this is humanity's normal, confused way

Help us to be bold, Lord, when facing sin
To stand against it and to be firm in defending Your glory
While the world continues to spiral its way in
Help us to proclaim to all the wondrous gospel story

For it alone has the power, the lost soul to save
For it alone tells of the precious life You gave

Thank You, O God, for this perfect gift which You have bestowed upon us
Thank You, O God, for our Savior, our Lord, our precious Jesus

Hallelujah and Amen...