

Exodus 32 “When Worship Goes Horribly Wrong”
Psalm 106
Acts 7

August 20, 2017

Since we are 32 chapters into Exodus, it can be easy to forget where we are
(and especially since I was on vacation for the last three weeks!).
And for that matter, many of you have come in the middle of the series –
so it would be useful to have something of a recap.

And that is where some of the longer Psalms come in handy!
Psalm 106 retells the story of the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings –
and Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 also retells the story,
highlighting the key themes of the book of Exodus.

When we sing a longer Psalm, I would like to encourage you to really focus on the words.
It’ll take a couple stanzas to get the tune stuck in your head,
but then you can really focus on what we are singing,
as we sing a part of the story of salvation.

So let’s sing Psalm 106
Read Acts 7

Exodus 32 is all about what people *saw*.
You can see this in the outline I’ve given you in the bulletin:

Verse 1 – “When the people saw...”
Verse 5 – “When Aaron saw...”
Verse 9 – the LORD says, “I have seen...”
Verse 19 – Moses “saw...”
Verse 25 – “When Moses saw...”

And here in Acts 7, after Stephen quotes from Exodus 32 and the rebellion at Sinai,
Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and *saw* the glory of God,
and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened,
and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (7:55-56)

There was a whole crowd standing there.
But only one man could *see* Jesus.

As we go through Exodus 32 today,
as we look at what Israel saw, what Aaron saw, what the LORD saw, and what Moses saw,
I want *you* to see Jesus.

1. The Golden Calf and the Logic of Idolatry (v1-6)

a. “When the People Saw” – How Easy It Is to Forget the LORD (v1-4)

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who 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.”
² So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden^[a] calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

And the first thing that we need to see is that the reaction of the people is entirely *understandable*.

Moses has been gone for 40 days.

That’s nearly six weeks.

For more than a month, you’ve been sitting around the camp,
waiting for this guy to come back.

And it’s not like you have anything to do!

There’s manna every day to eat – so you don’t need to find food

(and you are out in the wilderness, anyway, so there’s not much food to find!).

So, after the first week you were getting *bored*.

And now, nearly six weeks in – with no word or sign that Moses is still up on the mountain –
it’s time to *do something*.

We can’t just stay here forever!!

If you just operate on the basis of what you *see*

then the response of the people makes a whole lot of sense!

This is why Hebrews 11 keeps saying, “by faith” –

because it is only by faith that we will see what God is doing.

But the people respond by returning to the familiar – the comfortable – the old “normal.”

In Egypt – as in the rest of the ancient world –

the gods were depicted in animal or human form.

The Egyptian deity Apis was depicted as a bull.

So it is likely that at least *some* of the people were thinking of this golden calf
as a depiction of the gods –

after all, as we have seen before,

there was a “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt with Israel.

Many – perhaps most – of those gathered at Sinai

were *not* actually descendants of Abraham.

They had seen God’s mighty deeds in Egypt

and so they had believed and come out into the wilderness.

But seeing mighty deeds can only produce a temporary faith.

When the mighty deeds dry up, so does the faith!

And so they go back to the comfortable and familiar –

they want physical objects to represent their gods.

b. “When Aaron Saw” – The Blood of the Covenant without the Book of the Covenant (v5-6)

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said,

“Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.”⁶ And they rose up early 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.

But notice Aaron’s response.

“When Aaron saw this...”

Aaron also is operating on the basis of what he sees with his eyes.

He sees that the people are getting out of control –

and he sees that the only way that he can maintain his position – his influence –
is by going along with the crowd.

In other words, Aaron also is driven by what he can see.

And so when Aaron saw this,

he built an altar before the golden calf.

It would appear that Aaron thinks that he has come up with a solution to the problem!

He attempts to re-interpret what the people have done:

they had said,

“Here are your gods (plural), who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

Aaron knows that it was Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt,

and Aaron wishes to remain faithful to Yahweh.

So Aaron reinterprets the golden calf and says,

“Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh.”

How can Aaron say this?

Aaron has heard the Ten Commandments.

The second commandment says:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image,
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.
You shall not bow down to them or serve them...”

And further, Aaron has heard the Book of the Covenant –

and in Exodus 20:23,

the Book of the Covenant says, “You shall not make gods of silver to be with me,
nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.”

But temples in the ancient world had lots of images –

not just images *of* the gods!

Even the Tabernacle was to have the golden cherubim over the mercy seat!

And the cherubim, from what we hear in Ezekiel,

have a certain resemblance to the ox!

So maybe Aaron is thinking that this “golden calf” can be understood as a sort of cherub!

A guardian of God’s holy worship!!

Certainly Aaron is trying to “spin” the golden calf in a way that allows it to remain a “feast to Yahweh.”

But the rest of the passage is very clear that *Israel* thought of the golden calf as an idol –
an image representing their gods.

But for a moment, let's take Aaron's "re-interpretation" and run with it.

If this is a feast to Yahweh – and the golden calf is simply a golden "cherub" – there is still something terribly wrong with the worship in Exodus 32!

Think back to Exodus 24.

In Exodus 24, Israel worshiped the LORD for the first time recorded in scripture. Now, six weeks later, they worship the LORD again.

What is missing?

We have the burnt offerings and the peace offerings –
in other words, we have the *blood* of the covenant –
what is missing is the *book* of the covenant!
What is missing is the word of God!

As we saw in Exodus 24, the book of the covenant (the word of God) is what gives meaning to the blood of the covenant (the sacrifices). If you try to worship God *without* the word of God – then your worship is meaningless and vain.

Why?

Because your worship will always be explained by *some* word. What we do in worship *must always* be driven by the Word of God. The golden calf is a classic case of what happens when we allow "our culture" to dictate how we worship!

We need to listen to God.

It's awfully tempting to say that we need to find some new hip and cool way to spread the gospel, but the early church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

Now, I'm *not* saying that's enough simply to *listen to sermons*.

We have to put into practice what God says!

(that's what it means to *devote yourself* to the apostles' teaching and fellowship!)

Jesus said that the way that we make disciples is twofold:

"baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the HS, and teach them *to observe* all that I have commanded you."

It's not enough to know all the right doctrines and practices!

You have to *do* what Jesus says!

Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart (not just some of it!).

But what happens when God's people do *not* do what God says?

That's where we turn in verses 7-14:

2. The Wrath of God and the Need for One to Intercede (v7-14)

a. "I Have Seen...a Stiff-Necked People" – God's Wrath Against Idolatry (v7-10)

⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" ⁹ And the LORD said to

Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, 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, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

What do we do with this severe wrath of God?!

There are two positions that we need to avoid:

First, we *know* from the rest of Scripture that God's purpose was to make *Israel* a great nation.

So we also *know* that God is saying this to Moses in order to *teach Israel* (and us) about the need for an intercessor.

God has no ultimate intention to put this threat into action.

He knows what he has promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel –

and so he does not intend to *do* what he threatens here.

But second, we cannot say that this is "pretend wrath" –

as though God is just "play-acting."

After all, if God had consumed Israel and made a great nation out of Moses,

then his promise to Abraham would still come true!

Since Moses was of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

We need to take seriously the fact that *worship really matters* to God.

Why is God so upset about idolatry?

Because God meets with his people in worship.

If God's people engage in quote-unquote "worship" apart from meeting with God,

then that means that their worship is a purely naturalistic gathering.

God's whole purpose in the Exodus was to bring a people to himself –

so that he might dwell with them!

The last 7 chapters of Exodus have been *all about* how God can dwell with his people in the tabernacle!

To put it simply, God wants you to be with him!

But that also means that we need to let God be God!

We need to hear him on *his* terms!

When the Israelites said of the golden calf, "These are your gods..."

the true and living God was not permitted to speak!

In so much of what passes for Christian worship today,

the same thing has happened.

Too often, churches have replaced the Word of God with whatever feels right to our culture.

The scripture readings get shorter and shorter...

The songs focus more on me and my feelings rather than on the mighty deeds of God.

The sermons tell you more about the pastor's political and social views

than they do what *God* has said and done.

And the body and blood of Christ are replaced by a snack at the end of the service.

If worship is a meeting of the Triune God with his people –

where God speaks to us and feeds us –

where we gather in the presence of the living God –

then what happens if we shut him out?

Aaron calls it a "feast to Yahweh" –

but the word of the LORD is nowhere to be found!

This is why there is *so much scripture* in our service.

We used Psalm 66 as our call to worship,
Exodus 15 as our hymn of approach,
Exodus 32 as our OT lesson,
Psalm 106 as our song of reponse,
Acts 7 as our NT lesson.

God speaks to his people through his Word.

So if God's voice is muted,
then we are saying, in effect, that we don't want to hear from God.
We want God's name – "this is the feast of Yahweh" –
but we don't want to pay attention to what he says.

And the LORD has this to say about such worship:

"I have seen this people, and behold, 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, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

Why does God care so much about how we worship him?

Because this is where he gets to meet with his people.

Think about it this way:

I really enjoy spending time with my wife.
I love talking with her, spending time together, and making love to her.

If I then went on to say "Oh and I can do all those things with some other woman –
and I just call her Ginger..."
that would be repulsive!

And Scripture regularly compares idolatry to adultery.

When we ignore God in our worship,
when the focus in worship turns to ourselves and our own experience –
that is where we are guilty of the sin of the golden calf.

Now, I should hasten to add that you can do all the outward things right
and still fail to love the LORD your God!

When we went through the book of Jeremiah last year
we saw that there were *orthodox* prophets and priests
who had completely lost sight of the LORD.

God wants both the outward and the inward –

that's why he says Love the LORD your God with all your heart,
all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength.

God wants *everything* we are and everything we have for himself!

Okay, so I think that we've seen that God *really* hates it

when we eliminate *him* from our worship!

And that's why we need to see the importance of a mediator – someone to intercede for us – in verses 11-14:

b. Moses' Intercession: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (v11-14)

¹¹ *But Moses implored the LORD his God*

Notice how verse 11 says that Moses implored the LORD "his" God!

There is a serious question at this moment as to whether the LORD is still the God of Israel! He is very plainly the God of *Moses* – but at this moment he has repudiated Israel.

Atheists like to say, "what kind of God delivers his people only to destroy them?!"

Funny, that's exactly what Moses says!

and said, "O LORD, 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? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'?"

Moses recognizes that destroying Israel would be counterproductive to God's stated purposes.

Okay.

Remember what the problem is?

Israel has set aside the Word of God and they are doing whatever they feel like doing.

So God says, in effect, okay, fine, what if I do that?

Do you really want a god made in *your* image?

Do you want a god who would treat you the way you treat others? (the way you treat him?!)

And Moses says, No!

But pay attention to the argument that Moses uses in verse 13:

Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

Moses does *not* say, "Oh, the Israelites aren't that bad!"

"They are good people – deep down..."

The wages of sin is death.

If God judges us based on our own performance, we are doomed!

Moses' appeal is *not* to anything in us.

His appeal is precisely to the very thing that Israel had missed in their worship at the golden calf:

namely, God's Word.

God's Word – God's Promise – God's Covenant

“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, *to whom you swore by your own self...*”

What did God promise Abraham?

Children?

The Land, and the Seed, and the Blessing to the Nations.

Moses focuses on the first two here in verse 13 –

after all, without the Land and the Seed, there *will be* no blessing to the nations!!

And when God hears a mediator pleading his own Word and Promise back to him...

¹⁴ *And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*

What is God doing here?

Why does he threaten disaster – and then relent – and *not* do what he says!?

God is teaching us how heinous sin is.

And God is teaching us how we *need* someone to intercede for us.

We saw over the last few weeks how the Tabernacle was teaching Israel about the need for Jesus Christ.

You simply cannot understand who Jesus is

unless you understand something of what the Tabernacle is about.

In the same way, how does Jesus intercede for us?

Watch Moses.

Moses shows us in a picture how Jesus intercedes for us.

He prays for us *based on God's own promises!*

Why do you have confidence before God?

It's not because *you* did anything so great!

It's because *Jesus* did something so great!

And therefore we also learn something about how *we* ought to pray and intercede for others!

How do we pray for others?

We ask God to remember his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel –

to remember his promises to David – and especially to Jesus!

But while Moses intercedes for the people,

he does not excuse their actions!

3. The Anger of Moses and the Failure of Aaron (v15-24)

a. When Moses Saw – The Broken Tablets of the Testimony (v15-20)

¹⁵ *Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written.* ¹⁶ *The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.* 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.”* ¹⁸ *But he said, “It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but*

the sound of singing that I hear.”¹⁹ And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.²⁰ He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

Verses 15-16 give us a little foreshadowing.

We hear about the two tablets of the testimony.

These were two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them.

Verse 16 even highlights the fact that the tablets were the work of *God* –
and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

Something *very important* will happen to these tablets!

Then in verses 17-18 we have a brief conversation between Moses and Joshua.

Joshua thinks that he hears the noise of war –

but God has already told Moses what is going on –
and so Moses says no, it is the sound of singing.

And they are not singing the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15)!

And then in verse 19, we are told that *Moses* saw the calf and the dancing.

This passage has been all about *seeing*.

When the people saw that Moses delayed...

When Aaron saw what the people had done...

The LORD said “I have seen” what the people have done...

And now Moses sees the calf and the dancing –
and when he saw the calf and the dancing,
“Moses' anger burned hot...”

Moses is angry with the things that make God angry.

There is such a thing as righteous anger!

When I heard the white supremacists in Charlottesville saying foul things about Jews and blacks
I was angry!

When I saw the car plowing down the street – like an ISIS terrorist –
I was angry!

It is *right* to be angry with sin.

Now, we need to be careful!

Because we need to make sure that it is truly *God's* anger that is driving us!

There are lots of people and groups who are trying to manipulate our anger!

What should drive our outrage should be the fact that *God's name* is violated!

What happened inside of you when I mentioned Charlottesville?

Some of you thought – “Oh good, he's going to denounce white supremacy”

Others of you thought – “I hope he points out the evils of Antifa”

Others of you thought – “Oh no, I hope he doesn't say anything stupid!”

(I know you're out there!)

But when you think about Charlottesville,
how many of you are angry because *God's name* was violated?

When Moses sees the wholesale abandonment of God's worship,
his response *fits* the response of God a few verses earlier.

And so he throws the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.
The tablets of the testimony – the tablets that contain God's covenant with Israel –
are broken –
why?
Because Israel has *broken* God's covenant.

I want you to think about the significance of this!
In Exodus 19-24, God made a covenant with Israel.
“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.
You shall have no other gods before me.”
Now that covenant has been broken.

The Mosaic Covenant is only 40 days old – and it has already failed.
It is broken.

People sometimes say that the Mosaic Covenant was a “republication” of the covenant of works
There is a sense in which that is true.
The covenant of works said that Adam needed to obey God perfectly forever.
And there is a sense in which
the Mosaic Covenant says that Israel needs to obey God perfectly forever.

But already here in Exodus 32, Israel imitates Adam – and breaks the covenant.
Indeed, the whole point of Exodus 32-34 is that *from the start*
Israel has demonstrated their incompetence to keep God's covenant perfectly!
And so therefore, *from the start* the Mosaic Covenant is all about God's *grace*
to a weak and feeble people.

b. Aaron's Pathetic Apology – How *Not* to Respond When You Have Sinned (v21-24)

²¹ And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?” ²² And Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. ²³ For they said to me, ‘Make us gods who 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.’ ²⁴ So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

Then Moses turns to his brother, Aaron, and says “What happened?!!”
He even gives him the benefit of the doubt: “What did they do to you?!”
And Aaron sounds an awful lot like Adam – shifting the blame:
“the woman whom you gave me...”

“you know the people, that they are set on evil...”

And in one of the most pathetic apologies in history, he even disclaims any agency on his own part:

So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’

So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.

Verse 4 clearly says that Aaron fashioned the calf with a graving tool!

What I find fascinating in all this,

is that Aaron *still* winds up as High Priest!

In spite of his *catastrophic* failure in judgment!

In spite of his *pathetic* attempt at self-justification!

Centuries later, King Saul will have a similar catastrophic failure in judgment –

followed by a similar pathetic attempt at self-justification –

but God will remove the kingship from Saul,

yet here he allows Aaron to still become high priest.

Man judges the outward appearance – but the LORD sees the heart.

Perhaps God wanted us to see that Israel’s first high priest was a deeply flawed man –

indeed he was the one who crafted the golden calf in the wilderness!

And yet God still raised him up to the high priesthood.

If you are looking for a *perfect* high priest – you will have to look to Jesus!

4. The Sin of Israel and the Need for Atonement (v25-35)

a. When Moses Saw – The Levites Kill Three Thousand (v25-29)

²⁵ *And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies),*

In verse 25, we are told that “Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies.”

Yes, the people are responsible for their own sin –

and 3,000 of the people will perish by the sword because of their sin –

but Aaron is responsible for “letting them break loose.”

²⁶ *then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the LORD’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. ²⁷ And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” ²⁸ And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. ²⁹ And Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”*

Verses 26-29 may seem like a strange way to proceed:

we are used to having trials with a judge and jury to determine guilt or innocence

(and quite frankly, I think our system is a very good one!),

but Moses is the one whom God had appointed to rule Israel.

When Moses says, “Who is on the LORD’s side? Come to me,”
everyone who is innocent should have come!
(Indeed, even the *guilty* who realize ‘Yeah, I made a big mistake...’
should be quick to show up “on the LORD’s side”!)

So everyone else in the camp is saying, in effect,
“I am *not* on the LORD’s side – I agree with the golden calf!”

It says that all the sons of Levi gathered around him.
That *doesn’t* mean that *only* Levites gathered around him
(and from the reference to killings brothers *and sons*,
it would appear that there were *some* Levites who did not show up).
But it would appear that it was *predominantly* sons of Levi who gathered to Moses.

And because of this, Moses says that they have been “ordained for the service of the LORD” –
because they have stood up for the name of God –
even if it meant killing his own son or brother.

Now, before you say, “Wow, that was a barbaric act,”
it is worth pointing out that Jesus says,
“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother
and wife and children and brothers and sisters,
yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

It’s true – Jesus does not command us to kill anyone –
but he does say that *no other relationship* – no other allegiance –
can come anywhere near to our love for him.

But even after the execution of the 3,000,
the problem is not solved.

As Moses says the next day:

b. “If You Will Not Forgive Them, Please Blot Me Out of Your Book” (v30-34)

³⁰ *The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”*

How do you make atonement for the sin of idolatry?
How do you make atonement for setting aside the LORD your God
and worshiping a golden calf?

Verse 31:

³¹ *So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”*

Moses understands that there is no animal sacrifice sufficient to cover this sin.
The animal sacrifices were designed to cover unintentional sins –
ordinary sins.
You're not going to come to God with a bull and a goat and say,
"Oops, sorry about that golden calf thing!"

What can cover such a high-handed sin?
Moses offers himself.
He starts by simply asking God to forgive their sin.
Can't you just make it *go away*?
You are God!

But if not, take *me* instead.
Blot me out of your book that you have written.

Scripture talks about two different books.
Revelation 20, verse 12, talks about the "books"
the books contain the record of what everyone has done in this life.
But Revelation 20, verse 12, says that there is another *book* –
the book of life.
"And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,
he was thrown into the lake of fire." (20:15)

It would seem clear that Moses is referring to this latter book.
Moses is saying, "blot me out of the book of life,
so that you can be faithful to your promises."

It's the same basic point that Paul makes,
when he says in Romans 9:3,
"For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ
for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

When our hearts are so aligned with God's will
that we love what God loves – and we hate what God hates –
then we can begin to imagine saying,
"Blot me out of your book – so that you can be faithful to your promises!"

Verse 33

³³ *But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.*

What does this mean?
Does God blot people out of his book?
Revelation 3:5 says that the one who conquers will be clothed in white garments,
and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

And Revelation 13:8 speaks of those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life

before the foundation of the world.

There are two things that we know about this book.

First, if your name is written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world
then your name will never be blotted out.

Second, God says that he *will* blot some people's names out of his book!

Here's how to think about it:

Before the foundation of the world

the Triune God wrote a list of names in the Lamb's book of life in invisible ink.

Then, throughout history, as people were joined to God's covenant community,
their names were written down in the book of life.

Those who rebelled – those who apostatized – those who sinned and refused to repent –
they were blotted out of the book of life

(but their names were *not* written down in invisible ink
before the foundation of the world!).

In other words, those who are elect *will persevere*.

Those who persevere *demonstrate* their election.

So in one sense, Moses' offer "blot me out of your book" –
is a futile offer –

there is no way that God will blot out one of his chosen people!

And yet, in another sense,

Moses' offer is precisely what Jesus will do.

When Jesus goes to the cross, he is bearing the wrath and curse of God
that Moses had offered to bear!

The difference is simply that Moses would have been crushed by that wrath and curse.

Moses would never have risen again!

He would have died – and descended into hell – and stayed there.

But Jesus entered the realm of God's wrath and curse
with the power of a divine life.

He was truly man – but he was truly God –

and by the power of his divine life

(and because of the merits of his truly human obedience)

he rose again from the dead on the third day!

Do you see Jesus?

³⁴ *But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."*

c. The Plague (v35)

³⁵ *Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.*