

Exodus 32:15-35
December 14, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is the worst anger outburst you have ever observed where a person just went ballistic? What all happened? You don't have to admit it was you!

Well if you weren't here last week, the Lord's anger burned against the Israelites as soon as He discovered that they had made a golden calf and started worshipping it. Then He watched them take an "act of worship" and begin engaging in revelry. Moses interceded for His people and asked the Lord not to carry out His threat to destroy the people, and the Lord relented.

Transition: Now Moses has the task of coming down the mountain and dealing with the Israelites who greatly sinned by committing idolatry. Moses has to exert his leadership, so as we go through the remainder of chapter 32, we will explore Aaron's failure as a leader, but let's see if we can identify the leadership QUALITIES that Moses demonstrates so that we can apply them in our own lives. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Ex 32:15-24]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.15:

- Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back.

V.16:

- The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

V.17:

- When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp."

V.18:

- Moses replied:
 - "It is not the sound of victory,
 - it is not the sound of defeat;
 - it is the sound of singing that I hear."

V.19:

- When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

V.20:

- And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

V.21:

- He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

V.22:

- “Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil.

V.23:

- They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’

V.24:

- So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: Obviously God burned with anger when He observed His children worshipping another idol, but what was Moses reaction when he approached the camp and saw what was going on? [V. 19-20 His anger burned too! Are you trying to picture all that Moses did in his anger? Threw the tablets, breaking them into pieces; took the calf and burned it in the fire, then ground it to powder, etc]

Q: Why do you think Moses anger was intense? [Let people give subjective thoughts – Was he feeling the intense anger from the Lord? Did the Israelites embarrass him before the Lord?; was he emotionally exhausted after first hearing about the Israelites sin and interceding for them? Was he commercial, industrial strength irate because the people gave him and the Lord their word that they would obey God’s commands?]

Q: As a general rule, unless you’re mentally ill, people don’t explode with anger unless they hit a tipping point. What do you think the tipping point was for Moses that pushed him over the edge?

Q: Look at V.21 – What assumption(s) does Moses make about Aaron’s role with the Israelites? [That Aaron was supposed to be a good leader; the Israelites must have applied much pressure for Aaron to lead them into such a great sin; If the Israelites were out of control, then that was a reflection of Aaron’s inability to control the people]

Q: Did God reveal to Moses that Aaron had led the Israelites into sin? [No. Moses apparently assumed this. Re-read Ex 32:7-8]

Q: How do you think Aaron was feeling after watching Moses explode with anger? Do you think Aaron was even worried that Moses might be mad at him? [Moses had just finished a tirade!]

Q: V.22-So how does Aaron try to deal with Moses in his response? [He tries to suggest that Moses shouldn’t be angry at him because...]

Q: After listening to the dialogue between Moses and Aaron, what level of responsibility did Aaron take for the Israelites sin? [Zero. Instead of confessing his sins, Aaron made excuses. He blamed the people for their depravity (v. 22), Moses for his delay (v. 23), and the furnace for its delivery of a calf!]

[Read Ex 32:25-35]

V.25:

- Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.

V.26:

- So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

V.27:

- Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’”

V.28:

- The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.

V.29:

- Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

V.30:

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

V.31:

- So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold.

V.32:

- But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

V.33:

- The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.

V.34:

- Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

V.35:

- And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: Look at v.25 – What did the behavior of sinful people look like? [Running wild and out of control]

Q: Whose job was it to keep the people under control? [Aaron]

Q: What strategy did Moses implement to deal with the unrepentant Israelites? [v. 26 – He rallied before the camp all who had not been involved in worshiping the calf. He called for anyone “who is for the Lord” to come meet with him, which ended up being the Levites]

Q: According to v.27, whose strategy was it really? [The Lord’s]

Observation: Moses coming down the mountain, expressing anger, calling those who are “for the Lord,” watching 3K lose their lives all happened in one day.

Observation (v.30) = The next day: Notice that Moses understood that atonement for sin is necessary.

Q: Moses obviously understood the gravity of the Israelites’ sin and acknowledges this before the Lord. But what did Moses offer to the Lord that demonstrates strong, spiritual leadership? [Moses offered up his own life so that the people might be spared.]

Q: When Moses asks the Lord to forgive His people's sin, what was the Lord's response? ["Whoever sinned against me will be blotted out of my book. A time will come for me to punish them for their sin."]

Q: V.33-35 – What do we learn about God? [He is a just God and will not leave the guilty unpunished.]

Q: So what was Aaron's failure as a leader? [Avoided owning his part in contributing to the Israelites' great sin of idolatry; Blamed the downfall on the people's depravity; Blamed Moses for taking too long on the mountain!; he let the people get out of control]

Q: What leadership qualities did Moses demonstrate that we should emulate? [He immediately eradicated the golden calf; he confronted Aaron; He obeyed the Lord in calling out those who love him and killed those who kept persisting in revelry; He was willing to give up his life to atone for the sins of the Israelites – if God was not willing to forgive them.]

LOOK:

Moses provides us a good model of spiritual leadership.

- When his people failed, he interceded for them.
- When he met with the people, he confronted them with the goal to help them turn from their sin of idolatry.
- He listened to the Lord's instructions as to how to discipline the people instead of taking matters into his own hands.
- He was willing to sacrifice his own life to atone for the sins of the Israelite nation.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ex 32:15-35)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

C. God's wrath judging (vv. 15–35).

In His grace, God forgave their sins, but in his government, He had to discipline the people. How many tears have been caused by the painful consequences of forgiven sins! Moses had a right to be angry and to humble Aaron and the people. By breaking the two tables of the Law, written by God, Moses dramatically showed the people the greatness of their sin. Instead of confessing his sins, Aaron made excuses. He blamed the people for their depravity (v. 22), Moses for his delay (v. 23), and the furnace for its delivery of a calf! After dealing with the people, Moses returned to the Lord on the mountain and offered to give up his own life that the people might be spared. See Rom. 9:3. When a person dies, his or her name is removed from the book of life (Ps. 69:28; Ezek. 13:9). The book of life (or “the living”) should not be confused with the Lamb’s Book of Life, which records the names of the saved (Rev. 21:27; Luke 10:20).

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.)The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures. (Vol. 1, pp. 143–144). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

c. The anger of Moses (32:15–29)

32:15–18. As **Moses** descended **the mountain with the two tablets of the Decalogue** (cf. 31:18) he rejoined **Joshua**, who apparently was partway up the mountain (cf. comments on 24:13) and was not aware of what the Israelites were doing. Joshua thought that **the camp** was under military attack. However, **Moses** knew from what God told him that the people were **singing** and were involved in drunkenness and immorality.

32:19–20. In **anger** Moses at the foot of the mountain did four things. First, he smashed **the tablets** of the Law, symbolizing the people’s **breaking** of the covenant. Second, he **burned** the idol, reduced **it to powder**, spread it on **water** (a mountain stream, Deut. 9:21), and **made the people drink it**. By this action he demonstrated both the powerlessness of the calf-idol and God’s wrath. Though the burning would not have demolished the gold idol, it was smashed till it was crushed into tiny **pieces**. Drinking it symbolized that the people had to bear the consequences of their sin.

32:21–24. Third, Moses summoned **Aaron** to give an account of what had taken place. Aaron’s excuse was as ludicrous as the people’s actions. He blamed the **people** (vv. 22–23) and then in a lie he suggested that the idol “just happened”: **I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf**. **Aaron**, however, had actually shaped the idol himself (v. 4). God was so angry with Aaron that He was ready to kill him (Deut. 9:20).

32:25–29. Fourth, **Moses** judged the unrepentant. Moses rallied before the camp all who had not been involved in worshiping the calf. **The Levites** responded as a group. These were commanded to **go ... through the camp** and kill any who persisted in idolatry. **Three thousand** Israelites were killed by swords. Others, however, died by a plague (v. 35). After completing this

gruesome task the Levites were **set apart to the LORD**. Later they were assigned the responsibility of carrying the tabernacle (Num. 1:50–53).

d. The renewal of intercession by Moses (32:30–35)

32:30–35. Though the major instigators of the plot were put to the sword (except for Aaron, for whom Moses interceded, Deut. 9:20) **Moses** recognized that the nation as a whole shared the guilt. Therefore he again entreated **the LORD** for **atonement for their sin**. **Moses** told God that if He refused to **forgive** His people he would prefer to have his name removed from **the book** God had **written** (Ex. 32:32). Some say this was the book of life (Rev. 20:15; 21:27) that lists believers' names but, more likely, it was the census of the people. Moses' statement probably indicated he was willing to die a premature death (but not suffer eternal torment in hell). He did not want to be associated with a sinful, unforgiven people. Rejecting Moses' offer, God promised to **punish** the sinners (by premature death). Some died of **a plague** (Ex. 32:35) and all fighting men (except Joshua and Caleb) died later in the desert (Deut. 1:35–36; 2:14). Yet God said Moses would lead the nation (the younger generation) to the land promised them (Ex. 32:34). (On God's **angel** see 33:2.)

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 139). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

32:27 For a discussion of justifications for taking human life, see note on 20:13.

32:32–33 Does God keep a book with people's names in it? Several verses indicate that God keeps written records (17:14; Ps 56:8; 69:28; 139:16; Dn 12:1; Mal 3:16; Rev 3:5; 5:1–9; 10:2–10; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12–15; 21:27; 22:7–19). But such expressions could be metaphors, using a human analogy—keeping account books—to symbolize the fact that God remembers what people do, just as biblical language regarding God's eye or hand is figurative. The point is that every person will be held accountable for his actions and words (see Ec 12:14; Mt 12:36).