

To understand what is happening in this chapter we need to remember the setting. Mount Sinai was smoking and trembling when God came down and spoke the Ten Commandments. The Hebrews heard His voice. The people all agreed to live according to God's commands. (Exodus 24:3) They entered into a blood covenant with God. The elders went up the mountain and ate in God's presence. Out of fear, the people refused to meet with God and asked that Moses go represent them. (Exodus 20:19) Moses went on up the mountain leaving Aaron and Hur in charge. Joshua stayed at the edge of the cloud of God's glory waiting for Moses to return.

Commented [Paul1]: Exodus 24:3 (ESV)
³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."

Commented [Paul2]: Numbers 9:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night.

Every morning the people received the manna as their food provision. Every day they and their herds drank from the water that miraculously flowed from the rock. The cloud that led them covered them from the heat of the sun each day and lit up the night sky as a pillar of fire. (Numbers 9:16)

Commented [Paul3]: Numbers 9:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night.

They wait. They wait some more. Two weeks go by, and then three, four, five, and finally they get tired of waiting. They began to wonder if Moses survived the encounter with God. When would they get going to the Promised Land? They decided to take matters into their own hands, so they took their grievance to the associate pastor with a plan of action. *¹When 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."*

I wonder if Peter had this passage in mind when he wrote about the delay of Jesus' return?

2 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV)

³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

It is the sinful desires of man that prompt the denial of a day of accountability. It is denying the obvious, that God intervenes in the affairs of man. We see it all the time. We can read about it in history. We have seen it in our church. Yet, our sinful nature would prefer to make our own god, one that we can manage, one with little or no morality, one created after our own evil imagination.

Moses will come down the mountain and the people will be held accountable for their betrayal of the covenant. Jesus will return, and we will all give an account of our actions before a holy God. (Romans 14:12)

Commented [Paul4]: Romans 14:12 (ESV)
¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

I don't know what happened to Hur, but Aaron must have been the one they knew they could manipulate. Aaron did not confront them. He didn't remind them of Moses order to wait. He didn't ask them to recall the wonders of their deliverance from Egypt, the faithfulness of Moses, the agreement to have no other gods, but instead decided to be a people pleaser. (Galatians 1:10) He took the golden earrings from the people and cast it into the shape of a calf. (Psalm 106:19-22) This was the syncretism of YHWH and Egypt's gods. It was a direct violation of the first and second commandments. It was a graven image and another god. (Exodus 20:3-4) They were to resist the temptation to make any physical object that represented the invisible God.

While in Egypt, they had seen a lot of different kinds of cow worship. The ultimate in bull worship was probably the Apis bull, considered to [be] the manifestation of Ptah, the creator god worshipped at Memphis in lower Egypt. The bull lived in palatial quarters in the precincts of the temple; only the higher echelons of society were allowed to view it from special windows; its death was treated on a par with the death of pharaoh; and the remains were mummified. Images of calves or bulls were associated with the strength and power of the deity, and the idols as well as certain live animals came to be regarded as embodiments of the god.¹

As soon as their god was made, they began to worship it. The worship of false gods usually degenerates into debauchery, which is the reason they made the god in the first place, justification for their sin. We don't create images today. We create ideologies to justify our actions. It's for the same purpose of doing what we desire, whether elevation of self or just self-gratification. It's an imaginative way to believe we won't be accountable. The whole New Age philosophy is a way to be "spiritual" and yet indulge in your desires without fear of judgment. It's a way to ignore the fact that Jesus will return and judge the earth. (John 5:22)

The Apostle Paul tells us that this passage is specifically for the New Testament church. 1 Corinthians 10:6-7 (ESV) *⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."* The New Testament world had idols that were associated with pagan temple prostitution. The images today go straight to immoral desire by turning the human body into an idol. That is the power of pornography. You can't bow down to it for long before you end up going down the same road as the Israelites.

The problem is in the heart. They must have associated some sense of satisfaction with the cow worship in Egypt. That is the root of idolatry, desiring satisfaction in something outside the will of God. God is to be the One that satisfies our soul. Everything else is a substitute. That does not mean we cannot enjoy His creation, on the contrary, we enjoy it within His will and give thanks to Him for His goodness. Outside of His will is either destructive excess or eventual addiction that is also destructive. The only way to be free is to identify the evil in our hearts and realize it is a poor substitution for God. Then, put

Commented [Paul5]: Galatians 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Commented [Paul6]: Psalm 106:19-22 (ESV)

¹⁹They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image.

²⁰They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, ²²wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

Commented [Paul7]: Exodus 20:3-4 (ESV)

³You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Commented [Paul8]: John L. Madkay, Exodus p 529

Commented [Paul9]: John 5:22 (ESV)

²²The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

it to death by accepting the Lordship of Jesus! (Romans 8:13) Egypt was still thriving in the hearts of the Israelites.

The irony of the situation is that God was giving Moses a way to picture His presence in the Tabernacle while the people were creating their own way. The two ways couldn't be any more different. (1) The people seek to create what God has already provided; (2) they, rather than God, take the initiative; (3) offerings are demanded rather than willingly presented; (4) the elaborate preparations are missing altogether; (5) the painstaking length of time needed for building becomes an overnight rush job; (6) the careful provision for guarding the presence of the Holy One turns into an open-air object of immediate accessibility; (7) the invisible, intangible God becomes a visible, tangible image; and (8) the personal, active God becomes an impersonal object that cannot see or speak or act. The ironic effect is that the people forfeit the very divine presence they had hoped to bind more closely to themselves.

This is human nature on display. I want to be spiritual, but I want to be spiritual my way. I want a god I can control, that lets me indulge in my pride, or my lusts, or whatever it is I want to retain. (Psalm 135:18)

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. ^{8a} They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. While Moses was listening to God's plans, the people were making their own. They corrupted themselves. It is a Hebrew term implying depraved moral conduct which is offensive to God. That is a fascinating description of corporate sin. One suggestion for an action can infect a multitude and cause them to corrupt themselves. The New Testament refers to it as leaven. (Galatians 5:9) "Turning aside" is another description. They were on the path the Lord commanded them but they decided to go their own direction, a flesh detour. (Deuteronomy 11:16) The surprise is how quickly they would go this direction while surrounded by the miraculous provision of God. But don't be too surprised, we see it all too often in believers' lives.

Exodus 32:9-10 (ESV) *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."* Stiff-necked! Have you ever had one; I mean the medical condition. When someone behind you calls to you, you can't really turn your head to face them unless you turn your whole body. That is kind of the idea behind the word. It's a refusal to heed God. It's not that we don't hear, we just refuse to turn, so we continue on our own way. It's the "I'm the captain of my ship and lord of my fate" attitude. "No one is going to tell me what to do, including God!" (Deuteronomy 31:27) It's the animal that will not lower its head to accept the yoke.

This is a dangerous position for anyone to be in. Stiff-necked people always think they're right and never admit they're wrong. They refuse to listen to good spiritual counsel. They say, "I'm sorry; that's just the way I am," and then they expect everyone else to deal with it. They ask for advice, but they don't follow it. They go ahead and do what they were planning to do anyway. And when they get into trouble, they are unwilling to be corrected. "Yes," they say, "but my situation is different," and then they offer some kind of excuse. When they go through suffering, they complain about it, but they never seem to learn anything from it. They never change. They

Commented [Paul10]: John 5:22 (ESV)

²² The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

Commented [Paul11]: Donald Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp 280-281

Commented [Paul12]: Psalm 135:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them!

Commented [Paul13]: Galatians 5:9 (ESV)

⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Commented [Paul14]: Deuteronomy 11:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them;

Commented [Paul15]: Deuteronomy 31:27 (ESV)

²⁷ For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death!

never grow. And the saddest thing of all is that they don't even know it. Since they never bow in true submission to God, they don't realize how stiff-necked they are.

So don't be stiff-necked! Assume that you might be wrong; and when you are wrong, admit it. If you ask for counsel from someone in spiritual authority, try to follow it. Listen when people correct you, especially if what they're saying makes you angry. This is almost always a sign that there's some truth to what they're saying. Learn from God through suffering. Pursue spiritual transformation by spending time in prayer and the Word. Wear the yoke of Christ with glad submission. Preaching the Word – *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*.

The Lord appears ready to annihilate them, but we know that He knows the end from the beginning. (1Samuel 15:29) The Lord is giving Moses a chance to exhibit more Christ like qualities.

In our passage today, **Moses is a type of Messiah** more clearly than any other recorded about Him. He is the one that speaks to God face to face. He is the one that comes down from the presence of God to deal with sin. He intercedes for the people and averts the wrath of God that the people deserve. He is the one that is willing to give himself that the people might be saved. He is angry with sin and yet compassionately desires to see the people receive mercy. He is a mortal man but his access to God and obedience to Him saves his people. His faith and character make the covenant possible. What a picture of Jesus! (Deuteronomy 18:15)

By asking Moses to leave him alone, God is leaving the door open for Moses to intercede for his people. In other words, "If you don't intercede then this is what I'll do." It seems God may have been testing Moses by offering to make a nation from him, Children of Moses instead of Children of Abraham. Moses showed his godly character in choosing the good of the people rather than his own pride. (Matthew 22:39-40)

The people were certainly an ungrateful lot, so ready to dump Moses after all the sacrifices he had made for the, but Moses pleaded for them. He reminded God of the promises to Abraham. He spoke of God's reputation in the world. Deuteronomy 9:25 tells us that Moses prayed for 40 days and nights.

¹⁴ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Did God change His plan, or did He prompt Moses to do what He intended for him to do all along? God is righteous, but He is also merciful. (Exodus 34:6-7)

Moses headed back down the mountain with the two tablets engraved by God on front and back. Joshua was waiting half way down the mountain. It sounds to me like Joshua was trying to downplay what was happening. War would be better than rebellion against God. Moses wasn't fooled. He knew what was happening. God had already told him. But when he actually witnessed what was going on, he lost it. He broke the tablets, ground the calf to powder put it in the water and made the people drink it.

Then he confronted Aaron. Exodus 32:21 (ESV) *²¹ And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?"* Surely they forced him. Then Aaron did what is so common, he came up with lying excuse that was so bad it is almost comical. Exodus 32:24 (ESV) *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*

Commented [Paul16]: 1 Samuel 15:29 (ESV)
²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."

Commented [Paul17]: Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—"

Commented [Paul18]: Matthew 22:39-40 (ESV)
³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Commented [Paul19]: Deuteronomy 9:25 (ESV)
²⁵ "So I lay prostrate before the LORD for these forty days and forty nights, because the LORD had said he would destroy you."

Commented [Paul20]: Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)
⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

calf.” It’s a miracle! He could have added that he called it YHWH, argued that he only broke the second command. No thing in creation can represent the Creator!

25 And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), Here is another interesting phrase, “broken loose”. It is the casting aside of restraint. It is letting the flesh do whatever it desires ignoring the consequences and God’s commands. (Romans 1:22-24) Sin is breaking loose from God’s constraints.

Notice that Aaron had let them do this. As their spiritual leader he was responsible to discipline them. (1Peter 5:2) A great deal of the blame fell on him. The Bible does not record how he suffered for this. You would expect him to receive the fiercest discipline from God. But he is the one that will wear the priestly robes, a sinner covered with Christ. He’ll be the perfect example of the grace of God. He is every minister, a failed human leader, but by the grace of God clothed in Jesus (1Corinthians 15:9-10) and anointed for his task.

Moses cried out, *“Who is on the Lord’s side?”* Only the sons of Levi came to him. They called the idol the “LORD” (YHWH), but once they broke one command, they let go of restraint and all concern for God and His will. They were freed from slavery only to enter another kind of slavery, that of the flesh. (John 8:34)

What follows seems harsh, but compared to what they deserved, (Romans 6:23) it was light. The 3000 that died by the sword were only a small percentage of the total population and were probably the most stubbornly defiant.

The day of Pentecost is the day that Israel celebrates Moses bringing the Law down from Sinai (Simchat Torah). When the Law came down 3000 died. When the Spirit was poured out some 1500 years later at the same time of the year, 3000 were born again. (Acts 2:41) The letter kills but the Spirit gives life. (2Corinthians 3:6)

The deaths were a harsh lesson and the judgment was not over. A plague followed. God had clearly shown the people that He would not tolerate such rebellion, and yet He was merciful and did not destroy them all. He heard Moses’ intercession and spared them. Still, most of them would die in the wilderness, but they would raise a generation that would go in to the Promised Land.

The message has been about impatience with God, taking things into our own hands and going our own way. As we cast off restraints, the rebellion only increases until God deals with us. Don’t let it begin. Submit to God. Wait patiently on Him. (Psalm 130:5) Don’t turn from His way. (Deuteronomy 5:32)

Like Moses in this account, Jesus calls out to us today, **“Who is on the Lord’s side?”** To come to Him you have to leave the debauchery of the world, the pride trips, lust, compromises to be accepted, and stand unashamedly on His side. Will you follow the Levites’ example and leave the crowd of self-indulgence, bow your head and accept Jesus’ yoke, and stand with Him?

Questions

- 1 Describe the chapter setting?
- 2 Why did the people rebel?

Commented [Paul21]: Romans 1:22-24 (ESV)

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,
²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

Commented [Paul22]: 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

Commented [Paul23]: 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Commented [Paul24]: John 8:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Commented [Paul25]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [Paul26]: Acts 2:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Commented [Paul27]: 2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Commented [Paul28]: Psalm 130:5 (ESV)

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

Commented [Paul29]: Deuteronomy 5:32 (NIV)

³² So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left.

- 3 Why a golden calf?
- 4 How do we justify our actions today?
- 5 What does the NT say about this?
- 6 How can we be free from idolatry?
- 7 Contrast their way and God's way.
- 8 What is "stiffnecked"?
- 9 How is Moses like Jesus?