

Adult Bible Class
Study of Exodus, Lesson 17
June 22, 2025

Exodus in Review

The Israelites had been in Egypt for 215 years and in bondage for perhaps as many as 140 years (depending on when the Pharaoh that “knew not Joseph” took power and enslaved them). The Bible tells us that four generations were in Egypt before the Israelites were delivered by God (see Genesis 15:14-16 and Exodus 6:16-27).

When God sent Moses to the Israelite slaves in Egypt, Moses was given several miraculous signs to help the Israelites believe that God was going to deliver them. After these signs, the ten plagues, and the miraculous crossing over the Red Sea, God continued to do marvelous things by providing water and food in the wilderness for this great multitude.

In a world that had many gods, God proved that He was the one, true God. Even Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, proclaimed:

Exodus 18:10 . . . “Blessed *be* the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. **11** Now I know that the Lord *is* greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.”

God then brought His people to Mt. Sinai to give them His laws:

Exodus 19:3 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall . . . tell the children of Israel: **4** ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. **5** Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. **6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. **8** Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

In Exodus 20, God gave His people the Ten Commandments. At first, God spoke directly to the Israelites, but the people were afraid and wanted God to speak to Moses for them:

Exodus 20:18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. **19** Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

20 And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” **21** So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God *was*.

After this, God spoke to Moses regarding laws of all different kinds - moral laws, laws in dealing with one's neighbor, laws about the Sabbath and feast days, etc. Then Moses approached the people with God's laws:

Exodus 24:3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do."

4 And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord . . . **7** Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient."

8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

9 Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, **10** and they saw the God of Israel.

Moses stayed on the mountain with God after the elders went down. God was going to give him tablets of stone with the commandments written on them. He was up on the mountain for forty days and nights. During that time God showed him the Tabernacle plan with all its furniture and structure. God gave him instructions on the service of the priests and their special garments. Aaron and his sons were to be ordained for the priesthood. God commanded artisans Bezalel and Aholiab to make the Tabernacle with its furniture and the priestly garments. God also consecrated the Sabbath as being holy to the Lord.

Exodus Chapter 32 - Aaron and the Golden Calf

But now, after Moses had been away for forty days, the people were restless. Perhaps they thought Moses had died or had left them. At the very least, they were impatient, not willing to wait for his return. The people urged Aaron to make gods for them.

Exodus 32:1 (NKJV) Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *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.*"

A true man of God will lead the people in the right way. A true man of God is sent *by* God with words *from* God. He will not allow the *people* to lead *him* and manipulate him. In just forty short days, the people were reverting to pagan ways that they had witnessed in Egypt. In Egypt there were many temples with idol gods. Yet, God had just recently instructed His people, *You shall not make anything to be with me - gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves* (Exodus 20:23).

The people were telling Aaron what to do, and Aaron was following them! His leadership was only in the form of leading the people to do what *they* wanted to do in their impatience - to make an idol! That's not saying much!

Many people want a god they can serve who will lead them onward, but not many desire the one, true God with His laws, His ways, and His timeline. When people fashion their own god, *they are really making a god of themselves*. They are calling the shots, and they are defining what God is.

The apostle Paul spoke to the church in Galatia about their unbelief and about a change in their behavior after they had served God awhile. He said:

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? **2** This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? **3** Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? **4** Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

We can see that it is not so uncommon for people to have a wonderful experience with God, a miraculous deliverance - only to go back to old ways. Just as the Galatians were reverting, in Exodus we see the Israelites reverting to old ways of idolatry.

Exodus 32:2 And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." **3** So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. **4** And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

Before Moses ever had a chance to collect a freewill offering to make the items for the Tabernacle, Aaron received an offering of gold to make an idol. How generous the people were! All of them participated in this offering!

Instead of Bezalel and Aholiab making the furnishings ordained by God, Aaron fashioned a golden calf. Then, the people proclaimed it to be the god that had delivered them from Egypt.

5 So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the Lord." **6** Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Aaron, instead of trying to stop the people, helped them to continue their folly by building an altar for the idol! He then combined some elements of true worship (like building an altar and offering sacrifices) with idolatry. When the Scripture says that the people "*rose up to play*," this is a tactful way of saying that they participated in gross immorality (including drunken orgies). How is it possible that in less than two months time they could go from making a covenant with God - to this?

7 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. **8** They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"

Up on the mountain, God tells Moses what is happening below at the camp. Notice how God is getting ready to disown His people. He told Moses, "*your people*" have corrupted themselves. God knew everything they had done. He even quoted to Moses what they had said about the golden calf. For any of us to think that God does not see us, notice us, and remember what we do - it is sheer folly.

9 And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! **10** Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

God was mad! He already had a plan of action. However, Moses does something that changes everything for Israel. They deserved to be rejected by God, but Moses intercedes:

11 Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? **12** Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to 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 descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" **14** So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Moses didn't accept God's rejection of Israel! He reasoned with God that this would bring more harm than good. He reasoned that the Egyptians would speak ill of the Lord (they would say that God brought them out only to kill them), and he also reminded God of his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. More was at stake here than a temporary display of stupidity on the part of the Israelites. What the Israelites were doing was terrible, but God's promise, plan and purpose were also at stake.

When God's people bring God's promises to God in prayer, they have the power even to turn the tide of events.

What is the purpose of God proclaiming coming judgment? Many times throughout Scripture, God calls out judgment to His people or even to other nations. God is looking for repentance in all of this - a turning toward Him. When God sees a turning in people's hearts (this is repentance), he relents and judgment is stayed or individuals are rescued from the judgment.

15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in his hand. The tablets *were* written on both sides; on the one *side* and on the other they were written. **16** Now the tablets *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

There is great significance that the tablets were written by God's own hand. Law and morality must come from God. There is also significance in that the tablets were written on both sides. God's law is complete and needs no further modification.

Today, God still wants to write the law of God, but in a different place:

Hebrews 8:7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. **8** Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— **9** not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. **10** For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Today, God wants to write His law on people's hearts. He gives us His Spirit so we have the power to obey Him.

Exodus 32:17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "*There is a noise of war in the camp.*"

18 But he said:

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

19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Moses became the first person to break all of the Ten Commandments at once! But was breaking the tablets of stone just a show of anger and frustration? Perhaps since Israel broke their covenant with God, Moses broke the tablets of stone. However, we do notice throughout Scripture that Moses had a problem with anger. In anger he killed the Egyptian. In anger he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. And here, in anger he breaks the tablets of stone.

20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*.

No one bothered to challenge Moses by defending the calf. They knew what they had done was wrong. Why did Moses burn the calf, grind it to powder, sprinkle it in the water, and make the Israelites drink it? He showed that this idol was easily destroyed and he got rid of it completely. He also made the people receive consequences for their sin.

21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" **22** So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil. **23** For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' **24** And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it* off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

Moses asked Aaron why he allowed all of this. Aaron, instead of repenting, made up quite a story. He said that the calf appeared miraculously! Aaron tried to assert that "it just happened." But it didn't just happen. Aaron did this evil and then made an excuse for it because it would have been harder to stand for the Lord than to take the path of least resistance.

The book of Deuteronomy has a retelling of this event that gives a little more information:

Deuteronomy 9:7 "Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. **8** Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry *enough* with you to have destroyed you. **9** When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. **10** Then the Lord

delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them *were* all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. **11** And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, *that* the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.

12 "Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.'

13 "Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. **14** Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.'

15 "So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant *were* in my two hands. **16** And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. **17** Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. **18** And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. **19** For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also. **20** And the Lord was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. **21** Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it *and* ground *it* very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain.

Let's continue in Exodus:

Exodus 32:25 Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies),

There is nothing more dangerous than a people who cast off all restraint and do whatever seems right in their own eyes. The Hebrew word that means "unrestrained" gives the idea of loosening or uncovering. God has order and function in His world. Human beings want to thwart God's divine order and plan. Proverbs 14:12 says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the Lord's side—*come* to me!"

Moses gave the Israelites the opportunity to take a stand for the Lord. Today God gives us a chance to stand for Him. When the altar call is given, we can stand for God. In our daily lives, we can be a testimony of Christian living by our speech and behavior. When wrongs are done, we have the opportunity to speak out against them. When someone needs help, we can show them compassion and the way to Jesus. Standing for God requires purpose, strength, and courage.

And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. **27** 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 throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" **28** So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. **29** Then Moses said, "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."

In this situation, siding with the Lord meant siding against some people. Although the sin of Israel involved probably the whole camp in some way, yet only three thousand died that day. Apparently, these were the worst of the lot.

30 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." **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! **32** Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

In Old Testament typology, Moses is certainly a picture of Jesus Christ, offering himself for the sins of the people. Moses perhaps thought of the words of the Lord, *He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed* (Exodus 22:20). There was a great distance between God and the people, and Moses again was going to intercede on their behalf. Moses knew that their sin was so great that the blood of an animal could not pay the price for redemption. It had to be a man who would suffer and take their place. But God knew that even Moses' sacrifice would not be enough. In the future, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ would be enough to pay the sin debt for any and every man who would come to Him.

Moses' character shines brightly. He is a type and picture of Jesus Christ.

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

34 Now therefore, go, lead the people to *the place* of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin."

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

Exodus Chapter 33

Exodus 32 is a horrible time in the history of the nation of Israel. They came very close to losing it all. Without Moses' intercession, they would have ceased to exist. Now, let's get into chapter 33 to see how the story continues.

Exodus 33:1 (NKJV) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Depart *and* go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' **2** And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. **3** *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."

Moses had interceded for Israel by reasoning with God that He had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and if He destroyed the whole camp of Israel, His promise would be broken. Because of Moses' intercession, God is not going to withhold the Promised Land from His people. However, God is still angry with them. In the above Scripture, one can feel the hurt in the heart of God. He again speaks to Moses and says, "*the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt,*" which in a way distances Himself from them. Instead of promising that His Presence to go *with* them into the Promised Land, God tells them that He

will send His Angel *before* them. He further states, “*I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way.*” God is still pretty sore about the whole matter.

Some might think it thrilling that God was going to send His Angel to go before them. However, in this case, it was a concession - it was not God’s best. God *didn’t want to go with them in their midst* because He was deeply hurt by them. He was afraid that He would judge them on the way.

Many times further on in Scripture, Israel’s unfaithfulness to God is compared to harlotry or committing adultery. This passage from Isaiah illustrates this well:

Isaiah 57:5 (NLT) You worship your idols with great passion

beneath the oaks and under every green tree.

You sacrifice your children down in the valleys, among the jagged rocks in the cliffs.

6 Your gods are the smooth stones in the valleys. . .

They, not I, are your inheritance. Do you think all this makes me happy?

7 You have committed adultery on every high mountain.

There you have worshiped idols and have been unfaithful to me.

8 You have put pagan symbols on your doorposts and behind your doors.

You have left me and climbed into bed with these detestable gods.

You have committed yourselves to them.

Here, the Lord is hurt by the idolatrous actions of His people - forsaking the Lord to go after idol gods. It is compared to harlotry and adultery.

As we read Exodus 33, we realize how hurt God is by what Israel did in worshipping the golden calf. The close relationship that Israel had enjoyed with the Lord so far was different now because of their idol worship. What would Israel do? Would they be content in the fact that they would have the Promised Land but no longer a close relationship with God?

Exodus 33:4 And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.

Israel did the best thing they could possibly have done for this moment - they mourned. They needed to mourn. They had hurt God deeply.

There is the kind of mourning that human beings experience at the death of a loved one. There is mourning from someone who experiences injustice or hurt. But there is also sorrow and mourning when a person realizes he has sinned, or he is being judged by God - and that his sin has far reaching effects. This person repents, turns to God, and seeks Him for mercy. This is the kind of mourning that Israel did that day. God can work with sinners when they mourn over their sin:

Lamentations 5:15 (NKJV) The joy of our heart has ceased;

Our dance has turned into mourning.

16 The crown has fallen *from* our head.

Woe to us, for we have sinned!

Joel 2:12 “Now, therefore,” says the Lord,

“Turn to Me with all your heart,

With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments;

Return to the Lord your God,

For He *is* gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.
14 Who knows *if* He will turn and relent,
And leave a blessing behind Him— . . .

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;

16 Gather the people,
Sanctify the congregation,
Assemble the elders,
Gather the children and nursing babes;
Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber,
And the bride from her dressing room.

17 Let the priests, who minister to the Lord,
Weep between the porch and the altar;
Let them say, "Spare Your people, O Lord,
And do not give Your heritage to reproach,
That the nations should rule over them.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where *is* their God?'"

In the New Testament, Paul spoke of mourning for the Corinthians who were sinning:

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest *there be* contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; **21** lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.

Back to Exodus:

Exodus 33:4 And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. **5** For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You *are* a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.'" **6** So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

Aaron had taken their gold ornaments to make the gold calf; therefore, the Lord commanded them to remove their jewelry. Their gold ornaments were a reminder to God of the incident with the golden calf. The NLT version says:

Exodus 33:6 So from the time they left Mount Sinai, the Israelites wore no more jewelry or fine clothes.

Similarly, Paul teaches how godly women in the New Testament era should adorn themselves:

1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; **9** in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, **10** but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.