

## Exodus Chapter 32 - John Karmelich

Let me start by saying this lesson is a major change the last dozen chapters. Instead of just focusing on Moses "yapping" with God, we move back to the rest of the Israelites for half a chapter. Then we're on the mountain again as God and Moses dialogue about what's occurring with the other Israelites. What's the key point is the Israelites were messing up badly while God and Moses were talking. Moses has to return to deal with that problem. There's a lot to say about how the Israelites messed up and I'll get into all of that. What's relevant to us and why I believe this story is in the bible is it is a great lesson on how God wants us to lead. Whether Moses liked it or not God called him to lead all the Israelites to the land of Israel. Before I get into all of that, I'm well aware that not all of us are leaders. Still this chapter is a great lesson on how we're to do His will. As I always preach, when it comes to making decisions, start with prayer for God's guidance, then make the best decisions possible given our situation. In this story, God tests Moses in effect, by saying, "Are you going to deal with this or must I wipe everyone out and start all over again?"

With that said, time for the details. Moses has been alone with God for 40 days on the mountain. It has been probably 5 months since the Exodus. The Israelites are still getting manna (bread) rained on them from the sky every day. The pillar of fire and cloud were still there, so evidence of God still guiding all of them is strong. Despite that evidence those Israelites thought, "Moses has been gone for a long time, so we must make other plans to move on!" You know you're in trouble when you skip prayer and look for solutions contrary to the bible! Remember the Israelites all heard the 10 Commandments God gave to everyone before He left to solo with Moses, Near the end of the time Moses was there, the Israelites built an idol (statue) which violates a few of those commandments! Obviously, I can focus on the sins committed in this chapter, but I believe God wants me to focus on how leaders should react when what is blatant sin does occur and how say church leaders (as an example) should act in such situations.

Best if I explain this chapter piece by piece. As I go through it, notice the issues dealing with how God wants us to act as well as leadership. Remember that the last dozen chapters (or so) were strictly Moses talking (more like taking dictation) while God explains how to build and work that tabernacle that God wanted the Israelites to build. The text now jumps here back to the rest of the Israelites. It is strange to consider that the Israelites wanted to build a gold (statue) to lead them! Obviously it'd have to be taken through the desert with them! One must understand the culture they came from: Egypt had big statues honored different gods including of all things, a bull! It was sinful, but we must understand they came from a land where it was normal to drag statues with them. Bottom line Moses left Mt. Sinai (where he was getting the instructions to deal with the sin the Israelites had committed) to deal with it!

Moses' brother Aaron was the "de facto" leader since Moses was gone. He commanded the Israelites to give their gold (that they got for leaving Egypt) and to make a long story short, Aaron took that gold to make it into a golden calf. He also built an altar to offer sacrifices to it. He claimed it was for God. He mixed idolatry with the worship of God. Obviously it was sin, but I wanted to show how it is often the case of mixing sin with a genuine desire to worship God. If Aaron was a good leader, he'd have said to the Israelites "God wouldn't have taken us this far to dump us here! We'll wait for Moses to reappear". Bottom line the sin was done. Yes we're forgiven of sin, but the consequences always come!

The scene switches back to the mountain with God and Moses. God says "guess what your people are doing?" Obviously, God knows all things and He led the Israelites out of Egypt. The point of putting the blame on Moses was to say in effect, "I called you to be their leader, so what do you say?" Yes we

read that God offered to start over with Moses, but I'm convinced the issue is to test Moses to see if he was willing to be their leader or not!

Give Moses credit. He didn't defend the sin, but said in effect, "God Your reputation is on the line! The world will know that if you killed everyone, no one would trust You (in effect)". We read God changed His mind on this. I believe God can be grieved especially by sin. I am also convinced God stated all of this to test Moses on leadership. Bottom line, "God changed His mind" (or so it appeared) when Moses stated that God promised unconditionally, He'd give the land of Israel to Abraham's descendants. That is why the issue was settled for Moses to lead the Israelites and he had to deal with that sin issue!

Moses then went down the mountain carrying the two tablets containing the 10 Commandments. As he approached the camp, his assistant Joshua thought he heard war! Moses corrected him to say in effect, what you hear is partying! The Israelites not only burned sacrifices, but had a big party. The original Hebrew implies it was a drinking party and an orgy! There's a famous story of when Charlton Heston was filming this scene in the 10 Commandments, one of the extras walked up to him and said, "You're such a party pooper!" Here in the book, when Moses got there, he broke the tablets that God wrote on and made a scene by destroying the idol! He ground it into powder, mixed it with water and made the people drink the water then! Now that's leadership to get people to focus on God and not idols.

By the way, if you think idols don't exist today, the joke is find out where people spend their income or their spare time and you'll find their idols. Anyway, Moses wasn't done yet. Obviously most of us don't deal with leadership issues on such scales. We are called to be a witness for Him, and sometimes we've got to deal with sin issues, not by claiming we're better people, but by just pointing people to God as to let Him deal with the issues and guilt caused by such issues! Hope that helps.

Bottom line the way God calls us to lead is by looking to Him for guidance, (i.e., make daily time to be in His Word, prayer for guidance) and then make the best decisions we can. When we make decisions that affect others, we're leading whether we realize it or not. Bottom line that's a simple example of the times in our lives when God calls us to lead!

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John