



Today, we turn to Exodus 32 to conclude our study in the incredible Old Testament book of the Bible. We're skipping 12 chapters from last week to this week as we wrap up 21 weeks in Exodus together. So, in the end, we've covered much of the book of Exodus, but not all of it. In the chapters following the Commandments, God continues to lay down a few chapters worth of laws for the people, alongside instructions about the covenant between Him and Israel. Eventually, God begins to lay down instructions for the Tabernacle too. In Exodus 32, Moses goes up to Mount Sinai to meet with God. Israel does a few surprising things, as shown below when you consider all they have experienced in the previous chapters in Exodus. What you're going to see is that when the people of Israel are squeezed, some bad things happen. Today's study is titled: "Don't Be Like This."

Key Passage: Exodus 32

Discussion Questions:

1. Exodus 32:1 tells us the people were tired of waiting on Moses; they didn't know what happened to him, so they looked for a god who would go before them. What is it about waiting that often brings out the worst in us?
2. Where did Israel get the gold they used to fashion the golden calf? What does this teach us about the tendency toward idolatry in our lives? How can we guard against the tendency to misplace worship in our lives?

These words pack a punch: Israel sat down to eat and drink and rose to play. Israel has an eagerness for false gods, an eagerness to worship someone or something other than the God who had brought them out of Egypt. They got up early to offer burnt offerings to this false idol, clearly disobeying the first two commandments: Have no other gods before me and don't make idols. When the Bible speaks about their revelry here in this passage, there are some different opinions about what this means; it could mean sexual immorality and drunkenness. The main point is – the sacrifices that were meant for the One True God were being used for an idol – they were misplacing the glory from God to the false god of an idol. Do you have a misplaced worship? Is Jesus the priority of your life? Are the things of God the priority of your life? Or are you worshipping the wrong things? Are you worshipping money or possessions, freedom and individuality, sports, or your children?

3. How does Aaron's failure to lead effectively serve as a cautionary tale for leaders in any context, including the workplace and your home?

What a departure for Aaron – a failure of leadership. The man who had seen God move from start to finish here gets pressured by the people and just folds into their plan. Bad leadership is folding to the pressure of doing the wrong thing when you know the right thing to do. On the other hand, good

leadership is doing the right thing, even with outside pressure to do the wrong thing. Aaron had all the knowledge to do the right thing, and he failed.

4. What insights can we gain from Moses' intercession for the Israelites in verses 11-14 about the nature of God's mercy and covenant relationship with His people?

God initially responds with anger toward Israel. It's important to note that God's anger has to be provoked – His natural disposition is love! However, Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, pleading with God to relent from His wrath. This demonstrates that God's mercy can be invoked through the prayers and intercessions of His people. Despite Israel's disobedience, God reaffirms His covenant with them. Even though Israel broke their part of the covenant by their idolatry, God remained faithful to His promises. This highlights the faithfulness of our covenant-keeping God despite our failures.

Psalm 106:3 notes, "Therefore he said he would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to turn away his wrath from destroying them."

These verses remind us of our need for a mediator between us and God. Thankfully, we have the true and better Moses in the person of Jesus Christ (John 3:16). As for followers of Jesus, these verses should stir our hearts to worship and intercessory prayer.

5. Aaron's excuse-making in verses 21-24 highlights a typical tendency: avoiding responsibility. Why are we prone to shift blame? How can we cultivate a spirit of accountability in our own lives?

Author and Pastor Tony Merida writes, "We have seen our own versions of this approach. Instead of confessing sin, people prefer to make excuses for their sin. Sometimes there is truth to these excuses. In this case, Aaron was right: the people were evil. But that was not the issue. What they did was irrelevant in this discussion; Aaron chose to give into the temptation. You cannot control your situation and your circumstances all the time, but through Christ, you must not yield to temptation" (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary, Exodus, pg. 201).

6. Describing the Israelites as stiff-necked suggests a pattern of stubbornness and resistance to God's guidance. How are you likely to experience a stiff neck in your life? What steps can we take to cultivate a spirit of humility and receptivity to God's voice?

Stiff-necked means "hard of neck." It carries the idea of stubbornness, an inability to be led, and unresponsiveness. Author Ray Pritchard wrote an article that gave eight characteristics of stiff-necked people:

What are the marks of stiff-necked people?

- Certainty that you are right.
- Refusal to listen to anyone else.
- Defensive when criticized.
- Making excuses for your shortcomings
- Lashing out at others
- No desire to examine your own life.
- Repeated pattern of misbehavior
- Prayer without repentance

Do these things characterize your life?

7. Reflecting on the consequences of the Israelites' lack of restraint, how can we maintain healthy boundaries and self-control in our own lives?

When Israel is described as “broke loose,” it means they had a lack of restraint. This means they were out of control. It is the same word used in Proverbs 29 for unrestrained. Is there ever a time when we live out of control (unrestrained) and don't regret our choices? Author Victor Hamilton points out that this word is used several times in Proverbs in the context of ignoring advice, ignoring instruction, and ignoring discipline. Doesn't that sound like a destructive path to take?

8. What lessons can we draw from the tragic outcome of the Israelites' disobedience for our spiritual journey and relationship with God? How can we ensure that our hearts remain faithful and steadfast in our walk with God amidst the pressures and temptations of the world?

What follows the stiff neck, unrestrained actions of Israel? God judges them. The sons of Levi go through the camp, and 3,000 men are killed because of their sin against God. The tragedy continues when God essentially says, “I'm not going with you into the Promised Land.”

This final study in Exodus is a heavy warning from God today as we look at the example of the Israelites. Every one of us battles against the same things as the Israelites did. That said, in closing, let's consider three questions:

Am I placing anything above the Lord in my life?
Am I being unresponsive to the voice of God?
Am I lacking restraint?