

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

GOD DELIVERS

GOD THE REDEEMER

Rebellion Against the Redeemer

Today, we come to a familiar Bible story – the story of the Golden Calf. The events of the Old Testament are not tales made up by man for the purpose of making spiritual applications. They are real events. Paul used Old Testament occurrences as learning tools for New Testament believers. Paul quoted the words of Moses regarding the Israelites' rebellion in **1 Corinthians 10:7 (ESV)** 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."* It was George Santayana, a famous Harvard philosophy professor, who said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

While Moses was experiencing a spiritual high, the Israelites fell into a spiritual low. Although the story is familiar, let's read it again. Idol worshipers distort true worship.

Read Exodus 32:1-6 (ESV) ¹ *When 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."* ² *So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."* ³ *So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.* ⁴ *And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"* ⁵ *When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."* ⁶ *And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.*

When Moses went up into the mountain in **Exodus 24**, he told the elders to tarry until his return. However, in less than two months, the people doubted that Moses who had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt would return to lead them into the Promised Land. This doubting of Moses is a picture of those who doubt the promise of Jesus the Redeemer to return. Jesus promised in **John 14:3 (ESV)** ³ *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* Peter in his day spoke of doubters. **2 Peter 3:4 (ESV)** 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."*

Moses was on the mountain communicating with the LORD. As time progressed the Israelites sinned because they became impatient and gave into their doubts since Moses did not return

within their **expected** time frame. **Psalm 27:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

Aaron and the other leaders failed because they went along with the people's desires instead of leading them. I have always wondered how a man who had the privilege of fulfilling such a godly role as high priest for the nation of Israel could fail so miserably in his leadership role? Some have tried to justify Aaron's actions by saying that the golden calf was supposed to represent God (v. 4) and not replace Him, but that argument is very weak. It was unlawful for a Jew to make any representation of Yahweh, and Aaron knew it. Probably the best answer to explain what Aaron did is that he did what he did out of fear that the people would kill him. Sadly, his fears caused him to compromise his beliefs. Jesus the Redeemer would say in **Matthew 10:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* We will discuss a little later what literally spared Aaron from the LORD's wrath.

There are many 'religious' leaders who proclaim Christ with their lips and yet compromise the Word of God. The people said: *These are your gods* And then we read: *When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it [the calf]. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.* A manmade golden calf and a feast to the LORD are not compatible. There are many obvious golden calves in our personal lives today including entertainment, technology, cars, houses – all created things that become more important in our lives than the Creator Himself. Then there are more subtle 'golden calves' – churches that are more focused on entertainment than missions – church leaders who are more focused on gathering in money for their own desires than meeting the needs of the community – church members who are so full of themselves that there is no room left for God.

Idol worshipers deserve God's condemnation.

Read Exodus 32:7-10 (ESV) 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. ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" 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."*

The LORD's mention of *your people* makes me smile. I think of how a father may say to a mother "your daughter" or a mother may say to a father "your son" when the child has misbehaved. But, what happened while Moses was away was nothing to smile about. God appeared to be disowning the sinful people and how Moses would respond would be a test for Moses himself. Although it was not the same test that Abraham faced when God told him to sacrifice his son, Moses' test was similar because it would test the heart of Moses. In Moses' response we see a picture of the coming Mediator.

Idol worshippers need a mediator.

Read Exodus 32:11-14 (ESV) ¹¹ *But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O 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 say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against 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 offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” ¹⁴ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*

A self-centered man might be excited to accept this invitation to have a great nation made from his own descendants. But, Moses loved these people God had given him even as sinful as they were, and he wanted more than anything else to glorify the God of Israel and see Him fulfill His promises – promises already made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Another way Moses passed the test was Moses wasn't worried about his own future; he was concerned about the LORD's reputation. What would the Egyptians say about God if they heard that the whole nation of Israel had been destroyed at Sinai? As followers of Christ, we should always take into account how our actions reflect on the glory of the LORD.

Moses belongs to the select company of God's people known as intercessors, individuals like Abraham, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, the apostles, and our Lord Himself. In fact, our Lord's ministry today in heaven is a ministry of intercession. Let's read about how Jesus intercedes for us.

Read Romans 8:34 (ESV) ³⁴ *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

I know that many in our group have a heartfelt desire to see the salvation of their loved ones. I want to share the words of Charles Spurgeon to encourage you in continuing your intercession on the behalf of the lost. He said: “If they [lost sinners] will not hear you speak, they cannot prevent your praying. Do they jest at your exhortations? They cannot disturb you at your prayers. Are they far away so that you cannot reach them? Your prayers can reach them. Have they declared that they will never listen to you again, nor see your face? Never mind, God has a voice which they must hear. Speak to Him, and He will make them feel. Though they now treat you despitely, rendering evil for your good, follow them with your prayers. Never let them perish for lack of your supplications.”

Possibly you are wondering how to be an intercessor. An intercessor must know the Lord personally and be obedient to His will. We must be close to the Lord. **Psalm 25:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.*

In order to pray the way Moses and other biblical intercessors did, we must feel close to the Lord and comfortable in the presence of God. Let's read a couple of very powerful scriptures concerning intercessory prayer.

Read Hebrews 4:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Read James 5:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

If you have a heart's desire to be like Jesus, intercede for others. Scripture does tell us in several places such as **Numbers 23:19** that God does not change His mind. However, from this real-life situation where the prayer warrior, Moses, interceded on the behalf of the children of Israel, we do discover that God changed His course of action!

One verse that I love concerning prayer is **Revelation 8:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.* The smoke of the incense with the prayers and desires of God's people is a beautiful picture that reveals the truth that our prayers are heard by God. This should encourage us to *pray without ceasing*. I love the way the KJV expresses **Hebrews 4:16 (KJV)** ¹⁶ *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Moses did not reveal his prayer for his brother, Aaron in the passage in Exodus, but he did when he reviewed the places where the Israelites had been disobedient to the LORD in Deuteronomy.

Read Deuteronomy 9:20 (ESV) ²⁰ *And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.*

No man or woman's position can shelter them from the wrath of God if he/she fails to walk in the way of the LORD. This for me is still another reminder of the importance of interceding for others and also for ourselves.

The psalmist would later write about the Israelites' golden calf sin. He wrote of God in **Psalms 106:23 (ESV)** ²³ *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.*

Sin separates us from God. Just like Moses *stood in the breach* that is the broken place caused by sin between God and the Israelites of old, we too can stand in the breach for those in our day who are separated from God. **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*