

Idol Factory  
Exodus 32

This week a few of us took a vision trip to Boston. We want to multiply as a church and we have great potential to do so. I think we can plant tons of churches out of IDC. We have 9 in Aspire and had 40 at Equip with 10 who wanted to be there. That's about 60 people who are considering church planting or international missions in one church. **We are praying that some of you will go to New England because the need is so great.** One of the leaders of the church planting movement is a planter himself, a large Brazilian named Joe. He calls Boston and north of Boston "**the desert.**" It is **1%** at best evangelical. My friend Stephen is in **Lowell**, a city of **110,000** and he is one of the only evangelical churches and he has about **60 in worship**. There have been a number of failed plants there. But some really good work is going and we pray for more.

But it's not that they don't have worshipers in NE. It's not as though people aren't religious in areas.

You see, NE is no different than anywhere else in the world. Everyone worships something or someone.

Some have made the **Red Sox** an idol.

Some, in that Harvard, MIT intellectual culture, are slaves to **ambition**.

**In Salem, they have statistically more witches than Christians.**

We drove through Salem and heard that stat and I just thought how could anyone adopt this earth-based, superstitious religion? It's simple.

**Left to ourselves we are all idolaters.**

Apart from the grace of God, we would be worshipping something or someone other than God.

It may be your body, a sport, money, or whatever. But we are all worshipers. Calvin is often quoted as saying, "**The human heart is a perpetual factory of idols.... Everyone of us is, from his mother's womb, an expert in inventing idols.** (John Calvin). Os Guinness & John Seel comment on the how important this topic is: "**Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible ... There can be no believing communities without an unswerving eye to the detection and destruction of idols.**" (No God but God, 23).

**What is idolatry?** Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God. They are counterfeit gods. Substitute saviors. (Keller)

An idol is anything you seek to give you what only Christ can give you is an idol. (joy, security, peace, meaning, significance, identity, salvation).

The idol is the sin beneath the sin.

Many don't believe this is a problem because we they only associate idolatry w/ shrines, temples, and carved images. But heart idolatry is present everywhere. An idol may be: Money "Greed is idolatry" (Col 3:5).

Sex

A romantic relationship

Peer approval

Competence and skill

Secure and comfortable circumstances

Beauty

Brains

Success and ambition

Israel's worship of the **golden calf** idol is what we are looking at today. Perhaps you think, "I don't struggle with worshipping a cow; I like to eat them too much, but i don't struggle worshipping them." Maybe not a cow. But remember this story has everything to do with you because **it's not ultimately about a calf; it's about the human heart**. Stephen says, "in **their hearts** they turned to Egypt" (Acts 7:39).

While Moses was upon the mountain getting instructions for the tabernacle for the proper worship of God, the people were back at the camp engaging in the false worship of God.

Even though the people had gotten out of Egypt, Egypt was still in the people.

Moses had been gone for about forty days, and Aaron, his older brother, was in charge. The people tell Aaron how they want to worship, and Aaron demonstrates what a leader without conviction looks like.

He gives these sinful people exactly what they wanted.

### Learning from Their Fall

This is a story of "the fall." We were in Eden, receiving instructions about the tabernacle, but now we're looking at a huge plunge into sin.

Let's read these words aloud from Paul regarding this event:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

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.... Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 Cor. 10:6-8, 11-14

Paul says that we must not desire evil; we must not become idolaters. And after mentioning other Old Testament examples, says that one of the reasons we have this story is that they stand as an example. It is meant to teach us. He says that we must take heed, lest we fall. We will be tempted, but we must flee from idolatry.

In Corinth, they were tempted with the local pagan gods, and in Exodus, the people are tempted with the local Egyptian gods. In each culture, the gods may look different, but the principle is the same: we must avoid the idols of our culture.

#### 4 CHALLENGES REGARDING IDOLATRY

##### #1: TAKE HEED LEST YOU FALL (32:1-9)

Why did Israel fall into idolatry? The same reasons we will.

We fall when...

We fall when we disobey the word of God (1a) "Up, make us gods"

The Israelites were supposed to know the Ten Commandments. They knew the first commandment, which said to "have no other gods," and they knew the second, which was to "not make any images."

But they disobey God's clear command thus violating commandment one. Israel previously said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." (Ex 24:3). But they reject God's word.

This is the nature of sin. We don't want to be told what to do. This is as old as the garden, "Did God really say?" (Gen 3:1), "You will not die" (Gen 3:4). We don't want to be under authority.

I love Lecrae's song "Just like You," especially the line, "I was created by God but I ain't wanna be like Him; I wanna be Him. The Jack Sparrow of my Caribbean." We don't want to live under authority, in other words.

They were also breaking the second command. They claim to be worshiping "the LORD" and they proceed to give offerings (5). Yet, they make an image to do so. Remember the second command (READ 20:4-6)

I think "gods" in the ESV is better rendered "god" as the NIV/HCSB has it. Elohim (the name used here) is plural but can refer to "god."

I think they're claiming to worship the real God, but doing it in the wrong way, in a way that is in clear violation of what God has said.

They're actually mixing Egyptian idolatry, since the bull was worshiped.

This scene shows us the importance of knowing God for who he truly is, and not how we imagine him to be. Worship is built on a right perception of God revealed through Scripture. Tozer said, "The essence of Idolatry is to entertain thoughts that are unworthy of him."

**We fall when we don't trust the purposes of God (1b)** "we don't know what has become of this man..."

Notice the reason for their idol making. They're frustrated that Moses has been gone so long. Instead of trusting in God's purposes; they move on.

Not trusting God is sin, and it leads to countless other sins.

They were ready to get on with their journey. But God hadn't told them the itinerary. He only promised to go with them.

But the impatient Israelites didn't want to trust God. Did they have any reason to not trust God? Of course not. Think of all the miracles up to this point.

They are also failing to trust in their leader, Moses. They knew exactly where he was.

The same is true for us. God hasn't given us a script. He says, "I will be with you. Trust me. Trust in my timing. My purposes are good and best." But when you try to do things your way, in your time, you fall into sin. Perhaps you are in a wilderness, and you are ready to be out of it – but you must trust in God's goodness and wait for him.

**We fall when we forgot the grace of God (2-4)** "take off the rings..."

Notice how they got the gold to make the idol. It was from their plundering of Egypt. How did they get it? God gave it to them (3:20-22). The gold was a picture of God's victory; it was a picture of his grace. They forgot that. And they give what God had given them to an idol, instead of using God's gifts for his glory.

"They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt."

Psalm 106:19-21

We sin when we forget that God has given us all things for his glory.  
We should enjoy God's gifts, be thankful for his gifts, and use his gifts to build the kingdom, not for idolatrous devotion.

Think about not just the gold, but the skill and time it took to make this idol. Instead of using this skill, this time, and this gold to honor god, they use it for idolatry.

It leads us to a question, "Are you using God's gifts – time, talent, and treasure – for his glory?"

Many today want to "salvation without dedication." God delivered them from Egypt, but now they're failing to live for his glory. Many people want to be forgiven and go to heaven, but they want to hold on to the idols of the world. But God is not mocked.

verse 4, "These are your gods, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." This is similar to a later golden cow worship experience by Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 12:28. They forgot who saved them.

Take heed, lest you forget. Don't stop thanking him for his grace, and living for his glory.

**We fall when we distort the worship of God (5-6).**

This whole scene is a picture of distorted worship. They are doing everything their way, instead of God's way.

It's amazing how twisted their worship was from the way God prescribed it:

- They took the initiative, instead of God
- Offerings were demanded not offered freely (2)
- They didn't prepare themselves for worship
- There was no guarding of the presence of God
- The invisible God is exchanged for a visible image
- The personal, living God is exchanged for a lifeless, dumb idol.

They are doing **what's popular**, instead of **what's right** with regard to worship.

Aaron listens to them – either out of **fear** (a real possibility), or **popularity** and desire for **acceptance**. He displays terrible spiritual leadership.

We have a whole church culture that's built around the golden calf practice. "Let's do away with what Scripture says about worship, and do it our way." As a result, we have a group of **consumers led by Aarons** – who listen to their desires.

God's way of worship is about putting the gospel on display. It's about showing sinners how they can be forgiven and worship the Holy one. That's what the tabernacle displayed, the gospel.

But the golden calf is what people wanted. The calf can't talk. The calf isn't to be feared;

the calf can be manipulated for one's own desires. People don't want a holy God who speaks and confronts them.

Remember, Worship is about glorifying God, not gratifying self.

Take heed, you can do things in the name of the LORD but still not worship the LORD.

Take heed, you can have some orthodox acts of worship – they have a feast, they make offerings, etc, but their worship was not acceptable.

### We fall into sin when we exchange the glory of God (8)

The Lord says that they have chosen to worship something they've created instead of worshipping him, their creator and redeemer (8)

This is what Psalm 106 says, as well as Romans 1:23-25:

[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, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

(Romans 1:22-25 ESV)

Everyone worships something. The great sin is exchange Creator for creation.

Anything that's a created thing can be an object of idolatry.

Usually, the better something is, the more likely people make it an idol.

That's why people are in bondage to sexual sin because the human body is amazing creation. But people take a good thing, and turn it into a god thing, and end up in a life of total bondage and destruction.

You will worship something. Is it creation, or Creator?

### 2 Results of Idol Worship:

**Result 1: Corruption.** Wrong worship leads to a corrupt life (6-7).

A corrupt life follows corrupt worship. The word "corrupt" is used in verse 7.

In verse 6, notice that they "sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." Some have pointed out that this has sexual overtones.

It shouldn't surprise us. When you worship the wrong god, you are capable of all types of sin.

Later, Joshua hears loud sounds, as they come off the mountain, "There is a noise of

war” (32:17), and Moses tells him it isn’t. IN verses 19, there is “dancing.” Dancing itself is not a sin, but what may be going on his men chasing women, women chasing men, all types of drunken activity, accompanied by screaming, shouting and types of carousing like the pagans.

In Romans 1, Paul says this. That God has given over those who worship creation instead of creator to their “dishonorable passions” (26).

Therefore, sin problems are worship problems. Your pornography addiction is a worship problem; your anger problem is a worship problem; your love of money, is a worship problem.

The idol of money, “the god of mammon” was scene so obviously with the recent collapse of the economy. [Some have hung themselves, shot themselves behind the wheel of their Jaguar, slit their wrists, leapt from their office buildings](#)” (Keller, ix-x).

Why? Because their god was taken from them.

**Psalm 16:4**, “The sorrows of those who run after other gods shall multiply.” Sorrows multiply when you chase other gods.

Idolatry is self-destruction.

Love creation, use creation, steward creation, but worship Creator, the Triune God.

**Result 2: Imitation.** We become what we worship (7-10)

This point is made in Psalm 115, and illustrated in Exodus 32:7-10.

[4] Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.  
[5] They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.  
[6] They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.  
[7] They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
and they do not make a sound in their throat.  
[8] Those who make them become like them;  
so do all who trust in them.  
(Psalm 115:4-8 ESV)

G.K. Beale has written a big book on this very subject if you want to explore it more, called We Become What We Worship.

How does Israel illustrate this?

They become **dumb** and spiritually lifeless like an idol.

They are **corrupt**, and nasty like cattle. Notice Psalm 106, They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox **that eats grass.**” The Psalmist notes the disgusting digestive process of cattle. This is probably why in the story, Moses grinds up the bull, and has them drink it; probably putting it into the water supply so that it can be digested and unusable.

They become “**stiff-necked**,” and stubborn like unruly cattle (32:9). They were unruly like cattle. The text says that they “turned away” like cattle, and they “broke loose” like cattle (32:25). They had to be led like cattle (32:34). **Hosea 4:16** says, “Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn.”

Beale notes how some have suggested that **Satan** actually entered cow, people were dancing as a result of their imitation of Satan their cheerleader. In other words, Satan was the ultimate owner and builder of the calf (Beale, 152-153).

I think Satan was definitely involved in this whole thing. Scripture refers to Satanic influence in relation to idolatry. “They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known” (Deut. 32:17). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, “what the pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.” (19-20).

**So what should we do to avoid this fall?**

Worship God! As you behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, you become like Christ (2 Cor 3:18). That’s how we are transformed. You resemble what you revere.

**#2: SEE THE POWER OF INTERCESSION (32:10-14)**

**Psalm 106** says, “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” (23)

Here we learn about intercession, that is, praying for others.

In **verse 10**, God says “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.”

What God is doing here is pushing Moses toward intercession. God could destroy them in a second.

He's making a “rhetorical demand.” He is challenging Moses to get involved, basically saying, “**Here is what I will do unless you intervene**” (Stuart).



This is not uncommon in Scripture. God often declared his intention to do something as way of inviting intervention.

In **Amos 7:1-6**, God announces his intentions of what he will do to Israel, but Amos intercedes, and God relents.

In **Jonah**, Jonah announces that Nineveh will be destroyed in “forty days,” but Jonah knew this was an invitation for the Ninevites to actually repent (which is why he didn’t want to go!). They do repent, and God doesn’t destroy them.

The same thing happens here. When verse **14 says**, “God relents,” it doesn’t mean God changed his mind. God was inviting Moses to pray, and Moses does, and God does turn away his wrath.

God was not changing his plans;  
Moses was carrying out God’s plans.

God does send a plague, but it was a lesser punishment (32:34-35).

**So, what do we learn about prayer?**

Well, we learn that as sinners, we need a mediator, and that’s what we have in Jesus. He turned away the wrath of God from us through his intervention (John 3:16).

But as followers of Jesus, we’re also called to plead to God for others through Jesus, and to do so, I suggest that we learn from Moses three things:

**1. Appeal to God’s character and faithfulness.**

Notice how Moses appeals to

(1) God’s Power – “Why would you nullify your power?” (11)

(2) God’s Past Investment and Reputation – “Why would you want to enemy to delight in seeing God’s people crushed?” (12)

(3) God’s Covenant Faithfulness – “Why would God go back on his promises?” (13).

He appeals to God’s compassion, God’s past investment, God’s public reputation, and God’s covenant faithfulness.

This same type of praying according to God’s faithfulness is expressed again in **Numbers 14:13-19**.

Let me encourage you to appeal to the character of God in prayer.

**2. Seek the will of God not your own selfish desires.**

Moses isn't asking for personal glory here. God says that he would start all over with Moses, "that I may make a great nation out of you" (10). This could have been flattering, but Moses cared more about the people fulfilling God's purposes of making them a great nation.

We too should pray in line with God's will; that is making disciples of all nations, not making us famous.

This prayer points us to Jesus, whom God would bring through this people as the Ultimate Offspring. It is his glory that we should seek.

**Believe that God answers prayer!**

This is one of the best examples of how God is responsive to prayer.

Those of us who have a high view of God's sovereignty often struggle with prayer. But remember, God is not a math equation. He isn't some abstraction. God is personal. And he responds to prayer!

I love what Spurgeon said (a man who believed in God's sovereignty):

In God's Word we are over and over again commanded to pray. God's institutions are not folly. Can I believe that the infinitely wise God has ordained for me an exercise that is ineffective and is no more than child's play? Does He tell me to pray, and yet does prayer have no more of a result than if I whistled to the wind or sang to a grove of trees? If there is no answer to prayer, prayer is a monstrous absurdity, and God is the author of it, which is blasphemy.

(Charles Spurgeon, The Power in Prayer. New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1996, 9).

When you pray like Moses, you aren't whistling in the wind. Believe that God hears the cries of his people.

Is he pushing you to intervene through intercession? Draw near to God, through Jesus, and appeal to God, believing that he answers prayer.

**#3: REPENT OF SIN; DON'T BLAME-SHIFT OR MINIMIZE SIN (32:15-29).**

Notice the process here. First, Moses confronts the people. Second, Aaron shifts the blame and minimizes sin, instead of repenting. Third, some join Moses, turning from idolatry.

**Confrontation (15-20)**

Moses confronts them by doing two things: breaking the commandments, and destroying their idol.

**15-16:** Moses descends down the mountain with the two tablets. They were inscribed on the front and back with the law of God. The text says it was the writing of God himself. Here is a picture of the fact that the law comes from God. It is a revelation of his holy character.

**17-18:** Joshua joins him. He had gone halfway up the mountain and was waiting for Moses. He then comments on the sound, as mentioned earlier.

**19-20:** Next we see Moses' reaction. He had heard of what Israel was doing at the foot of the mountain, but now when he saw it, he was filled with anger. As a result he threw the tablets down and **broke them**. Then he grinds up the idol and makes Israel drink it.

I don't think Moses is acting sinfully here; since he is never rebuked for his anger, as he was later (Num. 20:1-13). Instead I think he is illustrating the point that Israel had broken God's law (cf., Zech. 11:10)

Think about this: these tablets are the most valuable possession on earth! This act symbolizes the severity of sin.

James says, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (James 2:10). That's serious. The word confronts us.

Notice also that it's at the foot of the mountain (32:19). This was the official gathering place for worship, the place of meeting with God (19:12, 17), as well as the location of the only proper worship altar (24:4). He is confronting their sin publicly here, signifying the breach of the covenant.

Next, Moses completely **destroys the calf**. This is a great picture. Idols aren't to be managed; they're to be destroyed. Moses probably puts it in their water supply so that they would drink it, and digest it – coming out as waste, making it permanently ruined.

## **B. Blame-Shifting and Minimizing Sin (21-24)**

**21, 35:** The next person he confronts is his big brother, Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?"(21). Moses calls this a "**great sin**." Indeed it was. And Aaron, as the spiritual leader, is rightly singled out for allowing this to happen (see verse 35).

But instead of repenting of sin, Aaron does what Adam (the first garden priest) did in the

garden, he blame-shifts.

And within the whole exchange he also shows that he doesn't take breaking God's law, and idolatry very seriously.

Notice what he does...

He puts the blame on the people for their evil, and tries to make it sound like Moses has the problem (22).

He says “Don't be so upset, little brother; you know how these people are, bent on evil” (22 paraphrase). In other words, why are you getting so mad? You've got issues. Then he puts it on the Israelites, “they're set on evil. There's nothing I could do.”

We have seen our own versions of this approach. Instead of confessing sin, people rather make excuses for their sin. And sometimes they accuse the accuser.

Sometimes there is some truth to these excuses. In this case, Aaron was right, the people were evil. But that's not the issue. What they did was irrelevant; Aaron chose to give into the temptation.

You can't control your situation all the time, and your circumstances, but through Christ, you must not yield to temptation.

He then says, “The people made me do it” (23).

Once again, Aaron refuses to admit his sin. He refuses to acknowledge that he yielded to temptation. He says, “They said to me...” as if he had no say in the situation.

The proper way to respond when confronted with sin, is not by saying “Everyone was doing it!” or “She made me do it!” or whatever. You may indeed be in a tempting situation, but you must handle the response, and when you sin, you need to repent.

His final excuse is the most pathetic...

He blames the fire! (23)

Aaron says, “We had a fire... I threw in a few earrings, and out came the calf!”

Aaron is trying to cover up his sin with the spin game. He's lying and making up things.

**Application:**

Whether you admit your sin or not, you're accountable for it.

We need to own it and repent of it, like David who said, “Against you, you only, have I

sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4). “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (7). “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (8)

**Proverbs** says, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (28:13). So there’s your option: conceal or confess.

I often talk to our kids about blame shifting. They are prone, like their parents, to not own their sin and repent of it. So, a few weeks ago, James got into a little trouble at school – nothing major, but enough that it required consequences, and enough to call for repentance. So, in effort to teach about this, I told him to write five apology letters so that he could see whom he affects when he sins. He wrote apologies to Jesus, then to his teacher, then to his parents, then to his siblings, and then to his church. He read the letter to his parents and siblings at the dinner table apologizing. As he cried when he read the letter, the others began to cry. It was good. I was happy with this example. Then, he put his apology letter to the church in the offering box. Matt called me last Sunday and said, “I got an apology letter apparently from James. This is incredible. I think I’m going to use this method!” I thought, “We’re not going to have any money but a box full of confessions!”

Do not conceal transgressions. Confess them. Seek forgiveness first from the Lord, then seek forgiveness from those you’ve offended.

### Who Is On the Lord’s Side? (25-29)

**25-29:** God makes it clear to Moses that those committed to idolatry must be cut off. As a result, three thousand men fall.

I can imagine a modern person’s reaction to this scene. They wouldn’t be able to justify this.

That’s because we don’t understand the reason behind it, namely, that leaving idolaters in the land would threaten the preservation of truth, and the salvation of future generations.

If idolatry continued to exist, then many would never have the opportunity to have eternal life through Jesus. Jews and Gentiles would both be eternally affected by the continuation of their idolatry.

Moses’ actions here are not to be imitated. In the new covenant, we aren’t given permission to kill as a means of preserving orthodoxy.

There also seems to be the possibility of repentance before the judgment is carried out.

26: Moses says “Whoever is for Yahweh, to me” (there is not verb “is” or “come” in the original).

Who chooses the Lord? **The Levites.**

Stuart says, “Since Aaron was a Levite and had led the move toward idolatry, it can hardly be doubted that other Levites had also succumbed to its attractions. But now, everyone was being given a chance to repent and re-establish loyalty to Yahweh’s covenant.”

This is how we are to respond when we are confronted with sin. The Levites, turn from idolatry, and choose the Lord.

Maybe you are here today and you have never made a decision to trust Jesus alone to be your Savior. What are you waiting on? Where else will you go? Choose him today.

Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me” (**Matt. 12:30**). Why don't you say, "I'm with Jesus" today. Not tomorrow. Today. Right now, in your heart, believe. Be baptized as a public testimony to the world that you're with Jesus.

27-29: Regarding the Levites carrying out of God’s demand for judgment, they are told to show no partiality (27).

What seems to be happening here is that the Levites are told to carefully and systematically see who is returning to Yahweh. Those found in idolatry were to be put to death. Three thousand men die (about 1% of the male population).

Because the Levites had to “consider the cost” in following out this severe act (cf., **Matt. 10:37-38**), they are told, “Today you have been ordained for this service of the LORD...” (29). God says he is setting them aside for special service, and that they were recipients of God’s blessing.

So here, we see the severity of sin; the reality of judgment; and the need to repent of sin, not to blame-shift or minimize sin.

#### **#4: SEE OUR NEED FOR A SUBSTITUTE (30-35)**

30: Moses goes back up to Mount Sinai (31) to intercede again for the people.

He says, “perhaps I can make atonement for your sin” (30), which is “a concept that could also be translated literally as ‘**get your sins covered/forgiven**’” (Stuart).

Understand that the killing of the 3,000 was only the beginning of the process of restoring God's favor and blessing.

The judgment of the 3,000 only corrected those who refused to return to God. It was a limited judgment.

What about those still alive? Those who had broken the covenant?

Their hope was in the mediator who climbed the mountain to make atonement.

**31-32:** Moses appeals to God.

He doesn't minimize their sin. He says it's a "great sin" (31).

He then seeks forgiveness for their sin, "forgive their sin" (32a).

Then he says something amazing, "if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (32b). Moses offers to lose his own (eternal) life for the sake of Israel. He sounds similar to Paul in Romans 9:1-3.

Moses understood the nature of salvation: when people sin they need a substitute.

As mentioned with the priests, sin could be forgiven through a representative, with sacrifices. But here is a new approach, the representative offers himself as the sacrifice.

**33-34:** God responds with **judgment** and **mercy**. The judgment comes with the immediate answer (33); the mercy comes when God agrees to continue with this stiff-necked people (34; 33:1-17).

God says, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book" (33). This represents a statement of God's practice of judgment.

Eternal life is not granted automatically to a person who tries to enter it without the forgiveness of sins.

Stuart says, "Verse 33 is, then, one of the Bible's stronger statements about the absolute necessity for the forgiveness of sins, and therefore, for a savior. It can be regarded as messianic even if not overtly so." (Stuart).

**34:** God tells Moses to continue on the journey. Their idolatry didn't result in total destruction.

The punishment spoken of here may refer to future punishment not the plague in the next verse (see Stuart).

35: The plague was a small-scale warning, and sample of God's wrath. We aren't told how many people died, even if any did. This plague may have only made them sick.

### We Need a Savior

The story seems to build up to this climactic finish, in which the mediator will give his life for the life of the people, but it didn't work that way.

Why not? Moses couldn't die for the people because he himself was a sinner. Ryken says, "God is willing to let someone die for someone else's sin, but the only sacrifice he can accept is a perfect sacrifice, unstained by sin. So Moses couldn't do it. He came close – perhaps closer than any man had ever come – but he still couldn't make atonement for sin."

This whole chapter points us to one great reality: we need a perfect substitute.... And we have one!

We have one who would come from this very people. He would ascend to the cross, and bear the punishment that we idolaters deserve.

He took the punishment in place of us, in order for our sins to be covered.

Jesus would say, "Take my life, that they may live."

"The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (John 10:11).

Because of Christ, our names can be written in the book of life! (Phil 4:3; Luke 10:20)

### CONCLUSION

Let me pull it all together...

My Non-Christian friend:

See Jesus Christ as your substitute who died in your place for your idolatry so that you could be reconciled to God.

Turn from your idols to the living God (1 Thess. 1:9-10). That's conversion.

Apart from Jesus, we just live in Romans 1 – satisfying our lusts and exchanging God for created things... left to ourselves we are idolaters.

You need a new life that's made possible through Jesus.



## To Fellow Believers:

See your idol for what it is and flee from it. They are dumb idols.

Properly assess created things. Enjoy and be thankful for and steward created things; only worship and serve and trust Creator God (Rom. 1:21-25) Clarkson: "An overvaluing of created things is the birth and food of soul idolatry"

Put your lusts to death daily (Col. 3:5)

How?

Set your mind on things above! (3:1-2)

Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. You are NEW! (3:4)

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly

See all of life as an opportunity to worship Christ.

Elevate your vision of Christ.

Believe that Christ is the best Master, the most intimate companion, and the most superior source satisfaction...

To repent requires a **change of affection**. You need a new affection. Don't blame-shift, or minimize sin. Repent of sin – returning to your first love.

Jesus Christ has to be seen as more reliable and more desirable. "If you uproot the idol and fail to 'plant' the love of Christ in its place the idol will grow back." (Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods). There's no neutral ground. You will worship something or someone.

Jesus is the God we trust, the Savior we embrace, and Lord we obey, the treasure we find satisfaction in.

5. Like Paul in Athens, observe the idolatry around us, and long to make Jesus known and worshiped as he should be.

Pray like the Psalmist, "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you." (Ps 67:3). Share the gospel with people who can't take this meal and sing these songs because they have not yet turned to Christ.

Love Christ. Trust Christ. Rest in Christ. Delight in Christ. Serve Christ. Give time, talent, and treasure to Christ.

