

JANUARY 31

Exodus 32-34

So...Moses comes down from the mountain with the tablets. What does he find? A party of epic proportions. People are worshiping the golden calf, they are singing, dancing, and running wild (Literally, the Hebrew says they were uncovered, but leaves the rest to our imagination.)

It had only been 40 days since this whole nation had listened to the Ten Commandments and solemnly proclaimed, *"whatever the Lord has said, we will do!"* Only 40 days - and this was the same group who had witnessed all of the judgments of God against the false gods of Egypt. They had been at the Red Sea, they had drunk water from the rock and they were eating manna - the "bread of heaven" - every single morning!

There are a lot of lessons we can learn from all of this, but here is one pretty important one: Just seeing miracles – witnessing, even experiencing the mighty acts of God - is no protection against stupidity! Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that all that is really needed is a genuine miracle or some extraordinary demonstration of the power of God, and then unbelievers will automatically be converted and follow Christ, foolish will be wise and revelers will become righteous

Not so in this case. Let's look at all the commands they were breaking when Moses emerges from the mountain.

- 1 - Worshipping other Gods
- 2 - Graven image
- 3 - Taking God's name and misrepresenting him
- 6 - Adultery is likely
- 10 - Coveting is likely

It is probably important for us to note that the children of Israel were not all involved in this debauchery. Perhaps as few as 3,000 were involved - that is the number who were slain. We do not know if everyone who participated died or only the ringleaders did, but the rest of the nation stood back in silence and let this thing happen. For that they too incurred guilt. Aaron was apparently trying to manage the crisis – on the one hand, give into the idolatrous demands of the people, and then on the other hand, somehow turn it into a festival that would honor Jehovah. He failed miserably in that attempt and then concocted the lamest of all excuses. 'The people made me do it.' And check out this excuse: "We threw our gold and earrings into the fire and out popped this Golden Calf." That's like a lame 6 year old with crumbs all over her face saying "I didn't eat the Oreos!"

If it wasn't for the fervent intercession of Moses, Aaron and all of the people of Israel would have died there in the wilderness.

One thing we notice about Moses is his willingness to intercede and negotiate with God. God's Word is that though He will send His angel with Israel to guide and protect his people through their trek to the Promised Land, He will not personally go before them because they are stubborn and rebellious and He might destroy them. Moses is not willing to settle for an angel. *"If your presence does not go with us, do not send us from here."* 'God, if you are not going, I'm not going.' *"How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?"*

Moses' desperate need for God's presence isn't an option. He would rather fail at the mission, or even die than go without God. I wonder, do we live our lives like that? Are we as just as convinced as Moses that apart from experiencing the presence of God we will fail? Moses also acknowledged that it was God's presence that would distinguish him and the Israelites from all the other people on Earth. Is that true of us today as followers of Jesus? Is God's presence in our life visible enough to the world to distinguish us from all those who do not know him?

Continuing on in chapter 33 we see that Moses now is a man well accustomed to speaking with the Lord *"face to face as a man speaks to a friend."* Here, we have a problem because when Moses asks to see the glory of the Lord, God says, *"You cannot see my face and live"* but shelters Moses in a cleft in the rock and allows him to stand there, with God covering his face, while the glory of the Lord passes by.

The solution to this problem? "Face to face" is a metaphorical phrase, not literal. Since we always let scripture interpret scripture, it is easy to see that this was not meant physically. Moses really did meet with God in a tangible way, but apparently not literally face to face.

But Moses did get to see God in the pillar of smoke and fire. And he did see God's back - or an appropriate translation would be God's afterburners. How cool is that?

On a side note, did you notice the mention of Joshua in this passage? He was Moses' young aide. He stayed at the Tent of Meeting. He didn't leave it! When Moses came to meet with God, Joshua saw the cloud descend. He knew when God met Moses. Perhaps he even heard something of their conversation. He learned the ways of God with man by watching Moses commune with God. And he was learning all the while how to be a leader of the people of God. It would be nearly 40 years before he would hear those mighty words, *"Moses, my servant, is dead... as I was with [Moses] so I will be with you."* But he is learning by watching, by being with Moses. That is called an apprenticeship, and that is a very Biblical way of training new leaders. So Samuel learned from Eli, so Elisha learned from Elijah, so Timothy and Titus learned from Paul. If God has given you a ministry in the church, then I believe that you ought to be asking Him also for an apprentice who can learn from you how to exercise the gifts the Holy Spirit has given, and how to practice the ministry skills associated with your kingdom work.

Before I go, notice one more thing about the self-revelation of God. He says to Moses, *"My name is Jealous"* - This Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a Jealous God. We tend to think of jealousy as a negative characteristic, something to be meticulously avoided. But jealousy can be a righteous thing. There is a way, for example, to be righteously jealous for my family - to cherish them, protect them, provide for their needs, and to zealously maintain the integrity and the purity of the family and its reputation. Well, God is a jealous God, or if you wish, a zealous God, with regard to protecting the purity and integrity of His name and reputation - *"I will not,"* He says in another text, *"share My glory with anyone!"*