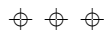


WATER•FIRE•STONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSES

Session 13 – His Presence, Part Two | Exodus 32

Broken. God’s commandments. Israel’s promise. Moses’ heart. It happened right after the covenant was signed and sealed. It happened while the glory of the Lord, visible from the camp below, set the mountaintop ablaze. To her shame, Israel became a harlot on her honeymoon.



Forty days, and still no Moses. In his absence, they weren’t feeling God’s presence. It was only a matter of time before forgetfulness set in. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of a calf. “How could they?” we ask. It seems like a random choice to us, but they were falling back on what was familiar. Aren’t we capable of this too? In times of uncertainty, old habits and patterns of thinking feel safe.

This session in our four-part series, *His Presence*, explores lessons to be learned from Israel’s impatience, failure, and forgetfulness.

Icebreaker

Give an example of a habit you would like to break and a new habit you want to form.

Goals for this Session

- Discover how Moses persuaded God to change His mind.
- Consider whether Aaron’s pattern of excuses bear any resemblance to our own.
- Pray honest prayers that refuse to give up, give in, or fall back into old habits.

1 Knowing he would be gone for an extended time, Moses put Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp (Exodus 24:14). Then Moses took Joshua with him and went up to God. For six days, they waited under the cloud of God’s glory and on the seventh day, God called Moses to come further up.

This is when Moses received the stone tablets, etched by God’s own hand. For forty days and nights, Moses stayed there while God gave him all the plans for the tabernacle, the place where God’s glory would dwell and all Israel would come to worship.

a. Read Exodus 32:1–18 | What is happening? Highlight what stands out to you, and why.

b. Aaron’s Failure (verses 1–6). Forty days is a long time. At some point, people started to talk. *What’s taking so long? Something must have happened. How will we ever find the promised land now? We can’t just sit here; we need a plan!* So they formed a committee and pressed Aaron to make a god for them.

We read the lame excuse Aaron makes later, but why on earth would he go along with the people?

As for this Moses...

Who were these people so quick to give up on Moses? Possibly the same vocal troublemakers who had stirred up conflict at Rephidim (Exodus 17).

c. Moses left Aaron in charge, but who was leading whom? Aaron condoned their sin by giving them what they wanted. Then he compounded their sin by proclaiming a “feast to the Lord.” Who knows, maybe he thought that would somehow satisfy the people, but the situation went from bad to worse.

As we saw in Exodus 24, burnt offerings were to remove sin and declare total dedication to the Lord. Peace offerings were to celebrate forgiveness and honor the Lord. But Aaron distorted that by giving the people what they wanted and helping them feel good about it. Is there a warning here for us? Use the verses below for help with your answer.

Exodus 23:2a

Psalms 24:3–4

2 Timothy 4:2–5

2 God's Anger (verses 7–10). What is God's response toward the people and how does He describe them?

a. "Now therefore, let Me alone..." Think about it. Was God telling Moses that He was angry and didn't want to talk about it? Not at all. By making Moses aware of the dire situation, what was God actually *prompting* Moses to do?

b. Moses' Prayer (verses 11–14). Would you be tempted to take the Lord up on His offer to Moses? After all, it's God who is offering to quit the people and start over. But this was a proving question for Moses.

Was God giving him an out? *These people are so obstinate. Moses, I'll let you off the hook. You want an easier assignment? I'll make it happen.*

Consider how far Moses has come since the early days when he begged to be excused. From reading his prayer, what has become the motivating passion of his heart?

3 When Moses prayed, God *relented* and changed His course of action. This is an example of how intercessory prayer is a vital part of God's ultimate and unchanging purposes. The very thing that Moses used to "change God's mind" was God's own promises. Like Moses, we can pray, "God, You said..."

a. Sometimes we struggle with what to say or wonder if our prayers make a difference. The Bible isn't only a textbook to study; it is filled with promises and praise to be prayed back to the Lord. God speaks to us through His Word. Why should we make a habit of praying it back to Him?

Isaiah 55:10–11

John 15:7

1 John 5:14–15

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God cannot and will not change His character. He is who He is. But He can and will change His mind when His people pray.

Robert Morris
Why Keep Praying

b. Moses appealed to God on the basis of His love, His plan, and His unchanging character. He has always been compassionate and merciful. He is always faithful. He keeps His promises. Think of at least three people or situations you are currently praying for. Can you pray like Moses, reminding God of His promises? (He hasn't forgotten, but it will do your heart good to remember.) Write a simple, specific prayer for each one.

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Memory Verse

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
1 Corinthians 10:12 NKJV

Comparing this with last week's verse* which part of this verse resonates most with you today?
How or in what way?

* All the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said, we will do." Exodus 24:3

4 Read Exodus 32:19–35. | What is happening? Highlight what stands out to you, and why.

- a. Moses' Anger (verses 19–20). When Moses sees with his own eyes what the people are engaged in, the Bible says his "anger burned." That describes a very physical, emotional reaction. His initial response is described in two short, intense verses. What did he do?

- b. Aaron's Excuse (verses 21–24). Aaron is supposed to be the brother with a flair for words, but what about now? When Moses confronts him with this great sin, he tries to talk his way out of trouble.

We see three problems with his response (some may seem familiar). Briefly explain how *none* of these comes close to repentance and discuss what a better response would be.

Don't be angry, Moses. | Calm down—what's your problem?

You know how these people are. | Shifting blame.

All I did was . . . | Make excuses.

5 After Moses destroyed the calf and rebuked Aaron, he took his stand in the main gate of the camp and cried out, “Whoever is on the Lord’s side, come to me!” The call went out to everyone but only the Levites responded. The purging that followed was painful but necessary.

- a. Putting idolatry to death (verses 25–28). At the Lord’s command, Moses sent the Levites through the camp with their swords and orders. Whoever was guilty must be punished. Three thousand men were executed that day. Painful as it was, not even the nearest friend or relative was spared.

Consider this. What could be closer or dearer to us than our own human nature? According to Romans 6:11–14, what does God’s Word command us to do?

Galatians 5:24 tells us that those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. According to Galatians 5:19–21 what must we take the sword to in our own life?

- b. Consecrate yourselves (verse 29). The word *consecrate* here means, “fill up your hands.” Moses told the people it was time to give themselves over completely to the Lord. The half-heartedness and rebellion that plagued the camp must go. They could plainly see how much pain it had caused.

Think about it. God set Israel apart to be a holy nation, and we are too (1 Peter 2:9). How do we consecrate ourselves? Use the verses below for help with your answer.

Romans 12:1–2

Ephesians 5:1–4

Titus 2:11–13

1 John 2:15–17

6 The Next Day (verses 30–35). Somewhere between verse 29 and 30, the sun went down on that terrible day. What a miserable night it must have been for Moses and the people.

- a. What did Moses do the next morning? Highlight what stands out to you and why.

- b. Are you seeing more of how Moses foreshadows Jesus? Simply explain how Moses reflects Jesus in this situation. Read John 10:11 and John 15:13 for help with your answer.

- c. Moses was God’s chosen one to lead and intercede for Israel (Psalm 106:23). Even though Moses loved them enough to die for them, God wouldn’t let him—but why? Read the verses below for help with your answer.

1 John 2:1–2

1 John 3:5

1 Peter 3:18

Action Steps ►► As you think through this part of Moses’ story, what is the most important takeaway point for you personally? How will you put what you’ve learned into action?

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

Adoration – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

Confession – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

Thanksgiving – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

Supplication – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.



Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A·C·T·S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound—just authentic.
