

Exodus

Lesson #11, Chapters 32-33

1. What is the state of things as Chapter 32 opens? See Exodus 32:1, then see Exodus 24:18 and Deuteronomy 9:11-12.

2. What sins can you pick out from Exodus 32:1 that would lead to this new development? How would you counsel the Israelites at that moment of temptation to think rightly about the situation in Exodus 32:1? What Scriptures would you use to remind them of biblical truth?

3. Unfortunately, Aaron got caught up in people's sinful thinking too. What did Aaron do to make a bad situation *worse* in Exodus 32:2-5?
 - a. How did his response lead to even greater sins for the people? See Exodus 32:6-8; Deuteronomy 9:16; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19-21; Acts 7:41; 1 Corinthians 10:7.

4. How does God respond to the spiritual adultery of the nation in Exodus 32:10? Describe Moses' response from Exodus 32:11-13. What elements of God's character and works does Moses focus upon?

5. Exodus 32:14 tells us God changed His mind after Moses interceded on behalf of the people. This brings up an important theological issue that must be approached precisely so we can understand God correctly. Please look up and summarize what you learn about

The solution to God changing His mind, relenting, or repenting is to understand that:

- God is speaking from man's perspective, using terms men can relate to. God does this, not to overthrow the many Scriptures that teach us He never changes or to imply that His decree is comprehensive and inflexible, but to help us understand Him better.
- God is unchanging. God always acts consistently with His character and nature.
- God is a holy God of justice and wrath. When people sin and will not repent, God consistently promises certain judgment. We might state it definitively as God always judges unrepentant sinners. We often see in the Scriptures that when the people were in unrepentant sin, judgment was promised.
- God is a God of love, mercy, grace, patience, and compassion. God likes to show mercy and extend grace to those who humble themselves and repent. We might state this more definitely as God always shows mercy to those who humble themselves and repent.
- God knows the end from the beginning. He knows the outcome of all things because His providence is working to bring it to pass. In the Scriptures, when we see people in unrepentant sin, judgment is promised. For example, the people of Nineveh repented, and in another example, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. They changed and therefore got to see another side of God's unchanging character, His mercy and grace. You can take a table, for instance, and take pictures of it from different positions in a room. Each picture will be different. From certain angles the table may look like a rectangle, or a trapezoid, or a parallelogram. It may be smaller or larger. In different light the table may even appear to change colors. But the fact is the size, shape, density, and color of the table remain consistent. It is the photographer, by his moving around that allows him to observe different aspects of the table. So, it is with God. He is unchanging. When people are in unrepentant sin, judgment is certain. When they humble themselves and repent, mercy and grace are certain. When we move from rebellion to repentance, we get to see an entirely different side of the unchanging God!

Taken from a lesson by Dr. Jack Hughes, "God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility: The Two Wills of God and When God Changes His Mind," Lesson #5. For more information about the study, please contact

www.drivennails.com.

Below is an excerpt from Dr. Jack Hughes' sermon in Genesis 6:6,
which deals with this very topic.¹

There is a false theological system called "Open Theism" which says that God isn't sovereign, doesn't have all knowledge, doesn't know the future, but is reacting to the chaos that is happening in the world.

First of all, we need to realize that sometimes God speaks in human terms so that we can relate to Him. When the Bible speaks as if God has human emotions, like our text, the big word is *anthropopathisms*. God uses *anthropopathic* language, *language that describes God with human emotions* so that we can relate to Him. Other times the authors of Scripture use *anthropomorphic* language that describes God *as having a physical body, the eyes of the Lord, the strong arm of the Lord*, etc.

God knows all things and has known all things before the foundation of the world. **Eph. 1:11, He is working all things after the counsel of his will. Isa. 46:10, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'** God knew about the fall and how mankind would corrupt themselves in eternity past. God never learns anything for He is all knowing. So why does **vs. 6** say **the Lord was sorry that he had made man?** Because sin grieves the Lord, but that does not mean He didn't know it would happen. Jesus predicted His arrest, trial, death by crucifixion, and resurrection multiple times, but yet He was greatly distressed in the garden. Jesus knew Jerusalem would be destroyed by Titus, but He was still grieved and wept.

Someone then asks, *But, what about the texts that say God relented or repented or changed his mind?* God is constant, unchanging, and infinite in all His attributes. Let's say you have a table set in the middle of a large room. Nothing else is in the room, just the table. You have a camera and you take a picture of the table bending over the top of it, then you take another picture straight on from one end, then another at an angle off to one side. You take some up close, some further away, some with the lights up, some with the lights down. Now, when you look at the pictures of that table, every picture is different. It appears to be a rectangle in shape in one picture, a trapezoid in another, a parallelogram in another, smaller in some pictures, larger in others, darker in some, and lighter in others. Every picture is different of the same table.

Let me ask you, has the table changed in weight, density, color, size, or materials? No. So, *Why are all the pictures of the table different then?* Because of the perspective of the photographer. The photographer changed his position, changed the lights, changed the distance he was standing from the table, etc. The table's attributes remain constant. The variety of pictures is due to the photographer. Thus, when people are living in sin and rebellion against God, the fixed picture they will always see is judgment. However, if they repent, the fixed picture they will see is mercy and grace.

Yes, when God is considered from man's perspective, He is sorry, relents, or repents. As men change their position in relation to God, they see different aspects of God's unchanging nature. But how does God see or describe himself and His nature? **Numb. 23:19** says, **"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? And I Sam. 15:29** says, **"Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."**

God promised to destroy Nineveh, sends Jonah to preach judgment to them, and the people of Nineveh repent. When they were in sin, judgment was certain. When they repented, mercy and grace were certain. Thus, all the texts in the Bible that appear to teach God changed His mind, relented, or repented, are looking at God from man's perspective. When men change position, they see different attributes of God.

6. Though Moses pleaded for God to extend mercy to the sinning people, what happens when Moses sees what had so offended God? See Exodus 32:15-20.

7. After Moses dealt with the people, he turned his attention to Aaron, confronting him about his sin in Exodus 32:21-24. How would you characterize Aaron's response?

8. After considering Aaron's response, how would you counsel him to a right response about his sin? Be sure to include the Scripture references you would use.

9. Further consequences of the people's sin are seen in Exodus 32:25. What happened and with what result?

10. What do you learn from the following Scriptures about giving way to temptation? See Genesis 4:5-8; Romans 6:12-14; Hebrews 3:13; James 1:13-16.

11. What is Moses' plan to quell the rebellion? See Exodus 32:26-29.

"A man must deny RELATIVE SELF, his dearest relations, if God calls; if our nearest alliance, father or mother stand in our way, and would hinder us from doing our duty, we must either leap over them, or tread upon

them. Luke 14:26. 'If any man come to me, and hate not father and mother, and wife, and children, &c. he cannot be my disciple.' Relations must not weigh heavier than Christ."³

"Whatever you deny for Christ, you shall find again in Christ, Matthew 19:29. 'Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.'⁴

12. What is commendable about the Levites' role in this incident? See Exodus 32:26-29; also look up Matthew 10:37; Luke 11:23.
 - a. Look up Moses' blessing upon the Levites in Deuteronomy 33:8-9. What do you notice in Moses' blessing that relates to our passage in Exodus? What insights do you gain into the Levites actions from this passage?

13. From Exodus 32:30-35, what observations can you make about Moses' interactions with God on behalf of the people?

14. What truths does the Lord bring up to Moses in Exodus 32:33-35 that bring balance to Moses' thinking? See also Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 24:16; Isaiah 3:10-11; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Hebrews 12:6-11.

15. Though God was gracious toward the people, regarding the worship of the golden calves and the other sins they had committed, there were still consequences for the people's rebellion and unbelief. What do you learn about that from Exodus 33:1-6?

³ Thomas Watson, "Discourses upon Christ's Sermon on the Mount," in *Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects, Being the Select Works of the Rev. Thomas Watson*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh; Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, & Co.; A. Fullarton & Co., 1829), 375.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

16. Some commentators have suggested that the angel mentioned here in Exodus 33:2 is different from the one mentioned 3 verses earlier in Chapter 32:34. Do a bit of Bible sleuthing and see what you learn after looking up Exodus 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2.
17. In Exodus 33:3, God says the Israelites are an obstinate people. Please explain what it means to be *obstinate*.
- a. What sins come from an *obstinate* and *stubborn* spirit? See Deuteronomy 9:6-13; Psalm, 78:8; Zechariah 7:11; Acts 7:51; Romans 2:5; and for the opposite see James 3:13-18.
 - b. What are some ways you can guard against stubbornness in your own heart?

“God obviously did *not* want to destroy his people, however, so here he indicated that his rhetorical offer at the present time to them was that he would not directly accompany them in the same degree that he had spoken personally to them from Sinai (20:1–19) or appeared personally to Moses several times at the top of the mountain. The close divine presence at Sinai under this scenario would be moderated after the Israelites left Sinai. God would be more indirectly present with them in the future for their own benefit, lest his intolerance of sin should require him to “destroy them on the way,” that is, before they reached the promised land. *To keep his plan of redemption on course, God had to limit his contact with Israel* (emphasis added).” ~Douglas K. Stuart⁵

“Although God instructed Moses to lead the Israelites into Canaan, and promised to fulfil his prior commitment to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he would not go with them. He feared that further acts of rebellion might cause him to destroy the people on the way. ‘*I will send an angel before you*’ was the

⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 690–691.

promise of divine help to overcome the inhabitants of Canaan and echoes 23:23. However, it did not necessarily imply that God would dwell in the midst of the people.” ~T. Desmond Alexander⁶

18. In Exodus 33:7-11 we see one way in which *the Lord did not abide in the midst of Israel*. What do you see happening in those verses?

“The tent mentioned in verse 7 was *not* the tabernacle, which had not yet been erected, but a provisional tent pitched by Moses and called here “the tabernacle (tent) of meeting.” Individuals who desired to seek the Lord could go there, outside the camp. The camp itself had been defiled by the sin of the people, so the tent was situated outside. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended, indicating God’s presence.” ~William MacDonald⁷

“The Tabernacle had not yet been made nor the Aaronic priesthood instituted. In addition the camp had been so defiled by the incident of the golden bull, that it was necessary to have the meeting place with God well outside it.” ~H. L. Ellison⁸

19. Exodus 33:11 is often misunderstood as to what it means when God spoke to Moses “face to face,” yet if we take the time to pull together all the doctrinal threads God has laid out in His Word, any confusion is cleared up. First, look up and summarize what you discover from Exodus 33:11, 18, 20-23; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16.

- a. Next, based on what you learned from the preceding verses, explain what “face to face” means.

- b. Finally, consider what is being conveyed about the relationship Moses had with God. See also Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23.

⁶ T. Desmond Alexander, “Exodus,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 117.

⁷ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 125.

⁸ H. L. Ellison, *Exodus*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 177.

- c. Is that kind of relationship available to us? See John 15:13-15; James 2:23; 4:4.
20. Exodus 33:12-16 picks up the conversation Moses was having with God in Exodus 33:1-3. The intervening verses (Exodus 33:4-11) contain parenthetical information about the people's response when Moses tells them what God had said and all kinds of extra details about what happened when Moses entered into God's presence. Here in Exodus 33:12-16 what is Moses' concern?
- a. What is God's comfort for Moses? Why does God apparently change His mind from His previous decision in Exodus 33:3, 5? See Exodus 33:12-16.
- b. What was it about Moses' request that was pleasing to God (Exodus 33:12-16)?
- c. When we desire similar things to the ones Moses requested, what can we know as well? See Exodus 33:13; Psalm 10:17; 37:4; 66:18-19; Philippians 3:7-11; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:3, 5-7; 1 John 3:22.
21. God continues to assure Moses that He will go with them into the land, to the point that Moses boldly asks for something unprecedented to take place. What happens between God and Moses in Exodus 33:17-18?

22. How does God mitigate Moses' request and why is it necessary to do so? See Exodus 33:19-23.
23. What's the connection between God's glory and His goodness (Exodus 33:18-19)? See also Psalm 27:13; 31:19; 65:4; 145:7-9.

"Goodness is God's darling attribute and His glory. Moses asked for God's glory and was shown His goodness (Exodus 33:18)." ~Thomas Lye⁹

24. How do we see the Lord showing kindness to Moses in Exodus 33:17-23? How can the Lord's dealings with Moses encourage and strengthen you when you remember that the Lord is just as faithful in His interactions with you?

⁹ Thomas Lye, Richard Rushing, editor, *Voices from the Past, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 182.