



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MAY 2023

Scripture Story: Exodus 32–34.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 28.

God thinks twice



Photo by Tim Adams

flashlight

“The prosperity of God’s chosen people was dearer to [Moses] than personal honor, dearer than the privilege of becoming the father of a mighty nation. God was pleased with his faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity, and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 319).

keytext

“The LORD said to Moses, . . . ‘they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.’

“But Moses . . . said, ‘Why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?’ ”

(Exodus 32:9-11, NIV)

what do you think?

Indicate whether you agree (A) or disagree (D) with the following statements and explain why.

- A or D:** God never changes His mind.
- A or D:** Temptation begins with our tendency to be selfish and do our own thing.
- A or D:** God is right to punish people who are resolute in the choice to sin.
- A or D:** God's anger and justice seem to contradict His compassion and love.
- A or D:** The best way to avoid falling into temptation is to be firm in your belief.

The above statements raise key issues that emerge in this week's story. Which statement do you think should be discussed and studied the most? Why?

did you know?

- **The children of Israel are often** referred to as a "stiff-necked" people. In the original language the Hebrew word for "stiff-necked" means stubborn. This image comes from the example of a beast or work animal that simply will not submit to the rein or yoke. The stubborn animal adamantly resists bending its neck to pull the load. You can read samples of this description in Exodus 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:13.
 - There are several comical things that people have said recorded in Scripture. Where would Aaron's remark in Exodus 32:23, 24 rank?

INTO THE STORY

"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'

"Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

"When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced,

'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

" 'I have seen these people,' the LORD said to Moses, 'and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.'

"But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. 'LORD,' he said, 'why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. . . .' Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."

(Exodus 32:1-12, 14, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

As you read this passage, what words or phrases stand out as pivotal to the story?

Who are the main characters mentioned and how are their characters and personalities reflected in this event?

What is shocking about God's attitude and behavior in this story?

What is unique about Moses and his attitude and behavior in this story?

Why do you think it was so easy for the Israelites to doubt God and slip into sinful behavior?

What do you see as the message God has for you in this story?

punch lines

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation’ ” (**Exodus 34:6, 7, NIV**).

“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ ” (**Luke 23:34, NIV**).

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (**James 4:7, NIV**).

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (**Joshua 24:15, NIV**).

further insight

“Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts.”

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 26.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read James 4:7.

The *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson contains statements for you to agree or disagree with. Which statements did you find were easy to respond to, and which ones required a little more thought before you were ready to answer? Which statement seems to connect with something you are going through lately in your personal life? Reflect on how easy or difficult it might be for you to apply today's Bible reading in the circumstances you face.

Sunday

Read *Into the Story* and answer the study questions in *Out of the Story*. As you work through the passage you may notice several major themes that emerge—which one seems to be speaking to you today? How do you reconcile the anger of God with His compassion and mercy? This story conveys two sides of God's character. How difficult is it for you to connect the two—seeing them as one whole? What other stories in the Bible portray God's anger and judgment and at the same time reveal His grace and mercy?

Monday

Read Exodus 32:9-11.

Read these verses several times and, if available, try reading them in a few other translations as well. What do you think is meant by the word "stiff-necked"? In what way are you stubborn or hard to bend? God seems to be at the end of His patience with Israel. Which do you think was most offensive to God in this scenario?

- The fact that they would so easily lose focus in light of all that God had already done.

- The way that the Israelites gave credit to a golden calf for the things He had done for them.
- The way many of them stubbornly refused to repent when given a chance to receive mercy (read the rest of Exodus 32).

Tuesday

Read Joshua 24:15.

The *Flashlight* clip from *Patriarchs and Prophets* portrays the amazing leadership quality of Moses—genuine selflessness. Read the quote and think of someone you know who is a standard bearer of humility. What specific actions or qualities have you witnessed from their life that demonstrate a Moses-like attitude and behavior?

In the same way Moses interceded for the people, whom do you want to intercede for today? You might choose a friend or a family member, or someone you know in the community who is going in the wrong direction.

Wednesday

Among the *Punch Lines* there are a few passages that come from the story and some that relate to themes in the story. Read the verses (along with the *Key Text*) and identify the one verse that most speaks to your life today. Take some time to internalize these passages and ask God to open up an opportunity for you to engage in a conversation with another person about this story. It may be that you know someone who needs to make a decision about whether they will be on God's side or stubbornly stick to their own way. Pray earnestly for them, and ask God to guide you in encouraging them to choose to be on the Lord's side.

Thursday

Read Romans 12:2.

Chapter 28 in *Patriarchs and Prophets* opens up another perspective into the

idolatry that occurred at the base of Mount Sinai. As you read this chapter, look for the insights that color in the story for you. You will also read phrases that offer principles to live by that can be a source of encouragement and instruction. Ellen White states one principle that is powerful this way: "God would have His servants prove their loyalty by faithfully rebuking transgression, however painful the act may be" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 323, 324). When have you witnessed a young person stand up for what was right even though others might have misunderstood or ridiculed them?

Friday

Read Exodus 34:6, 7.

Rewrite this passage in your own words and try not to use any of the same words or phrases. Reflect on the fact that God is much bigger than our comfort zone, and yet still the God we can have close to us all the time.

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 28.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.