

## **Dr. John Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32**

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This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Exodus. This is session 14, Exodus 32.

Okay, for those of you with poor hearing, we're not meeting next Monday.

And on that last Monday night, we'll cover some of the issues that we didn't cover last week in regard to the tabernacle and the priesthood and so forth. So, if we didn't cover all those questions, which we did not, we'll try to pick up on some of them as we come along. As I said at the outset of this section, we have this interesting kind of sandwich.

We have chapters 25 to 31, the instructions for the tabernacle and the priesthood, and then we have chapters 35 to 40, the report on the building of the tabernacle. They use almost the same language, just a different verb tense.

You shall, and Moses did. In between then is this very significant section, chapters 32 to 34, the golden calf. And we want to look tonight at chapter 32.

This is significant enough and enough theological content that I thought we'd do just one chapter tonight because this is so significant in terms of the lessons being taught here. Verses 1 to 6, when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses, and it's really sort of the fellow who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what's become of him.

So why did the people want Aaron to make gods for them? All right, all right. And why, what's their concern? Exactly. The issue is fear.

They're afraid. This was the problem in the garden. The snake convinced Adam and Eve that God was not trustworthy, and they were afraid God was going to use them, and he was going to deprive them of some of the things they needed.

So, do they have reason to be afraid? How long has Moses been on the mountain? Forty days. How long can a person survive without water? Eight days if you're lucky. You can survive, some of you are old enough to remember the two or three Irish hunger strikers who starved themselves in the early 70s, I think it was, 55 days you can make it without food.

But eight days without water. He's been up there 40 days. There's no water on that mountain in that firestorm.

So, their fear is not just ungrounded. We don't know what happened to this Moses. And who is he according to verse one? This Moses who brought us out.

There's their failure, isn't it? Moses brought us out of Egypt, and Moses is obviously dead up there on that mountain, so we're in terrible trouble. What should they have thought? God brought them out, and whatever happens to Moses, God is still around. So, on the one hand, yes, if Moses was the one who brought them out, then their fear had some grounds.

But if God brought them out, then whatever happened to Moses, they don't need to be afraid. Okay, how is this attitude the opposite of trust? Okay, you have to make your own decisions because of the fear that is driving you. You have to forgive yourself.

Okay, okay. Fear, no foundation. Trust, there is a foundation.

What else does fear say? Yeah, yeah. You're not thinking clearly. You're driven by your fear.

Trust then says, I don't know how God is going to work this out, but I believe he is. And therefore, I don't have to rush into this or that or the other solution. Fear tends to make us grab whatever comes to hand that maybe will get us out of this mess.

But, yes, yes, yes, absolutely, yes, yes. And there's a sort of a chicken and egg thing. Fear makes us forget.

And because we forget, we're afraid. Yes, yes. Go back, go back.

All the way through, they're wanting to go back. They're afraid to look ahead into the unknown. They'd rather go back to the known, even if that means slavery.

Of the many gods, to focus on the one, one God. Yes, yes. And again, it has to be said, what's happening here is pretty shocking.

As I said to you two or three weeks ago, everything they have learned in Egypt is wrong. There are not many gods. There's one God.

God is not this world. He's outside of this world. God can't be manipulated.

And you go right on down the list. And so, again, we can't stand back and point too many fingers at them. They're in a very, as someone said, as Adam and Eve walked out of the garden, Eve said to Adam, I believe we're in a paradigm shift.

Yeah. The Hebrew people, we're in a paradigm shift, a big one. And so, we can understand a bit of their fear.

I think that's a very fair assumption. I think, as we can say, why God surely could have given these instructions. We can read them in five chapters in about 45 minutes.

You don't need 40 days for it, do you? But that's exactly it. I think that's a very fair assumption that God is doing this on purpose, that he's depriving them of some of what they think of as their necessary support, precisely to try to bring them to the place where they'll stop depending on the fallible and depend on the infallible because the tablets weren't made on the computer.

Presumably not. Or a little bit of them. Presumably, they were not.

Yes. What's the significance of 40 years? It is, it's, 40 years is a generation. So, it's a complete cycle, if you will.

And 40 days then is seen as a complete cycle of time, whatever cycle you're talking about. Yes, 3, 7, 10, 12, and 40 are the sort of the sacred numbers of the Bible. Okay, let's move on.

Now, at the very moment when the people are saying, make us gods who will lead us, who will go before us, what is God doing on the mountain? He's talking to Moses, and what is he giving Moses? The instructions. He's already given the Ten Commandments. He's going to put them on stone, but they've already been given.

And what is the tabernacle, what things does the tabernacle provide and represent? All right, fellowship, the presence of God, and the visible presence. Here is something tangible that represents God's presence with them. Make us a God that we can see.

And at this very moment, God is giving them what he knows they need. They need, all of us need, because we're in bodies, we need tangible representations of God. That's why we build cathedrals.

We also need his fellowship. We need the sense of his presence. We need to be engaged in worship, and we need to have some focus for our worship.

They needed what? Verse 1, up, make us gods who will what? Go before us. How did the tabernacle provide guidance? There was a priest there, yes, yes, but guidance on the journey, precisely. The pillar of cloud that was over the tabernacle.

And when the pillar moves, you pack up the tabernacle and move it to go along with it. And when the pillar stops, you unpack the tabernacle and set it up, and there you stay till the pillar moves. So, God knows what they need.

And the irony is, at this very moment, God is giving them what they need. What else did the tabernacle provide that we humans need? Sanctuary, yes, yes. How about the description of the tabernacle? It's beautiful, isn't it? We humans need beauty.

And again, the irony is, all Aaron could make was a little gold calf. God had so many more wonderful plans for their aesthetic fulfillment. These colors weren't just sort of thrown around.

This was something that was beautiful. Yes, you're exactly right, exactly right. That cloud thing that's kind of scary.

We don't know how that operates, but we know how an idol operates. So, it glows, whereas in the daytime... No, you didn't see it glowing, but you would see it as a pillar of cloud. So yes, there's a whole lot of, for want of a better word, denial going on here in the interest of control.

Because everything that should give them hope is very... Exactly, exactly. It doesn't look like what we know. As I've told you before, the imperial god of Egypt was the god Amun-Re, which is really a combination of two gods.

Ra is the old sun god. Amun was the hidden god of the 12th dynasty. That's the dynasty that was in control before Joseph arrived.

And they've combined the two, and Amun-Ra was typified by the bull. As I guess I told you earlier, we have virtually all of the Amun-Re bulls. They were mummified.

We don't have many of the pharaohs, but we got virtually all the bulls. So again, this isn't accidental. Aaron may say, later on, you know, I put the gold in, and out came this calf.

No, no. It's very specific here. He received the gold from their hand, fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a golden calf.

Now it's possible that it was a full-size bull, and the Bible is mocking it by saying, yeah, all it was a little old calf. Or it may have been just a model of a yearling calf, the bull calf, you know, sort of a teenage calf who is at the peak of his fecundity. So, we don't know for certain, but it's possible that this is a mockery.

If the bull was to give him hell and pain, why would they bring a baby? Well, I think, again, it's possible that calves, again, Hebrews, have a small vocabulary. So, you've got the mature animal and everything up to that from birth to, that's why I say it may well be a yearling. And, again, the yearling, you know, for the derby, we run two-year-olds.

The two-year-olds are really very young horses. So, again, this may be a young bull and stressing his youth and vitality. Yes.

Aaron went to seminary in Egypt. And so, he's doing what he's learned. I'm very confident that, in fact, a long time ago I wrote an article on this.

I'm very confident that Aaron didn't see the problem because you can find it, and, again, I wrote my doctorate dissertation in this area; you can find it in Egyptian hymns and prayer statements like, Ammon is the one God without another. There is none like Ammon. Ammon is hidden from the gods.

They do not know his name, and he's the bull at the same time. The pagan worldview can imagine oneness, as long as it's never separated from manyness.

So, I'm confident that Aaron did not see the problem. Moses is up there worshipping the invisible Yahweh. I'm down here making a representation of the visible Yahweh.

If we're saying it was just, is he doing that? No, I think if it was a calf, it was a teenage bull. That's what we've got. He's a youthful bull at the very peak of his reproductive power.

But, let me pursue this a bit because this is right at the point. Paganism can imagine; of course, the gods are invisible. Of course you can't see them.

But that thing there and the invisible God are the same. There's no boundary between this visible thing that I've made and the invisible thing that it represents. What the Bible is saying is, oh yes, there is.

God is not this world. Therefore, you cannot represent him in the shape of anything in this world. And this is the lure.

This is the lure of paganism. It's the lure of paganism around us today. Well, of course there are invisible spirits out there.

But, those invisible spirits are part of the tree. Yes, yes, the river is not all there is to river deity. The river deity is a spirit.

But, this river is a part of the river spirit. They call it new age. It's old age.

It's ages old. It's as old as the dawn of the human race. And, the thing that is, again, so stunning here is God is saying, no, I am a spirit, and nothing created is identical with me.

Question? Yeah. Precisely. Precisely.

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

There ain't no such thing. Excuse the bad grammar. Yes, yes, we are so easily sucked into this whole thing.

And, again, I happened in my devotions to be reading Leviticus 18 this morning. And that's the one about all the sexual sins. And it just hit me again.

We've talked about this in the past. But, let me remind you of it. The pagan worldview is a worldview that insists there are no boundaries.

This is the cosmos. And there is nothing beyond the cosmos. That's what Carl Sagan believed.

He knows better now. He's dead. And, in the cosmos, all tangled up together.

And, the picture, unfortunately, has them sort of in separate spheres. But, the dotted lines are to say they're all tangled up together. There's the human sphere.

There's the sphere of nature. And there's the sphere of the deity. And all those are interconnected.

What I do, if I say the words right, the gods have to do. And, if the gods do it, then the world of nature will do it. And I will get what I want.

But, there's one thing that cannot happen. There cannot be boundaries. There cannot be a boundary between me and nature.

There cannot be a boundary between me and the gods. There cannot be a boundary between the gods and nature. If it is, then my rituals won't work.

There are no boundaries. Now, Leviticus 18 says, Don't do what the Canaanites do. And then, incest, bestiality, adultery, homosexual behavior.

Don't do what they do. Why did they practice these things? They practiced them for religious reasons. They practiced them in their religion.

But, they practiced them outside of their religion for religious reasons. That is, there are no boundaries. There's no boundary between me and my daughter.

There's no boundary between me and my mother. There's no boundary between my wife and your wife. There's no boundary between me and the animal.

There's no boundary between me and another male. There are no boundaries. Now, you listen to what's going on in our society.

And, what you're hearing is that. Nobody's going to tell me how to use my sexuality. There are no boundaries.

This book, this nasty, disgusting old book. This says, Oswald, there is a boundary. I built it into the world.

You can't have sex with your daughter. There's a boundary between you as a parent and her as a child. Because the biblical worldview says there is someone beyond the cosmos.

And, it is impossible for me to go up into heaven and bring him down. Remember that biblical text? And, just as there is a hard and fast boundary between me and God. There's a hard and fast boundary between me and nature.

We are not apes with trousers on. We are a different order of being. Again, tell that to the anthropologist or the biologist.

And, you'll get yourself in a knock-down, drag-out fight. Now, the good news is. The good news is.

The boundary is one-way permeable. Because God, bless his name, can break in upon us. Anywhere and anyhow, he chooses.

So, there really is a paradigm shift going on here. And, Aaron, I'm confident. Aaron really was confused when Moses said, what did they do to you? I mean, did they pull your fingernails out? Did they burn you with cigarette butts? I mean, what did they do to you? And, Aaron says, hey, it's not my fault.

I'm just doing what I... I mean, what's the problem, Moses? And, Moses says, you still don't get it, do you? God is holy. We didn't talk about it last week. But, holy, having only occurred three times in the book of Exodus, before chapter 25, occurs about 40 times between chapter 25 and chapter 40.

Think God might be trying to make a point? God is absolutely other than anything you can think of, Aaron. He's other in his essence, but he's also other in his character. The gods are made in our image.

So, they're just like us, only worse. We lie, so they lie. We're corrupt, so they're corrupt.

Now, it has to be said, sometimes we're good, and sometimes they're, again, excuse the bad grammar, gooder. They're just everything we are, written large. And, this book says, guess what? The holy one is not like us.

He's not made in our image. So, three verses, okay. It seems like the election is going to be very interesting.

I'm not going there, and I'm not going there. How involved were the people in this process? They had one thing to do: break the earrings off your wives' and children's ears, period. Period.

That's all they contributed. That's all they did. Who did the work? Aaron, the religious professional. I'll say something more about that before the evening is over, I hope.

When we refuse to wait on God, what happens? We get in a mess, yes. Number one, the creation is exalted, the bull. Resources are misused.

Only the skilled are valued. And God is driven away when we won't wait. In two weeks, we'll see how, in fact, waiting on God produces the very opposite.

He'd seen them do it in Egypt. He may have participated in it in Egypt. And, again, I can't prove this from the scripture, but I'm pretty satisfied that Hebrew religion was very thoroughly paganized by the time Moses got there.

They had spent 400 years in the most pagan culture of its day. So, I don't think there's any way that they could have done something else. And, you notice what the text says.

This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. The people are saying it. Now, there's a Hebrew thing going on here that is quite interesting, at least to a Hebrew professor.

The word that is typically translated God actually is a plural. That "im" ending is plural. Cherubim, seraphim. So, don't talk about cherubims, please. You can talk about cherubs, or you can talk about seraphs, but cherubim is plural. Seraphim is plural.

Elohim is plural. So, depending on the context, this same word can be translated as God or gods. So, my translation here says, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Well, maybe that is what they intended, but I don't know why they called a single calf your gods. I think they said, this is your God. This is Yahweh.



And I think that's what they had learned. I think that's what they had practiced in Egypt for years. The God of the fathers, here's our idol.

And so, again, they're reverting to the past. God has specifically said that's wrong. You can't do that anymore.

When push comes to shove, I don't care whether I swore in blood I would never do it again. I'm scared. I'm scared.

I need a little help here. All the people. Yeah.

He received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf, and they said. So, he is Aaron; they are the people. So, Aaron makes this thing, and the people say, Woo! Behold your God, Israel, who led you forth from the land of Egypt.

It doesn't say Aaron said it. And it's fascinating to me that, in verse 5, when Aaron saw this, he made an altar. Sounds a little bit like King Saul.

Oh, the people wanted to do this, Samuel. So, I said, okay. Tomorrow will be a feast day.

So, they rose up early the next day; they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. As I say in the background note, they were not playing volleyball. Play, in Hebrew, is one of those rare words that fits exactly the English connotations.

It can mean to torment. The cat played with the mouse. And the cat had a whole lot more fun than the mouse did.

It can mean recreation, or it can mean foreplay. And it's the latter here. Foreplay.

The Hebrew word has those same three connotations, just like the English word play does. That's very rare. Usually, it's an approximation.

But, in this case, no. Torment. Torment.

To play with somebody. To torment them. Yes, Yeah, and again, I think we've just got syncretism going full blast here.

Is it Ammon-Ra? Yes. Is it Yahweh? Yes. Is it the gods? Yes.

Is it God? Yes. And again, no boundaries. We who have been raised on the Bible think in categories.

This is not that. Paganism says, no, you can't do that. Everything is equal of everything else.

There are no boundaries. This has to do with how we think today. No, no, no.

You can't say this is so and that's not so. Everything is so some of the time. And for those of us who are over the age of 60, it's very difficult for us to even imagine that people think that way, but they do.

All of our teenagers think that way. Nothing is absolute. Nothing.

Nothing is absolutely so. And nothing is absolutely not so. Exactly.

Exactly. And as I've said before, except when you jump off a tall building. It's pretty absolute that you'll go down.

Yeah, the very way we form the thoughts of our minds is only corrupt all the time. That's about as absolute a statement as you can find. And there it is.

There it is. The very way we think has to be transformed. And this is what Paul is talking about in Romans 12.1. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, thinking a different way.

And that's the challenge. Again, it's a mark of my approaching senility. But I'll say it anyway.

I truly believe that if we are, if human society is here in 200 years, they will mark the corruption of the church to the coming of television. The world got in amongst us, and we invited it in. And watch that stuff on an average, an average of seven hours a day, which is what is true for America.

Which means a bunch of people are watching it 17 hours a day. Because I don't watch it for one hour a day. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, it's here. And the challenge that you who are younger have is how in the world can you raise your children with a Christian, biblical worldview when they're bombarded with the other one? And go late. Yes, okay.

Yes. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and the sexual behavior is religious behavior. The gods are sexual, and the gods act sexually.

And so, when we, in the context of religion, act sexually, we are participating with the gods. So, this is not just having fun. It's having fun with religious significance.

Make love, not war. Okay, so, verses 7 to 14. Remember, now, the covenant is over.

The covenant closes with, if you do these things, you will be blessed. If you keep the covenant, you will be blessed. If you break the covenant, you will be cursed.

The covenant is now broken. If God, without one more moment's notice, had fried all of them to a cinder, it would have been nothing other than just. We've got to get that through our heads.

We have this picture of, well, gee, they did just one little thing, and God goes off like a rocket. No, they didn't do one little thing. They broke one and two, and in so doing, they've broken the whole thing.

It's over. So, the fascinating thing is that God discusses this with Moses. The Lord said to Moses, Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

They have turned aside quickly out of the way I commanded them. They've made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped and sacrificed it, and said, these are your gods, or this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. He doesn't need to tell Moses that.

He doesn't need to talk with him about it. The Lord said to Moses, I've seen this, people. Behold, it's a stiff-necked people.

Again, I've talked about this before. This is the picture of the calf. You put the halter on it.

You're going to leave it someplace really nice, but the calf doesn't know that, and the calf says no and digs in all four hooves and makes its neck like a rod. That's the Hebrew people. Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and that I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation out of you.

Now, there are two things in this dialogue that interest me. Notice the first one. Verse 7. Whose people? Whom what? You brought up.

God is saying the same thing the people said. This Moses fellow, he's the one who brought us up. We don't know what's happened to him.

God says your people that you brought up, they're a mess. Hang on. Now look at verse 10.

Is God just going to be done with a chosen people? Well, in order that what? Yes, and? I can make a great nation out of you, Moses. How does that sound? Every preacher has been here. After all I've done for these people, after all the sermons I've preached to them, after all the times I've stayed up all night with them, praying with them, counseling them, helping them, they treat me like this.

I think Yahweh is testing Moses. Moses, would you like to feel that way? To feel like they have injured you after all you've done for them? And would you like it to go down in the books of history, not the children of Israel, but the children of Moses? That has a nice ring to it, don't you think, Moses? So, Moses, if you'll just get out of my way, I'll go down and give them what they've got coming to them. Get out of his way? You mean, Yahweh, if I don't get out of your way, you won't do what you should? God is inviting Moses to intercede.

Moses is the one being tested here. Moses could say, oh, you're right, God, after all I've done for them, go get them. He doesn't say that.

He implored Yahweh, his God, and said, oh, Yahweh, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? They're not my people, God. It's one of the great lessons every preacher has to learn. They're not my people.

They're Yahweh's people. They may be rotten to the core, but they're Yahweh's people, not mine. Why should the Egyptians say, with evil intent, did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains, to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger.

Relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants. The people may have forgotten, but Moses hasn't forgotten.

He hasn't forgotten what God has done for them in grace to deliver them from Egypt. He hasn't forgotten what God has done for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in grace. You said to them, I'll multiply your offspring as stars of the heaven and all this land that I've promised, I'll give to your offspring.

They'll inherit it forever. If nobody else has learned the lesson of the exodus, Moses has. He's learned that God is not just, just.

You say, Oswald, you're repeating yourself. That's correct. Yahweh is more than just.

He is gracious. And Moses says, God, you've been saying over and over again, they're going to know that you are Yahweh. God, if you do what these people deserve, people are going to be misled.

They're not going to know who you really are. And God says you're right, Moses. You better go down and talk to them.

This is not the picture of this raging monster God. Let me at him. Let me at him.

I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill him. And Moses said, be careful, God.

No, no, no. You know, watch out. No, no, no, no.

And finally, the gods say, oh, all right. I guess I won't. What do you think, Moses? Are they your people? And are they in a mess? Would you like me to make a new people for you? I will if you'll just get out of my way.

No, God, I won't get out of your way because that would dishonor you. The world would end up misunderstanding who you really are.

I'm not going to do that, God. God says, you're right. Go down and talk to them.

Well, Moses goes down. Yes? Yeah? I have a little idea of how to change God's mind. And this is the trouble I have when I've been a scholar, because my Bible says, so the Lord relented from the harm which he would do to his people.

So, I go down to my help to define relented better was sorry. And it sounds like there it says, God was sorry that he got mad. But then it refers to Genesis 6, 6, where it says, God was sorry that he made these people.

He destroyed everybody then, except Noah and his family. So, he's not above them. What's the difference? OK, it is a Hebrew problem.

The word means everything from to repent, to have pity on. In between, it means to relent, to be sorry, and to change your mind. A classic example of this is Jonah.

God says, yet 40 days, and I'm going to burn Nineveh down. And Jonah said, goody, I'm going the other way. I'm not going to tell him that God's going to burn him down in 40 days.

God says, yes, you are. And after a little experience in the fish, Jonah said, yeah, I think I will. And he goes.

Now, he does not. I read a lot of commentaries and Sunday school lessons and sermons that say Jonah called on them to repent. He did not.

There's not a word of repentance. There's not a word of possible grace in Jonah's message. Jonah says, you're going to get burned down in 40 days, and I'm glad.

And they repented anyhow. And God changed his mind. God was going to burn that city down, but the people genuinely repented, and God changed his mind.

There's nothing there about repenting from moral evil, nothing morally evil about burning Assyria down. In fact, it would have been morally righteous to burn them down, but they have repented. And God says I'll be glad to change my mind.

It's the same thing here. God says, hey, Moses, these people, they got it coming to them. I'm going to do it if you'll get out of my way.

He says, no, I won't, God. God says, okay, that's good enough for me. Your intercession for them on the sake of my name is enough to make me change my mind and not do the just thing.

So, there's the problem. The word has that huge range of meanings, and you've got to sort of choose which one you're dealing with, given the particular situation. I think with Genesis, sorry is right.

He was sorry he made this bunch. I don't think here it would be right to say he was sorry he said he was going to bring the broken covenant on. No, but he will change his mind about bringing that broken covenant on them on the basis of Moses' intercession.

Does that help? Yeah, it helps a lot. Okay. One other thing I thought of too, I hate to be so negative, but if God didn't allow Jonah to go the other direction, and we see that played out there, but Moses didn't make that decision to go, no, I'm not going to let you be the leader of the people.

Yeah, I think there are a lot of if-onlys. If Moses had failed the test here, I think we would never have heard any more about Moses. I think God would have somehow kept his promise to his people, but Moses would have been off the stage, I think.

So, this, as I say, I think this is primarily a test of Moses, and Moses passes it with flying colors. So, God says, let me just quickly rush through the rest of this chapter. God says, well, go down and talk to him.

So, Moses goes and talks to him. When he sees what's actually going on, God sounds like a lamb compared to Moses. Moses goes off like a rocket.

As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made and burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the people drink it. There's the guy who's mad.

Bam! Go to the tablets. The first man to break the Ten Commandments. Grabs a sledgehammer.

After having thrown the thing into the fire, get it softened up, beats it to dust. Puts the dust on the water and makes the people drink it. Not very long.

I think this guy looked like the Tasmanian devil in Bugs Bunny. Yeah, right. A lot of energy, or at least an adrenaline rush.

Why didn't he make the people drink it? Nobody's ever going to use that gold to make an idol again. How seriously do you have to treat sin in your life? You dare not coddle it. You dare not make a place for it.

You dare not explain it away. It is sin. And then you have surely the funniest line in all of Scripture.

What did they do to you? I told them to let anyone who has gold take it off. So, they gave it to me and I threw it in the fire. Out came this calf.

It's funny, but it's also sad. The denial of responsibility. It's not my fault.

I couldn't help it. Deal with it radically or explain it away. Those are our choices.

There's not really any middle ground when it comes to sin. And in comparison to what Moses has just done. It's so fascinating to see Aaron trying to explain it away.

Trying to deny his own responsibility. Aaron's probably a little scared. You're right.

He's still got the sledgehammer in his hand. What did they do to you? Nothing, nothing, nothing. Well, it's almost like passing the buck.

But this time they were passing the bull. Did you all hear that? They weren't passing the buck, they were passing the bull. Okay, moving right along.

Yep. Yep. Yep.

Yes, and I don't have an answer for that. My tentative answer is, in this case, and I can't answer for his eternal destiny by any means. But humanly speaking, God has chosen to use him.

And therefore, he remains in the position, rather like Saul. You know, David says, I'm not going to touch the Lord's anointed.

The anointing of God is on this man. And therefore, in one sense, it seems as though that lasts a lifetime even if the person abuses it.

Now, as I say, I can't speak for the eternal destiny of either Saul or Aaron. But it's very interesting to me, so far as I can tell. I have not done an exhaustive study, but I've done a fairly thorough one.

I cannot find one place in the Bible where a purely complimentary thing is ever said about Aaron. I think the reason is precisely to draw the starkest difference between the high priest and this fallible human high priest. We have a high priest who is without sin.

We have a high priest who takes himself as the sacrifice to the holy place. That's my guess, that there's an intentional difference being driven between them. That's what a human high priest looks like.

And over and over again, this is true, that the priesthood are the ones who lead Israel into idolatry. And again, there's a message for preachers there. Okay, one more word and I'll let you go.

Nope, two more words, two more paragraphs, two more words. The thing with the Levites, it looks to me like from verse 29, Moses said, today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother. And there were, how many, 3,000 men who fell.

I think that is saying that the primary leaders of this apostasy were Levites. And that Moses recognizes this and says, okay, any of you Levites who are not in that bunch, come over here. Now, you guys deal with the cancer in your tribe.

I may be reading too much into that, but I think that's what's going on here. As I said, the Levites were the ones historically who led the people into idolatry. So again, this is talking about the extreme seriousness with which we have to treat sin.

You don't mess with it. Then, finally, Moses says, okay, you have sinned a great sin; this is verse 30. Now I will go up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.



That worries me a little bit. Wait a minute, Moses, you interceded for these people, and they have not all been destroyed. Now you're going to make atonement for them? You're going to cover their sin? There are a lot of arguments about the word atonement.

The basic meaning of the word is to cover. That's K-P-R. Those three consonants in Hebrew mean to cover.

And there's a wordplay going on with the lid of the ark. It is called the kipporot, which might mean simply the cover. But Luther, in his translation, his German translation, the first common language translation of the Hebrew in 1500 years, Luther said, wait a minute, this verb means yes, to cover, but it also means to cover over in the sense of hiding sin.

So, he said, this is the thing that covers over. And so, he chose the German words that the English translation is the mercy seat—the atonement cover.

So, Moses says, maybe I can make a covering for your sin. Oh, really? So, Moses returned to the Lord and said, alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made gods of gold for themselves, as if God didn't already know that.

It's interesting in our praying how often we give God information he doesn't need. Now I want to pray for Sister Joan. She's in room 367 of St. Joe Hospital in Lexington.

And God says I was aware of that. Your people have sinned a great sin. They've made themselves gods of gold.

Now, if you will, forgive their sin. But if not, blot me out of the book you have written. Now, this is a place where Dr. Kinlaw and I disagree.

You can figure out which one is probably right. Anyway, he talks about Moses as the interceder here. I don't read it that way.

I read Moses trying to twist God's arm. Now, God, if you're going to blot them out, you're going to have to blot me out, too. And God says, Moses, get off it.

Whoever has sinned against me, I'll blot out of the book. Now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you. Behold, my angel will go before you.

We're going to hear more about that in the next chapter. I think this is saying no human, however great he may be, however good he may be, can make atonement for anybody else. If our sin is going to be atoned for, it's going to take more than a Moses.

And thank God he has come. Here, we have one greater than Moses and greater than Aaron, and he is Jesus Christ. I was wondering if you saw it's kind of like Luke 19, 40.

It's the same as in agony because he saw his people. And I wonder if there's a difference. And Paul too said, didn't Paul say something like that? Oh, yes.

Yeah, Paul says in Romans that if it would save my brothers, I would be willing to be blotted out. But notice that's not what Moses is saying. He's not saying blot me out so they can be saved.

What he's saying is if you're going to blot them out, you're going to have to blot me out too. That's very different. He's not saying take my life in place of theirs.

He's saying if you will, forgive their sins. But if not, please blot me out of the book you've written. If you're not going to forgive their sin and blot them out, therefore, then you're going to have to blot me out too.

And God says I'm going to blot out people who have sinned, Moses, not you. So, I'm pretty convinced that this is not about Moses offering himself in place of his people, but saying, God, if you're going to take the people, you're going to have to take me with them. Trying to twist God's arm.

And God says I'm not in for arm twisting. Yes, he does, in the sense he doesn't destroy them all. Now, you notice the very last verse: the plague came on the people because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

Now, I may be trying to save God's reputation here. I suspect the plague is herpes or syphilis, or gonorrhea. They didn't drop dead on the spot.

They may have. But I just think it's very interesting that it's connected with the calf. And I have to say, no, I do not believe that God created AIDS to punish homosexuals.

I do not believe that. Neither do I believe that he created herpes to punish promiscuous people. I do, however, believe that he made the world so that when we're living the way we were designed, we will not experience certain diseases.

There's a difference between those two. An evil God who's trying to punish people and a God who has made the world so that if you don't live in the way you were designed to, you're going to get hurt. In the same way, my old example, did God design gravity to punish people who jumped off tall buildings? No.

But if you do jump off tall buildings, bad things are going to happen to you. So, if you live in ways that are other than his design, you're going to get hurt. Yes, yes, yes, in a real sense.

Ah, well, I wish I knew the answer to that. But it's pretty clear right throughout the Bible that the Hebrew people and the Christians following felt that God is keeping a record of those people who are obeying his covenant and those who are not obeying the covenant. I think it's connected to the fact that the covenant was supposed to be written.

So, then here's a book of those people who are keeping the covenant and are thus eligible for blessing, and those people who are not keeping the covenant and are thus headed for curse. Now, ultimately then, it becomes the Lamb's Book of Life, and so on and so forth. I don't think that's necessarily in the thinking here.

But I do believe it's the concept that yes, in heaven God has a book. That's right. That's right.

Which is, in a real sense, when the Hebrew people accepted the covenant, their names are written in the book. These are the people who are eligible for blessing. Oops.

Oops. So, Moses is saying, are you going to blot their names all out? If you do, you've got to take mine off too. And God says, hey, the people who sin will have their names blotted out.

But then he goes ahead and forgives them. The reference to the Book of the Living is Psalm 69. That's what's probably talking about it, and they call it that, the book of the living.

And the very last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, speaks about those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. And God caused their names to be written in a book of remembrance. People ask me, what's your favorite Bible verse? And I say, usually, it's the last one I read, but that one comes close.

I love that idea that, wow, we're in a world of despair and cynicism where people are saying, hey, look. Look. It pays to be a crook.

The mafia die in their beds. Good people look at all the terrible things that have happened to them. Then, those who feared the Lord spoke to one another.

When I'm sinking in despair, I need you to put your arm around my shoulder and say, hey, God's still on the throne. Come on, let's go together. And God says, Gabriel, do you hear that? You hear that? Write his name down in the book.

A book of remembrance for those who fear the Lord. That's a lovely thought to me. That is in Malachi chapter 3--3:16. OK.

There are a lot of good 316 verses in the Bible, aren't there? 1 John 3:16 is a good one, too. That's the book of Malachi. And as you probably know, I've written a book on it, and so I like the book of Malachi a lot.

But it started in verse 13. Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. And you say, how have we spoken against you? You've said it's vain to serve God.

What's the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? Now, we call the arrogant blessed. Evil-doers not only prosper, they put God to the test and escape. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

The Lord paid attention to them and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and who thought on his name. OK.

Well, I said a few minutes. It's been 25 few minutes. Thank you for your patience.

Yes? Do you have sheets for next week? Yes, they're right over there. OK. Not for next week, though, for two weeks.

Yep. If you see any of the missing faithful, be sure to let them know.

This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Exodus. This is session 14, Exodus 32.