

THE STRANGE OLD TESTAMENT GOD

DOES GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?

# THE GOLDEN CALF INCIDENT



- Ex 24:1-11: The Israelites promise to do the words of God, and God makes a covenant with them.
- Ex 24:12 - 25:9: Moses is called up on the mountain to God to receive the law. God gives Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle for God so he can live among them.
- Ex 32:1-10: The people get impatient and think Moses will never come back. So they make the golden calf and say: *"This is your god, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."* God tells Moses to hurry down because the people *"have become corrupt"*. They have already broken the covenant. God says to Moses: *"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."*

# EXODUS 32:11-14

Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

(New American Standard Version)

# 1. THE BIBLE SAYS ELSEWHERE THAT GOD DOES NOT CHANGE HIS MIND

*God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, **that he should change his mind**. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Num. 23:19)*

In this context: God will not change his mind about Israel. Balaam was hired by the Moabite king Balak to curse Israel, but the word of God to Balaam and Balak is that God is not going to change his mind and go from blessing Israel to now cursing them.

# 1. THE BIBLE SAYS ELSEWHERE THAT GOD DOES NOT CHANGE HIS MIND



- *He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie **or change his mind**; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.* (1 Sam. 15:29)
- Here Saul is trying to make God change his mind and not reject him as king after all, but God has made up his mind. And he does not change his mind like a human being might have done.
- The same Hebrew word is also used in v. 11 and 35 about God **regretting** that he made Saul king —> the word can describe:
  - a. an emotional reaction of grief, sorrow and pity (e.g. Judg 2:18)
  - b. *and* it can mean to change one's mind.
- **God didn't suddenly realize that he had made a mistake, but he was sad about the situation with Saul.**

## 2. WHAT ABOUT THE PROMISE TO JUDAH?

- *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. (Gen. 49:10)*
- God could have started over with Moses and still fulfilled the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) that a great people would come from him, since Moses also was a descendent of Abraham.
- **But the Messianic promise to Judah could not be fulfilled, since Moses was not a descendent of Judah but of Levi.**
- Num 23:19 and 1 Sam 15:29 both say that **God does not lie either**. So he would fulfil this promise to Judah that a king would come from his tribe.
- *So how "serious" was God when threatening to destroy the people in Ex 32?*

He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, **then I will relent** and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then **I will reconsider** the good I had intended to do for it. (Jer. 18:6-10)

This depends on the people's response to the threat of judgment. The task of the prophets was not to just tell the people about the judgment before it happened, as to impress them that God knew the future. God wanted to **warn them** about the judgment **to make them change their ways**, exactly to **avoid** the judgment.

**God changed *his* ways if people changed *their* ways.**

### 3. GOD OFTEN "CHANGES HIS PLANS"





R. BARRETT

### 3. GOD OFTEN "CHANGES HIS PLANS"

- *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, **God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them**, and he did not do it.* (Jon. 3:10 ESV)
  - *And **the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*** (Exod. 32:14 ESV)
- God "changes his mind", and Jonah gets angry and says that was exactly what he knew was going to happen: *"But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, **a God who relents from sending calamity.**"* (Jon. 4:1-2)
- **Jonah confirms that God "changes his mind" because he is good - not because he is influenced by others.**

## 4. THE ROLE OF MOSES AND ATONEMENT IN PREVENTING THE JUDGMENT

- Moses “intercedes” for the people and is able to prevent the complete destruction which would have been the punishment for breaking the covenant and sinning. Still there is a partial judgment happening in v. 28, and the talking Moses did in v. 11-13 was not enough in itself. **Atonement for sin against the holy God was still necessary.**
- *The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; **perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.**”* (Exod. 32:30)
- Moses offers his own life as atonement for the people, but God rejects this (v. 32-34). It is not a bad idea (—> Jesus), but Moses was not sinless and not a good enough sacrifice. And it was not the time for that yet. The point: **Atonement is always needed**, which seems to happen in v. 35:
  - *And **the LORD struck the people with a plague** because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.* (Exod. 32:35)
- A similar story is told in Num 16:41-50. Atonement is preventing the punishment here as well.



# CONCLUSION

- Ex 32 describes the wrath of a holy God towards sin, and atonement is needed to avoid this. God does not change his mind because he was convinced by Moses, but the consequences are changed because **Moses intercedes for the people, repents on their behalf and some sort of atonement is done.**
- God is still holy, sin is still sin, and atonement is still needed to avoid the judgment. God is still the same. So then why does he not behave like this anymore?
- **Because Jesus has made atonement for us once and for all with an eternal sacrifice.** Without Jesus the same thing would have happened again. But *Jesus always lives to intercede for us.* (Heb. 7:25) **What Moses does in Ex 32, Jesus does all the time.**
- *But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father— Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* (1 John 2:1-2)

What does Ex 32 mean for us today?

**The gospel is actually that it does not apply to us today! God has not changed, but the change is that Jesus has come. God's judgment on sin comes either at the end of history or on the cross.**

