

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In our last three lessons, we have seen how God spoke with the Israelites from Mount Sinai in the midst of the fire, thunder and lightning, and gave them His ten **holy** commandments. We also saw how God commanded the people of Israel to make an **altar** at the base of Sinai and offer some spotless animals as sacrifices.

Why did God order those animal sacrifices? God ordered them because He is righteous, and His holy law declares: *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* Whoever breaks God's law has sinned...and the payment of sin is death! Since the Israelites could not keep all of God's commandments, they had to present to God sacrifices without blemish, so that the innocent animal might die as a **substitute** for the guilty person. The animal forfeited its life so the sinner would not have to. In this way God proved that He is righteous and that He cannot excuse sin based on man's efforts. God can only forgive sin based on the blood of a perfect sacrifice.

Our lesson today is called "**Broken Commandments**." At this point in the story of the prophet Moses and the tribes of Israel, they are still camping in front of Mount Sinai in the desert. Let us now return to the Torah to see what happened after God gave them the Ten Commandments. We are reading in chapter twenty-four in the book of Exodus.

The Scripture says:

The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their

*instruction." Then **Moses set out with Joshua his assistant, and Moses went up on the mountain of God.** He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them." When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain **forty days and forty nights.***

Let us pause here. In the next study, Lord willing, we will learn what God told Moses on Mount Sinai during that forty day period. Today, however, we are going to see what happened to the Israelites who were in the camp at the base of the mountain waiting for Moses to return. We all know that waiting for God patiently is not easy for the children of Adam. It is much easier for us to give up; to forget God's Word and go our own way. Thus, what we are going to read now about the Israelites is important for us-very important. God wants **to warn us** through this shocking story.

In chapter thirty-two, we read:

*When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round 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, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."*

Do you see what the Israelites were doing? Not many days after they had said, *"Everything that the Lord has said we will do!"* we see them breaking the first and second commandments which God had just given them on Mount Sinai! God had said to them: One: *"You shall have no other gods before me!"* Two: *"You shall not make for yourself an idol!"* But what did the Israelites do? They turned their backs on God and made for themselves an idol in the shape of a calf like the idols they had seen in Egypt.

Why did the Israelites so quickly turn their backs on God and His Word? Because what they wanted was **a god which they could see and touch**. They were like people today who choose to ignore the Word of God and follow men and their traditions. Following a **man** whom the eye can see is easier than following **God** whom no one can see. That is why most of the children of Adam substitute **the ideas of men**, which have no solid basis, for **the true Word of God**.

Let us see now what happened after the Israelites made for themselves the golden calf.

The Scripture says:

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. Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Did you hear what Aaron did? The Scriptures tell us that *"he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord!'"* Was that the truth? Could the Israelites worship the Lord in that way? Definitely not! We know that **God did not have any part of the worship festival that they were organizing**. Now they had not only broken the first and second commandments, but also the third commandment which says: *"You shall not use the name of the Lord your God in vain."* "God the Lord! God, God, God!" was in their mouths, but their hearts were far from Him. Their worship

was in vain. Their words about God were worthless. Their prayers were only a lot of meaningless bowing down that could only make God angry!

Now, let's finish the story:

*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, O 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. "O 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. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants [the land of Canaan] I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua [who accompanied Moses] heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There

is the sound of war in the camp." Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear."

*When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, **breaking them to pieces** at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, '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.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day **about three thousand of the people died**. And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.*

After this, the Lord told Moses to chisel out **two stone tablets** to replace the ones which he had broken. On these the Lord rewrote **the commandments** which the children of Israel had already broken. What a great sin the Israelites committed! They had **broken** God's holy law. The evil heart of man showed itself again. In spite of all the Lord had done for the people of Israel, we see how quickly they left the way of righteousness which God had established. They chose to follow another way, to create

for themselves **their own religion**. They chose the path of the works of their hands. They turned their back on the way that God had established and rejoiced in a religion they chose for themselves. The Name of God was on their lips, but their hearts were far from Him! That is why they went as far as to have a calf forged, taking pleasure in the works of their hands, and turning their backs on the living and true God.

What does God want to teach us through this shocking story? God wants us to think about where we stand in our relationship with Him. Perhaps there are those who are thinking: "I am not like the Israelites. I have never turned my back on God and worshiped an idol." You who think this way, are you positively sure that you have never worshiped an idol? Perhaps you have not had an idol forged for yourself. However, an idol is not limited to sculptured images to be worshiped. An idol is anything which comes between us and God. An **idol** can be money, clothes, sex, soccer, television, self, another person like yourself, or the traditions of your ancestors. Some cling to idols of fetishes and amulets. For others, their religious obligations are their idols; they put more importance on praying and fasting than on listening to the Word of God! **Anything that replaces God and His truth is an idol.**

Who is your God? Whom do you really worship, the Lord God, or an idol? Is the name of God merely on your lips or is His Name inside your heart? There is something that distinguishes those who truly worship God from those who worship idols. It is **the Word of God**. What is your attitude toward the true Word of God? Do you know God's Word? Do you believe it? Do you love it with all your heart? Or are you like the Israelites of whom God said, *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."*

How about you? Whom do you really worship, do you worship the Lord God who gave His righteous law to Moses? Do you believe His Word? Or are you placing your hope in

the way of your own religious works as the Israelites did? Whatever the case may be, the Scripture says:

*"These things happened to [the Israelites] as examples and were written down as warnings for us...Therefore, my dear friends, **flee from idolatry**. I speak to sensible people." "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile...those who practice magic arts, [and all] **idolaters**...their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur." "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God which he has given about [the Redeemer, who] has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true....Dear children, **keep yourselves from idols!**"*

Thank you for listening....

Next time, God willing, we will look at the unusual plan God designed so that He might dwell among the sinful Israelites without compromising His righteousness.

God bless you as you remember this important warning from His Word:

"Keep yourselves from idols!"