



## Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text  
Exodus 32:1-35

Topic  
The Israelites get restless waiting for Moses to descend Mount Sinai and imagine something bad has happened to him

Title  
*“Anybody here seen my old friend Moses?  
Can you tell me where he’s gone?  
He freed a lot of people, but it seems the good fast long...”*

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It’s the universal complaint of all haters of Disneyland: They don’t like the long waits.

How long are the waits? Believe it or not, Disneyland has unashamedly posted the ten longest wait times of the last decade:

#10 The Matterhorn Bobsleds - 150 minutes June 19, 2017.  
Don’t be surprised; it’s an iconic ride - dating to 1959, just four years after Disneyland opened. I have, in my office, a piece of the Matterhorn - from its most recent renovation.

#9 Stars Tours - 150 minutes December 11, 2015.

#8 Indiana Jones Adventure - 175 minutes December 29, 2016.

Numbers 7 & 6 both occurred on May 20th of 2017. It was the hottest day in May in Anaheim. It was only 95°, but that's considered unbearable by the thin-skinned residents of Southern California. Can you guess which rides posted wait times of 180 minutes? Both Splash Mountain and the Grizzly River Run.

#5 Space Mountain - 190 minutes January 3, 2017.

#4 Goofy's Sky School - 200 minutes October 13, 2015.

All I can say is, everything else must have been closed. It's fun - but not 200 minutes-in-line fun.

#3 Soarin' Around the World - 210 minutes May 21, 2017.

#2 Radiator Springs Racers - 240 minutes January 28, 2017.

The #1 longest wait time of the last decade: Guardians of the Galaxy Mission Breakout - 300 minutes (5 hours) May 29, 2017.

For the record - *We don't wait in lines that are much longer than 30 minutes. We FastPass, or just hit it later; you can track live wait times right from your phone.*

Newer rides - hey, it may take you several visits before you can find a manageable line. I think it was fully three years after its opening that we first went on Finding Nemo.

You can't simply show-up on a packed weekend during their peak summer season and think you're gonna walk-on rides. You need to have a **strategy** to manage waiting - otherwise of course you're going to get frustrated and simply quit going to the "Happiest Place on Earth."

I'm talking about waiting strategies because, in our text, the children of Israel grew impatient waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai:

Exo 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

These are people who definitely would not do well at Disneyland.

**We** are called upon to wait:

- If you are in Christ, you are waiting for His imminent return to resurrect the dead in Christ, and to rapture living believers.
- While you are waiting for Him to come for you, you're probably waiting for some answers to prayer. You might be waiting through an acute or chronic suffering.

The impatience of the Israelites can teach us a lot about waiting patiently. We want the "Lord [to] direct [our] hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (Second Thessalonians 3:5).

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Waiting Provokes You To Be Readier, and #2 Waiting Presents God As Being A Relenter.

## #1 Waiting Provokes You To Be Readier

(v1-6)

The first Christians were excited about waiting. You might say that *they couldn't wait to wait*.

The apostle Paul wrote, "... knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed" (Romans 13:11). If you don't see Paul's excitement in that, you're reading it wrong.

The apostle Peter confronted scoffers head-on - those who mocked the promise of Jesus' imminent return. Then Peter said,

2Pe 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

2Pe 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2Pe 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

Peter was waiting, looking forward, with extreme joy. These guys were world-class wait-ers. Waiting encouraged them to personal holiness, and to tireless ministry. Each new day was lived as if it would be THE day that Jesus would come. In that light, they stayed ready by serving the Lord with all their heart, mind, and strength.

The Israelites example for us **the very opposite perspective**.

Exo 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain...

Let's reduce this to simpler terms so we can see ourselves being described:

- Moses was Israel's deliverer and mediator.
- He had gone up Mount Sinai to be with God.
- In his absence, the Israelites were to wait in holiness with the expectation Moses would return, to lead them to their inheritance in the Promised Land.

***Sounds just like us:***

- Jesus is our Deliverer and Mediator.
- He has ascended into Heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- In His absence, the church on earth is to wait in holiness with the expectation Jesus will return, to take us to the place He is preparing for us in Heaven.

We can wait like Paul and Peter; or we can wait like the Israelites.

Exo 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

It had been close to forty days. Even if you concede that forty days is a long time (it isn't), their reaction to waiting was extreme.

Impatience caused the Israelites to seek other 'gods.' As we've pointed out before, these gods were demonic entities - principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world. They were represented by idols of wood and stone, but they were real.

In Egypt, you'll recall, Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform mighty works that were, for a time, equal to those of Moses. The source was demonic.

The religions of the world - they are **all** "the doctrines of demons." In a very real sense, their devotees worship demons as they are being deceived to a Christ-less eternity.

Exo 32:2 And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me."

Some commentators suggest that he asked for their personal adornments thinking they were too vain to give them up. If so, Aaron was wrong.

(In passing I note without comment that their "sons" wore golden earrings. Do with that what you will).

Exo 32:3 So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron.

Exo 32:4 And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

Commentators suggest this was gold overlay on a wood carving. No telling how large or how small this was.

Exo 32:5 So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD."

Demons don't mind if you worship God - so long as you add to your worship things that are *false* and *fleshly*. We need to constantly guard against bringing the world into the church.

Exo 32:6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

"Rose up to play" means they had a drunken orgy. They went through the motions of genuine worship in the Spirit, then turned immediately to the satisfying of their flesh. Today we call this hypocrisy. We might describe someone as a Sunday Christian.

Maybe you've waited 40 days for God to act; or maybe you've waited 40 months, or 40 years. What seems a long time really isn't. We're promised in the Bible that "our light affliction is but for a moment" (Second Corinthians 4:17).

How can decades, or a lifetime, of suffering be considered a "moment?" It's so hard to accept that with the Lord a thousand years is like one day, and one day is like a thousand years.

How was it men like Paul and Peter couldn't wait to wait? What gave them courage and perseverance? One thing we can note about their waiting - they looked beyond this life to eternal life.

Paul, for example, freely admitted he had a “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

In that same passage he would exclaim, “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain” (v21). It was no death wish. Heaven is our home, so we ought to be homesick.

Peter said, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (Second Peter 3:13).

In the Book of Hebrews we read of the saints, especially those who suffered much on the earth, that “they desire[d] a better, that is, a heavenly *country*” (11:16).

Of Abraham it is said, “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God” (11:12).

People wait in line for 300 minutes because, for them, Guardians of the Galaxy Mission Breakout, is worth it in the end. How very, very much more is Heaven worth the wait.

In the mean time, having a desire to depart and be with Jesus is just the motivation you need to adopt the spiritual philosophy, “to live is Christ.”

## #2 Waiting Presents God As Being A Relenter

(v7-35)

God never changes His mind, but He does **relent**. Rather than define the word, I can illustrate it.



The classic example of God relenting is the ancient city of Nineveh. God sent Jonah there to announce, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Hearing the message, "the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them." They reasoned thus:

Jon 3:9 Who can tell if God will turn and **relent**, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

The result:

Jon 3:10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God **relented** from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

In only two of the thirty-eight instances in the Old Testament is this word "relent" used of men repenting. God's "relenting" is a description of God in human terms that aims at showing us that He *can* and *does* change in His actions and emotions towards men when given proper grounds for doing so, and thereby He *does not* change in His basic integrity or character.

Exo 32:7 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*.

Exo 32:8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "

Exo 32:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people!

Exo 32:10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

Apparently God could keep His unconditional promises to Abraham even if He killed-off Israel and started over, so to speak, with Moses. This tells us that God's absolute sovereignty over His creation takes into account mankind's free-will without violating either. Just because I cannot fully explain the relationship of sovereignty to free-will doesn't mean one of them isn't real.

Exo 32:11 Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

Exo 32:12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

Exo 32:13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.' "

Regarding Nineveh, God relented despite Jonah's objections. Regarding Israel, God relented on account of Moses' intercession. God always relents when men repent. In the Bible, our intercession is also highlighted as a factor in men repenting. Not always; prayer isn't a magic spell that violates someone else's free will. But we pray nevertheless.

Exo 32:14 So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

This is an Old Testament way of saying that God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. Eventually, those who continue in rebellion despite His longsuffering must be judged; they must perish eternally. But along the way, God works through His people to reach sinners.

Exo 32:15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in his hand. The tablets *were* written on both sides; on the one *side* and on the other they were written.

Exo 32:16 Now the tablets *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

While Moses was receiving the Law, Israel was busy breaking it.

Exo 32:17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "*There is* a noise of war in the camp."

Exo 32:18 But he said: "*It is* not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, *But* the sound of singing I hear."

Whoa! We forgot about Joshua. He had accompanied Moses part way up the mountain. He camped there, for forty days, with neither human nor divine contact. It was like an episode of *Alone*.

Did he build a shelter? Did he hunt for food, or did he fast?

If any Israelite had cause to complain, it would have been him. Not that we need it, but Joshua proves that the Israelites could easily have waited.

What was Joshua's secret? Joshua was Moses' servant. If he was told to wait - he waited. We ought to rejoice in the simplicity of serving God by waiting in His will.

Exo 32:19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

No mystery as to the symbolism. The first edition Ten Commandments were broken - physically *and* spiritually.

Exo 32:20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*.

I'm not up on my internal medicine, but I'm guessing that drinking ground-up gold and burnt wood isn't very healthy. It shows the harmfulness of sin. We say we're not affected by it, but we are, and so are all those around us. Sin is like a poison.

Just think of how many substances that are poison when abused are destroying lives. So are the religions and the philosophies of this present evil world system. They promise paradise, but deliver poison.

Exo 32:21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought *so great a sin upon them?*"

Exo 32:22 So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set on evil*.

Exo 32:23 For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

Exo 32:24 And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it* off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

It's sad that Aaron shifted the blame. Man-up and admit what you've done. Aaron's excuse about the calf sounds stupid, but it is one that is repeated all the time. Often if a person is caught in sin, they will describe it as a natural progression, rather than a transgression. And they'll suggest it just happened, and that they don't know how.

Exo 32:25 Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies),

Exo 32:26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the LORD's side - *come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

"Among their enemies" means surrounding nations and tribes would be negatively affected by their poor testimony. Like it or not, your life is a testimony - one way or the other.

Some of the Israelites carried-on sinning after the symbolism of the broken tablets, and after being made to drink of their sin. Moses must deal with them.

Exo 32:27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' "

Those who kept on carrying on had broken the Law and deserved the death penalty. Brother, companion, neighbor - this was no small ask.

You know, you might be called upon to break fellowship with a family member, a friend, a neighbor, who won't repent. It's hard, but you can be thankful *you don't have to kill them*.

Exo 32:28 So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.  
Exo 32:29 Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

From this day forward, the tribe of Levi was assigned a special place in the care of the Tabernacle. They were blessed by their obedience to be the ones to handle the things of the Lord.

Exo 32:30 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

God had offered to make Moses a new Abraham. That's heady stuff. Not only did Moses refuse, he stood in the gap for these stiff-necked people.

Ministry always involves stiff-necked people at some point. It's not a reason to quit for some easier situation.

Exo 32:31 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold!

Exo 32:32 Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

This "book" could be the Book of Life later described in the Bible. Most likely it was the census that we read about in a previous chapter.

Moses identified with the sinners when he asked to be numbered among them. The meditation here is that he was acting Christ-like. We read of our Savior, "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). That's us.

Exo 32:33 And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

Does this mean they were lost for eternity? No. Those who had sinned could be forgiven; but they would, as a consequence, die a premature death. They would not be on the census roll when the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

This, in fact, came true when these same individuals refused to enter the Promised Land. All those above twenty years of age fell in the wilderness during a forty year wait.

Apparently not everyone was involved in the worship of the Golden Calf with its ensuing party. I can name one person who wasn't involved: Caleb. From everything we read of him later on in the Bible, it's pretty clear he remained faithful. I can only wonder if they had to maybe subdue him so he wouldn't start killing sinners on his own.

Exo 32:34 Now therefore, go, lead the people to *the place* of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before

you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin."

Exo 32:35 So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

Seems that God sent a plague killing a token number in order to emphasize that all of them would fall short of the goal. It's an encouragement to us to finish well. Too many of us are, in our Christian old-age, falling back into old habits, old sins, and making shipwreck of our walk and our ministries.

You sometimes hear criticism of the so-called "God of the Old Testament." It's unfounded. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is presented as a relenter - not desiring or taking any pleasure in the death of the wicked, but working constantly to save them.

I'll close with a poem to encourage us as we wait:

*So dear to my heart is the promise of God,  
A home with the pure and blest;  
Where earth weary pilgrims, strangers here below,  
Will find their eternal rest.*

*I'm homesick for Heaven, seems I cannot wait,  
Yearning to enter Zion's pearly gate;  
There, never a heartache, never a care,  
I long for my home over there.*