

LESSON 8



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MAY 20 2023

God thinks twice

Scripture Story: Exodus 32–34.

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

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The story of Israel's journey to the promised land of milk and honey is riddled with moments of disbelief and disobedience. Amid the many miracles of God's guiding hand and tender care, the people's rebellious attitude produced tendencies toward sin and idolatry that were hard to break. This lesson marks a pivotal point in the leadership of Moses and portrays how difficult it is to break the habits of sin without a change of heart.

As Moses communed with God on the mountain, the signs of God's continued presence were in plain view of the people. Some thought that something must have happened to Moses. *Patriarchs and Prophets* claims that although "the cloud was still in view, it seemed to many in the camp that their leader had deserted them, or that he had been consumed by the devouring fire" (p. 315). Instead of reflecting on the ways God had led them in the past and staying strong in their belief in God, they allowed their minds to harden into rebellion again. Some of the Israelites pressed Aaron into making the golden calf and instituting a festival of idolatrous worship.

God informed Moses of the Israelites' godless behavior and made the decision to obliterate them all and start over, promising He would make a great nation out of Moses' family instead. In fact, Moses would have been the new Abraham—the grandfather of a great nation. But Moses modeled selfless leadership and Christlike humility by suggesting a different way. He pleaded with God to change His mind and spare the people, even if it meant blotting his own name out of the book of life. The prayer of Moses pushed God to

relent and give the people another chance.

Although this story is filled with disaster and sinful human propensities, it also shows God's grace and justice and the tender humility Moses demonstrated on behalf of his people.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover the way events expose the character of God, people, and leaders. (*Know*)
- Feel the jealous passion of God for a people who will love and obey Him. (*Feel*)
- Determine to align themselves on God's side whether temptation is near or far away. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

The Nature of Humanity, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 7

"Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one

another, and to care for their environment” (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

A group of researchers were studying the feeding patterns of tuna off the southern coast of Australia. A small wrinkle in the program occurred when a large great white shark jumped over an electric fence that surrounded the pen of fish in the water. Naturally, the shark initially feasted on a banquet of tuna fish for a season before the researchers even noticed it was in the area. What was amazing was the way the tuna found a way to avoid the hungry shark. The observers noticed how every time the shark would rise to the surface the tuna would huddle at the bottom, and when the shark would make its way to the bottom the tuna would swim to the top. Basically, the tuna learned to avoid being eaten by putting a safe distance between themselves and the shark at all times.

It makes sense to avoid temptation in a similar way. But how realistic is it to “avoid” temptation or always “run in the other direction” when the opportunity for dubious behavior arises? On the one hand, we need to avoid temptation by positioning ourselves far from it. On the other hand, we may not always be able to avoid circumstances that tempt us, so we need to believe so firmly in God’s Word and His leading that we can stand strong even when we have to face temptation head-on.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The tuna in the story above learned to avoid danger by distance, but what happens when temptation and sin are jumping and shouting right before you,

as it was when Moses remained on the mountain? Before they knew it, many were worshipping a golden calf, claiming, “This is the god that brought us out of Egypt.” Consider how the Israelites responded and look for the lesson in this week’s Bible story.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- 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 character and personality 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? (You may have to read the rest of the story to get the whole picture.) What evidence do you see in this story of Moses’ reputation of being a man of great humility?
- Why do you think it is so easy for the Israelites to slip and fall into sinful behavior? How long do the miracles God performs on behalf of the Israelites last in securing their belief? Is this true for people today? What kind of patience should be extended toward people who are new to God’s family? Are the people who led Israel into sin in this story harshly treated? What evidence of God’s mercy is revealed in regard to them? Are they given a chance to explain or do what is right?
- Let’s read the rest of the story and list four or five key verses that capture its essence.
- What do you see as the message God has for you in this story?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This week’s story is filled with some amazing insights into the qualities of good leaders, and into the character of God’s grace mixed with His unwavering insistence on loyalty. There are glimpses of the way our sinful habits tend to die hard and the way miracles don’t really deepen our belief the way we

think they should. As you discuss this story with your class, consider the following snapshots that come out of it.

On Moses and Meekness

Moses has a reputation of being a man of meekness. Yet images of a staff-wielding, fire-breathing prophet of God who parted the Red Sea are also very real. Where do we see him as meek? Consider the way he reacts to God's decision to give up on Israel and start over:

God disowns Israel—Before, God had referred to the Israelites as “My people” almost 20 times (Exodus 3:7; 3:10; 5:1; 7:4; 7:16, etc.). Yet, when the Israelites rebel and make the golden calf, God seems to disown them, saying to Moses: “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7, NIV). God is completely fed up with them and says, “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” (verse 10, NIV). Now, Moses could have been flattered by such an opportunity—a chance to start over and become the new father of the Lord's chosen people. But Moses pleads with God to spare the disobedient throng and even says, “But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (verse 32, NIV). Ultimately, Moses, in his selflessness, gets God to give them another chance. Have you considered the things that make great people great? Think about the Bible characters and what they really did to claim fame.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Dramatic Reading

Sometimes reading the Scripture can become redundant even if everyone is given a chance to read. Sometimes the flow of the story or details can be lost if the story is not read carefully or enthusiastically.

This week's lesson (Exodus 32–34) is a riveting story with several characters speaking, saying some pretty amazing things. Photocopy the chapters and highlight the parts for readers to read. One part can be that of a narrator, another part—God, another—Moses, and so on. Have the students practice the reading once or twice outside or in the hallway before class so the reading can be fluid. You might ask the students in class to read the story quietly first and then read the story dramatically. This exercise can evoke more interest and therefore better listening, not to mention involve a handful of students in a creative way.

On Prayer

Another intriguing discussion concerns the nature of prayer and whether our prayers can really move God to do something other than what He would have done. Ellen White discusses this in *The Great Controversy*: “The same compassionate Savior lives

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

today, and He is as willing to listen to the prayer of faith as when He walked visibly among men. The natural cooperates with the supernatural. *It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask*" (p. 525; italics supplied).

How does knowing this change the way we should pray? How does it change how often we should pray? How does it change what we should pray for?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Divide the students into groups of two or three for the following exercise. Ask each person to make a list of five to 10 major events, starting with the Exodus, in which God had unmistakably proven His protection and care for Israel. Then, on the other side of the page, to make a similar list of ways they have seen God work in their life. Have them share their lists with the members of their group.

For debriefing, ask the following question: In the heat of the moment, will your past experiences be enough to enable you to be faithful to God? If not,

what else do you need in order to be able to resist the temptations that may come your way?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This story has so many rich lessons in it that it is hard to know which to apply to our life today. The Israelites were so quick to forget what God had done for them and slip mindlessly into sin. Do you ever forget to pay attention to what God has done for you? Do you ever forget to remember?

Furthermore, what a selfless person Moses was to stick his neck out for a bunch of people who seemed hopeless. Is it possible you have friends that seem hopeless? Do they need someone who will continue to pray for them, even when they are going in the wrong direction?

What about the way God draws a line in the sand and gives everyone a chance to repent and either confess their loyalty or stubbornly cling to their way? Maybe God is calling you to cross the line today.

Maybe you are being given an opportunity in this story to confess your need of God's grace and commit to being loyal to God.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 28.



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STUDENT LESSON

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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.