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It is the Sound of Singing that I Hear

32: 15-20

It is the sound of singing that I hear DIG: How was Moses equipped to handle what he finds at the foot of the mountain? What is his frame of mind? What trips his anger? What had the rebellion accomplished? What was the purpose of forcing the rebellious Israelites to drink the gold dust?

REFLECT: Do you destroy things when you get angry? Do you throw things? How did Yeshua act when he got angry? What do you think is the appropriate way to express your anger? How can you act in an appropriate way when others get angry with you? What do our rebellions against God accomplish?

Following **his** intercession **Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments 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 (32:15-16).** In ancient times two copies of every suzerainty treaty (one for the suzerain and one for the vassal) were always made, and each copy contained the text of the entire treaty. We assume, therefore, that each of the two stone **tablets** contained all **of the Ten Commandments**. One of the copies belonged to the covenant-making **God** (the Suzerain), the other to **His** covenant **people, Isra'el** (the vassals). Both were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant (**25:22**). **The tablets** had been written by **God Himself**, making **the people's** sin against the second Commandment all the more guilty.⁶⁶⁸

On the way **down the mountain Moses** met **his** young aide **Joshua**, who had been faithfully waiting for **him**. **He** thought **he** heard the sound of war in **the camp** below. **When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp."** There was **war in the camp**, but not the kind **Joshua** was thinking of. **Moses**, however, knew that **the noise** was evidence of the idolatry called to **his** attention by **God** on top of Mount Sinai. **Moses** concluded: **It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of**

defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear (32:17-18).

The **singing** and dancing of **the Hebrews** here ought to remind us of a similar scene after the parting of the Red Sea. In **15:20-21**, **the Israelites** held a great celebration because of **God's** great deliverance. And they did so with **singing and dancing**. Here, when **Moses** came **down the mountain**, they were celebrating in the same exact way. But instead of honoring **God**, they were worshiping a golden **calf!**⁶⁶⁹



Moses had successfully soothed **God's** wrath, but when **he** actually **saw** with **his** own eyes the depth to which **the Israelites** had sunk, **he** did not follow **his** own advice. **When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands** in righteous indignation, **breaking them to pieces (32:19)**. This was appropriate and symbolic in the light of the broken covenant between **God** and **Isra'el**.⁶⁷⁰ If **they** were not prepared to obey the Ten Commandments, **they** did not deserve to have **them**.

But even that would not bring a sense of relief to **them**, as if **they** were finally rid of the burden of **the Ten Commandments**. Rather, it shocked **them** into a clearer understanding of just what it was that **they** had done. True, **they** may have been able to imitate portions of **their** exodus experience, although wholly inadequate, by making the golden bull **calf** and proclaiming it to be the god of the exodus. They may have used **gold** to imitate the splendor of the ark and the mercy seat, and they may have appointed **Aaron** the high priest of **their** new religion. But one thing **they** could not duplicate was **the Ten Commandments**. In fact, **their** actions were exactly opposite of **them**. And the smashing of **the tablets** of **stone** told **them** that the party was over. **Their** attempt to create **their** own religion had failed.⁶⁷¹

Seething, **Moses** came to the center of the rebellion **and took the calf**, that was probably wood overlaid with **gold, and burned it in the fire. Then he ground the gold to powder, scattered it on the water** of a mountain stream (**Deuteronomy 9:21**) **and made the Israelites drink it (32:20)**. The sin, as it were, was poured into **their** bodies along with **the water** to symbolize that **they** would have to bear the burden of it just as a woman who was suspected of adultery was obligated to **drink of the bitter water that brought a curse (Numbers 5:11-31)**.⁶⁷² Not much of a god! Instead of being filled with **the Spirit, they** were filled with **gold**. This painted a clear picture of the worthlessness of idolatry. If **the calf** could not save **itself**, it certainly could not save its worshipers.⁶⁷³

The Psalmist would say it this way: **Why do the nations say: Where is their God? Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. O house of Isra'el, trust in God. He is our help and our shield (Psalm 115:2-9)**. **The idols** of today are just as worthless as they were in **Moses'** day. And just as surely as **God** was **the Israelites help and shield** then, **He** is our **help and shield** today.