

## "Aaron: The Problem of a "Good Person""

We have been looking at the lives of people in the Bible, but from what we have been seeing, they have all come across one failure or another during their lives. No matter how outstanding or great one may seem, we all have faults which is shown time after time in the Bible. We have even seen the flaws of Abraham and Moses; the great men of faith.

Without doubt, we are creatures bound to make mistakes, and if these failures cannot be avoided, it becomes important how we face the mistakes we have made. Today, we will be looking at the mistakes of a certain individual. Their mistakes are not our own, but as we are human, we are equipped with a similar mind. We would like to learn and take in to our own hearts an important lesson from their mistakes.

Last week, we looked at the mistakes of Moses after the death of his sister Miriam. Moses had a sister named Miriam, and a brother named Aaron. The Bible mentions them in the following way, **"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam."** (Micah 6:4) Yes, Aaron and Miriam acted as the Moses' left and right hands, supporting him, and Moses found comfort and encouragement in their support.

As we spoke of last week, Miriam, after having placed baby Moses onto the Nile, and seeing the Pharaoh's daughter draw him out of the water, she came and offered her own mother to nurse the baby. Her courage and cleverness is astonishing and such qualities of her nature must have contributed a great deal when leading the Israelites. Her existence meant a great deal to Moses. With this in mind, it is not hard for us to understand why he showed such anger to the stubborn people.

Who we would like to focus our attention to today, is Moses' brother Aaron. Aaron had a tremendous role in the Exodus and time spent in the wilderness; his name being mentioned a total of 312 times. You may find it a surprise but when God called out to Moses, he pleaded as if to complain how much he is not suitable for the cause. This is an unexpected weak point of a man who lead millions of Israelites out of Egypt. God chose Moses despite knowing this and placed an accomplished orator, Aaron, by his side. In Moses' place, Aaron went before the Pharaoh to speak. He became Moses' mouth as he walked by his side.

Aaron, much like Moses was a gentle person. Although he was the older brother, he understood his place even calling Moses "my lord" in support of his leadership.

Aaron was also very compassionate. When Miriam was struck with leprosy, he immediately turned toward God for compassion (Numbers 12:10-11), and when the people's treason caused a plague to spread, he ran into the midst of the assembly and made atonement for them (Numbers 16:47-48). In Psalms he is described to be "consecrated to the Lord". (Psalms 106:16)

But even he had flaws. The greatest was when his brother Moses had gone up the mountain and had not come back for 40 days and nights. The Israelites had begun to feel uneasy which slowly spread into Aaron who waited at the foot of the mountain. Aaron was responsible in leading the Israelites in Moses' absence, but he made a grave mistake.

Aaron stood before the people whom Moses was troubled over many times. Seeing that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they came to 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."** (Exodus 32:1)

**Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 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."**

**5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." 6 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. (Exodus 32:2-6)**

Aaron had gathered the gold the Israelites had had on. He then casted it and shaped it into a calf. The people must have delighted that this was the god who saved them from Egypt. They eat and drank to celebrate.

During that same time, the Lord says to Moses **"Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 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.'"** (Exodus 32:7-8)

The Lord was angered by this and tells Moses that he will destroy them. but Moses intervenes by saying, **"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 all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever."** (Exodus 32:13) And the Lord relented the disaster he had threatened.

With what thoughts did Moses descend the mountain? In his hands were the tablets of the covenant law, engraved by God. But when he neared the camp, he saw the calf idol and dancing. His anger burned and he threw the tablets, breaking them. He then said to Aaron,

**"What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"**  
**22 "Do not be angry, my lord,"** Aaron answered. **"You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 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.'** **24 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!"**  
**25 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."** (Exodus 32:21-25)

The first thing that Aaron said was, "You know how prone these people are to evil." Yes, it was that you know how these people are. Behind this was an excuse, "Understand how difficult it was for me to deal with these people all by myself." And then he said, **"Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and**

**out came this calf!"** (Exodus 32:24) Do you remember what was written earlier? It was that **"He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool."** (Exodus 32:4) He had lied to protect himself.

The cause of this event is described as in Exodus as following. **"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."** (Exodus 32:25)

After this Moses returned to the Lord and said, **"Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."** (Exodus 32:31-32) He tries to atone for their sins with his own life but that could not be done, and thus, many of the Israelites were struck by God. Exodus chapter 32 tends with these words. **"And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made."** (Exodus 32:35)

As we spoke of earlier, Aaron was a good man. He was compassionate, and humbly served his brother Moses as if he was his servant. But Aaron was not firm in his standing. A "good person" can be said as a compliment, and in reality he was a great man but at times he could not make clear what is right and wrong and had a way of making decisions based on pressure and to please the people around him. Not standing firmly where they should be without making the good and bad clear means that much less friction and conflict with others, thus being called a "good person."

But being called a good person backfired. Because of this, the Israelites were struck by God. The people had acted upon their own wishes and Aaron had acted upon his own. We must take this to our own hearts.

Furthermore, a similar occurrence happened nearby. The fact that he had let the Israelites do as they wished also applied to his family. Aaron had 4 sons and Nadab and Abihu were his first and second sons. Aaron was a priest so his sons were also raised to become priests. A priest is there to sacrifice what the people offer to be forgiven of their sin. And thus the people are forgiven. Then what about the priest? The priest is also human so they must strictly make sacrifices for themselves. They must first be forgiven of their own sins to stand between God and the people.

It is their duty to administer the people's worship. The reason why a priest is necessary is because we humans are full of sin and thus unable to come before God in worship as they are. We cannot worship unless we are first forgiven by God. The heavy responsibility of offering the sacrifices was on the priest. In those days, the people were forgiven through the priest's action of offering the sacrifice, then they were purified so that they could worship.

Nadal and Abihu must have grown up seeing the various ceremonies, learning this crucial role from their father. But in Levi 10:1-3

**"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. 2 So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 3 Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:**

**"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored." Aaron remained silent." (Levi 10:1-3)**

"Unauthorized fire" is mentioned here. This meant that the fire was not one commanded by the Lord but a fire "against their regulation." So what then is a fire within their regulation? It is written of in Leviticus 16:12-13.

**"He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. 13 He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the tablets of the covenant law, so that he will not die." (Leviticus 16:12-13)**

It is written that the fire must be take from "the alter before the Lord." Yet they must have brought the fire from elsewhere. They had burned the incense with the coals they themselves lit.

The next Olympics will be held in Tokyo. In all Olympic games, there is a lighting ceremony that takes place. The fire of the torch comes from the ruins of the Temple of Hera in Olympia, Greece. The torch is relayed from place to place, person to person, until it reaches the stadium. If that Olympic flame on the torch is somehow put out, it is not secretly relit with a lighter. If such an action is taken, it would be a

historically disgraceful scandal. The Olympic flame cannot be excused with a mere "oh, it should be fine." The Olympics is a festival created by humans. If even the Olympics regard their flame in such importance, the gravity of importance in the forgiveness of sin before God cannot be stressed enough.

But what Nadab and Abihu did was just this. They took lightly the action of coming before God. Further, they did not fear God. And who was it that needed to teach them to fear God? Yes, it was their father Aaron.

Being a priest himself, it was Aaron's responsibility to teach his sons the honor in their duty, and that the most important thing in carrying out their duty is fear and respect, and that what God has decided must be carried out completely.

We know, that it is difficult to teach the young the holiness of God, or to fear God, or to faithfully follow Him. But if they are to become a priest, it is of utmost importance to acquire these things. Because of their youth they may say or think, "how can I keep doing something so troublesome." We see this when we look back to the time when we ourselves were young. We try to slack or cheat our way through things. And each time we must be called out, and disciplined. Of course for the good of that person.

Aaron bore that duty. But just as he had shown with the Israelites, he **"had let them get out of control"** (Exodus 32:25) and he had also done so within his family. He must have been a good, loving father. But he may have missed the most indispensable part of being a father. There is nothing more painful than this, but his sons were consumed by the fire as a result. Why did such a thing happen? Moses, who was the two son's uncle, later tells Aaron,

**"This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:**

**"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored." Aaron remained silent.**" Aaron fully understood these words. The Lord is perfectly holy, no human can stand before him. Therefore a priest is worthy to stand before God only through solemn purification of oneself, and fear. Yet his sons took lightly of this and thus were struck. That is why he stayed silent rather than grieving God's severity. There was no excuse to make.

Aaron was a good man. We also wish to be good. Everyone strives to be good, and we should be. But as we have spoken of today, there is something that a good

person can lose sight of. That is to face what is wrong and right, to think in regards to this, and to make the right decisions even if others may not perceive you as a "good person."

We all have the heart of Aaron. We want to learn from this tragedy that occurred as a result of his decisions. We are given the great challenge to be a good man, good woman, and to stand in conviction in the Lord. How immensely difficult it is to accomplish the one life we are given by God. Yet we wish to be able to take this challenge step by step as we walk. Lets pray.

Translated by Shirah Vogt