

Exodus 32:25-29

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Moses called for those who were with him to stand up on the LORD's behalf. The Levites did so, and they were then ordered to go through the camp and kill those who were connected to the idolatry (probably the ringleaders), resulting in three thousand Israelites being killed. Moses then urged the people to dedicate themselves to the LORD once again.

Earlier in the chapter, Moses saw that the people had built the golden calf idol. Here, *Moses saw that the people were out of control*. The Hebrew word for *out of control* (“para”) can mean “let loose,” “allow to run wild,” or “neglect” ([Proverbs 1:25](#)). The only other place this word is used with the same verb form is in [Proverbs 29:18](#) (“Where there is no vision, the people are **unrestrained**”).

The people got this way because *Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies*. Aaron, the high priest of the LORD, had allowed the people to not only create an idol but engage in immorality as acts of worship to this idol. This would be a *derision* (a similar word is translated “whisper” in [Job 4:12](#)) among other nations because Israel was supposed to be different, worshipping the LORD and Him only. By adopting pagan practices, they would show that they were no different than the Egyptians or any other people in the Ancient Near East.

In light of these celebrations, *Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!”* The *gate of the camp* was the place where justice was dealt. Here, Moses challenged the people to make a decision—stand for the LORD or continue their pagan practices. To be *for the LORD* meant a rejection of pagan gods. The people could not choose to combine the worship of the LORD and the worship of a pagan idol. They could not adopt the dehumanizing practices of paganism and also live in the love-your-neighbor lifestyle of self-governance as prescribed by the LORD.

Moses' challenge was answered, *and all the sons of Levi gathered together to him*. Both Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi ([Exodus 2:1 – 10](#)), so it was appropriate that the ones who responded to Moses' call were his kinsmen.

Moses then told the Levites, *“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’”*

Note that Moses starts with the fact that the message came from *the LORD, the God of Israel*. The people wanted to be led by the golden calf, but the idol was silent and the LORD their God spoke. The LORD commanded them (not Moses or a prophet) to arm themselves with swords and go through the camp to kill those who were involved in the idolatry.

This command was a lesser punishment than what God relented from, but was still consistent with the fact that the people had broken the covenant ([Leviticus 20:10](#)). Even so, it was probably a very difficult thing for the Levites to do in light of the fact that some of the ones to be killed were friends and even family.

In response to His word, *the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day*. Probably, the *three thousand* that were killed were the ringleaders of the rebellion against the LORD and were still active in their idolatry. Many more people might have deserved death, so killing three thousand could be seen as an act of grace. It is certainly an act of grace compared to the LORD’s original plan to eliminate them all. There were likely around two million Israelites, so three thousand is about 0.15 percent of the population.

Because the Levites were obedient to the LORD’s command, *Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”* The Hebrew word translated *dedicate* is literally “fill the hands,” as was seen in [Exodus 29:9](#). Later, the Levites were chosen to be the priestly tribe in Israel ([Numbers 3:12 – 13](#)). Earlier, the whole nation of Israel was said to be a “kingdom of priests” ([Exodus 19:6](#)), but here they had failed in their assigned responsibility by violating the covenant and mimicking the pagan actions of the other nations. The answer was for them to *dedicate themselves to the LORD*.

The time for such dedication was *today*. The Bible is consistent in emphasizing that *today* is the only time to make the proper decision. The reality is that the present is the only time we can make decisions. We cannot act in the future, only the present. This *dedication* would lead to a *blessing* that would also come *today*.

Interestingly, Aaron, the enabler, was not executed. He certainly deserved to be, but [Deuteronomy 9:20](#) states that Moses interceded for him in order to save his life.

In contrast to the three thousand killed on this occasion, it is noteworthy that on the Day of Pentecost, there were three thousand people saved ([Acts 2:41](#)). Pentecost is a Hellenized name (from Greek, meaning “fifty”). The feast of Pentecost is the “Feast of Weeks,” which is a prescribed Jewish holiday held fifty days after Passover ([Exodus 32:22](#)). Jewish tradition holds that the day that the Law was given on Mount Sinai was fifty days after the initial Passover in Egypt, when the voice and thundering occurred ([Exodus 19-20](#)). God later gave Moses the tablets on which the Law was written in the previous chapter, [Exodus 31:18](#), “When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.”

So the 3,000 who died due to breaking the covenant law after Moses’ speech might be analogous to the 3,000 in [Acts 2](#) who were added to the church after Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. These 3,000 were saved “from this perverse generation” ([Acts 2:40](#).)” The giving of the Holy Spirit to dwell within the souls of believers is analogous to the giving of the Word of God on tablets from Mount Sinai. God writes His law upon the hearts of believers through the Spirit, which was promised as part of a new and better covenant ([Jeremiah 31:31](#)). There are other analogies as well, such as the flame over the heads of the people in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-4](#)) being similar to the lightning on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 20:18](#)).

Biblical Text:

²⁵ **Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—
²⁶ then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, *come* to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. ²⁷ He said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” ²⁸ So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. ²⁹ Then Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”**