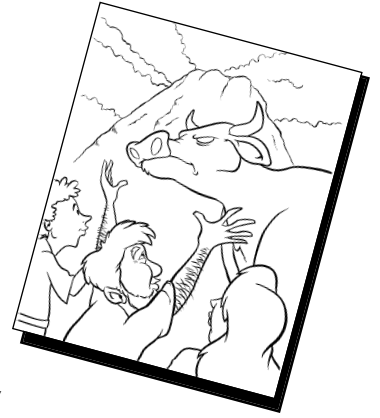




God Punishes Israel's Idolatry

Exodus 32



LESSON GOAL

Students will thank God for His mercy and patience.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Describe Israel's great sin of idol worship.
- Explain God's response to Israel's rebellion.
- Identify the key principles of Moses' prayers for Israel.
- Tell about idols of the heart that people worship today.
- Retell the acts of God's mercy.

KEY VERSE

"So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exodus 32:14).

APPLICATION

- Identify things that you value more than God (possessions, praise, etc.).
- Ask God for forgiveness for daily sins.
- Thank God for specific acts of mercy in your life today.
- Praise God for the mercy found in Jesus Christ.

NEXT WEEK

God's Presence Fills the Tabernacle
Read Exodus 33–34, 40.

Symbol Key



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Israel had intensely experienced God. They had seen God's power in bringing Israel out of Egypt. They had heard His voice proclaim the Ten Commandments. They had felt the ground shake when God's presence descended upon Mount Sinai. Every day, they could see the fire and cloud on top of the mountain, a continual reminder of God's presence. But experiencing the awesomeness and fearfulness of God was not enough to change Israel's heart. While Moses was on top of the mountain receiving plans for God's dwelling place, Israel was at the foot of the mountain fashioning a god of their own choosing. While Moses was being given the stone tables containing the Ten Commandments, Israel was provoking God's wrath by breaking those commandments. Because of Israel's idolatry, God confronted Israel's sin.

Israel's Idolatry

After 40 days of Moses' being obscured by cloud and flame upon Mount Sinai, Israel had become weary of waiting. They were anxious to be away from the mountain and to have a god who would go before them, presumably leading them into the Promised Land (Ex. 32:1). They excused their rebellion against God by reasoning that they did not know what had happened to Moses. Moses' own brother, Aaron, led the people by commanding them to bring gold and by fashioning the gold into a calf (32:4). The people revealed their wickedness by claiming that this calf was the same God who had brought them out of Egypt. Aaron built an altar before the idol and ordered a feast unto Yahweh, the special name God gave to reveal Himself to Israel (32:5). After sacrifices were offered, the people worshiped as they wished: eating, drinking, and playing (most likely a reference to sexual perversion; 32:6).

The Israelites (including Aaron) had exalted themselves above God. They knew God had rescued them from Egypt, but now they chose to worship God as they wished and not as He commanded. Self-styled worship is idolatry. The people had attempted to keep both Yahweh and the idols from the surrounding nations. The result was that Yahweh's name was defamed when Israel attributed to the infinite creator the shape of His creation. Israel neither worshiped God nor desired to do so, even though they used Yahweh's name. The Israelites idolatrously exalted themselves above God when they decided for themselves how they would worship.

Moses' Intercession

God revealed to Moses His fierce anger over the people's idolatry. He no longer called Israel "my people," but instead called them "your people"; God was disgusted to call the people His own. Israel was a "stiff-necked people" who were committed to their own way. God told Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great

Additional Reference Materials

*Moses and the Gods of
Egypt: Studies in Exodus*
by John J. Davis

*The MacArthur Study
Bible* by John MacArthur

nation" (Ex. 32:10). God was going to destroy the people. They had broken the covenant they had made with God and deserved nothing short of destruction. God would have been just to destroy them. And He could have been faithful to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by making a great nation of their descendant Moses.

But Moses knew the character of God, and he knew that God answers prayer. Moses pleaded for the people and offered reasons to God why He should not destroy the people. Moses pleaded with God based upon God's past kindness to Israel; God had rescued Israel "with great power and with a mighty hand" (Ex. 32:11). Moses said that God would be defamed by the Egyptians if He destroyed the Israelites after saving them (32:12). He appealed to God's faithfulness as he spoke to Him concerning His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of countless descendants to whom would be given the Promised Land. Moses' prayer, while in part motivated by love for the people, was devoted to God's glory. Moses was eager that God's name would be exalted by both Israel and the nations. He pleaded for God to show the greatness of His name by showing His mercy.

In answer to Moses' prayer, God "relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (32:14). It is always a mystery how God answers prayer. In God's wisdom, He had revealed to Moses His true hatred for Israel's sin by threatening wrath. Moses knew though that God listens to prayer. God would have been just to answer this prayer with either "yes" or "no," but God chose to have mercy upon Israel, not pouring out the wrath they deserved. In His amazing providence, God showed mercy on the people by listening to Moses' prayer. God's ways are beyond our understanding. What awesome mercy that God should listen to and work His sovereign will through man's prayers!

The Seriousness of Idolatry

Although God withheld the judgment He had threatened, Moses still had to deal with the heinous sin of the people. Moses went down the mountain, carrying the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down the mountain, he was filled with righteous anger at the sight of the calf and the revelry in the camp (Ex. 32:19). Moses smashed the Ten Commandments, a dramatic symbol of Israel having broken the covenant with God. God had established the standard for continuing in a relationship with Him, and Israel had willfully tossed it aside. Their relationship as His treasured people was dependent upon obeying and keeping His laws (19:5). The people did not deserve to continue in that relationship.

Another picture of the depravity of the people was when Moses melted the golden calf, ground it into powder, and threw the dust into a nearby brook (Deut. 9:21). As the people went for water, they essentially drank their god (Ex. 32:20)! What a bitter reminder that must have been of the gross foolishness of choosing to worship a man-made object!

When Moses asked Aaron what the people had done to force him to make the idol, Aaron repeated what had happened. The only change Aaron made was that he denied having formed the calf (Ex. 32:4). Instead, he said that he had thrown the gold into the fire, and the calf had miraculously come out (Ex. 32:24). Aaron was essentially blaming the existence of the calf on a miracle! Deuteronomy reveals that the Lord would have destroyed Aaron if Moses had not prayed for him (Deut. 9:20).

Probably, before breaking and melting the golden calf, Moses had to put down the rebellion in the camp (Ex. 32:25). As Moses walked through the camp, he could see and hear the people continuing in their idolatry. Moses knew that God was

angry and that He hated this sin. In a drastic attempt to put an end to the sin, Moses called apart all who were on the Lord's side (Ex. 32:26). Out of the 12 tribes, only the Levites gathered around Moses. The Levites were commanded to put on swords and go throughout Israel, killing those who were unwilling to obey. The Bible does not disclose how fierce was the battle that followed or who was killed. It does reveal that 3,000 men were killed by the Levites before the idolatry ceased. The end of the chapter also reveals that God sent a plague on the people because of what they had done (Ex. 32:35).

Moses Intercedes Again

Moses had already prayed for God to relent from His fierce anger. God was not going to destroy the people, but Moses felt the heaviness of the people's sin. He knew that Israel needed to be forgiven, even though they were completely unworthy. The next day, Moses told 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" (Ex. 32:30). Israel needed to be restored to a right relationship with God.

Moses went up the mountain and confessed Israel's idolatry. He could base his plea on nothing but God's grace in forgiveness. He asked God to take his own life if He would not forgive the people. Paul's concern for Israel to be saved is reminiscent of Moses' concern. Paul wished that he himself "were accursed from Christ for [his] brethren" (Rom. 9:3). Although it is impossible to lose salvation, Paul was willing to be lost so that Israel might be saved. Similarly, Moses was willing to trade his life for that of Israel.

The Lord answered Moses that at the judgment each would bear the weight of his own sins (Ex. 32:33–34). But for now, God revealed to Moses the good news that He would still send His Angel before the people (Ex. 30:34). Although God's justice would one day be performed on the wicked, God in His grace was not going to destroy all the people. God's hatred for idolatry is infinite. Yet He chose to have mercy on Israel.

Israel's idolatry had drastic consequences. Many people were killed in battle and many in the plague. The Ten Commandments were smashed. But the most drastic consequence of their sin was abated through Moses' prayer. God's passion for His own glory and His hatred for idolatry were about to be revealed in His righteous destruction of the people. But in His sovereign plan, God worked through Moses' prayer and graciously saved the people from His anger. In addition to His initial mercy and in response to Moses' prayer, God was willing to continue a relationship with His people, Israel.

Although God answered Moses' prayer and forgave the people as a whole, individually God would punish unrepentant Israelites for their idolatry by eternal punishment. Moses could not die for them. Praise God that in Moses' place, in the place of the godly Israelites, and in the place of the church, Christ died. He alone could satisfy the demand of God's wrath. What amazing mercy!

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth"
(Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

What is the name of the place where God dwelt among the Israelites?

The tabernacle.

Who was allowed to go into the tabernacle?

Only the priests, Aaron and his sons.

What do you call the leader of the priests?

The high priest.

Why did the priests make sacrifices?

To remind the people of their sin.

Why do we not need to make sacrifices today?

Because Jesus was the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin.



The Seriousness of Sin

To help communicate the seriousness of sin, review stories that dealt with God's acts of judgment. Use the flash cards to remind the students that when Adam and Eve sinned, God expelled them from the garden. There was a time when people were so sinful that God destroyed everyone in a flood. At Babel, God scattered the people and confused their languages because of their pride. God burned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the people's wickedness.



Idle Idols

Materials: large pictures of idols on cards (get from websites for religion or even tourism); small samples of wood, carving stone or clay, paint, gold flakes, etc.

Directions: Show the students pictures of idols from various world religions—perhaps Buddha, Hindu gods, totem poles, or pictures of gods of the time period. Talk about what they are made of (wood, gold, marble, stone, etc.). Bring in raw materials to show the class. Talk about who came up with an image and made the idols (man). Demonstrate by drawing a picture on a piece of blank paper—an image from your imagination. Talk about what the idols do and what power they have (do nothing, do not move, could fall over and break, have no power, cannot help anyone). Then compare all this to the God of the Bible. God created everything, including the materials people use to make idols! We did not make God. He made us! We cannot even capture God's image in picture or form. We cannot draw His picture or make a statue of Him. But we are made in God's image. God is all powerful. Talk about how God demonstrates His power throughout the Bible. Also talk about how it is not only silly, but also a sin, to



worship idols. Talk about other forms of idols—not just statues, but anything that we put above God (such as money, fame, and beauty).

Right Worship of God

While this week's lesson deals with how we are not to worship God, it gives us the opportunity to teach the students about true worship. True worship begins with a right view of God. Using a review game of your choice (e.g., tic-tac-toe or prizes for correct answers), ask the students some of or all the following questions:

Is there more than one God? (Deut. 6:4)

Can God lie? (Num. 23:19)

Does God know the future? (Psalm 139:1–6, 15–16)

Does anything happen that God does not know about? (Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20)

Is there anything that God cannot do? (Jer. 32:17, 27)

Did God make the world in seven days? (Gen. 1:1–2)

Is God everywhere at the same time? (Psalm 139:7–12)

Does God hear our prayers? (Prov. 15:29)

Does God ever break a promise? (Num. 23:19)

Did God die for us? (Rom. 5:8)

Is God love? (1 John 4:8)

Is God sinless? (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 1:5)

Is God beautiful? (Psalm 27:4)

Is anything more powerful than God? (Jer. 32:17, 27)

Can anyone live independently of God? (John 15:5)

Does God's love ever change? (Lam. 3:22–23)

Does God get impatient or get angry quickly? (Ex. 34:6–7)

Can we compare God to anything in this world? (2 Sam. 7:22)

Is God ever unfair? (Dan. 4:37)

Is God totally in control over all people and circumstances? (Psalm 33:8–11)

Will God ever die? (Isa. 57:15)

Is God's Word true? (Psalm 19:7–11)

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included to use during worship time. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

Reading of the Text

Read Exodus 32:1–4.

Introduction

Today we will learn a very important truth. It is so important that you will want to pay close attention during today's lesson. We will learn what made God angry. It made Him so angry that He killed 3,000 people for their sin. The sin of these people was that they worshiped false gods rather than the one true God as they were commanded. Let's listen carefully to what happened to the Israelites so that we can learn how to worship God.



Leadoff Questions

LOQ: If you were asked to draw a picture of God, could you? How do you know what God looks like?

Answer: You cannot draw a picture of God because He is invisible (Col. 1:15). There is nothing in this universe that can represent God. He is like nothing else. God is spirit (John 4:24).

LOQ: How did the Israelites sin?

Answer: The Israelites went to Aaron and asked him to make a god for them. Moses was on top of Mount Sinai talking with God and had been up there for 40 days and nights. The people down at the bottom of the mountain thought he had forgotten them. In order to make this idol, Aaron had them bring all their gold earrings, and he melted them down into a mold. It says that he fashioned it, and he made it into a calf, and when Aaron was done, the people saw it and said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). They were saying the golden calf was the same God who delivered them from Egypt. They thought the golden calf that Aaron had just made with his own hands represented the God who divided the Red Sea and destroyed the whole Egyptian army.

LOQ: Was this golden calf a symbol of the true God? Could this golden calf speak, walk, or even listen?

Answer: No.

LOQ: What was Israel's great sin?

Answer: They broke the second commandment. They bowed down to an idol and

said it was the Lord. They also broke the third commandment and took the Lord's name in vain. To call a worthless idol "the LORD" is to use His name in a vain or in a useless way.

LOQ: Do you think this pleased God?

Answer: No, the people's actions did not please God. They had sinned against Him.

LOQ: How did God respond?

Answer: God's response is found in Exodus 32:9–10. Because of their disobedience, He calls them "stiff-necked." To be stiff-necked means to be stubborn, hard, and cruel. People who are always disobedient to authority are stiff-necked and are not pleasing to God.

LOQ: What does *mercy* mean?

Answer: Mercy is showing kindness to someone who deserves punishment.

LOQ: How did God show mercy in verse 28? How many people should have died?

Answer: Only 3,000 died even though all the people deserved to die.

LOQ: How else did God show mercy?

Answer: God had Moses continue leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. This revealed that God had not given up on them. He did not throw them away but kept them as His own.

LOQ: What was the harm that He was going to do to them?

Answer: He was going to destroy them.

LOQ: What were the three ways in which Moses responded to Israel's sin?

Answer: He prayed that God would have mercy on the people. He got very angry and broke the tablets that had the Ten Commandments on them. He burned and ground into fine dust the golden calf, scattered it into the water, and made the people drink it.

Summary

The people of Israel asked Aaron to make a symbol for them to worship. They directly disobeyed God's commands to not make a carved image. Aaron went along with the desires of the people and made a golden calf. Even after the Lord's faithful provision and awesome display of power, the people did not want to obey Him. God was merciful and did not kill all of them. Moses prayed to God, and God answered with mercy to the people. This is important for us as well.

Application

We need to recognize that God has had great mercy on us. We also commit acts of idolatry, not with figures or statues but with wanting pleasure, possessions, or attention more than God. Each sin we commit is just as serious as the Israelites' sin. We need to cry out to God for forgiveness and mercy. When we see others who are sinning, we need to pray that God will be merciful to them as well. Pray that God will cause them to repent and ask for forgiveness. Then they can experience the mercy of God too.



Presentation Ideas

A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Shattering Sample

Before this class session, make a tablet out of clay. Let it dry completely. For a visual example at the beginning of the lesson, drop the tablet on a table and let it shatter. In today's lesson, Moses shatters the Ten Commandments because of Israel's sin.



Prayer Acrostic

Write out the acrostic "PRAYER" vertically on the board. Summarize the main points of Moses' prayer on behalf of Israel in Exodus 32:11–14 by writing these short phrases next to the letters. Emphasize that Moses' prayer focused on God's character and actions.

Pleaded with a sovereign God

Recalled God's powerful deliverance of Israel

Appealed to God's faithfulness

Yeared for God to be glorified among the nations

Entreated God's mercy

Requested God to relent from sending disaster



Reaction Charades

Before teaching on the three responses of Moses to Israel's idolatry (Ex. 32:11–20), ask three student volunteers to come up and act out Moses' reactions in front of the class. Have the responses written on index cards to show to each student actor. Allow the class to shout out guesses during the game until someone gives the correct answer.

Three Responses of Moses

1. Prayed (Ex. 32:1–14)

2. Broke the tablet containing the Ten Commandments (Ex. 32:15–19)

3. Burned and ground the golden calf into fine dust (Ex. 32:20)

Praise and Worship

Cleanse Me

Create in Me a Clean Heart

I Will Sing of the Mercies

My Jesus, I Love Thee

Take My Life and Let It Be

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



How to Pray

Review Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:11–13. First, he prayed about God's past blessings to His people (brought them out of Egypt). Then Moses made a specific request (do not destroy them). Finally, Moses remembered God's promises that were applicable (Abrahamic Covenant). Students can pray in the same way. First, remember God's blessings and thank Him for them. (Dear God, thank you for...) Then make requests. (Tell students about how God is all-powerful and can do anything. However, He will answer prayer according to His will.) Finally, pray to God about His promises to us in the Bible. (Since God does not lie, if He promises something to us, He will provide it!) Teachers should emulate this prayer, too, when praying with the students.



Grumbling

As the Israelites waited for Moses to return from the mountain, they became impatient. Their impatience turned to grumbling. This grumbling weakened Aaron's ability to make wise decisions. He must have been tired of hearing all their complaining, so he finally gave in to them. Do your grumbles and complaints wear down your parents? Do you ever keep whining until they finally give in to your desires? Can these grumbings cause your parents to give in and allow you to make poor choices? What should your response be when your parents take a long time to respond to your questions? Have you ever pushed your parents into a decision that you wanted them to make which turned out to be the wrong choice?



"God Punishes Israel"

Use this work sheet to reinforce the key truths of this week's lesson. The work sheet is located at the back of the lesson.



Journal Page: "What Is an Intercessor?"

Give each student a copy of the journal page at the back of this lesson. The students can work on the page individually, in small groups, or at home.

Coloring Sheets

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

"You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).



Tenth Commandment

If you have decided to assemble the Ten Commandments as you go through them, post the tenth commandment. What is covetousness? We have learned that covetousness is wrongly wanting something that belongs to someone else. It is based on greed and the desire for more, which are sinful attitudes of the heart.

Covetousness is wrong because it is an attitude or belief that God has not given us enough or all that we need and that somehow, He has made a mistake in giving us what He already has. We need to guard our hearts from this sinful attitude and remember that God indeed has given us all that we will ever need.

God *Punishes* Israel



Exodus 32

Name _____

1. What was Israel's great sin in Exodus 32? _____
2. Write one commandment the Israelites broke when they worshiped the golden calf.

3. In verse 9, the Lord called the people of Israel a _____ people.
4. How was God going to punish the Israelites? _____
5. Who pleaded with the Lord on behalf of the Israelites? _____
6. List three things Moses did when he saw the Israelites dancing around the golden calf.

7. In Exodus 32:35 we read that the Lord _____ the people for what they did with the golden calf.

What Is an Intercessor?

Today in Sunday School, you learned that Moses interceded for the Israelites. What does it mean to intercede for someone and to be an intercessor?

Would you like to read a prayer Christ prayed for you? It is in John 17:9–24.

In ancient times, if you were a friend of the king and you asked him to have mercy on your friend who had wronged the king and was condemned to die, you would be an intercessor. Today, if you are a believer, when you pray for your friend who has sinned against God, you are being an intercessor.

Who will you intercede for this week?

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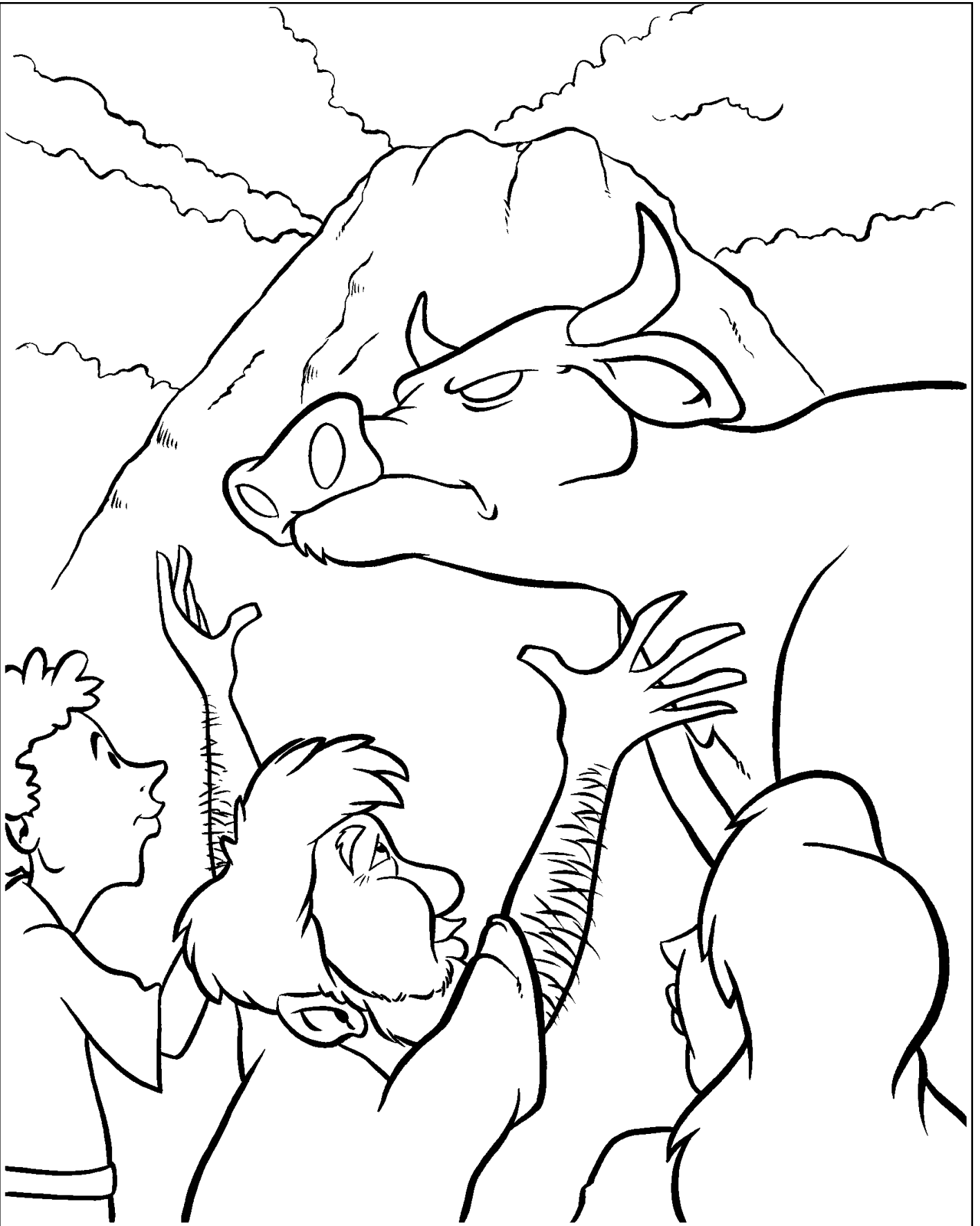
Who will you intercede for this week?

Fill in the blanks below.
Use the Scripture references provided to find the answers.

Prayed	Prayed For	God's Answer
Abraham <u>(Ex. 8:8-11)</u>	<u>(Gen. 18:22-23)</u> Pharaoh	<u>(Gen. 18:32)</u> <u>(Ex. 8:12-15)</u>
Moses <u>(Rom. 8:34)</u>	<u>(Num. 11:1-2)</u> <u>(Rom. 8:34)</u>	<u>(Num. 11:2)</u> <u>(Rom. 5:8; John 3:16)</u>

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**“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘...Your people...have corrupted themselves.... They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it’”
(Exodus 32:7-8).**



Moses prayed, "Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people" (Exodus 32:12c).

