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Preparing for this lesson, two competing images came mind. First, the scene from Mel Brooks' film, ***History of the World, Part I***, where Brooks, playing Moses, is coming down the mountain with three stone tablets. Near the bottom he says, "*Hear me. Hear me. O pay heed. The Lord God, the great Jehovah hath given unto you these 15 ...*" then drops one of the tablets and it smashes. Without hesitation, he looks down, and says, "*These 10 commandments for all to obey.*"

There's the epic film, ***The Ten Commandments***, in which Charlton Heston, acting as Moses, has just received the stone tablets from God. He comes down the mountain, finds the people with the golden calf idol and he hurls the tablets at the golden calf, causing an impressive explosion, with sparks and flames everywhere, and people fleeing for their lives. Neither of these scenes are true to the biblical account, so take your pick!

How do we imagine God if we have neither met nor experienced Him?

The *family of Jacob and the descendants of Israel* experienced God's hand of **deliverance** as they fled slavery in Egypt, God's hand of **rescue** at the seashore, and God's hand of **provision** when they complained about a lack of meat and bread. Now towards the end of the second month "on the other side", they are getting ready for the rest of the journey.

Judging from the written account thus far, there appears to be a cantankerous, complaining and rebellious group travelling with them. Happy to escape slavery in Egypt, every difficulty was Moses' fault. At the seashore, they complained, *Why did you bring us our here in the wilderness to die? Weren't there enough graves in Egypt to bury us?*¹ ... they ranted. One month later, they complained against Moses, *If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt. There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted.*² The following month, they complained *Why did you bring us*

¹ Exodus 14:11-12

² Exodus 16:3

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*out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us with thirst, our children and our livestock too?*³

This is a leap year, and yesterday an eight year old girl was celebrating her 2nd birthday. Now imagine this child on a long journey. What is the one question they keep repeating? - "*Are we there yet?*", and that was exactly how this group of escaped slaves were behaving. Their journey had only just begun, but every time they faced difficulty, they nailed Moses with the question, *Why did you bring us out of Egypt? To suffer the indignity of hunger and thirst in the wilderness?*

If there's anything worse than slowly plodding along towards an unknown destination countless miles down the road, it's coming to a full stop in that journey with countless miles ahead.

They were paused in their journey at the foot of Mount Sinai and that's when real trouble began. Moses had gone up the mountain, where God had said to him, *When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain*⁴; as would be expected, he was there a long time, long enough for this group of trouble-makers to force themselves on Aaron, *Make us some gods who can lead us! We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses who brought us here from the land Egypt!*

Like many passages in the Bible, this is rich in teaching and learning.

The **first** thing we learn is that **God has placed worship in everyone's hearts**. It's not that we need "a god" to worship. God placed His Spirit in us, the Spirit which beckons us to worship Him. When we deny God the worship due to Him, it leaves a hunger, a void in our spirit. Some try to satisfy this hunger with food or alcohol or drugs, others try to fill the void with over work or other addictive behaviour, all of which become the gods we worship.

³ Exodus 17:3

⁴ Exodus 3:12

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Years ago, I met a person we would call "a high-powered city-type" who said, *When I have made the wealth I need to be reasonably comfortable, I will set side time to learn about God and worship Him!* He had to go through painful family stresses to learn his priorities were wrong!

The Israelites had the same hunger to worship God, but fell for the trap all humans fall for, *If you cannot see or hear or feel Him, He is not there!*, and we make god out of the wrong things.

St. Augustine described what the Israelites did as, "**disordered love**," or the love of the wrong objects in one's life. We all fall prey to idol worship and idolatry, to the disordered love of something other than the One, True God.

The **second** lesson we take is about leadership, and the question is this: *Do we place our trust in the leader, or do we place our trust in God who placed the person in the position of leadership?*

When we studied the character of Daniel, we read him tell the king Nebuchadnezzar, *"It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings."*⁵

When Pilate said to Jesus, *"Don't you know that I have the authority to pardon you, and the authority to crucify you?"*, Jesus replied, *"You haven't a shred of authority over me except what has been given you from Heaven."*⁶

The trouble-makers among the Israelites placed their faith in Moses, not on the God of Moses. So when Moses was not seen for a while, they questioned his authority to be their leader and asked Aaron, *make us some gods who can lead us*, and what do they make? A replica Egyptian idol they would have seen worshipped during their time in Egypt.

The lessons we learn about leadership is, the leader is not perfect and is prone to failure. If we accept the fact that **ALL** leadership is God-

⁵ Daniel 2:21

⁶ John 19:10-11

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ordained, and that in position, leaders fall prey to power and wealth, which puts them on the slippery slope from invincibility, to pride and arrogance, and finally hubris, we can appeal to God who placed them in the position of responsibility (not authority!). God listens, He hears and He acts, especially when leaders have assumed God's authority.

Dr Christie Wilson, missionary in Afghanistan during the late 1960s and 70s mentions a church built in central Kabul, destroyed by government forces on 17 July, 1973 when they heard an "underground Church" existed under the church! Dr Wilson writes, *The very day of the destruction of the Church and the excavation of the foundations was complete, the government responsible was overthrown. It had been a monarchy for 227 years, and then it became a republic.*⁷ If you trace the troubles of this beautiful country and its most amazing people, it goes back to this date in history. Leaders who mess with God in this world, are accountable for their actions.

The **third** and final lesson from this passage is this: *a big part of exercising our faith, is waiting!*

Waiting is a necessary part of our lives for two reasons: first and foremost is that God is waiting for us to be still and quiet ourselves, to listen to Him, to hear Him confirm the direction of our lives, to hear Him speak to our weaknesses, and assure us of His strength.

What we do while we wait, reveals the depth and strength of our faith in God.

The Israelites travelling through the wilderness saw evidence of God and experienced His power and His love, unlike most people throughout history. But they wanted to dictate the terms of the relationship. They became impatient and broke the very first two rules God gave - no other gods before Him and no graven images. Instead of trusting God they

⁷ "Today's Tentmakers: Self-support: An Alternative Model for Worldwide Witness" by J. Christy Wilson. Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon USA. page 124

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decided to displace God. Thousands of years later, before Jesus ascended and returned to Heaven, He told the disciples to return to Jerusalem and **wait**, which they did. 40 days they waited, praying and waiting. They were told to wait and they did!

God knows what's going on in our lives. He wants us to turn our attention off ourselves, and focus on Him. I can't help but wonder how often we frustrate ourselves by waiting for God to do something, when He's just waiting for us to respond to Him.

Learning to wait upon God is part of our journey of life. What we do, how we spend our waiting time, determines our relationship with God. Those who focus on God during times of uncertainty and waiting, will experience peace as their faith grows. Those who consciously dismiss God and reject His direction, God will never impose Himself. He will leave us to suffer the consequences of his absence and our mistakes.

What are you waiting for today? And what will you do while waiting?

AMEN.