

## OFF THE BUS

### A Devotional Meditation on Ki Tisa (When You Take)

Exodus 30:11-34:35; 1 Kings 18:1-39;  
Psalm 119:11; Romans 8:28-39, 11:22-23; James 2:14-24

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My first high school church choir tour began with a small disaster. We sang at a church in Nashville during their Sunday morning worship service, and then stopped for lunch at a nearby mall. We were on a tight schedule since we had to perform that night at a church in Lexington, Kentucky. Our bus captain explained that we had only one hour for lunch, and emphasized that we had to be back on the bus on time. The choir members then scattered to the fast-food restaurants within sight, but my friend Monte and I had a different idea. We saw a seafood restaurant across the parking lot, and reasoned that we could enjoy a quality meal within the allotted hour. We kept watch on the time, and finished our lunch with five minutes to spare, or so we thought. When we walked out of the restaurant, our bus was nowhere in sight. We walked to the other side of the mall where the second bus had parked, but it was also gone. It seemed we had been left behind.



*Missing the Bus. Photo by Richard, February 11, 2006, [via Flickr](#).*

That turned out to be an adventurous afternoon. We made our way to the bus station in Nashville, where we called the church in Lexington and left a message. When the choir arrived, the leaders got the message, and our bus captain arranged for us to get on an evening flight to Lexington. When he met us at the airport, we asked him who we should pay for the cost of the airline tickets. He said not to worry about it, that the cost was on him because he had failed to make sure we were on the bus before it left. Thus ended our small disaster.

Except that I'm not so sure our bus captain was at fault. The situation was confusing, and our poor judgment at stretching the limit of our allotted time for lunch only made the confusion worse. Our adult leaders would have been justified in holding us accountable for failing to obey instructions, and sending us back home at our parents' expense. It was only the grace and mercy of our bus captain that kept us on the tour, at great cost to himself.

That was my first practical lesson in what our Messiah does for us. That gentleman on our choir tour had unknowingly helped me begin to understand what Paul explained:

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? It is Messiah, who died, and moreover was raised, and is now at the right hand of God and who also intercedes for us.

Romans 8:33-34 TLV

This is the kind of intercession not for the guiltless, but for those who deserve destruction because they have violated God's standards of righteousness. His intercession does apply to our small errors, such as being late, or forgetting to do an assigned task, or inadvertently taking something that belongs to someone else. We are still responsible for such errors, and God's grace and mercy apply there as well. Forgiveness for those small indiscretions is reason enough to thank and praise our Redeemer, but we have even more reason to thank Him for interceding on our behalf in matters of blatant disobedience and rebellion – the kind we do on a daily basis when we ignore God's instructions and indulge our own pleasures.

We make light of our daily disobedience to God, just as our Hebrew ancestors did. They had been redeemed at great cost from Egypt, just as we have been redeemed at great cost. Like them, we are also in the process of being educated in the ways of our God, which includes thorough testing to see if we were actually serious when we accepted His invitation to move from death to life. And, like them, we grow impatient when God doesn't move on our schedule.

It wouldn't be so bad if we paid attention to His voice, but that requires some effort at learning how He communicates, and at internalizing His word in our hearts so we avoid sinning against Him. Instead, we follow the footsteps of our ancestors in the wilderness. They outsourced their relationship with God to Moses, just as we outsource our relationship with God to pastors, teachers, rabbis, and saintly grandmothers.

It is this cavalier attitude toward our holy God that results in the sudden appearance of golden calves. When the Israelites at Sinai strong-armed Aaron into making an actual Golden Calf to represent God, they were not so much turning their backs on God, but remaking Him in their own image. It's easy to do this with an Invisible God, but we can't get away with it forever. At Sinai, God required immediate corrective action. He was ready to do it Himself when He told Moses to leave Him alone so He could destroy the Israelites and start again by making a nation from Moses. That's where we see another practical lesson in intercession:

Then Moses sought *ADONAI* his God and said, "*ADONAI*, why should Your wrath burn hot against Your people, whom You have brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out to do evil, to slay them in the mountains, and to annihilate them from the face of the earth?' Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this destruction against Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of I will give to your offspring, and they will inherit it forever.'"

Exodus 32:11-13 TLV

Yeshua's intercession is like this. He stands in the gap for Israel, just as Moses did.

Why Israel? Because that is the Covenant Nation God chose from all nations on the earth. That's what Paul means when he writes about "the elect." It's why we from the nations who pledge allegiance to Israel's Messiah become part of that nation by adoption. It's also why the visible remnant of that nation, the Jewish people, remain part of it so that the rest of us have something to be adopted into. And when we succumb to our inherent

foolishness and rebel again against our God, He does exactly what He did at Sinai: He looks to His Intercessor to find a reason not to blot us out of existence.

We won't know until the Kingdom is fully come on earth how close we have all come – perhaps on a daily basis – to destruction because of our disobedience, willful and otherwise. That's when we'll find out how much of the good things of God we missed for the same reason. Part of His mercy is that His perfection of His elect takes place over millennia. Individuals and even entire generations can fail to obtain the fulness of His intentions, but their failure cannot halt the process. That is why we can look back at our predecessors, from those who made the Golden Calf to our parents who were blind to certain things we see more clearly, and discern the kindness and severity of God. Our children and grandchildren will do the same with us, hopefully rejoicing in the good examples we set before them, and learning from our errors.

This is how the Covenant Elect enter the Kingdom. We believe God, and He counts it as righteousness. Believing, of course, means acting on what we have heard so that our lives demonstrate, however imperfectly, evidence that our Redeemer's work in us is having the intended transformative impact. It's a journey, and it can be confusing, which is why we have to listen and obey lest we find ourselves off the bus.