

Exodus Chapter 32

Exodus 32:1 "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for [as for] this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."

“Make us gods”: Such was the influence of the polytheistic world in which they lived that the Israelites, in a time of panic or impatience, succumbed to a pagan world view. What made it even more alarming was the rapidity with which pagan idolatry swept in despite recent real-life demonstrations of God’s greatness and goodness toward them. But they weren’t just requesting gods, but gods to lead them forward, “which shall go before us.” The pagan world view had robbed them of seeing God as having led them out of Egypt and instead they scornfully attributed the Exodus to Moses (Acts 7:40).

While Moses was experiencing a spiritual peak, the people of God hit bottom. Fearful that Moses would not return and their desiring something tangible to follow, they asked for substitute gods that would “go before” them. Within weeks of experiencing the presence of God at Mount Sinai (Chapter 19), they were involved in an orgy of idolatry (Acts. 7:40).

We see here, that while Moses was communing with God for 40 days on Mount Sinai, the people became restless. Perhaps, the presence of God, which had led them from Egypt to where they were staying, had moved to the top of the mountain where He was communing with Moses. Moses had not told them how long he would be gone, and they probably thought that he had left for good. These people soon forgot that God was not something you made with your hands.

They should have remembered God through Moses' discrediting the false gods of Egypt. The true God had led them this far. People have a tendency to soon forget. Soon they had worked themselves up to the point of going to Aaron to make them a god. They had worked themselves up to the state of believing that Moses would not be back. They want something they can see to worship. They wanted a leader they could worship, as well.

Verses 2-4: Aaron suggested the people give him their “golden earrings”; then he melted the gold into a “molded calf”. This action clearly broke the first two commandments (see Exodus 20:3-6). Although the Egyptians worshiped cows, probably more pertinent here is that bovine imagery was directly associated with the Canaanite worship of Baal. This golden calf is a dark foreshadowing of Israel’s future idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7).

Exodus 32:2 "And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which [are] in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring [them] unto me."

Perceiving that they were not to be dissuaded from their evil counsel, and diverted from their purpose, but were determined at all events to have an image made to represent God unto them in a visible manner.

"Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters": These were some of the jewels in gold they had borrowed of the Egyptians. And it seems that, in those times and countries, men, as well as women, used to wear earrings. And so Pliny says, in the eastern countries men used to wear gold in their ears. And this may be confirmed from the instance of the Ishmaelites and Midianites (Judges 8:24). Aaron did not ask the men for theirs, but for those of their wives and children. It may be, because he might suppose they were fonder of them, and would not so easily part with them. Hoping by this means to have put them off of their design.

"And bring them unto me": To make a god of, as they desired. That is, the representation of one.

Perhaps Aaron thought that they would not give up their gold. I really believe maybe Aaron had given up too on Moses returning. At any rate, Aaron should have known better than to be persuaded to do such a thing.

In chapter 20 of Exodus, we saw that God spoke with the people, and they were warned not to make gods of silver or gold. They heard God's voice and saw the smoke and were terribly frightened. How in the world they forgot that so quickly, I do not know. Aaron had been even closer than the people. It seems so unthinkable that Aaron would do this.

Exodus 32:3 "And all the people brake off the golden earrings which [were] in their ears, and brought [them] unto Aaron."

Aaron had miscalculated the strength of the people's fanaticism. Not the slightest resistance was offered to his requirement, not the slightest objection made. "All the people," with one accord, surrendered their earrings. Some measure is hereby afforded of the intensity of the feeling which was moving the people and urging them to substitute an idolatrous worship for the abstract and purely spiritual religion which had reigned supreme since their departure from Egypt.

If he thought giving up their valuable jewelry would stop them, he was wrong. It is so strange today that worship of other gods usually costs the person greatly, but he still does it. There is something about giving up something that means a great deal to you that seems to make people happier in their worship. The one true God gives us salvation freely. We may give our tithes and offerings and of ourselves to His service, but salvation is a free gift. We do not work to get it, and we certainly can't buy it.

Notice that this was not just part of these people; the Scripture says "ALL". They were so eager to have something that they could see to worship, that they were willing to give their jewelry, or anything else.

Exodus 32:4 "And he received [them] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These [be] thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

“A molten calf”: The young bull, which Aaron caused to be fashioned, was a pagan religious symbol of virile power. A miniature form of the golden calf, although made of bronze and silver, was found at the site of the ancient philistine city of Ashkelon. Since it dates to about 1550 B.C. it indicates that calf worship was known not only in Egypt, but also in Canaan prior to the time of Moses. In worshiping the calf, the Israelites violated the first 3 commandments (20:3-7).

Aaron it seemed was more interested in pleasing these people than he was in heeding the instructions God had given all of them at the foot of the mountain. It looks like being raised by Hebrew parents would have taught him better. Moses' first mistake was asking for a helper, when God first called him to bring the people out of Egypt. We see no mention of Hur, here. Whether Aaron did all the engraving himself or had help, we do not know.

Why he made a calf, only God and Aaron know. Any image of anything would have been just as bad a sin. God had explicitly told them not to do this very thing. Their fear was short lived. Cows are being worshipped even today in various parts of the world. If you will notice the places where cows are worshipped, there is famine in the land.

Exodus 32:5 "And when Aaron saw [it], he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow [is] a feast to the LORD."

“Aaron” may have intended a partial obedience – he would give the people what they asked for, and then he would use it to worship God. But by calling it a feast “to the Lord, Aaron broke the third commandment (see 20:7).

“Feast to the Lord”: Syncretism brought about the ludicrous combination of an idol, an altar, and a festal celebration held in a bizarre attempt to honor the true God.

Aaron was really confused. He was proclaiming a feast to the Lord, but at the very same time had made the golden calf (false god). In many countries in the world today when Christianity springs forth in a country where false gods have been worshipped, they have a tendency to try to bring some of the old habits of worship with them. This is not good. You cannot mix worship of other gods in. The true God will not permit it.

The world and the church cannot be mixed. God is a jealous God. This was a terrible mixture. It was almost as if they were saying, I will worship both and whichever one is right will get me to heaven. Compromise is not part of God's plan. He will not be compromised. This offering would not be acceptable to God.

Exodus 32:6 "And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

“Rose up to play”: The Hebrew word allows for the inclusion of drunken and immoral activities so common to idolatrous fertility cults in their revelry (see the description in verses 7 and 25). Syncretism had robbed the people of all ethical alertness and moral discernment (1 Cor. 10:7).

The verb suggests illicit and immoral sexual activity in relation to those practices normally accompanying the fertility rites found among the Canaanites who worshiped the god Baal and his consort Ashtoreth. The same verb is used (in Genesis 26:8), where it is said, “Abimelech ... saw ... Isaac was sporting with [caressing] Rebekah his wife.” Most feel this involved conjugal caress. The nakedness of the people (in verse 25), seems to support further the conclusion that this included the sensuous fertility practices common to the peoples all around Israel (see notes on 1 Cor. 10:7-8, 13-14), for the present-day application of these ancient teachings.

The verb rendered “play” comes from the same root as the name “Isaac,” which refers to laughter (see Gen. 21:1-70). Here, it means sexual acts done in the worship of pagan gods. Immorality often accompanies idolatry, even today (Rom. 1:22-24).

We see, that they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, thinking this would satisfy these gods. It seems they were so anxious to worship, that they got up really early in the morning. After sacrifice, there was always a feast and this was no exception. The difference in this feast and the holy feast was that this was followed by sex play. This play really meant an orgy. Many false religions appeal to the fleshly nature of man. In the Strong’s concordance this particular word used for play means make sport.

Verses 7-14: “Corrupted” and “stiff-necked” means unresponsive and stubborn (33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27). God wanted to destroy the people and create a new “nation” of Moses. Moses appealed to:

- (1) God’s responsibility, asserting that these are “Your people;
- (2) God’s reputation (the Egyptians would make false conclusions); and
- (3) God’s reliability, citing Yahweh’s solemn oath to Israel’s forefathers.

Exodus 32:7 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted [themselves]:"

“Thy people”: In alerting Moses to the trouble in the camp, God designated Israel as Moses’ people, a change of possessive pronoun Moses could not have missed. Beforehand God had acknowledged them as “My people.” In pleading with God for Israel and in responding to God’s offer to make of him a great nation (verse 10), Moses maintained what he knew to be true, given the Exodus and the divine promises to the patriarchs (verses 12-13). And designated them correctly as “Your people” (verse 11).

God told Moses hurry up and get down to your people. We see that God told Moses that these people were his responsibility. He called them "thy people" to Moses. You can see quickly from

this that God was strongly angered by what they had done. "Corrupted" means that they were ruined as far as God is concerned.

Exodus 32:8 "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These [be] thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

“Molten calf”: The people were unable to wait for Moses, and they broke the second commandment by persuading Aaron to make an image of God to satisfy their idolatrous lusts. Aaron sinfully submitted to their dreams, and not only produced a replica of the familiar Egyptian god Apis (god of nature), but called for “a feast to the Lord” (verse 5). Which was really turned into the abominable orgy mentioned above.

We see that God Himself had commanded them not to make a graven image. These people made solemn pledges to God and the minute Moses was gone for a while; they forgot everything they had promised. These people were far too easily deceived into worshipping anything they could see with their eyes. They were not grounded in the one true God.

Exodus 32:9 "And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it [is] a stiffnecked people:"

This phrase, afterwards so common (Exodus 33:3; 33:5; 34:5; Deut. 9:6; 9:13; 10:16; 2 Chron. 30:8; 36:13; Psalm 75:5; Jer. 17:23; Acts 7:51), occurs here for the first time. It is generally explained as “obstinate,” but rather means “perverse”. The metaphor: being taken from the horse that stiffens his neck against the pull of the rein and will not be guided by the rider. The LXX omits the verse for no intelligible reason.

Rebellion throughout the Bible was called witchcraft. This being stiffnecked had to do with not wanting to be controlled. People who do not like to be controlled are rebellious.

Exodus 32:10 "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."

Even as our Lord tested the devotion of two of His disciples (Luke 24:28), so here God tested Moses' singleness of purpose.

“I will make of thee a great nation”: God could have consumed all the people and started over again with Moses, just like he had earlier with Abraham (Genesis 12).

God was so angered by these people and the terrible sin they had committed that He was about to kill the whole 2-1/2 million of them. God told Moses, I will destroy all of them and start again with just you. Many people in the churches today would have you believe that God does not punish, but this is not true. To have Satan attack you is bad, but the worst thing I can think of is to cause God to pour out His wrath upon you.

Exodus 32:11 "And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?"

Moses had not lost his interest in God, though Israel had.

"Why doth thy wrath wax hot": So hot as to consume them utterly? For though he saw reason enough why God should be angry with them, yet he humbly expostulates with God whether it would be for his honor utterly to destroy them. Or this is a petition delivered in form of an interrogation or expostulation, (as Matt. 8:29; compare with Luke 8:28).

"Which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?" This had the Lord ascribed to Moses, and observes it is an aggravation of their ingratitude to Moses, and here Moses retorts, and ascribes it to God, and to his mighty power; as for himself he was only a weak feeble instrument. The Lord was the efficient cause of their deliverance, in which he had shown the exceeding greatness of his power. And he argues from hence, that seeing he had exerted his mighty arm in bringing them from thence, that he would not now lift it up against them and destroy them.

Exodus 32:12 "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people."

Those that remained, as the Targum of Jonathan, who were not drowned in the Red sea. A good man will be concerned for the honor and glory of God among the enemies of his people. That their mouths may not be opened to blaspheme the Lord and speak ill of his ways (see Josh. 7:9). And this is sometimes an argument with God himself, not to do that to his people they deserve, lest it should give occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully, insult, and triumph (Deut. 32:26).

"For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth": That he brought them out of Egypt, not with a good but ill design. Not to bring them into the land of Canaan, as they promised themselves, but to destroy them in the mountains. Not to erect them into a great kingdom and nation; which should make a considerable figure in the world; but to cut them off from being a people at all. The mountains where they were at now, are Sinai and Horeb, and there might be others thereabout, among which they were encamped: the Targum of Jonathan is, "among the mountains of Tabor, and Hermon, and Sirion, and Sinai".

"Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people": Not that there is any turning or shadow of turning with God, or any change of his mind, or any such passions and affections in him as here expressed. But this is said after the manner of men concerning him, when he alters the course of his dealings with men according to his unalterable will. And does not do the evil threatened by him, and which the sins of men deserve.

We see in this Moses as a type of Christ. Jesus is constantly pleading our case before God. We, like these people, do not deserve the pardon of God. Jesus, as our advocate with the Father, is speaking on our behalf even now in heaven. Moses told God that His anger was about to cause Him to waste all the effort He had spent to save this people. Moses even reminded God that the Egyptians would feel as if their false gods had truly won. This repentance here was not like us seeking repentance for the evil we have done. God was justified in His wrath.

God knew ahead of time that He would forgive them and give them another chance. He showed by this that He could be angered and He could destroy everyone if He desired. He still listens to the prayers of His people. Especially to Moses who had gone to all this trouble along with God to get these people out of Egypt and established as a nation who feared God. This evil against this people was justified, but God found a place of forgiveness. Just as every one of us deserves death, but through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross have been pardoned and given life eternal in Jesus.

Exodus 32:13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit [it] for ever."

“Israel”: Another name for Jacob, which means “one who strives with God” (Gen. 32:28).

Moses reminded God of the Abrahamic covenant. Of course God could turn rocks into people. He really doesn't need us. God promised Abraham this seed would come from him. Abraham was faithful to God. This was one reason right here that God didn't destroy them. God fulfills all of His promises.

Exodus 32:14 "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people."

Changed his sentence at the entreaty of Moses, who in this represented the Lord Christ, the great Mediator and Intercessor for all the sinful race. He was pleased not to inflict upon them that punishment which he threatened (Exodus 32:10). And so acted as men do when they repent and change their minds. Though he designed to punish them, yet he would not ruin them. See here the power of prayer! God suffers himself to be prevailed with by humble, believing importunity.

And see the compassion of God toward poor sinners, and how ready he is to forgive! It must, however, be well observed that such expressions as this, of the Lord's repenting, must be understood as spoken after the manner of men. For that no proper change or repentance can take place in the Divine Mind, plainly follows from the perfection of the divine knowledge. Which comprehends at one view all things, past, present, and to come, and can never be surprised at their happening as they do. Or change his mind on that account. See this further explained (in Genesis 6:6).

This really meant that God's heart softened and He spared them. He did not intend to kill them from the beginning. They did deserve death, but God spared their lives, partially because of the faith of their ancestors.

Exodus Chapter 32 Questions

1. Why did the people get restless?
2. What request did they make to Aaron?
3. What did they say about Moses?
4. How many days was Moses communing with God?
5. These people soon forgot that God was not something you _____ .
6. What kind of a god did they want?
7. Aaron told them to take off what and give to him?
8. In chapter 20 of Exodus, God told these people what?
9. What did Aaron do with the gold he received of the people?
10. What did the people say about this?
11. Aaron was more interested in pleasing the _____ than _____ .
12. In foreign countries where Christianity springs forth, some try to bring what with them?
13. What statement makes you know that the people were anxious to worship this false god?
14. What 2 types of offerings did they make?
15. After they ate and drank, what did they do?
16. Many false religions today appeal to the _____ of man.
17. What did God call these people?
18. What did corrupted mean in verse seven?
19. What had Aaron made for them to worship?
20. What had these people forgotten?
21. What did God tell Moses was wrong with these people?

22. What was called witchcraft throughout the Bible?
23. God told Moses to let Him alone so He could do what?
24. Who would God make into a great nation if He destroyed the children of Israel?
25. Moses told God He had brought them out how?
26. What was Moses asking God to do?
27. What would the Egyptians believe, if God destroyed Israel here in the desert?
28. Who was Moses a type of in all this?
29. What three ancestors of these children of Israel did Moses remind God of?
30. What covenant had God made with them?
31. What did it really mean when it said God repented?