



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for September 19, 2010
Released on Wednesday, September 15, 2010**

"God's Hatred of Idolatry"

Lesson Text: Exodus 32:1-10

Background Scripture: Exodus 32

Devotional Reading: Psalm 24:3,4,6

Exodus 32:1-10

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.

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.

3 And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.

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.

5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord.

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.

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:

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.

9 And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

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.

INTRODUCTION

Israel's deliverance from Egypt ranks as one of the most significant miraculous events in the history of this nation. In it God clearly demonstrated the impotence of all of Egypt's false gods and His own infinite might. The ten plagues showed Israel and Egypt that God was alive and active toward His chosen people. The crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground was evidence of His purpose of freeing them from slavery. The

provision of water from solid rock and manna from heaven was further evidence of His greatness and care.

Surely with all these events being done so recently for the Israelites, their faith would be strong and their confidence in God unshakable. Surely they were ready to trust and obey even if unexpected circumstances arose to test that faith. Surely they would not forget for a long time how God had worked on their behalf in their times of need and how He had actively controlled various situations in order to accomplish good for them. Surely they fully understood the folly of the Egyptian religious system.

How quickly they forgot about trusting God. How brief was their comprehension of the foolishness of Egypt's religious system. How soon they turned to trusting in their own ways.

Getting Egypt out of Israel

The exodus was the event that brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt. But getting Egypt out of Israel was quite another matter. It involved the removal of all ties to that previous way of life. The practices of Egyptian culture were no longer appropriate (if they ever were) for the Israelites, given their covenant with God (Exodus 19:5,6). Getting Israel out of Egypt was a geographical step; getting Egypt out of Israel was a spiritual issue.

In a way, the latter transition was far more challenging. The Israelites had to be willing to sever ties with their past. God's power had delivered them from physical bondage. Did the Israelites have the willpower and resolve to avoid spiritual bondage?

The incident recorded in today's printed text reveals that getting Egypt out of Israel was not going to happen overnight. A high price would be paid in the process of learning that lesson.

ISRAEL'S SIN (Exodus 32:1-6)

1. What incident is the background for what happened in this text (Exodus 32:1a)?

At this point, Moses has been on Mount Sinai for 40 days (Exodus 24:18). When he announced his plan earlier to ascend the mountain, he had not given any specific time that he would come back. He had simply told the elders to wait until he and Joshua returned (24:13,14).

The word *delayed* implies that the people are becoming impatient with Moses. Forty days must seem like more than enough time for him to stay on the mountain! They were probably eager to get moving on their journey to Canaan and saw no value in staying put any longer.

2. What did the people feel they needed in Moses' absence (v. 1b)?

The degree of influence Moses had on the people was astounding. For them to feel that God was no longer present when Moses was away indicates their faith was more in him than in God. This showed an immense amount of spiritual immaturity and indicates for us the importance of individual spiritual growth. We must develop a strong trust in God apart from those who lead us so that we can stand firmly in our faith when our leadership changes or disappoints us.

It seems inconceivable to us as we read this account that the people insist that Aaron make idols. How can they reject the Lord so completely and so quickly—with all the evidence that they have witnessed? But the people are prepared to reject such leadership and replace it with something abysmally inferior.

Not only is the people's demand a rejection of the Lord's authority, they also demonstrate great contempt for His appointed messenger. They scornfully refer to him as *this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt*. They seem to have forgotten that Moses is only the human instrument who led them out of Egypt. Their ultimate deliverer is the Lord!

The Results of Patience

Although Scripture acknowledges the value of patience, this trait is often lacking. Christians are not immune to this problem. However, at times God's people have shown great patience (and its companion virtue, perseverance). The great cathedrals of Europe are a testimony to this fact.

Generation after generation took part in erecting these striking houses of worship. Many who helped had no hope that they would ever see the finished results of their efforts. Construction of the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, began in 1248. One of the church's towers had reached only one-third of its ultimate height 200 years later. After 300 years, the roof still had only a board covering. The building was completed in 1880, over 600 years after the foundation was laid!

The people Moses was leading had no such patience. Moses had been on the mountain six weeks when they began clamoring for a different god who would satisfy their longings immediately. So, which are we more like: the Israelites or the cathedral builders? When change in the church, society, or even our personal lives is not moving at the pace we think it should, we need to remember what Israel's impatience led to! —Charles R. Boatman

3. Why is it so shocking that Aaron cooperated with the people when they came with this request (vs. 2,3)?

Perhaps the most shocking thing about this incident is Aaron's compliant response to their request. He too had come to question what had become of his brother. What he should have done was courageously oppose the people's request and encourage them to trust God. He could have reminded them of the wonderful ways in which God had worked so far in bringing them to their present situation. Instead, he cooperated with them in their doubts and requested a collection of golden earrings from their families, intending to grant them their request.

4. What did Aaron do after receiving the people's gold pieces (v. 4)?

The people's response was immediate; they came with the requested gold pieces without hesitation. These earrings probably came from the Egyptian women from whom the Israelites had been told to ask for them (Exod. 11:2,3; 12:35,36). Their wishes for visible representation of leadership were so strong that they gladly gave them up.

It should be noted that Aaron fashions one calf, not multiple calves or gods. Is he trying to cover for his mistake by limiting the people to one "god" who will represent the Lord? However this question may be answered and whatever Aaron's motives may be, it cannot be denied that he allows the violation of the commandment prohibiting "any graven image" (Exodus 20:4). That Aaron is held responsible for his part in this sin is clear from Moses' later account in Deuteronomy 9:20.

The people's words reflect the high regard in which they hold the golden calf that Aaron has constructed: *These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt*. This statement blatantly, brazenly denies what the Lord had done

for the people. They are attributing God's mighty act of deliverance through the exodus to a golden calf!

5. What does this incident reveal to us about human nature?

This incident should be a stark reminder to us of how fickle human nature can be. None of us are immune to the possibility of quickly forgetting God's good and great works when faced with something unexpected. It is necessary that we consistently keep ourselves in the Word of God and spend time in prayer in order to constantly fortify our faith. It is not even enough to regularly attend church and listen to our pastor and Sunday school teacher. We must personally grow by means of the Bible and prayer.

6. What did Aaron and the people do next (vs. 6,7)?

Aaron may be said to have broken the Second Commandment by building a graven image. However, he now proceeds to promote the actual worship of the calf. Is Aaron once more trying to "save face" by encouraging the people to celebrate a *feast to the Lord*, since the word for *Lord* that Aaron uses is *Yahweh*?

Even if that is true, Aaron should realize that with the construction of a pagan symbol will come the observance of pagan practices. If Aaron is going to encourage doing something *to the Lord*, he should have done so at the outset by refusing to comply with the people's demand to "make us gods" (v. 1).

Burnt offerings and *peace offerings* were part of the ceremony confirming God's covenant as recorded in Exodus 24:1-8. Ironically, that was one of the occasions on which the Israelites had promised their obedience to all that the Lord commanded (v. 7). Here they follow their offerings by a time of eating and drinking, which accompany peace offerings (compare Leviticus 7:11-36).

But the words about rising up *to play* carry a far more ominous meaning. The Hebrew verb often has sexual connotations. Illicit sexual activity is often part of pagan worship ceremonies (compare Numbers 25:1,2). The people's earlier pledge to obey the Lord has become nothing but a farce.

What Do You Think?

How and why do people rebel against God today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Issues of personal freedom
- Wrong views of God's love and justice
- Hebrews 3:7-19

GOD'S ANGER (Exodus 32:7-10)

7. How did God describe to Moses what the people had done (vs. 7,8)?

Now the scene shifts from the people's rebellion at the foot of the mountain to the Lord's word to Moses, who had ascended the mountain. Whatever thrill Moses experienced at receiving the Lord's commandments is now tempered by the bad news that the people *have corrupted themselves* by acting in total defiance of these commandments.

In addressing Moses, the Lord refers to the Israelites as *thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt*. Why doesn't the Lord say, "Whom I brought out of Egypt" (compare Exodus 20:2)? Perhaps the Lord is indicating His wrath toward the people (32:11) and distancing himself from them by such language.

The Lord describes to Moses exactly what the Israelites have done and professed concerning the molten calf (v. 8). One may compare the language *have turned aside quickly* to what Paul writes about the Galatian Christians: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

Paul uses the incident of the golden calf to warn the Corinthians against developing the same attitude. (He quotes Exodus 32:6 in 1 Corinthians 10:7.) We dare not be too quick to criticize them for their lack of faith; as Paul cautions, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

8. What did God mean by referring to His people as stiff-necked (v. 9)?

When the Lord called Moses to lead the people out of bondage, He spoke of seeing their affliction and being moved to do something about it (Exodus 3:7,8). Now, however, the Lord sees something else about the Israelites: they are *stiffnecked*. As such, they are determined not to obey Him despite the good intentions they previously expressed (19:8; 24:3,7). They have not really grasped what it means to be a "holy nation" (19:6).

What Do You Think?

What are some signs that you are becoming "stiffnecked" toward God? What corrective action do you take?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In the church
- At home
- At work

9. What did God say He would do for Moses, and to the people because of their actions (v. 10)?

The Lord now announces a most dramatic change in His plans for the Israelites: He is prepared to destroy them. In so doing, the Lord plans to start anew using Moses as the founder of *a great nation* (compare similar language in Genesis 12:1, 2).

The very mountain where the Lord provided as a "token" of the fulfillment of His promise (Exodus 3:12) is now to be a token of His judgment. It is a stunning reversal of the Lord's intentions. But He has made it clear that the Israelites' position before Him hinges on their obedience (19:5).

Exodus 32:11-14 (not in today's text) records Moses' intercessory appeal for the wayward Israelites. Moses raises three critical concerns. First, the Lord has already (and quite recently) displayed His power on behalf of the people (v. 11); despite the people's twisted thinking in attributing their deliverance to the golden calf, that does not change the fact of what the Lord has accomplished. Second, the Egyptians will claim that the Lord has delivered the people from bondage with the ultimate aim of destroying them (v. 12); thus His reputation in the sight of the nations will be tarnished.

Third, the Lord has made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob), promising that their descendants will be as numerous as the stars of Heaven (v. 13). God established a link with the patriarchs when He called Moses and sent him to the Israelites in their suffering (Exodus 3:6, 15, 16). Will He sever that link now?

The Lord hears Moses' plea and refrains from destroying the people (Exodus 32:14). Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Twice during Moses' life-time, God offered to

destroy Israel and use Moses to found a new nation (v. 10; Numbers 14:12), but he refused. The Jews never knew the price Moses paid to be their leader. How much they owed to him, and yet how little they showed their appreciation!" (Wiersbe's *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, Victor).

However, the Israelites are not given a complete exemption from judgment. Their sin results in bitter consequences (Exodus 32:15–35). What should have been a joyous occasion has become a heartbreaking reminder of the high cost of disobedience.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Weak faith is not persevering faith (Exodus 32:1).
2. We cannot justify sin by the support it receives, for there are always those willing to accommodate it (vs. 2,3).
3. One temptation we face is not to replace God but to make Him something He is not (vs. 4,5).
4. The way we worship reflects the God we worship (vs. 6,7).
5. Even the witnessing of miracles does not guarantee genuine and lasting faith (vs. 8,9).
6. Perhaps the greatest challenge to our faith is the desire for personal glory and comfort (v. 10).

CONCLUSION

Idol Words

An idol has been defined as "anything that comes between a person and God." That simple description is hard to improve on. An idol does not have to be a "graven image" such as the golden calf.

In Colossians 3:5, Paul defines covetousness as idolatry. Thus idolatry can include violation of not only the Second Commandment (as in the case of the Israelites) but also of the Tenth. Looked at from this perspective, idolatry becomes an issue not only for primitive tribes in a remote jungle but also for highly educated people. Modern advertising constantly bombards us with messages about all the "stuff" we need to make our lives more rewarding. Such messages distract us from God's perspective.

Any act of idolatry, whether it involves a graven or computer-generated image, ultimately begins in the human heart. Idolatry was King Solomon's ruin, but it began when the king's heart "was turned from the Lord God of Israel" (1 Kings 11:9). The king failed to heed his own advice found in Proverbs 4:23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." In staying with the focus of this study, perhaps the verse could be paraphrased as follows: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the *idols* of life."

PRAYER

Father, we realize that the account of the Israelites' idolatry is for our benefit (1 Corinthians 10:11). May we examine ourselves to see what idols we have allowed to displace You. Help us destroy them before they destroy us. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

No Christian is exempt from the temptation of idolatry.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "God's Great Promise." We will look at God's mercy and grace in restoring His people. In preparation, study Exodus 34:1-10.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Willie Ferrell

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www.jesusisall.com

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