

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. – Exodus 20:4-6

Read Exodus 32:1-6

“The Golden Calf”

Even though Israel had seen the invisible God in action, they still wanted the familiar gods they could see and shape into whatever image they desired. Two popular Egyptian gods were *Hapi* (a bull) and *Hathor* (a heifer). The Canaanites around them worshipped Baal, thought of as a bull. Baal was their sacred symbol of power and fertility. These gods were closely connected to immoral sexual practices.

It is a human weakness to want a god we can see. Look up: John 20:29; Hebrews 11:1. We also form idols because they are easy to control. Since we shape them to our liking, they are convenient to obey or ignore.

v. 6 – “rose up to play” or “pagan revelry” implies sexual acts. Idolatry leads people to cast off all restraint and do whatever seems right in their own eyes; the shameful record of Israel's history will later be described this very same way. Look up: Judges 17:6. The “gods” we create place barriers between us and the love our true God wants to lavish upon us. Look up: Ephesians 1:7-9.

Read Exodus 32: 7-14

God was ready to destroy the entire nation because of their sin. God's first impulse to destroy the people was consistent with His justice (we all deserve His anger). When Moses interceded for the people God relented, consistently with His mercy.

Read Exodus 32:15-24

v.19- Overwhelmed by the sight of blatant idolatry, Moses broke the stone tablets containing the covenant commandments, which had already been broken in the hearts and actions of the people.

There is a time for righteous anger, but we must be careful not to sin, or do anything we'll regret later. Moses had to deal with anger through much of his life. In anger he killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). In anger he broke the tablets written by the finger of God. In anger he beat the rock God commanded him to speak to (Numbers 20:10-11). This last display of anger kept Moses out of the Promised Land. Look up: Ephesians 4:26

v.20 – Commentators have suggested Moses ground up the golden calf and made the people drink it for three reasons. (1) To show the people that this "god" was nothing, (2) to completely obliterate it, (3) to make the people pay an immediate consequence of their sin.

v.24 - Aaron quoted the people exactly. But he lied when he described his own actions: “*I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf*” (Look at Exodus 32:4). Aaron did this evil thing and made his excuse because at that moment, it seemed harder to stand for the Lord than to go along with the people, and Aaron took the path of least resistance.

Read Exodus 32: 25-29

Moses gave the people of Israel the opportunity to make a stand for the Lord. The Levites, to their honor, sided with the Lord and with Moses. Sadly, they were the only significant group to do so. The name of the next book of the Bible, Leviticus, means simply “relating to the Levites.”

“Every man his brother.” Read Luke 14:26. This random punishment was a representation to the survivors of what they too deserved. The Levites's zeal is rewarded by making them into a priesthood.

Read Exodus 32: 30-35

Moses knew the enormity of the people's sin, yet he still asked for forgiveness. This was an appeal to the mercy and grace of God. Moses asked for the forgiveness of Israel on the basis of his own relationship with God. If God would not forgive, Moses asked to be damned in the place of his sinful people. The Apostle Paul had this same heart of Jesus and love for the children of Israel. Look up: Romans 9:3-4. This sacrificial heart was the same heart Jesus had in dying for our sins (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

God agreed to spare the nation as a whole, but consequences for their sin were realized through plagues from the Lord. Although the nation as a whole was spared, God's justice was still due to individual sinners.