

Day 109 - WEDNESDAY: March 1st

Exodus 32

Exodus 32:1-35 NKJV

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to 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 descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' " So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." But he said: "It is not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, But the sound of singing I hear." So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it. And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out." Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the LORD's side—come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' " So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on

you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother." Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

Daily Deep Dive:

Let's begin today by reading the UCG reading plan: "With Moses gone for almost a month and a half, the people quickly became disoriented and asked Aaron to give them another god-symbol to lead them.

Interestingly, they still seem to have viewed this idol as a representation of the Eternal (verses 4-5). God, however, saw it otherwise, saying that they "worshiped it and sacrificed to it" (verse 8) rather than "to Me." With all God had done for them, it is amazing how quickly they forgot His commands—and dismissed Moses as if he were a fraud. The apostle Paul even warns us to learn from what they did and not do the same thing (1 Corinthians 10).

Another incredible aspect of this whole affair is Aaron's part. It seems almost stupefying that he would consent to it—and seemingly so readily. When the people approached Aaron with the suggestion to make an idol that they could worship, it was he who told them to give him their golden earrings. It was then Aaron who formed and shaped the idolatrous object. Perhaps Aaron himself had begun to wonder what had become of Moses. It is likely that he viewed the people's "request" as an implicit threat—which it probably was—that if he didn't go along with what they wanted, the consequences would be dire.

Aaron likely feared for his own safety and that of his family if he opposed the movement underway. He should have shown more stamina and trust in God, but he went along. To top it off, rather than face up to his responsibility, he told Moses a ridiculous lie (verse 24). In any case, there was certainly a failure of leadership at a high level. This too should be a lesson for all of us. No matter who we are, no matter how much we have seen God do in our lives, we can be led astray if we aren't constantly on guard spiritually.

Concerning the Israelites' chosen object of idolatry, they were well acquainted with Egyptian calf worship, detailed in the discussion of the plagues. It's not surprising that they would choose a calf as a symbol of their worship, because it was common in the Egyptian culture in which they had been immersed for many generations. Centuries later the Israelite king Jeroboam would fashion similar idols (1 Kings 12:28) after being banished to Egypt (1 Kings 11:40), and this idolatrous worship would remain prevalent throughout most of the time of the northern kingdom of Israel. Among the Canaanites, the bull was also seen as an embodiment of Baal. Perhaps the widespread worship of oxen in paganism, as in India today, has been directly inspired by Satan, as his main face—him being a cherub—is that of an ox (compare Ezekiel 10:14; Exodus 1:7-10).

"The bull was revered throughout the ancient Near East as the symbol of fertility" (Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses: A Life*, 1998, p. 264). It may have been the fertility connection involved in this idolatrous worship that stimulated some of the Israelites to become involved in sexual "play" (verse 6). The Expositor's Bible Commentary has this to say about verse 6: "The verb sahaq signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play ('conjugal caresses')" (1990, Vol. 2, p. 478). In reaching this level, the unseemly episode had probably gone way beyond what Aaron had agreed to or perhaps even imagined. We read earlier that the apostle Paul compared sin to leavening (1 Corinthians 5:8). He even used an example to show that sin, like leaven, can spread to affect more and more people unless it is stopped in its tracks (verses 1-7). The incident with the golden calf seems like a classical case of allowing some leaven in and, as is the proclivity of leaven, before long the leaven had

permeated insidiously. We need not necessarily think that the entire congregation of Israel had degenerated into extensive sexual immorality, but it was widespread enough that God told Moses, "Your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves" (verse 7)—effectively disassociating Himself from the Israelites.

Though God forgave Israel's sin—including that of Aaron—they paid a costly fee for such gross violation of God's law. Moses told the Levites to take their swords and begin to slay the people. About 3,000 were killed (verse 28). Those who were slain may have been among the ringleaders or those who pushed things to an extreme once the partying started. Verse 35 states that God plagued the people because of the golden calf incident. This may be a reference to the slaying of the 3,000, or it may refer to an additional, unspecified punishment. The lesson that rings loud and clear from all this is that sin exacts a penalty. There is no exception to this principle.” [END]

Verses 4 & 5: Notice the specific words used by Aaron: “"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" and then in verse 5, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD."

Notice, they didn't invent a new god, they retained aspects that appealed to them of the True God, but blended in their man-created ideas into their religion. This practice of blending different religious beliefs and thoughts together is called “syncretism”. Christianity today is a blend of aspect of true religion with false religious beliefs and ideas. We can see from this chapter how much God hates this!

If you would like a very good sermon on this topic of “syncretism” and how it can affect us as God's Church, I would encourage you to listen to a 2015 sermon from elder Scott Delamater on the topic. Here's the link if you wish to dive deeper on this topic:

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/syncretism-through-the-ages>

Verse 9 – I found it funny that Moses is like, “you don't have to tell me how difficult to lead these people are...I work with them every day!”

Verse 10 – Notice in this verse the promise that is on the table before Moses. God offered to start over with Moses and make the nation that would come from Him even mightier and greater (See Deut 9:14).

Numbers 12:3 tells us that Moses was very humble, more than anyone on the face of the earth. This is evident right here. Moses didn't serve God for glory, fame or power, otherwise he would have jumped at this offer. After Moses appeals to God and His reputation among the nations, I imagine God could have said something similar to what He had said to Abraham: "Now I know! Now I know you aren't serving me just for what you can get out of the relationship!"

Verse 17 – We don't often think about Joshua being gone this whole time also. Joshua would be the next leader and it makes sense that he wasn't there watching all this take place.

Verse 19 – Tells us that he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Deut 9:17 states: "Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes."

Verse 26 – Adam Clarke's commentary states: "That is, Who among you

is free from this transgression? And all the sons of Levi, etc. - It seems they had no part in this idolatrous business"

Verse 27 – John Gill's commentary states: "That is, Who among you is free from this transgression? And all the sons of Levi, etc. - It seems they had no part in this idolatrous business" Adam Clarke's commentary adds: "It is probable that there was an enclosed or entrenched camp, in which the chief rulers and heads of the people were, and that this camp had two gates or outlets; and the Levites were commanded to pass from one to the other, slaying as many of the transgressors as they could find." [END]

Verse 29 – I don't believe the NKJV presents this verse very clearly (but it could just be me). I believe the NLT states it clearly and accurately as: "Then Moses told the Levites, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD, for you obeyed Him even though it meant killing your own sons and brothers. Today you have earned a blessing."

Verses 34 & 35 – God had promised to spare Israel from diseases and their enemies. In Exodus 15:26 God said: "'If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to

His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

In Exodus 23:22 God said: "But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries."

Israel did not obey and here God promises to visit their sins upon them and in verse 35 it says the "Lord plagued the people". This word for plagued is most commonly translated "smite" (KJV). It can also mean "inflict (disease), strike, hurt, etc... It didn't have to go this way for the people, but they chose a path (like all of mankind) contrary to God's way.