

Aaron Makes An Idol, A Golden Calf

Exodus 32

Outline

- 1-6 | Meanwhile, back in the camp... The people asks Aaron to make them an idol, thinking Moses was dead; The people worship the idol of the golden calf
- 7-10 | God tells Moses of the people's idolatry and His anger toward them
- 11-14 | Moses intercedes for the people, asking God to remember His covenants to Abraham, Isaac and Israel; God remembers and holds back His harm He had planned
- 15-18 | Moses comes down with God's tablets; Joshua tells Moses about the sound from the camp; Moses explains what kind of sound it was
- 19-20 | Moses broke the tablets at the foot of the mountain; Moses then ground up the idol and put it in water and made the people drink it
- 21-24 | Moses confronts Aaron
- 25-29 | Moses calls people to arms and the Levites responded, they killed 3000 men who were worshiping the idol
- 30-35 | Moses chastises the people for their sins; Moses makes intercession for the people; God sends an angel to go before Moses and God smites the people

Reflections

Moses has been up on the mountain for almost 40 days receiving the law from God and in the meantime the people have become restless and fear that Moses might not return. So they turn to Aaron and ask him to make an idol for them to worship, presuming that God isn't going to help them anymore. So Aaron does, he fashions an idol of gold made from the earrings of the people and in the image a calf, like one of the Egyptian gods. Once it was formed, Aaron called for a feast and the people offered burnt offerings, feasted, and then "rose up to play."

How often do we find ourselves like the Israelites, impatient with God and fearing that He has forgotten us? What do we do then? We start to look for our own ways of finding direction / protection / deliverance. The same thing the Israelites did.

First, it is sad that Aaron gave in so quickly to doing the bidding of the people. He had both preformed miracles and witnessed first-hand the power of God over the Egyptian gods, the very gods of whom he fashioned an idol. Yet, when asked by the people, he doesn't even seem to hesitate to give instruction about collecting the gold rings and then producing an idol of a calf.

It is sad that the gold rings were among the things that God promised the people they Egyptians would gladly give to the Israelites urging them to leave after the last plague.

Exodus 3:21-22 NASB "I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. **22** "But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."

Exodus 11:2-3 NASB "Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold." **3** The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses himself was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

Exodus 12:35-36 NASB Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing;

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36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

The Believer's Bible Commentary¹ offers this comment regarding this turn of events and the gold used to fashion an idol.

God had blessed His people with gold when they left Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36), but the blessing turned into a curse through the sinful hearts of the people.

The other thing that stood out in this first section was the description of how the people celebrated before this idol.

Exodus 32:6 NASB So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

The offering of burnt offerings and the feasting can be understood fairly easily, but what does the phrase "rose up to play" mean? Strong's Dictionary² gives this definition.

H6711 - פָּדַח; *tsâchaq*; tsaw-khak' - A primitive root; to laugh outright (in merriment or scorn); by implication to sport: - laugh, mock, play, make sport.

It is translated as "caressing (1), entertained *(1), jesting (1), laugh (4), laughed (2), make sport (2), mocking (1), play (1)" in the NASB according to the NASB Exhaustive Concordance³. Additionally, the Complete Word Study Dictionary⁴ indicates that there may be "sexual, licentious overtones" in this particular incident.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary⁵ notes that Paul indicates this as well in I Corinthians 10. Paul was addressing a church in a culture that was known for its sexual sins, infinite in variety and plentiful in number. Yet he uses this incident to denounce the practices to a church, whose some of its members were still participating in the sinful practices.

1 Corinthians 10:7-8 NASB Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." **8** Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

Don't get me wrong, I do believe that God wants us to enjoy our lives but at the same time do it in a way that honors Him. As God's people we have much to celebrate! However, we shouldn't let our celebration become idol worship or slip into sensuous debauchery. Peter has this to say about this type of revelry (underlining added).

1 Peter 4:1-5 NASB Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, **2** so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. **3** For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking

1 MacDonald, William, and Arthur Farstad. *Believer's Bible Commentary: An Exposition of the Sacred Scriptures*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers; e-Sword, 1995.

2 Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: With Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original with References to the English Words*. e-Sword, 1890.

3 *New American Standard(r) Updated Edition Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*. The Lockman Foundation; e-Sword, 1998.

4 Zhodiate, Spiro, Warren Baker, and Gene Carpenter. *The Complete Word Study Bible and Dictionary Pack*. e-Sword, 1993.

5 Walvoord, John, and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old & New Testament*. Victor Books; e-Sword, 1983.

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parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Sadly, the lure of the debauched life is appealing. It is easy to be drawn into temptations of the like listed by Peter. I know that I face some of those same temptations each day. It is what I do with the temptations that makes the difference. Sometimes I resist and flee from them and their ultimate source, the devil, and sometimes I amuse myself for a time. I might not actually participate in the sins physically, but I might remember past times when I did or continue to watch a TV show or movie where the scenes depict the activities listed by Peter. According to Jesus, this is just like actually doing them.

God created food and sex and He wants us to enjoy them. That is part of why He created them. However, He also established guidelines for how best to enjoy them. It is only when we allow the enjoyment of them to become distorted or excessive, as Paul and Peter describe, that we move away from God's design. Also in trying to adhere to God's standard, the people we use to participate in those activities will not understand and will possibly ridicule or make fun of us for not doing so any more. As Peter says, we've already wasted enough time living like that (the Lord knows I wasted more than my share of time). Stand fast to God's standard when that happens and seek God's forgiveness when you are unable to resist.

Lord God, You created all things and You want us to enjoy Your creation. Give us wisdom to recognize when we begin to move outside Your design and become carried away in our lusts and corrupt Your "very good" creation. Forgive us when we sin against You and others in this manner. We pray that Your Spirit will remind us of Your design and embolden us to resist, flee, and stand fast in our faith. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Key Words: Old Testament, Torah/Pentateuch, Exodus, Moses, Aaron, Idolatry, Golden Calf, Discontentment

Note: This was originally published by me on studythebook.org on August 13, 2016.
