

Commentary on Exodus 32:1-10

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **September 19, 2010**, is from **Exodus 32:1-10**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

Exodus 32:1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; 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.”

Perhaps the uncertainty and impatience of the people led them into a state of fear and panic. Rather than maintain their faith in the true God and trust in Moses, after all that God and Moses had done for them, they demanded new gods and a new leader. They wanted visible representations of their gods, gods they could get their hands on, made by them; gods similar to the gods in Egypt (where they seemed to always want to return). They kept looking back to their old life of slavery, and considered it better than their new life of freedom from oppression. They found their true security in slavery, not from trusting in God.

2 Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”

Aaron had seen all that God could do and had done from being closer to Moses during the 10 plagues than anyone else. Aaron should have been able to tell the people “No!” Aaron should have been able to give the people good reasons to keep trusting in God. Instead, Aaron involved everyone in the sin of idolatry by requiring everyone to give their ear rings to make their idol? Did this symbolize that from then on they were going to listen to new gods and a new leader?

3 So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron.

Everyone complied with what Aaron led them to do, perhaps Aaron and all the people bowed to peer pressure. Rather than obey God’s commands, or seek the will of God and the strength of God’s Spirit to do right through prayer, they took their ear rings and gave them to Aaron. They had stopped listening to God, and they had stopped doing God’s will under Aaron’s leadership. The people and Aaron acted unreasonably in their rebellion against God and Moses.

4 He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

Aaron made the mold himself and cast the image of the calf. There was nothing magical or supernatural about it, as Aaron would later claim when Moses called him to account for his actions. An image of a bull was often worshiped, for it symbolized strength. The people would depend on “gods,” plural, made with human hands for leadership and protection. And then Aaron misled the people further by attributing the traits and actions of the true God in history to the idol he had made. By wanting “gods,” plural, this calf was probably only the beginning of what the people and Aaron had in mind regarding the casting of more idols.

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.”

Aaron built an altar so the people could return to the idolatry that they had practiced in Egypt. He gave the true, revealed name of God to his idol and called for a festival; therefore, he misused the name of God (he used the name of God in vain). God would never honor this falsehood of Aaron’s by working through this idol. But the father of lies would want to do so, and perhaps he misled Aaron and the people.

6 They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

The people tried to duplicate the worship of the true God before a false god. The true God would accept burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being properly offered according to His commands. Without changing their form of worship as they worshiped a false god, the people were further misled, which led them additionally into the immoral and sinful practices of their neighbors who worshiped idols. The word “revel” is similar to the word “rebel.”

7 The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely;

God saw everything. God saw the immoral practices and the idol worship of the Israelites. Then, God sent Moses down to deal with the people calling then “*Your* people” and the people “*you* brought up.” God was ready to disown them as “His people,” because they had first disowned God as “their God.” They did not consider themselves “God’s people” or Moses as their leader. Moses was an Israelite and the people were Israelites, so they were literally “Moses’ people.” The dictionary says that to act perversely is to deliberately and obstinately behave in a way that is unreasonable or unacceptable.

8 they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

God both saw and heard what they had done, and told Moses exactly what He saw and heard. We see the foolishness of trying to hide our actions from God. We learn the foolishness of worshiping idols, especially when all the evidence points to their idols (as well as the idols of Egypt and all idols) not having the power to do what only the true God can do.

9 The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are.

God saw how stubborn and unwilling the people were to learn and obey the truth and the true God. We also see that some people today think just as these ancient Israelites. In spite of all the evidence God had given them that He was the one, true, holy, supreme, all-powerful God, Who could defeat their every enemy (even a pharaoh), they still turned from God, complained against God, complained against the leader that God had given them for their own good, and sought different gods and leaders.

10 Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

God judged that since the people had rejected Him that He would destroy them. They would become an example of what happens to those who persistently disobey and dishonor God. They would serve as a stern warning to others. Moses could then serve as a good example; that faithfulness is rewarded, while rebellion is punished. God could begin again with Moses as He had with Abraham. Moses rejected this idea in his prayer for the people. Eventually, God does give the people (older than 20 years old) what they ask for later in their rebellion; He lets them die in their wilderness wandering rather than enter the Promised Land.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Think of six possible reasons for why the Israelites wanted gods (plural), idols, visual representations of powers greater than themselves?
2. How would you give an answer to each of these possible reasons (if you were Moses and had been given the opportunity to speak to the people prior to Aaron making the golden calf)?
3. Why do you think Aaron wanted everyone involved in his making of their idol? Why do some people want to involve as many as possible in their rebellion against the God of the Bible and the Bible’s teachings? Why do you think atheists take the trouble to write books that teach their disbelief in God?

4. Why do you think Aaron lied to the people about the God Who truly led them out of Egypt by claiming the god he had made had done this for them? How might something Aaron did then to them be similar to what some leaders might try to do today?

5. What did the people's idolatry lead them to do? What did their idolatry influence God to feel and do? What are some things that people who worship false gods (or a false god) do today that is contrary to the Bible's teachings? How do you think God will respond to those who worship false gods today?

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