

Where Can Idolatry Lead?

The *International Sunday School Lesson* for Sunday, September 19, 2010
Exodus 32:1-10

“Aaron took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt’” (Exodus 32:4—NASB-U).

“Aaron 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!’” (Exodus 32:4—NRSV).

“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’” (Exodus 32:4—KJV).

Aaron involved the Israelites in the sin of idolatry by asking each person to contribute their gold earrings to make his golden calf. This calf would represent their gods; probably until they could fashion more idols for all the gods they wanted to serve. They attributed to their gods what the true God had done in their lives; giving these idols the credit for their rescue from slavery. How Aaron, who had seen so much of the Lord’s work through Moses, could have granted their request for new gods is beyond reason.

When they turned from following the true God, they also turned from the Lord’s appointed leader, Moses. The excuse they gave Aaron for turning away from the Lord was their lack of confidence in Moses; for they said, “we do not know what has become of him” (Exodus 32:1). They refused to believe that Moses was absent for so long because he was doing the Lord’s work. They wanted Aaron for their new leader, partly because without Moses’ visible presence they would not follow the invisible God. Perhaps Aaron thought it would be easier to give them what they wanted rather than teach them more about the true God’s nature and what God had done in their midst.

Throughout history, many have attributed God’s creative and historical work to the gods they have made. Leaders, similar to Aaron, have convinced others to serve idols, whether material or mental images. Similar to idolatry, some believe that everything began by chance from nothing. — Copyright 2010 L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Questions for Further Thought

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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?