

# The Book of Exodus

## The Golden Calf

Text: Exodus 32

Introduction:

1. The first section of the book of Exodus dealt with the exodus from Egypt.
2. The second section covered the giving of the Law.
3. The third section detailed and described the pattern for the Tabernacle.
4. This chapter begins the fourth and final section of the book – the beginning of the journey to Canaan as the covenant nation of Israel.
5. Sadly, before the journey can start, Israel has to be reproved of a terrible sin.

### I. The Making and Worshipping of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1-6)

- A. It is important to reflect upon the setting and context of this event.
  1. The Israelites had witnessed all the miracles of the Exodus.
  2. Daily, they saw the pillar of cloud and fire and ate manna from Heaven.
  3. They were encamped around a mountain where they had heard the very voice of God Himself and daily saw His presence on the top of the mountain.
  4. Yet, in spite of all this, the people turned from God to worship idols.
- B. The motivation for the people to return to idolatry was the absence of Moses.
  1. Moses had gone up into the mountain to receive the Law of God.
  2. He was there for 40 days and nights (24:18).
  3. Yet, to the people it seemed that he delayed to come down and they did not know what had happened to him.
  4. This is the danger of walking by sight and not by faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7).
  5. They rejected the spiritual for the physical – needing a material emblem of God.
    - a. Sadly, this was how they had viewed Moses – giving credit to him.
    - b. Now, he had to be replaced by something else that was physical.
    - c. People still do the same today – Pope, priest, cross, Lord's Supper, baptism, etc.
- C. When the opportunity arose to replace Moses with another leader, they chose one that would follow their own desires instead of God's.
  1. Thus, they used Moses' absence as an excuse to revert to idolatry.
  2. Sadly, Aaron proved to be the kind of leader that they wanted – weak and easily swayed.
  3. Many seek the same kind of religious leaders still today.
- D. Furthermore, people will sacrifice greatly and pay dearly to have things their own way!
  1. They rejected reason by claiming that idols made of metal could be "gods" who would "go before them."
  2. They gave precious gold for the creation of this image.
    - a. Keep in mind that this gold had been a gift from God when they spoiled Egypt in their exodus (3:22; 12:35-36).
    - b. Their blessing became a curse (cf. Eze. 16:11-17; Hos. 2:8; Mal. 2:2).
  3. They gave much time and effort to make a golden calf.
  4. Aaron spent time fashioning it with an engraving tool – to make it beautiful.

# The Book of Exodus

5. They built an altar before the image of the golden calf.
6. They set aside a day for worship and brought offerings to the idol.
7. One must be careful not to judge spirituality by material means.
- E. The true desire and motive of the people is seen in their actions – they “sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”
  1. Their wish was not for spiritual guidance of leadership.
  2. They sought only the fleshly – couched in designs of religion.
  3. The Hebrew word for ‘play’ means, “To sport, jest, mock, laugh; to make sport.”
  4. In 1 Corinthians 10:7; this event is connected to lust, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring.
  5. In idol worship, it was often used of the lustful dancing that would take place (cf. 32:19, 25).
- F. They turned to the will of man instead of following the will of God.
  1. This type of idolatrous worship was what they had seen in Egypt.
  2. They had heard the voice of God declare that they were not to make idols (20:1-6; 22:20).
  3. They had agreed to obey all that God commanded (19:8; 24:3, 7).
  4. Yet, they allowed themselves to be draw back into the ways of the world.
- G. Finally, Aaron gives an important example about the dangers of compromise.
  1. Many try to excuse or justify the actions of Aaron.
  2. They claim that he tried to stop the people from committing this sin by requiring their golden jewelry.
  3. Instead, he should have simply and forcibly said, “NO!”
  4. In the end, he made the golden calf; he built an altar before it; he proclaimed a day of feasting; and he tried to excuse himself from any wrongdoing.
  5. Only because of the intercession of Moses was Aaron spared (cf. Deut. 9:20; 13:6-8).
  6. God is not please with any compromise that goes against His revealed will.
- H. May we learn these valuable lessons from the sin of Israel.

# The Book of Exodus

## II. The Anger of God

(Exodus 32:7-14)

- A. Of course, God was aware of all that was happening in the camp of the Israelites.
- B. He informed Moses of their transgression and instructed him to go down from the mountain.
- C. Furthermore, God said that His anger against the nation should result in their destruction.
- D. He offered to make a new nation from Moses and his descendants.
  - 1. Many have often wondered about and questioned God's statements in the passage.
  - 2. Some even have used it to doubt the character and faithfulness of God.
  - 3. It must be understood that this was both a statement of justice and a test to Moses.
  - 4. First, God would have been just in destroying Israel for their sin (Rom. 6:23).
    - a. In fact, there will be punishment in which many are killed (vs. 28).
    - b. There were other occasions where God struck dead those who rebelled against Him (Gen. 18; Num. 16; 2 Sam. 6; Acts 5; etc.).
  - 5. Second, God used this as an opportunity to test the faith of Moses.
    - a. Leaders are often faced with the danger of pride.
    - b. God used the language of the people to say that Moses had brought Israel out of Egypt.
    - c. He said that He could make of Moses a great nation.
    - d. This appeal to pride was rejected outright by Moses.
    - e. His first concern was for the glory of Jehovah.
    - f. He did not want God to appear weak or dishonest to the world.
    - g. He did not want God to forget or to fail in keeping His promise.
    - h. And, he did not want the nation to be destroyed.
  - 6. Third, it demonstrated to the people the humility, meekness, and love of Moses (cf. Deut. 9; Num. 12:3).
  - 7. Finally, it proved the mercy, longsuffering, and forgiveness of God.
- E. Moses interceded on behalf of the people and God did not destroy them.
  - 1. The word "repented" in verse 14 does not mean that God repented of sin.
  - 2. The idea of repentance is a change of heart or mind.
  - 3. God changed His mind from destroying His people to sparing them.
  - 4. The submission and intercession of Moses had a part to play in this change (cf. 2 Sam. 24:15-16; Jer. 18:8; 26:13; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10).

## III. The Anger of Moses

(Exodus 32:15-24)

- A. Like God, Moses was disappointed and angry with the children of Israel.
- B. By his words and actions, he demonstrated to them the indignation of Jehovah.
- C. Moses cast down and broke the tables of stone – symbolizing the nature of Israel's sins.
- D. He destroyed the golden calf and ground it into powder which he put in the water that Israel drank.
- E. He confronted Aaron over his role in this transgression.
- F. Though Aaron tried to excuse himself, he was guilty of sin.

# The Book of Exodus

## IV. The Punishment of Israel

(Exodus 32:25-29)

- A. After witnessing the corruption of the people, Moses issued a punishment for them.
  - 1. The Hebrew word for 'naked' means, "Loosened, let loose; loosened of restraint; unbridled."
  - 2. Thus, it may refer to the ungoverned and rebellious actions of the people.
  - 3. However, it was also used for a loosening of the garments; thus, for one whose nakedness was exposed.
  - 4. Since this was common in idolatrous worship, it is likely that "naked" is the best understanding of the word in this context.
- B. Note that Aaron is held responsible for the sins of the people.
  - 1. This does not rid them of personal responsibility.
  - 2. However, it emphasizes that Aaron arranged the situation that made their sins possible.
  - 3. Thus, he was just as guilty as they – even if he himself were not a participant.
- C. Moses stood in the gate of the camp and called those who were for Jehovah to rally to him.
  - 1. The idea seems to be that the wicked practices were still taking place.
  - 2. Those who heard Moses' call had ceased such evil deeds.
  - 3. Those who gathered to Moses were from the tribe of Levi.
- D. Moses commanded them to go through the camp and to slay their neighbors.
  - 1. Again, the idea is to kill those who were continuing to practice evil.
  - 2. They were not to kill everyone, nor were they told to stop at 3,000.
  - 3. It seems that it took the deaths of that many to cause the idolatrous festival to finally cease.
- E. By executing this punishment on the sinful Israelites, the Levites consecrated themselves to God and received His blessing.

## V. The Mediation of Moses

(Exodus 32:30-35)

- A. This event emphasized the role of Moses as the mediator between God and Israel.
- B. God's unfolding of the scheme of redemption demonstrated man's need for a mediator.
  - 1. By committing sin, man separates himself from God.
  - 2. By their idolatry, Israel had broken the covenant with God.
  - 3. They needed a way to find forgiveness and to come back into fellowship with God.
- C. Moses had been chosen by God to be both the leader of Israel and the mediator for his people.
  - 1. In verse 7, God emphasized this by calling Israel "thy people."
  - 2. Moses showed himself to be a mediator by his intercession for the people (vs. 11-14).
  - 3. Moses showed himself to be a mediator by his condemnation of the people, including Aaron (vs. 19-21).
  - 4. Moses showed himself to be a mediator by his punishment of the people (vs. 25-29).
  - 5. Moses showed himself to be a mediator by his atonement for the people (vs. 30-33).

# The Book of Exodus

6. Compare this with the work of Jesus as Mediator (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:1-3, 34; Matt. 25:46; 2 Thes. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:9; Rom. 5:11).
- D. This is another step in God's revelation of His character in relation to the sins of man and the means of redemption.
  1. The book of Genesis shows how sin entered into the world.
  2. Abel – *Faith and atoning blood*
  3. Noah – *The obedience of faith*
  4. Abraham – *The righteousness of faith*
  5. Isaac – *The submission of faith*
  6. Jacob – *The struggle and maturity of faith*
  7. Joseph – *The victory of faith*
  8. The book of Exodus develops this idea further by showing what was necessary for God to deal with the sins of a rebellious people.
- E. Moses demonstrated great love for the people by asking to be blotted out of God's book if it would result in the forgiveness of Israel.
  1. This is similar to Paul's desire for Israel (Rom. 9:1-3).
  2. God's answer demonstrates the seriousness of sin – it cannot be overlooked.
  3. God's answer demonstrates the righteousness of God – only the guilty will be punished.
- F. But, in the meantime, Moses was to lead the people on to the Promised Land.
- G. A time of judgment would come and God would fully deal with unforgiven sin on that day.
- H. Eventually, the people would be plagued – when the cup of God's wrath was full.