

Exodus 32 New American Standard Bible

The Golden Calf

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.”² Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.”

³ So all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. ⁴ Then he took *the gold* from their hands, and fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a cast metal calf; and they said, “This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”⁵ Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar in front of it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the Lord.”⁶ So the next day they got up early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and got up to engage in lewd behavior.

⁷ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have behaved corruptly. ⁸ They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a cast metal calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. ¹⁰ So now leave Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

Moses’ Plea

¹¹ Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said, “Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians talk, saying, ‘With evil *motives* He brought them out, to kill them on the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and relent of *doing* harm to Your people.

¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’”¹⁴ So the Lord relented of the harm which He said He would do to His people.

¹⁵ Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one *side* and the other. ¹⁶ The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing engraved on the tablets. ¹⁷ Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “*There is* a sound of war in the camp.”¹⁸ But he said, It is not the sound of the cry of victory, Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; But I hear the sound of singing.”

Moses’ Anger

¹⁹ And it came about, as soon as Moses approached the camp, that he saw the calf and *the people* dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ Then he took the calf which they had made and completely burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

²¹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* a great sin upon them?” ²² And Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. ²³ For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.’ ²⁴ So I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ Then they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

²⁵ Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to *the point of being* an object of ridicule among their enemies— ²⁶ Moses then stood at the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, *come* to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. ²⁷ And he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: ‘Every man *of you* put his sword on his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’”

²⁸ So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. ²⁹ Then Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”

³⁰ And on the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” ³¹ Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Oh, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves!

³² But now, if You will forgive their sin, *very well*; but if not, please wipe me out from Your book which You have written!” ³³ However, the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will wipe him out of My book. ³⁴ But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless on the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” ³⁵ Then the Lord struck the people *with a plague*, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

They were looking for a substitute for Moses. Moses does not return and the Israelites panic, they think he is lost or dead. They are desperate for a new leader to show them the way out of the vast barren desert, so they approach Aaron to build them an oracle, a cultic object or image that would act as a medium between them and God; they would ask questions and the calf, acting as a medium between them and Yahweh, would provide the answers. David's household owned similar items and images (which were used as oracles) which were called Teraphim in biblical times. They were regularly used throughout Israel and weren't outlawed until much later during king Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 23:24).

substitute for Moses is evident from the beginning of chapter 32

The Israelites surely did not worship Moses, he was just a prophet acting as a medium between them and Yahweh, so when they were looking for a substitution for Moses they were looking for an object that would do just that: mediate between them and Yahweh.

Verse 23 They said to me, ‘Make us Elohim who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.

Aaron is defending himself by pointing out that he only intended to make them an object that would act as a medium between them and god, but they mistook it as a god and started worshipping it; in other words, he had no part in this crime and thus emerges clean.

1. The gold to make the calf came from the Egyptians as a parting gift.
2. The people motivated Aaron to act outside of God’s will.

3. Why did Aaron allow himself to be pressurised by the people?
4. After all God had done for them, how could this people be so unfaithful?
5. A spirit of corruption had come upon them.
6. How could they dare say 'a calf' is there God now?
7. God was ready to destroy Israel and start all over again through Moses.
8. Moses brokers with God on behalf of the people of Israel.
9. Moses reminds God of His reputation and all of the promises He had made.
10. So God changed His mind, this is the heart of an intercessor.
11. God writes His word on the stone tablets.
12. Joshua seems to be unaware of the peoples rebellion on their return to the camp.
13. In anger Moses destroys the stone tablets.
14. Moses is perplexed, he can't understand Aaron's lack of conviction.
15. Aaron makes his excuses for his actions.
16. Moses separates the people of God from the people of the golden calf.
17. God sends a judgement and three thousand Israelis die.
18. Rededication of heart is sometimes necessary.
19. Atonement is to mend what is broken.
20. Moses acts sacrificially by offering himself to release the people.
21. There is a book of salvation which excludes the unrepentant rebellious.
22. It is Aaron who sculptures the false god.
23. Problems will always occur when God's people start to play, by serving the flesh that is controlled by the soul, which has abandoned the spirit.
24. God's anger is very severe against the people.
25. Moses conviction is that it was God who freed them from Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.
26. God's promises can always be trusted in.
27. God writes a second edition of the stone tablets.
28. Not all singing and worship is directed towards God, God worship exults God, flesh worship doesn't.
29. As part of the judgement Moses makes them drink the ground down golden calf.
30. Sometimes God's servants and God's word tarry awhile but that doesn't make it any less God's word.
31. Aaron lies to Moses to escape his responsibility for his actions. Why did God not destroy Aaron?
32. What is the difference between a great sin and a sin?
33. God declares a delayed judgement on the people.
34. There are those who say Aaron made the calf as a substitute medium in place of Moses absence, but he was not party to the reckless party that was going on.