

## Exodus 32

### Verses 1-6

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> He 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.” <sup>5</sup> Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the Lord.” <sup>6</sup> 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.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

In 40 days the people had gone from “We will obey everything that the Lord has commanded us in the covenant” to making an idol that was forbidden in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

It seems that all of the Israelites wore gold earrings. It seems unlikely that this was the case when they were slaves in Egypt. Was this a new fad a result of the gifts given to them by the Egyptians? Did all or most of the Egyptians wear earrings? In any case, they had more than enough gold for the project at hand

<sup>4</sup> He 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.”

This was not a wooden object covered with gold. It was an idol made of pure gold.

The logic of Aaron and the people is hard to comprehend. Aaron had just made this god and they attribute all the miracles of the last year and a half to it. The 10 plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea and all the miracles of the last 5 months in the wilderness. Since they had been out of Egypt for 5 months before this god was made, how in the world could it be the God that brought them out of Egypt?

Many people might assume that the Israelites were worshipping “The Lord” under the symbol of a golden calf. But that is not what scripture tells us.

See Psalm 106:19 – 22

**They made a calf in Horeb,  
And worshiped a cast metal image.**

<sup>20</sup> **So they exchanged their glory  
For the image of an ox that eats grass.**

<sup>21</sup> **They forgot God their Savior,  
Who had done great things in Egypt,**

<sup>22</sup> **Wonders in the land of Ham,  
And awesome things by the Red Sea.**

<sup>23</sup> **Therefore He said that He would destroy them,  
If Moses, His chosen one, had not stood in the gap before Him,  
To turn away His wrath from destroying *them*.**

These verses seem to imply that the people had forgot God and the great things that he had done for them. But how can people forget the God that separated the Red Sea that is 10 miles wide and 2400 feet deep, in just 5 months? The mother of Forrest Gump said it best, “Stupid is as stupid does”. Does that sound too harsh? Then let’s look at what the Apostle Paul said about this kind of thinking and behavior.

See Romans 1:18 - 25

<sup>8</sup> **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**  
<sup>19</sup> **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is*, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

<sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up to vile impurity in the lusts of their hearts, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>5</sup> Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow *shall be a feast to the Lord.*”

Why is Aaron calling this idol “the Lord”? Apparently he is just as confused as the people. And God is going to make this person the 1<sup>st</sup> High Priest of Israel? People who see the God of the Old Testament as being overly harsh should reconsider what God had to overlook or look past in order to accept Israel as His chosen people.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

Since Israel left Egypt the following has taken place.

1. The crossing of the Red sea.
2. God had given them water, manna and quail.
3. They were given the 10 commandments
4. They were given laws and regulation
5. The covenant was confirmed.
6. 70 elders and 4 other men ate and drank in the presence of God.

How did the people of Israel react to their needs being met, God providing them with laws and regulations that will make Israel a good and noble society, and God making them a favored nation? They said, enough of this being good stuff, let's party. Just to be clear this party time included committing adultery and fornication.

Verses 7-14

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*. <sup>8</sup> They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” <sup>9</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. <sup>10</sup> Now then let me alone, that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” <sup>11</sup> Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, “O 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? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people. <sup>13</sup> 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.’” <sup>14</sup> So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.

Why would the Lord say this to Moses? The Lord told Moses to come up the mountain and kept him there for 40 days and nights in preparation for making the Tabernacle and setting up the priesthood. Even though Moses had nothing to do with this rebellion, he was their leader, and it was up to Moses to deal with it. However, where are the 70 elders that saw God and ate a meal in His presence?

<sup>8</sup> They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”

This verse verifies the fact that Israel saw this idol as the god that brought them out of Egypt but this god was not the unseen God that told them not to make an image of Him since they had heard God at Sinai when he gave the 10 commandments but they did not see Him.

**<sup>9</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people.**

It is true that the Jews were an obstinate people, but they were no different than the rest of humanity. 1600 years earlier God destroyed the whole world with a global flood because everyone except 8 souls had rejected His leadership. Even a third of the angels were not happy living in heaven.

**<sup>10</sup> Now then let me alone, that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”**

God offered to make a great nation out of Moses but Moses will offer 3 reasons why God should not do this. These can be found in verses 11 thru 13.

**<sup>11</sup> Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, “O 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?**

It seems that Moses disagreed with what the Lord had told him in verse 7.

**<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.**

Then Moses tells God his 3 reasons why He should not destroy Israel.

1. He appealed for God to remember all that he had already done for Israel. (Vs 11)
2. He pointed out that the Egyptians would accuse God of leading the people out in order to destroy them. (Vs 12)
3. He asked God to remember the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Vs 13)

Moses should be commended for his intercession.

**<sup>14</sup> So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.**

Isn't it interesting that God is willing to humble Himself before His own creation because he desires what is best for them? The ultimate example of this was at the cross but we will see this numerous times throughout the Old Testament as well.

Verses 15 - 20

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> But he said,

"It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,  
Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;  
But the sound of singing I hear."

<sup>19</sup> It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> He took the calf which they had made and 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*.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

This verse was quoted in Exodus 24 when God first told Moses that he would give him the tablets of stone. The tablets had the 10 commandments and the other social laws written on them.

See Exodus 24:12

<sup>12</sup> Now the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the Law and the commandments which I have written for their instruction."

<sup>16</sup> The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.

God made the tablets (carved them to the proper size and shape) and He engraved the law and the commandments on them.

<sup>19</sup> It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Some people see this as righteous indignation while others see it as uncontrolled anger. The latter seems more likely because God told Moses that he had to cut out the two new tablets. This was his punishment for destroying the 1<sup>st</sup> set of tablets.

See Exodus 34:1

**Now the Lord said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you smashed.**

Do you know who the worst sinner in the bible was?

It was Moses.

He broke all 10 commandments at one time. ☺ ☺

<sup>20</sup> He took the calf which they had made and 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*.

We have all heard the expression; they will drink the cup of God's wrath. Here, it was both literal and symbolic.

Verses 21 - 24

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin upon them?” <sup>22</sup> Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. <sup>23</sup> 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 has become of him.’ <sup>24</sup> I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin upon them?”

Aaron gives several excuses:

1. It's not my fault; these people are prone to evil.
2. You were gone a long time; we didn't know what to think.
3. I just threw some gold into the fire and it formed all by itself.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> excuse was so ridiculous it deserves some special attention.

**<sup>24</sup> I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.**"

This was somewhat like a scene in the terminator movie.

See video 3205      Scene from Terminator

<http://www.levickfamily.com/9.13.html>

How did God feel about Aaron's lack of leadership?

See Deuteronomy 9:20

**<sup>20</sup> The Lord was also angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time.**

Aaron was deserving of the death penalty, but Moses prayed for his brother and God spared his life. This is another example of God's grace and forgiveness.

Verses 25 - 29

**<sup>25</sup> Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—<sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in 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. <sup>27</sup> He said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Every man *of you* put his sword upon 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.'" <sup>28</sup> So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. <sup>29</sup> 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."**



**<sup>25</sup> Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—**

When religious leaders allow and/or cause the flock to go astray the world is given good cause to ridicule and reject religion.

**<sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in 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.**

The reason the tribe of Levi responded to this crisis was most likely based on their strong willed nature.

See Genesis 49:5-7

**<sup>5</sup> “Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
Their swords are implements of violence.  
<sup>6</sup> May my soul not enter into their council;  
May my glory not be united with their assembly;  
For in their anger they killed men,  
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.  
<sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;  
And their wrath, for it is cruel.  
I will scatter them in Jacob,  
And disperse them among Israel.**

These two tribes were known for their cruelty and Jacob prophesized that they would be dispersed among the tribes of Israel for that reason.

**<sup>27</sup> He said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon 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.’”**

In this case the killing of brother, friend and neighbor was a command from God and the tribe of Levi will be blessed for their service. But how did the sons of Levi decide who was worthy of death? Did they only kill those who were caught in the act of “playing”? There is no doubt that the sin of adultery and fornication is a sin but it seems that anyone involved in the worship of the golden calf would have been subject to the death penalty. How they decided who would die or live is not clear because God did not reveal this to us.

**<sup>28</sup> So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.**

It's surprising that only 3000 died. In a camp of 3 million people that would be 1 out of 1000. Did only a small percentage of the people worship and sacrifice to the Golden Calf? That seems unlikely since God was ready to destroy all the people and start over with the family of Moses. We can assume many more should have died for their actions that day but God's grace kept it to a minimum.

Verses 30 - 35

**<sup>30</sup> 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." <sup>31</sup> Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. <sup>32</sup> But now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from your book which you have written!" <sup>33</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book. <sup>34</sup> But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin." <sup>35</sup> Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.**

**<sup>30</sup> 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."**

Moses makes a clear distinction here that worshipping the golden calf was a "great sin". Not all sin is on an even par. We know that because the consequences for sin can range from a small fine to the death penalty. The sin of idolatry brought the death penalty while a lesser sin required a sin offering or a fine of some kind.

**<sup>32</sup> But now, if you will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from your book which you have written!"**

This was a very compassionate act on Moses' part and he did all he could do as a mediator between Israel and God but we all know that God will judge each person by their own actions.

Paul made a similar plea in Romans 9:1- 3.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my countrymen, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

<sup>33</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book.

It sounds like God has a book with all of our names in it (all of humanity from day six of creation until the end of time) but our names will be blotted out if we reject God.

Here are some other verses that mention the book of life

1. Daniel 12:1

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

2. Luke 10:20

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

3. Philippians 4:3

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, true companion, I ask you also, help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement as well as the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4. Hebrews 12:23

<sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect,

5. Revelation 13:8

<sup>8</sup> All who live on the earth will worship him (the devil), everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered.

**<sup>34</sup> But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.**”

It seems fairly clear from this verse that there were many who sinned by worshipping the golden calf that did not suffer the death penalty that day like the other 3,000. However, God makes it clear that they will be punished at some point in the future.

**<sup>35</sup> Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.**

We are not told what punishment was given but it would have been clear to those who suffered this judgment that they were being punished for the sin of worshipping the golden calf.