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Aaron Made an Idol in the Shape of a Calf 32: 1-6

Aaron made an idol in the shape of a calf DIG: How long had Moses been up on Mount Sinai? What was the attitude of the people toward him? Where do you think the former slaves got their gold earrings? Why did they say gods, plural? Who led the Israelites out of Egypt? What did Moses see when he came down carrying the Ten Commandments?

REFLECT: What is the golden calf in your life? What is standing between you and God? Spouse? Children? Parents? Computer? Sports? Music? God doesn't want anything between Him and you! Has service for the King, replaced the King in your life?

While **Moses** was experiencing intimate fellowship on the top of Mount Sinai with **God, the people** were rebelling at the foot of **the mountain** with **Aaron**. One gets the impression, from these verses, that **the people** had decided among **themselves** that **Moses** had abandoned **them**, had been killed, or that **his** behavior did not serve **their** needs or desires. In light of this, **they** decided to take matters into **their** own hands.[658]

The people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain. The word for **so long** comes from a verb that normally means *to be ashamed.* It may mean that *the people had been put to shame, because they felt Moses had left them and had not returned.* So **the people gathered around Aaron.** The use of the verb **gathered**, with the preposition **around** often conveys a sinister intent; these people were rebellious in spirit (see **Numbers 16:3, 42, 20:2** for other examples of the same construction). The demand that they made of **Aaron** was menacing: **Come make us gods who will go before us.** They needed a visible, tangible object to follow. Right away **they** lapsed into idolatry.[659] As **for this fellow Moses who brought us up into Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him (32:1). The rabbis teach that Satan caused the Israelites to see a bier, or a table on which a casket or corpse is placed, passing across the skies on which a figure resembling Moses, which confirmed**

their conclusion that he was dead. It was very strange that after seeing all the miracles of the ten plagues, that **they** had those kinds of thoughts. **They** had already forgotten that it wasn't **Moses** who parted the Red Sea.

You would think **Aaron**, who was the high priest, would try to stop **them**. Unfortunately, **he** had already forgotten what the Torah said: **Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong (23:2). He** went along with **them** and said: **Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.** This was probably the plunder **they** acquired from **the Egyptians** on the day of the exodus **(12:35-36).** So **all the people took off their earrings**, which may have been part of the plunder from **Egypt**, **and brought them to Aaron (32:2-3).** Both Stephen **(Acts 7:39-41)** and Paul **(First Corinthians 10:6-7)** remembered **Aaron's** sinful submission to the wishes of **the crowd** as an example of willful disobedience.

He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. The **calf** was probably intended to represent one or more of the visible forms of the Egyptian bull-god Apis (**to see link click Bo – The LORD Will Bring a Terrible Plague on Your Livestock in the Field**)**. Then they** said: **These are your gods, O Isra'el, who brought you up out of Egypt (32:4).** Worse still, **they** blasphemed **God's** name by claiming that neither **God** nor **Moses** had brought **them up out of Egypt** but that **the calf** had done so.[660] The plural word **gods** may be confusing, because there was only one bull-**calf** made. This may actually be a reflection of *syncretism, or the thought that all paths lead to **God**,* in which the **calf** was seen as being in partnership with **God**.

It was obvious that **Isra'el** had failed to learn the lesson of the ten plagues **of Egypt**. **They** failed to learn the lesson of the uselessness of idolatry and that failure to learn it, had corrupted **their** faith. Therefore, **they refused to obey Moses. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:39). They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped** an idol that ate **grass rather than the Creator** of the universe **(Romans 1:25).**

King Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, made the same mistake. He also made two **golden** calves and uttered the same words to the people: **Here are your gods, O Isra'el, who brought you up out of Egypt (First Kings 12:28b)**. And throughout **Isra'el's** history there will always be that dichotomy, the constant threat of a new religion (like Ba'al), or the corruption of the true religion (like worshiping **the golden calf**).

Not only did **Aaron** build **the golden calf**, but **he** also built **an altar** and put it in front of **the people**. **When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf** and announced: **Tomorrow there will be a festival to God (32:5).** The fact that **the Jews** were engaged in *syncretism* is confirmed by **Aaron's** proclamation that the next day would **be a festival to ADONAI. The Hebrews** were falling prey to polytheism, and in doing so had violated the first two commandments of the Torah that **God** had given **them**. ***They*** *didn't realize that instead of all paths leading to* ***God****,* ***God*** *would travel any path to get to* ***them****.*

So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented peace offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry (32:6). These were the very same offerings that **ADONAI** had commanded **the Jewish people** bring **Him** on **an altar of earth** earlier **(20:24).** This is another confirmation that some form of *syncretism* was taking place at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Psalmist described it like this: **At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull that eats grass. They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. So He said He would destroy them – had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to keep His wrath from destroying them (Psalm 106:19-23).**

It was not surprising that after **they** sacrificed **offerings** to **Aaron's calf**, **the people** began to **indulge in pagan revelry**, which violated the seventh commandment **(20:14).** Throughout biblical times idolatry was frequently carried

on in connection with all kinds of immorality **(Galatians 5:19-21; First Peter 4:3).**[660] Basically, when **Moses** came down from Mount Sinai **he** saw an orgy.

Isra'el had served false **gods** in **Egypt (Joshua 24:14)**, and **their** flesh was unchanged. It was true that **God** had made redemption possible for **them**. But sadly, most were still a **perverse generation** without faith **(Deuteronomy 32:20)**. So when reading **their** history we must never forget that **we should flee sexual immorality (First Corinthians 10:8a** and **14).** So, too, **John** would say: **Little children, keep yourself from idols.** May **God** grant us the wisdom to heed **his** solemn warnings. There is only one way of escape, be constantly occupied with **Jesus Christ**.

Today we need to learn this lesson. **Moses** was away from **Isra'el**, up the mountain; **Messiah** is away from the earth, seated **at the right hand of the Father**. But before **He** went away **He** said to **His** disciples: **Trust in God; trust in Me also (John 14:1). He** is the object of our faith, and it is only as our affections are set upon **Him**, as we are in daily communication with **Him**, that our hearts are kept from **idols**. But just as surely as **Isra'el's** turning away from **God** was at once followed by the making of **the gold calf**, and just as surely as believers have lost their **first love (Revelation 2:4)**, so today, divorcing our hearts from **Messiah** opens the door to the sin of idolatry.[661] Stay close to **Him**.