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Exodus 32

*“Lessons from a Golden Calf”*

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God called Moses to go up on Mt. Sinai to receive instructions about building a tabernacle and installing the priesthood. While Moses was there 40 days and nights, God engraved <sup>1</sup> the 10 Commandments on two tablets of stone, which Moses was instructed to take back to the camp of the Israelites.

Exodus 32 gives us the account of all that was going on while Moses was gone. It's a classic tale of, “When the cat's away, the mice will play!” In this case, Moses, the cat, was gone so the mice grew restless. It didn't seem to matter that Moses had left his brother Aaron in charge. The Israelites must have felt Moses was taking too long to return, so they asked Aaron, the man Moses selected to “ride herd” while he was away, to make gods for them to worship. <sup>2</sup>

We're going to learn four things from this story. First, we'll see an example of how every human being was created with an innate need to worship. Second, this incident will expose the problem of falling back on the familiar idols of the past. Third, this account also examines what happens with our flesh when God is not our focus. And fourth, the need for true Believers to stand up for what is right when others won't or don't.

### Explains Our Innate Need To Worship

1. Even though Moses was only gone 40 days, the people were already longing for someone or some thing to worship.

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<sup>1</sup> [Exodus 31:18](#) - “When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets inscribed by the finger of God.”

<sup>2</sup> [Exodus 32:1](#) - “When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods 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.’”

2. God had not spoken to them or appeared to them during this time because he was meeting exclusively with Moses.
3. In their impatience, they asked Aaron to *“make us some gods...”* (Exodus 32:1)
4. This situation helps us understand there is a God-given need in every human being to connect with him.
5. We were created in his image and in his likeness, being made with his imprint.
6. When we don't know God, we will intuitively sense that something is missing.
7. Unfortunately, what often happens is that when we don't realize the God-hole that exists because of his absence, we go in search of other things or people to fill the hole, which becomes misdirected worship.
8. Some of the common ways we attempt to replace God is by making a person, money, an achievement, a possession, a place, etc., our God.
9. We have a need to ascribe worth to something greater than ourselves, which is what worship is really all about.
10. In the end, nothing will ever satisfy like a relationship with God.
11. George Harrison, one of the Beatles, wrote, “There was never anything, in any of the Beatle experiences really, that good; even the best thrill soon got tiring.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Exposes The Problem Of Falling Back On Our Past

12. Exodus 32:2-4 - *“Aaron answered them, ‘Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.’ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ ”*
13. What's interesting about Aaron's remarks is that he had no idea that God was going to select him to be the first High Priest, and the remarkable thing is that even though God knew what was going on, he chose Aaron anyway!
  - a. God chose Aaron, even though he didn't stand up to the people.

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<sup>3</sup> I - Me - Mine, Chronicle Books, March 8, 2007 reprint edition, p. 37.

- b. God chose Aaron, even though he instructed the people to bring the materials to make an idol so he could make it for them!
14. One of the things God instructed his people to never do was use a tool to fashion an altar to worship him.
    - a. Altars were to be made of undressed stone because God didn't want human effort or man's works associated with the worship of God.
    - b. For Aaron to use a tool was wrong on two levels: he applied human effort to make a false god.
  15. Aaron got the idea to make a calf god from the Egyptians, who worshiped the bull god, Apis.<sup>4</sup>
    - a. Apis was the most important of the sacred animals in Egypt.
  16. When Aaron lost sight of God, he fell back on what was most familiar in his past.
    - a. Many of us, when we lose sight of God, gravitate back to the things we used to do, the sins we used to commit, the same crowd we used to spend time with, etc.
    - b. Notice how irrational this is:
      - i. Aaron fashioned the calf-god and said to the people, *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."*<sup>5</sup>
      - ii. It's hard to imagine that Aaron really believe "Moo-god" brought the 10 Plagues upon Egypt, delivered the Israelites from slavery, separated the Red Sea, and provided water in the desert!

#### Examines What Happens When God Is Not The Focus

17. When God is not the focus, people will live out of balance and out of control lives.
18. **Exodus 32:5-6** - *"When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."*
19. The people partied and worshiped the "Moo-god" by *"indulging in revelry."*
  - a. The King James Version says, the people *"rose up to play."*

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/aes/b/bronze\\_of\\_the\\_king\\_before\\_bull.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/b/bronze_of_the_king_before_bull.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> **Exodus 32:4b**

- b. The word revelry or play, is the same word found in [Genesis 26:8](#), which tells us that Isaac caressed his wife, Rebekah.
  - c. This word can be understood as a sexual term.
  - d. In the NIV, [Exodus 32:25](#) tells us that *“Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.”*
  - e. The KJV says, *“... Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame).”*
  - f. There’s no doubt that immoral things were taking place, and that’s what happens when the flesh takes over.
  - g. [Galatians 5:16-17](#) - *“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.”*
  - h. The more we follow after the Lord and stay in fellowship with him, the less tempted we will be to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
20. All of these shenanigans caused God to temporarily disown his people!
- a. [Exodus 32:7-8](#) - *“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ ”*
  - b. God threatened to destroy the people because of their wickedness.
    - i. [Exodus 32:10](#), we read that God said, *“Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.”*
21. Moses interceded on behalf of the people and God relented from his anger.
- a. The KJV says that God *“repented,”* while the NIV says he *“relented.”*
  - b. The NIV helps us understand the true meaning of this Scripture.
  - c. God does not repent in the sense of turning from sin, but he relented in the sense of not bringing the disaster the people deserved, and he turned toward them and extended mercy.
22. When Moses arrived at the camp of the Israelites, he was furious!
- a. [Exodus 32:19-20](#) - *“When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.”*
23. Moses was not only angry with the people, he was also angry with his brother, Aaron.

- a. [Exodus 32:21](#) - *"He said to Aaron, 'What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?'"*
24. Eighty-three-year-old Aaron, acting like a 6-year-old who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar, came up with a big-time whopper!
- a. [Exodus 32:22-24](#) - *" 'Do not be angry, my lord,' Aaron answered. 'You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods 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.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!' "*
25. Moses saw how the people were running wild and how it was Aaron's lack of leadership that created this situation.
26. So Moses *"stood at the entrance to the camp and said, 'Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.' "* ([Exodus 32:26](#))
27. The Levites were the only tribe that rallied to Moses, and in their response, they were saying, "We will stand for righteousness and we choose to live for God."

Expresses The Need For True Believers To Stand Up for Righteousness

28. [Colossians 4:12](#) - *"He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."*
29. [James 5:8](#) - *"You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."*
30. [Isaiah 7:9b](#) - *"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."*
31. The result of their willingness to stand for the things of God was that God would select the tribe of Levi to minister before him, and that they would exclusively be selected as priests to serve God in the Temple.
32. God took note of their faithfulness, their devotion, and their willingness to be separated from the wickedness of their fellow Israelites.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.

2. Read [Exodus 32](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. In what ways did you long for someone or some thing to worship, prior to coming to faith in Christ?
4. What caused you to sense that something was missing in your life?
5. How did you try to satisfy the need to fill the hole in your life?
6. Read and discuss the George Harrison quote Pastor Gary shared. (See #11 above)
  - a. Do you think his experience is common or uncommon?
  - b. Are there any examples you can share of people – personal acquaintances, family members, celebrities, etc. – who’ve come to a realization that money, fame, power, things, etc., will never satisfy?
7. Read and discuss [Exodus 32:2-4](#).
  - a. Does it surprise you that God knew what was going to happen and what was taking place, and yet, he still chose Aaron?
  - b. Have there been times in your life when you’ve fallen short of God’s standards, and out of the mess you created, he restored you and used you?
  - c. Does knowing how God handled this situation help you better understand God’s mercy and grace?
8. Share examples of times in your life, when after coming to Christ, you fell back into old ways of living and old ways of doing things.
  - a. Looking back, how would you rate yourself when it comes to rational thinking and rational actions?
  - b. How can we guard ourselves to ensure we don’t “backslide”?
9. Have you experienced what some have called “righteous indignation,” similar to Moses’ reaction in [Exodus 32:25](#)?
10. Read and discuss [Galatians 5:16-17](#).
11. Read and discuss [Exodus 32:22-24](#).
  - a. What’s your reaction to the tall tale Aaron told Moses?
  - b. Share examples of times in your life when you need to “fess up”
12. Share examples of pivotal times in your life when you made a conscious decision to make a stand for the Lord.

- a. Read and discuss [Isaiah 7:9b](#).
  - b. How did the Lord honor you for your faithfulness?
13. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: be a willing participant in actively worshiping the Lord in their devotional life, as well as corporate worship services; determine never to place any thing or any person above their relationship with the Lord; resist the temptation to go back, even for a time, to their former way of life; keep the Lord in the center of their life; and finally, to be bold in standing up for righteousness as well as their faith, regardless of the circumstances or the consequences.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).