
The Golden Calf

by Rev. Mark Perkins, Pastor

from Exodus 32; 1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 10:29.

The Golden calf represents the failure of the children of Israel at the Holy Mountain of God.

It was there that they made an idol because of their impatience with Moses, who had been on the mountain with God for what they considered as too long.

Exodus 32:1-4. "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.' And 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.' Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And 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.'"

Notice that the people have yet to receive the tablets, but they have already received the commandment against idolatry, and so they are sinning in cognizance against God, Ex 20:23.

Notice also Aaron's direct involvement in this caper. He fashioned it with his own hands.

The people recognize that without Moses they would have died in the desert, and they fear being without him.

It is their desire to replace Moses because they had made him into a god. Their idolatry was directed toward a man, and not the one true God at all.

It is ludicrous for them to think that a calf was the God who brought them up from Egypt. Their reversionism has taken them to irrationality.

In Exodus 32:7-14, Moses beseeches God to withhold from destroying the nation of Israel for their idolatry, and the Lord assents.

Moses then descended from the mountain with the tablets of the Law in his arms, he first hears and then sees the idolatrous feast. He is so angry that he dashes the tablets on the rocks at the foot of the mountain.

They are utterly shattered. Next he melted down the golden calf, ground it into powder, and scattered the powder over the surface of the water. He made the people drink that water. All this from verses 15-20.

Moses then turns to Aaron, whom he left in command before he went up on the mountain.

Aaron's reply is one for the books.

Exodus 32:21-24. "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?' And Aaron said, 'Do not let the anger of my lord burn - you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. 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 Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And 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.'"

Aaron first attempts to blame the people for his failure in leadership.

Second, he fabricates the story of the manufacture of the calf. He implies that the calf is from God Himself by telling of its miraculous production.

As a memorial, the broken tablets of the law were placed inside of the ark of the covenant. In spite of this failure, the covenant would continue, covered by the mercy seat (Jesus Christ) of God.
