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# *Sunday Church School*

*November 1, 2020*

“The People Sin Against God”— Exodus 32:1-14

Golden Text: Psalm 9:10

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“Exodus 32:1-14”

<sup>1</sup> Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

<sup>2</sup> And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me."

<sup>3</sup> So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron.

<sup>4</sup> And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

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“Exodus 32:1-14”

<sup>5</sup> So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD."

<sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

<sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*.

<sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' “

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people!

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<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup> Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

<sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

<sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.' “

<sup>14</sup> So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

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Do you know people who see God merely as a means of escape from some difficult circumstance —and become dismayed when they discover that the circumstances did not suddenly disappear as they had hoped?

Or have you known people who have a higher degree of faith in other people than they do in God?

Both scenarios seem to be prevalent in the case with the Israelites of the Exodus generation.

- They were quick to agree to follow the Lord and all He commanded, but the events in Exodus 32 suggest that their faith was not really in God but in their mortal leader Moses.
- When he was absent for a time, they forgot even the most basic of God’s commands.

## LESSON OUTLINE:

I. MOTIVATION TO APOSTATIZE (Exd. 32:1-2) II. ISRAEL’S REBELLION (Exd. 32:3-6) – III. THE LORD’S RESPONSE (Exd. 32:7-14)

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## **I. MOTIVATION TO APOSTATIZE (Exd. 32:1-2)**

- This entire episode is in response to the Hebrew people’s assumption that something has happened to Moses, and he must be replaced.
- Moses had been in the flaming, cloud-covered mount for forty days without food or water.
- Moses was Israel’s sole contact with Yahweh and was the mediator of Yahweh's power and guidance
  - Perhaps Moses had left them or possibly had been killed
- Isn’t it amazing they did not ask for Aaron to take Moses’ place, but chose rather to provide their own replacement for him.
- They had not provided for the first leader, why did they think it was their responsibility to provide the second?
- And the only plausible solution was to make idols (gods) to lead them on the wilderness march – thereby causing them to lapsed into idolatry.
- One would think Aaron, who was the high priest, would try to stop them, but he did not.

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## II. ISRAEL’S REBELLION (Exd. 32:3-6)

- Caution to the Priest who just goes along with the liberalism of the people and give them what they want and not what they need
- The questions they had was: **who will go before us** – *as they were seeking leadership and direction toward the promised land*
- Their apostasy was initiated by their **disrespect** for the one God had sent to **lead them out** and **lead them in**.
  - ❑ **“for as for this Moses”** is a Hebraic phrase used often to convey derision or disrespect (e.g., I Sam 10:27; 21:15; 25:21; II Sam 13:17)
  - ❑ This saying demonstrates that the Israelites were not overly concerned that something has happened to Moses.
- The calf was either a representation of the Egyptian bull god **Apis** (*fertility god associated with the propagation of grain and herds*) or of the Canaanite fertility god **Baal**.
  - ❑ **Apis** [Greek] (Egyptian **Api, Hapi/Hep**) **symbolized** a courageous heart, great strength, and fighting spirit

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## **II. ISRAEL’S REBELLION (Exd. 32:3-6)**

- No matter how you look at this sin, it was a great offense against God.
- The Jews were God’s people, chosen by His grace and He had redeemed from Egypt by His power.
- God had led them, fed them, protected them from the enemy, and made them a part of His covenant through His holy laws which they agreed to obey (19:8; 24:3-7)
- At Sinai, the people had seen the awesome display of God’s glory and had trembled at His power.
- Yet, in spite of all these marvelous experiences, they impudently disobeyed the Lord and lapsed into idolatry and immorality.
- Moses had agreed to God’s giving him Aaron as a helper (4:10–17), but now Aaron had become a leader in helping the people sin.
  - When did Aaron come down from the mountain?
  - Why did he not rebuke the people and turn to God for help?
  - To say that Aaron stooped to the people’s weakness is no excuse (20:1-6)
  - Aaron gave them instructions to bring their earrings to him.

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## **II. ISRAEL’S REBELLION (Exd. 32:3-6)**

- Aaron presented the idol to Israel with the announcement, “These are **your gods who** brought you up out of Egypt.”
- An altar was built before the new image and a festival was proclaimed in honor of Yahweh.
- Whole burnt offerings were presented and peace offerings in which the worshipers ate a portion of the animal.
- The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to indulge in revelry (32:5–6)
- To say that Aaron made the calf as a symbol of Jehovah, stooping to the weakness of the people, does not excuse him; for Aaron knew what the Lord had said about idols (20:1–6).
- The basic cause of this sin was unbelief as the people became **impatient** while waiting for Moses, and without true faith they decided they had to have something they could see.
- **Impatience** and **unbelief** led to **idolatry**, and **idolatry** led to **immorality** (This is the pattern explained in Rom. 1:18–32).

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## III. THE LORD’S RESPONSE (Exd. 32:7-14)

- Of course the Lord knew what was going on in the camp of Israel (Heb. 4:13) and He informed Moses of the people’s behavior
- At first glance it seems God is blaming Moses for what had happened, but Moses was quick to remind the Lord that Israel was His people.
  - *For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.*
- God was prepared to wipe out that stiff-necked nation and build a new one from the descendants of Moses.
- This proposal was designed to test Moses’ regard for the people and to any possible ambition on his part (32:7–10)
- Moses passed the test. He immediately began to pray for the people. He urged the Lord to consider three things:
  - (1) the power he had already displayed on behalf of Israel;
  - (2) the possible blasphemous thoughts of the Egyptians and
  - (3) the promises he had made to the patriarchs.

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## **III. THE LORD’S RESPONSE (Exd. 32:7-14)**

- God responded to the logic of this model intercessory prayer and He relented concerning the destruction which he had threatened.
- Forgiveness of the people had not yet been secured, but the Lord’s first burst of anger was averted by Moses’ prayer (32:11–14).
- Moses descended the mount carrying the two tablets of the Testimony which had been inscribed on both sides by God himself.
- At some point in the descent Joshua rejoined Moses and Joshua interpreted the noise coming from the camp as the sound of war.
- Moses pointed out that the noise was neither the sound of victory nor defeat, but the music of revelry (32:15–18).
- It was Jehovah’s glory that was at stake and not Moses’ reputation, so Moses reminded the Lord of His promises to the patriarchs.
- When Scripture says that the Lord “repents,” it is using human language to describe a divine response (Num. 23:19; Jer. 18:7–10; Amos 7:1–6).

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## **III. THE LORD’S RESPONSE (Exd. 32:7-14)**

- Twice during Moses’ lifetime, God offered to destroy Israel and use Moses to found a new nation (V. 10; Num. 14:12), but he refused.
- The Jews never knew the price Moses paid to be their leader.
- How much they owed to him, and yet how little they showed their appreciation!
- God was even going to kill Aaron, but Moses interceded for him (Deut. 9:20).

**Facts: To see clearly that sin is offensive to God.**

**Principle: To understand how God responds to the sin of His people.**

**Application: To anticipate God’s response to our own sin and what we need to do about it.**



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## **“ADVANCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE”**



1. What was behind (what motivated) the request from the Israelites to ask Aaron to make an idol?
2. What was Aaron's response and how should he have responded?
3. Is there a problem with the manner Aaron described the golden calf which he presented to the people?
4. Was there anything wrong with the manner in which the people worshipped?
5. How did the Lord describe the people and their actions to Moses? What did God propose to Moses? In what sense was this proposal a test for Moses?

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## **LESSON DEVELOPMENT**

**Sin often occurs as the act of a single individual. Develop an approach to discuss the idea of group sin (Ex. 32:1-6).**

**What are some areas in your life has God tested you, particularly as he assesses your confrontation or lack thereof to others' sins? (32:7-10)**

**How inclined are you to intercede unto the Lord on behalf of someone else as Moses did? (Exd. 32:11-13)**

**Does God repent, change His mind, or rethink a decision? What happened in this text relative to Israel? (Exd. 32:14)**

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