

LESSON 12



IDOLATROUS WORSHIP

Scripture Text: Exodus 32:1-33

Our last lesson left Moses on Mount Sinai. After giving him the plan for the tabernacle and cautioning him to follow the pattern, the Lord gave laws concerning the priests' garments, consecrating of priests, offering of sacrifices, the furniture and services of the tabernacle, and the Sabbath. Then God gave Moses two sacred tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. The people had given their promise, bound by the blood of the covenant, to do all that God said.

While Moses talked with God on the mount, the people made and worshiped a golden calf. The Lord would have destroyed Israel for this, but Moses prayed for them. They were punished. Human nature, or the flesh, has a tendency to turn to idolatry.

MEMORY VERSE: *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*

—1 Corinthians 10:14

Impatience Leads to Trouble

Exodus 32:1-3 Waiting at the foot of Sinai, the people felt a desire for someone to guide them, something to worship. This is not sin; all people have this desire. But Israel looked too low. **Up, make us gods.** They became impatient and failed to wait on God and His way. They looked to something human hands could make. Only a few days before, they had seen the mountain tremble, seen the smoke, the lightning, the fire; they had heard the very voice of the God. They saw **the glory of the Lord** on top of the mountain (24:16-17). This was real. Aaron, his two sons, Moses, and seventy elders of Israel had seen even more (24:10). How could Aaron and these people turn to anything less—to a metal calf not capable of having life? And the Lord had commanded, **Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image** (20:4). Here we see the exceeding sinfulness, the binding and blinding of sin. What sacred things they trampled! Would we have done better? In their dispensation the way was not yet opened for God to indwell all of His people freely. In this Gospel dispensation Paul exhorted in 2 Timothy 1:14, **That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.** Yet, even now, many fall away—seldom to a calf, but to some other idol. We need to **watch and pray** lest we fall worse than they. These things are written for our examples. Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-7.

Nature of Idol Worship

Exodus 32:4-6 Aaron formed the image of a calf, **fashioned it with a graving tool, and build an altar before it, proclaiming a feast to the Lord.** The people said, **These be thy gods . . . which brought thee up out of . . . Egypt.** What blasphemy! They had quickly forgotten the miracle at the Red Sea just three or four months before. They failed to remember the many other miracles God had brought to them in this journey. They knew this was just an image. **They rose up early**—eager to worship the calf. They **offered burnt offerings**, ate and drank, **and rose up to play.** They danced and made merry, rather than pray and worship and praise God and seek His will.

Idolatry is sin against three duties we have toward God—to love Him, to hallow Him, and to trust Him. The idol

worshiper gives to inanimate matter (or perhaps to animals or human beings) the place and honor which belongs to God alone. We must worship God ONLY (Matthew 4:10). The idolater loves earthly things more than God. Read Mark 12:30. The idolater trusts the influence or power of a visible object or charm, rather than that of God alone. We are to **trust . . . in the Lord for ever** (Isaiah 26:4). Read Psalm 115. Every use of a visible symbol of deity lowers God. One may say, "These are only a means of drawing our thoughts to the God they represent." That exactly Israel's position. They knew the calf had no life. To them it only represented God. But how did God look upon it? He wants our direct worship with no in-between step. **Flee idolatry.** Cast away all images, pictures, crosses, crucifixes, metals, ornaments, symbols, charms, etc., that appear to aid worship but only separate between man and God.

The Anger of the Lord

Exodus 32:7-14 The Lord spoke to Moses, **God, get thee down . . .** He told him what the people had done. In His **wrath** He would **consume them** and raise a nation from Moses. Moses prayed. He mentioned God's powerful works with Israel thus far. He also brought to God's mind what effect this action would have on His reputation with the Egyptians. He pleaded with God about His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord heard. He **repented**, or changed His mind about destroying Israel.

The Anger of Moses

Exodus 32:15-33 Moses **went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand**—the commandments upon them. When he **saw the calf, and the dancing**—merrymaking, rather than mourning for their sin, **Moses' anger waxed hot.** Because of their sin, he threw down and broke the tables. He burned the calf and ground it to powder. To punish the people, he made them drink water mixed with this powder. Part of their sin was nakedness. Idol worship leads to nakedness. When America lost sight of the true God, nakedness became common and accepted by the people but not by God. Moses made a call to those loyal to the Lord and ordered them on the Lord's authority to execute the idolaters. Three thousand were killed.

As to Moses' anger cooled, love led him to intercede for Israel. This is one mark of a true pastor. He loved Israel enough to identify himself with them, even in the extreme punishment of damnation. In his desire to make atonement and in his willingness to be identified with his sinful people, Moses is a type of Christ.

When Moses asked the Lord to forgive, or to blot him out of God's Book also, God set forth the Law concerning sin. **Whosoever hath sinned . . . will I blot out . . .** Then, as now, each one was individually responsible to God for his acts. Sin brings death—separation from God (Romans 6:23). But sinner, look—there is good news for you—**the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

JUST A THOUGHT

Remorse is the egg that pleasure laid.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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