

To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹ 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.” ² 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.” ³ So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ 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!” ⁵ 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.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. ⁸ 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!’” ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ 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? ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.’” ¹⁴ So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Text: Exodus 32:1-14 A 8-13-17 1 Timothy 6:6-10 Matthew 6:19-23 Ps. 100 Resp. Ps.: 96
Hymns: 17, 239, 384 244

OUR REBELLIOUSNESS, AND GOD’S GRACE

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Why did the children of Israel worship the golden calf? Why didn’t God destroy them as they deserved, and as He said He would. We’ll consider those questions as well as lessons the Lord has to teach **us** in the story of the golden calf.

Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. He had been gone for forty days. We're told, *"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.'"* Why would the children of Israel want another god to worship? What they ended up doing gives us the answer. At Aaron's request they gave him some of their gold jewelry, which he made into a calf. Speaking of that golden calf the people told themselves, *"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"* Aaron then told the people, *"Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD."* The name Aaron used for "LORD" in the original text is "Jehovah," a name God used for Himself in the Old Testament. *"The next day [the people] offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings"* to the golden calf. They thought they could worship the golden calf **and** worship God, and that God was OK with that. Then, we're told, they *"rose up to play."* We know from verses after our text that they had a wild party, involving sexual immorality (Ex. 32:7, 17, 19, 25). They liked their calf god that 'allowed' them to do what they wanted to do.

Why would Aaron go along with the people and make the calf god and let them think it was OK to worship it along with God? When Moses confronted him with this Aaron said, *"You know the people, that they are set on evil."* (Ex. 32:22b). Aaron was afraid to stand up for God and His Word and take the heat from the people, so he just gave in to them.

Just a few weeks before this the Israelites were trembling in fear as Mt. Sinai shook and smoked. God had commanded them, *"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them"* (Ex. 20:3-5a). A few weeks later when they worshiped the golden calf, what God told Moses was certainly true: *"They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them."* In His righteous anger the Lord described the people to Moses, not as "**My**" (**God's**) people, but as "**your**" (**Moses'**) "**people whom you**" (**Moses**) "**brought out of ... Egypt."**

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 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.'" God had made a covenant with the children of Israel, that if they would be faithful to Him, He would bless them and give them the Promised Land and send the Savior through their race. But as they showed many times traveling through the desert on the way to the Promised Land, they were rebellious toward God and His covenant. So God was going to destroy them and make another nation from Moses' descendants.

In God's words to Moses, *"Now ... let Me alone, that ... I may consume them,"* we see God's grace. One commentator remarks:

God is talking with Israel's mediator, the one who spoke for God to Israel and for Israel to God. God did not need Moses to get out of the way in order to carry out His expressed will, nor did He need to consult Moses. But He Himself sets the condition that says He will not act until Moses leaves. God graciously controls the events to permit the mediator to mediate; He couches His words to invite the intercessor to intercede. (Sermon Studies On The Old Testament, Series C, NPH © 1984, p. 302)

In speaking to Moses God had referred to the Israelites as "*your people whom you brought out of ... Egypt.*" We're told, "*Moses pleaded with the LORD ...: 'LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against **Your** people whom **You** have brought out of ... Egypt ... ?'*" Moses begged God not to destroy the children of Israel, reminding Him that they were **the Lord's** people. Moses pleaded with God, "*Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*" (the special name God had given Jacob), "*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.'*" Moses reminded the Lord of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make their descendants into a nation (the Jewish nation), and to send the Savior through their descendants. Moses knew that God cannot, and will not, break His Word.

"So," we're told, "*the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.*" The Israelites had rebelled against the Lord and disobeyed His Commandment. They deserved to be destroyed. Although God later punished them, in His grace He did not destroy them.

After all God had done for them (the promise of the Savior, the ten plagues against Egypt that finally freed them from slavery there, delivering them when He parted the Red Sea, water out of a rock and making undrinkable water drinkable, and more), how could the children of Israel worship the golden calf? The Lord tells us about their rebelliousness and idolatry to make us think about our rebelliousness and idolatry. How often do we do things we know we shouldn't do, even though God's Word and our conscience tell us it's wrong? We're tempted to have our own 'golden calves': ourselves, other people, money and things, our reason and what seems reasonable to us instead of what God says in His Word, pleasure, and on and on. An idol is anyone or anything that is as important, or more important, to us than God and obeying His Word. The real test isn't, "What **should** the priorities be in my life?" but, "What **are** the priorities in my life?" We can't 'bow down' to an idol all the time, sometimes, or any time. "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

After our text we're told that Moses had a talk with Aaron about the major role he played in the making and worshiping of the golden calf. Aaron tried to shift the blame onto the people, telling Moses, "*You know the people, that they are set on evil*" (Ex. 32:22b). Then Aaron made the

pathetic excuse, *“I cast [the gold] into the fire, and this calf came out”* (Ex. 32:24b), as if the calf pretty much made itself. When we’ve done things we shouldn’t, how many times haven’t we tried to shift the blame onto someone else? (“If he wouldn’t have done what he did, I wouldn’t have done what I did.”) How many times haven’t we made pathetic excuses for our sins? Aaron wasn’t fooling God with his sorry excuses, and neither are we when we make them.

The children of Israel thought they could worship God **and** the golden calf. We can’t divide our heart’s devotion between God and anyone or anything else. Our God tells us, *“I am the LORD; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols”* (Is. 42:8, NIV). *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength”* (Dt. 6:5). We pray with the psalmist, *“Teach me Your way, O LORD, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name”* (Ps. 86:11, NIV).

Moses later told the Israelites, *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst”* (Dt. 18:15). Moses was speaking of Jesus, whom God would send through the Jewish race. As Moses faithfully interceded for God’s people during his lifetime, so Jesus, the Son of God, faithfully intercedes for us. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus *“is ... able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”* (He. 7:25). We read in the 106th Psalm, *“[God] said He would destroy [the children of Israel] – had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to keep His wrath from destroying them”* (v. 23, NIV). Moses pleaded with the Lord to have mercy on His people according to His promises. Jesus pleads with His Father to have mercy on us according His promises which Jesus Himself fulfilled. We deserve to be destroyed eternally in hell because of our sins. God does not destroy us, but has mercy on us, because Jesus bore the punishment for all of our sins in our place on the cross.

The Bible assures us, *“If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim. 2:13). Although we are not always faithful to God, God always remains faithful to us and all of His promises in His Word. The Bible says, *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (He. 4:14-16). For Jesus’ sake, God graciously forgives every one of our sins.

In the story of the golden calf the Israelites’ rebellion and idolatry is a mirror for us to take a serious look at ourselves and our rebelliousness by nature, and how we’re so prone to give in to the temptation of idolatry. It’s also a reminder that we have such an amazing, loving, forgiving God. “Thank You, dear Heavenly Father, for Your mercy and grace toward us poor sinners for Jesus’ sake.” Amen.