

Exodus

August 5, 2007

Chapter 32

I. Background Comments

Atheism is not really a threat to Christianity. Why? Because people want to believe in God! The problem is that most believe in the wrong god. Even those who call themselves Christian will often burden their thoughts thinking about God in ways that are different than His revelation to us. The liberal Christian and the agnostic Christian, the nonbelievers in conservative pews and other non-Christian theists, the people who make up most of the United States, are the biggest threat to believers in the true God. Only by standing firm can we hope to navigate the storms that they create and keep a pure worship. Chapters 32-34 and all of Exodus deal with the nature of the true God.

II. The Sin

Ex 32:1-6

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** Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." **3** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **4** 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." **5** When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." **6** 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. NIV

- Verse 1 We do not know what the people or Aaron thought, but we can surmise. Basically, the people might have thought that Moses was gone forever, and that Aaron was in charge. Aaron probably felt that he had to do something, even though his best choice was to do nothing.
- Verse 1 The verb associated with gods is plural, which would make the translation proper. In making one idol, probably intended to be Yahweh, Aaron might have thought that he was keeping the people from going too far from God.
- Verse 1 The people still wanted to go to the Promised Land. They might have felt that they needed a "god" to lead them.
- Verse 2 We see Aaron being active in telling the people how to make the detestable god. Was he forced, or did he volunteer?
- Verse 3 All, when *kol* is used in the Hebrew, can also have the meaning of "all sorts of." For example, Joshua was clearly not involved. However, my guess is that with the complicity of Aaron, almost all of the people were involved in the idolatrous act. (Why were the people so easily led into sin?)

Verse 4 Since *Elohim*, usually translated as God, really means gods, the NKJV translation is probably best:

Ex 32:4

Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" NKJV
Later, Jeroboam used the same terminology, though, which is translated differently. He did this probably to build on this Exodus tradition when he built the two calf idols:

1 Kings 12:28

28 Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" NKJV

Verse 6 The eating, drinking, laughing, and dancing would have been part of the fellowship offerings.

III. The LORD Informs Moses

Ex 32:7-10

7 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 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.' 9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." NIV

Verse 7 "Corrupt" means to be ruined, to be in disrepair, or to be spoiled...basically a description of something that was good but is no longer.

Verse 9 Did the LORD not know that they were stiff-necked when He took them out of Egypt?

Verse 10 Would the LORD have destroyed the Israelites if Moses had not intervened? Hint Gen. 49.

Verse 10 Basically, the Lord is saying that He will destroy the Israelites once Moses leaves Him alone. However, Moses does not leave the LORD alone...the LORD knew that He would intervene.

IV. Negotiating with God

Ex 32:11-14

11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" 14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

NIV

Do you think that it is a good thing to negotiate with God? Did God repent (or relent)? Why did God threaten Israelites? Why did God offer to make a great nation from Moses? Why did Moses reject the offer?

V. Proceeding Ahead

Ex 32:15-18

15 Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. **16** The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. **17** When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp."

18 Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear." NIV

Verse 15 Even though Moses was 80 years old, he was a very strong man. However, one wonders how big that the stone tablets were given that he could carry them all the way from the mountaintop.

Verse 18 "Singing" could be singing, shouting, or responding. Miriam does it in Chapter 15 and God does it in the cloud in Chapter 19. Basically, while we might not know exactly what it is, it involves false worship of God, probably emulating true worship.

VI. The Lamest Excuse in the Bible

Ex 32:19-24

19 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. **20** 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. **21** He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" **22** "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. **23** 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.' **24** So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" NIV

Verse 19 Moses breaks the tablets to signify that the Israelites had broken the covenant with God.

Verse 20 Making it into a powder and then making the Israelites drink it is a very good way of demonstrating the value of the idol.

Verse 21 In Moses' implied words, we see that the people pressured Aaron, but that he was also leading them.

Verse 22 Aaron starts off his defense rather well in this verse, but by verse 24, we see that his actions are totally without alibi. Probably initially he was reluctant but later he got into it.

VII. Judgment

Ex 32:25-35

25 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. **26** So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. **27** Then he

said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day." 30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." 33 The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." 35 And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made. NIV

Verse 25 A decision is needed. Apparently all the Levites rallied to Moses, including apparently Aaron, despite his great sin.

Verse 26 It is the LORD's just decision that some will have to die for this idolatry. Basically, the Levites with Aaron as the lead have led the people into sin. They are responsible for their sin and now for administering the punishment.

Verse 29 How were they blessed? They were blessed by serving the LORD and by not being killed.

Verse 33 Think of the book of life as a census. In the ancient worlds, such censuses were kept. The living was included in it, but when someone died, they would be blotted out of the book. (Of course, Christians have eternal life and are never blotted out of the book!)

Verse 34 There is a two-fold indication from this:

1. A plague does strike now, taking out the immediate guilty.
2. A future punishment for the people is envisioned, perhaps even the Diaspora

VIII. Discussion: What Should Aaron Have Done?

The answer seems simple to us. Why was it not simple to him? Was he afraid, or did he think that Moses was not coming back? In a sense, he has a panic of faith and takes things in his own hands. When we take things in our own hands, we make bad decisions, even if it is apparently the best decision that we can make at a given time. The point is that we should not make a decision when we have a choice from two bad alternatives if we can wait.

IX. Discussion: What is Moses Thinking?

Moses has done everything that God has told him to do. Yet, his people have failed miserably. What was he thinking about them? What was he thinking about God? He realizes that he does not understand God. What is he to do about that?