

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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How Will You Worship the Next Time? (Part 6)

Exodus 24:1-2, 9-11

Last month we finished with a few comments on the statement by the people, *“We wot not what is become of him”* (Exodus 32:1). We will pick up from that point now. I suppose you could give the people the benefit of the doubt. At that particular moment, they did not know exactly where Moses was except that he was supposed to be on the mountain. They had not heard from him for forty days, so I suppose that he could have wandered away and left them. He might have died on the mountain. But anything that they might have guessed about Moses would have been wrong. It was their fear of God that caused Moses to be on the mountain in the first place. Remember, God had begun by speaking from the mountain and giving them the ten commandments. They were so fearful after hearing God that they begged Moses to receive the rest of the law from God, and then they promised to obey whatever God gave to Moses (Exodus 20:19). The people were not being honest about not knowing where Moses was. It was a continuation of their lack of faith that had begun when they left the land of Egypt. This was simply another instance of unbelief and a desire to do what they wanted to do.

Whatever excuse we might try to make for why the people said what they said, it still does not explain why they desired Aaron to make an idol. We may acknowledge that they did not know precisely where Moses was, and we may allow for their impatience, but there is absolutely no justification for their desire for idolatry. They had heard God say that they could not have any other gods, and they had heard Him clearly forbid the making of images to represent Him. They had heard Moses repeat what God said in Exodus 20:23 about not making images, and they said in Exodus 24:3 that they would

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obey it. Now they are disobeying God and desiring an image that they can see. For this sin, there is no excuse. The people knew the commandment of God, but they are willfully disobeying it. At this point, they do not care about God or Moses. They want their own desire to be fulfilled.

Notice the third part of this Mixed Up Worship. We have mentioned this as we dealt with the other parts of the verse, but we will focus on The Command itself for a few minutes. The people said, *“Up, make us gods, which shall go before us.”* I have read this verse many times and pondered that particular statement, but I cannot fathom what the people are desiring when they command Aaron to make them gods. The only thing that makes sense is that they wanted a god that they could see. They had been following God and Moses for a few months, but they were still attached to the visible gods of Egypt. Even though God had shown through the ten plagues that those gods in reality had no power, the people still wanted to live by sight. They wanted a god that they could see. But whatever explanation we might try to come up with, it does not matter. God had very clearly told them—no other gods and no images of any kind. That alone should have been enough. After what God had done for them in delivering them from the land of Egypt, these Israelites should have been willing to do whatever God said whether they understood it fully or not.

Would you not agree that they should have been willing to obey God regardless of what God told them to do? I hope that you would agree, but let us examine our lives for a moment. If we are saved, God has the same right to tell us how to live our lives as He did the nation of Israel. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says, *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”* If we are saved, we are not our own boss. God bought us with the blood of Christ and delivered us from the bondage of sin. Therefore we are His, and He can tell us how to live our life. He does

so throughout the Word of God and, especially in the New Testament, He gives some direct commands to believers. But how many times do we neglect, ignore, or just deliberately disobey what God has said in His Word? We may have read it ourselves or heard some preacher preach on a specific passage. We may not directly dispute what the passage says, but we will say something like this: *“That is his interpretation.”* Or, we might try to act as if we understand the Bible better than the preacher, and we will say *“That does not apply to me,”* or *“That is the way people used to live, but it does not apply to Christians today.”* There are some things that are not to be practiced today like animal sacrifices and a few other things, but what most people do not want to practice today is just basic Bible holiness. They make every excuse under the sun as to why they do not have to live holy lives, but they sound just like the Israelites in Exodus 32. They *“wot not,”* and they are right. They do not know because they will not listen to God’s Word, nor will they listen to God’s man when he is preaching God’s Word! They want to do their own thing, and they want to be as much like the world as they can be. We may not understand everything in God’s Word, and no one ever will, but we must determine to obey what we do understand. We must reject the attitudes of ignorance and selfishness and determine to obey God! We can obey God. It just comes down to whether we will or not. If we do not obey God’s Word, then we are no better than the children of Israel. We may not fashion a golden calf, but we are practicing sin and rebellion nonetheless. We must repent of our sin and determine to obey God completely.

The last part of their command must be commented on as well. They said, *“Which shall go before us.”* They expressed a willingness to follow, but it had to be of their design. I cannot comprehend the audacity of these people. They had complained earlier when Pharaoh’s army was coming after them, and they had complained about water and food. As bad as those times of complaining were, this statement supersedes them in wickedness and unbelief. Did they not remember that the invisible God was leading through Moses? They could visibly follow him. But even better than following

Moses, God had given them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The cloud and fire were a visible manifestation of God Himself. They should have been willing to follow God regardless of what they saw, but He manifested Himself in the cloud and fire. They had God Himself to follow, why would they want a false idol?

But again, we are no better. We have God’s eternal, preserved Word. We can read it and study it and allow God to talk to us through it. Having God’s Word, we should never doubt, nor should we follow our own desires, nor the ways of any man. But so often we neglect God’s Word and desire something else. May God be so real through His Word that we will not hesitate to follow Him.

The fourth part of this Mixed Up Worship is The Comment. Exodus 32:4 says, *“And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”* The focus of this point will be the statement made by the people, but before we consider that I want to briefly mention Aaron’s part as described in the first part of the verse. I mentioned this earlier, but it bears repeating. Aaron knew better. He had heard the commands of God, and he had seen God on the mountain. Why he ever gave in to what they were demanding, I have no idea. There are three possible explanations: 1) He was as desirous of a visible god as the people were; 2) He thought that what he was doing was legitimate worship and not a violation of God’s commands; and 3) He was afraid of what the people might do if he did not give them what they wanted. To be honest, in Aaron’s actions and explanation to Moses, I can see all three of these explanations displayed. But all of them are terrible excuses. Even if he did not want to make an idol, he refused to tell the people that he would not do it. He may have died, but he would have died honoring God, and there is no greater honor than that. Instead, Aaron goes down in Scripture as a spineless man who gave in to what the people wanted. There is no honor in doing wrong.

But back to the comment. I can see both the first and second commandments being broken here. The people could have been saying that the calf was a different god, and not the God speaking from the mount. In doing so, they were worshiping another god even though God had clearly said, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3). If that is what they thought, then this proves that idolatry is complete insanity because the god did not even exist until after they had left Egypt.

If they were saying that this is a representation of Jehovah, then it is a violation of commandment two which says, "*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*" (Exodus 20:4a). The reason that God commanded that no idols were to be made to represent Him is that there is nothing that man can make that can represent Him. That appears to be circular reasoning, but it is true. Nothing can represent God. No beast or man is an adequate picture of God. Aaron made a calf. It seems crazy and abominable to us, and it should, but to the Israelites it reminded them of one of the Egyptian gods. Maybe that is what they meant it to be. Or it may have reminded them of the strength of God. Whatever Aaron was trying to do, it was wrong, and the people would suffer God's wrath. We will begin there next month.