

Lesson 11 – 10 April 2011

Israel's Sin and Restoration

Lesson Scope: [Exodus Chapters 32 through 34](#)

Lesson Focus

Man's downward tendency is ever present and universal. Even his worship is easily corrupted with his humanistic "improvements" as he pursues a disobedient course in spite of better knowledge.

This lesson showcases Israel's apostasy away from the one true God in favor of a lifeless golden calf and sensual rites of worship. "What went wrong?" is the obvious question. Likely, it was a combination of absent leadership, timid temporary authority, and the fleshly desires of an idle throng of people.

When Moses arrived on the scene, he condemned their sin and called them to repentance. At the close of the lesson, we see the chastened sinners as they trek outside the apostate camp in search of reconciliation with their God. Although they were restored, their sin was not without consequences. God has outlined the acceptable pattern of worship. Those who deviate from this pattern invoke God's wrath.

The word sensual relates to the senses, food, song, and immorality were all included in the Israelites' departure from God. The error was not that their worship included the senses but that it excluded God Himself.

Our tendency is to become overzealous in condemning worship that differs from ours, even though it does not violate Biblical principles.

In general we should focus on whether we ourselves are truly worshipping God, not on whether others are worshipping Him.

Lesson Aim: To reveal the nature of sensual, counterfeit worship and God's attitude toward such worship.

Theme Verses: [1 Corinthians 10:6-7](#). "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink. and rose up to play."

Lesson Text.

"Up, Make Us Gods"

Exodus 33:1-6

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, *and* go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: ²And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: ³Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way. ⁴And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments. ⁵For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye *are* a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. ⁶And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.”

"Ye Have Sinned a Great Sin"

Exodus 32:7

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.”

Exodus 32:10

“Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.”

Exodus 32:26-35

“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who *is* on the LORD'S side? *let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. ²⁷And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, *and* go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. ²⁸And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. ²⁹For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the

LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day. ³⁰And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. ³¹And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. ³²Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. ³³And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. ³⁴Therefore now go, lead the people unto *the place* of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. ³⁵And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made."

"Every One Which Sought the LORD Went Out"

Exodus 33:4

"And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments."

Exodus 33:7-10

"And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, *that* every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which *was* without the camp. ⁸And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, *that* all the people rose up, and stood every man *at* his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. ⁹And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood *at* the door of the tabernacle, and *the* LORD talked with Moses. ¹⁰And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand *at* the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man *in* his tent door."

Questions for Study

"Up, Make Us Gods"

1. What factors contributed to Israel's lapse into idolatry?
2. In what ways did Aaron fail?
3. What gives false worship its appeal?

"Ye Have Sinned a Great Sin"

4. What consequences did Israel merit for their sin? What did they receive?
 5. Explain the importance of Moses' responses in these verses.
- ### **"Every One Which Sought the LORD Went Out"**
6. Why did Moses pitch the tabernacle outside the camp?
 7. How do the people's actions in these verses illustrate true Worship?

Analyzing the Passage

"These be thy gods.... Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD" (Exodus 32:4-5). The people responded enthusiastically to their new "gods" (plural), while Aaron announced a feast to "the LORD" (Jehovah). In Egypt calves and bulls were used in idolatrous worship. Making the calf and worshiping it were flagrant violations of the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-5). The accompanying festivities included eating, drinking, singing, dancing, and nakedness.

At Moses' summons, all the sons of Levi identified "on the LORD's side" (Exodus 32:26). Not long after this, God named the Levites as His choice for special service related to the tabernacle (Numbers 3:5-9).

"The Tabernacle of the congregation (Exodus 33:7) was not the tabernacle set up in chapter 40. It was a tent where, in this transitional period, God manifested His presence with the cloudy pillar and communicated directly with Moses.

Principles and Applications

"Up, Make Us Gods"

1. Sinful man desires tangible objects of worship (Exodus 32:1). No doubt this is an attempt to bring God down to man's level, man feels able to control what he can see and touch. But "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain [God] How foolish to think that any physical object could adequately represent Him!
2. Unsound leadership leads people to believe that sinful worship has God's blessing (Exodus 32:2, 4). Leaders who value the opinion of their people more than the approval of God will find a way to accommodate the people's wishes. They can twist the Scriptures to

support a rationale that makes wrongdoing appear good or at least excusable. Carnally-minded people are quite happy to follow such leaders.

3. Counterfeit worship mixes the true and the false (Exodus 32:4-5). The people called for the worship of "gods." but Aaron made an image and called a feast to "the LORD." Such mixtures gratify the flesh and, at the same time, salve the conscience. The human conscience can accommodate nearly any error if it is introduced gradually enough. Spiritual perception is soon lost when the lines between truth and error become hazy.

4. Sensual worship pampers fleshly appetites (Exodus 32:6). It emphasizes, not what pleases God, but what pleases the worshiper. This motivation finds ways to introduce entertainment, unbridled emotion, and physical gratification into the worship experience. Godly virtues of holiness, humility, and self-denial become neglected and forgotten.

"Ye Have Sinned a Great Sin"

5. Sensual worship leads people to immoral practices (Exodus 32:7). Sin is deceptive, and the crisis that sin brings to the human heart is terrible. Sensual worship is essentially a dependence on senses and physically tangible things to achieve spiritual fulfillment. The worshipers come to believe that heightened sensation indicates a deeper spiritual experience. When man yields control to his fallen nature, even what the Bible identifies as grossly immoral can be incorporated into false worship.

6. God's wrath is against corrupt worship (Exodus 32:10, 28, 35). Who we worship is important, but how we worship Him is no less important. Our manner of worship expresses and exposes our view of God. To worship as one pleases is to disobey God, to reject His authority, and to mock His holiness. False worship robs God of His rightful glory violating a basic purpose for man's creation. No wonder such worship stirs God's righteous wrath.

7. Leaders call God's people to separate from the sinful worship practices of the world (Exodus 32:26). The ordained leaders of the church carry the main burden of preserving New Testament worship. It is their duty to identify sinful worship practices and to call the saints to a consistent practice of Biblical principles. The church body is re-

sponsible to respond favorably to the teaching and example of their leaders by adhering to godly patterns for worship, for the ordinances, and so on.

8. God holds individuals accountable for what they worship (Exodus 32:33). Consider Cornelius (Acts 10), whose worship rose up before God as a memorial. The Lord rewarded him by sending Peter to instruct him and his household in the way of salvation through the Gospel. Going against truth also brings consequences. God has placed in creation enough evidence of Himself so that every person is without excuse (Romans 1: 19, 20).

"Every One Which Sought the LORD Went Out"

9. True worship springs from a heart of humility and contrition (Exodus 33:4). When Peter preached at Pentecost the listeners cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized.- We can never approach God unless we humble ourselves and exercise faith in the blood of our perfect Sacrifice. Because of the worthiness of Jesus' sacrifice, we can approach God boldly and receive His mercy and grace.

10. God will receive His people when they forsake sin and return to Him (Exodus 33:7). What a blessing! Turning to God often means separating from one's fellows. Israelites who sought the Lord found Him "without the camp." Repentance and reconciliation are what God has wanted from all men since sin entered the world. Every one of us is born with the rebellion that the prodigal son expressed, but the Father watches for our steps to turn toward home.

11. True worship results in God's blessing (Exodus 33:9-10). He, rather than man, established true worship. We enter into worship at the foot of the cross, continue in worship by offering the fruit of our lips in praise, and follow through with spiritual fruit in our lives. We stand approved in our worship by God alone, and He is without partiality.

Important Teachings

1. Sinful man desires tangible objects of worship (Exodus 32:1).
2. Unsound leadership leads people to believe that sinful worship has God's blessing (Exodus 32:2, 4).
3. Counterfeit worship mixes the true and the false (Exodus 32:4-5).

4. Sensual worship pampers fleshly appetites (Exodus 32:6).
5. Sensual worship leads people to immoral practices (Exodus 32:7).
6. God's wrath is against corrupt worship (Exodus 32:10, 28, 35).
7. Leaders call God's people to separate from the sinful worship practices of the world (Exodus 32:26).
8. God holds individuals accountable for what they worship (Exodus 32:33).
9. True worship springs from a heart of humility and contrition (Exodus 33:4).
10. God will receive His people when they forsake sin and return unto Him (Exodus 33:7).
11. True worship results in God's blessing (Exodus 33:9-10).

Answers to Questions

1. What factors contributed to Israel's lapse into idolatry?

Israel's actions illustrate man's inherent tendency to drift into sensual worship and idolatry. Moses, their leader, had apparently disappeared, and Aaron granted their carnal wishes.

2. In what ways did Aaron fail?

Aaron sought to please man, not God. He gave little or no resistance to the insistent crowd. He led the people in their idolatrous worship. He mixed the name of the Lord with the gods of gold.

3. What gives false worship its appeal?

False worship is appealing because it pleases the senses. Mixing in some elements of true worship salves the conscience, allowing the worshiper to believe that God will accept him.

4. What consequences did Israel merit for their sin? What did they receive?

They merited divine wrath and destruction. Except for Moses' intercession, this likely would have become reality.

About three thousand died by the swords of the faithful Levites. God expressed His displeasure by removing His presence far from the camp and by plaguing the people. Moses forced them to drink water contaminated with the residue of their idol.

5. Explain the importance of Moses' responses in these verses.

Moses' summons to those who were "on the LORD'S side" identified the faithful Levites. Their slaying of the three thousand was part

of God's judgment against them. Moses' selfless intercession turned aside God's wrath, or Israel would have been destroyed.

6. Why did Moses pitch the tabernacle outside the camp?

God had departed from the midst of them, or they would have been consumed (Exodus 33:3). This removal expressed God's displeasure and rebuked Israel's sin. Those who sought the Lord identified themselves by separating from their brethren as they went out to the tabernacle.

7. How do the people's actions in these verses illustrate true worship?

Their mourning and non-wearing of their ornaments expressed repentance and humility. Their rising up and worshiping in their tent doors indicate reverence.

Summarizing the Lesson

No Christian is exempt from the possibility of failure in worship. Our fallen nature is a continual source of temptation to drift in the direction of whatever pleases the flesh. In God's Word, He has clearly revealed the why and the how of worship that He will accept. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8).

Research Guide

1. Study the New Testament verses related to Christian sacrifice, especially Hebrews 13.
2. Compare the Ten Commandments with the activity of Aaron and the sinning multitude.