Exodus Lesson 19 (2019)

**IDOLATRY AND INTERCESSION**

Exodus 32:1-33:6

While Moses was on the mountain receiving instructions for Israel’s worship, the people below were getting restless. Marching through the desert had been exhausting, but for more than a month fugitives had been idle, waiting for Moses to reappear. Was he dead? Not knowing that Moses was even now getting a blueprint for worship based on the model of heaven itself, the Israelites decided to entertain themselves with the kind of worship they were used to.

1. In what ways to the words in 32:1 violate what God recently told Israel in the following verses? (20:2,3,4)
2. What needs and desires do you think motivated Israel to request manufactured gods?
3. The gold for the calf came from the plunder God had told the people to bring from their Egyptian neighbors (11:2-3; 12:35-36). What was this gold supposed to be used for? (25:2-9)?

***Cast in the shape of a calf*** (32:4). The Hebrew term “calf” means “young bull in his first strength.” Bull images were common in Near Eastern religion, including both Egypt’s and Canaan’s.” The sacredness of the bull as the symbol of strength and reproductive power runs from Baal worship in Canaan to popular Hinduism in South India today, wherever religion is seen as a form of stockbreeder’s ‘fertility cult.’” Since it was later burned (32:20), the calf may have been a carved wooden statue covered with gold veneer. Or, it may have been crudely cast in solid gold, finished with a shaping tool, and later melted in the fire.

***Indulge in revelry*** (32:6). “Play” in NASB. The Hebrew verb has sexual connotations. Here it refers to the immoral sexual activity, such as orgies, that often accompanied fertility rites. This was one of the practices that had roused the Lord to such wrath against the Canaanites that He planned to destroy them.

***Stiff-necked.*** The Lord is comparing Israel to unresponsive oxen or horses who won’t obey His pull on their yoke.

1. Realizing t he had done wrong, how did Aaron try to redeem the situation? (32:5) To what extent did his attempt succeed (32:6), and why? How did God evaluate the situation and those involved in it? (32:7-10)
2. God promised Abraham that He would destroy the wicked Canaanites and make Abraham into a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 15:13-21). What do you think were His motives in making a similar offer to Moses? (32:10)
3. What reasons did Moses give for turning this offer down? (32:11-13)

**Relent** (32:12). The Scriptures are full of exhortations for men to turn from their sin to God, but there Moses pleads with the Lord to “repent” (KJV)! How can we correctly understand Moses’ plea? First the “evil” (KJV) or “disaster” (NIV) to which Moses refers is not “sin” (God cannot sin, because sin is rebellion against God’s character and will), but the terrible judgment that the Israelites deserve because of their idolatry. Second, the “repentance” Moses seeks from the Lord is simply the decision to accept his intercession on the people’s behalf rather than executing divine justice. “The meaning is not that God changed His mind; still less that He regretted something that He intended to do. It means, in biblical language, that He now embarked on a different course of action from that already suggested as a possibility… God’s promises and warnings are always conditional on man’s response [see Jeremiah 18:7-10] … We are not to think of Moses as altering God’s purpose toward Israel by this prayer, but as carrying it out; Moses was never more like God in these moments, for he shared God’s mind and loving purposes.”

1. Once he descended from the mountain, how did Moses’ reaction to Israel’s sin compare with the Lord’s? (32:10, 19) Why was it appropriate that Moses broke the tablets of the Law? Moses didn’t even try to offer a sacrifice to atone for such gross idolatry. How did he seek to make atonement? (32:31-32)
2. “To intercede” means literally “to stand between.” Psalm 106:23 describes Moses’ actions in Exodus 32:11-14, 31-32 as standing “in the breach.” The imagery is of standing in a hole in a wall to prevent enemies from entering, or standing astride a chasm between two cliffs, bridging the gap between God and man. What do you learn about intercession or standing in the breach from Exodus 32:11-14, 31-32?
3. How does Moses’ example show what it means that Jesus “always lives to intercede for us”? (Hebrews 7:25) Besides Moses’ intercession, what else was necessary to heal the breach in the relationship between Israel and the Lord? (32:25-29, 35)

**Your response**

1. What truth from 32:1-35 would you most like to take to heart? How would you like this to affect your thoughts and habits? What action can you take to begin this process?