

Pastor Jim Jackson, 7/31/16

Exodus: Finding Freedom, pt. 24—The Golden Calf Appears

Exodus 32:1-35

Moses DISAPPEARS

Having left leadership responsibilities to Aaron and Hur, Moses went up into the storm to meet with God at the top of Mount Sinai and spent 40 days getting instructions about the Law. Despite miraculously rescuing Israel a few months earlier, the people grow restless and don't know, or care, if Moses died travelling up the mountain as an old man or was overcome by fire and smoke, so they pressure Aaron to make idols. Unlike Moses who waited to hear from God, Israel would not wait to hear from God or Moses. *Leadership can be a lonely and thankless calling* (Heb. 13:17).

The calf APPEARS

A vocal minority began to stir up spiritual discontent, so Aaron gathered gold, melted it in fire and forged a calf—which may have been the Egyptian creator/fertility bull-god, Apis—and equated it with the LORD ('YHWH'). Aaron's first leadership decision broke the first three (and most important) commandments and led the nation to sin after they had covenanted their allegiance to God just one month before (Ex. 24:3-7)! *Great leadership doesn't fold under stress or pressure, but acts in the best interests of God and people.* Losing all restraint, the nation has a drunken orgy in honor of the LORD (breaking the seventh and tenth commandments), attempting to mix pagan fertility from Egypt with worship to the true God. *Syncretism is spiritual poison* (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5, 6). After observing it, God is so angry they broke the covenant, He almost destroyed the whole nation and started over with Moses and his family. Returning to see what happened, Moses smashed both tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. *It's easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than the Egypt out of the Israelites* (Col. 3:5-10). When asked about the calf, Aaron, apparently forgetting he carved it, claimed he threw the gold in the fire and 'out came this calf'! *Great leadership doesn't make excuses, they set examples!* (1 Tim. 4:12; Heb. 13:7). Moses then tells all the sons of Levi to kill the men who led Israel in their rebellion and 3000 die. The Levites are then given the role as priest-assistants for their desire for the pure worship of God. In response to the covenant-breaking orgy, God kills 23,000 with a plague (1 Cor. 10:6-8). *God desires pure worship from the pure heart of His purified people* (2 Tim. 2:22).