



## Parkway Fellowship

Epic Fails • Just Go With It...Aaron's Golden Calf • Exodus 32:1-6 • 11/03/2019

### Main Point

When we follow our hearts, we become impatient with the promises of God and compromise.

### Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Name a time or situation in which you have to wait on something or someone (i.e., waiting for a doctor's appointment, waiting in line, waiting in traffic, waiting to get married).**

**During times or periods of waiting, what are some feelings, emotions, or actions that you display while waiting?**

It really seems that the old adage, "good things come to those who wait" is a theme repeatedly mentioned throughout the Bible. Today we will be looking at a story in Exodus where the Israelites began an unhealthy cycle of obedience and disobedience to God. The beginning of the Israelites' failure was due to a lack of patience and trust in God, which caused them to fashion idols of their own choosing.

### Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 32:1-6.

**Why were the people so eager to abandon their faith?**

**What are situations that cause you to worry and doubt in your faith?**

The Israelites had already agreed to obey the Ten Commandments and their leader, Moses,

had been gone for around 40 days. The people were ready to give up on God, break the commandments, and follow their own path.

**Aaron was left in charge and served as the spokesperson for Moses. Why do you think Aaron was so quick to compromise to the people's pleas?**

**When is it hard for you to avoid going along with the crowd? What can you do to avoid it?**

Aaron's lack of leadership caused the heart issue of compromise to become full-blown. He feared persecution from the crowd instead of fearing punishment from the Lord. An interesting aspect of this passage is that after Aaron made and fashioned the golden calf, he made an announcement that there would be a festival to the Lord. The Israelites weren't necessarily trying to make a substitute for God, but they were wanting to worship God on their own terms. In their "worship" of the Lord, they ended up throwing a big party with drinking, dancing, and a little debauchery thrown in for good measure.

**What are some ways that we might "add to" or "take away" from God's Word? Can you truly worship God if it's on your terms and not His? Explain.**

In having and making idols, we become just like the Israelites in that we shift our focus off of God and onto His creation. We make false substitutes for our love, devotion, money, and time. Society has taught us that all of this stuff, all of the awards, accolades, popularity, money, or prestige will bring us happiness and fulfillment, but in the end it leads us to emptiness, loneliness, and regret.

**God had rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and from all that went with it, like pagan worship. So why do you think they were so quick to want to return from that which God had rescued them from?**

If the Israelites had remembered what God had promised and how God had continually come through for them, they would have trusted instead of doubting. God had parted the Red Sea, God had provided manna from heaven, and water from a rock. In each of these situations, God continually showed His faithfulness. Instead of doubting God during times of waiting, we can remember what God has done in the past and continue to trust Him even in the midst of the worst of circumstances.

| Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 32:21-24.

**Does Moses' question to Aaron seem fair or unfair to you? What about Aaron's response—fair or unfair?**

## What would have been a better way for Aaron to have responded to Moses?

Moses had left Aaron in the place of leadership while Moses went to talk to God at Mt. Sinai. Aaron had been chosen by God to be Moses' speaker and mouthpiece when Moses had tried to use his speech impediment as an excuse not to lead the people out of Egypt. When presented with the opportunity to compromise his faith, Aaron made a decision to go along with the crowd and collected the gold earrings used to make the mold of the idol. Aaron's fall is a great reminder to Christians—especially those in leadership—that we are only one bad decision away from changing the trajectory of our lives. The responsibility for the people falling into such great sin or to keep following God and His commandments was left in the care of Aaron. Moses asked the question in verse 21 to confront Aaron of his wrongdoing, not to allow Aaron an excuse for his lack of leadership.

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Consider the following points of application from this week's message: I will insulate myself with like-minded Christ-followers. I will maintain my integrity during times of pressure. When Satan reminds me of my past, I will remind him of his future. I will be convinced that my sin never just affects me. I will confess and seek forgiveness for my mistakes. Which statement stands out to you the most personally? Why?**

**What are some areas of compromise in your life that you need to repent of and turn back to the Lord in full devotion?**

## Prayer

Thank Jesus that you can ask for forgiveness when you substitute His love for a lie and for when you doubt and disobey Him. Pray that He would equip you with strength and courage in the face of adversity.

## Commentary

| Exodus 32:1-6

32:1 The question may be raised as to whether Moses' intent as narrator of this material was to convey the idea that the people "gathered around Aaron" or that they "gathered against Aaron." The Hebrew expression for "employed" is used by Moses only three other times, all in Numbers and all in contexts of opposition and hostility, where the proper translation is "gather

against” or the like. The only other usage of this same compound term is found in Ezek 38:7, where it clearly does not mean “gather against” but in fact means “gather around” in support. Alternatively, it may be that the expression had a large enough range of meaning that it was always technically ambiguous in itself and required contextual definition. Since Ezekiel’s Hebrew is centuries later than that of Moses’ and may reflect semantic drift over time for this particular compound, it is safest to assume that Moses’ own usage would be consistent and that he intended his readers to understand that the people gathered in hostility against Aaron to pressure him into helping them return to idolatry (cf NJPS). This does not excuse Aaron, who should have been willing to resist such pressure but who instead caved in to it. Yet it does tell us that Aaron may have acted partly out of fear for his own popularity/wellbeing/acceptance or the like.

But why did the people want “gods who can go before us”? Were they not satisfied with Yahweh’s leadership during the past months, as he went before them day and night? The answer was partly a matter of the strong attractions of idolatry, partly a matter of the absence of Moses, who was so closely associated with Yahweh’s presence, partly a matter of the passage of time during which the obvious presence of Yahweh in the pillar of cloud and fire was lacking, partly a matter of the attractiveness of the idea of a syncretism of Yahwism with the Egyptian bull cult (see below), but mostly a matter of something that continues to plague even Christian people today: an inability to see that the spiritual world is primary to and in control of the physical and visible world. In order to help his people understand the truth, Yahweh insisted on being believed in rather than being seen. It was so much easier to believe in something that could actually be seen. The Israelites were powerfully attracted to the latter option.

The reference to Moses as “this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt” is not an attempt to avoid thinking of Yahweh as the one who rescued the people from their slavery; rather, it is consistent with God’s own characterization of Moses as the deliverer. In Exodus sometimes Moses is described as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt and other times it is Yahweh who is so described.

In saying “we don’t know what has happened to him,” the people were reflecting not just a genuine confusion but also a lack of faith at the same time. Had they been willing to trust God fully, they would have been willing to wait as long as necessary for Moses to return. But their assumptions got the best of them: it appeared after “a very long time” (the meaning of “forty days and forty nights” in 24:18 and of “so long” in 32:1) that Moses might not be coming back at all. The people had manna and water, so they were not panicked for food; but they wanted to get on with their journey and not stay in the wilderness of Sinai forever, a place where they had recently suffered an unprovoked attack by Amalekites. They needed, in their opinion,

guidance, protection, and divine power backing them in their conquest of the promised land. They needed, they thought, real, tangible gods. When one remembers what a closely won military contest the battle at Rephidim had been (17:8-16), it is not so surprising that they would not have wanted again to experience that sort of uncertainty.

32:2-4 Acceding to the pressure he felt from the people, Aaron helped them revert to idolatry. Seeking the appropriate material (gold), he asked for earrings from the women and children, but not the men. This could reflect his estimation that more than enough earrings would be produced that way to have sufficient gold for an idol, leaving the men still resplendent in their own earrings. Or it could reflect the fact that only women and children—not men—wore earrings among the Israelites, perhaps because earrings were a visible sign that only a man's "dependents" wore, either in Egypt or generally among Israelites.

The statement "so all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron" does not imply in the original that every single Israelite had agreed to the idolatry. Exactly how Aaron built the golden young bull idol is difficult to decipher. What the NIV translates as "made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool" the NRSV, for example, translates as "formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf."

Collecting the earrings, melting them into gold, and shaping the gold around a wooden form to make an idol may have taken more than a day. This, indeed, could have built the suspense. The result was full approbation, unfortunately. Not only had Aaron made an idol, but he apparently had made a good one—so the reaction of people (an indefinite but large group described simply as "they") was to recognize Aaron's work as an idol fit for them to follow and indeed to have followed. That is, they recognized the calf as the embodiment of the divinity that had led them in their exodus and so told each other, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." Such an announcement sounds much like that made by Jeroboam I when he introduced to the northern Israelites his countercultus golden young bulls ("Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt," 1 Kgs 12:28), the only difference being that Jeroboam said "Here are ..." and the people surrounding Aaron said "These are ..." In all likelihood Jeroboam knew of or was informed of the tradition stemming from this passage and capitalized on its continuing popularity in his own day. In either case, there is little doubt that Israelites of all times believed that it was Yahweh, and no other god, who had delivered them from Egypt. In other words, Yahweh was now being represented by an idol, the very sort of thing forbidden clearly by the second word/commandment.

32:5 Just as Jeroboam in his day was trying to modify the true religion of Yahweh into an idolatrous version, so Aaron attempted something of the reverse: to salvage worship of

Yahweh by associating the idolatrous version squarely with Yahweh, building an altar in front of the calf, and declaring a “festival” (worship-feast day) to Yahweh for the following day. Building an altar in front of a god/idol conformed to the expected positioning of sacrifices in idolatry; it guaranteed that the god would see the offerings made to him and accept them. By contrast the orthodox biblical positioning of the altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle, and later temple, so that there was no direct line of sight from the ark in the holy of holies to the altar because of the curtain/veil hiding the ark was actually a positioning that required Israelites to have the faith to understand that the one true God actually saw what they did for him without having his idol right behind and facing the altar on which they did it.

32:6 Again imitating orthodoxy through idolatry, the people “sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings,” which were forms of offering otherwise appropriate for Yahweh (on burnt offerings see Exod 10:25; 18:12; 20:24; 24:5; 29:18, 25, 42; 30:9, 28; 31:9; on fellowship offerings see 20:24-25; 29:28). “Burnt offerings,” also known as “whole burnt offerings,” sought atonement for the worshiper’s sin. “Fellowship offerings,” also known as “sacrifices/offerings of well-being” celebrated the worshiper’s ongoing covenant relationship with Yahweh. Had they been worshipping Yahweh correctly at his tabernacle, they would have been doing a good thing; but here they were worshipping exactly as forbidden in the second word/commandment (Exod 20:4-6, 23) and were ignoring a law they had solemnly agreed to keep (24:3, 7).

Further copying the worship styles of idolatry after eating and drinking the idol-worship meal prepared from their fellowship offerings, the people began to engage in “having fun” (NIV “revelry,” HCSB “to revel”). If any overtone of sexual debauchery is intended here, it is not followed through in the rest of the narrative: Moses later described shouting (v. 17), singing (v. 18), and dancing (v. 19), but not the sort of cultic prostitution the Israelites later indulged in at another location (Num), and identified the people’s sin as idolatry per se (vv. 31-32; 34-35). The revelry of the occasion was apparently singing and dancing with abandon, bad enough as a means of celebration of the people’s newfound relationship with an idol.