

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: October 22, 2017
Lesson Title: "Rebellion"
Lesson Passage: Exodus 32:1-6,11-14

ABOUT THIS LESSON

When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the law from the hand of God, he left Aaron and the elders in charge. As Moses tarried on the mountain, the people went to Aaron and demanded that he provide tangible evidence of divine leadership, to replace Moses, now absent. Without consulting Yahweh, Aaron responds to their demand by fashioning a golden image of a calf and saying "these are your gods, O Israel." When Moses learns of their apostasy, and realizes that they are about to be obliterated by the God whom they have betrayed, he successfully intercedes for his people.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain the probable reason for the people's demand, "Up, make us gods!"
- (2) Explain why the people's worship of the golden image was a violation of the covenant.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Start with this: A wag once quipped, "God created man in His image, and man returned the compliment." *Then comment:* Since the dawn of time, human beings have had an irrepressible urge to create gods of their own. Unable to comprehend the mystery of a God who is Spirit, men through the ages have created more tangible gods--gods of wood, stone, silver and gold. Our lesson passage describes one such instance, early in Israel's history.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Read Ex. 32:1-6, then comment:* The Israelites had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, nurtured in the wilderness and protected by the hand of God. They had pledged themselves to keep the covenant. And now they negated all of this by fashioning a golden idol and worshiping it. **Ask:** What could possibly have led them to do this? **Suggest this possibility:** From the beginning, the people of Israel had regarded Moses as God's representative. When he was with them, they could be assured of God's presence. But, now, it had been 40 days and nights since Moses had disappeared into an ominous cloud on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:18). Given the awesome manifestations of the glory of the Lord on that day ("like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain"-- 24:17), it would have been quite natural for them to assume that Moses had perished. Deprived of the visible assurance of God's presence in the person of Moses, they might have concluded that it was time to create a substitute. (*And remember, they had had nothing to do for 40 days, but wait.* Recall the proverbial saying: "An idle mind is the devil's workshop.")

2. *Comment on the events described in Exodus 32:1-5:* (1) What Aaron fashioned probably was not a "calf," but a "bull" (the Hebrew word, *egel*, is used of a 3-year old heifer in Gen. 15:9.) (2) The bull figured prominently in Canaanite Baal worship, a possible source of the idea among the Israelites. (3) *Refer to the phrase, "and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt,' and point out that we can't know with certainty who "they" were. Was it Aaron and the elders, or was it the people?* (4) The demand in v. 1 ("Up, make us gods") and the cry in v. 4, "These are your gods...who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (32:4) suggest that the Israelites temporarily reverted to the polytheism in which they had been immersed during their 430 year sojourn in Egypt. However, Aaron's announcement, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord" (Yahweh) in v. 5 suggests that the golden calf worship was specifically related to the one Lord whom Moses had taught them to serve. Add these thoughts: [a] Possibly, Aaron and the people did not intend to abandon the worship of Yahweh, since the feast in v. 5 is in honor of "Yahweh." In Canaanite religion, the god was not thought to actually have the appearance of a bull, but, rather, was believed to stand on the bull as a symbol of his power. Perhaps they thought Yahweh would have the same relationship to the bull. [b] But the people had at least violated the second commandment (Exod. 20:4-5). And even if the bull represented Yahweh to the people, they had made it "for themselves" (v. 8).

3. *Refer to Exodus 32:6:* The words "rose up to play" in v. 6 probably describe an orgy which included sexual immorality, an activity with which the sacred symbol of the bull was closely associated in pagan religion.

4. Observe that the conclusion of our lesson passage, Exodus 32:11-14, must be understood in the light of the Lord's scathing reaction to the people's apostasy, as described in vv. 7-10: (1) Note that the Lord now describes the Israelites as "your (Moses') people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt," in contrast to His earlier affirmation, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (They are no longer the people whom the Lord brought up, since they have "corrupted themselves," v. 7). (2) Their apostasy was twofold: They had "turned aside quickly" from obeying His commandments (v. 8), and, they had engaged in idol worship (v. 8), thus violating the first two commandments (Ex. 20:3-4).

5. *Comment on Moses' reaction to the Lord's indictment, a plea for mercy (Ex. 32:11-14):* (1) Moses reminds the Lord that if He destroyed Israel, He would undo what He has done, thus turning their miraculous delivery from Egypt into an occasion for ridicule (vv. 11-12). (2) Israel's destruction would short-circuit the oath God had made to the fathers--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and their descendents (Gen. 22:17-18).

CLOSING THE LESSON

A FINAL COMMENT: We are accustomed to thinking of "repentance" as a turning from sin, but v. 14, which says, "the Lord repented of the evil he thought to do" has an entirely different meaning. For God to "repent" suggests that He changes His intention in accord with His righteous purposes. This suggests that prayer can make a difference.