

Incomprehensible!?

“Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, “O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, “Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!” The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.” (Ex. 32:4-6, NLT-SE)

How on earth was that possible? How could this blunder happen?

Lets just recollect: Israel had witnessed amazing miracles in form of ten plagues, mainly harming their Egyptian slave masters but not them (Ex. 7-11). They had experienced their own exodus from Egypt, loaded with Egypt’s riches (Ex. 12). They had seen the Red Sea parting, allowing their safe crossing before watching the drowning of the complete Egyptian army (Ex. 13-14). After entering the desert they had experienced God’s miraculous food provision (Ex. 16), the provision of water from the rock and the defeat of the Amalekites (Ex. 17). And at Mount Sinai all the people had proclaimed in unison, “We will do everything the Lord has said” (Ex. 19:8). What’s more, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel had actually seen (!) the God of Israel (Ex. 24:9-11). Thus no matter how we look at it, they all must have known that this God Almighty is no illusion but for real.

So how then was it that a mere forty days after Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet God they started worshipping a golden calf as their gods? Did they assume he wouldn’t return as promised because to them the glory of God looked like a consuming fire (Ex. 24:17)? Or were they simply too impatient cause Moses hadn’t come back for such a long time (Ex. 24:18), during which (unbeknown to them) God gave him important instructions for Israel’s future (Ex. 25-31)? Well, according to Exodus 32:1 impatience was exactly the problem.

Still, how could Aaron (Moses’ brother and spokesman), of all those left below, cave in to the people’s evil request to create them a god and with that clearly violating God’s first commandment given in Exodus 20:3?

This whole event seems so bizarre, incomprehensible and absolutely crackers. But is it really? Perhaps we’ve better be careful in judging those involved too swiftly, cause taking a hard look at our own lives might just reveal a constant danger for us acting likewise.

- How often do we today brush this caring, rescuing, providing, loving, leading, protecting, just, righteous, uplifting, correcting, healing, gracious and merciful God aside and substitute Him with our golden calf - our money, houses, assets, company, ministry, job, titles, connections, accomplishments or whatever supposedly rescues us from our bondage and problems? Spiritually, this is no different to what the Israelites did when they literally idolized the riches they’d received from pagan Egypt on their exodus.
- One of the lessons I certainly learn from this account is this: If our walk with the Lord is not sustained by a personal relationship and communication with Him but relies on human mediation, on hearsay from others, on second hand revelation, then all the miracles in the world will fail to keep us on the Kingdom Road.
- Aaron’s behavior in this whole incident should give us red alert, too. He conducted himself as a man without backbone who faltered under the pressure and demands of the people. How about us? Do we falter? Do we have a backbone? Do we stand for what we proclaim we stand for (God’s truth and principles) even if it is unpopular and opposing to those around us? Or do we cave in and start diluting the truth cause we don’t want “to lose the people”? How often do we compromise for people’s sake? How often do we consciously violate God’s commands, assuming His grace and mercy will cover it again?