



## [Exodus 32:1-6](#)

(1) And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. (2) And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. (3) And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. (4) And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (5) And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. (6) And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

*King James Version*

[Moses](#) had placed Aaron in charge while he received instruction from [God](#) on Mount Sinai. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, Aaron probably lacked the conviction or courage to fill Moses' shoes adequately in his absence. To stall for time, he asked the people to contribute to the cause, hoping to deter them. Understanding the principle of "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Matthew 6:21](#)), he asked them to donate some of their jewelry.

His plan failed. They eagerly gave of their treasure, showing where their heart really was. Now Aaron had to go through with it, and he did.

A major motivator in the process of [apostasy](#) is contained within the words, "Moses delayed his coming." Impatience, weariness with the way, and the constant struggle without any indication of relief are all included. God repeats this in the New Testament, when Christ warns that the evil servant says, "My master is delaying His coming" (

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[Matthew 24:48](#); [Luke 12:45](#)). God emphasizes it just in case His children's endurance begins to lag. He does not want anyone to turn aside to some exciting distraction in the surrounding culture.

Unfortunately, that is what occurred here. The impatience and the weariness of their struggle moved the Israelites to take their eyes off the Promised Land, their goal. Instead they focused on a more exciting and stimulating practice from [the world](#) they had just left.

The key to this process is found in verses 4 and 5, in the words, "This is your god, O Israel" and "Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.'" Can God be worshipped in any form as long as it is dedicated to the Lord? Does that please God? Did this celebration become a feast to the Lord because a man in authority like Aaron proclaimed it? Is God pleased when His people worship Him in ways other than what He has prescribed? God's reaction to their idolatrous festivities plainly shows they had turned aside from what He had delivered to them through Moses ([Exodus 32:10](#)).

The world's theologians call this process [syncretism](#), which means "the combination of different forms of belief or practice; the fusion of two or more original forms." The incident of the Golden Calf blends the worship of the true God with the worship of false gods, and the result is proclaimed to be worship of which the true God approves.

Predictably, God was indignant with the people for defining for themselves the nature of the god they wanted to serve. They were preventing the God of heaven from defining His own nature as revealed in His laws, His way, and His actions for and against them. Their experience with these things would teach them about Him. Instead, they decided to define that nature, and chose the form of a bull, a god commonly worshipped in Egypt.

Is God a bull? Of course not! Is God confined to what a bull can do? Of course not! To modern thought worshipping a bull seems silly and foolish, but the spiritual lesson involved is serious. The essence of [idolatry](#) is defining the nature of God, not according to His Word, but according to human experience and ideas.

What is the effect of man defining God according to his own ideals? His god determines his standards. These standards are immediately perceived in his conduct, which can rise only as high as his god, as exemplified in [Exodus 32:6](#): "Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings [a form of worship], and brought peace offerings [indicating [fellowship](#) between God, the priest and offerer]; and the people sat down to

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eat and drink, and rose up to play."

As one might imagine, they were not engaging in ordinary eating and drinking and playing. They were not throwing a ball around, they were not shooting a ball through a hoop, nor were they kicking a ball around a field. They were playing! These people were involved in a gluttonous, drunken debauchery! "Play" suggests conjugal caresses—fornication and adultery!

The symbolism is obvious. When the nature of the true God is falsely defined, the effect will be spiritual [adultery](#). There will be a deterioration, a degeneration, of society expressed in peoples' conduct. Plummeting standards and moral laxity are the fruit produced. Writing of Christianity in the second century, historian Will Durant observes, "Much of this difficult code [of conduct, as practiced by the apostolic church] was predicated on the early [return of Christ](#). As that [hope](#) faded, the voice of the flesh rose again, and Christian morals were relaxed" (*Caesar and Christ*, p. 599).

God handled Israel's debauchery at Sinai severely, but unfortunately, Israel failed to learn the lesson. They never understood the principle of worshipping God as He instructed. In fact, it led to their eventual destruction and captivity.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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