

Impatient People

Opener: What is the longest time you've spent waiting on someone to show up? Why were they so slow?

Scripture: When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." ² Aaron answered them, "Take off [your] gold earrings and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."

⁷ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because those you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' ⁹ "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky'" ¹⁴ Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. ¹⁵ Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. ¹⁹ When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets down, breaking them to pieces. ²⁰ And he took the calf, burned it in the fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

²¹ He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" ²² "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what happened to him.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" ²⁷ Then Moses said to the Levites, "This is what the Lord God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap on a sword. Go through the camp and kill your brother, friend, and neighbor.'" ²⁸ On that day about 3,000 died. ³⁵ Then the Lord struck them with a plague because of what they did. Exodus 32 (condensed)

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever given up on God and done things your way? How did it work out?
2. Why did Aaron initially acquiesce to the people's corruption and later make excuses for their actions?
3. Idolatry is treasuring something more than God. What are some idols, or "golden calves," in our day? What makes them so attractive? What makes them dangerous?
4. Why would anyone prefer idol worship to inviting the living God into their lives?
5. God said he would destroy the people and start over with Moses, but then He relented and struck them with a plague instead. What does this reveal about God and how He dealt with the Israelites in the OT? How does His approach then compare to the way He deals with rebellious Christians today?
6. Has there been a "golden calf" moment in your life when God showed you His undeserved mercy?

Wrap Up: Let's put ourselves in their shoes. They hadn't seen hide nor hair of Moses for so long that they figured he could be dead. They had to do something. So they got Aaron to come up with this golden calf. Needless to say, things didn't turn out well. When Moses finally showed up, all heck broke loose. He smashed the stone tablets to smithereens, then he burned that calf, ground it into powder and made them drink it. He turned the Levites into executioners, and when they were done, they had 3,000 graves to dig. That idol became their downfall. And it's exactly the same for us today—whatever we value more than God will become our downfall. You can count on it.