

Israel Commits Idolatry.

Text: Exodus 32:1-14

Suggested Hymns:

371, 341, 342, 300, 298

- 1) How Did Israel Commit Idolatry?
- 2) Why Was Israel's Sin So Shameful And Damnable?
- 3) How Was Israel Delivered
From The Guilt And The Curse Of This Sin?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 32:1-14, ¹*Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."*

²*And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."* ³*"So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron."* ⁴*And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.*

Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵*So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord."* ⁶*Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

⁷*And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves."* ⁸*"They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"*

⁹*And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!"* ¹⁰*"Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."*

¹¹ *Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?”*

¹² *“Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. ¹³ “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’”*

¹⁴ *So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text tells of an incident which occurred during Israel’s journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The history of that pilgrimage is not only interesting, but also very instructive and beneficial.

The difficulties, the struggles, the sufferings, and the battles which those wanderers experienced all in turn claim our attention. But most impressive of all is God’s wonderful providence, which guided these people, protected, fed, and preserved them.

It is God’s purpose and will that the story of this pilgrimage should never be forgotten. The Feast of Tabernacles in Old Testament reminded the people of these events.

Also Paul in New Testament calls attention to the occurrences and appeals to all Christians to heed the admonitions, as we heard in part of the Epistle Lesson before, 1 Corinthians 10:11, ¹¹ *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition.*

Moses tells both of the godliness and faith of Israel, and also records many of Israel’s sin. Today our text refers to one such sin. The theme for today is *Israel Commits Idolatry*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How Did Israel Commit Idolatry?

This was not the first sin which these people had committed while fleeing from Egypt. Even in Egypt they murmured and complained when they should have given thanks.

Recall that *Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”*² *And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.”*

Then Pharaoh command that the people work even harder. It was then the people complained to *[Moses and Aaron], “Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”*

Again, when they had travelled only a short distance *the people said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?”*¹² *“Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”*¹ They also complained many other times. How ungrateful is man! And how rebellious!

Our text follows on from when Moses had gone up on Mt Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God but was slow in returning. The children of Israel became impatient and said to Aaron, *“Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”*

And at once there were those people who suggested that God had forsaken them, and that now they must provide for themselves. And, of course, if God had left them, they must have some god. They called on Aaron to make them an idol. And Aaron was too weak to resist their sinful proposal. He made them a man-made god.

That is the path which always leads away from God to ever darker sin. First dissatisfaction with God’s Word and ways, then one sin leads to another, until man does not even hesitate to commit the most vile wickedness.

This is nothing new. It also happened to some of Jesus' followers as we read in John 6:66, ⁶⁶ *From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.* Remember also Judas Iscariot who had the money box² and also betrayed Jesus. Be warned! Let us daily pray with the Psalmist in Psalm 139:23-24, ²³ *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;* ²⁴ *And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

2. Why Was Israel's Sin So Shameful And Damnable?

Because it was gross idolatry. Idolatry is that sin whereby people substitute something in the place of the true God. Now, there is nothing higher, more majestic, or more adorable than the true God.³

But in place of this God, people choose the vilest objects. Some people even sacrifice to demons as we read in 1 Corinthians 10:20, ²⁰ *Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.*

Also animals as we read in Romans 1:23 that they *changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.* — What a shameful sin!

Today when we hear of people in pagan lands building temples to elephants, snakes, and monkeys, we are appalled. But these poor heathen were never taught the truth.

How much worse is the idolatry when it is found among people who know the truth and have often experienced God's help! Such were these Israelites. They had received faithful instruction. What wonderful deliverance and guidance of the true God! Scripture says in Luke 12:47, ⁴⁷ *“And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

However, let us not imagine that we are in no danger of committing idolatry. Right here in our own country stand thousands, or even millions of people who are living in a more refined form of this sin without being convinced of it.

All those people who fear and love any one or anything more than they fear and love God commit this sin of idolatry. All those people who place their

confidence and trust in anything more than in God are idolaters. In this way many make a god of mammon, that is, of material things.

We read in Matthew 6:24, ²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.* They make gods of their own bellies as we read in Philippians 3:19, ¹⁹ *whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things.*

Even of their parents or children, as we read in Matthew 10:37, ³⁷ *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* Or of the honour among men as we read in John 5:44, ⁴⁴ *“How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*

How shameful is this sin by which man prostitutes his most precious and costly possession to fornication with an idol! And yet, how common is this sin! Who is entirely free from its pollution? Should we not cry out, *O God, have mercy upon us?*

By this sin we incur God’s displeasure, for He is a jealous God. We read in Exodus 20:5, *For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.*

In our text *the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!* ¹⁰ *“Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.*

People may speak a lot about the unfairness and sin against our neighbour; and it is true, the sins against our neighbour are not small matters. But the fact that by sin we insult God, we transgress His commandments, we defy Him, we rebel against His authority and government, makes our transgression all the more heinous and the punishment all the more severe. Let us therefore ask, —

3. How Was Israel Delivered From The Guilt And The Curse Of This Sin?

Let us note firstly that many of these Israelites were not saved. They chose not to repent of their sin; and when Moses came down from the mountain, he had those who either did not participate in this gross iniquity or repented of it kill those who continued in this sin, so that in one day three thousand of them died and perished in their sins.⁴

Just so today many people live and die in this sin of idolatry. However much we testify against it, the hearts of these people cling to idols. In their eyes God is a negligible quantity or even nonexistent; but they have an exaggerated view of money, pleasure, honour, and other ambitions.

They will not listen to the warning voice of the preaching of repentance and are therefore like the rich man, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.⁵ They go where there is howling and gnashing of teeth.

However, secondly, not all the Israelites perished because of this sin. Thousands of them repented, came to God, and with Moses begged the Lord to remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God was merciful to them and forgave them. He did not blot them out, but again showed them His favour and received them as prodigals who repentantly returned to Him.

That is the only way in which we also may be delivered from this guilt and iniquity — by repentance, by turning to God, by pleading the covenant of His grace.

It is true that this sin of idolatry fully deserves God's wrath, displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. The Lord, however, is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

You also, my dear hearer, know very well that this sin has taken possession of you again and again. You know that you have loved the creature more than the Creator; you know that you have trusted in temporal power, in earthly friends, more than in God.

So remember the words of 1 John 1:8-9, ⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* [But] ⁹ *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Since we have faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour we will confess and forsake our sin, and God will have mercy upon us. The blood of Jesus Christ is so precious that it also cleanses us from this sin. Let us therefore, as long as the day of God's grace lasts, as long as the gate to His kingdom is open, plead for God's mercy, ***"God be merciful to me, a sinner."***

Let us rejoice in His grace, in the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, and let us earnestly pray that God would give us strength and power to conquer this sin, so that our hearts may be freed more and more from this vile sin of idolatry .

Let us always worship none but the Lord, our God, and serve Him alone, so that we can truthfully say with the psalmist, in Psalm 73:25-26, ²⁵ ***Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*** ²⁶ ***My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Exodus 14:11-12

² John 12:4-6

³ Psalm 47, Psalm 100, Psalm 139:1-12

⁴ Exodus 32:28

⁵ Luke 16:19-31