

For GC Discussion

- What can we do to work patience in our lives so we don't fall into similar traps to the people in the desert?
- What might idolatry like this look like in our lives? How can we go about avoiding it?
- What can we learn from the way God deals with His people in this section, and how He reveals Himself to Moses?

Next Week: we will finish off our series on Exodus as the people complete the construction of the tabernacle

Notes and Questions



Week 12: The Golden Calf

Exodus Chapters 32-34

This Weeks Summary

This week we see just how unable the people were to keep the covenant that God had made with them. Moses is a long time coming down the mountain, and in their impatience they have Aaron create a god of gold to lead them forward.

For Study:

The following verses all have to do with the major subject areas from our text this week.

Idolatry:

Isaiah 44:6-20
Ephesians 5:1-10
Ezekiel 14:1-8
1 Corinthians 10:1-33
Romans 1:18-32

Patience:

Romans 8:24-30
Psalm 37:1-11
James 1:2-4

The Mercy of God:

Psalm 103:1-18
Micah 7:18-20
Psalm 25:1-10

For Worship: Listen to *'Search Me Oh God'* by Hillsong. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.

This week we saw the greatest failure yet by the people to worship God as He has required of them. Impatient for God to do something, they make for themselves an idol to worship. Here are some more things we can learn from the text:

The Snare of Impatience

It's remarkable how little it takes for the people to fall into the idolatry of these chapters. In front of their eyes God has been doing signs and wonders and showing them His greatness and power, and all it takes for them to turn from His instructions is for Moses to be away for a few weeks. All the people have seen isn't enough to stop them losing patience with Moses and with God and deciding to take matters into their own hands. They want to try and force forward their journey into the promised land - look at what they say to Aaron - 'make us gods who shall go before us'.

What this shows is that the problem of impatience isn't a new one - maybe we've made it worse with all our technology that speeds things up for us so often, but at heart we as human beings naturally always want to speed up the program. The Bible teaches us again and again though that God just isn't like that - His timing is perfect, and it's rarely the timing that we want it to be. What God values and what we do can often be very different - we want instant pleasure, whereas He has greater and better ideas of what He's doing in any given situation. His plans are to bring about things which are so much more valuable than just a passing pleasure. Yes, God wants to bless His people with good things, but He knows that for us to enjoy those good things well they can't just be shoved upon us, but there is a process to walk through - a process of testing, trying, and changing us until we're ready to receive the blessing. The people just couldn't understand that and it caused them to sin greatly against God - may He help us not to fall into the same impatient trap, but to patiently wait for the promised blessing to come about.

A Dangerous Mixture

There's a part of this account that is genuinely scary for those who want to honour God and worship Him in truth. Notice what Aaron says to the people as he makes the golden calf - 'these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' There is an attempt to hide the fact that the people are committing serious idolatry and walking away from the God who has led them this far. They try to pretend that this calf is in fact the one who has rescued them from Egypt and was all the time leading them towards the promised land. It's crazy and a complete deception, but designed to appease the consciences of these idolatrous

people by somehow allowing them to convince themselves that they haven't really left the God who rescued them. They are still worshipping Him, maybe just in a different form - a form they know they can control better, but the same God nonetheless. It's a pretty clear indicator to us that when we're on the lookout for idolatry in our lives, it isn't just the complete departures from Biblical faith that we're looking for, but just as much it's the compromises and the additions that we make while still claiming to hold to our original faith - these in some ways are even more dangerous. We need to be so careful that we too don't create a god who suits us better and somehow try to join it on to the God of the Bible - in doing so we are committing just as great a sin as these people did.

A Merciful Outcome

It's interesting how the situation plays out between God and Moses. Initially he almost seems more merciful than God is, and intercedes for the people, appealing to the honour of God's name in having rescued His people and finishing the job. Then when Moses gets down the mountain he seems to almost realise how serious it really is and it's he who leads the judgment against the people. Then later as he intercedes again Moses shows an incredible example of compassion and love for the people as he offers to be blotted out himself in their place. You could almost get the impression that it's Moses kind of holding God back from judgment, but it's really important to remember that anything good that comes from Moses' life has ultimately come from God. God then reveals Himself to Moses at his request proclaiming the reality of His character - 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' - this is the God we worship, and this is where our faith must lie. He is good, even when we don't totally understand all that He is doing. Even when He seems harsh, this proclamation is the reality of His character - a God full of mercy and grace.

The Glory of that which is passing away

Though God chooses to reveal Himself to Moses in a special way He tells Him that He cannot see His face, but only His back. Even with this degree of veiling to the full glory of God, whenever Moses goes in to speak to Him he returns to the people with a face that shines so brightly that the people can't look at him and he has to veil his face to hide the brightness. The New Testament (2 Corinthians 3) would tell us that if the Old, passing away covenant had this much glory, how much more glory is there in the New Covenant, not written on stone, but written on our hearts. Not to do with the letter of the law, but the reality of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts - this is true glory.