

Praying for People Who Reject God



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 32:1–6; Romans 1:22–27; Exodus 32:7, 8; Exodus 32:9–29; Exodus 32:30–32.

MEMORY VERSE: “So Moses went back to the LORD and said, ‘Please listen! These people committed [did] a terrible sin and made a god from gold. Now, forgive them of this sin. If you will not forgive them, then erase my name from your book’ ” (Exodus 32:31, 32, ERV).



God's people turned away from Him and worshiped a man-made statue of a god, the gold cow.

MOSES was in the mountain with God for only 40 days, and what happened? God's people turned away from Him and worshiped a man-made statue of a god, the gold cow. After God gave His people so many mighty signs, experiences, and miracles, how could they do that?

Did the people not understand who God really was? Or did their love for sin cause them to forget their powerful experiences with God? Weren't the Israelites grateful for everything God did for them? Or did they not really care? Did they not fully understand what God did for them? Were their minds ruined with their sins and the old way of thinking from the past? Were they not grateful for God's gift of mercy? Did they so quickly forget the mighty acts of God (Psalm 106:13, 21–23)? Or should we blame their worship of the gold cow on Aaron's failed leadership? Moses tells us that the Lord “ ‘was so angry with Aaron he wanted to destroy him too’ ” (Deuteronomy 9:20, NIV).

Whatever Israel's reasons for sinning against God and turning from Him, what lessons about sin and God's mercy can we learn from their experience?

FAILED LEADERSHIP (Exodus 32:1–6)

God invited Moses to spend time with Him. 40 days and 40 nights may have seemed a short period of time for Moses. But 40 days and 40 nights was too long for the Israelites. Their visible leader, Moses, was gone too long. The people became confused and refused to wait for Moses. They felt afraid and insecure. The people wanted a visible god who would lead them, much the same as the “gods” they saw all their lives in Egypt.

Read Exodus 32:1–6. How was it possible for Aaron’s leadership to fail in a big spectacular way?

Aaron failed to do what was right. Aaron didn’t trust the Lord. He did what the people wanted. The people asked for something forbidden and terrible: “ ‘Come. Make us a god that will lead us’ ” (Exodus 32:1, NIV).

People gave gold to make the statue. Aaron didn’t stop them from giving. Worse, Aaron invited them to give! Then Aaron helped to make the false god. After Aaron made the gold calf, they announced, “ ‘Israel, here is your god who brought you up out of Egypt’ ” (Exodus 32:4, NIV). The people were evil, filled with sin, and short-sighted. They made this statue and then announced that this “god” saved them from the Egyptians. Isn’t it strange how sin can change our thinking and actions for the worse? People celebrate and worship the things they make. When they do, their hearts and minds become ruined.

“The people of Israel needed a strong leader during this time. This leader needed to put the honor of God above popular favor, personal safety, or his own life. But Aaron was not a strong leader. Aaron tried to stop the people, but He was afraid of them. Aaron was weak when he needed to be strong at an important time. Aaron’s weakness caused the people to want to make the gold calf even more. The noise and trouble grew worse. The crowd grew excited. Even so, some Israelites stayed loyal and true to God’s Promise. But most of the people joined in the sin. Aaron was afraid for his own safety. But he didn’t stand up for God’s honor. He gave the people what they wanted.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 316, 317, adapted.

Why was Aaron, a leader, so weak? What excuse do you think Aaron gave in his own heart for his actions?



Aaron helped to make the false god.

EVIL AND WORSHIPING FALSE GODS (Romans 1:22–27)

Where did the worship of false gods quickly lead the Israelites? Read Exodus 32:6 for the answer.

The gold cow looked much the same as the Egyptian bull-god named Apis or the Egyptian cow-god named Hathor. When Israel made the gold cow, they broke the first and second commandments. God must punish this sin because the people openly broke their relationship with the living Lord. The Israelites worshiped something they made and not the God who made them. Their god could not see, hear, smell, speak, care, love, or lead.

God made people to be copies of Himself. But now the people made a god that looked the same as an animal. Why did they want to serve this animal as a god? So, the people sinned deeply against the Lord (Isaiah 31:7; Isaiah 42:17).

In what ways does the sin with the gold cow show us what is written in Romans 1:22–27?



Some people bow down in front of statues. Other people worship false gods in their hearts.

When people worship false gods, they reject the Bible truth that God is God and man is man. Worshiping false gods breaks the connection between God and man and separates us from Him. Some people bow down in front of statues. Other people worship false gods in their hearts. All types of this worship will break our relationship with the Lord and lower us into sin. No wonder the verse talks about what the people did the next day. First, they killed animals and offered them as gifts to the statue of the gold cow. Then the people started to party and have a good time. Ellen G. White says that the party was “much the same as the feasts in Egypt that people celebrated in honor of false gods.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 320, adapted.

People are very good at making their own false gods. Worse, after they make their own gods, they bow down and serve them. These people replace the Savior who made them with things that, sooner or later, destroy them.

What are ways, today, that people worship nature and the things that God made, and not God?

A TERRIBLE SIN (EXODUS 32:7, 8)

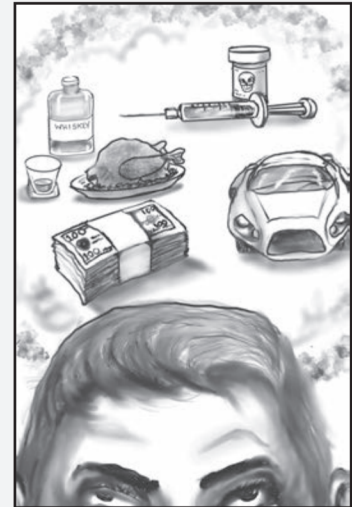
**Why did God send Moses back to the camp of Israel?
Read Exodus 32:7, 8 for the answer.**

The Israelites worshiped a false god. When they did, they started to “divorce” God. “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down from this mountain. Your people, the people you brought out of the land of Egypt, have done a terrible sin’ ” (Exodus 32:7, ICB). The people made their sin worse when they thanked their “god” for helping them escape Egypt. The people went against what God said to them (read Exodus 20:2)! The people rejected God and His mighty acts. The Israelites’ hearts and minds were completely ruined.

For Ezekiel, the worship of false gods caused God’s people to suffer and to do other sins (read Ezekiel 8:1–18; Ezekiel 20:1–44; Ezekiel 22:1–12). We may wonder, how could God’s people be so foolish? Why did they refuse to stop worshiping false gods? We are sure that we would not do the same thing. Are we really free of false gods? Today, false gods may look different. But they have the same power over us that false gods had over God’s people in Bible times.

A false god replaces God. We know that worshiping the false god isn’t right. But we worship it anyway. The false god steals our time, our thoughts and imagination, our hearts, and our feelings away from God. We spend more time with the god than we do with God. The false god can make us slaves. We become what we look at and watch. So, we will become no better than whatever “god” we serve.

If God isn’t the most important part of our lives, then other gods will replace Him. If we don’t enjoy being with God and communicating with Him, we will enjoy and give our lives to something or someone else. What we substitute for Jesus may look different for each of us: pride, a selfish heart, money, power, sex, food, TV, a bad drug habit, alcohol, dirty thoughts, pleasures, work, sports, family, video games, shopping, sex tapes, films and movies, ideas, government, fame, good grades, and so on. We can even turn anything good and beautiful into a false god. Worshiping false gods puts us in terrible danger because false gods change our personality, our thinking, our feelings, and our choice of friends. False gods change who we are. False gods destroy our real, personal relationships and replace them with empty friendships that, in the end, can’t save us.



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money, power, sex, food,
TV, a bad drug habit,
alcohol, dirty thoughts,
pleasures, work, sports,
family, video games, shop-
ping, sex tapes, films and
movies, ideas, government,
fame, good grades, and so
on.**

GOD'S HOLY ANGER (Exodus 32:9–29)

What did Moses say and do when God wanted to destroy Israel? Read Exodus 32:9–29 for the answer.

While Moses was on Sinai, God said that He would destroy the people who turned against Him. Then God would make Moses' future children into a powerful people group. But Moses didn't want God to do that. Moses asked the Lord to remember that the Israelites weren't his people, but God's. Moses didn't bring the people out of Egypt. God brought them out with His mighty works. So, Moses asked God to remember His early promises to their fathers. Moses was working as a real helper. He asked God to forgive His people. Moses stood between God's anger and the people.

"Then the LORD took pity on his people. He didn't destroy them as he had said he would" (Exodus 32:14, NIRV). After that, Moses went back to the camp.

When Moses came near the camp, he saw the gold cow. Moses saw the people dancing. He became very angry, and he threw the two pieces of stone on the ground. The stones broke into several pieces at the bottom of the mountain (Exodus 32:19). God wrote His law on the two pieces of stone. The broken pieces of stone were a symbol that showed that Israel broke God's law. God scolded Moses for breaking the stone. Later, God commanded Moses to cut two more pieces of stone to replace the broken stones: " 'I will write on the tablets the same words that were on the first tablets, which you broke' " (Deuteronomy 10:2, ICB).

Moses angrily scolded Aaron for doing what the people wanted. "Moses said to Aaron, 'What did these people do to you that would make you do this [make a gold cow]? Why did you lead them to do such [the same as this] a terrible sin?' " (Exodus 32:21, ERV). What made things worse was that God honored Aaron so much in the past. Aaron went on the mountain with Moses and the 70 leaders (Exodus 24:1).

Aaron said that a miracle caused the gold cow to appear in the fire and then jump out of the flames. Aaron tried to use this story to trick his brother. (Do you see how one sin leads to another? In this example, worshiping false gods leads to lying.) Moses wasn't fooled. He saw that the people behaved wildly. Moses could see the evil behavior that happened when the people worshiped the gold cow. So, Moses knew that he needed to stop their sinning right away.



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NO MORE TEARS OR PAIN (Exodus 32:30–32)

How far did Moses go in his prayer for sinners? Read Exodus 32:30–32 for the answer.

Because Israel worshiped the gold cow, terrible things happened in their camp. Many people died (Exodus 32:28). “The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed [done] a terrible sin. But now I will go up to the LORD. Maybe if I pray to him, he will forgive your sin’ ” (Exodus 32:30, NIV). “So Moses went back to the LORD and said, ‘Please listen! These people committed a terrible sin and made a god from gold. Now, forgive them of [for] this sin. If you will not forgive them, then erase my name from your book’ ” (Exodus 32:31, 32, ERV).

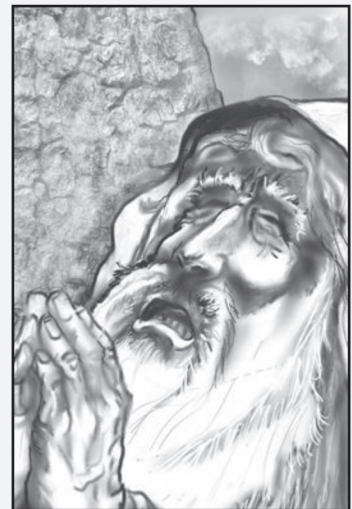
Moses is a symbol for Jesus. Moses prays for sinners and is willing to die for them. These things show us what Jesus would do for all of us. Moses felt so much love in his heart for sinners. Moses showed his loyalty to the Lord and His love for people. The book of Exodus doesn’t say how long Moses stayed with the Lord on the mountain this time. But the book of Deuteronomy tells us that Moses was on Sinai this time for 40 days (read Deuteronomy 9:18).

In Exodus 32:32, the word written as “forgive” is from a word in the Hebrew language whose basic meaning is “to take on” or “to carry.” We see an example of this meaning in Isaiah 53:4, which talks about Jesus: “For sure He took on Himself our troubles and carried our sorrows” (NIV). This same word is translated as “forgive” in Exodus 32:32 and “to take on” in Isaiah 53:4. This meaning helps us understand forgiveness and what it cost God to save us.

Moses asked the Lord to “carry” the people’s sin. That is exactly what Jesus did at the cross, thousands of years later. Exodus 32:32 shows not only the idea of a Substitute accepting the punishment for our sin. The verse also shows that the Substitute is God Himself.

Exodus 32:32 shows us how we get forgiveness. God in Jesus carried our sins. That’s the only way He could forgive us. This Bible truth is a powerful picture of God’s plan to save us and shows us how much it cost God to do it.

Moses asks God Himself to carry His people’s sins. Jesus did just that. How do we understand this powerful Bible truth? What does it tell us about God’s love?

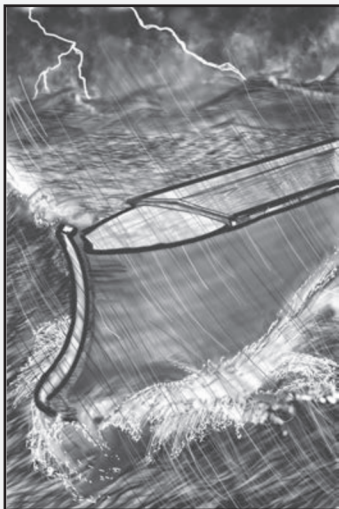


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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Idolatry at Sinai,” pages 315–327, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

This week’s lesson is about God’s work in Christians. “With God’s power working in us, he can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of” (Ephesian 3:20, ERV). We should not live for ourselves or do what we want, because that causes us to worship self and not God. Our attention should be on God and His power. He gives us His strength, which leads us to a new life. The Lord gives us power over sin (Philippians 4:13; Jude 1:24, 25).

“Because God is fair, He must punish evil. But God must punish evil because He is a loving God, too. God is not just the Leader of His people. He also protects them. God punishes sinners who refuse to stop fighting against Him so that they don’t destroy the lives of other people, too. When God spared Cain’s life and let him live, God showed to everyone in heaven what would happen if sin didn’t get punished. Cain’s life and teachings caused his future children to become so evil that the only way God could save the earth was to destroy it with a worldwide Flood. . . . The longer men lived, the more evil they became. The same thing happened at Sinai. If God didn’t punish the sinners fast, the same thing that happened with the people who lived before the Flood would have happened with the Israelites.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 325, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Think more about the question at the end of Monday’s study. What are ways that we can worship nature and not the God who made nature? How can we be good managers of this earth and protect nature without worshipping it or making it a false god?
- ❷ Why did Moses order the killing of the people who refused to be sorry for their sin and continued to fight against God and His teaching?
- ❸ Read 1 Peter 2:24. How does this verse show the powerful idea that Jesus is our Substitute? Why must we have a Substitute to save us from our sins? Why is any teaching about how we are saved from sin wrong if it doesn’t teach this idea of a Substitute?

FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE

16-year-old Domenico didn't want to lose Fulvia after he met her in Florence, Italy. So, he lied when she asked about his parents.

Fulvia asked Domenico, "What do your parents do?"

Domenico said, "My parents are rich. They own a beautiful car."

Then Fulvia asked Domenico where he lived. Without thinking, he gave her the address of the orphanage where he lived.

But when Fulvia went to the address, she found the orphanage. So, Domenico couldn't lie anymore.

He said, "I'm an orphan. I live here."

Fulvia told her father everything. Domenico thought their relationship was over. But her father's answer surprised Domenico.

Fulvia's father said, "We have three children. Invite Domenico over. Then we'll have four kids."

Fulvia's family accepted Domenico the same as a son. Domenico visited their home often. The family made Domenico feel very loved. Domenico learned about God's love for the first time. Domenico heard about God before. But now he saw God's love in real life. Domenico wanted to know God. He started to pray.

Years passed. Domenico left the orphanage. He married Fulvia when he was 22. Domenico continued to want to know God. Domenico watched the 1956 American movie *The Ten Commandments* while he was in the orphanage. He wondered if there was a church that kept all ten commandments. He wondered if anyone lived the way the Bible talks about.

When Domenico was 30, he heard someone on the radio say, "Now we're going to talk about Paul the Teacher and Preacher." Domenico listened. He noticed the radio show host said things about the Bible that no other Christians said. Domenico started to listen to the radio station often. When a radio show host talked about Ellen G. White's book *Steps to Christ*, he called the radio station to ask for a copy. Domenico also asked if the station would send someone to his house to answer his questions.

Emmanuel and his wife showed up at Domenico's house with the book. Emmanuel opened the Bible to answer Domenico's questions. Then Domenico asked him to tell him about the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Domenico wanted to know more about the history of Christianity. So, then he read *The Great Controversy*.

After seven months of Bible studies, Domenico felt God's love fill his heart. He got baptized. Now 68, Domenico Civardi says, "I'm grateful to Adventist radio because it changed my life."

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The family made Domenico feel very loved.



Domenico Civardi