

Additional notes for teachers:

Many of the notes comprise deeper matters which have arisen in the course of preparation of the Students Notes. Other material has been appended for the purpose of providing background, explanations or interesting detail.

LESSON 24 THE GOLDEN CALF

1. ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY AND ATTITUDE TO GOD

Moses had been God's mouthpiece to Israel and, in some measure, a visible indication of His presence among them, especially since their plea "let not God speak to us". In Moses' absence they turned to Aaron and their minds went back to the customs and practices of Egypt, e.g. graven images. So they appealed to Aaron "make us gods".

We do not know to what extent Israel had previously been involved in the idolatry of Egypt, though Joshua 24:14 would suggest some connection. The calf was introduced as "the god" which had brought them forth from Egypt (see Exodus 32:4 RSV) so that they would worship the Lord as the Egyptians worshipped their gods.

The construction of a molten image of gold indicates considerable metallurgical skill. A furnace would be needed to provide the terrific heat necessary. Apparently a mould was available into which molten metal was poured. Aaron possibly did not know what the finished product would be until "this calf came out" (Exodus 32:24).

The people associated a "feast unto the Lord" with the sacrifices to the calf. We might compare Saul waiting impatiently for Samuel and being told "obedience is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22).

The destruction of the golden calf (Exodus 32:20) also involved considerable metallurgical skill on the part of Moses who was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt. To burn gold requires enormous heat and the resulting oxide being ground to powder and dissolved in the water would produce an exceedingly bitter draught. The accuracy of the record is its own guarantee that this is indeed an authentic account.

2. THE ANGEL OF GOD'S PRESENCE

The Angel of God's Presence had at first refused to go with the people (Exodus 33:3) but in response to Moses' pleading, agreed to do so (Exodus 32:34; 33:12-16) as also in Exodus 23:20-23 and Isaiah 63:9. Compare Moses self-sacrifice (Exodus 32:32) with Paul's words, Romans 9:3.

TEACHING METHODS

1. Co-ordinate the sequence of events at Sinai including Moses' ascensions, the receiving of the Law, the design of the Tabernacle etc. and Israel's idolatry.
2. Show how quickly Israel failed when put to the practical test under the covenant which they had just made at Sinai.
3. Discuss the challenging call of Moses, "Who is on the Lord's side".
4. Teach the lessons of meekness, loyalty and resolute strength of character from the actions of Moses in this lesson.