

# Israel Worshipped False Gods

By Tom Hill

**Bible Text:** Exodus 32:1-6

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The people of the world have become idol worshippers. The evidence for this conclusion abound everywhere. Even in America, many religions include physical idols as part of their religious practice.

In other cases, people elevate prized possessions, or bank accounts to the place of an idol which they worship. Still others worship people in position of religious authority or in prominent positions. It isn't surprising that idols dominate the world. We expect it.

But it disturbs me greatly to see idol worship invade the Church of Jesus Christ. This invasion of idol worship has become prevalent. But only the discerning eye enlightened by the Holy Spirit observes the clues.

Many believers have a divided heart, attempting to worship God and hold onto things of this world at the same time. Others make God last on their priority list. Further, disobedience of God's word has become acceptable, even desirable, especially when it is done "for the Lord."

As a consequence, the Church has grieved the Holy Spirit and quenched His ministry in our lives. We lack God's glorious presence. We desperately need a spiritual revival.

Before that will occur, however, believers in Jesus Christ need a fresh revelation of the truth of God's word regarding false gods. The rebuke of God's truth must then produce repentance for sin. That repentance will, at the very least, produce personal spiritual revival, perhaps even Church-wide revival.

One passage identifies several features of false gods. It describes the time in Israel's history when they forged the golden calf. I refer to the well known Scripture found in Exodus 32:1-6:

"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. {2} And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. {3} And all the people brake off the

golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. {4} And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. {5} And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. {6} And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”

Their actions clearly led to idol worship. But, this kind of action does not describe the only instance of idol worship. In fact, idol worship occurs under other instances as well. It is idol worship whenever someone holds blind or excessive adoration of a person or thing. It results, too, when people assume God to be other than He is. When we substitute these false assumptions for the true and living God, we become idol worshippers.

In either case, we change the truth of God into a lie. In reality, we reject Him as God as He has revealed Himself to us.

The passage in Exodus clearly identifies some typical patterns of idol worship. From this passage, I want to examine with you three plain irrefutable truths about false gods. They reveal features and characteristics of idols. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these truths in your life bring about a spiritual revival that will transform you.

### **Conformity to the world’s pattern**

False gods, idols, conform to the methodology of the world. In the instant case, the Children of Israel faced a dilemma, wait for God or do something. As you may recall, God called Moses up to the mountain to give him the law. He remained there 40 days. As the time extended, the Israelites became restless and decided to do something.

As a result, they copied the world’s methodology instead of God. They forged the golden calf and called it the god who brought them out of Egypt and who would now lead them.

The idea for the idol originated from their time in Egypt. It copied the form of the Egyptians’ chief god. In fact, the Children of Israel never gave up the idols from Egypt. They did not forsake them (see Ezekiel 20.7-8).

When they no longer expected nor desired God's supernatural presence, authority, and ability, they turned from waiting upon Him. Instead, they adopted the world’s methods to accomplish God's plan and purpose. Methodology always results from a failure to wait upon God. It was true in their day; it is true in our day, as well.

Sadly, the Church of Jesus Christ today has copied the sin of the Children of Israel. We no longer want to wait upon God. So we, like them, look to the ways of the world and adopt them. After all, we say, if it works in the world, it will work in the Church. Too often, the Church follows the typical pattern of the world.

For instance, when the world wants to accomplish a task, it follows a certain pattern. It uses the following process:

- Set goals.
- Develop an organizational structure that will help attain the goals.
- Recruit influential people to support the strategy.
- Develop a financial plan to pay for the plan.
- Create a media and promotional program to help sell it.
- Adopt a slogan to popularize it.
- Amass popular support and interest to accomplish the plan.
- No doubt you have seen these steps in use. Charity fund drives give clear examples of them in action.

What devastates me, however, is to observe them commonly in practice in the Church of Jesus Christ. Too often, the Church impatiently fails to wait upon God for His plan for His people. As a result, we have lost the wonder of God and fail to see His terribleness and awesomeness. Those who fail to wait for God miss His supernatural work in their lives.

The Scriptures abound with evidence of God's unusual intervention on behalf of those who waited for Him. David overcame the Philistines when he waited for the wind of God in the Mulberry Trees (2 Samuel 5). Paul reached Philippi when he waited for God (Acts 16). The New Testament Church experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in that first revival when they waited for God (Acts 1-2).

What happened in those instances will happen again today to those who wait for God. In fact, history has proven it true in every spiritual revival. History also discloses the sad truth that the sin of Israel recurs in the lives of those who fail to wait upon God. The condition of the Church of Jesus Christ proves it today.

### **Reliance upon human resources**

While the first feature of false gods emphasizes methodology, this feature stresses the means used to accomplish God's plan and purpose. Again, the immediate circumstances with the Children of Israel clearly picture this truth.

They produced the idol which they worshipped through human effort and resources. Note the account in verses two and three which describe the source of the materials. It came from the bounty of gold that the Egyptians gave to them upon their midnight exodus. The Israelites took it and gave it to Aaron for the idol.

Next, the record in verse four explains that Aaron fashioned it with a graving tool. After melting the gold, he could then mold it into a form, that of a calf.

In other words, no where in the whole process did the Children of Israel depend upon God. They could do it without Him, and they did. It did not require any supernatural work from God. They did it in their own strength.

In similar fashion, the Church of Jesus Christ today uses the same approach to accomplish what they believe to be God's purposes. I make this conclusion because so much of the Church's activities require no supernatural intervention of God at all. We can explain it all in terms of human effort and resources. In the end, it stimulates the praise of man, but not of God.

But God wants His children to live and act supernaturally. He wants believers to rely totally upon the Heavenly Father to work the impossible and unexplainable in them by the Holy Spirit. He wants to accomplish in the Church His miraculous works, those explainable only in terms of His mighty arm.

Jesus made this abundantly clear in the Parable of the Vine and the Branches. In this parable, He distinctly and plainly says in John 15:5:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

When the Church relies upon someone or something other than God, the result, then, is not of God. That makes it evil and fleshly. It is at enmity with God. That which we say is for God is actually against Him (see Romans 8.5-7).

To accomplish the will of God requires His supernatural authority and ability by the Holy Spirit, Who works it through the believer. To do otherwise proves the presence of a false god.

### **Imitation of divine realities**

The final feature of false gods centers upon the manner of accomplishment. The record under examination details their false worship. It had all the appearance of rightness. Aaron called a feast to the Lord. He built an altar, and the Israelites offered sacrifices on it. They even sang with joy and enthusiasm. Their worship possessed the look and feel of truth.

But saying it is so does not make it so. And therein lies the sad condition of the Church of Jesus Christ. Too often the Church has succumbed to mistaking the imitation for the real. She has assumed that excitement, enthusiasm, excellence, and energy prove the presence of God.

Yet mankind can manufacture and manipulate conditions to produce these effects. One need only to look at sporting or musical events to find their presence in abundance. Their presence confirms neither the presence of God nor His approval.

These terms fail to describe the awesome presence of God. Note the difference between them and the descriptions of God's glorious presence on Mt. Sinai, in the Holy of Holies, in Isaiah's vision, and numerous other revelations. Words fail to describe such encounters with the living God.

Tragically, the false often looks like the real thing because we have never experienced the real thing. We are satisfied with the mere form instead of the reality. Note Paul's warnings about such conditions in 2 Timothy 3.5:

“Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

He repeats his warning to another who had the task of giving leadership to the New Testament Church in Titus 1.16:

“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedience, and unto every good work reprobate.”

Only God can create a divine atmosphere. He produces an awesome reverence that defies imitation.

Where has the Holy Spirit identified in your life where you have followed the example of the Israelites? Have you substituted the false for the true? Have you mistaken the imitation for divine realities? Have you become satisfied with what you can manufacture and manipulate?

The Spirit of God wants the truth to correct you from error. He points out where you have believed false doctrine. From the example of the Israelites, He shows you false practices to avoid.

In the end, the Spirit's correction comes to conform your opinions, attitudes, and actions to the truth of God's word. He wants you to wait on God and to rely upon His power to work the unexplainable in and through your life. He wants you to know the divine reality of God's glorious presence.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see these truths from His word. I pray that He will apply them in your life today. I pray that He will revive and transform you so that you will experience the divine reality of His glorious presence.