

THERE CAME OUT THIS CALF
EXODUS 32:24
Jim Laws

“So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off. So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.’”

Moses was on the mountain with God and while there he received the Ten Commandments. He remained on the mountain, as God rehearsed to him the contents of the law and gave instructions concerning the tabernacle and the priesthood. Down below, camped around the foot of the mountain, the Israelites waited for their leader to return. After weeks had passed and he did not return, they feared the worst; incorrectly assuming Moses was dead or had deserted them. Needing something they could *physically see* to hold them together, the crowd convinced Aaron to take matters into his own hands. Acting on *his own authority*

Aaron said to them, “‘Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.” Aaron melted down some of the jewelry and made a golden calf to represent God who had brought them out of Egypt. Perhaps, it was a wooden figure overlaid with gold. Perhaps, it was a process the Hebrews had learned in Egypt. It is not clear if the Hebrews viewed the calf as a different God from Jehovah, or a representation of Jehovah. At any rate, the act was viewed as sinful, as it was a violation of the covenant and caused both the wrath of God and Moses himself. Further, Aaron ordered a special feast and sacrifices to be made, “And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings. And the people sat down to each and drink and rose up to play” (Ex. 32:6).

God informed Moses about the idolatrous actions by the children of Israel and His intention to annihilate the entire race, except Moses with whom God would fulfill his covenant to Abraham (Ex. 32:10). Moses, acting from love and selflessness, earnestly pled for lives of the Hebrews. Their impulsive act was as much a rejection of Moses, as it was of God. It would be hard to deny him the satisfaction, if he had gone along with God’s plan, and he could have said, “Go ahead, they don’t appreciate what I do for them anyway.” However, Moses was a man of meekness and self-sacrifice; he reasoned with God that their enemies would mock the Exodus as a trap laid out by a capricious god. God listened approvingly and turned the chastisement of the Israelites over to Moses. Moses proved himself to be man of velvet and steel: velvet in that he was tender-hearted toward Israel, steel in that he would make them face the consequences of their sin.

As Moses confronted Aaron, he heard one of the lamest excuses one could imagine, “So I said to them, “‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.” In Moses’ presence Aaron was strong; without him he crumpled under the pressure of the people. Such is the temptation of many people, “Whatever the people want, that’s what we will give them.” Moses had his own temptations, but Aaron faced the “orator’s” temptation to give the people what they wanted. The same temptation still exists for many present-day preachers. Since Moses

was “slow of speech,” God had given him an orator, one who could speak well for Moses, who should have used his skills to persuade the crowds to turn from sin and back to faith in God. Sadly, Aaron did not. When he was called to account for his action, his offered only a lame excuse, “there came out this calf.” Let’s not give ancient Israel, or Aaron, the compliment of a close imitation, or we too will face the wrath of God. Let’s take God at his word.