

The Sunday School

BIBLE LESSON.

Abridged from Peloubets' Notes.

Third Quarter, 1902.

JULY TO SEPTEMBER.

Lesson IV. July 27. Exodus 32:1-6, 30-25.

WORSHIPING THE GOLDEN CALF.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Thou shalt have no other god's before me.—Ex. 20:3.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE CAUSES OF DISOBEDIENCE.—Vs. 1. There were two causes of the Israelites' sin. The first was the prolonged absence of Moses. 1. AND WHEN THE PEOPLE SAW THAT MOSES DELAYED TO COME DOWN OUT OF THE MOUNT. It was an absence of forty days (Ex. 24:18), on the most important of all errands, communion with God. Joseph Parker well asks, "Do we love solitude? Do we ever go up for our marching orders? It is our habit to shut out the world and keep it far below us that we may have every day some five minutes at least with God?"

The second cause of disobedience was the people's longing for idolatry, which Moses' absence gave them a chance to gratify. In pursuit of this desire, THE PEOPLE GATHERED THEMSELVES TOGETHER UNTO AARON. Then went to Aaron, Moses' brother, because Moses had left him (and Hur) in chief command during his absence (Ex. 24:14). AND SAID UNTO HIM, UP, MAKE US GODS. "Rather, make us a god." The word is plural *Elohim*, used everywhere to denote the one God.

Such were the true causes of the Great Disobedience—impatience and faithless discouragement at Moses' absence, and a longing after the easy religion and base ceremonies of idolatry. The people, however, were ashamed to own the real causes, so they spoke as follows: FOR AS FOR THIS MOSES, HERE WAS A MAN SO GREAT THAT EVERY NATIONAL DELIVERER SINCE THEN HAS BEEN CALLED "THE MOSES OF HIS RACE." he is absent only six weeks, and his people sneer at him, "this Moses!" Truly it requires a hero to give due honor to a hero. THE MAN THAT BROUGHT US UP OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT. You would think this would have been an argument for their grateful regard, but men of mean spirit hate their benefactors, just as the Jews hated Christ. WE WOT (know) NOT WHAT IS BECOME OF HIM. "Here is this Moses, who has already got himself lost; how shall he guide two millions of people?" If you want to sin, the silliest excuse will satisfy you.

II. THE GREAT DISOBEDIENCE.—Vs. 2. AND AARON SAID UNTO THEM, BREAK OFF THE GOLDEN EARRINGS. Doubtless, a part of the "spoils of the Egyptians" obtained when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:35, 36). WHICH ARE IN THE EARS OF YOUR WIVES OF YOUR SONS. "Earrings are worn in the East almost as much by men as by women." AND BRING THEM UNTO ME. Possibly "Aaron thought to save them from breaking the first commandment by joining them in a breach of the second." Or, very likely, he expected to thwart their desires by imposing hard conditions. It was the mis-

take weak men are continually making,—trying to hoodwink the devil. Moses would have come out boldly with a thundering No!

3. AND ALL THE PEOPLE BRACK OFF THE GOLDEN EARRINGS WHICH WERE IN THEIR EARS. The sequel shows that some refused to join in the sin, but the great majority—generally speaking, all—gladly consented.

4. HE... FASHIONED IT WITH A GRAVING TOOL. Many scholars translate this "collected it (the gold) in a bag." The engraving might have been done after the image was cast, or it may have reference to carving the wooden mold or image into or over which the molten metal was poured. The worship in Egypt of sacred live bulls (Apis at Memphis especially) may have suggested this calf, or it may have been a memory of the worship of bulls in Chaldea, the ancient home of the Hebrews, where the bull idols, winged and with human heads, symbolized God's strength, wisdom, and omnipresence. MADE IT A MOLTEN CALF. A little later, when Moses was hot against Aaron for this sin, Aaron made the paltry excuse, "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (vs. 24), as if he would have Moses believe a miracle had been wrought. Moses knew too well, by his own experience, that the gods of Egypt worked no miracles.

How we imitate Aaron "I didn't break it," says the child, "it broke itself." So when a young man of evil life loses his health, he talks sadly of mysterious providences, and says nothing about his dissipation. So when a lazy man fails in business, he ascribes his bankruptcy to competition and "business complications." Phillips Brooks once said: "We are all ready to lay the blame on the furnace. Everywhere there is this cowardly casting off of responsibilities upon the dead circumstances around us."

AND THEY SAID, THESE BE THY GODS, O ISRAEL. Rather "thy god," as before. The idol was proclaimed as an image of the true God, as if the people would break the second commandment, but not the first. But they had broken the first commandment in their hearts, and soon went on to worship the idol as God (I Cor. 10:7; Acts 7:41; Ps. 107:19) WHICH BROUGHT THEM UP OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT. One would think that the very utterance of these words would have turned the people back to gratitude and obedience to God. What a chance here for Aaron to have reminded the people of all that Jehovah had done for them.

5. AND WHEN AARON SAW IT (this). Saw in what light the people viewed the image. HE BUILT AN ALTAR BEFORE IT. Never think, when you take a start in idol-worship, that you will stop there. The idol must have an altar. The altar must have an offering. The whole must have a temple. Every sin is self-perpetuating. Begin to love money more than God, and the great idol of mammon will soon make a temple of your life. AND AARON MADE PROCLAMATION, AND SAID, TOMORROW IS (shall be) A FEAST TO THE LORD. God was still to be worshipped, but under the form of a calf, and with the impure rites of a pagan religion. Probably Aaron thought he was very shrewd in "saving for God what he could of honor and reverence."

6. AND THEY ROSE UP EARLY ON THE MORROW. The idol-worshippers, the mammon worshippers, rise early, and we, too, must rise early to succeed with "our Father's business," to get time for prayer and Bible study and a useful, active life. AND OFFERED BURNT OFFERINGS. The burnt offering was a completely consumed sacrifice, and signified absolute surrender of what was worshipped. AND THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND TO DRINK, AND ROSE UP TO PLAY. "They ate of the remains of the peace offering," the burnt offerings being wholly consumed. The "play" was not merely singing and dancing, but in all idol-worship it included, also, the most indecent revels.

III. INTERCEDING FOR THE DISOBEDIENT.—Vs. 30-34. 31. AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE MORROW THAT MOSES SAID UNTO THE PEOPLE, YE HAVE SINNED A GREAT SIN. Not all the guilty, therefore, had been slain, but only the leaders in the idolatry. And Moses meant for the others to understand that, though they were spared, they were still beneath God's dread displeasure. AND NOW I WILL GO UP UNTO THE LORD. PERADVENTURE I SHALL MAKE AN ATONEMENT FOR YOUR SIN. "Already the holy mystery of atonement was moving between man and God." The entire New Testament is foreshadowed in this sentence! "What is the future," Moses implied, "so long as we have it is dreadful past? How can we do better, till we have got clean from this wrong-doing?" That is the word which every sinner needs.

31. AND MOSES RETURNED UNTO THE LORD, ON MOUNT SINAI, AND SAID, OH, THIS PEOPLE HAVE SINNED A GREAT SIN.

"The Scriptures deal but sparingly in such interjectional phrases as the present, and wherever they occur they indicate the most profound emotion in the speaker." No one should be able to look calmly on a sin.

32. YET NOW, IF THOU WILT FORGIVE THEIR SIN.—"Supply after the word 'sin,' well and good, 'I am content,' or some such phrase. Similar instances of omissions due to strong emotion will be found in Dan. 3:15; Luke 13:9."

AND HE NOT, BLOT ME. I PRAY THEE, OUT OF THE BOOK WHICH THOU HAST WRITTEN. "The phraseology is in illusion, probably, to the custom of having the names of a community enrolled in a register, and whenever one died, of erasing his name from the number."

33. AND THE LORD SAID UNTO MOSES, WHOSEVER HATH SINNED AGAINST ME, HIM WILL I BLOT OUT OF MY BOOK. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," men still say (Ezek. 18:4), and they ask how the death of a sinless Christ can help us out of that dilemma. It is answered by Christ's great heart of love and sympathy, that took upon itself, in Gethsemane and on the cross, all our sins, and prepared for them such an atonement as no mere man, not even Moses, could possibly furnish. As the Mount of Beatitudes interpreted the law of Sinai, so this great problem of Sinai was solved by Calvary.

34. AND GO, LEAD THE PEOPLE UNTO THE PLACE OF WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN UNTO THEE. At the burning bush (Ex. 3:8) God had told Moses where he was to lead the Hebrews. BEHOLD, SOME ANGEL SHALL GO BEFORE THEE. Some celestial subordinate, and no longer God himself. Read in Ex. 33 how Moses won from God a renewed promise of his personal presence. NEVERTHELESS IN THE DAY WHEN I VISIT, I WILL VISIT THEIR SIN UPON THEM. "The weary waiting in the wilderness for forty years may have been a part of the punishment." The Jews have a tradition that at least one ounce of the powder of the golden calf has been mingled in each of the later calamities. God knows when to punish.

A LIFE IN PERIL.

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