

1. [Exo 32:1 ESV] 1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

- Intro -

2. Exodus 32 records the familiar historical account of the Israelites and their adulterous sin of making and worshiping the golden calf. For years this story left me dumbfounded that the Israelites could do something so foolish as worshiping false gods just a month after witnessing first hand all the miraculous events involved in their Exodus from Egypt. I have since come to realize, however, that this is not exactly what happened. And once I came to understand the true significance behind the golden calf, it confronted me with a spiritual dilemma that changed much about how I practiced and celebrated my own faith.

3. In reality, the Israelites never intended or even attempted to worship false gods and a careful reading of Exodus 32 makes that quite clear. Having said that, this common misconception is actually quite understandable given some of the different translations of this chapter. For example, in verse one we read that the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us **gods** who shall go before us. The fact that the plural word gods is used here obviously seems to infer that the Israelites were asking to have idols of false gods created.

4. Although, when we look at the Hebrew word that gets translated as "gods," we find the word elohiym, Strong's H43, which is used a total of 2,606 times in the ESV. Despite this Hebrew word being plural itself, the most common two ways it is translated is God with a capital G, as it appears 2,346 times when the text is specifically referencing the true God, and god with a lowercase g, as it is rendered 244 times. So quite literally, 99% of the time, the word elohiym is translated simply as god. Thus, it seems entirely plausible that the Israelites were not requesting that Aaron craft them an image of false gods, but rather, of the Most High God Himself. Interestingly enough, there is actually textual evidence to support this idea a few verses later.

5. In verse 4, after having made the golden calf, Aaron presents it to the people and declares, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” Not surprisingly, the word that gets translated as gods here is once again elohiym. And thus this becomes a very curious statement because the Israelites are certainly well aware of who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and it wasn’t some collection of random false gods. The New King James Version, as well as the New American Standard and Darby translations, all recognize this contextual clue and instead translate the verse as, This *is* **your god**, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” In this way, we can see that the Israelites were actually intending to direct their worship towards the one true God that had just rescued them from their bondage in Egypt.

6. But the most obvious evidence that confirms the Israelites were not worshipping false gods is found in verse five. After making an altar for the golden calf, Aaron proclaims, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh.” Whenever the word lord appears in all capital letters it is actually a substitution for the proper name of the Most High God. Shockingly, this substitution appears nearly 7,000 times throughout the Old Testament. Another example of this substitution that relates to the context of this chapter can be found in Exodus 20:2, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Again, the word lord in all capitals denotes a substitution for the original Hebrew name of the Most High. If you’d like to learn more about actual proper names for both our Heavenly Father and the Messiah, you might consider watching my video, The Name of Yahweh, which seeks to bring some clarity on the history behind the original Hebrew names of the Father and the Son, as well as their Biblical significance.

7. So in actuality, Aaron is directly stating in Exodus 32:5 that they intended to use the Golden calf to worship Yahweh, the Most High God, who had just delivered them up out of Egypt. This was truly a stunning revelation when it was first shown to me. I had always understood, and been taught, that the reason Yahweh was so angry with the Israelites was because they had started worshipping other gods. But the fact that Aaron specifically declares the following day would be a Feast to Yahweh completely disproves this notion. Which then raises the

question, if they weren't worshipping other gods, why exactly was the Most High so furious with them?

8. There are, in fact, two major reasons the Father was so angry. Even though the Israelites weren't trying to worship false gods, they were already breaking two major instructions that Yahweh had personally given to them just 40 days ago. The first being the commandment against graven images. Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, Yahweh, your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." So clearly, even though the Israelites were attempting to reconnect with Yahweh during the extended absence of Moses, they were directly violating this command by worshipping the golden calf.
9. The second commandment they were breaking is found in Exodus 20:23, "You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold." This verse gets translated in several different ways amongst the various bible versions, but all of them unanimously include the instruction to not make gods for yourself of gold or silver. I personally find the ESV translation particularly fascinating because it mentions making these gods in order to be with Yahweh. And this is precisely what the Israelites were doing with the golden calf. They were making a golden idol in order to use it in worshipping Yahweh, to be with Him.
10. In Deuteronomy 12:29-31 we find further clarification on why the Father gave this instruction. "When Yahweh your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods?--that I also may do the same.' You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way, for every abominable thing that Yahweh hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods."

11. Put differently, when someone tries to worship Yahweh using traditions and rituals that were associated with the veneration of pagan false gods, our Father is not honored, he is angered. He only remembers the abominable and detestable things that people did to honor those gods, things that Yahweh hates.
12. Think about it this way. Imagine a man and woman get married and soon after the husband begins to struggle with alcoholism. As a result he becomes verbally and physically abusive, begins having multiple affairs, and engages in a number of other deplorable behaviors. Traumatized, the woman is forced to get a divorce. Years later she meets a wonderful man who is loving, kind, generous, and patient and she eventually remarries. Once they are married, the woman decides to honor her new husband by celebrating their anniversary on the date she married her abusive ex-husband. Furthermore, she decides to also celebrate her new husband's birthday on the day her abusive ex-husband was born. Being patient and loving, the new husband tries to be understanding about the traditions his wife had from her previous life, however, during these supposed celebrations, all he can think about are the terrible acts committed by his wife's abusive ex-husband.
13. Admittedly, it sounds rather absurd when it's presented this way, but that is essentially what the Israelites were doing. They were taking pagan traditions they had learned during their time in Egypt and were trying to use those traditions to worship and honor Yahweh. To make matters worse, they were doing this after He had specifically instructed them against such practices. In fact, we also see this command in Deuteronomy 12 when the Father is giving them instructions for once they are in the promised land. "You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way." I began to recognize that Yahweh's anger was entirely understandable. And it wasn't long after gaining this perspective that I realized I was unfortunately guilty of making the exact same mistake when I celebrated Christmas and Easter.

14. For years I had been well aware of the fact that both Christmas and Easter, as they are now observed, originated directly from pagan religions. There is a tremendous wealth of resources available on the web and in print that documents the overwhelming evidence that confirms this. In fact, I had even seen and heard a great many well known Christian authors, pastors, and researches acknowledge the undeniable truth of this claim. Because this information is readily available, this video will not venture into this historical evidence. However, the following video resources would be an excellent starting point for anyone new to this information, and links are available in the description.
15. Even though I had been aware of the pagan origins of Christmas and Easter for some time, I was never overly concerned by it because I obviously was not worshipping false gods when I celebrated these holidays. I was honoring the God of the Bible, the Most High, the maker of heaven and earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And while these celebrations may have had pagan origins, they obviously had been successfully co-opted and Christianized for centuries. And if ever I was questioned or confronted about these pagan origins, I would reassure myself, like countless millions of Christians, by confidently proclaiming, "He knows my heart."
16. And this is absolutely true, the Father obviously does know my heart. He is aware that when I celebrated these holidays I was certainly not doing it with the intention of venerating pagan gods of the past. However, I was starting to understand that since the Father had specifically instructed his children to NOT worship him with the traditions of pagan gods, I was using the fact that He knows my heart to try justify doing something that was wrong. In other words, just because he knows in my heart I was not worshipping other gods, doesn't negate the fact that I was still doing something He directly commands us not to do. I began to recognize that my heart was deceiving me with this erroneous line of reasoning. This is why the Father describes our hearts so harshly in Jeremiah 17:9-10, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, Yahweh, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."

17. I also began to realize that me justifying my actions by stating, “He knows my heart” was inherently selfish. That is to say, I recognized that statement is only concerned with myself and my own feelings regarding these holidays. Personally, I loved these holidays. They had always been deeply meaningful and significant to **me** and I had a lifetime of happy memories from celebrating these days. Would my loving Heavenly Father really want **me** to give up something that brought **me** so much joy? Especially since he knows my heart. He knows I’m not worshipping other gods.

18. But perhaps the biggest issue with this line of thinking is that it never once considers how HE feels about me celebrating these holidays. And as mentioned earlier, the Father does share quite candidly exactly how He feels about it. Deuteronomy 12:31, “You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way, for every abominable thing that Yahweh hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.” I was heart broken when I finally understood this. By using these pagan holidays in an attempt to honor my Heavenly Father, I was actually insulting Him. I was making the exact same mistake the Israelites did with the golden calf. I was like the woman celebrating her anniversary on the date she married her abusive ex-husband. And what grieved my heart so much is that in my attempt to honor my creator, I was simply reminding him of all the abominable things that have been done for these pagan gods.

19. And once I saw that, and truly understood it, I could no longer pretend to hide behind my ignorance. I suddenly had a very concrete and unavoidable decision to make. Would I continue to celebrate these days and take part in these traditions knowing full well that they not only upset the Father, but that he has specifically commanded me to not do that? Or would I humble myself and make the choice to leave behind a lifetime of joyful traditions because they ultimately dishonor my Creator? This was one of the hardest decisions I had faced in my life. It would mean confusing and disillusioning my kids and forcing them to endure massive social turmoil and hardship among their peers. It would mean I would have to break the heart of my mother and much of my extended family, and ask my wife to do the same. It would mean separating myself from long standing traditions I shared with family, friends, and co-workers. It would mean feeling like an absolute outcast for months at a time, every single year. But the hardest part of this

decision, was recognizing that it wasn't really a decision at all. I didn't really have a choice.

20. Given everything that my Heavenly Father has done for me. Sending his son to take the penalty for MY sin, allowing HIM to die in MY place. After my Father had shown such tremendous grace and patience in pulling me out of a pit of spiritual filth and despair only to wash me clean and give me a new purpose in His kingdom. After constantly demonstrating His faithfulness in countless little daily miracles of providence and provision. How could I possibly continue doing something that would bring him such dishonor. How could I possibly choose myself and what I wanted, or Him and what he commanded?

21. So ultimately, I gave it all up, never to return. I walked away from ALL of it. And now, some five years later, it remains one of the most difficult changes I've led my family through. It remains a constant source of strained relationships, awkward interactions and confused questions. Every year, twice a year, it is like navigating a labyrinth of consumer madness full of the traps and snares that are the opinions and judgments of others. Each season, trying to find new and gracious ways to decline invitations and answer questions in a way that doesn't make others feel condemned. It's always been difficult, it has never been easy, and I am absolutely convinced it is the LEAST I can do for my Heavenly Father. These hardships are meaningless in comparison to what he endured for me.

22. However, the most fascinating part of this whole transformation has been the incredible blessing that has come with our obedience. We gave up two holidays and received seven in exchange. As a family, we now celebrate the real Biblical holy days that our Father always intended for his children to keep and they are unimaginably significant and deeply, powerfully meaningful. These special appointed times have become the new filter through which we track the passage of time each year. And they have been an endless source of fascinating revelation about our Heavenly Father and his plan of salvation through His son, our Messiah.

23. Please consider my video, "The Feasts of the Lord," for a brief introduction to the Biblical Feast Days, or Appointed Times, and a heartfelt invitation for all followers of Jesus to make these Holy Days

part of their lifestyle of worship. And If you are interested in learning even more about the Feasts of YHWH and how they all point to Jesus, please see my video “The Jesus I Wish You Knew” that features me discussing a painting I created on the topic. Ultimately, if you love Jesus, you are going to adore these special days that the Father set apart since before the creation of the world.