

---

## Exodus 32:1-14: What are our idols?

### 1. Introduction

We come to chapters 32-34, which are the theological heart of Exodus. They are sandwiched between the regulations of chapters 25-31 and 35-40. This week we focus on the calf, the idol. Next week we think about Aaron, Moses and the people.

Note again Israel's honesty in admitting its sins. Verse 1 would not be found in the history of any other nation!

### 2. What is an idol?

We can regard all misguided worship as idolatry = people misguidedly making something important in their life.

Note that Israel seeks support outside itself, in the transcendent world. They feel that they need a deity, a power strongest than they are. On the contrary, we modern humans seek support within the world, often within ourselves. Modern idolatry is self-centred, internal. (I do see a little Buddha figure in the window of the house opposite the church, but I don't think the inhabitants will be worshipping it. Yet as Christians we should not have such figurines.)

### 3. External idols

When I looked online for what people see as contemporary idols, I found the following:

- Money, sex and power; cars, celebrities and clothes (three Cs)
- The American pastor Tim Keller mentions that the gods of beauty and health, of power and achievement, money and sex are widely revered. He adds that each god also has its own shrine: the office blocks, spas, gyms, studios or stadiums. And he notes that people are willing to make great sacrifices for these gods.
- Economic growth and scientific achievements; we pretend we are lords of our world.
- Richard Branson's ego was so small that he needed a trip into space, at tremendous cost to the environment. Many others build their egos through acquiring more 'stuff', so they need bigger houses. Big cars are on display in front of garages, while the garages act as storerooms. These things will never give lasting satisfaction.

Conservative Americans tend to call creation care idolatry, but that is nonsense. It is right and indeed necessary that we look after God's property.

### 4. The self as idol

I want to go deeper: modern idolatry has 'self' at its core. We no longer bow down to idols and images. We rule over our own lives. We value individual freedom over everything else. Even when reading the Bible or pretending to serve God, we want to have the last word. That's wrong.

We modern humans no longer worship powers 'out there', but ourselves. Classic FM has the annoying jingle 'It's finally me-time.' For many people it is me-time 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is idolatry.

### 5. Our misrepresentations of the Lord

Having put ourselves centre stage, we are in danger of deforming God. People say things like: 'He never punishes', 'He is only love', etc. Which goes against the Bible.

We create a God we can understand; a tame one on a lead. But a god we can understand is not a God. The biblical God is different. He does not owe us anything and can never be fully understood.

Wait for him when he seems absent. Do not expect him to fix everything immediately

---