

## Celebration and Praise No Substitute for Worship 2

**Author:** Larry W. Wilson

After descending from Heaven and speaking the Ten Commandments to Israel from Mount Sinai (Exodus 20), the Lord called Moses to a summit on Mount Sinai. (Exodus 24:12) During this forty day visit, God gave Moses various instructions and the Ten Commandments which Jesus had written with His own finger on two tablets of stone.

Moses left his brother Aaron, and Hur\* in charge of the camp as he and his young aide, Joshua, departed. The Bible says, ". . . the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days [Moses and Joshua waited near the summit while] the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights." (Exodus 24:16-18, insertion mine)

While Moses was visiting with God in what looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain, the Hebrews camped at the foot of the mountain became bored. The Bible says, "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods [a god\*\*] who will go before us.

As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him [he may have perished in the fire].' Aaron [who tried to thwart their evil request by demanding their precious jewelry] answered them 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' So [to Aaron's dismay] all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.

He [obligingly] took what they handed him and [he had it] made it into an idol cast in the shape of a [male] calf\*\*, fashioning it with a tool. Then they [the metal craftsmen] said, 'These are your gods [This is your god\*\*], O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

When Aaron saw this, he built [tried to sanctify the situation by building] an altar **in front** of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival [a celebration] to the Lord.' So the next day the people [were excited and they] rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry [wild dancing and singing].

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, because **your** people, whom **you** brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods [This is your god\*\*], O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' 'I have seen these people,' the Lord

said to Moses, 'and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.

Then I will make you into a great nation.' But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. 'O Lord,' he said, 'why should your anger burn against **your** people, whom **you** brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?' (Exodus 32:1-11, insertions and emphasis mine)

Did you notice the way the Lord tested Moses? The Lord identified rebellious Israel as Moses' people, but Moses reminded the Lord that the Israelites were *His* people and that *He* had brought them up out of Egypt! This banter about ownership says much about the character development that took place during the forty years Moses spent in the desert herding sheep.

When Moses was a powerful member of Pharaoh's court, the Israelites were *his* people and he thought of himself as "their deliverer." Now eighty years old, Moses understood the truth. He was a servant of the Owner and Deliverer of the sheep.

As Moses and Joshua descended the mountain, a loud sound could be heard. "When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, 'There is the sound of war in the camp.' Moses replied: 'It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.'

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain." (Exodus 32:17-19) "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them [dance and sing] naked unto their shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, 'Who is on the Lord's side?'

'Let him come unto me.' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor [that is naked].'"

And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men [and in addition to this, many women]." (Exodus 32:25-28, KJV, insertions mine) "And [after thousands of naked revelers were slain] the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made. (Exodus 32:35, insertions mine)

## **No Substitute for Worship**

Three thousand men and perhaps as many women were killed that day, and perhaps thousands more perished when God sent His plague upon the camp. This is a powerful object lesson. The worship of God is a very serious matter and God is angered by idolatrous revelry and dissipation.

From God's point of view, there is a sharp difference between true worship and false worship. True worship occurs when a person approaches God to humbly and obediently submit to God's commands. Celebration and praise **are no** substitute for worship. Of course, it is appropriate to praise God in a worship service, but our praise falls on deaf ears if we have not humbly and obediently entered into worship.

The primary reason for worship is the renewal of submission to God and His authority. God calls us to worship to break up our selfishness. The carnal heart is like jello; if it gets cold, it will congeal. True worship renews our understanding of God and commitment to His Word.

True worship warms the heart and makes it turn to putty in the Potter's hand. If submission is not the design of every worship service, the service itself becomes a stumbling stone. False worship can be inspiring and comforting and false worship is popular and fulfilling to the carnal nature because it satisfies the carnal nature. Billions of people are following in Cain's footsteps.

They are telling God how He will be worshiped rather than humbly submitting to God's commands. I have said many times, if we leave a worship service without being brought into a deeper sense of God's love and our need to obediently submit to His authority, we have not worshiped – we have been entertained.

Aaron knew the price of true worship because he had been on the mountain in God's presence just a few days earlier. (Exodus 24:1) He tried to weasel out of the request to make an idol by demanding they give up their precious golden earrings – and to his surprise, they gave them up.

Then, at the feast, he demanded they dance naked – and to everyone's amazement, they gave up their clothes. This is a powerful object lesson. The carnal nature would rather give up possessions and decency than to submit to God's authority.

The revelry at the base of Mount Sinai is very revealing (pun intended). Aaron failed to stand up for the honor of God whose cloud of burning fire was clearly visible at the top of the mountain because he was afraid the people would riot and ultimately kill him. Aaron tried to rectify the idolatry of Israel by putting an altar to the Lord *in front* of the golden calf, but that did not stop them.

Aaron should have boldly refused to build the idol and suffered the hostility of the Israelites. Aaron's weakness is seen today. Many preachers, to keep their jobs, give their congregations what they want rather than what they need. Thus, Israel's descent into apostasy is like ours.

Israel's long history is one of rebellion against the Lord. About 700 years after the golden calf incident, just before the northern ten tribes were to be destroyed in 722 B.C., the Lord said to Israel through Isaiah, "The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?" says the Lord.

'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations – I cannot bear [to listen

to] your evil assemblies.

Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.

Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.' " (Isaiah 1:11-17)

What is the point of attending a worship service if God will not accept our worship? Those who approach God must do so with clean hearts and hands.

Jesus told the woman at the well, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:23) The phrase, "worship the Father in spirit and truth" means submission.

Worship is a humble surrender to God's authority. Worship services should renew our devotion to God because our carnal nature is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7) and the law of sin is at work in our bodies. (Romans 7:23) However, we will be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit **if** we wholeheartedly worship God and submit to His authority. (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 4:1,2)

About 100 years after the ten northern tribes had been destroyed because of rebellion, the Lord told Jeremiah that the remaining two tribes of Israel were about to be destroyed.

Notice the words of the Lord: "For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about [temporary] burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: **Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. - Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts [and even though they never failed to have worship services, they rarely worshiped me].**

**They went backward and not forward . . . . Therefore say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips. Cut off your hair [Jeremiah] and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the Lord has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath.'** " (Jeremiah 7:22-24, 28,29 insertions mine)

After reviewing Israel's idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai and 1,500 years of failures, I hope you will be awoken to the fact that the true meaning of worship has been largely lost today. True worship comes with a price, the price of submission.

A strong current of false worship is sweeping the world away from God and when the first angel's message in Revelation 14:6,7 is given, the call to fear God and worship Him will be

stunning!

\* Hur was probably one of the seventy elders because he was the head of the tribe of Judah which was the largest tribe.

\*\* See Psalm 106:19,20.