

Dr. John Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture on Exodus 32 analyzes the Israelites' creation of the golden calf. **He explores their motivations**, highlighting their fear and lack of trust in God during Moses' absence. **Oswalt contrasts this with God's simultaneous provision** of the tabernacle, emphasizing the irony of their actions. **The lecture further examines the theological implications** of the event, particularly concerning the concepts of covenant, idolatry, and God's nature. Finally, **Oswalt discusses Aaron's culpability and Moses' intercession**, concluding with reflections on God's justice and mercy.

**2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament →
Pentateuch → Exodus).**



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3. Briefing Document: Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. John Oswalt's Session 14 on Exodus 32:

Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Exodus 32

Introduction:

This session focuses on the critical events of Exodus 32, where the Israelites create and worship a golden calf while Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving instructions from God. Oswalt emphasizes the theological significance of this event, exploring the themes of fear versus trust, idolatry, God's holiness, the nature of the covenant, and God's grace. He places the golden calf incident within a larger context of paganism and the human tendency to seek control and tangible representations of the divine.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Fear and Lack of Trust:

- The Israelites' primary motivation for creating the golden calf is fear. They are afraid of the unknown and specifically fear that Moses, their leader, has abandoned them by being on the mountain for 40 days. "When the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain... they said to him, 'Up, make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses...we don't know what's become of him.'"
- Oswalt contrasts this fear with trust in God, highlighting that their fear stems from a belief that *Moses* was their deliverer, instead of recognizing that *God* was the one who brought them out of Egypt. This fear leads them to seek control and visible solutions, rather than trusting in God's invisible guidance. "Moses brought us out of Egypt, and Moses is obviously dead up there on that mountain, so we're in terrible trouble. What should they have thought? God brought them out, and whatever happens to Moses, God is still around."
- He argues that fear makes people forget God's past provision and leads to rash decisions. "Fear makes us forget. And because we forget, we're afraid."
- The Israelites' desire to return to the known, even slavery in Egypt, rather than facing the unknown also reflects their fear. "All the way through, they're wanting

to go back. They're afraid to look ahead into the unknown. They'd rather go back to the known, even if that means slavery."

1. **Idolatry and Paganism:**

- Oswalt emphasizes that the golden calf is a clear act of idolatry, reflecting the pagan worldview they learned in Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped Amun-Re, symbolized by the bull, and the Israelites are reverting to this familiar practice. "The imperial god of Egypt was the god Amun-Re, which is really a combination of two gods... and Amun-Ra was typified by the bull."
- Aaron, having "gone to seminary in Egypt", likely saw no problem with this representation, viewing it as a visual manifestation of the invisible Yahweh, not a replacement. "I'm very confident that Aaron didn't see the problem because... you can find it in Egyptian hymns and prayer statements like, Ammon is the one God without another. There is none like Ammon. Ammon is hidden from the gods... and he's the bull at the same time."
- He points out that paganism blurs boundaries between the spiritual and the physical, man and nature, and man and the divine, leading to practices like the sexual sins described in Leviticus 18. "The pagan worldview is a worldview that insists there are no boundaries... There cannot be a boundary between me and the gods. There cannot be a boundary between the gods and nature." This has deep implications for modern morality as well, which often tries to obliterate boundaries. "Nobody's going to tell me how to use my sexuality. There are no boundaries."
- He emphasizes that God is *other* than the created world. Therefore, no physical representation can capture His essence or substitute for true worship. "God is not this world. Therefore, you cannot represent him in the shape of anything in this world."

1. **God's Provision and the Tabernacle:**

- At the very moment the Israelites are making a false god, God is on the mountain giving Moses instructions for the tabernacle, which provides exactly what the people need: a tangible representation of God, fellowship with Him, a place of worship, and guidance through the pillar of cloud. "At this very moment, God is giving them what he knows they need... They need tangible representations of God. That's why we build cathedrals."

- The tabernacle's beauty, sanctuary, and clear guidance are an ironic contrast with the simplistic and crude golden calf. "And again, the irony is, all Aaron could make was a little gold calf. God had so many more wonderful plans for their aesthetic fulfillment."

1. **The Broken Covenant and God's Justice:**

- The creation of the golden calf is a clear breach of the covenant God made with Israel. By violating the first and second commandments, they have effectively broken the entire covenant. "The covenant is now broken. If God... had fried all of them to a cinder, it would have been nothing other than just."
- Oswalt emphasizes that God would be entirely just to destroy the Israelites for their disobedience. However, this is not the end of the story.

1. **Moses as Intercessor:**

- God challenges Moses, referring to the Israelites as "your people, whom *you* brought up," to see if he will align himself with God's judgment or intercede for the people. "God is saying the same thing the people said. This Moses fellow, he's the one who brought us up. God says your people that you brought up, they're a mess."
- God even offers to make a new nation through Moses. This is a test. "I can make a great nation out of you, Moses."
- Moses passes the test. He recognizes that the people are God's, not his. He appeals to God's grace and promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the necessity of making God's true nature known to the nations. He is concerned with God's reputation as both just *and* gracious. "They're not my people, God... They may be rotten to the core, but they're Yahweh's people, not mine... God, if you do what these people deserve, people are going to be misled. They're not going to know who you really are."
- Oswalt points out that Moses' intercession does not *change* God's mind but reveals God's heart. "Your intercession for them on the sake of my name is enough to make me change my mind and not do the just thing."

1. **The Nature of Repentance and Atonement:**

- Oswalt clarifies the meaning of "relent," pointing out that it includes concepts of repentance, pity, and changing one's mind. God relents from destroying the Israelites based on Moses' intercession. "The word means everything from to

repent, to have pity on. In between, it means to relent, to be sorry, and to change your mind."

- Moses' attempt to "make atonement" for the people is not a substitutionary sacrifice but an expression of solidarity with them. He is willing to be blotted out with them if they are not forgiven. "If you're going to blot them out, you're going to have to blot me out, too."
- God clarifies that atonement cannot be made by a human. True atonement will come only through the work of a greater redeemer. "I think this is saying no human, however great he may be, however good he may be, can make atonement for anybody else. If our sin is going to be atoned for, it's going to take more than a Moses."

1. **Aaron's Role and the Priesthood:**

- Aaron's weak explanation for the golden calf, "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf," reveals his failure to take responsibility for his actions. "It's funny, but it's also sad. The denial of responsibility. It's not my fault."
- Oswalt notes that Aaron is never praised in the Bible, suggesting an intentional contrast between him as a fallible high priest and the perfect high priest, Jesus Christ. "I cannot find one place in the Bible where a purely complimentary thing is ever said about Aaron. I think the reason is precisely to draw the starkest difference between the high priest and this fallible human high priest. We have a high priest who is without sin."
- The Levites who were not involved in the idolatry are called to deal with the sin in their tribe. "The primary leaders of this apostasy were Levites. And that Moses recognizes this and says, okay, any of you Levites who are not in that bunch, come over here. Now, you guys deal with the cancer in your tribe."

1. **Consequences of Sin:**

- Oswalt emphasizes that sin must be treated seriously and not explained away, minimized, or coddled. "Deal with it radically or explain it away. Those are our choices."

- He suggests that the plague mentioned at the end of the chapter, resulting from their sin, may not be a direct divine punishment, but rather the natural consequence of their actions and a breakdown in the way they were designed to live. "God made the world so that when we're living the way we were designed, we will not experience certain diseases... if you live in ways that are other than his design, you're going to get hurt."

1. **The Book of Remembrance:**

- The idea of God keeping a record of those who obey Him and those who do not is introduced, connecting it to the concept of the "Book of the Living," as found in Psalm 69, and the Book of Remembrance in Malachi. "There's a book of those people who are keeping the covenant and are thus eligible for blessing, and those people who are not keeping the covenant and are thus headed for curse."
- This ties into the idea that fellowship with other believers is critical, because they can remind us that "God is still on the throne." "When I'm sinking in despair, I need you to put your arm around my shoulder and say, hey, God's still on the throne. Come on, let's go together."

Conclusion:

Dr. Oswalt's session on Exodus 32 underscores the dangers of fear and idolatry, the importance of trusting God's plan and provision, and the essential nature of God's holiness and grace. The incident of the golden calf is not just an historical account but a timeless lesson about humanity's tendency to turn away from the true God and the need for genuine repentance and a savior. This chapter serves to highlight the sharp contrast between the true and living God, and the futile attempts to find Him in worldly objects.

4. Study Guide: Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32

Exodus 32: The Golden Calf

Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why did the Israelites ask Aaron to make them gods?
2. How does the fear of the Israelites contrast with trust in God?
3. What is the significance of the 40 days Moses spent on the mountain?
4. What specific needs did the tabernacle provide that the golden calf could not?
5. How was the golden calf connected to Egyptian religious practices?
6. Explain the pagan worldview regarding the interconnectedness of the human, natural, and divine spheres, and how that differs from the biblical worldview?
7. What was the people's role in the creation of the golden calf, and what does it reveal?
8. What did the Israelites say about the golden calf? And what does it suggest?
9. How does the concept of atonement relate to Moses' actions in this chapter, and what does the instructor suggest about Moses' motive?
10. What does the instructor suggest was the nature of the "plague" in verse 35, and what is the instructor's takeaway point about the connection between the plague and sin?

Answer Key

1. The Israelites asked Aaron to make them gods because they were afraid after Moses had been gone for 40 days, which was a significant length of time, particularly since they were likely running out of water. They felt abandoned by their leader and, thus, vulnerable without visible guidance.
2. The Israelites' fear led them to take matters into their own hands and create a tangible god, whereas trust in God would have allowed them to wait for God's guidance and trust that He was still with them despite Moses' absence. Their fear showed they were focusing on the fallible (Moses) instead of the infallible (God).

3. The 40 days Moses spent on the mountain represents a complete cycle of time, and it was a period when God was intentionally depriving the Israelites of what they thought they needed, testing whether they would depend on the infallible God rather than the fallible human Moses.
4. The tabernacle provided a tangible representation of God's presence, fellowship with God, and clear guidance via the pillar of cloud, whereas the golden calf was just a human-made object that was inadequate to fulfill these needs. The tabernacle also represented beauty and a place of sanctuary, which were also important human needs.
5. The golden calf was connected to the Egyptian bull god, Amun-Re, who was a god of fertility and power, which demonstrates the Israelites' syncretism, as they were blending their past, pagan ways with their new faith.
6. The pagan worldview believes that all things--humans, nature, and the divine--are interconnected, blurring the boundaries between them. In contrast, the biblical worldview emphasizes that God is distinct from creation, setting hard boundaries between the Creator and the created world, as well as between humanity and God.
7. The people only broke off their earrings, and Aaron, as the religious professional, did all of the work of fashioning the calf. This demonstrates the misuse of resources, the exalting of human skill, and suggests that they were relying on a religious professional to do their work, leading them into a mess when they refused to wait on God.
8. The Israelites proclaimed about the golden calf, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." This indicates that they were reverting to pagan practices and syncretizing Yahweh with an idol, using the name of God to validate the idol, rather than recognizing Yahweh as an invisible, transcendent God.
9. Atonement, meaning "to cover," is used to describe Moses' potential actions. The instructor believes Moses was not trying to offer himself as a substitute, but instead was trying to twist God's arm, implying that if God were to destroy the people, He would need to include Moses, too.

10. The instructor suggests the plague may have been a sexually transmitted disease rather than a direct divine act, highlighting that when people live outside God's design, they experience consequences. God doesn't create suffering to punish people; He made a world where consequences follow actions.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of fear in the Israelites' decision to create the golden calf and compare it to the role of trust that was intended by God.
2. Discuss the significance of the tabernacle as a response to the Israelites' need for a tangible representation of God and how it contrasts with their choice of the golden calf.
3. Compare and contrast the pagan and biblical worldviews as they are presented in the context of the golden calf incident and the instructions for the tabernacle.
4. Evaluate Aaron's role in the golden calf incident. Was he a passive participant, or did he have more culpability? How does this incident inform our understanding of leadership and accountability?
5. How does the story of the golden calf reflect broader themes about sin and atonement as presented in the book of Exodus and in the Christian faith?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Syncretism:** The merging or blending of different religions or belief systems.
- **Paradigm Shift:** A fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions.
- **Infallible:** Incapable of being wrong; completely trustworthy and reliable.
- **Atonement:** The act of covering or making amends for wrongdoing, often involving sacrifice.
- **Paganism:** A religious belief system that includes a variety of deities and often involves the worship of nature or idols.
- **Cosmos:** The universe seen as a well-ordered whole.
- **Sanctuary:** A place of refuge or protection.
- **Intercession:** The act of pleading or mediating on behalf of another.
- **Relent:** To abandon or soften a harsh intention or action.
- **Kipporot:** Hebrew word meaning "cover," refers to the lid of the ark of the covenant and signifies the place of atonement.
- **Stiff-necked:** A term used to describe people who are stubborn and resistant to guidance or authority.
- **Elohim:** A Hebrew word that can mean God or gods depending on context, indicating a single being or a plurality of divine beings.
- **Levites:** Members of the tribe of Levi, who were designated to serve as priests and assistants in the tabernacle and later in the temple.
- **Mercy Seat:** The English translation of the Hebrew concept of the "atonement cover" and is the lid on the Ark of the Covenant.
- **Book of the Living:** Refers to a heavenly book where the names of those who are faithful and obedient are recorded.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Exodus, Session 14, Exodus 32, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Exodus 32: The Golden Calf Incident

1. **Why did the Israelites demand Aaron make them gods while Moses was on Mount Sinai?** The Israelites were overcome by fear and anxiety due to Moses' prolonged absence on Mount Sinai (40 days). They reasoned that without Moses, who they perceived as their leader out of Egypt, they were lost and in danger, particularly without water. They felt they needed a visible god to guide and protect them. Their fear led them to forget that God, not Moses, was their true deliverer.
2. **How does the Israelites' demand for a visible god contrast with the nature of God?** The Israelites' demand for a tangible idol reveals their limited understanding of God. They fell back into pagan beliefs, thinking they needed a physical representation of God that they could control and manipulate. In contrast, the true God, Yahweh, is transcendent and beyond creation, separate from the world. He cannot be confined or represented by any created thing, and He is not subject to human desires or rituals.
3. **What does the Golden Calf symbolize in terms of paganism?** The Golden Calf is heavily influenced by the Egyptian bull god Amun-Ra. It represents a syncretistic blending of religious ideas, where the Israelites attempted to integrate the worship of Yahweh with pagan idolatry. The calf also symbolizes a worldview where the divine is not separate from the world, leading to the belief that one can manipulate the spiritual realm through rituals and images. It represents a desire for a god that is visible, manageable, and part of the physical world, a sharp contrast to the invisible, transcendent God of Israel.
4. **How did Aaron's actions contribute to the making of the Golden Calf, and what does it teach us?** Aaron, the religious professional, gave in to the people's demands and created the Golden Calf. He likely did this based on what he learned and knew from Egyptian religion. His actions reveal a denial of responsibility and a lack of true understanding of God's holiness, even though he had been given instructions about the tabernacle and God's presence. This highlights the danger of religious professionals leading people astray and that having the title of "religious professional" does not necessarily make one immune to falling into error.

5. **What is the significance of the tabernacle in contrast to the Golden Calf?** While the Israelites were demanding a tangible god that they could see and control, God was simultaneously instructing Moses about the tabernacle. The tabernacle was designed to provide a tangible representation of God's presence among His people, offering fellowship, worship, and guidance. It was God's designed way for them to connect with Him. In contrast to the golden calf, the tabernacle points toward true worship, connection, and obedience rather than creating a god that fits with their own desires.
6. **What does Moses' intercession for the Israelites reveal about God's nature?** God offered to destroy the Israelites and make a new nation from Moses, testing his loyalty and heart. Moses' refusal to allow this and his intercession for the people shows that God's desire is for relationship and repentance rather than just punishment. Moses recognizes that destroying the Israelites would misrepresent God's character to the nations, who would then believe God was evil for destroying His own people. Moses' intercession also highlights God's grace. He is not only just, but he is also gracious, willing to change his course of action based on intercession, showing that God is merciful and his heart is one of compassion.
7. **How did Moses respond to the Golden Calf incident, and what does it illustrate?** Moses responded with righteous anger upon seeing the idolatry. He broke the tablets of the Law and destroyed the calf, demonstrating the severity of their sin. He made the people drink the pulverized gold, showing the consequences of idolatry and a need to eradicate sin from one's life without compromise. This response emphasizes the need for a radical approach to sin and shows the difference between God's seemingly lenient response (relenting) and a human's righteous anger at sin.
8. **What is the significance of the "book of remembrance" in this context, and how does it relate to the broader Christian view?** The "book of remembrance," referenced in Malachi, provides encouragement to those who are faithful to God, in the face of evil seeming to prosper. God takes notice of those who seek Him and remembers their faithfulness, providing an encouragement during difficult times. This concept connects with the idea of a heavenly record of those who are aligned with God, ultimately leading to the "Lamb's Book of Life." This idea demonstrates that God keeps track of faithfulness and that, ultimately, there are rewards for those who are on God's side and live in a way that is pleasing to Him.