

How did Israel get to such a low point in their journey with God that He would call them corrupt and be ready to annihilate them? Understanding the steps which took them there, can explain why some Christians get into the horrible situations in which they find themselves and can help believers today avoid taking a similar path.

**1. An unwillingness to wait for God (impatience)**

- a. Evidence of their impatience is found in verses 1, 23 and 8. Their “lengthy” wait for Moses was viewed by God as a “quick” turning away from Him.
- b. Their impatience in no way justified, because there was no immediate need and because they had had ample reason to trust God and His time table.
- c. The challenge of impatience is answered with the fruit of the Spirit including patience. Impatience leads to further sin and its consequences (cf. 1 Samuel 13:13–14). Instead it is better to humble ourselves before God and wait for Him to work (1 Peter 5:6).

**2. A desire to walk by sight rather than by faith**

- a. They bemoaned not seeing Moses and wanted gods which they could see (vv 1, 4). Claiming that the calf represented Jehovah (cf. v 5) did not excuse their lack of faith or disobedience.
- b. Their action was at least a violation of the second commandment (“you shall not make for yourself an idol”), if not also the first (“you shall have no other god before me”). They wanted something they could see, and in so doing demeaned God and forgot who He was (cf. Psalm 106:19–21).
- c. This desire for a visible “god” would become a recurring sin of Israel. Though we may not make idols, there is a danger in trusting what we can see, e.g., God’s provision, rather than the invisible God who gives us all which we need. If we respond to Scripture by saying that we don’t see how it would help, we may want to walk by sight rather than faith.

**3. A heart inclined to rebel**

- a. Aaron’s evaluation of the people as prone to evil (v 22) is substantiated by their eagerness to give up their gold for an idol (vv 2–3) and God’s statement that they were “stiff-necked” (v 9). The downward spiral in the pagan revelry further demonstrated their heart’s inclination.
- b. Their rebellion incurred God’s anger and their near destruction (vv 9–10a). At least 3,000 died in judgment if not eventually more (vv 27–28, 35).
- c. All kinds of evil come out of the heart (Mark 7:21–22). If inhibitions were removed, what would be revealed out of your heart? Rather than a stiff neck or a hard heart, we should have soft hearts, ready and desiring to hear and obey God’s desires.

**4. An absence of good leadership**

- a. Moses had departed with Joshua but had left Aaron and Hur in charge (24:14). There was no lack of leadership, but a lack of good leadership. Aaron did not resist the evil will of the people (vv 2–4) and eventually gave weak excuses for his action (vv 22–24).
- b. Moses charged Aaron with leading the people into sin (v 21). Neither did God excuse Aaron, but was angry enough to destroy him (Deuteronomy 9:20).
- c. Weak leadership is bad leadership. Elders are to rightly lead (1 Peter 5:1–4). Husbands and fathers are responsible to do more than provide, but to know where the family should be heading and showing how to get there. Mothers are to support the godly leadership of their husbands. Bad leaders may live, like Aaron did, but those for whom leaders were meant to care may suffer.

**5. A disregard for the covenant with the LORD**

- a. This disregard, which underlay the whole downward spiral, becomes explicit when God says, “they have turned away from what I have commanded them” (v 8). The primary commands were violated. And the breaking of the covenant was displayed in the graphic symbolism of Moses breaking the stone tablets with the covenant written on them.
- b. God’s readiness to destroy the people (v 9) affirms their absolute disregard of the covenant. Though Moses’ intercession stopped their immediate annihilation, God’s evaluation did not change.
- c. Christians enjoy a new covenant which God has made with them by the blood of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, even true believers can disregard this covenant, as the actions of the Corinthians demonstrated. To knowingly sin shows a disregard for the sacrifice which Jesus made on the cross, when He was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. 1 Peter 2:24).

We seldom get into serious sin without it going through a number of smaller steps. Wrong desires lead to sinful actions (cf. James 1:14–15). King David is the tragic example. Israel’s impatience was compounded with other failings leading finally to the worship of a golden calf.

The excuses which Christians make about the sins in which they get entangled are about as good as Aaron’s. Tolerated sins lead to the golden calf. Don’t collect the gold jewelry and the golden calf will never appear. Desire God and to please Him. Stop the progression to corruption before it begins.