

EXODUS 32:1-10 (THE GOLDEN CALF - THE TESTING OF AARON)

Starting with verse 1 of this chapter, a chiasm begins which will span every verse until Exodus 34:17 – 8 sermons. However, it is a rather unique chiasm because it not only conveys individual thoughts in individual verses, but it also contains examples which comprise entire passages. It is truly a marvel of wisdom and beauty which eyes had not rested upon until the 31st of August 2011.

When it came to light, I was so very excited. Each time a chiasm is revealed, it sheds new light on what God is thinking and what He wants us to know. I have printed off copies for you so that you can keep them in your Bible and follow along with it as we go through these next three chapters. Let's review it now...

Exodus 32:1-34:17 – The Glory of the LORD (8/31/11)

A Call to Holiness

a 32:1-35 Example of idolatry.

b 33:2 And I will send *My* Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the

Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

c 33:3 for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you *are* a stiff-necked people

d 33:7-11 Moses meets the Lord in the Tent of Meeting.

e 33:12 You have said, "I know you by name."

f 33:12 You have also found grace in My sight

g 33:13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight,

show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I

may find grace in Your sight.

h 33:13 And consider that this nation *is* Your people

i 33:14 And He said, “My Presence will go *with you*, and I will give you rest.”

x 33:15 If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here.

i 33:16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us?

h 33:16 So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth.

g 33:17 I will also do this thing that you have spoken

f 33:17 You have found grace in My sight

e 33:17 I know you by name

d 33:18-34:8 Moses meets the Lord on Mt. Sinai.

c 34:9 O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we *are* a stiff-necked people

b 34:11 Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the

Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

a 34:12-17 Warning against idolatry.

As you can see, the center of the chiasm is verse 33:15 – “If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here.” The people were prone to idolatry and they were stiff-necked in their demeanor, but Moses knew that unless the presence of the Lord went with them there would be no true way of knowing that they had received His grace.

In type and picture, the Presence of the Lord being with Israel is realized in the giving of the Holy Spirit to those in the church. He is the seal and the guarantee of God's presence in our lives. Sometimes we may feel He is distant or has left us. But this is more often than not because we have fallen back into some type of sin, highlighted by the idolatry of Israel. That thought goes well with our text verse of the day...

Text Verse: "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness." 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

Let us remember that the Lord is with us, and that we should act in accord with that knowledge at all times. Let us be pleasing to God and stand firm on the commands, exhortations, and prohibitions which are given to us for right living. Such is what we are told to do in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. This is Your God, O Israel (verses 1-4)

For the sake of context, we need to remember where we are in the history of the book of Exodus. Using Moses as their leader, the Lord had brought Israel out of their bondage in Egypt. On the way to Sinai, and even at the foot of Sinai, He had shown them great and marvelous proofs of His abilities to care for them, as well as His affections directed towards them.

At Sinai, He had come down in their presence and verbally pronounced to them the Ten Commandments. After that, because of the terror of the meeting, they had asked that the Lord not speak to them. Therefore, towards the end of chapter 20, Moses ascended Sinai and received the Book of the Covenant. This went all the way through chapter 23.

After receiving the Book of the Covenant, Moses went back down, and the covenant with the people was cut. The agreement was made, and the people committed themselves to obedience. This was followed by the covenant meal between the Lord and the leaders of Israel.

After this, towards the end of chapter 24, Moses and Joshua ascended Sinai again where Moses would be presented with the details for the construction of the sanctuary and all of its furniture, the ordination of the priests, the details for the sacrifices and offerings, and the law of the Sabbath. At the end of chapter 31, the very last thing that was recorded was –

“And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” Exodus 31:18

The two tablets of the Testimony, written by the finger of God which contained the Ten Commandments, was handed to Moses. The words which had been uttered at the beginning of chapter 20 by the Lord, were written down by Him and presented to the leader of the people. This then is the context of where we are now.

1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain,

The words *ha'am* or “the people” are certainly used in a general sense. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that “some” of the people were involved in the depravity of the idolatry to be described here. Regardless of this though, these things will normally start with a few and eventually permeate the entire body.

Whether few or many then, they are regarded as a single group. They had been brought out of Egypt and had been promised to be brought back into the land of their forefathers. But after an extended period of sitting idle, they are restive and unable to endure any more delay.

The word used concerning Moses which is translated here as “delay” is *bosh*. It is a verb which means “ashamed,” but the primary meaning is “to fall into disgrace, normally through failure, either of self or of an object of trust” (HAW). The word has only been used once so far and it gives us a clue as to the entire flavor of the coming account. It was first seen in Genesis 2:25 –

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not **ashamed**.”

In Eden, there was no shame; no disgrace. There was peace between God and man. But that quickly changed when sin entered the picture. It is sin which causes shame and brings about disgrace. The people imply that Moses has let them down, just as God was disappointed in Adam. A classic use of this word, and one which resembles the events which lie ahead, comes from Isaiah 44:9 –

“Those who make an image, all of them *are* useless,
And their precious things shall not profit;
They *are* their own witnesses;
They neither see nor know, **that they may be ashamed.**” Isaiah 44:9

Due to the delay, it seemed that Moses has failed and fallen into disgrace. Either he had died in the fiery inferno on the mountain, or he had packed up and left without letting the people know, or some other unknown event had occurred. Whatever their thoughts about Moses were, it included the idea that he had fallen into disgrace.

Thus the irony of what is about to occur centers on this word, given to us in the first sentence of the account. Rather than Moses, it is the people who will fall into disgrace. Moses, or “He who draws out” will have to draw them out of the wrath of God which will be directed towards them.

We were told in Exodus 24 that Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. This means that what we are seeing here occurs somewhere around five weeks after his ascent. We know this because the details of what we will see took at least a few days, or maybe even a week, to transpire.

The Lord selected this period of forty days for a reason. According to Bullinger the biblical meaning of forty is –

"Forty has long been universally recognized as an important number, both on account of the frequency of its occurrence, and the uniformity of its association with a period of *probation, trial, and chastisement*—(not *judgment*, like the number 9, which stands in connection with the punishment of enemies, but the chastisement of sons, and of a covenant people). It is the product of 5 and 8, and points to the action of *grace* (5), leading to and ending in *revival* and *renewal* (8). This is certainly the case where *forty* relates to a period of evident *probation*."

The forty days are rightly defined by him as a time of evident probation. The people had been given the law and now they were being tested with that law

without their chief leader there to supervise them. How would Aaron fare as their designated representative? How would they fare?

There are eight such great forty day periods recorded in Scripture. One of them corresponds to this period in a marvelous way. Israel was given these forty days of testing and they are now shown to have failed. Jesus was given forty days of testing and He prevailed.

1 (con't) the people gathered together to Aaron,

The Hebrew reads, *v'yiqahel ha'am al aharon* – “And assembled the people *against* Aaron.” Aaron and Hur were appointed as the leaders during Moses’ absence. Being the prominent leader, the people have come against him in a forceful way. It is what we could consider the possible beginning of a mob scene.

1 (con't) and said to him, “Come,

The word is *qum*. It means to arise. They are tired of waiting and they are adamant that Aaron now arise and take action. And so they demand that he get up and act.

1 (con't) make us gods that shall go before us;

The word for “gods” here is *elohim*. It can mean either “god” singular or “gods” plural. Different translations say one or the other. However, in this verse the word for “shall go” is *yeleku*. It is in the plural, and therefore they are demanding visible gods to lead them. In these words then, multiple sins are seen.

The first is a violation of the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The second is a violation of the second, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image.” They have also devolved from monotheism to polytheism. Regardless of what Aaron actually makes, they have requested “gods.”

The mentioning of the Lord handing the Ten Commandments to Moses after his long discourse on the mountain is not without significance then. There are several purposes for it. First, it came at the end of the directions for the sanctuary as the fulfillment of what the sanctuary anticipated.

All of the details looked forward to Christ, but without the law which Christ fulfilled, there would remain an eternal disconnect between God and man. Only when this law was placed in the Ark and covered by the Mercy Seat, could there be a sort of restoration of that fellowship which was lost in Adam.

Secondly, it was given to show us that a willful, open, and united act of disobedience against these laws had taken place. The people had forgotten the words of the covenant, but the Lord had not. They had agreed openly and publically to it, and they had openly and publically violated it.

And so thirdly, we will see the just due for violating God’s law and the mercy and grace which is granted when God’s mediator stands between the Offended and the offenders. Moses, as a type of Christ, will be seen to do just this in the verses ahead. Without his intercession, the people would have been destroyed.

^{1 (con’t)} **for *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.”**

The words here show double contempt. The first is upon the unnamed Lord. Instead of relying on He who had already shown Himself reliable on numerous occasions, they completely ignore Him in what they say. It is as if He isn't even a consideration.

Instead, they turn their contempt towards the human instrument of their situation, Moses, by saying *ki zeh Mosheh* – “for this Moses.” The words again imply that he is a failure. “Yeah, whatever happened to that guy?” It reflects a quickly-faded gratitude for all he had done. Especially concerning their acknowledgment that he was “the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt.”

What is even more incredible, is that they are right there at the base of Sinai. All they had to do was send someone up to see what was going on in the cloud and fire. But they were too cowardly to even do this. They were warned to not do this thing. It is an acknowledgment that they knew, very well, that the Lord was there, but instead of coming to *face* Him, they would stay below and *disgrace* Him.

And yet even more, they continued to receive their daily portion of manna and their stream of water from the rock. Exodus 16:35 tells us that the manna continued unabated for forty years. Joshua 5:12 tells us that the manna finally ceased only when they had eaten of the produce of Canaan, exactly forty years later.

Instead of the unseen Lord, who would care for them by His effort, they sought a visible god which would embolden them in their own effort. And thus pride has stepped into the minds of the people. They have fallen into the same sin as their first father. And in defiance of God, they intended to work their way into the promised land apart from Him.

It is the same pattern which all false religions follow. They use what God offers to sustain them – just as Israel continued to eat the manna, but they ignore His leading and His counsel – just as Israel set out to fashion their own gods. But Matthew Henry shows us that this is not how it should be –

“While Moses was in the mount, receiving the law from God, the people made a tumultuous address to Aaron. This giddy multitude were weary of waiting for the return of Moses. Weariness in waiting betrays to many temptations. The Lord must be waited for till he comes, and waited for though he tarry.” Matthew Henry

² And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.”

What Aaron should have done was to stand and defend the honor of the Lord and the keeping of His commands. He was entrusted with the care of the people after having been included in the meal with the Lord on the mountain. He had seen the Lord prove faithful time and time again, but he was also a weak and fallible person, unwilling to sacrifice himself in the defense of the Lord.

And yet, he knew that the right thing to do was to not obey the demands of the people. In hopes of deterring them from this course of action, he goes to what he supposes is their greatest source of affection by asking them to “break off the golden earrings.”

The word translated as “break” is *paraq*. It means to break off or tear away. It is a rather rare word, being used just ten times. Instead of saying, “take them off,” he uses this stronger word which almost gives the idea of violence. It is a challenge to the people. “All right, if you want me to do this thing, then you will have to do this other thing.”

The word for earring is *nezem* – a ring. It can be an earring or a nose-ring or some other type of ornament. Here, it is specifically noted as on their ears. Genesis 35:2-4 makes it apparent that the wearing of these *nezem*, or rings, was in and of itself a source of some type of idolatry –

“And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. ³Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.’ ⁴So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem.”

They had probably gotten these as a part of the plunder when they left Egypt. They would be considered a valuable and deserved blessing. But now Aaron was telling them that if they wanted a corporate idol, they would have to give up their personal ones.

It seems he was betting that they would not be willing to make such an exchange and would prefer their own most valuable possessions. Even more, he specifies those that belong to the wives, sons, and daughters. He probably felt that the people would be as weak towards their families as he was towards them.

The sentiment of what occurs here in defiance of the Lord, is actually something that He later sets down as a precept in His word. In Malachi 2, we read this –

“If you will not hear,
And if you will not take *it* to heart,
To give glory to My name,
Says the Lord of hosts,

'I will send a curse upon you,
And I will curse your blessings.
Yes, I have cursed them already,
Because you do not take *it* to heart.'" Malachi 2:2

This in fact is what will occur with these cherished possessions of the people. The blessings of their departure from Egypt will become a curse.

³So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron.

If it was Aaron's intent to keep the people from their plans, he failed. It says that "all the people" did as he asked. Again, this doesn't necessarily mean all the people of the camp, but it at least means all of the people who had conspired against the Lord. They tore away their earrings and they brought them to him.

⁴And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

The words here are so difficult to translate that there are a multitude of possibilities as to what occurred. Some say that instead of receiving the gold and fashioning it, he received it and bound it in a bag. The same thing occurs in 2 Kings 5:23.

Some say that the order is reversed, and that he made a molded calf and then fashioned it with an engraving tool. But that is not how cast images are handled after they have been cast. What is possible is that it mentions the receiving of the gold first to show that Aaron was now compelled to fashion a god for the people.

After this, he fashioned the thing from wood with the chisel. And then next, he had the gold melted and poured out on it. The reason this is likely is that in Deuteronomy 9:21, it says this –

“Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it *and* ground *it* very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain.”

That it was burned seems to imply that its core was wood. Only after the wood was burned away, did he crush and grind the gold into dust. This seems likely from the words used. First, the word for “fashioned” is *yatsar*. So far, it has only been used three times in the Bible. The first two are seen in these words –

“And the Lord God **formed** man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

⁸The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had **formed**.” Genesis 2:7, 8

After this, it was used one more time in God’s forming of the beasts of the earth. Now, it is seen *in opposition* to those uses. Instead of the Lord forming man, and beasts for man’s use, it is man forming a god in the form of a beast in defiance of the Lord.

The word for “engraving tool” is *kheret*. It is used for the first of just two times. It comes from a root meaning “to engrave,” and so it indicates a chisel or a graver. In Isaiah, it is used to indicate a pen for writing.

The word for “molten” is *masekah*. This is its first use in the Bible and it comes from *nasak* which means to pour out, as a libation, and thus to cover. Thus, if a

wood form was made, it would then have been covered with the gold which had been melted and then applied over it. From this, they formed their false god, a calf.

The word for “calf” is *egel*. Again, it is a new word in Scripture. It is the same as the adjective *agol* which means circular, or round. The reason is that a calf, especially one nearly grown, will frisk around, dancing and twirling. The mental imagery of this is beautifully seen in Malachi 4:2 –

“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.” NLT

Why a calf is selected is not agreed upon. Many scholars tie this calf in with the calf-worship of Egypt’s god Apis, the god of strength and fertility.

Others disagree and claim that Egypt’s worship was of living animals, not images. If they wanted a god to follow, they could have just taken one of their own calves and sacrificed to it and followed it where it led. Thus they tie the calf all the way back to the Babylonian times prior to Abraham.

What is correct is that they were relying on a god of Egypt. Many ancient images of Apis have been found in Egypt. Acts 7:39, which I will cite in a moment tells us that it was to Egypt that they had turned their hearts. They had left the Lord and what He had revealed to them. This is evidenced in the next words...

^{4 (con’t)} **Then they said, “This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”**

The Hebrew reads, *eleh elohekha* - “These are your gods...” It is plural. Again, people argue what the intent here is by the use of the plural. Some see it as being the many earrings of the people being combined into one form, thus the plural is used.

Others see the plural being used for the singular. In other words, the sign of the thing represents another thing. This seems likely based on Aaron’s words of the next verse. He will call for a feast to the Lord, implying that the calf stands *in place of the Lord* as their recognizable image of Him.

But even this is in direct violation of the Ten Commandments and it shows that regardless of Aaron’s intent, the hearts of the people had rejected the Lord. His chosen leader was long gone, and they had closed their *eyes* to His past mercies and their *hearts* to His future promises. This is attested to by Stephen in Acts 7 –

“This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,³⁹ whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Acts 7:38-41

What will we do in our times of distress?

How will we deal with the unseen Lord?

When our lives devolve into a horrendous mess

Will we hold fast to the promises in His word?

*Or will we turn to another god, which is no god at all?
Will we forget what Christ has already done for us?
Through His cross, He has reversed our fall
This came through the blood of our Lord Jesus
The unseen Lord is a hard concept to follow, it's true
But this is what He would ask of us; faith to display
By remembering what He has done in the past, for me and for you
We can have strength to continue in Jesus, day by day
And so let us never forget His gift, His holy word
Which reminds us of the faithfulness of our Lord*

II. A Stiff-necked People (verses 5-10)

⁵So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it.

With the handiwork of the workman accomplished, Aaron now provides full assent for the continued path of apostasy by building an altar before the calf. After the giving of the Ten Commandments, the people asked Moses for the Lord to not speak to them anymore. After that, Moses ascended the mountain to receive the Book of the Covenant. The very first thing mandated at that time was the law of the of the Earthen Altar. This is what that passage says –

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. ²³ You shall not make *anything to be* with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. ²⁴ An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. ²⁵ And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall

not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. ²⁶ Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it." Exodus 20:22-26

In direct violation of the law of the altar, Aaron approved the work of man's hands and built an altar to the *abomination*. And in addition to that, in further disobedience to that law he next makes a *proclamation* ...

^{5 (con't)} **And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord."**

Not only did he approve of an image formed by man's hands, and not only did he build an altar to it, but he ascribed to it the character of Yehovah by claiming a feast to Him. The self-existent One who proclaimed to Moses, and through him to the people of Israel, I AM THAT I AM, had been reduced to an image of wood and gold.

And that image was merely an image of something else which had been created by God, having been formed by Him as He desired. Now a mere image of His handiwork, that of a brute beast, had been exalted by Aaron as a representation of His infinite being.

The disgrace of what he has done is literally incomprehensible, and yet it is something that almost every human has done countless times in his own life. We form a god in our image. Whether it is through physical idols, or active disobedience to His word, we form our own god, suitable to our own liking.

Whether we decide that God is wrong in forbidding abortions, or whether we ignore His word concerning the order of the family unit, or whether we refuse to acknowledge that Christ is Lord - to the glory of God the Father, we recreate a god

in our image and for our glory. The difference between Aaron and us is that Aaron's *deed* happens to be recorded for all of us to *read*. The evil we have done may be *out of sight*, but it is recorded by God and *it will be brought to light*.

⁶Then they rose early on the next day,

The idea we get here is that the people were too excited to sleep. The tedium of the previous five plus weeks had become too much for them. The thought of a feast day was as exciting to them as the thought of a coming wedding day. No sooner had the sun risen, then they went forward for their day of feasting.

^{6 (con't)} offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings;

The one offering that they needed the most, the sin offering, is noticeably missing from this verse. Instead, they made burnt offerings to appease their false god, and they brought peace offerings as a sign of fellowship and intimacy with him, but they were blinded to their sin and never considered such an offering.

^{6 (con't)} and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Along with the sacrifices came feasting and drinking. As with most of such things when conducted in an unholy manner, it led to something worse. The words *v'yaqumu letsakheq*, "and rose up to play," probably include fornication, adultery, and the like. It is the same word which was used concerning the accusations against Joseph by Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:14.

Paul cites this verse in 1 Corinthians 10 along with a list of other things which brought about the wrath of God upon the people of Israel. After citing them, he then followed up with these words of warning, assurance, and relief –

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.” 1 Corinthians 10:12, 13

The lessons of the past have been given to us as examples for us to learn by. God is not contained in a box, and He is not represented by an animal or a man, except in the person of Jesus Christ who alone is the image of the invisible God.

As servants of the Lord, we are to refrain from idolatry, and we are to refrain from sexual immorality, both of which are ever more prevalent in society, and both of which are therefore all the more easy to fall into.

⁷ And the Lord said to Moses, “Go, get down!

The Lord uses the same term now that He did in Exodus 19:24, *lek red* – “Go, get down.” It is a highly emphatic expression implying an *emergency*, and expecting *urgency*. Moses didn’t understand the urgency in Exodus 19. In this chapter, he isn’t even aware of it. It is such a forceful expression, that it even affects him...

^{7 (con’t)} For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*.

The term *ammekha*, or “your people,” carries one of two possibilities. The first is that the Lord is telling Moses that the people have sinned and they require a mediator to intercede for them. The second is that the Lord has disavowed them

as His people. The covenant which united them is broken and they are no longer His.

What appears from the coming verses and chapters is a mixture of both. The Lord has distanced Himself from the people, but he understands that the tie of Moses' blood relationship is permanent. As we will see, He will offer a new beginning through Moses, promising to make him a great nation, but because of Moses' faithfulness to his people, in Chapter 34 the Lord will continue the covenant between Himself and Israel.

The greatness of Moses the man is seen in both how the Lord deals with him, and how he deals with his people. No matter what though, at the present time, the people have broken the covenant and the Lord is rightfully offended at their actions. Concerning what they have done in relation to modern idolatry, Adam Clarke provides wise words of counsel –

“This is one pretense that the Roman Catholics have for the idolatry in their image worship. Their high priest, the pope, collects the ornaments of the people, and makes an image, a crucifix, a madonna, etc. The people worship it; but the pope says it is only to keep God in remembrance. But of the whole God says, Thy people have corrupted themselves; and thus as they continue in their idolatry, they have forfeited the blessings of the Lord's covenant. They are not God's people, they are the pope's people, and he is called "our holy father the pope.”
Adam Clarke

⁸They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.

The words here show that whether the people thought Moses was gone a long time or not, the Lord saw it as a *very short span*. They turned away from Him and they were in a hurry to do so. Because of this, the guilt of their actions was all the

more visible and intense. He had commanded, telling them the proper way in which to live before Him; and no sooner had He done so, than they had turned aside to the false path. As Arthur Pink describes this –

“Man must have an object, and when he turns from the true God, he at once craves a false one.” Arthur Pink

^{8 (con't)} They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’”

His words here confirm the analysis of Adam Clarke concerning the idolatry of the RCC. The Lord says that not only had they made a molded calf, but they had worshipped and scarified to it. The Lord deems such actions as worship not of Him, but of the object itself, regardless of what the verbal expression of the people claim.

⁹ And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people!

The Lord was fully aware of the people before He ever created them. Certainly for this reason, as much as any other, He chose them. This might seem contradictory, but it is not. When making an example of something or someone, you choose that which fits the type the most perfectly.

The Lord chose Israel knowing the hardness of their hearts and their rebellious nature so that they could be an example to all people, carefully recorded in His word. And the metaphor He uses to describe them now is one which will be used numerous times of them in Scripture, and countless more throughout history. He says they are “a stiff-necked people.”

The word is normally explained as being obstinate, but it is more than that. It signifies a perverse people who want to behave in a way which is both unacceptable and unreasonable, even in spite of the consequences they will face.

It is a metaphor which finds its source in an animal which will not submit itself to yoke or bridle. He stiffens himself against the pull of the rein, even if it hurts. Thus Israel is being described as the very animal they have shaped and worshipped, a twirling calf. It is as if in history we are viewing a rodeo and Israel is the twirling obstinate animal.

They failed to submit to the yoke of God's law, right in the sight of the burning mountain and just after a breakfast of manna provided by the Lord which formed on the ground upon which they now danced. This term for them will be used again and again to remind them of their infancy in the wilderness where they bowed their hearts away from God and turned their necks, rather than their faces, to Him.

In their defiance, the Lord now displays His anger at them. The dread and horror which was on display at Sinai in the giving of the Ten Commandments can now be expected to be released on them for violating those very same laws. It is a pattern which will be seen time and again in their history. The first is promised, and it is promised *right now...*

¹⁰ Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.

The Lord now states to Moses the words *v'atah hanikhah li* – "And you let alone Me." This appears to be a command, but it is not. It is the beginning of another test. Aaron was tested and he failed. Now a new test is being introduced. This becomes clear with the next words, *v'yikhar api bahem v'akalem*, "...and my wrath will burn hot against them and I will consume them."

His burning wrath and His promised destruction is merely an exercise in revealing *the character of Moses*. This is what occurred with Jacob when the Lord wrestled with him in Genesis 32:24-28 –

“Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶ And He said, ‘Let Me go, for the day breaks.’

But he said, ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me!’

²⁷ So He said to him, ‘What *is* your name?’

He said, ‘Jacob.’

²⁸ And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.’”

The Lord tested Jacob, not for His own learning, but for Jacob’s. Now we see the same thing occurring again. The Lord has told Moses to leave Him alone, not “that” or “so” his anger may burn against the people, but “and” His anger will burn against them. If Moses agrees, the action will occur. And the test is made greater with our final words of the day...

***10 (fin) And I will make of you a great nation.”**

v’e-e-seh owtkha l’gow gadol - It is almost an exact repeat of the words spoken to Abraham over 430 years earlier. “And I will make you a great nation.” The mettle of the man is being tested. The love of his people, the faithfulness to his duties, and the desire for recognition are all being established.

As noted earlier, the number forty speaks of a time of evident probation. Aaron failed, the people failed, but Moses’ character is yet to be revealed. He has gone

forty days and forty nights without food or water. Will he remain steadfast in His love for his people, his faithfulness to God, and his ability to withstand temptation?

He is being used as a picture of Christ who endured the same testing almost 1500 years later. Next week we will pick up with the account of this memorable incident which we can turn to in order to learn valuable insights into how we ourselves should be willing to act when faced with our own temptations and human limitations.

We, like Israel, like Aaron, and like Moses, have been brought up out of Egypt, the land of sin. The Lord has promised to take us back to the land we originally came from; the Land of Promise. In the meantime, we are to live by faith and not by sight.

We cannot replace our affections and devotions to the Lord with inanimate objects like statues of Mary, or false gods of gold and silver. We cannot trust in money or IRAs to keep us secure as we go. We cannot make sex, work, or wealth our god. Instead, we are being asked to trust the Lord and to pursue Him alone.

I met some nice people as I travelled the US in 2010 who fell into a bad patch. It involved the courts and confinement for the husband, and real distress for the wife and children. They become exceedingly pious and seemed to hold fast to the Lord through what happened, but not long after his confinement ended, he went back to his profession and the money started coming in.

She became a body builder. They stopped posting about the Lord and instead they make posts about the empire they are building. It is an empire built on sand, I assure you. Any such god that we put our trust in will fail us. The money will

fade, the looks will disappear, the bodies will tire, and only emptiness will be left. What a sad price to pay for the temporary pleasures of this life.

Let us put away our golden calves and fix our eyes upon the high mountain where the Lord dwells. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let us be resolute in our stand upon God's sacred word, and let us never be willing to forsake our love and devotion to our most honored Lord.

If you have never called out to Him to be your Savior, please do it today...

Closing Verse: "They made a calf in Horeb,
And worshiped the molded image.
²⁰ Thus they changed their glory
Into the image of an ox that eats grass.
²¹ They forgot God their Savior,
Who had done great things in Egypt,
²² Wondrous works in the land of Ham,
Awesome things by the Red Sea." Psalm 106:19-22

Next Week: Exodus 31:11-24 *It's always exciting to see what the Bible shows us...*
(The Golden Calf – The Testing of Moses) (90th Exodus Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. Even if a deep ocean lies ahead of You, He can part the waters and lead you through it on dry ground. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Golden Calf

Now when the people saw
That Moses delayed instead
Coming down from the mountain
The people gathered together to Aaron, and to him said
“Come, make us gods that shall go before us
For as for this Moses, the man who brought us up, also
Out of the land of Egypt
What has become of him, we do not know

And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings
Which are in the ears of your wives, so let it be
Also your sons, and your daughters...
And bring them to me
So all the people broke off
The golden earrings which were in their ears
And brought them to Aaron
Of the Lord God, they showed no fears

And he received the gold from their hand
And he fashioned it with an engraving tool
And made a molded calf
Aaron truly acted like a fool

Then they said
“This is your god, O Israel
That brought you out of the land of Egypt
As you know very well
So when Aaron saw it
He built an altar before it, disobeying God’s word
And Aaron made a proclamation and said
“Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord

Then they rose early on the next day
Offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings
And the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play
And the Lord said to Moses “Go, get down!
For your people whom you brought out
Of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves
They have performed great wickedness, no doubt

They have turned aside quickly
Out of the way which I commanded them, as I did tell
They have made themselves a molded calf
And worshiped it and sacrificed to it as well
And said, ‘This is your god, O Israel
That brought you out of the land of Egypt
This to the people they did tell

And the Lord said to Moses, who was paying heed
“I have seen this people
And it is a stiff-necked people indeed
Now therefore, let Me alone
That My wrath may burn hot against them in my consternation
And I may consume them
And I will make of you a great nation

Lord God, we sure know how to strive against you
It is in our nature to stiffen our necks in this way
Grant us wisdom to do what is right to do
And to be pleasing in Your sight; this we pray
Help us to follow closely what is written in Your word
And be a light on our path, guiding each of us
Help us to be obedient to the things we've heard
Concerning what You have done through our Lord Jesus

Lead us to Your place of rest, in eternal glory
That which is promised in the gospel story

For this we pray, and to this help us to attend
And surely we shall praise you forever; days without end

Hallelujah and Amen...