

REBELLION, Part 2

EXODUS 32:1-10

In the last lesson, I noted Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law of God and the mountain appeared to be on fire with the glory of the Lord.

Exodus 24:17 ¹⁷And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.

The point being made at that time was I was unsure whether or not the mountain continued to manifest God's presence on that mountain in the sight of the people while Moses was up there forty days. When Moses came down the mountain, it was burning with fire.

Deuteronomy 9:15¹⁵“So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.

It would be reasonable to presume God's glory was visible to the people down below the whole time Moses was up there which makes the rebellion we are discussing that much more egregious. Yahweh's glory was visible to them and they turned back to mute, deaf powerless idols.

In the last lesson, we introduced the rebellion of the golden calf on Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 32:1 ¹Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

The people had been without God's prophet, Moses, for forty days and they seemingly lost faith in that period of time. They weren't trusting the God who had done so much for them to this point in the Exodus to complete what He started with them. This was so even in the face of the likely manifestation of God's fiery glory on the top of the mountain during the time Moses was up there with Yahweh. In the absence of Moses' leadership, the people reverted back to what they knew which was paganism. It appears there may have been some people awaiting the time they thought was the opportune moment to lead the people back into idolatry.

Some theologians claim the golden calf was simply a representation of Yahweh, but my thinking is they went back to paganism and viewed this calf as something more than a visible representation of Yahweh. The text could be indicating the people were mixing paganism with what they learned when Moses reappeared in Egypt to free them from slavery the result of which is what we would call syncretism. The dictionary definition of syncretism is the "amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought" [*The Oxford American College Dictionary*]. Whenever truth and error are mixed, which is what syncretism does, it mixes true religion with false religion. When that happens error eventually wins out and the truth is abandoned. That would be a recurring theme throughout Israel's history. Up to the time of the Babylonian captivity, paganism always won out in Israel.

That truth is also a valid application for what is happening today in the church. When liberalism began to intrude into Bible believing churches, the churches eventually abandoned biblical truth and turned to liberal social gospel practices and Marxist liberation theology with no regard for biblical truth. In fact, biblical truth became inconvenient and had to be changed and denied. That also happened early on in what became Roman Catholicism. As error crept into the Roman Church, error eventually became dominant and was enshrined as doctrine. It happened in mainline Protestant denominations. It has happened in the Pentecostal churches where the Faith movement has made heretical inroads in the form of the prosperity gospel and the preaching of a false christ. It has happened in the Charismatic movement where all manner of abuses occur that are claimed to be from the Holy Spirit but seem to be more from demonic influence than from the Spirit.

Sailhamer believed the Israelites thought the calf represented Yahweh, but he based this on a definition of idol that is questionable. He said an idol was a representation of God ("big G" God, Yahweh) while polytheism was the worship of many gods.¹ That's correct concerning the definition of polytheism, but incorrect concerning the definition of an idol. The definition of an idol is simply a representation or a symbol of an object of worship without regard to whether it is supposed to be an image of Yahweh or of some other false, "little g" god. He made it an either/or issue of polytheism, worshiping many gods, versus idolatry,

¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 310.

worshiping a representation of Yahweh, but that isn't the only option. The idol could represent a false god like, for example, a bull such as appears in this narrative which represents a pagan deity. A more accurate definition of an idol is "something we ourselves make into a god. It does not have to be a statue or a tree. It can be anything that stands between us and God or something we substitute for God."² To say that an idol is always a representation of Yahweh is incorrect.

Sailhamer believed Elohim, although plural, was used to refer to a single god here, which is very likely, because it can be understood that way and frequently is in the Bible. That is confirmed in Nehemiah 9:18 where this verse is quoted referring to a single god. He reasoned this made their sin idolatry which was the sin of worshiping an image representing Yahweh. He also correctly said Israel had been warned throughout their history to refrain from worshiping idols. That is also true, but with the possible exception of this incident, Israel never worshiped idols or images they claimed to be Yahweh. They always worshiped idols that represented pagan gods such as Tammuz or Molech and so on. Sailhamer's argument, at least in my mind, simply doesn't make any sense. Perhaps this idol did, in the minds of the Israelites, represent Yahweh at first, although I'm skeptical of that argument for reasons we will discuss, but his overall argument fails to make the case.

² Ronald F. Youngblood, gen. ed., s.v. "idol, image," in *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 529.

Another theory concerning the golden bull idol was presented by Cassuto. He believed the Israelites didn't think the idol represented Yahweh, or any other god, but was instead a surrogate for Moses. Then Aaron gave a non-committal answer to the rebelling people in order to buy time. When the people agreed to fund the project, he was trapped and had to go ahead and make the idol. The people then thought the idol represented Yahweh as His partner in their deliverance.³ While many theologians agree with Cassuto and connect the idol with Yahweh, the rest of this idea simply does not square with the Scripture, and I don't think it has any credence.

J. Vernon McGee believed the Israelites had idolatry in mind. "Can you imagine these people lapsing into idolatry that quickly? It would be inconceivable to me if it were not for the fact that I have watched the church lapse into apostasy that I never dreamed I would live to see."⁴ Wiersbe wrote, "Israel's lust for idols was born in Egypt and still worked in their hearts."⁵

It appears evident if Moses hadn't come back to provide leadership, the Israelites would have abandoned the God who just led them safely out of Egypt. Because we have revelation knowledge in the form of the Bible, we know that couldn't happen because God does have a plan and a purpose for Israel; therefore, the nation couldn't be destroyed. Moses did come back, some tem-

³ U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 411-413.

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible: Genesis through Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 300.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Pentateuch* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2001), 245.

poral discipline was imposed on the Israelites, the covenant was renewed, and they continued on.

The people approached Aaron to craft this idol. Implicit in this request is probably the idea that he would be their new leader. Perhaps they looked at him as priest over all the people, but to this point in the narrative, he and his sons had yet to be appointed as the nation's priests. The oldest sons were the priests of the family at this time. Aaron wouldn't be consecrated as the High Priest until after the construction of the Tabernacle was completed which had yet to begin when the rebellion took place. He wasn't High Priest at that time. There are some indications Aaron tried to steer the people to Yahweh, but he was not a strong leader and he apparently could not stand up to the pressure they were putting on him to make an idol for their worship.

For whatever reason, and fear of the people may have been at least one of the reasons, if not the primary reason, Aaron quickly capitulated to the demands of the people because the grammar indicates the crowd was hostile. Aaron immediately began gathering gold jewelry in order to cast a golden calf. As far as we know, the people didn't specifically demand a calf; they just said "make us a god." Most of the artist's renderings we can find today portray, at least in my estimation, the altar and the calf to be far too elaborate and far too large for what could have been possible in the wilderness and constructed on very short notice. Given the circumstances, the idol probably wasn't crafted in great detail and wasn't too large. The text indicated the calf was crafted in a

day (Ex. 32:8). We noted in the last lesson that Aaron and Hur were appointed by Moses to act in his stead while he was on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:14). Hur's name is not mentioned in this pericope. Matthew Henry reported the Jews had an answer for his absence. "The Jews have a tradition that his colleague Hur opposing it [meaning Hur opposed the people's request for an idol] the people fell upon him and stoned him (and therefore we never read of him after) and that this frightened Aaron into compliance."⁶ Jewish tradition can be unreliable; therefore, we shouldn't presume this to be fact, but it is an interesting story.

Exodus 32:2-4 ²Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." ³Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. ⁴He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool [תְּהַרְט] and made it into a molten [מִסִּבָּה] calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Aaron collected gold earrings to supply the gold needed to fashion the golden calf. At that time, people often kept their gold in the form of jewelry. Coins were not yet in use as a means of monetary exchange. This was jewelry the Israelites had obtained from the Egyptians when they left Egypt. How much gold was required to fashion the idol wasn't stated, but as I noted, all the artist's images we see today must be far too large. In Judges 17:4, two hundred pieces of silver, which was probably about five pounds, were used to craft an idol. In the past, we've noted that gold can be hammered incredibly thin; therefore, it wouldn't take much gold to cover a relatively small wooden bull. This idol was

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary: In One Volume: Genesis to Revelation*, ed. Leslie F. Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 107.

almost certainly not solid gold. It was either melted gold poured into a mold in the shape of a calf or, most probably, melted gold fashioned into plating fastened to the outside of a wooden form in the shape of a bull. This is supported by the fact molten, *מִטָּבַח*, means an image, molten metal, or a covering. Once the wooden object was covered in gold plate, the graving tool, *קָרַט*, was used to fashion details in the metal. Since Moses burnt the idol, it must have had a wooden core that was capable of burning (Ex. 32:20). The resulting charcoal was ground into powder. I don't know, but I suspect that solid gold idols were rarely cast and even then, only if they were quite small.

Even if the Israelite's original intent was to craft an image that represented Yahweh, which I acknowledge to be possible although remote, I think other Scriptures negate that thought. Even if they had the mindset that the idol represented Yahweh, we are going to see they immediately shifted from that mindset to one of worshiping the idol as a representative of something other than Yahweh. However, I don't think they had that mindset even at the beginning. From the start, they were worshiping an idol and that was their intent.

The people already heard God proclaim the Ten Commandments only a very few days before this happened (Ex. 20:1-17, 22) and He specifically reiterated the command not to worship other gods of silver and gold. Why would he single that commandment out apart from the other nine commandments at that point in time? Because Yahweh knew the Israelites were going to fashion a

false god out of gold in just a few days which implies the god they were going to make was not meant to be a representation of Him.

Exodus 20:22–23 ²²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. ²³‘You shall not make ~~other gods~~ besides [אֲנִי] Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.

The word besides, אֲנִי, is a marker of association meaning with, against, near, among, or accompanied. It has the sense of being in close proximity to something or someone. In English, “besides” means other than or apart from which is an accurate interpretation of the Hebrew. Yahweh was implying that the idol He knew they were going to make in a few days was not a representation of Him, but a rival god to set alongside Him. “Alongside” Him is probably the best interpretation (NET, LEB) and the HCSB translates it “rival” Me. This strengthens my conviction the idol they built while Moses was on Sinai was not meant to be a representation of Yahweh, but it was instead intended to be a representation of a pagan deity to set alongside Yahweh as His rival. Which is, of course, exactly what it was, the bull god which was called Apis in Egypt.

Exodus 20:23 ²³You must not make gods of silver to rival Me; you must not make gods of gold for yourselves. [HCSB]

Exodus 20:23 ²³You must not make gods of silver alongside me, nor make gods of gold for yourselves. [NET]

Exodus 20:23 ²³You will not make alongside me gods of silver, and gods of gold you will not make for yourselves. [LEB]

Psalm 106:21 reveals the Israelites had forgotten their Savior which is an indication they had not made an idol to represent Yahweh. Instead, they replaced Yahweh, whom they had already forgotten, with another god. Unger claimed they only forgot God's "great work of deliverance," but the text doesn't say that; it says they forgot their "Savior."⁷ That might necessarily involve forgetting what their Savior did for them, but the text makes it clear they forgot Him, their Savior. Shortly, we will note they wanted to credit a pagan god with saving them, and they didn't want to credit Yahweh with saving them.

Psalm 106:19–21 ¹⁹They made a calf in Horeb And worshiped a molten image. ²⁰Thus they exchanged their glory For the image of an ox that eats grass. ²¹They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,

Other Scriptures reveal the Israelites never could shake the idolatry to which they were exposed in Egypt. Even after they had conquered most of the land, Joshua had to tell them to choose between the idols of Egypt, among others, and Yahweh. They still embraced the gods of Egypt at that time.

Joshua 24:14 ¹⁴"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to summarize Yahweh's dealings with Israel over the course of their history beginning with their time in Egypt. When the Lord said they did not "forsake the idols of Egypt," He had in mind the history of the nation. They never left those idols in Egypt; they brought them out

⁷ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 906.

with them, if not literally, then at least in their hearts and minds. They had a terrible time breaking away from them.

Ezekiel 20:7–8 ⁷“I said to them, ‘Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.’ ⁸“But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

The nature of the revelry the next day suggests a pagan celebration and not a celebration of Yahweh in the form of a calf. Bear in mind this pagan celebration was taking place in the presence of God's glory on Mt. Sinai.

“All the people” probably indicates a majority of the people were willing to give their gold for the idol, but we know God always has a believing remnant of Jews who would not have participated in this rebellion. In light of subsequent revelation, it is possible the Levites did not participate in the request for an idol, but, on the other hand, they may have followed Aaron's lead to acquiesce to the demand. If they did that, they subsequently repented, sought forgiveness, and were restored because they rallied to Moses' side when he came down the mountain to confront the people (Ex. 32:26). Following that, the Levites were appointed to do the work of the Tabernacle (Num. 1:47-53).

What did it mean when “they” said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt?” Who is “they?” That must be the people who demanded the idol in the first place. Moses and his leadership were gone and it is possible they were thinking Yahweh was gone as well since Moses

was the mediator between the Israelites and Yahweh. This is weak, however, since the fiery glory of God was almost certainly still visible on Mt. Sinai. They had to know Yahweh was still right there even if they didn't know what had become of Moses. What is more probable is they were taking advantage of Moses' absence to push a return to the idolatry they lusted after. There was most likely a group of people who were leading the rest of the Israelites away from Yahweh and back to idolatry. Having said that, we also have to acknowledge the Israelites never needed much encouragement to reject Yahweh and embrace idolatry. We can't disregard the fact they "forgot their Savior" and they did not "forsake the idols of Egypt" and this was a reference to national Israel. God wasn't referring to a small group within the nation; He was referring to the majority of the nation. This wasn't so much an embrace of syncretism, as some theologians want to characterize it, as it was a rejection of Yahweh altogether. They were telling the people it wasn't this God Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt, it was this familiar god, the bull god, who brought them out.

When the nation divided into two kingdoms, Jeroboam was worried his people would leave the Northern Kingdom, Israel, because worship was centered in Judah at the Temple in Jerusalem. To counter that, he placed two golden bulls in Bethel in the south and Dan in the north proclaiming, "behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:25-33). The connection with what happened in Samaria to what happened at Mt. Sinai is too obvious to ignore. Jeroboam had spent time in Egypt hiding from Sol-

omon; therefore, he was just as familiar with Egyptian paganism as were the Israelites who had been in bondage there.

1 Kings 12:26–29 ²⁶Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. ²⁷“If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” ²⁸So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” ²⁹He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

Once again, this was not a case of simply adding the bulls to the worship of Yahweh, it was the replacement of Yahweh with the bulls. If Jeroboam was simply adding to Judaism, the people still would have been comfortable going to Jerusalem to worship, and the king did not want that to happen. He was switching Israel's worship from Yahweh to these pagan idols and the system they represented. He built temples and he installed illegitimate priests. He was replacing Yahweh and Judaism.

The Israelites may have kept up the appearances of Judaism, but their heart was in paganism. That was a hallmark of their history that started here at Mt. Sinai and continued to the time of the Babylonian destruction. That isn't to say there weren't periods of revival and a return to worshiping Yahweh, but those periods of revival never lasted long. The book of Judges revealed the cycles of failure, apostasy, paganism, and restoration the Israelites experienced and which characterized their history to one degree or another until 586 BC.

Even after they no longer overtly embraced idolatry, they embraced legalism and a system of religion over the true worship of God.

Many theologians disagree with my analysis here. They think the golden bull was meant to be a representation of Yahweh and they think that opened the door to syncretism which eventually overwhelmed Judaism. I think the embrace of idolatry was much more abrupt and complete than that. It happened almost overnight here at Mt. Sinai. You need to make up your own mind about which side of this issue you think is the best fit for the biblical evidence. My position is this is quite simply an overt return to idolatry.

Whether or not Aaron actually fashioned the idol himself or had it done, he built an altar before it. He announced “tomorrow” would be a feast to Yahweh.

Exodus 32:5 ⁵Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow [מָחָר] shall be a feast to the LORD [יְהוָה].”

The text here definitely reads Yahweh, יהוה; it wasn't a generic name for God. Aaron seems to have been trying to steer the people back to worshipping Yahweh instead of some false god. This tends to lend some credence to the argument Aaron felt some pressure from the crowd to go along with making this idol against his better judgment. The altar would have been constructed either of earth or unhewn stone according to the instructions Yahweh gave them in Exodus 20:24-25. The altar, according to normative worship practices at the

time, would have been in front of the idol so it could “see” the offerings being presented to it.

Tomorrow, מָחָר, does not have to refer to the very next day, although that is the predominate meaning of the word in the Old Testament. It also refers to the future or on the time to come. It refers to a period of time past the present time in the narrative. For example, in Exodus 13:14, the word was translated “in time to come” in the NASB and “in the future” in the HCSB, the LEB, and the NET Bible. It could be either one in this Exodus context of the Mt. Sinai pericope, however, it would take some time to make a wooden form in the shape of a bull, to melt the jewelry, to fashion the melted gold into flat sheets, and to attach it to the form in order to complete the idol. They didn’t have a lot of time to do all that because the entire narrative concerning Moses’ stay on the mountain was limited to forty days. The fact they were some days into his absence means they had fewer days than forty to craft this idol and begin their pagan party. Whether they worshiped this idol the very next day or a few days later is not known, but the work involved in crafting the idol seems to suggest it was a few days in the future, although the next verse suggests otherwise.

Verse 6 suggests in stronger terms it was the next day when they presented their offerings to the bull idol and it describes the same sort of revelry that accompanied pagan worship practices.

Exodus 32:6 ‘So the next day [מִתְחַרֵּת] they rose early [שָׁכְמוּ] and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play [צָחֲקוּ].

The next day, מחרת, means the next day, tomorrow, which doesn't leave any room for putting it off a few days into the future. While I have to wonder how they could do the work necessary to craft this idol in less than twenty-four hours, the grammar in this verse suggests that is exactly what happened. The bottom line is it happened whether the very next day or a few days later.

Beginning early in the morning, מִבֹּקֶר means to do something early in the morning, the people gathered to offer sacrifices to this bull idol. The burnt offering was the substitutionary sacrifice and the peace offering was a fellowship offering. The peace offering was meant to be eaten so the people ate and drank presumably around the altar and the idol. As I noted earlier, we don't know how many Israelites actually participated in this worship service. Aaron made this ceremony look like the original covenant ratification ceremony. This is another indication that Aaron may have been trying to get the people to focus on Yahweh, but if so, it didn't work.

The word play, צחק, means to laugh, to make jokes, or to mock. It may express joy or humor. The primary meaning refers to laughter. It may also carry a sexual meaning to caress, to fondle, to engage in foreplay; it refers to indulging in physical, sexual activity. In Genesis 26:8, Ahimelech saw Isaac "caressing" Rachel which may be thought of as exchanging conjugal caresses.⁸ Kaiser

⁸ John Skinner, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 364.

claimed the word “signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play,”⁹ but, if that is true, I couldn’t find any lexicon to verify it. That stretches the meaning of the word to an extreme. I do think that is the situation at Mt. Sinai, but I base that on not only the sexual connotation of the word, but on the nature of pagan worship. Concerning the affectionate actions of husband and wife Isaac and Rebekah, the word could not possibly carry the meaning that Kaiser assigns to it. The word also carried a sexual connotation when Potiphar’s wife claimed Joseph “came in to me to make sport of me,” meaning she was claiming his intention regarding her was rape. The concept of mocking cannot be divorced from the context either. Creating an idol in the very place where God is present before them on the mountain is an act of mocking Him.

It would be entirely in keeping with the concept of fertility cult worship, which the bull represented, for sexual activity to be part of the worship the Israelites conducted before that image. We have to remember pagan images and idols represent Satan and they placed this idol right in the midst of their camp. These religious services involved relations with cult prostitutes both male and female. There were not cult prostitutes present at that time, so where does that leave us in terms of the activity going on? That leaves us thinking there was that type of activity taking place among the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. We also have to understand the satanic mindset. Modern Satanism embraces the motto, “Do

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 478.

What Thou Wilt" which represents a self-indulgent, humanistic worldview. Sex is a primary means to the end of worshiping self by doing what you want to do when you want to do it. That is, in fact, a primary component of satanic worship services. It wasn't any different 3,500 years ago. The fertility cults seem to have been designed to allow man to engage in this most base of human activities—unrestrained sexual activity—under the umbrella of religion and pleasing the gods.

The prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel engaged in frenzied dancing, shouting, and self-mutilation around their altar and there is no reason to suppose this was not characteristic of their regular worship practices. Unger noted, "The loud cries and frenzy of the Baal-worshippers and their self-mutilations are all manifestations of demon-energized religion, as in the case of all idolatry."¹⁰ The text suggests this same kind of revelry was taking place at Mt. Sinai. Gaebelein wrote, "Then the people "rose up to play"; wild dances, licentious and filled with the abominations of the heathen, the flesh let loose, is what followed."¹¹ That is probably an accurate understanding of what took place.

At this point in the narrative, Moses was told to return to the camp because the people had rebelled against Yahweh and in so doing had corrupted themselves. Before Moses went back down, he and God have a conversation

¹⁰ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 480.

¹¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible: Genesis to Deuteronomy.*, vol. 1, Logos Electronic Ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 172.

concerning the fate of Israel. Will Yahweh destroy them and start over with Moses, or will He restore them and continue with Israel as part of His plan for history?

Exodus 32:7–10 ⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted [שָׁחָת] themselves. ⁸“They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” ⁹The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate [קָשָׁה עֲרֵף] people. ¹⁰“Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

It is interesting that God referred to the Israelites as “your people” meaning Moses’ people and as the people you, Moses, brought out of Egypt. This is possibly an indication of God’s anger at the Israelites. By suggesting they are Moses’ people, Yahweh may be disassociating Himself from them. Alternatively, Moses was so identified with both Yahweh and the Israelites that his status as the representative leader of Israel representing God and representing the people to God was acknowledged by the Most High God. Moses’ preeminent position and status continues to be acknowledged to this day. Giving credence to this thought is the fact God invited Moses to intercede for the people in order to “convince” God to change His mind and spare the people. We will examine that issue further next week.

Corrupt, שָׁחָת, means to spoil, to ruin, to destroy, to pervert, to corrupt, or to become corrupt. The stem of this word expresses an intensive action with an active voice. They were ruining themselves by doing a corrupt thing. That’s not a state in which any of God’s people should ever want to be. In terms of applica-

tion, what does that say about believers who have substituted something else for God which is itself idolatry? Idolatry doesn't have to be the overt worship of some sort of pagan deity and its image. Whether God is replaced by one's spouse, children, careers, hobbies, sports, money, fame, politics, or anything else, God views that person existing in a state of corruption and ruin they have brought upon themselves. It doesn't have to be a golden calf to be idolatry; anything that replaces God in one's life is idolatry. It doesn't have to be an overt, obvious rebellion either. One can have idols no one else knows about, but God knows and He sees corruption. That is not to say that restoration is impossible; any straying believer may be restored fellowship with God. That's what the concept of atonement is about, the restoration of fellowship. In the New Testament, we are restored upon the confession of our personal sins that have broken fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). That includes idolatry.

To say they quickly turned aside is quite an understatement. It was only a matter of weeks before the Israelites turned to idols. God said, "they" have turned to idols, but the faithful remnant surely didn't participate. It may not have been a vast majority of the people who engaged in the idol worship. Idolatry was a national sin and it was always a national sin even though there were faithful believers in the nation. For example, Daniel and his three friends suffered exile for the national idolatry of Israel yet they were faithful believers. Believers are not promised deliverance from the calamities that befall their nation, but they are promised deliverance from the wrath of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:10¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 5:9⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

While it must be true to believe not everyone participated in the rebellion, there is also no record any of those who chose not to rebel tried to stop the others from rebelling.

God recognized the fact He had been replaced by this golden calf in the hearts and minds of the people. He told Moses they were bowing down and sacrificing to this idol which are both acts of worship. They called this idol their god who brought them out of Egypt. The true God was not pleased with these developments, to say the least.

Obstinate, קָשָׁה עֵרָף, literally means “hard necked” which all the other English translations interpret “stiff-necked” instead of “obstinate.” The Hebrew word קָשָׁה means hard, harsh, cruel, fierce, severe, strong, or violent and its primary use is to describe something as hard. The idea seems to be they won’t bend their hard neck in submission to the will of God. In this context, it is referring to the Israelite’s propensity to display a stubborn, obstinate, God-rebelling will. In terms of their relationship with God throughout history, stiff-necked seems to be a rather persistent characteristic of the Jewish people.

Yahweh’s reaction to all this is to cut loose His anger on the rebels, to destroy them, and to make of Moses a great nation.