

Unveiling the Mystery of the Golden Calf in Our Day

This past week in the section of the Torah that was read in synagogues around the world, we included the making of and worshipping of the golden calf.

Exodus 32:8 says, “They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molded calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, which has brought you up from the land of Egypt.’”

While we all know that this event was a low point in the history of Israel, what many don’t know is that this same text also includes one of the most amazing demonstrations of G-D’s grace shown in the Bible. The focus is so often placed on the making and worship of the golden calf, the breaking of the Tablets and Aaron’s famous line,

Exodus 32:24 says, “I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave *it* to me, and then I threw it into the fire, and this calf came out.’”

While these events are very important, in reality, they each only lay the groundwork for a wonderful foundational principle that is established within this portion of Torah. To lay the groundwork for the principle, we must look at the context. First, the people of Israel have been redeemed from slavery in Egypt, they have travelled through the wilderness and are surrounding Mount Sinai, and have been waiting for Moses to return from meeting with G-D on the Mountain. In Exodus Chapter 20, G-D began to speak the Commandments from the Mountain to all of Israel, but after speaking only a few (what became known as the Ten Commandments), because of great fear, the people asked G-D to stop speaking to everyone and tell

Moses the Commandments and let Moses tell them to the people.

Then, Moses climbs up the Mountain and receives the Commandments from G-D and the people are waiting for Moses' return. When Moses does not return quickly enough, the people ask Aaron to make a god to replace Moses. Hence, the golden calf is made. G-D then tells Moses to return to the people because of this great sin of idolatry. Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel, G-D relents as a result, and Moses journeys down the mountain. Upon hearing the noise of the people and seeing their actions, in anger, Moses breaks the Tablets of Covenant.

Yet, with all of this action and excitement, the main part of the story within the portion has not yet taken place. It doesn't happen until two chapters later when Moses meets with G-D again and writes the new set of tablets. This new set of tablets is different from the first, and one of the differences is vitally important for those of us who believe in Yeshua and the New Covenant.

When writing the commandment concerning having and worshipping no other gods on the replacement set of Tablets, the wording is as follows:

Exodus 34:14-17 says, "(For you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they prostitute themselves with their gods, and sacrifice to their gods, and someone invites you to eat of his sacrifice. And then you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters prostitute themselves after their gods. They will make your sons prostitute themselves after their gods. You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."

Notice verse 17 states, "You shall make no molded gods." In chapter 20, there is no mention specifically of "molded," yet here, it is specifically added. Why? Because a principle is

being established. For most it remains a mystery overshadowed by what they consider the major events of the text. This principle is so powerful that, once learned, it is life changing.

Why add the clarification of “molded” to the commandment, “Have no other gods before me?” There are two reasons and both are significant, especially for believers in Yeshua.

The first reason is that this verse is added as if the event of the golden calf had never happened. In other words, the text does not read, “You shall make no molded gods for yourselves again.” Simply by adding this line, G-D is demonstrating His absolute forgiveness of Israel for their sin. In one sentence, G-D let the people know that as far as He was concerned the golden calf incident never took place. This is the same way He treats our sins: once repented of, they no longer exist.

The second reason is that the new tablets are the perfect example of the New Covenant. Although we have sinned and committed idolatry against G-D, He has made a new covenant as proclaimed in Jeremiah 31:32, “It will not be according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord.”

The second set of tablets and the wording upon them is one of the most powerful examples of the forgiveness of G-D in Torah and its relationship to the New Covenant. Take time to read Exodus chapter 34 and compare the words on the Tablets to the words of Exodus chapter 20, while also considering the words of Jeremiah 31:32 and Hebrews 8. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer *is executive director of The Messianic Times and author of With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity and OY!*

How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry.