

## THE GOLDEN CALF.

– JULY 14. – EXOD. 32:1-8,30-35. –

**Golden Text – "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."  
– 1 John 5:21.**

AS soon as Israel had been delivered from the bondage in Egypt, God began to educate and deal with them as a nation, and his dealing was such as to distinguish them from all the other nations on the earth. The first step to this end was the giving of the law from Mt. Sinai, through Moses, their divinely appointed leader. The import and character of that law we considered in our previous lesson.

This lesson calls to mind the peculiar circumstances of the giving of the law, and the covenant based upon that law, instituted through their mediator, Moses, and solemnly assented to by all the people, who, with united voice, responded to the Lord's proposal, saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." For the Lord had said, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Exod. 19:4-8.) And it was in pursuance of the conditions of this covenant that God at once called Moses up into Mount Sinai and delivered to him the law.

But how quickly Israel violated their part of the covenant this lesson shows. While yet Moses was in the Mount with God the whole nation lapsed into the most degrading idolatry, utterly ignoring their covenant and forsaking the Lord who, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, had so recently recovered them out of Egyptian bondage, led them triumphantly through the Red sea, destroyed their enemies, fed them with manna in the wilderness and refreshed them with water from the barren rock. In this sudden and disgraceful

apostasy, there is not the record of a single dissenting voice. Even Aaron, who had [R1835 : page 158] been so intimately associated with Moses, and had been left in charge during Moses' absence, weakly hearkened to the demands of the people and became their leader in their idolatry. Thus the whole nation, within the brief space of forty days, forsook the Lord, despised their covenant, and plunged into sin. "Up, make us gods," they said, "which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." So, at Aaron's call, they brought their earrings to Aaron and he made them a golden calf; and they praised the work of their own hands and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

This tendency to idolatry on the part of any people, and especially of Israel, manifested on various occasions, may seem strange to many, but the evil had its root, both with Israel and with other nations, in the depravity of the fallen nature which gravitates toward sin and yet seeks to silence the protests of conscience with the sanction of religion. Man is naturally inclined to worship. In his fallen condition, however, it is not love or gratitude or reverence for superiority of wisdom, power or goodness, but superstitious fear, that prompts it. He desires to do evil: conscience protests, and fear and superstition suggest the joining of the desired evil practices with a form of worship; and the form of worship seeks some central figure, real or imaginary, to receive it; and that central figure is the god. And this god is supposed to have just such characteristics as the evil mind of his inventor and worshiper desires. Idolatry, therefore, is not the blind reverential adoration of superior dignity or power or moral worth; but it is wilful and sinful devotion to degrading self-gratification.

It is clear, therefore, that idolatry is the synonym of evil; and it precludes the recognition of the one true God, whose purity and holiness are directly adverse to the spirit of idolatry. The Apostle Paul gives an apt description of it in Rom. 1:21-32, – a description which not only fitted the ancient heathen nations, but which also characterizes

very prominently the heathen nations of to-day. It reads thus: – "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor [R1836 : page 158] their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections."

The sin of idolatry is most prominently set forth in the Jewish law, the very first commandment being, – "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;...for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous god." The worship of the one true and righteous God, whom we are commanded to worship in the beauty of holiness (Psa. 29:2; 96:9), is elevating and ennobling, and calculated to develop in us the glorious moral likeness of God; and only those do truly worship him in the spirit of the truth – in the beauty of holiness – whose fruit is always unto praise and honor and glory.

In considering the gross idolatry of Israel, acquainted as they were with God by such marvelous experiences of his goodness and grace, we may smile at the puerility which would erect a golden calf and call it a god, as well as despise the faithless degeneracy of a people so favored; but before we judge Israel harshly let us see to it that no semblance of the same sin lies at our own door. Not forgetting that Israel after the flesh was a typical people, let us beware of being identified with her antitype in sin.

The Apostle Paul in Col. 3:5 and Eph. 5:5 says that all covetousness is idolatry; and the Lord, in reference to the same disposition, says, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." (Matt. 6:24.) The sin of covetousness, the worship of Mammon, the idolatry of money, is the great sin of "Christendom," the antitype of fleshly Israel.

Nor is she less blameworthy in this idolatry than was fleshly Israel in the worship of the golden calf; for if fleshly Israel had witnessed many manifestations of the divine favor, "Christendom" has surely seen many more. It is a lamentable fact, too, that while all "Christendom" is plunging into this idolatry of money, so that even the heathen nations about us say that money is the Christian's god, the religious leaders of the people make no resistance, but, like Aaron, weakly assent and throw their influence also into the common current.

We have already called attention to the fact that Moses, the mediator of the law covenant, was a type of Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. His return to the people from Mount Sinai corresponded to the second coming of Christ, which marks the idolatrous worship of the golden calf as corresponding in time also to the present worship of mammon on the part of Christendom.

The action of Moses in the destruction of the calf, burning it in the fire and reducing it to powder, then sprinkling it on the waters of which the people must drink, aptly symbolizes the foretold destruction of hoarded wealth in the great time of trouble due in the end of this age, and the bitter experiences of the rich while their wealth is burned in the fire of trouble and becomes to them bitterness.

But while Mammon is the popular god that commands the worship of Christendom in general, let us not forget that there are also many other forms of covetousness less general, and beware of being overcome by them. Only God is worthy to be enthroned in our hearts; only those principles of righteousness and truth so gloriously exemplified in his character are worthy to control our lives; and only those incentives which his wisdom and goodness present are worthy of our ambition and effort. And every thing that is short of this partakes of the spirit of idolatry. Therefore the beloved Apostle said, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

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