

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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## Exodus 32

We have now to contemplate something very different from that Which has hitherto engaged our attention.

**“The pattern of things in the heavens,”** has been before us - Christ in His glorious Person, gracious offices, and perfect work, as set forth in the tabernacle and all its mystic furniture. We have been, in spirit, on the mount, hearkening to God’s own words - the sweet utterances of Heaven’s thoughts, affections, and counsels, of which Jesus is **“the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last.”**

Now, however, we are called down to earth, to behold the melancholy wreck which man makes of everything to which he puts his hand.

**“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said unto him, Up, make us gods 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.”**

What degradation is here! Make us gods! They were abandoning the Lord, and placing themselves under the conduct of manufactured gods - gods of man’s making. Dark clouds and heavy mists had gathered round the mount. They grew weary of waiting for the absent one, and of hanging on an unseen but real arm. They imagined that a god formed by **“graving tool”** was better than the Lord; that a calf which they could see was better than the invisible, yet everywhere present, God; a visible counterfeit, than an invisible reality.

Alas! Alas! it has ever been thus in man’s history.

The human heart loves something that can be seen; it loves that which meets and gratifies the senses. It is only faith that can **“endure, as seeing him who is invisible.”**

Hence, in every age, men have been forward to set up and lean upon human imitations of divine realities. Thus it is we see the counterfeits of corrupt religion multiplied before our eyes.

Those things which we know, upon the authority of God's Word, to be divine and heavenly realities, the professing Church has transformed into human and earthly imitations. Having become weary of hanging upon an invisible arm, of trusting in an invisible sacrifice, of having recourse to an invisible priest, of committing herself to the guidance of an invisible head, she has set about "**making**" these things; and thus, from age to age, she has been busily at work, with "**graving tool**" in hand, graving and fashioning one thing after another, until we can, at length, recognize as little similarity between much that we see around us, and what we read in the word, as between "**a molten calf**" and the God of Israel.

"**Make us gods!**" What a thought! Man called upon to make gods, and people willing to put their trust in such! My reader, let us look within, and look around, and see if we cannot detect something of all this. We read, in I Corinthians 10, in reference to Israel's history, that "**all these things happened unto them for ensamples (or types), and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come**" (ver. 11).

Let us, then, seek to profit by the "**admonition.**"

Let us remember that, although we may not just form and bow down before a molten calf, yet, that Israel's sin is a "type" of something into which we are in danger of falling. Whenever we turn away in heart from leaning exclusively upon God Himself, whether in the matter of salvation or the necessities of the path, we are, in principle, saying, "**up, make us gods.**" It is needless to say we are not, in ourselves, a whit better than Aaron or the children of Israel; and if they acknowledge a calf instead of the Lord, we are in danger of acting on the same principle, and manifesting the same spirit. Our only safeguard is to be much in the presence of God.

Moses knew that the "**molten calf**" was not the Lord, and therefore he did not acknowledge it. But when we get out of the divine presence, there is no accounting for the gross errors and evils into which we may be betrayed.

We are called to live by faith; we can see nothing with the eye of sense. Jesus is gone up on high, and we are told to wait patiently for His appearing. God's Word carried home to the heart, in the energy of the Holy Ghost, is the ground of confidence in all things, temporal and spiritual, present and future.

- He tells us of Christ's completed sacrifice; we, by grace, believe, and commit our souls to the efficacy thereof, and know we shall never be confounded.
- He tells us of a great High Priest, passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, whose intercession is all-prevailing; we, by grace, believe, and lean confidently upon His ability, and know we shall be saved to the uttermost.
- He tells us of the living Head to whom we are linked, in the power of the Holy Ghost, and from whom we can never be severed by any influence, angelic, human, or diabolical; we, by grace, believe, and cling to that blessed Head, in simple faith, and know we shall never perish.
- He tells us of the glorious appearing of the Son from Heaven; we, through grace, believe, and seek to prove the purifying and elevating power of "**that blessed hope,**" and know we shall not be disappointed.

- He tells us of **“an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God,”** for entrance thereinto in due time; we, through grace, believe and know we shall never be confounded.

- He tells us the hairs of our head are all numbered, and that we shall never want any good thing; we, through grace, believe, and enjoy a sweetly tranquillized heart.

Thus it is, or, as least, thus our God would have it. But then the enemy is ever active in seeking to make us cast away these divine realities, take up the **“graving tool”** of unbelief, and **“make gods”** for ourselves. Let us watch against him, pray against him, believe against him, testify against him, act against him: thus he shall be confounded, God glorified, and we ourselves abundantly blessed.

As to Israel, in the chapter before us, their rejection of God was most complete.

**“And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me . . . And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy Gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast unto the Lord.”**

This was entirely setting aside God, and putting a calf in His stead. When they could say that a calf had brought them up out of Egypt, they had, evidently, abandoned all idea of the presence and character of the true God. How **“quickly”** they must **“have turned aside out of the Way,”** to have made such a gross and terrible mistake! And Aaron, the brother and yoke-fellow of Moses, led them on in this; and, with a calf before him, he could say, **“Tomorrow is a feast unto the Lord!”** How sad! how deeply humbling! God was displaced by an idol. A thing, **“graven by art and man’s device,”** was set in the place of **“the Lord of all the earth.”**

All this involved, on Israel’s part, a deliberate abandonment of their connection with the Lord. They had given Him up; and, accordingly, we find Him, as it were, taking them on their own ground.

**“And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them . . . I have seen this people, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a greater nation.”**

Here was an open door for Moses; and here he displays uncommon grace and similarity of spirit to that Prophet whom the Lord was to raise up like unto him. He refuses to be or to have anything without the people. He pleads with God on the ground of His own glory, and puts the people back upon Him in these touching words, **“Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?”**

**“Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth. Turn from thy fierce wrath and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swearest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.”**

This was powerful pleading. *The glory of God, the vindication of His holy name. the accomplishment of His oath.* These are the grounds on which Moses entreats the Lord to turn from His fierce wrath. He could not find, in Israel’s conduct or character, any plea or ground to go upon. He found it all in God Himself. The Lord had said unto Moses, **“Thy people which thou broughtest up;”** but Moses replies to the Lord, **“Thy people which thou hast brought up.”**

They were the Lord’s people notwithstanding all; and His name, His glory, His oath were all involved in their destiny. The moment the Lord links Himself with a people, His character is involved, and faith will ever look at Him upon this solid ground. Moses loses sight of himself entirely. His whole soul is engrossed with thoughts of the Lord’s glory and the Lord’s people. Blessed servant! How few like him! And yet when we contemplate him in all this scene, we perceive how infinitely he is below the blessed Master. He came down from the mount, and when he saw the calf and the dancing, **“his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands and brake them beneath the mount.”**

The covenant was broken and the memorials thereof shattered to pieces; and then, having executed judgment in righteous indignation, **“he said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.”**

How different is this from what we see in Christ! He came down from the bosom of the Father, not with the tables in His hands, but with the law in his heart. He came down, not to be made acquainted with the condition of the people, but with a perfect knowledge of what that condition was.

Moreover, instead of destroying the memorials of the covenant and executing judgment, He magnified the law and made it honourable, and bore the judgment of His people, in His own blessed Person, on the Cross; and, having done all, He went back to Heaven, not with a **“peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin,”** but to lay upon the throne of the Majesty in the highest, the imperishable memorials of an atonement already accomplished. This makes a vast and truly glorious difference.

Thank God, we need not anxiously gaze after our Mediator to know if haply He shall accomplish redemption for us, and reconcile offended Justice. No, He has done it all. His presence on high declares that the whole work is finished. He could stand upon the confines of this world, ready to take His departure, and, in all the calmness of a conscious victor - though He had yet to encounter the darkest scene of all - say, **“I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gravest me to do”** (John 17).

Blessed Saviour! we may well adore thee, and well exalt in the place of dignity and glory in which eternal justice has set thee. The highest place in Heaven belongs to thee; and thy saints only wait for the time when **“every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** May that time speedily arrive!

At the close of this chapter the Lord asserts His rights, in moral government, in the following words:

**“Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore, now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine angel shall go before thee: nevertheless, in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them.”**

This is God in government, not God in the Gospel. Here He speaks of blotting out the sinner; in the Gospel He is seen blotting out sin - a wide difference!

The people are to be sent forward, under the mediatorship of Moses, by the hand of an angel. This was very unlike the condition of things which obtained from Egypt to Sinai. They had forfeited all claim on the ground of law, and hence it only remained for God to fallback upon His own sovereignty and say, **“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”**

~ end of chapter 32 ~

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