

The history of the children of Israel can be summarized as a pattern of cycles, they forget YHVH's commandments, YHVH brings trials on them which cause them to cry out to Him, and YHWH sends a savior who returns them to YHVH. This happened over and over.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that the things that happened to Israel were written down for the benefit of those living in the end times . . .

1 Corinthians 10:11 <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

The good things were written down as well as the bad so that we can see how to avoid the traps that many of them fell into. One of those traps was plain, outright, disobedience. The generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt was somewhat unique. It appears that, in spite of being corrected time after time for disobedience, they never seemed to see that they had a problem. They always blamed their problems on God, on Moses, and seldom, if ever, repented of accusing God and disobeying His clear instructions. Thus, they never really grew in love and faith toward the One who had brought their salvation.

So in this teaching we're going to talk about what happens to a people who fail to repent and it will focus, to a large degree, around the sin of the golden calf.

As you recall, God took them on a journey designed to prepare them for wedding. Though there were pitfalls along the way, it appears that through their trials that first 40 or so days, they did gain enough trust and faith to eventually take on the army of Amelek and defeat him. But their allegiance to God was shallow at best. Though they were quick to complain to Him about their problems, they were negligent when it comes to acknowledging Him when He delivered them and outright void of asking Him for forgiveness when they had sinned. They simply failed to repent. Thus, they never really changed.

What is repentance? For our purposes, we'll deal with repentance as it pertains to a man and his relationship with God, and the first place we see the word "repent" in that regards is in 1 Kings 8. At the dedication of the first Temple, Solomon prophesied of the time when Israel, as a whole, would be scattered throughout the nations . . .

1 Kings 8:47-48 <sup>47</sup> "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and **repent**, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; <sup>48</sup> "and when they **return** to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name:

In this example, the word *repent* as well as the word *return* come from the same Hebrew word – shoov (Strong's #7725 - שׁוּב ). It simply means to *turn around* or *return*. Implied within its meaning is that you return to where you came from, not that you start off in a different direction. It is also the Hebrew word for *restore*.

In the 1 Kings passage, Israel is sent away because of lawlessness (sin is the transgression of the law), so if they are to repent that would indicate they would return to obeying the law. Pretty simple.

One of Israel's greatest sins was the sin of the golden calf. It happened after Israel had "signed on" to the covenant, and while God was still in the cloud above them.

Jewish tradition holds that "the Jews" only created the golden calf as a means to make repentance accessible to them<sup>1</sup>. They also state that Israel repented of the sin of the golden calf while Moses spent his third 40-day cycle on the mountain which culminated in Moses descending the mountain on Yom Kippor with tablets in hand<sup>2</sup>. But does scripture really support these claims? If so, should we not see evidence of such repentance? I personally see no place in the Bible where that first generation of former Egyptian slaves ever really repented of anything, at least not of the sin of the golden calf.

What actually happened is that Israel was given the Torah, the instructions of God, at Mount Sinai. They agreed to the instructions (which served as a type of marital contract, but more importantly as stipulations of a suzerain treaty<sup>3</sup>) and a covenant was made between Israel and God. The covenant was ratified when Moses wrote the laws down and read them to the people. Moses then ascended the mountain to receive tablets of stone that were a condensed version of the covenant stipulations. This would be customary in the case of a suzerain treaty. But while Moses was on the mountain, and God was on the mountain, Israel openly committed idolatry - spiritual adultery - before God's eyes (remember, He was in the cloud above them<sup>4</sup>). This is how Moses describes it.

Exodus 32:8 <sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way (derek) which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

God dealt with the instigators in accordance with the covenant, But what did he do with the rest? It would appear that they repented when they found that God was not going to go with them. This is what Moses wrote . . .

Exodus 33:3-4 <sup>3</sup> Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." <sup>4</sup> When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.

What was so upsetting about what He just said? Two things –

- God could at any moment destroy them, and . . .
- The cloud and fire would no longer be visible

Both of these are bad . . . real bad. They had grown accustomed to the cloud, the cloud represented sustenance, shelter, and security . . . just as God had intended. But they also knew that in that cloud was the power to destroy them just as He had done to the Egyptians. But notice – they didn't repent, they were just sorry! They just mourned. It's like, "Oh, we got caught!" Not, "Oh, we really blew it. We must stop what we're doing and again honor the One who saved us from the Egyptians"

Never-the-less, at first glance, it would appear God pardoned and forgave them. Why do we suppose that to be true? Just read the text . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Exodus 34:9 And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

We know that God ultimately did relent and go with them, so we naturally assume that God pardoned their sin, but is that actually what the text says?

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<sup>1</sup> R' Joshua ben Levi taught: "The Jews only made the Golden Calf to open the way for repentance. It is written, *'If only they would retain this feeling in their heart, to fear Me and observe all My commandments ... forever.'*" (Deut. 5:26) (Talmud, Avoda Zara 4b)

<sup>2</sup> Rashi

<sup>3</sup> See preceding articles on Covenants

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 40:

According to the Gesenius' Lexicon, it appears the Hebrew for the phrase "and pardon our iniquity and our sin", is cast in the future tense, and thus could read "since you will pardon our sins and our iniquities".

This is in fact, just what the LXX indicates . . .

<sup>LXE</sup> Exodus 34:9 and said, If I have found grace before thee, let my Lord go with us; for the people is stiff-necked: and thou shalt take away our sins and our iniquities, and we will be thine.

It appears that Moses, in his wisdom, pointed God's thinking to the promises and the covenants, and the fact that it was "in the plan" to send another redeemer for the children of Israel. This is what the psalmist says . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Psalm 106:19-23 <sup>19</sup> They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. <sup>20</sup> Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. <sup>21</sup> They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; <sup>22</sup> Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. <sup>23</sup> Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.

Moses stood in the gap for them. It was not their repentance that kept them from being destroyed, it was Moses . . . and I would submit – what Moses stood for – the coming Messiah of Israel. What the psalmist says reminds me of what Paul said about Messiah Yeshua . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 8:34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Though it doesn't appear that Israel ever repented of the Golden Calf incident, this doesn't suggest Israel always disobeyed. They did have a little more than a year of time when they honored and obeyed God. This, of course, was during the building of the tabernacle.

After things cooled off, the people took up a collection for the building of the tabernacle – a place for God to reside within the camp of Israel. What better way to get the people's minds focused on something other than themselves than a building project? As congregational building projects go, they sometimes unite, sometimes divide. This time it seems to have united. They worked together and were probably quite proud of the things they were able to get done by the help of the Ruach (Holy Spirit). The first anniversary of their redemption from Egyptian slavery came around and some were so concerned about offending God (by not bringing a Passover lamb to the tabernacle) that Moses entreated YHVH for a remedy for their unfortunate state of corpse uncleanness. Their zeal for God was renewed and they were "gonna give it another try". Unfortunately, all it was, was zeal.

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after they left Egypt, God was ready to move on. Moses was excited. The people were all arranged as armies around the Tabernacle, and they were ready to go. "Let's get to the promised land" they thought. Nothing could stop them! Moses shouted . . .

". . . Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You."  
(Numbers 10:35)

. . . and they began to march. But within days, they had begun to complain again. It even got to the point that Aaron himself began to complain. There was something about that wilderness march that didn't set right with the Israelites. Then, of course, when they got to the land . . . we all know the story . . . they refused to go in and basically accused YHVH, the one who less than fourteen months earlier had delivered them single-handedly from Pharaoh, of bringing them out of Egypt just to kill them in the wilderness. God again stated His intent to destroy them, and again Moses interceded. And again, the people mourned<sup>5</sup> - they didn't repent. In fact, the closest it comes to them ever repenting was when they repented of following Moses out of Egypt in the first place! In pronouncing God's sentence upon them, Moses says . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Numbers 14:43 "For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have **turned back** from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you."

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<sup>5</sup> Numbers 14:39

Israel had a desire to return, it was just not to God. They always wanted to return to Egypt<sup>6</sup>. They never got it. They never stopped looking over their shoulder, and they never stopped "playing church".

Though one might think that Israel's problem was simply a lack of faith, and I can see that faithlessness was probably a big part of it, Steven, in his message to the Sanhedrin, indicates that their problem was simply lawlessness . . .

Acts 7:37-41 <sup>37</sup> This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' <sup>38</sup> This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. <sup>39</sup> Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, <sup>40</sup> saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' <sup>41</sup> And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands . . .

The psalmist, in describing God's patience with Israel in the wilderness and the times of the judges says that . . .

<sup>35</sup> They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer. <sup>36</sup> But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. <sup>37</sup> Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant." (Psalm 78:35-37)

Though the story of the generation that came out of Egypt is unique in the annals of history, and we have no way of knowing what the outcome would have been otherwise, would you not think that if Israel had simply confessed their sins to God, did what they could do to restore the relationship, then rededicate themselves to walking in the way they had been shown, God would have forgiven them and that first generation would have been able to enter the land? We just don't know.

What we do know is this . . . These things were written for us. A future exodus of the children of Israel is prophesied at the end time<sup>7</sup>. Human nature has changed little in 6000 years. Will we have the ability and the humility to confess our mistakes and change our walk as God leads us?

Shalom Alecheim

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<sup>6</sup> See Num. 11:4 (replace the word "again" (shoov) with "to return" (shoov) and you will see how deeply they wanted to go back); Num. 14:3-4

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 16:14-15