

CHAPTER 32

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 32

This chapter gives an account of the idolatry of the Israelites making and worshipping a golden calf, (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:1-6) the information of it God gave to Moses, bidding him at the same time not to make any suit in their favour, that he might consume them, and make a large nation out Moses's family, (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:7-10) the intercession of Moses for them, in which he succeeded, (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:11-14) his descent from the mount with the two tables in his hands, accompanied by Joshua, when he was an eyewitness of their idolatry, which raised his indignation, that he cast the two tables out of his hands and broke them, took the calf and burnt it, and ground it to powder, and made the children of Israel drink of it, (^{<0235>}Exodus 32:15-20) the examination of Aaron about the fact, who excused himself, (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:21-24) the orders given to the Levites, who joined themselves to Moses, to slay every man his brother, which they did to the number of 3000 men, (^{<0225>}Exodus 32:25-29) another intercession for them by Moses, which gained a respite of them for a time, for they are threatened to be visited still for their sin, and they were plagued for it, (^{<0230>}Exodus 32:30-35).

Ver. 1. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount*, etc.] The time, according to the Targum of Jonathan, being elapsed, which he had fixed for his descent, and through a misreckoning, as Jarchi suggests; they taking the day of his going up to be one of the forty days, at the end of which he was to return, whereas he meant forty complete days; but it is not probable that Moses knew himself how long he should stay, and much less that he acquainted them before hand of it; but he staying longer than they supposed he would, they grew uneasy and impatient, and wanted to set out in their journey to Canaan, and to have some symbol and representation of deity to go before them:

the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron; who with Hur was left to judge them in the absence of Moses: it was very likely that they had had conferences with him before upon this head, but now they got together

in a tumultuous manner, and determined to carry their point against all that he should say to the contrary:

and said unto him, up; put us off no longer, make no more delay, but arise at once, and set about what has been once and again advised to and importuned:

make us gods which shall go before us; not that they were so very stupid to think, that anything that could be made with hands was really God, or even could have life and breath, and the power of self-motion, or of walking before them; but that something should be made as a symbol and representation of the divine Being, carried before them; for as for the cloud which had hitherto gone before them, from their coming out of Egypt, that had not moved from its place for forty days or more, and seemed to them to be fixed on the mount, and would not depart from it; and therefore they wanted something in the room of it as a token of the divine Presence with them:

for [as for] this Moses; of whom they speak with great contempt, though he had been the deliverer of them, and had wrought so many miracles in their favour, and had been the instrument of so much good unto them:

the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt; this they own, but do not seem to be very thankful for it:

we wot not what is become of him; they could scarcely believe that he was alive, that it was possible to live so long a time without eating and drinking; or they supposed he was burnt on the mount of flaming fire from before the Lord, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it.

Ver. 2. *And Aaron said unto them*, etc.] Perceiving that they were not to be dissuaded from their evil counsel, and diverted from their purpose, but were determined at all events to have an image made to represent God unto them in a visible manner:

break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters; these were some of the jewels in gold they had borrowed of the Egyptians; and it seems that, in those times and countries, men, as well as women, used to wear earrings, and so Pliny^{f935} says, in the eastern countries men used to wear gold in their ears; and this may be confirmed from the instance of the Ishmaelites and Midianites, (~~and~~ Judges 8:24). Aaron did not ask the men for theirs, but for those of

their wives and children; it may be, because he might suppose they were more fond of them, and would not so easily part with them, hoping by this means to have put them off of their design:

and bring [them] unto me; to make a god of, as they desired, that is, the representation of one.

Ver. 3. *And all the people brake off the golden earrings, which were in their ears*, etc.] The men took off their earrings, and persuaded their wives and children, or obliged them to part with theirs; though the Targum of Jonathan says the women refused to give their ornaments to their husbands, therefore all the people immediately broke off all the golden ornaments which were in their ears^{f936}, so intent were they upon idolatry. This is to be understood not of every individual, but of the greatest part of the people; so apostle explains it of some of them, (~~<4307>~~1 Corinthians 10:7). Idolaters spare no cost nor pains to support their worship, and will strip themselves, their wives, and children, of their ornaments, to deck their idols; which may shame the worshippers of the true God, who are oftentimes too backward to contribute towards the maintenance of his worship and service:

and brought [them] unto Aaron: presently, the selfsame day; they soon forgot the commands enjoined them to have no other gods, save one, and to make no graven image to bow down to it, and their own words, (~~<1247>~~Exodus 24:7).

Ver. 4. *And he received [them] at their hand*, etc.] For the use they delivered them to him:

and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf; that is, after he had melted the gold, and cast it into a mould, which gave it the figure of a calf, and with his tool wrought it into a more agreeable form, he took off the roughness of it, and polished it; or if it was in imitation of the Egyptian Apis or Osiris, he might with his graving tool engrave such marks and figures as were upon that; to cause the greater resemblance, so Selden^{f937} thinks; *see Gill* "~~<2442>~~*Jeremiah 46:20*" or else the sense may be, that he drew the figure of a calf with his tool, or made it in "a mould"^{f938}, into which he poured in the melted gold,

and made it a molten calf; the Targum of Jonathan gives another sense of the former clause, "he bound it up in a napkin"; in a linen cloth or bag, i.e. the gold of the ear rings, and then put it into the melting pot, and so cast it

into a mould, and made a calf of it. Jarchi takes notice of this sense, and it is espoused by Bochart^{f939}, who produces two passages of Scripture for the confirmation of it, (~~0083~~Judges 8:24 ~~1083~~2 Kings 5:23) and illustrates it by (~~2346~~Isaiah 46:6). What inclined Aaron to make it in the form of a calf, is not easy to say; whether in imitation of the cherubim, one of the faces of which was that of an ox, as Moncaeus thought; or whether in imitation of the Osiris of the Egyptians, who was worshipped in a living ox, and sometimes in the image of one, even a golden one. Plutarch is express for it, and says^{f940}, that the ox was an image of Osiris, and that it was a golden one; and so says Philo the Jew^{f941}, the Israelites, emulous of Egyptian figments, made a golden ox; or whether he did this to make them ashamed of their idolatry, thinking they would never be guilty of worshipping the form of an ox eating grass, or because an ox was an emblem of power and majesty:

and they said, these be thy gods, O Israel, [which brought] thee up out of the land of Egypt; they own they were, brought up out of that land by the divine Being; and they could not be so stupid as to believe, that this calf, which was only a mass of gold, figured and decorated, was inanimate, had no life nor breath, and was just made, after their coming out of Egypt, was what brought them from hence; but that this was a representation of God, who had done this for them; yet some Jewish writers are so foolish as to suppose, that through art it had the breath of life in it, and came out of the mould a living calf, Satan, or Samael, entering into it, and loved in it^{f942}.

Ver. 5. *And when Aaron saw it,* etc.] In what form it was, and what a figure it made, and how acceptable it was to the Israelites. The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase it,

“and Aaron saw Hur slain before him;”

for reproving them for their idolatry, as the Midrash^{f943}, quoted by Jarchi, says: and Aaron fearing they would take away his life if he opposed them,

he built an altar before it; that sacrifice might be offered on it to it:

and Aaron made proclamation, and said, tomorrow [is] a feast to the Lord; that is, he gave orders to have it published throughout the camp, there would be solemn sacrifices offered up to the Lord, as represented by this calf, and a feast thereon, which was a public invitation of them to the solemnity: though some think this was a protracting time, and putting the people off till the morrow, who would have been for offering sacrifice

immediately, hoping that Moses would come down from the mount before that time, and prevent their idolatry.

Ver. 6. *And they rose up early in the morning*, etc.] Being eager of, and intent upon their idol worship:

and offered burnt offerings; upon the altar Aaron had made, where they were wholly consumed:

and brought peace offerings: which were to make a feast to the Lord, and of which they partook:

and the people sat down to eat and to drink; as at a feast:

and rose up to play; to dance and sing, as was wont to be done by the Egyptians in the worship of their Apis or Ox; and Philo the Jew says ^{f944}, of the Israelites, that having made a golden ox, in imitation of the Egyptian Typho, he should have said Osiris, for Typho was hated by the Egyptians, being the enemy of Osiris; they sung and danced: the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem interpret it of idolatry; some understand this of their lewdness and uncleanness, committing fornication as in the worship of Peor, taking the word in the same sense as used by Potiphar's wife, (⁻⁰³⁹⁴Genesis 39:14,17 ((see Gill on "⁻⁴⁶⁰⁷1 Corinthians 10:7")))).

Ver. 7. *And the Lord said unto Moses, go, get thee down*, etc.] In (⁻⁰³⁹²Deuteronomy 9:12) it is added, "quickly", and so the Septuagint version here: this was said after the Lord had finished his discourse with him, and had given him the two tables of stone, and he was about to depart, but the above affair happening he hastens his departure; indeed the idolatry began the day before, and he could have acquainted him with it, if it had been his pleasure, but he suffered the people to go the greatest length before a stop was put to their impiety:

for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves; their works, as the Targum of Jonathan supplies it, their ways and their manners; their minds, the imaginations of their hearts, were first corrupted, and this led on to a corruption of actions, by which they corrupted and defiled themselves yet more and more, and made themselves abominable in the sight of God, as corrupt persons and things must needs be; and what can be a greater corruption and abomination than idolatry? the Lord calls these people not his people, being displeased with them, though they had been, and were, and still continued; for,

notwithstanding this idolatry, he did not cast them off from being his people, or write a “Loammi” on them; but he calls them Moses’s people, as having broken the law delivered to them by him, they had promised to obey, and so were liable to the condemnation and curse of it; and because they had been committed to his care and charge, and he had been the instrument of their deliverance, and therefore it was great ingratitude to him to act the part they had done, as well as impiety to God; wherefore, though it was the Lord that brought them out of Egypt, it is ascribed to Moses as the instrument, to make the evil appear the greater. Jarchi very wrongly makes these people to be the mixed multitude he supposes Moses had proselyted, and therefore called his people.

Ver. 8. *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them,* etc.] The Targum of Jonathan adds, by way of explanation,

“on Sinai, saying, ye shall not make to yourselves an image, or figure, or any similitude.”

This was the command God had given to them; this the way he had directed them to walk in; from this they turned aside, by making the golden calf as an image or representation of God; and this they had done very quickly, since it was but about six weeks ago that this command was given; wherefore if Moses had delayed coming down from the mount, they had made haste to commit iniquity; and, perhaps, this observation is made of their quick defection, in opposition to their complaint of Moses’s long absence:

they have made them a molten calf; for though it was made by Aaron, or by his direction to the founder or goldsmith, yet it was at their request and earnest solicitation; they would not be easy without it:

and have worshipped it; by bowing the knee to it, kissing it or their hands at the approach of it, (see ^{אֲרָבָה}Hosea 13:2).

and have sacrificed thereunto burnt offerings and peace offerings:

and said, these be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; the very words they used, (^{אֲרָבָה}Exodus 32:4) and which were taken particular notice of by the Lord with resentment.

Ver. 9. *And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people,* etc.] He had observed their ways and works, their carriage and behaviour; he had

seen them before this time; he knew from all eternity what they would be, that their neck would be as an iron sinew, and their brow brass; but now he saw that in fact which he before saw as future, and they proved to be the people he knew they would be; besides, this is said to give Moses the true character of them, which might be depended upon, since it was founded upon divine knowledge and observation:

and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people; obstinate and self-willed, resolute in their own ways, and will not be reclaimed, inflexible and not subjected to the yoke of the divine law; a metaphor taken from such creatures as will not submit their necks or suffer the yoke or bridle to be put upon them, but draw back and slip away; or, as Aben Ezra thinks, to a man that goes on his way upon a run, and will not turn his neck to him that calls him, so disobedient and irreclaimable were these people.

Ver. 10. *Now, therefore, let me alone*, etc.] And not solicit him with prayers and supplications in favour of these people, but leave him to take his own way with them, without troubling him with any suit on their behalf; and so the Targum of Jonathan,

“and now leave off thy prayer, and do not cry for them before me;”

as the Prophet Jeremiah was often bid not to pray for this people in his time, which was a token of God’s great displeasure with them, as well as shows the prevalence of prayer with him; that he knows not how, as it were, humanly speaking, to deny the requests of his children; and even though made not on their own account, but on the account of a sinful and disobedient people:

that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: which suggests that they were deserving of the wrath of God to the uttermost, and to be destroyed from off the face of the earth, and even to be punished with an everlasting destruction:

and I will make of thee a great nation; increase his family to such a degree, as to make them as great a nation or greater than the people of Israel were, (see ⁴⁰⁴Deuteronomy 9:14) or the meaning is, he would set him over a great nation, make him king over a people as large or larger than they, which is a sense mentioned by Fagius and Vatablus; and, indeed, as Bishop Patrick observes, if this people had been destroyed, there would have been no danger of the promise not being made good, which was made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, concerning the multiplication of their seed,

urged by Moses, (⁽¹²²¹³⁾Exodus 32:13) seeing that would have stood firm, if a large nation was made out of the family of Moses, who descended from them: this was a very great temptation to Moses, and had he been a selfish man, and sought the advancement of his own family, and careless of, and indifferent to the people of Israel, he would have accepted of it; it is a noble testimony in his favour, and proves him not to be the designing man he is represented by the deists.

Ver. 11. *And Moses besought the Lord his God*, etc.] As the Lord was the God of Moses, his covenant God, and he had an interest in him, he made use of it in favour of the people of Israel:

and said, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people? so as to think or speak of consuming them utterly; otherwise he knew there was reason for his being angry and wroth with them; but though they were deserving of his hot wrath and displeasure, and even to be dealt with in the manner proposed, yet he entreats he would consider they were his people; his special people, whom he had chose above all people, and had redeemed them from the house of bondage, had given them laws, and made a covenant with them, and many promises unto them, and therefore hoped he would not consume them in his hot displeasure; God had called them the people of Moses, and Moses retorts it, and calls them the people of God, and makes use of their relation to him as an argument with him in their favour; and which also shows that Moses did not understand that the Lord by calling them his people disowned them as his:

which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? this the Lord had ascribed to Moses, and observes it is an aggravation of their ingratitude to Moses, and here Moses retorts, and ascribes it to God, and to his mighty power; as for himself he was only a weak feeble instrument, the Lord was the efficient cause of their deliverance, in which he had shown the exceeding greatness of his power; and he argues from hence, that seeing he had exerted his mighty arm in bringing them from thence, that he would not now lift it up against them and destroy them.

Ver. 12. *Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say*, etc.] Those that remained, as the Targum of Jonathan, who were not drowned in the Red sea: a good man will be concerned for the honour and glory of God among the enemies of his people, that their mouths may not be opened to blaspheme the Lord and speak ill of his ways, (see ⁽¹¹⁷¹⁾Joshua 7:9) and this

is sometimes an argument with God himself, not to do that to his people they deserve, lest it should give occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully, insult, and triumph, (⁴⁶²⁶Deuteronomy 32:26,27)

for mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth; that he brought them out of Egypt, not with a good but ill design; not to bring them into the land of Canaan, as they promised themselves, but to destroy them in the mountains; not to erect them into a great kingdom and nation, which should make a considerable figure in the world, but to cut them off from being a people at all: the mountains where they now were, were Sinai and Horeb, and there might be others thereabout, among which they were encamped: the Targum of Jonathan is,

“among the mountains of Tabor, and Hermon, and Sirion, and Sinai:”

turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people; not that there is any turning or shadow of turning with God, or any change of his mind, or any such passions and affections in him as here expressed; but this is said after the manner of men concerning him, when he alters the course of his dealings with men according to his unalterable will, and does not do the evil threatened by him, and which the sins of men deserve.

Ver. 13. *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants,* etc.] The covenant he made with them, the promise he had made unto them, with an oath annexed to it:

to whom thou swarest by thine own self; which he did, because he could swear by no greater; and for the confirmation of his covenant and promise, (see ⁴⁰²⁶Genesis 22:16)

and saidst unto them; for what was said to Abraham was repeated and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob:

I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven; multitudes of which are out of sight, and cannot be seen with the naked eye, nor numbered:

and all this land that I have spoken of; the land of Canaan, then inhabited by several nations:

will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever; as long as they are a people, a body politic, and especially while obedient to the divine

will; but should they be now cut off, this promise would become of no effect: this is the great argument Moses makes use of, and the most forcible one.

Ver. 14. *And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.*] He did not do what he threatened to do, and seemed to have in his thoughts and designs, but did what Moses desired he would, (^{<0202>}Exodus 32:12) not that any of God's thoughts or the determinations of his mind are alterable; for the thoughts of his heart are to all generations; but he changes the outward dispensations of his providence, or his methods of acting with men, which he has been taking or threatened to take; and this being similar to what they do when they repent of anything, who alter their course, hence repentance is ascribed to God, though, properly speaking, it does not belong to him, (see ^{<2488>}Jeremiah 18:8). Aben Ezra thinks that the above prayer of Moses, which was so prevalent with God, does not stand in its proper place, but should come after (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:31) for, to what purpose, says he, should Moses say to the Israelites, (^{<0230>}Exodus 32:30) "peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin": if he was appeased by his prayer before?

Ver. 15. *And Moses turned, and went down from the mount,* etc.] He turned himself from God, with whom he had been conversing forty days; his back was to the ascent of the mount, and he turned himself in order to go down; or "he looked"^{f945}, as a man considers what is to be done, as Aben Ezra observes, and he saw that he was obliged to go down in haste:

and the two tables of the testimony [were] in his hand; or hands, as in (^{<0229>}Exodus 32:19) for they were, perhaps, as much as he could carry in both hands, being of stone, as in (^{<0218>}Exodus 31:18) on which was written the law, the "testimony" of the will of God with respect to what was to be done or not done:

the letters were written on both their sides, on the one side and on the other were they written; some think that the engraving of the letters was such, that it went through the stones, and in a miraculous manner the letters and lines were in a regular order, and might be read on the other sides; to which Jarchi seems to incline, saying, the letters might be read, and it was a work of wonders; others think that the letters were written both within and without, like Ezekiel's book of woes; that the same that was within side was written without, that so, when held up, they might be read by those that stood before and those that stood behind; but rather so it

was that the whole was written within, some of the commands on the right, and some on the left, and so the tables might be clapped together as a book is folded.

Ver. 16. *And the tables were the work of God*, etc.] And not of angels or men; the stones were made and formed by God into the shape they were:

and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables; the letters in which the law was written were of his framing, devising, and engraving; and this was to show that this law was his own, and contained his mind and will; and to give the greater dignity and authority to it, and to deter men from breaking it.

Ver. 17. *And when Joshua heard the noise of the people, as they shouted*, etc.] Dancing about the calf: when Moses went up into the mount, Joshua went with him, and tarried in a lower part of the mount all the forty days until he returned, (see ⁴²⁴³Exodus 24:13) though not so low as the bottom of the mount where the people were, nor so near it as to know what they did there, for of their affairs he seems to be entirely ignorant; nor so high as where Moses was, or, however, not in the cloud where he conversed with God, for of what passed between them he had no knowledge, until declared by Moses:

he said unto Moses, [there is a] noise of war in the camp; such a noise as soldiers make in an onset for battle; he supposed that some enemy was come upon and had attacked the people, and that this noise was the noise of the enemy, or of the Israelites, or both, just beginning the battle; or on the finishing of it on the account of victory on one side or the other; and as he was the general of the army, it must give him a concern that he should be absent at such a time.

Ver. 18. *And he said*, etc.] Not Joshua, as Saadiah Gaon thinks, but Moses, in answer to what Joshua had said:

[it is] not the voice of [them that] shout for mastery; that have got the better of it, and have obtained the victory, and shout on that account; or, “not the voice of a cry of strength”, or “of a strong cry”^{f946}; that is, of men who have got the victory, and are in high spirits, and shout with a strong voice; and so the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan,

“not the voice of strong men that overcome in battle:”

neither [is it] the voice of [them that] cry for being overcome; which is not a voice of shouting, but of howling; or, “not the voice of the cry of weakness”, or “of a weak cry”^{f947}; who being unable to stand their ground are conquered, and make a bitter outcry on falling into the enemy’s hands, or being wounded shriek terribly, and so the above Targums,

“not the voice of the weak who are overcome by the enemy in battle:”

[but] the noise of [them that] sing do I hear; as at a merry entertainment, either on a civil or religious account: Moses, who knew what the children of Israel had done, and what they were about, could better judge of the nature of the sound he heard than Joshua could, who knew nothing of what was transacting,

Ver. 19. *And it came to pass, as soon, as he came nigh unto the camp,* etc.] To the bottom of the mountain, and pretty near where the people were encamped:

that he saw the calf, and the dancing; the golden image of the calf, and the people dancing about it, in honour of it, and as glad they had got a symbol and representation of God to go before them; and so the Egyptians did before the golden ox; as Philo says, before observed:

and Moses’s anger waxed hot: he fell into a passion of indignation at the sight of such execrable idolatry, though he was so meek a man, and though he had himself expostulated with the Lord why his wrath should wax hot against this people; but, when he saw it with his own eyes he could not contain himself, but his spirit was raised to a very great pitch of anger, and could not forbear showing it in some way or another, and particularly in the following manner:

and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount; of Sinai; at the foot of it: he brought the tables, though he knew what they had done, and no doubt showed them to them, told them what they were, and enlarged on the wonderful condescension and goodness of God in giving them such laws, and writing them with his own hand, engraving them himself on such tables of stone; and then broke them to pieces, to denote that they had broken these laws, and deserved to be broke in pieces and destroyed themselves; and this he did before their eyes, that they might be the more affected with it, and be the more sensible of their loss; and this was not the mere effect of passion, at least a sinful one,

but was under the influence and direction of God himself; since we never read he was blamed for this action, though afterwards ordered to make two tables like them: the Jews say ^{f948}, this was done on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, which answers to part of June and part of July, and is observed by them as a fast on account of it.

Ver. 20. *And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire*, etc.] Melted it down into a mass of gold, whereby it lost its form, and had no more the appearance of a calf:

and ground it to powder; but how this was done is not easy to say, whether by beating the mass of gold into thin plates, and then filing them small; for this art has remained unknown; the chemists have boasted of it as only possessed of it; but it seems Moses, learned in all the learning of the Egyptians, had it: however, it is now certain by various experiments, that gold, though a very thick and heavy body, consists of parts which are separable from one another, and to be divided into infinite subtler parts: the famous Dr. Halley has shown that one grain of gold may be divided into 10,000 parts, and yet visible; and Dr. Keil has demonstrated that a cubic thumb's breadth of gold is divisible into 47,619,047 parts, which do not escape the sight: according to the computation of the said Dr. Halley, leaf gold, with which silver threads are gilded, is not thicker than the 124,500 part of a thumb's breadth; so that a cube of the hundredth part of a thumb's breadth of the said subtle parts may contain 243,000,000 ^{f949}:

and strewed it upon the water; of the brook that descended out of the mount, (^(R102)Deuteronomy 9:21) now called the fountain of St. Catharine; which Dr. Shaw ^{f950} says, after it has supplied the demands of the convent (now built on this mount) is received without into a large basin, which running over, forms a little rill: and another traveller ^{f951} speaks of a fountain about the middle of Mount Sinai, which, though small, was found in it running water very wholesome and refreshing: but if this was a brook of running water, it seems more likely that water was taken out of it and put into a proper vessel or vessels, on which the powder of the golden calf was strewed; or otherwise it would have been carried away with the stream, and could not have been taken up and given to the people to drink, as is next said; and this shows that it must be reduced to a very small light powder indeed, to float upon the top of the water and not sink to the bottom, as mere filings of gold would necessarily do:

and made the children of Israel drink of it; not the whole body of them, or every individual, but the more principal persons, and such who had been the most active in encouraging the making of the calf, and the worshipping of it: this was done not only that they might entirely lose their gold and have no manner of profit by it, but that the idol, which is nothing in the world, might be brought to nothing indeed, and that there might be no remains of it to be abused to superstitious uses, as well as to show them their folly in worshipping that which could not save itself; and by drinking it, whereby it passed through them and became an excrement, to express the utmost abhorrence and detestation of it; as also to show that they deserved the curse of God to enter into them, as oil into their bowels, as that water did, and be utterly destroyed: the Jewish writers, as Jarchi and Aben Ezra, suppose this water, with the powder of the golden calf in it, had the same effect and was for the same use as the water of jealousy, that it made the bellies of those that drank it to swell: and the Targum of Jonathan observes, that whoever gave any golden vessel towards the making of the calf, there was a sign appeared in his countenance: and Aben Ezra suggests the same, but neither of them say what it was: but an ancient Latin poet, quoted by Selden^{f952}, reports from the Hebrew writers, that whoever were guilty of this idolatry, as soon as they drank of the water their beards became yellow as gold, whereby the Levites knew who were guilty, and slew them; but as this is quite fabulous, so I have not met with it in any Jewish writer, only an author of theirs, of great antiquity and credit with them, says^{f953}, that whoever kissed the calf with his whole heart, his lips became golden.

Ver. 21. *And Moses said unto Aaron*, etc.] Having destroyed the calf, and thereby expressed his abhorrence of their idolatry, he examines the principal persons concerned, and inquires into the cause and reason of it, how it came about; and begins with Aaron, though his own brother, with whom along with Hur he had committed the government of the people during his absence; and therefore was justly accountable for such a transaction, which could not have been without his knowledge and consent: no mention is made of Hur, whether he was dead or no is not certain; the Jewish writers say he was, and that he was killed for reproving the Israelites for their wickedness; and it looks as if he was dead, since he was not in the examination, and we hear of him no more afterwards:

what did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? as idolatry is, than which no sin can be greater, it being not only a

breach of the first table of the law, but directly against God, against the very being of God, and his honour and glory; it is a denial of him, and setting up an idol in his room, and giving to that the glory that is only due to his name; and Aaron being the chief magistrate, whose business it was to see that the laws of God were observed, and to restrain the people from sin, and to have been a terror to evil doers; yet falling in with them, and conniving at them, he is charged with bringing sin upon them, or them into that; and is asked what the people had done to him, that he should do this to them, what offence they had given him, what injury they had done him, that he bore them a grudge for it, and took this method to be revenged? for it is suggested, had they used him ever so ill, he could not have requited it in a stronger manner than by leading them into such a sin, the consequence of which must be ruin and destruction, (see ^{<0219>}Genesis 20:9) or else Moses inquires of Aaron what methods the people had made use of to prevail upon him to suffer them to do such a piece of wickedness; whether it was by persuasion and artful insinuations, or by threatening to take away his life if he did not comply, or in what manner they had wrought upon his weak side, to induce him to take such a step.

Ver. 22. *And Aaron said, let not the anger of my lord wax hot*, etc.] He addresses him in a very respectful manner, though his younger brother, being in a superior office, the chief ruler of the people, king in Jeshurun; and he perceived a violent emotion rising in him, great indignation in his countenance, and an high resentment of what was done, and therefore he entreats his patience to hear him, in a few words, what he had to say, and he begins with the well known character of the people:

thou knowest the people, that they [are] set on mischief; or are “in wickedness” ^{f954}; wholly in it, and under the power and influence of it, given up to it, and bent upon it; and there was no restraining them from it; and he appeals to the knowledge of Moses himself for the truth of this, of which their several murmurings against him, since they came out of Egypt, were a proof; (see ^{<0169>}1 John 5:19).

Ver. 23. *For they said unto me, make us gods, which shall go before us*, etc.] Which was true, (^{<0231>}Exodus 32:1) but then he should have told them, that gods were not to be made; that what were made with hands were no gods, and could not go before them; that the making of any image, similitude, or representation of God, was forbidden by him, as they had lately heard from his own mouth; he should have dissuaded from such

idolatry, by showing them the evil nature of the sin, and the ruin they exposed themselves to by it:

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; their words he truly recites, and perhaps might choose the rather to mention them, because they carried in them some reflection on Moses for staying so long in the mount; and as if that contributed much to this affair, and which put the people on forming such a scheme, they concluding he must be dead through famine; or, as the Targum of Jonathan, be burnt with flaming fire from the Lord.

Ver. 24. *And I said unto them, whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off,* etc.] That is, any ear rings of gold, let them loose or take them off their ears:

so they gave [it] me; of their own accord, as if unasked by him, though he had bid them bring it to him, (^(~~431~~)Exodus 32:2):

then I cast it into the fire; to melt it, but says nothing of the mould the melted gold was poured into:

and there came out this calf; he speaks of it as if the gold became in the form of a calf without any design, or without using any methods to put it in this form; but that it was a matter of chance, or rather something preternatural and miraculous; he speaks of it as if it was alive, and came out of itself: and indeed the Jews represent it as done by magic art, and by the operation of Satan, and speak of it as coming out alive, bellowing and dancing; and the Targum of Jonathan is,

“and I cast it into the fire, and Satan entered into the midst of it, and out of it came the likeness of this calf.”

Aaron says not a word of his fashioning it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf; but Moses learned this elsewhere, and has recorded it. What Moses thought of this apology is not said; it could not be satisfactory to him: and it is certain the conduct of Aaron in this affair was displeasing to God; and it seemed as if he would have destroyed him, had not Moses prayed for him, (^(~~432~~)Deuteronomy 9:20).

Ver. 25. *And when Moses saw that the people [were] naked,* etc.] Not in their bodies, being stripped of their ear rings; for parting with them was not sufficient to denominate them naked in a corporeal sense; nor as being

without their armour, which was laid aside while they were eating, and drinking, and dancing about the calf, and so might be thought a proper opportunity for the Levites to fall upon them, by the order of Moses, and slay them: but it can hardly be thought that all the people bore arms, and that Moses took the advantage of their being without them: but rather they were naked in their souls, through their sin, and the shame of their nakedness appeared; their sin was made manifest, and they were discovered to be what they were; and they were now deprived of the divine protection; the cloud was departing from them, the symbol of the divine Presence, God being provoked by their sins; unless it is to be understood of their ceasing from work, and keeping holy day in honour of the calf, and so were loitering about, and not attending to the business of their callings, in which sense the word sometimes seems to be used, (see ^{<01874>}Exodus 5:4 ^{<01872>}Judges 5:2)

for Aaron had made them naked unto [their] shame amongst their enemies; to part with their ear rings, or lay aside their armour while feasting, could not be so much to their shame among their enemies; but to sin against God, in the manner they did, was to their shame, which Aaron was a means of by not doing all he could to hinder it, and by doing what he did to encourage it; and now he made them naked to their shame by exposing it, saying they were a people set on mischief, and given up to sin and wickedness; and what they had now done served to expose them to shame even among their enemies, both now and hereafter; when they should hear of their shameful revolt from God, after so many great and good things done for them, and of the change of their gods, and of their fickleness about them, which was not usual with the Gentiles: though the last word may be rendered, “among those that rise up from you”; that should spring from them, come up in their room, and succeed them, their posterity, as in (^{<01874>}Numbers 32:14) and so Onkelos renders it, “to your generations”, and is so to be understood, as Abendana observes; and then the sense is, that this sin of making and worshipping the golden calf, and keeping a holy day, would be to their shame and disgrace, among their posterity, in all succeeding ages.

Ver. 26. *Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp,* etc.] In one of the gates of it; for it doubtless had more than one to go in and out of, as is clear from (^{<01877>}Exodus 32:27) it being probably entrenched all around; here Moses set himself, it being the usual place, as in cities, where the people

were summoned together on important occasions, and justice and judgment were administered:

and said, who is on the Lord's side? [let him come] unto me; who is for the worship of the true God, and him only, and against the worship of a gold calf, or any other idol, and is zealous for the glory of God, and the honour of his name;

and all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him; that is, all those that had not given in to the idolatry of the calf; all is put for many. Jarchi infers from hence, that this tribe was wholly free from that sin; but the contrary is most evident, for it appears from the context that many of them were slain for it; yea, as, on the one hand, they were only of the tribe of Levi, who joined themselves to Moses, though there was no doubt many in all the tribes that were not in the idolatry; so, on the other hand, there were none slain, or very few, but of the tribe of Levi, as will appear in the exposition of the following verses, the being principally concerned with Aaron in making the calf; and therefore those of the same tribe that joined them not were the more zealous and studious to purge themselves from the imputation of the crime, by going over to Moses at once, and showing themselves to be on the Lord's side.

Ver. 27. *And he said unto them, thus saith the Lord God of Israel,* etc.] The following orders are given by Moses, not of himself the chief magistrate, and as the effect of heat and passion, but there were from the Lord, who was Israel's God and King; he had them expressly from him, or by an impulse on his spirit, or in such a way and manner that he knew it was of God, and this was his will:

put every man his sword by his side; girt there, ready to be drawn upon order:

and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp; not into the tents, where good men might be bemoaning the sin committed, but throughout the streets, where many were loitering, it being a holy day with the idolaters:

and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour; who were idolaters; none were to be spared on account of relation, friendship, and acquaintance.

Ver. 28. *And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses,* etc.] They girded their swords by their sides, went through the camp, and slew their brethren, companions and neighbours, who were keeping holy day in honour of the idol:

and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men; the Vulgate Latin version reads 23,000, very wrongly; now these being chiefly, if not altogether, of the tribe of Levi, the brethren, companions, and neighbours of the Levites, that were the slayers, together with the after plagues that came upon them, (⁽¹²²⁵⁾Exodus 32:35) account for the deficiency of males in this tribe, some few months after, when it was numbered; and the number of them from one month old and upwards amounted but to 22,000, which was but a very small one in proportion to the other tribes, who generally, one with another, numbered 40,000 each, and none so few as 30,000 ^{f955}; of this tribe Aaron was, and therefore used with severity, because of his concern in this sin; and even though it was the tribe of Moses, it was not spared.

Ver. 29. *For Moses had said,* etc.] To the Levites, when he first gave them their orders:

consecrate yourselves today to the Lord; devote yourselves to his service, by obeying his orders, slaying those, or the heads of them, who have cast so much contempt upon him as to worship the golden calf in his room; and which would be as acceptable to him as the offerings were, by which Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the Lord; and as these Levites were consecrated to his service this day, on this account:

[even] every man upon his son, and upon his brother; not sparing the nearest relation found in this idolatry, and for which the tribe of Levi is commended and blessed in the blessing of Moses, (⁽¹²³⁸⁾Deuteronomy 33:8,9) and as it follows,

that he may bestow a blessing upon you this day; which was their being taken into the service of God to minister to the priests in the sanctuary, to bear the vessels of the Lord, and for their maintenance to have the tithes of the people: this day was, according to the Jewish writers ^{f956}, the seventeenth of Tammuz, or June, on which day the Jews keep a fast upon this account.

Ver. 30. *And it came to pass on the morrow,* etc.] The eighteenth day of Tammuz it was, the same writers say, that Moses implored the mercy of

God for Israel. Jarchi on (⁽¹²²¹⁾Exodus 32:11) says it was on the seventeenth day the tables were broke, on the eighteenth the calf was burnt, and on the nineteenth that Moses went up to intercede for them:

that Moses said unto the people, ye have sinned a great sin; the sin of idolatry, (see ⁽¹²²¹⁾Exodus 32:21) from whence it appears, that all that were guilty of it were not slain, perhaps only some of one tribe; and there was great reason to fear, that as wrath was gone forth it would not stop here, but others would fall a sacrifice to the divine displeasure; wherefore it is proposed by Moses to make application to the Lord on their behalf, that they might obtain mercy:

and I will go up unto the Lord: on the top of Mount Sinai:

peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin; not by any sacrifice offered, but by his prayers prevail with God to forgive their sin, and not punish any more for it: he had by his first prayer obtained of the Lord not to consume them off of the face of the earth, and utterly destroy them as a nation; but that he did not hinder but that resentment might be shown in a lesser degree, or by parts; as not 3000 men had been cut off, chiefly out of one tribe, if not altogether, the rest of the tribes might expect to be visited, according to the number of their delinquents.

Ver. 31. *And Moses returned unto the Lord*, etc.] On the mount where he was in the cloud:

and said, oh, this people have sinned a great sin; which to following words explain; he confesses the same to God he had charged the people with in (⁽¹²³⁰⁾Exodus 32:30):

and have made them gods of gold; the golden calf, which they themselves called “Elohim”, gods.

Ver. 32. *Yet now, if thou will forgive their sin*, etc.] Of thy free grace, good will, and pleasure; it will redound to thy glory, men will praise thy name on account of it; these people will have great reason to be thankful, and will lie under great obligations to thee, to fear, serve, and glorify thee; and in particular it will be regarded by me as the highest favour that can be asked or granted:

and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written; not the book of the law, as Jarchi, written with the finger of God, the name

of Moses was not written there; nor the book of the just, as the Targum of Jonathan, the list and catalogue of good men, that belonged to the visible church, called in after time “the writing of the house of Israel”, (^{<3131>}Ezekiel 13:9) but rather the book of life, either of this temporal life, and then it means no more than that he wished to die, even immediately by the hand of God, which seems to be countenanced by (^{<04115>}Numbers 11:15) or else of eternal life, and is no other than the book of life of the Lamb, or God’s predestination or choice of men in Christ to everlasting life, which is particular, personal, sure, and certain; and Moses asks for this, not as a thing either desirable or possible, but to express his great affection for this people, and his great concern for the glory of God; and rather than either should suffer, he chose, if it was possible, to be deprived of that eternal happiness he hoped for, and should enjoy.

Ver. 33. *And the Lord said unto Moses,* etc.] In answer to his request:

whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book; not that anyone that is really in the book of life is ever blotted out, or that anyone predestinated or ordained to eternal life ever perish: but some persons may think themselves, and they may seem to be written in that book, or to be among the number of God’s elect, but are not, and turn out obstinate impenitent sinners, and live and die in impenitence and unbelief; when it will appear that their names were never written in it, which, is the same thing as to be blotted out of it, (see ^{<10028>}Psalms 69:28). Now by this answer the Lord does not absolutely refuse the request of Moses with respect to the people, though he does with regard to himself, and the blotting his name out of his book; and it is plain, by what follows, he meant to show mercy to the people, since he bids Moses go and lead them on towards Canaan, and promises an angel to go before them; though he reserves to himself a liberty to chastise this people for this sin, as he should have opportunity, along with others.

Ver. 34. *Therefore now go, lead the people [unto the] place of which I have spoken unto thee,* etc.] That is, to the land of Canaan, which he had promised to their fathers and to them, and had directed Moses to bring them to:

behold, mine angel shall go before thee: and not I, as Jarchi interprets it; not the Angel of the covenant, and of his presence, as in (^{<02310>}Exodus 23:20) but a created angel, which, though a favour, was a lessening of the mercy before promised and granted; and which gave the people a great

deal of concern, though Moses by his supplications got the former blessing restored, (^{<LE3P>}Exodus 33:2,4,14,17):

nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them; that is, when he should visit them in a way of correction for other sins, he would visit them in like manner for this sin, the worship of the golden calf; and so Jarchi well explains it,

“when I visit upon them their iniquities, I will visit upon them a little of this iniquity, with the rest of iniquities; and there is no punishment (adds he) comes upon Israel, in which there is not something of the punishment of the sin of the calf;”

and the Jews have a saying^{f957}, that

“there is not a generation in which there is not an ounce of the sin of the calf.”

Ver. 35. *And the Lord plagued the people*, etc.] That is, continued so to do at certain times, with the pestilence, or other calamities; for this seems not to refer, as some think, to the slaughter of the 3000 men: the reason follows,

because they made the calf which Aaron made; that is, they provided him with materials to make it; they urged and solicited him to do it, and would not be easy without it, so that the making of it is ascribed to them; or they served it, as Onkelos; or bowed unto it, as Jonathan; with which agree the Syriac, Arabic, and Samaritan versions, which render it, they served, or worshipped, or sacrificed to the calf which Aaron made.