

Israel's Fall and Restoration  
Exodus 32-40

- I. Introductory Issues
  - a. This is a return to the Fall in the Garden"
    - i. The sin couldn't have been more poignant.
  - b. Israel's fall parallels that of all humankind.
  - c. This sin is repeated in I Kings 12.25. This leaves us to conclude that sin and restoration is paradigmatic in Biblical faith.
  - d. Moses' intercession proves key to keeping the people together.
  - e. There is much interest in this episode in the nature of God's presence and closeness with the people.
- II. The Golden Calf
  - a. The calf is ironically everything the tabernacle is not:
    - i. People seek to create what God has provided
    - ii. They take initiative, not God
    - iii. Offerings are demanded, not invited
    - iv. No elaborate preparations
    - v. The calf is an overnight rush job
    - vi. God is objectified and made tangible
    - vii. The personal God is replaced by an impersonal individual
  - b. The golden Calf is Israel's violation of the basic relationship between themselves and God.
  - c. The repeated issue of who brought Israel out of Egypt raises question of who watches out for Israel when they sin.
  - d. The initial stimulus to the sin is Israel's leadership vacuum.
    - i. People founder without proper leadership
    - ii. They rally around Aaron.
  - e. Israel is requesting an image of the messenger of god.
    - i. The image of God's messenger makes that person concrete.
    - ii. The calf seems to be a substitute for Moses' mediation between the people and God.
  - f. God's Repentance
    - i. "Let me alone" opens the door for Moses to influence God's decision-making
    - ii. The peoples' relationship with YHWH is much like a marriage covenant
    - iii. Moses appeals to God reasonably
- III. Discussion Questions
  - a. The jewelry used to construct the calf likely came from the despoiling of Egypt. What are we learning here about possessing objects that are essentially temptations to us?
  - b. What were the people craving in their summons of Aaron and the calf?
  - c. How will God make of Moses a "great nation" without the rest of Israel?

- d. What is implied about our relationship with God in Moses' plea to God in 32.11ff?
- e. Did Moses go overboard in 32.19ff?
- f. How does Aaron fare in this scene? Does he get better or worse treatment than he deserves?
- g. How bad really was the Golden Calf episode?
- h. What is a present day equivalent to the worship of the calf?
- i. How does God recover his relationship with us when we commit "unpardonable" sins?