

refer to the plague of lice suggests it refers to a direct work of God, rather than one done by an intermediary. Similarly "finger of God" in Luke 11:20 (referring to Jesus' casting out demons) seems to describe direct divine action. Cassuto⁹ thinks that the use of "finger of GOD" instead of "finger of the LORD" and the use of *finger* instead of hand (since writing requires more, than one finger for man) show that the expression does not refer to God's actual physical act of writing. This argument does not seem very strong to us. But whichever view we take, God was the author of the words on the tablets.

We can only guess as to the size of the ten commandments. Certainly they were smaller than the ark of the covenant, and light enough to be carried in the hand (32:15). Keil and Delitzsch¹⁰ suggest that stone slabs about one cubit by one and a half cubits would be large enough for the 172 words of the ten commandments without the writing being excessively small.

Exodus 31:18 is a transitional verse between the instructions about the tabernacle and the priesthood and the story of the golden calf that follows in chapters 32-34. Notice Ex. 32:15, 19.

THE TEXT OF EXODUS TRANSLATION

32 And when the people saw that Mo-ses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aar-on, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Mo-ses, the man that brought us up out of the land of E-gypt, we know not what is become of him. (2) And Aar-on said unto them, Break

⁹*Op. cit.*, pp. 405, 406.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, pp. 219, 220.

off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. (3) And all the people brake off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aar-on. (4) And he received it at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf: and they said, These are thy gods, O Is-ra-el, which brought thee up out of the land of E-gypt. (5) And when Aar-on saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aar-on made proclamation, and said, To-morrow shall be a feast to Je-ho-vah. (6) And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

(7) And Je-ho-vah spake unto Mo-ses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of E-gypt, have corrupted themselves: (8) they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said, These are thy gods, O Is-ra-el, which brought thee up out of the land of E-gypt. (9) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, I have seen *this* people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: (10) 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 great nation. (11) And Mo-ses besought Je-ho-vah his God, and said, Je-ho-vah, why doth thy wrath wax hot against they people, that thou hast brought forth out of the land of E-gypt with great power and with a mighty hand? (12) Wherefore should the E-gyp-tians speak, saying, For evil did he bring them forth, 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. (13) Remember Abraham, I-saac, and Is-ra-el, thy servants, to whom thou swarest 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. (14) And Je-ho-vah repented of the evil which he said he would do unto his people.

(15) And Mo-ses turned, and went down from the mount, with the two tables of the testimony in his hand; tables that were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. (16) And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. (17) And when Josh-u-a heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Mo-ses, There is a noise of war in the camp. (18) And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome; but the noise of them that sing do I hear. (19) And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Mo-ses anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. (20) And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Is-ra-el drink of it.

(21) And Mo-ses said unto Aar-on, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought a great sin upon them? (22) And Aar-on said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are *set* on evil. (23) For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Mos-ses, the man that brought us up out of the land of E-gypt, we know not what is become of him. (24) And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off: so they gave it me; and I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

(25) And when Mo-ses saw that the people were broken loose (for Aar-on had let them loose for a derision among their enemies), (26) then Mo-ses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Whoso is on Je-ho-vah's side, *let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Le-vi gathered themselves together unto him. (27) And he said unto them, Thus saith Je-ho-vah, the God of Is-ra-el, Put ye every man his sword upon his thigh, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his neighbor. (28) And the sons of Le-vi did according to the word of Mo-ses:

and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. (29) And Mo-ses said, Consecrate yourselves to-day to Je-ho-vah, yea, every man against his son, and against his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.

(30) And it came to pass on the morrow, that Mo-ses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto Je-ho-vah; peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin. (31) And Mo-ses returned unto Je-ho-vah, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. (32) Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. (33) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. (34) And 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. (35) And Je-ho-vah smote the people, because they made the calf, which Aar-on made.

EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. After careful reading, propose a topic or title for the chapter. (This one is easy!)
2. How long had the people waited for Moses? (24:18)
3. To whom did the people come with a request? (32:1; 24:14)
4. What was their request? (32:1)
5. What was the condition of the people's hearts just then? (Ps. 106:21; Acts 7:39-40; Nehemiah 9:17-18)
6. Where did Aaron obtain material to make the calf? (32:2-3)
7. How could a "graving tool" be used to make a "molten" calf? (32:4)
8. What did the people say about the golden calf when they saw it? (32:4) What did they say that contradicted

- themselves? (32:1)
9. What did Aaron build after he made the calf? What proclamation did he make? (32:5)
 10. What sacrifices did the people make? (32:6; 20:24)
 11. What is involved in "they rose up to *play*"? (32:18-19; I Cor. 10:7)
 12. Did the Lord know about their idolatry? (32:7-8)
 13. Whose people did the Lord say they were? (32:7. Compare 32:11)
 14. What is meant by a "stiffnecked" people? (32:9; Deut. 9:6; Isa. 48:4; II Chron. 30:8; Acts 7:51)
 15. Did God suggest by saying to Moses, "Let me alone," that Moses very probably could affect and influence His intentions? (32:10)
 16. What did God at that moment intend to do with the people? (32:10; Ps. 106:23)
 17. What would God make of Moses? (32:10; Compare Num. 14:12; Gen. 12:2; Deut. 9:14)
 18. Would this offer have been a strong temptation to Moses?
 19. What three arguments did Moses use to influence God to spare the people? (32:11-13)
 20. Did God spare the people? (32:14)
 21. How can God "repent" when he "changes not"? (Mal. 3:6; Ex. 32:14) (For other examples of God "repenting," see Jonah 3:10; Jer. 26:19; Joel 2:13; II Sam. 24:16; Jer. 18:10; Gen. 6:6-7.)
 22. How were the stone tablets written? (32:15-16)
 23. Who was with Moses on the mount? (32:17; 24:13)
 24. What did the minister of Moses think about the noise from the people? (32:17)
 25. What sort of sound did Moses say they heard? (32:18)
 26. What did Moses do when he saw the calf and the dancing? (32:19)
 27. What did Moses do with the calf? (32:20; Deut. 9:21)
 28. What question did Moses ask of Aaron? (32:21)
 29. By what title did Aaron address Moses? (32:22; Num. 12:11) Why use such a title?

30. Was it really true that the people were "set on evil" (mischievous)? (32:22; See Deut. 10:6, 24)
 31. What "tall tale" did Aaron tell Moses? (32:24) What does this show about the character of Aaron or the condition of his heart?
 32. How did the Lord feel about Aaron at that time? (Deut. 9:20)
 33. In what way were the people "broken loose"? (32:25). (Compare the King James translation of 32:25.)
 34. How would Israel now be regarded among their enemies since they had "broken loose"? (32:25)
 35. What call did Moses issue to the people? (32:26)
 36. Who answered the call? (32:26)
 37. What were the Levites told to do? (32:27) Wasn't this rather extreme? Compare Num. 25:5, 7-11; Deut. 33:9; Luke 14:26; Ex. 22:20.
 38. How many were slain? (32:28. Compare Acts 2:41)
 39. What were the Levites called to do? (32:29)
 40. What did Moses tell the people that he would do for them? (32:30) Was he certain that his efforts would be successful?
 41. What did Moses ask God to do for the people? (32:31-32)
 42. Is the first part of 32:32 a complete or an incomplete sentence? What is the significance of this?
 43. What self-sacrificing request did Moses make? (32:32) Who made a somewhat similar statement? (Rom. 9:3)
 44. Did Jehovah forgive the people's sins? (32:33, 34; Compare Ex. 34:7; Ezek. 18:20)
 45. Did God agree to let the people go to the promised land? (32:34)
 46. Who (two persons) would lead them? (32:34; 23:20; Num. 20:16)
 47. How did God punish the people? (32:35)
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EXODUS THIRTY-TWO: IDOLATRY!

I. Causes of Idolatry

1. Forgetful people; (32:1).
2. Weak leadership; (32:2, 21-24, 25).
3. Lust of flesh; (32:6).

II. Consequences of Idolatry

1. Anger of God; (32:7-10).
2. Anger of leaders; (32:19).
3. Punishments; (32:20, 35).
4. Derision of enemies; (32:25).

III. Cure of Idolatry

1. Call for decision; (32:26).
2. Discipline; (32:27-28).
3. Prayer for forgiveness; (32:30-31).

INTERCESSOR!

1. Need for an intercessor; (32:7-10).
2. Test of an intercessor; (32:10).
3. Pleas of an intercessor; (32:11-13).
 - a. Must be earnest.
 - b. Must be based on truth.
4. Power of an intercessor; (32:14).
5. Truthfulness of an intercessor; (32:30-31).
6. Self-sacrifice of an intercessor; (32:32).
7. Limitations of an intercessor; (32:33).

THE REPENTANCE OF GOD! (Ex. 32:14)

A. What it is not!

1. Not a change in God's standards; (Mal. 3:6).
2. Not partiality to God's favorites ("pets"); (I Pet. 1:17).

3. Not getting over a temper tantrum.
 4. Not withholding just punishment; (32:33, 35).
- B. What it is!
1. A consistent pattern for God; (Jonah 3:10; Jer. 26:19; Joel 2:13; II Sam. 24:16; Jer. 18:10; Gen. 6:6-7).
 2. An act of compassion. ("Repent" here means "have compassion.")
 3. A change in God's response based on a change in man's relation to Him.
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FAILURE OF LEADERS! (Ex. 32:21-24)

1. Failure brings sin on the people; (32:21).
 2. Failure brings God's anger on the leaders; (Deut. 9:20).
 3. Failure leads to blame-shifting; (32:22-24).
 - a. Blames the people; (32:22-23).
 - b. Blames chance happenings; (32:24).
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MOSES - A SPIRITUAL STATESMAN! (Ex. 32:19-20, 25-35)

1. Reacted strongly to sin; (32:19).
 2. Administered discipline; (32:20).
 3. Called for decision; (32:26).
 4. Placed spiritual relationships over fleshly ties; (32:27, 29).
 5. Denounced sin as sin; (32:30-31).
 6. Prayed for the people; (32:30).
 7. Willing to sacrifice himself; (32:32).
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EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

1. *What is in Exodus thirty-two?*

The chapter contains the familiar story of the making of the golden calf, God's anger, Moses' breaking the ten

commandments, and Moses' prayer.

The chapter makes clear that the idolatry of the people brought upon them later punishments that could never be all averted: "I will visit their sin upon them!" (32:34). Israel's idolatry caused them to be rejected temporarily as God's special people, until Moses prayed for their restoration with great earnestness. Note Ex. 33:13: "Consider that this nation is *thy people!*" Ex. 33:9: "Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and *take us* for thine inheritance." The chapter portrays a RUPTURE of the covenant between God and Israel.

Ramm accurately entitles the section "Israel in Idolatry; or Israel is out of Egypt, but Egypt isn't out of Israel."¹

The chapter reveals the power of idolatry. We need this dramatic reminder, because we tend to think idolatry is a temptation only to primitive peoples. We do not always recognize our own idolatries. John wrote, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (I John 5:21). Paul cautions us, "Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them were" (I Cor. 10:7).

Many critics view the chapter as a resumption of the Sinai story left off after 19:24. They consider the story in Ex. 32-34 to have been written shortly after the time of King Solomon to condemn Jeroboam I for making the golden calves (I Kings 12:28-33). According to this theory the author of 32-34 was the writer commonly called "J" (for Jehovist, or Yahwist). J's story was interrupted after Ex. 24 by the insertion of a long section of Priestly instructions (Ex. 25-31), written about the time of the Babylonian captivity. With chapter 32 the "J" (or JE) section is resumed. In addition, some critics hold that within chapters 32-34 themselves there are evidences of later interpolations.²

We cannot accept these critical views. There is utterly

¹*Op. cit.*, p. 179.

²Martin Noth, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-245.

no evidence in any ancient manuscripts of the existence of the separate source documents that the critics write of. The supposed lack of unity in the material seems evident to those who want to believe it and not evident to those who do not want to believe it. To us, the book of Exodus has a remarkable unity and progressiveness. And even the critics cannot agree among themselves as to exact points of division between the various "sources."

King Jeroboam I deliberately created religious ceremonies that would conflict with the Mosaic law, so as to get the people in this new nation completely cut off from loyalty to the Jerusalem temple. Thus it appears that the laws and stories in Exodus were things he was familiar with, things that had been written centuries before his time. It is quite hard to believe that someone ("J") wrote Exodus 32-34 AFTER Jeroboam had already made his golden calves.

2. *What request did the people make to Aaron? (32:1)*

They requested that Aaron make them "gods" who would go before them on their journey.

They referred to Moses as "this Moses ('this guy!') that brought us up out of the land of Egypt." They did not mention that JEHOVAH had brought them up! The lofty truth of an eternal, imageless God had not yet penetrated their minds, much less their religious habits. They wanted visible gods who would go before them - gods they could SEE!

Moses endured "as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27). But the people wanted a visible god.

We marvel at how quickly the Israelites had forgotten the LORD! Scarcely five months before they were singing, "Jehovah is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: This is my God . . ." (Ex. 15:2).

The story of the making of the golden calf is a plain demonstration that seeing miracles and experiencing God's great wonders will not save and uphold those who have a weak faith. Those who cannot endure "as seeing the

invisible". (God) will probably not be saved by an abundance of visible miracles.

Moses had been gone forty days (24:18), and the people thought he would never return. Moses had delegated authority to Aaron and Hur (24:14). After 24:14 we hear no more of Hur. Jewish tradition (unverified) says he resisted the people's demands and was put to death by them. Josephus (*Antiquities* III, v, 7-8) mentions the people's anxiety over Moses' delay; but he says not even one word about the golden calf! Josephus tends to glorify Israel and to super-glorify Moses.

There has been MUCH discussion about the identity of the "gods" which the Israelites requested Aaron to make. Were these "gods" (plural) or "a god"? The story mentions only one golden calf (32:8). But the Hebrew verbs translated "go up" and "brought" (in 32:4) are forms used with plural subjects. The Hebrew word for "God" (*'elohim*) is naturally plural in form, although when referred to the LORD it normally takes a singular verb (as in Gen. 1:1: "God [plural form] created [singular verb] . . ."). The word *'elohim* frequently has a definitely plural meaning, "gods." In such cases the verb is plural also, as it is in Ex. 32:1.³ We agree with John Davis⁴ that the people were thinking of "gods" (plural) when they made their request to Aaron. Compare Ex. 32:31. (Isn't it remarkable that the people asked for "gods" to lead them instead of another man like Moses?)

Exodus 34:4 quotes the people as saying when they saw the ONE golden calf, "*These are thy gods, O Israel.*" It has been proposed that the words "gods" and "these" in this verse are "plurals of majesty," which only refer to one god. This is a possible and commonly-accepted explanation as to why *'elohim* often takes a singular verb. But examples

³Interestingly, Nehemiah 9:18, in telling of this very event, quotes the people as saying, "This (singular) is thy God (*'elohim*) that brought thee up out of Egypt."

⁴*Moses and the Gods of Egypt*" (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 283.

of the pronoun *these* with a singular meaning are RARE indeed. II Chron. 3:3; Ezek. 46:24; and Ezra 1:9 have been proposed as examples of this; but these are extremely uncertain passages, as a little study will reveal.

Our opinion is that the Israelites were not trying to be grammatically consistent at that moment. They were too excited to be bothered about grammatical points, such as whether the word "god" took a singular or plural verb. We should not be surprised if they were inconsistent. Theologically they were very inconsistent. Why not also grammatically?

Another much-discussed question is this: Were the people desiring to make another god instead of Jehovah? Or was their idol a representation of Jehovah? Was it an adaptation of some Egyptian idol? Or perhaps of some Canaanite idol?

The prevailing opinion among scholars is that the golden calf was in some way a representation of Jehovah, or a mount for Jehovah to sit or stand upon. Scholars feel it was probably NOT a representation of an Egyptian god, because the feast held in connection with the worship of the calf was announced as a "feast of Jehovah" (32:5).⁵ (At least Aaron proclaimed a feast unto Jehovah.) Cassuto⁶ thinks that the Israelites were not actually asking for a substitute for the God of Israel, but were only asking for a replacement for Moses; and that Aaron did not consider that he was making another God instead of Jehovah. Scholars who hold views such as these assume that Aaron and the Israelites were thinking about god-images like those of Canaan and Syria, rather than like those of Egypt. The Canaanites at ancient Ugarit called their father-god "El, Father Bull." These Canaanite and related gods are very often pictured as sitting or standing on wild beasts - bulls, lions, cattle, etc. *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*

⁵Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 141.

⁶Op. cit., pp. 411-413.

(Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 163, 164, 167, 179, shows pictures of numerous such gods riding upon animals. Thus according to this view, when Aaron made the calf, he was seeking to fashion a mount for the LORD, a bull calf upon which the invisible God could ride, like Canaanite deities. As the mercy-seat was indeed sort of a throne for Yahweh, so the bull calf was to be sort of a vacant throne for Yahweh. Thus, according to this view, Aaron did not really intend to commit the sin of idolatry when he made the calf.

Though the theories just presented are frequently expressed, there are problems in adopting them. The Biblical text does NOT state that the golden calf was designed like the idols of any particular people. Then there is the problem as to why the Israelites should have tried to make a calf like some Canaanite or Syrian image when they had lived in Egypt for centuries, and had become thoroughly Egyptianized. When the Israelites were in the wilderness and experienced difficulties, they always wanted to go back to EGYPT, and not to Canaan. (See Neh. 9:17; Ex. 14:11; 16:13; Num. 14:4.) Joshua 24:14 and Ezek. 20:7, 8 both speak of the Israelites serving the gods of EGYPT. Ezekiel even mentions that they did not "forsake the idols of Egypt." Acts 7:39 quotes Stephen as saying that they "turned back in their hearts unto EGYPT" (not to Canaan or Syria); and then they "made a calf in those days and brought a sacrifice unto the idol." Observe that the calf is plainly called an idol. Psalm 106:21 says that when they made the likeness of the ox "They *forgot* God their savior who had done great things in Egypt." Surely if they had *forgotten* God, they were not trying to make an image of him or for him to ride upon.

This scriptural evidence causes us to think that the golden calf actually was an idol in the worst sense of that word; and that it was probably adapted from some Egyptian model, rather than being patterned after a Canaanite bull-statue upon which some god-figure was standing.

It is well-known that the Egyptians made statues of animals that were worshipped as gods. These included the Hathor cow images, and the image of the Apis bull. The Apis bull was most often worshipped as a living bull, another one being picked to replace each former one at death. But statues of the Apis bull have indeed been found, dating as far back as the seventh century B.C., and possibly older.⁷

3. *Where was material obtained for the golden calf?* (32:2-3)

It was obtained from the golden rings in the ears of the families of the Israelites. The text does not clearly state this, but possibly Aaron thought that the request for costly earrings might restrain the Israelites. Not only was the value of the earrings great, but the Israelite men had to take them away from their family members, who might be uncooperative. If that was in Aaron's mind, his hopes were in vain. ALL the people BROKE OFF the earrings, and brought them to him. Aaron underestimated their fanaticism, and in so doing put himself in position where he needed to reject his own offer; and he was not equal to it. Thus he was swept along by the mob pressure to make an idol, an act that he certainly did not personally approve.

The Israelites did wear earrings in ancient times (Gen. 35:4). But in later years they did not (Judges 8:24). The taboo on earrings seems to have started at Mt. Sinai after the golden calf incident (Ex. 33:4-6). Gideon made an "ephod" from earrings, but they were the earrings of the Midianites (Judges 8:24-27).

4. *What was the technique used in making the calf?* (32:4, 8)

It was first "molten" and then "fashioned" (cut, form, make) with an engraving tool. "Molten" indicates that the

⁷*Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 190, has a photograph of an Apis statue wearing a sun-disk between its horns and a sacred cobra (uraeus) from its forehead. It is dated in the Saite period, 663-525 B.C. See also *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 141.

gold was first melted. We are not informed how it was made after the gold was melted. We suppose that a wooden model or a wooden frame of the idol was then made, and the gold was then overlaid upon this wood.⁸ Isaiah 30:22 and 40:19 suggest that idols were made in this manner. The fine details (such as eyes) would then be engraved into the golden shell. This would explain how the image could be "burned" (32:20). We get the impression that the calf was made in one day. If so, it could hardly have been anything but CRUDE.

We cannot excuse Aaron's action of making this idol. His heart was surely not in his work, but he did it. This did not disqualify him from the priesthood, any more than the sins of Abraham, Jacob, and David disqualified them from being great leaders in God's program for the ages. God's gifts are bestowed on the basis of grace rather than merit.

5. *How did the people respond when they saw the golden calf?* (32:4)

They became almost delirious with ecstasy! They said, "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!" Whereas they had said shortly before (32:1) that MOSES brought them up from Egypt, now they say the calf-idol had brought them up. What insanity! The calf had not even been in existence when they left Egypt!

The use of the plural forms "these" and "gods" gives problems, because only one idol was made. See notes on 32:1. Cassuto⁹ writes that the Jews never had the foolish

⁸An alternate translation of "fashioned it with a graving tool" is "he bound it up in a bag." To arrive at this rendering one must read *charit* (bag, purse, pocket) for the word *cherit* (graving tool) that is actually in the text. Then we must translate the verb *tsarar* as "wrap" or "bind up." This translation is found in II Kings 5:23, where Naaman put two talents in a bag. But this rendering seems incongruous and superfluous. Why should Aaron tie up the earrings in a bag? Why should such a triviality be mentioned? See Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 413.

idea that the calf led them from Egypt, but only that they considered the calf an emblem of God, itself worthy of divine honor along with the Lord, and thus spoke of "these," referring to the LORD *and* to the calf. This idea, as appealing as it might be, just isn't what the text says. The people upon seeing the calf said, "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up."

The words of the people are the very words later used by King Jeroboam I (931-909 B.C.) to refer to his golden calves set up at Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:28). Jeroboam's allusion to Aaron's golden calf could hardly be missed. The people were probably just as ready to worship a golden calf in Jeroboam's time as they were in Aaron's time.

The term "calf" (Heb., *'egel*) is masculine, and refers to a young bull in full strength. A three-year old animal is referred to as an *egelah* (same word with a feminine ending). The same word refers to an ox (or to the female heifer counterpart) mature enough to work at plowing or threshing (Judges 14:18; Jer. 50:11; Hosea 10:11). Psalm 106:19-20 makes the "calf" synonymous with an "ox."

6. *What did Aaron do when he saw the people's reaction to the calf?* (32:5)

Aaron built an altar before the calf, and he cried out, "A feast to Yahweh tomorrow!"

What was Aaron thinking when he built the altar and proclaimed a feast to Yahweh (if indeed he really was thinking in any coherent way at all)? It is proper for us to give Aaron whatever credit there may be possible. "Love believeth [the best possible about] all things" (I Cor. 13:7).

Aaron's making the altar was surely a legitimate act (Ex. 20:24), and the altar was not mentioned later as a cause for criticism. Making the altar was Aaron's own idea; the people had said nothing (as far as we know) about an altar.

Proclaiming a feast to Yahweh was also Aaron's own idea. We cannot assert on the evidence of the text that Aaron was trying to link the molten calf to Jehovah worship

(as some have alleged). If that was his idea, it did not work. Jehovah himself told Moses that the people had sacrificed **TO THE CALF**, and not to Him (32:8). It seems to us that Aaron was probably trying to divert the people's minds from the calf to the altar, and thus from calf-worship to Jehovah worship. It hardly compliments Aaron to represent him as thinking that he could transform the calf into a Jehovah-worship accessory by making an altar before it and proclaiming a Jehovah feast. (That would be somewhat like trying to make a cocktail party or a dance holy by having an "invocation" at the start.) Aaron did not later attempt to excuse himself by saying something such as, "Well, I thought we could use the calf to symbolize Jehovah, or use it for Jehovah to ride upon." Compare 32:21-24.

Whatever Aaron had on his mind, it did not cancel his sin. God became so angry with him that He was ready to kill him (Deut. 9:20). The decisiveness of Moses in situations of idolatry makes Aaron look very shaky. See Ex. 32:19-20; Num. 25:4-5.

7. *How did the people worship around the calf? (32:6)*

The people responded enthusiastically, rising up *early* the next morning. (Perhaps it was late in the evening when the calf was completed.) They "broke loose." (See notes on Ex. 32:25 concerning this expression.) They offered burnt-offerings (20:24) and peace offerings. Then they "sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

Eating and drinking are innocent enough, but the "play" was another matter. Paul classifies this "play" as idolatry (I Cor. 10:7). The "play" including singing and dancing (32:18-19). The "play" included laughter, probably loud and uproarious. The Hebrew word translated "play" (*tsachaq*) means to laugh (Gen. 17:17), jest, mock (Gen. 19:14; 21:9), make sport of (as in Judges 16:25, where the Philistines "made sport of" Samson), and play. The word is used in Gen. 26:8 to refer to Isaac "sporting" with his wife, Rebekah. On the basis of this one use of the word many interpreters have read into the "play"

around the golden calf the idea of a wild sex orgy,¹⁰ such as the Canaanites might have indulged in at a Baal festival.

We seriously question that the "play" around the idol involved any sex orgy. *Tsachaq* does not basically refer to sex acts. What Isaac was doing with Rebekah was out-of-doors in plain sight, and probably involved nothing more than teasing, or joking, or laughing with Rebekah. The passage about Isaac does not indicate that the word meant "fondling" or even "caressing." Paul does not mention in I Cor. 10:7-8 that "fornication" was associated with the "play" around the golden calf, as it was with later idolatry (Num. 25:1).

It is not necessary, or even possible, to assume that all the people (600,000 men!) were involved in the idolatry. But many were, and therefore the whole nation was collectively involved in the transgression.

8. *How did God react to the golden calf?* (32:7-8; Deut. 9:12)

Jehovah was angry enough to destroy them (Deut. 9:19). His displeasure was HOT. Observe the statement that "They have made. . . ." They all made it by contributing materials, by requesting that it be made. See Ex. 32:20, 35.

Note that God referred to Israel as "THY (Moses') people" (32:7). For that moment He disowned them. But Moses reversed this, and (in 32:11) referred to them as "thy (God's) people."

God accused the Israelites of three things:

(1) They had *corrupted* themselves. "Corrupt" means "destroy, lay waste, corrupt morally (Gen. 6:11), overthrow." All acts of forsaking God corrupt those who disobey.

(2) They had turned aside quickly. Quickly indeed! It was scarcely six weeks since they had heard the ten commandments, which forbade the making of any type of image.

¹⁰Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 216. Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

(3) They had made a molten calf and worshipped it and sacrificed unto it (NOT unto God). Concerning the plurals "these" and "gods," see notes on 32:1.

9. *What did God threaten to do to the Israelites?* (32:9-10; Deut. 9:13-14).

To consume them, that is, burn them up (literally "to devour" them).

God declared that they were a stiff-necked people. This was a common expression (Deut. 9:6; II Chron. 30:8; Isa. 48:4; Acts 7:51), which described people as being like oxen or horses that would not respond when the guiding rein was tugged.

God declared that He would make of MOSES a great nation, once He had consumed the Israelites. The same promise was made to Moses later at Kadesh (Num. 14:12). The promise was like that given to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). Moses later mentioned this promise to Him in his speech to the people (Deut. 9:14).

Whether this promise was actually an alluring temptation to Moses or not, he rejected it instantly. If he had accepted it, his own descendants would not necessarily have been better people than the other Israelites. His grandson became an idolatrous priest (Judges 18:30).

God said to Moses, "Now therefore, let me alone." But Moses refused to let God alone. Like Jacob, he would not let go until he obtained the blessing (Gen. 32:24-29). In "Let me alone" there is an acknowledgement that Moses' intercession could alter (or at least delay) God's threatened punishment. God placed the fate of the whole nation into the hands of Moses. Would Moses, as the mediator of the covenant, show himself worthy of his calling, and sacrifice his own exaltation for the sake of a guilt-laden people?

"He (God) 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" (Psalm 106:23).

10. *What three appeals did Moses make to God to spare Israel? (32:11-13)*

(1) Remember your special relationship with Israel. They are "thy people," which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt.

(2) The Egyptians would hear of it and think God had brought Israel forth to slay them, and they would gloat. (Joshua later used a similar argument, Josh. 7:9.)

(3) Remember your covenant promises with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to multiply their seed and give them the promised land. The promises mentioned in Ex. 32:13 can be read in Gen. 22:17; 13:15.

Moses mentioned "mountains" in 32:12. The Sinai area was very well supplied with mountains.

Regarding "repent" in 32:12, see notes on 32:14.

Note in 32:13 that God had sworn "by his own self." God can swear by none greater. (Heb. 6:13)

11. *How can God REPENT? (32:14)*

It should not be surprising to us that God "repents" of His threats to do evil (bodily punishment). "Repenting of evil" is one of the most prominent and basic aspects of God's nature. See Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:2. The Old Testament very frequently mentions God's repentance. See Jer. 26:19; 18:10; Jonah 3:10; II Sam. 24:16; Gen. 6:6-7. Aren't you glad that God will "repent" (change his mind about) the evil which He would be absolutely just to inflict?

The word here translated "repent" (*nacham*) most often means "to have compassion, to pity, to be comforted, to console." It is used in Psalm 23:4: "Thy rod and thy staff, they *comfort* me." Ex. 34:14 could be translated, "And Jehovah had compassion concerning the evil which He said he would do to his people." (Note the reassuring reference to "his" [God's] people.) Of thirty-five occurrences of this verb in the Old Testament, thirty refer to God as the subject and only five to men's acts of repenting.

God does not "repent" in the sense that he acknowledges He was in error or made a bad judgment. See Mal. 3:6.

God does not have temper tantrums, of which He needs to repent. God NEVER really desires or gets pleasure from the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11).

God was totally just in being angry over Israel's idolatry. God would be unworthy of our worship if He did not abhor evil. But at the very moment God was angry, He left the door open to Moses' intercession for the people, with the clear hint that if Moses prayed, the consequences would be different. In all of these things, God showed no shiftiness, no uncertainty, no variation. (James 1:17)

We are not told whether Moses was informed at that moment that God had repented. But the fact that God did not object to Moses' prayer for the people was itself a reassurance to Moses. Later when Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he knew that God had forgiven at that moment, and thus Moses wrote of what had actually happened just then.

Many commentators have tried to explain God's "repentance" as a figure of speech that seeks to express God's feelings in human terms that we can understand, because His feelings are beyond human comprehension. They speak of God's repentance as an anthropopathism (attributing human feeling to God) or an anthropomorphism (attributing human forms to God). This explanation seems to us rather unnecessary. Mankind learned of "repentance" from God, not God from man. We do not assume we know all about God. But one revelation from God about Himself is worth a thousand of our speculations about Him.

12. *What did Moses carry as he came down from the mount?* (32:15-16)

He carried the two tables (tablets) of stone inscribed with the ten commandments. See notes on 31:18. It was unusual for ancient inscribed stones to be written on both sides.

13. *What did Joshua think about the noise in the camp?* (32:17-18)

He thought it was a sound of war in the camp. Being a

military man, he was probably conditioned to interpret all loud sounds from people as war. See Ex. 17:9.

Joshua had been left on the lower slopes of the mount when Moses went up (24:13). As Moses descended, he met Joshua, but he did not tell him what God had said in 32:8. Even when Joshua commented about the uproar, Moses did not tell Joshua what God had said, but merely corrected his false impression of the sound.

Exodus 32:18 very definitely has a poetic rhythm in Hebrew. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the whole book was originally written in verse, of which a fragment is here preserved.¹¹ Poetic lines sometimes drop from the lips of gifted people without the lines being in a poetic setting.

The words "shout," "cry," and "sing" are all actually translated from one Hebrew word (*'anah*). This word refers to antiphonal singing in Ex. 15:21, and may do so here, as if one group of idolaters were singing and another group were echoing their words.

14. *How did Moses react when he saw the idolatry? (32:19)*

He was surprised, shocked, stunned, and indignant! Though he had been told about it, the impact of seeing it was much stronger than of hearing about it.

The word "dancing" is plural, as if referring to dances, or different types of dances. Cole¹² suggests that the plural is a "plural of indignation," as if to say "such goings-on!"

Moses slammed down the tables of ten commandments, and broke them "beneath the mount" (that is, at the foot of the mount). In the very place where the covenant had been made (24:4), the tables of the covenant were broken. How sad, but how appropriate.

We are not informed as to whether we should interpret the breaking of the ten commandments as merely an act of Moses in anger, or as a symbol of the breaking of the

¹¹Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹²*Op. cit.*, p. 218.

covenant between God and Israel. The scripture does not definitely state the latter idea, but the symbolism comes immediately into our minds. Certainly there was a rupture in the covenant relationship. Observe Moses' fervent pleas to God to accept Israel back as His people (33:13; 34:9).

Perhaps God blamed Moses slightly for breaking the ten commandments. See notes on 34:1.

Moses' breaking ALL the laws seems to illustrate James 2:10: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Israel in breaking one law had broken all the law.

S. C. Barlett tells of climbing up and descending Mt. Sinai:

We started to descend . . . by the gorge on the north-east side [called "Jethro's path"], by which possibly Moses may have descended when he heard the sounds of the camp, before he could see what was taking place there. We were completely shut in by the sides of the gorge till just as we emerged from it near the bottom. There was no sound below for us to hear, but we could readily accept Mr. Palmer's statement that while descending here, he had distinctly heard the sounds of his own camp at the foot of the mountain, while entirely hidden from view. . . . The passage by which we [and presumably Moses] descended was of the steepest, the rocks often loose, and the descent hard. Between the almost perpendicular cliffs, sometimes singularly honey-combed . . . we made our way . . . in an hour and a quarter from the top of Ras Safsafah.¹³

15. *What did Moses do with the golden calf?* (32:20; Deut. 9:21)

He utterly destroyed it, even making the Israelites drink the water containing its ashes. Deut. 9:21 mentions that

¹³*From Egypt to Palestine* (New York: Harper, 1879), pp. 269, 270.

the water was that in "the brook that descended out of the mount."

Moses **GROUND** the calf, probably between stones. See notes on 32:4 regarding how the golden calf might be *burned*.

Moses' treatment of the idol surely showed the worthlessness of it. It also humiliated the idolaters. In later years King Josiah treated the altar at Bethel in a way similar to the way Moses treated the golden calf. (II Kings 23:15)

Numerous Jewish and modern commentators have associated the "water of bitterness" used as a test of a wife suspected of adultery (Num. 5:17-22), with Moses' act of making the people drink the water bearing the ashes of the golden calf. To us this does not appear to be a legitimate association.

Firstly, the scripture does not associate the two passages. Secondly, the law given in Numbers five was apparently revealed by God to Moses some time **AFTER** the golden calf was destroyed. Thirdly, Exodus 32 does not mention any examination of the people to see who passed and who flunked the water-drinking test.

In spite of these barriers to associating the two passages (Ex. 32 and Num. 5), writers still speak as if Moses used the gold-dusted water as a guilt-detector, a sort of trial, or ordeal, by water. Supposedly the people's physiological or psychological reactions to drinking the water would show which ones were guilty of participating in the idolatry. The smiting of the people referred to in 32:35 has been considered to be a reference to those who got sick after drinking the water because they were guilty of the idolatry. But Ex. 32:35 appears to be a statement about punishment rather than about testing.

16. *What excuse did Aaron give to Moses? (32:21-24)*

Aaron blames the people. Also he said that the calf formed itself (miraculously!) in the fire, and "came out" (under its own power!). It is hard to imagine that Aaron

did not have a sheepish grin after he told his story about the calf. What a "tall tale"! God was ready to destroy Aaron (Deut. 9:20).

Moses said, "What did the people do unto thee, that thou hast brought a great sin upon them?" Moses was astounded at Aaron. Aaron had failed miserably to be a strong leader. Moses' question was more designed to convict and reprove Aaron than to get information.

What Aaron said about Israel in 32:22 was very true. They were constantly "in evil." See 14:9; 15:24; 16:2, 20; 17:2, 4. Israel had been rebellious ever since Moses knew them (Deut. 9:7, 24).

Nevertheless, Aaron's answer was very evasive and defensive, like that of Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:12-13). Aaron shows no real sorrow for his sin.

Aaron addresses Moses as "My lord." See also Num. 12:11. This title has a servile tone about it that seems most unfitting from the one who stood with Moses on the bank of the Nile when it turned to blood (7:20).

17. *What call for decision did Moses make? (32:25-26)*

He stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is for Jehovah? Unto me!"

While this had the nature of an ultimatum, it also contained the opportunity of an amnesty.

Exodus 32:25 speaks of the people having "broken loose" (K.J.V., being "naked"). They had broken loose from all the regulations of God. The word does not mean to "make naked," and it is not so translated that way anywhere in the American Standard version. The Hebrew verb *para'* means "to loosen, to let loose, unbridle, to break out" (as a disorder). It may mean to "uncover" (or let loose), as of the hair (Num. 5:18; Lev. 13:45). But there is not one passage where it clearly refers to nakedness. This has a bearing on whether or not the "play" of 32:6 refers to a sex orgy. See notes on that verse.

Israel's "breaking loose" had given their enemies an opportunity for derision (literally, a "whispering"). The

enemies would include the nearby Amalekites and others who would hear about this. Compare Deut. 28:37. The sins of saints cause unbelievers to blaspheme God.

In these circumstances Moses made his ultimatum-amnesty proclamation. And all the sons (meaning descendants) of Levi gathered together unto Moses.

The response of the Levites comes as a surprise to us. Nothing previously written about the tribe of Levi (except possibly the faith of Moses' parents) causes us to think very highly of them. Levi and his brother Simeon were angry and cruel men. They massacred the Shechemites (Gen. 34:25-26). They hocked an ox (Gen. 49:5-7). Still, when the call came for men to stand with Moses, the tribe of Levi responded to a man. (Possibly the "all" may be used here a bit hyperbolically, as in other places. Compare Ex. 9:6.)

Several questions must remain unanswered: Were the Levites as a whole less guilty of participating in the idolatry than the other tribes? Was their family association with Moses cause for their response? Were they more willing to confess their sins than the other tribes?

The immediate response of the Levites suggests that if Aaron had boldly stood up and opposed the people's request that he make them "gods," he would have had many loyal Israelites to stand with him.

18. *What were the Levites commissioned to do? (32:27-28)*

They were to put on their swords and go through the camp slaying people. About 3000 fell that day.

Note that it was *Jehovah* the God of Israel who commanded this mass execution, but the "word of Moses" proclaimed it. A similar order to execute violators is in Num. 25:5.

The expression "from gate to gate" indicates that Israel's wilderness encampment had definite boundaries, and probably a fence with gates.

"Brother" means "fellow-Israelite." Fleshly ties must not be stronger than spiritual relationships. (Matt. 12:46-

50; 10:37; Luke 12:52-53; 14:26).

The small number slain (small in contrast to the total population) may indicate that not all the people were involved in the idolatry, or that God in His grace spared many offenders.

Three-thousand men were slain at Sinai for breaking the law. On the day of Pentecost after Christ ascended three-thousand law-breakers were made alive (Acts 2:41; Eph. 2:5). This is a vivid object lesson showing the differing natures of the law and the gospel.

The command to slay was a drastic test of faith for the Levites. But the punishment was just: "He that sacrificeth unto any God save unto Jehovah only, shall be utterly destroyed" (Ex. 22:20).

How could the Levites rampage through the camp killing without resistance? Was the meekness of the people due to the suddenness of the attack, or the guilt they felt for their sin, or the authority projected by Moses' language and bearing? It would seem reasonable that 22,000 Levites could slay 3000 people before the people realized what was happening (Num. 3:39). The people did not know what Moses had ordered the Levites to do. We suppose that the Levites slew only guilty idolaters, those whom they may have seen participating.

19. *What were the Levites called to consecrate themselves to?* (32:29)

They were to consecrate themselves to Jehovah, for a holy war against sinners. "Consecrate" means literally "fill the hand." Compare 29:9.

Exodus 32:29 is a difficult verse. Does the command refer to something that the Levites were called to do AFTER the 3000 were slain? (We favor this view.) Or is it merely a restatement of the order in 32:27? Or is it merely a report on the consequences of their slaying the 3000?

The R.S.V., which follows the Septuagint here, gives the verse the latter meaning: "Today you have ordained

yourselves." The Septuagint reads, "Ye have filled your hands this day to the Lord." It definitely seems that the imperative reading, "Consecrate yourselves," is the correct reading, rather than the indicative reading, "Today you have ordained yourselves."¹⁴

The words of 32:29 stand AFTER the report of the slaughter. Thus it seems preferable to interpret them as being Moses' words to the Levites after they had completed the punitive slaughter. After that fearsome event, they are called on to present themselves. ("Fill your hand!") They are to give themselves to service to the Lord that day, for service in time to come, so that every man of them might, if need be, be against his own father and mother, and thus to get themselves a blessing that day. They accepted the call.

The "blessing" which Levi was to obtain that day was the privilege of service in God's tabernacle (Num. 3:6-9). Moses blessed Levi in Deut. 37:9 with these words:

Who said of his father, and of his mother, I have not
seen him,
Neither did he acknowledge his brethren;
Nor knew he his own children:
For they have observed thy word
And keep thy covenant.

The previous ferocity of the Levites was now disciplined and consecrated to serve God alone. And thus the curse that once rested on them (Gen. 49:7) was turned into a blessing.

20. *What did Moses promise to do for the people? (32:30)*

He promised to go unto Jehovah (back up in the mount) to try to make atonement (covering) for them.

¹⁴The Hebrew reading is an imperative, "Consecrate yourselves." The verb could possibly be rendered as an indicative (reading it as piel perfect instead of Qal imperative); "They have filled *your* (plural) hand." But the presence of the plurals "they" and "your" indicate that the imperative reading is the correct one, and the Greek reading is incorrect.

The "Ye" is emphatic: "You! you have sinned a great sin."

The word "peradventure" (meaning "perhaps") is a word that expresses hope in Jer. 20:12. But the same word expresses fear and doubt in Gen. 27:12. The use of this word suggests that Moses was not at all sure his efforts would be successful.

21. *What did Moses pray unto God? (32:31-32)*

Moses confessed their sin. He requested God to forgive (literally "lift up") their sin. And if God would not do this, to blot out his name out of God's book.

Exodus 32:31 mentions for the third time their "great sin." See 32:21, 30, 31. Regarding the "gods," see 32:1.

Moses' prayer was utterly selfless. He lived only for the people. His prayer was similar to Paul's in Rom. 9:3. He was willing to sacrifice himself for the people.

The last part of the request for forgiveness in 32:32 is not stated, leaving its conclusion to be supplied by the mind of the reader. The last part of 32:32 might have been "then I will be content," or "I will say no more," or "please do so!" For similar incomplete sentences, see Daniel 3:15; Luke 13:9; 19:42; Romans 9:22; I Samuel 12:14-15. (This type of expression is called aposiopesis.)

Moses' reference to the "book" of God is the first reference to this book in the scriptures. We do not know how Moses even knew such a book existed. We do not know what Moses understood the nature of this book to be. (Many facts and practices in divine religion had been taught to the pre-Mosaic patriarchs, concerning which we are told nothing of the way or time they were revealed. Examples include tithing, the priesthood, burnt-offerings, etc.)

This book is elsewhere called "the book of the living" (Psalm 69:28; Isa. 4:3), "the book of remembrance" (Malachi 3:16), and the "book of life" (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 20:15; 13:8; 17:8).

We do not know for sure that the book mentioned by

Moses was the same book that we know as the book of life. Possibly this "book" was a list of those granted more lifetime on earth, and did not have reference to eternal life. We do feel, however, that it probably was the same book that we know as the book of life, because the names of those to be saved by God have been written in the book of life "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 17:8). We do not assume that Moses knew as much about the book as we have learned by revelation since his time.

Moses prayed for Aaron also at this time. The exact time of Moses' prayer is hard to specify. Possibly it was during the forty-day period in the mountain that Moses was to in a few days (Deut. 9:18-20; Ex. 34:1-2, 28).

There would come a time when not even the prayers of Moses or Samuel could avert judgment upon Israel, but that time was not yet (Jeremiah 15:1).

22. *Was Moses' prayer granted?* (32:33-35)

The request (or offer) of Moses was refused. Moses could not be a substitute for Israel. (Only Christ could be a substitute.) Whoever had sinned would be blotted out of the book, not Moses.

Though God is forgiving, there are times when He will be no means clear the guilty (Ex. 34:7). This gives God no pleasure. "For he doth not afflict willingly ('from his heart'), nor grieve the children of men." (Lam. 3:32-33) But justice must often be administered, even when it is painful.

God foresaw that that generation would continue in their ways of unbelief. He foreknew that that generation would be rejected at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 14:22-35), and all perish in the desert (Ex. 32:34b).

"Forty years long was I grieved with that generation, And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Wherefore, I swear in my wrath. That they should not enter into my rest" (Psalm 95:10-11). Hebrews 4:5-7 quotes this passage, and indicates that Israel not only did not get to enter into the promised

rest of Canaan-land, but they did not enter God's eternal rest. How totally tragic! (But the sad fate of Israel was written to warn us of the same danger! Heb. 4:11)

Nonetheless, God did allow the people to be led on by Moses and an angel to the place of which God had spoken (to the promised land). God foreknew they would never make it.

God promised that "My angel shall go before your face" (or presence). Regarding this angel see 33:2; 23:20-24; Num. 20:16.

The statement is 32:35 that "Jehovah smote the people" is indefinite as to when and how the smiting was done. The verb translated "smote" is related to the word translated "plague" (*negeph*) in Ex. 12:13; Num. 16:47. This suggests a deadly smiting. The R.S.V. translates it "The LORD sent a plague upon the people." It has been suggested that this plague was the possible consequence of the potion (the gold-dusted water) that Moses had made them drink.¹⁵ This notion seems untrue. See notes on 32:20.

THE TEXT OF EXODUS TRANSLATION

33 And Je-ho-vah spake unto Mo-ses, Depart, go up hence, thou and the people that thou hast brought up out of the land of E-gypt, unto the land of which I sware unto Abraham, to I-saac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: (2) and I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Ca-naan-ite, the Am-or-ite, and the Hit-tite, and the Per-iz-zite, the Hi-vite, and the Jeb-u-site: (3) unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people; lest I consume thee in the way. (4) And when the people heard these evil tidings,

¹⁵Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol. 1 (1969), p. 454.