

“WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE?”

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*“Then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, Whoever is on the LORD’S side—come to me!
And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.”*
Exodus 32:26.

THOSE idolatrous people seem to have been awestruck by the appearance of Moses in their midst. You can picture them gathered around Aaron, worshipping the golden calf and performing their unclean rites—but, as soon as ever Moses marches into the camp, they recognize his commanding presence and his kingly authority. “Drag down that abomination,” he cries! “And break it in pieces.” And though, just now, they were adoring it, they implicitly obey him. The calf is hurled from its pedestal, burnt in the fire, ground to powder and mingled with the water that the idolaters drank. Then rings out the grand challenge of our text. The brave man who seems to stand like a solid rock amid the raging billows, feels it necessary to strike a decisive blow for Jehovah—and once and for all put an end to that shameful idolatry. So, taking his stand, as though to lift up the banner of Jehovah, he cries, “Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me! And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him”—the men who afterwards became the priests of the Most High God. Then came that just but terrible command to execute the idolaters—and three thousand of the people perished as a warning to the rest—and that cursed image-worship was stamped out of the camp, at least, for a time.

Now, dear Friends, very much as Moses did on that occasion, needs to be done very frequently in every age. It is necessary that a banner should be displayed because of the Truth of God and that men should be called out to rally around it. And those who do so, those who are the most fearless and the most faithful, shall receive a great reward, even as we read in the Book of Deuteronomy that Moses bestowed a special blessing upon the tribe of Levi because its sons were faithful in that trying and testing time—“And of Levi he said, Let Your Thummim and Your Urim be with Your holy one, whom You did prove at Massah, and with whom You did strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Your word and kept Your covenant.” Blessed are they, also, who in these days bow not down before the modern idols that so many worship! Blessed are the brave men who never question whether a certain course will “pay” or not, but who do the right thing, whatever the consequences of their action may be! These are they who, amidst the bright ones in Heaven, shall be doubly bright and who, here below, shall be the officers in the army of the Lord who shall be called to lead the way in the day of battle. I would that we had many among us who would come forward with brave decision and yield themselves up, without doubt or fear, to follow wherever the God of Truth and the Truth of God should lead them. High shall their renown be and great shall their reward be, even as it was with these courageous sons of Levi who so promptly responded to the challenge of Moses, “Whoever is on the Lord’s side—let him come unto me!”

What I am going to try to do is, first, *to describe the conflict and show which is the Lord’s side.* Secondly, *to point out to the Lord’s followers what they must do.* Thirdly, *to remind the Lord’s hosts of their encouragements* and, fourthly, *to repeat the question of the text—and to put forward proposals for enlistment in the army of the Lord.*

I. First, then, I have TO DESCRIBE THE CONFLICT WHICH IS NOW GOING ON AND TO SHOW YOU WHICH IS THE LORD’S SIDE. That is not a very difficult task and the conscience of each one of you ought to help me in its accomplishment.

This is where “the Lord’s side” begins—*Belief in God against Atheism and other forms of unbelief*. Infidelity assumes many forms—the doubt as to whether there is any God at all—the daring defiance of God if there is a God. Or the indifference which utterly neglects God, not caring about Him either one way or another. Believers are on the opposite side to all of these and you know that the side they are on is “the Lord’s side.” To fear Him, to reverence Him, to trust Him, to love Him, to serve Him, to worship Him—that is being on “the Lord’s side.” On which side are you, dear Friend? Are you a believer, a fearer, a truster, a lover, a worshipper of God, or are you a neglecter, a rejecter, a hater of Him?

Here again are two sides—*obedience to the commands of God, or a determination to please ourselves*. Are we endeavoring to obey the moral law or are we pouring contempt upon that law and seeking to be happy by having our own way? How is it with you, my dear Friend? Are you making yourself into your only god? Are you allowing your own lusts and passions to be the supreme governing influence over you? Are you saying to yourself, “I will have my own way. I will do as I please. As long as I can make myself merry, I care nothing whatever about the commands of God”? If that is the way you talk, it is quite clear on which side you are. Between the will of the flesh and the will of God, there is no possible question as to which is “the Lord’s side.”

Here is another battleground—*Christ and His righteousness, or your self-righteousness*—cleansing in Christ’s blood and covering with His perfect righteousness, on the one hand and—on the other, salvation by your own works, salvation by your own prayers, salvation by your almsgiving, or by anything of your own. You know, at once, which is “the Lord’s side” out of those two, for the Lord is always on Christ’s side. Indeed, Christ, Himself, is God! Justification by faith is the side on which God is, but justification by the works of the Law is a lie—in fact, it is an impossibility! Now, dear Friends, on which side are you with regard to this matter of salvation by Christ or salvation by self? Are you “on the Lord’s side” of that question?

Here is yet another point from which to view this great conflict—*the Gospel of the Grace of God, or the superstitions and lies of men*. The Bible teaches us that sinners are saved by believing in Jesus Christ, but superstition says, “No, they are saved by being sprinkled with water through the subtle influences that trickle from priestly fingers. They are saved by baptism, saved by sacraments. Here, then, is a sharp conflict between salvation by Christ and salvation by priests. We know which is “the Lord’s side” of that controversy, but, dear Friend, on which side are you? Do you go directly to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Great High Priest and do you trust alone to the merit of His atoning Sacrifice, or will you go crouching to your fellow creature and pour the infamous story of your sin into his ear and so defile him even more than he already is? And then will you come back deluded with the false notion that you have obtained “absolution” at his hands? We know that none can forgive sins save God, alone—this is the Lord’s way of making reconciliation through the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son. So, Friends, are you for Zion or for Rome? Are you on the side of Christ or on the side of antichrist?

There is a fierce battle still raging in the world *between Scripture and tradition*—between this Grand Old Book and certain things which have been handed down by tradition from the fathers. They are said to be customs of the early church, or to have been ordained by various councils, or decreed by “infallible” popes. Well, dear Friends, are you on the side of God’s Word or of man’s word? Is your rule of life, “Thus says the Lord,” or, “Thus say the fathers,” or, “Thus say the councils,” or, “Thus say the popes”? Who is on the Lord’s side in this matter? There is a stern fight still to be fought over this question—the battle has long been raging and it will continue to rage until the victory is won by the Truth of God. I am looking forward to the time when there will be only two parties left to fight—the men who will have this text emblazoned on their standards, “One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,” and who will have nothing but the Bible for their rule of conduct—and those bearing the other banner in praise of the inventions of men and the traditions of the fathers. They will cling to their errors, I have no doubt, as long as they can, but the Lamb will overcome them—and they who are on “the Lord’s side” will also come off more than conquerors through Him that has loved them!

There are two sides to all the moral questions in the world. There is holiness, for instance. You all know on whose side that is. And there is unholiness—and you have no difficulty in deciding on whose side *that* is! Then, as to order, peace, quietness, love, generosity and so on, you all know on whose side they are. And you equally know on whose side disorder, strife, disaffection, tumult, selfishness and covetousness are. You are well aware, Brothers and Sisters, that wherever there is anything that is right, true, pure, holy and of good report, that is “the Lord’s side.” Therefore, always

be on that side. But if there is anything that is impure, unchaste, unlovely, unjust—that is not “the Lord’s side” and it should not be His people’s side. At the present time this dear land of ours seems as if it were going to be swallowed up by the demon of drunkenness. Temperance, righteousness, sobriety—these are all on “the Lord’s side” of that question, so let every Christian see that he takes the same side as the Lord does. I need not go into all the questions that are prominent at the present time because they keep on changing their positions—and sometimes it is one question that is most prominent and sometimes another—but to almost every question which comes up, there is “the Lord’s side” and there is another side. And the question must always be asked, “Which is the Lord’s side?” And I trust as soon as that question is answered, you will say, “That is the side for me to take—the side upon which the Lord is.”

II. Now, secondly, I am TO POINT OUT TO THE LORD’S FOLLOWERS WHAT THEY MUST DO TO SHOW THAT THEY ARE ON HIS SIDE.

And the first thing is, *they must acknowledge it*. The Truth of God deserves to have bold adherents and brave proclaimers. Righteousness ought not to be claimed as the portion of men who are ashamed to acknowledge it. Suppose that those sons of Levi had slunk away to their tents and had said, “Oh, yes, we are on the Lord’s side, but we do not mean to expose ourselves to any risk in dealing with these idolaters.” That would have been like the coward spirit of a soldier who shirks his proper place on the field of battle. He is too modest, too retiring to fight—that is only another way of saying that he is a coward and unworthy of the uniform he wears! In like manner, it is a mean, beggarly spirit that will not lay down life and limb, substance and honor—and everything else that one has—for the cause of God and His Truth. Oh, for more of the true spirit of chivalry among those who call Jesus their Lord and Master! It is a shame that they should ever blush to acknowledge His name! They might rather blush with shame to think that they have ever been ashamed of Him! I count it *nothing*, Brothers and Sisters, to speak for the cause that everybody thinks to be good, or to float with the stream by agreeing with what the multitude reckons to be right. Every timeserver can do that! But, to swim against the stream, to speak unpopular Truths of God, to declare that which God has taught you, even though nobody else believes it, to beard the lion in his den, to stand—like Athanasius—against the whole world for God and for His Christ—this is being a man, indeed! No, more—this is being a Christian! And the time shall come when this shall be reckoned the noblest kind of man whom even God, Himself, has made. So, if you are on God’s side, admit it!

Then, next, *rally to the standard*. Moses cried, “Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me!” If you are a Christian, you should unite with other Christians. I believe, Brothers and Sisters, that it is the duty of all converts to test the various sections of the professing church by the Word of God and then to cast in their lot with that part which holds the Truth of God most fully and clearly. And, having conscientiously done that, to rally with the hosts of God in the great battle against wrong. Oh, you converts who have never joined the church, what are you doing? I beseech you, think over this matter, pray over it and remember that in the olden times, they first gave themselves to the Lord and afterwards they gave themselves to His people—according to the will of God. And so ought you to do. Believers ought not to be solitary stones, lying by themselves—they should be built up into “a holy temple in the Lord, built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” So, dear Friends, if you are on “the Lords side,” admit it and join with those who also are on that side.

Then, next, if you are on “the Lord’s side,” *be willing to be in the minority*. It is true that minorities have generally come in for kicks and blows rather than kisses and caresses, but, at the great Day of Judgment, all such wrongs will be righted. And, after all, it has often been a minority—yes, and even a minority of *one*—that has done great things for God, after all! Just now I mentioned Athanasius. You remember that when the whole of Christendom seemed to swing round to Arianism, it was Athanasius, standing alone, “*Athanasius contra mundum*,” as he truly said, who brought the Church back to belief in the Deity of Christ! And in the days of Luther, who can ever tell what a pivot and hinge that one lone man was for Germany and Europe? And in Scotland, what force there was in the one brave man, John Knox, whose preaching and prayers Queen Mary feared more than an army of soldiers! Few followed these brave leaders at the first, for following meant the stake, the scaffold, prison, suffering, shame, reproach and death—yet these were the men and women who did the true work of God, after all, and who fought the good fight of faith!

Be you followers of them. Run not with the multitude to do evil—rather choose the narrow way that leads unto life, though few there are that find it. From the days of Noah the followers of the Lord have usually been in the minority. If the rightness of any course could be decided by the counting of heads, the devil would mostly be in the right—but we do

not count in that way. We test every question by the Word of God, not by the votes of men! If the Lord has said anything, believe it, even if no one else does. If the Lord has revealed any Truth to your conscience, hold to it, even though, to all others, it should seem to be a lie and, verily, I say unto you, you shall have your reward! The sons of Levi were in a minority in comparison with the great host of idolaters in the camp of Israel, yet they came out boldly for the Lord, and are, therefore, held in honor even to this day!

Further, *you must be aggressive* if you are on “the Lord’s side.” These sons of Levi, as soon as they declared that they were on the side of Jehovah, had to come forth to smite and slay His enemies. So must you, if you are a follower of the Lord. There is nothing that the devil likes better than to be left alone. I am often asked, “Why do you not preach what you believe and leave other people’s doctrine alone?” Ah, just so! Why don’t I? And why did not the Lord Jesus Christ let the devil alone and let false teachers alone? And why does not the Gospel let error and falsehood alone? When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, one part of His work was to destroy the works of the devil. The demons said to Him, “Let us alone: what have we to do with You, You Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?” His answer was, “Hold your peace and come out of him.” And when the demons say to us, “Leave us alone,” we reply, “That is the very thing that we cannot do and that we dare not do!” We must not let falsehood, and sin, and error alone! Christ Himself said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” His faithful servants are to follow His example—to quarrel with error, to fight against sin—to be aggressive against everything that is opposed to our Lord and His Truth!

The devil is quite ready to make a league of peace with us, or to agree to a truce and say, “Now, do not go on fighting any longer. Let us shake hands and be friends. There can be no reason why I should not continue to be the prince of the power of the air, and Christ should also have His disciples—only let them be very decorous and quiet—and mind their own business.” But we will make no such wicked league or truce as that, for we are to resist the devil! As Peter writes, “whom resist steadfast in the faith.” The sons of Levi had to kill the adversaries of God and so must you, *spiritually*, who are on “the Lord’s side.”

You must also *let love to God rule all nature’s ties* if you are on “the Lord’s side.” Moses expressly commended Levi for this—“Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children.” They were so jealous for the Lord of Hosts, that they would not tolerate idolatry in their nearest kith and kin! Happily, Brothers and Sisters, we have not to fight anybody with a sword of steel. God forbid that any of us should ever take the life of a fellow creature! Our one weapon is the two-edged sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God! The force we use is the force of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But, I charge you, never do a wrong thing, or even a *questionable* thing in order to please father, or mother, or wife, or child. And never allow any wrong to go unrebuked in the dearest friend you have, for, “faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Some have condoned sin to please a wife or a husband, but they who are faithful to God must also be faithful to the members of their own household. This may involve persecution for themselves, but they must be willing to bear it for Christ’s sake—and they must not yield an inch, or an iota, in any matter of principle, or any question of truth and right, even to the beloved of their heart. Can you do this? If so, you are worthy to be counted among those who are on “the Lord’s side.”

Once more, they who are on “the Lord’s side” *must do as they are told*. They must be prepared to obey all Christ’s commands to the letter—and also in the spirit of them—right to the end of life. I am ashamed of the way in which some professing Christians ignore so much of the Bible, shutting their eyes to Christ’s commands, or, like, Nelson, turning their blind eye to those they don’t wish to read. Finding themselves in a certain community, they believe what the community believes without ever testing it and trying it by the Word of God. They do not want to know too much and if anybody tries to teach them a Truth of God which they do not know, they are unwilling to learn it lest it should unsettle them in their ecclesiastical position. I bless God that when I was converted to Christ, I laid down this rule for myself—“Whatever the Lord teaches me in His Word, I will follow. If it should lead me into a path where I shall be quite alone because I can find nobody to believe as I believe, yet will I believe and teach that which the Holy Spirit reveals to me in the Word.” At this moment I have not an atom of respect for any authority in matters relating to Divine Truth except the authority of God—and I would strongly urge all young people to try all catechisms, creeds, customs, doctrines, practices and everything else by that Infallible test—“To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light of God in them.”

III. Thirdly, I am to remind THE LORD’S HOSTS OF THEIR ENCOURAGEMENTS.

First, we may be encouraged to be on “the Lord’s side” *because it is the cause of right and truth*. To me it seems to be a sufficient reward to a man to know that he is defending a right cause even if he has to die for it. Do you crave the applause of human hands and voices? Do you covet the glance of approving eyes? If so, your self-respect has already fallen below the point which it ought to mark. Are you right in the course you are now pursuing? If you are, you need not ask for anything more. To be right and yet to be poor—to be right and to be abused, or even to be put to death—is, surely, sufficient for any follower of the Lord!

Better still, if there can be any better, remember that *you are on God’s side*. He who is Almighty looks upon you as His friend! Or, rather, say that He who is Almighty is your Friend! He is much more than that, for He is your All-in-All. You may shelter yourself beneath His wings. Behind the bosses of His buckler you may hide yourself in perfect security!

Moreover, *Jesus the Crucified is with you* if you are on “the Lord’s side.” There He stands, whose head was crowned with the cruel thorns and whose hands and feet were pierced by the terrible nails. Blessed is every soldier of the Cross, for he has Christ for his Captain and where His flag waves, victory must surely come!

Further, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, *all the saints of God are with us*—the countless hosts of the redeemed before the Throne of God, above, are all on His side and ours—and so are *all the holy angels* “that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word.” All the unfallen intelligences in the universe are on “the Lord’s side.” Therefore let us not be afraid, who are enrolled beneath the banner of the Cross, and let others cast in their lot with us, for they will be siding with a noble host that has gone on before us! The lineage of the saints of God is a very high one. Talk of the blood royal or imperial—bah, a single drop of the blood of the martyrs flowing through our veins is far more to be desired! To walk as they walked, “of whom the world was not worthy”—those first confessors of the destitute, afflicted, tormented”—this is to be a member of the blood royal of Heaven, the highest nobility that can be gained in this world! How many of you, young men and young women, or older men and women, are ready to say, “We are on the Lord’s side”? The air all around us is crowded with the spirits of just men made perfect! They are watching to see how we run the Christian race and wrestle for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus! And they sing a new song of praise unto the Lord as He leads one and another to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints—to stand out boldly for Christ and Him crucified—and to speak, or serve, or suffer as best shall glorify the Lord Most High!

IV. Time and strength both fail me, so I cannot say more upon that point, though much more might be said. I am, in closing my discourse, TO REPEAT THE QUESTION OF THE TEXT AND TO MAKE PROPOSALS FOR ENLISTMENT IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD. I should like to act as a recruiting sergeant and to enlist some new soldiers for King Jesus.

“Whoever is on the Lord’s side? Well,” says one, “I wish to be.” Well, I will gladly help you enlist. You know what the sergeant does when he enlists a young man—the first thing he does is to give him something—a shilling. And if you intend to be a follower of the Lord, *you must receive something* or, rather, you must receive SOMEONE—even the Lord Jesus Christ, for, “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” You cannot be on “the Lord’s side” unless you receive the Lord’s Christ as your Savior! But as soon as you accept Him as the free Gift of Jehovah’s Free Grace, you are enlisted into the army of the Lord! Will you take Him on those terms? Will you have the Lord Jesus Christ as your Captain? I pray His gracious Spirit to make you say, “Yes, that I will, by His Grace.”

Next, the sergeant puts the ribbons in the young man’s hat and, if you receive Christ, the next thing you have to do is to *confess Christ openly by being baptized*. Our Captain’s own words, as recorded in the Gospel according to Mark, are these—“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved”—and what He has joined together, no one has the right to put asunder. So, get the colors in your hat, young recruit, if you really are enlisted on “the Lord’s side.”

When you have done that, the next thing for us to do is to *take you to the barracks and drill you*. You will not be fully fitted to fight the Lord’s battles until you have been drilled and trained by your new officers. So, submit yourself to the discipline of the Church of Christ. Be willing to take your place in the ranks with your Brothers and Sisters, to follow the New Testament Church order, to be taught what are the first principles of the Christian faith and to be instructed yet further in the things of God, so that, afterwards, you may be able, in your turn, to instruct others. Christ’s commission

runs thus, “All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth. Go you therefore, and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them (those who are made disciples) in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” So, you see, we are to teach *before* we baptize and afterwards still further to teach those who have been made disciples and who have been baptized into the triune name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Then, we shall want you to *put on your full regimentals*. What are the regimentals of a Christian? The garments of holiness, the livery of love and the whole armor of God. We pray the Lord to clothe you from head to foot in the Divine Panoply wherein all the warriors of the Cross should be arrayed—the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the Gospel of Peace, the shield of faith, “the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.” There is nothing like having your Bible always with you and being able to turn to any passage that you need when you are confronting the foe, for, “It is written,” is a wondrous weapon against the devil, as Christ Himself proved! Satan flees from this sharp sword. And other adversaries of the Lord and His people feel the force of the Word when they will not yield to anything else.

Then, when you are fully armed, drilled and trained, *we shall expect you to wage war for King Jesus*. And the first war must be a civil war—war within your own soul—war to the bitter end against every sin, every evil habit, every false word! All iniquity must be driven out of your spirit at the point of the bayonet, and no quarter must be given to any enemy of the Most High God. Then even while the civil war is raging, we shall want you to carry the war into the enemy’s territory. Attack the foe on all sides—speak to your friends about Christ. So live that they will see Christ’s life reproduced in you, at least in a measure. Plead with those with whom you work or live—the servants in the house, or your companions, all sorts and conditions of men—tell them all about Jesus Christ! If we were once to have a church fully awakened and zealous for Christ and His Truth, we would soon have the persecuting times back again. The early Christian Church was very enthusiastic—they went everywhere preaching the Word. Somebody says, “Ah, they lived in the days of persecution.” But it was not the persecution which made them enthusiastic—it was their enthusiasm that brought upon them persecution for Christ’s sake! And probably if we were as good Christians as we ought to be, we would not be half as well liked by the world as we now are! And if there were more noise and opposition made against the followers of Christ, it would not be at all a bad sign! If those who hate righteousness, hated Christians more heartily than they now do, it might be a token that God was more manifestly at work in us, making us more “out-and-out” for Him than we are at present.

Now, then, you who are on “the Lord’s side” in this congregation—you who really believe in Jesus—I invite all of you to confess your faith in Him if you have not already done so. No, more than that—in the name of Jesus in whom you believe, I exhort and command you to confess your faith in Him! Be not ashamed to avow your convictions. Do not try to conceal yourselves from your fellow Christians. Come out and come out soon—and may the numbers of this church, or of some other church be greatly swollen by the addition of those who are truly upon “the Lord’s side.” I wish I could persuade some of you not to put off this confession any longer, but to say, “I love my Savior, and I mean to come out and confess that I am on ‘the Lord’s side.’ I have been far too long hesitating and halting between two opinions, but I will not let another week go by without saying, as plainly as words can say it, ‘I have given myself to Christ and now I wish to give myself to His Church.’” May God bless you all for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *EXODUS 32:1-29.*

Verse 1. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us, for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.* They needed something to look at—something visible that they could adore. It was not that they meant to cease to worship Jehovah, but they intended to worship Him under some tangible symbol. That is the great fault of Ritualists and Romanists—they aim at worshipping God, but they must do so through some sign, some symbol, some cross, some crucifix, or something or other that they can see.

2, 3. *And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.* People are often very generous in their support of a false religion and, to make idol gods, they will sacrifice their most precious treasures, as these idolaters willingly gave their golden earrings!

4. *And he received them at their hand and fashioned it with a engraving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.* No doubt they copied the Egyptian god which was in the form of a bull, which the Holy Spirit, by the pen of Moses, here calls a *calf*. The Psalmist probably also alludes to it when he speaks of “an ox or a bullock that has horns and hoofs.” It seems strange that these people should have thought of worshipping the living God under such a symbol as that!

5. *And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.* “To Jehovah.” They intended to worship Jehovah under the form of a bull—the image of strength! Other idolaters go further and worship Baal and various false gods, but, between the worship of a golden calf and the worship of false gods, there is very little choice. And between the idolatry of the heathen and Popery, there is about as much difference as there is between six and half a dozen!

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.* It was usual to worship false gods with music and dancing and with orgies of drunkenness and obscene rites—and the Israelites fell into the same evils as they had seen among their neighbors.

7. *And the LORD said unto Moses.* Just in the midst of his hallowed communion, the Lord said to him.

7. *Go, get you down; for your people, which you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.* God would not acknowledge them as *His* people. He called them Moses’ people—“your people, which you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.”

8-10. *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 thereunto and said, these are your gods, O Israel, which have brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of you a great nation.* For Moses began at once to pray for the people—to interpose between God and the execution of His righteous wrath and, therefore, the Lord said to him, “Let Me alone...that I may consume them.”

11. *And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why does Your wrath wax hot against Your people?* See how he dares even to say to God, “They *are* Your people, though they have acted so wickedly. ‘Why does Your wrath wax hot against Your people?’”

11-13. *Which You have brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Therefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did He bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce wrath and repent of this evil against Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own Self, and said 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 forever.* Moses pleaded the Covenant which the Lord had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—and there is no plea like that. Although it might have been to his own personal interest that the people should be destroyed, Moses would not have it so. And he pleaded with God for the sake of His own honor, His faithfulness and His Truth, not to run back from the Word which He had spoken.

14, 15. *And the LORD repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people. And Moses turned and went down from the mount.* Does it not seem sad for Moses to have to go down from the immediate Presence of God and to stand among the idolatrous and rebellious people in the camp? Yet that is often the lot of those whom God employs as His servants—they have, as it were, to come down from Heaven to fight with Hell upon earth.

15-17. *And the two tablets of the testimony were in his hands: the tablets were written on both sides, on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.* For Joshua was a younger man than Moses, and also a soldier, so his ears were quicker to hear what he took to be “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.* Moses knew that it was not a battle-cry either of the victors or the vanquished—but the song of idolatrous worshippers.

19. *And it came to pass, as soon as he came near unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount.* In righteous indignation, preserving those sacred tablets from the profane touch of the polluted people by dashing them to fragments in his holy anger

20. *And he took the calf which they had made and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strew it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink it.* Think of the courage of this one man to go single-handed right into the middle of the idolaters’ camp and deal thus with their precious god!

21-24. *And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto you, that you have brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: you know the people, who they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whoever has any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it to me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.* Which was a lie. Aaron was a poor weak-minded creature, easily persuaded to do wrong. And when his stronger-minded and more gracious brother was absent, he became the willing tool of the idolatrous people—and yet Aaron is called, by the Psalmist, “the saint of the Lord,” and so he was, taking him as a whole. One black spot on the face of a fair man does not prove him to be a Negro. And so one sin in the life of a man who is usually holy, does not put him among the ungodly.

25-28. *And when Moses saw that the people were naked, (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies) then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, Whoever is on the LORD’S side—come to me! And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said unto them, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Put every man, his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses.* The rebellious, the idolatrous, the men who had defied the authority of God were to be summarily executed on the spot.

28, 29. *And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day.* Such a colossal crime as that must be expiated before the Lord could again bless the chosen race.

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