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Moshe Remembered how the Israelites Provoked ADONAI to Wrath

9: 7-24

Moshe remembered how the Israelites provoked ADONAI to wrath DIG: How long was Moshe on the mountain with God? What kinds of stress might this situation cause with the Israelites? In what sense is the golden calf a response to this stress (see Exodus 32:1-4)? What should the Israelites have done instead? To whom does God speak to in verse 14? What does it mean when Moshe breaks the two tablets of stone? What was he feeling? How and why does Moses intercede for Isra'el? Consequently, Isra'el is spared; but are they any better off, or do they learn their lesson?

REFLECT: What situations are most stressful to you? How do you respond to stress? What effect does it have on your relationship with others? With God? Are any of your stress management techniques similar to the Israelites? Sinful Isra'el reflects sinful mankind. In your own life, what has been your "golden calf?" How did this affect your relationship with the LORD? How have you seen God's forgiving nature in your life? How have you shown Him your thanks? In your life, past or present, how have you forgotten ADONAI's loving provision, only to have your attention drawn away from Him, and to the world?

Moses labors to impress on Bnei-Isra'el their perpetual tendency toward rebellion. The main incident alluded to is the golden calf. Therefore, the love and mercy of God is stressed.



Mose remembered the golden calf incident (9:7-14): Moshe was addressing a new generation, but **they** needed to realize that **they** were sinners just like **their parents**. **Remember, never forget, how [your parents] provoked ADONAI your God to wrath in the wilderness.** If **the people** were ever foolish enough to claim that the gift of **the Land** was a result of **their righteousness**, then **they** were suffering from a severe case of religious amnesia. Therefore, **they** were called to remember the long and sordid history of **their** stubbornness and provocation of **God**. **Moses** declared: **From the day you left the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against ADONAI (9:7).** Moshe then recalled some of Isra'el's earlier sins. **He** begins with the golden calf incident (see the commentary on **Exodus**, to see link click [Gg](#) - The Golden Calf Incident).

Moses reminds **the Israelites** that **their** rebellion occurred at the same time that **Moshe** was receiving **the Torah** from **YHVH Himself**. If there was a time, above all others, when **the people** should have been faithful, it was during the formation of **the covenant at Horeb** (which is the name used for Mount Sinai in **Deuteronomy**). Instead, **you provoked ADONAI to wrath, and ADONAI was angry with you - enough to destroy you (9:8).** However, it wasn't merely the golden calf incident. Look at everything else, in just three short months **they** witnessed the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the deliverance of **manna** and **quail** to eat, water from **the rock** to drink, the Sh'khinah glory to guide and protect them day and night. How could they forget so soon, turn around and worship **an idol?**²⁵⁸ Clearly, there could be no grounds to argue that the gift of **the Land** would be a reward for **righteous** behavior!

Highlighting the significant theological points of the account of **Moshe** going **up** and **down Mount Sinai** the first time, **he** said: **When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that ADONAI cut with you, I stayed on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights; being completely dependent on God, I did not eat bread or drink water (9:9, 9:18, 9:25 and 10:10).** ADONAI gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God. Moreover, on them were all the words (see [Bk](#) - The Ten Words) that ADONAI had spoken with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire, on the day of the assembly (9:10).

These verses contain the report of the great apostasy, the making of **an idol** at the very time when **the covenant** was being concluded. **Now, at the end of 40 days and 40 nights, ADONAI gave me the two tablets of stone -the tablets of the covenant** ADONAI said to me, "Get up! Go quickly down from here, for your people whom you brought out from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned from the

way I commanded them; they have made a molten image for themselves" (9:11-12).

So, **God** might have *felt* like **destroying them**, but **He** really didn't *want* to **destroy the People**. **He** wanted for **Moses** to intercede for **them**. But **Moses** could not be the mediator (9:29). Even though **Moshe** and **ADONAI** **both** shared a deep love for **the people of Isra'el**, **Moses** could bear that load. And later in the book **Moshe** clearly makes a distinction between **himself** and the true **Mediator** that **he** was pointing to. Speaking of the future **Messiah**, **Moshe** declared, probably with great relief: **ADONAI your God will rise up for you a prophet like me from your midst - from your brothers [Judah]. To Him you must listen (18:15)**. And the message is clear throughout the book of **Deuteronomy**, that we need **Yeshua** to be our **Mediator**.

Then the theme of stubbornness returns. Frustrated, **ADONAI spoke to me saying, "I have seen this people, and it is indeed a stiff-necked people. Leave Me alone** (also see **Exodus 32:10**), **so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under the heavens. Then I will make you into a nation mightier and greater than they" (9:13-14)**. The divine, "**leave Me alone,**" was taken by **Moses**, not as a prohibition, but as an invitation to intercession.²⁵⁹ Just as **God** involved **Abraham** in the "consultation" prior to the judgement of **Sodom and Gomorrah** (see the commentary on **Genesis Ew - Abraham Intercedes**), so here, **YHVH** pauses and makes the divine will "vulnerable" to human challenge.²⁶⁰

Moshe remembered how he interceded (9:15-21): So, I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire. Now the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. When I looked, you had indeed sinned against **ADONAI your God - you had made yourselves a metal calf**, which was a breach of the first and second mitzvot. **So quickly you had turned aside from the way ADONAI had commanded you! So, I took hold of the two tablets, threw them out of my two hands, and smashed them before your eyes**, graphically illustrating what **they** had done to **their covenant (9:15-17)**. **Moshe's** act was not simply a spontaneous reaction of anger. **He** interceded because **he** wanted to save **Isra'el** from the punishment of disobeying **the covenant**. Documents from the Near East attest, that in case of treaty breaches, **tablets** were **broken**. So, **Moses** hurried to break **the tablets** that **God** had just ratified with **Isra'el**. No **covenant . . . no punishment (7:10-11)**. If **the covenant** were subsequently renewed, a new document would be needed. What we see here is the deep love of a shepherd for **his flock (Exodus 32:32; Micah 1:8-9; Habakkuk 1:2; Lamentations 1:16; Romans 9:1-3)**. This is commitment, and **God** is looking for people just like this today.²⁶¹ **For the eyes of ADONAI range throughout the earth to**

strengthen those whose hearts are wholly His (Second Chronicles 16:9).

After seeing **their** wicked conduct, **Moshe** broke **the tablets**, thus symbolized the nullification of **the covenant**, **Moses** immediately began to intercede. **Then I fell down and prostrated myself before ADONAI like the first time (Exodus 32:30), for 40 days and 40 nights. I did not eat bread or drink water - because of all your sin that you committed, doing evil in ADONAI's sight, provoking Him to anger.** Through her breach of **the covenant**, **Isra'el** made **herself** liable to the curses of **the covenant**. For I was afraid of the fierce wrath and fury which ADONAI bore toward you - to destroy you (9:18-19a).

But ADONAI listened to me that time also (9:19b and also see Hebrews 12:21). **This was not the first time Moses prayed successfully on behalf of Isra'el. He had previously prayed for them at the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 14:15), and at Marah (Exodus 15:25).** Moshe also interceded on behalf of his brother Aaron. ADONAI was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time, **with the effect that only two of his sons perished and two survived (Leviticus 10).** I took your sin - the calf you had made - and burned it in the fire. Most of the large **idols** worshiped by the ancients were first made of wood, and then covered with some kind of metal. **I crushed it, grinding it up so well that it was as fine as dust, and I threw its dust into the wadi flowing down from the mountain (9:20-21).** And he actually had **the people** drink **the water (Exodus 32:20).** The sin, as it were, was poured into **their** bodies along with **the water** to symbolize that **they** would have to bear the burden of it just as a woman who was suspected of adultery was obligated to **drink of the bitter water that brought a curse (Numbers 5:11-31).**²⁶² Not much of a **god!** Instead of being filled with **the Spirit**, **they** were filled with **gold**. This painted a clear picture of the worthlessness of **idolatry**. If **the calf** could not save **itself**, it certainly could not save its worshipers.²⁶³

Moshe remembered how the Israelites provoked ADONAI to wrath (9:23-24): The **Horeb** incident did not stand alone. To emphasize the point, **Moshe** lists a string of places where **Isra'el** had **provoked ADONAI to wrath**. Although they are slightly out of chronological order, for rhetorical effect, **Moses** may have listed the sites from the least serious breach of loyalty to the most severe.²⁶⁴ **Again, at Taberah (meaning burning) the people were murmuring about their hardships and God sent a fire that consumed some of them on the outskirts of the camp (Numbers 11:1-3); at Massah (meaning testing) the Jews were thirsty, so Moshe struck the rock and YHVH provided water abundantly (see the commentary on Exodus [Cu](#) - Strike the Rock and Water Will Come**

Out of It); and at Kibroth-hattaavah (meaning *graves of craving*), **the Israelites** became weary of **manna** and **craved meat** to **eat and provoked ADONAI to wrath**, so **He** sent flocks of **quail** over **the camp** for **them to eat**. While **the people** were **eating the meat**, **God's** judgment fell and **He** sent a **severe plague** upon **them** (**Numbers 11:4 and 31-34**).

Finally, **Moses** rehearsed **Isra'el's** great failure at **Kadesh-barnea** (**Deuteronomy 9:23; Numbers 13-14**). When **ADONAI** sent you from **Kadesh-barnea**, saying, "Go up and possess the Land I have given you," then you rebelled against the commandment of **ADONAI** your God and didn't believe Him or listen to His voice. **This is an allusion to the sin of the spies who walked by sight, not by faith, and saw only the problems in the Land. Though Moses had already recalled this incident in detail, a short reference to it is made here because of its serious nature.** Stated bluntly, **Moshe** declared: **You have been rebellious against ADONAI from the day that I knew you (9:24)**. But for **God's** grace in the past, **they** would not even be standing on the plains of **Mo'ab**, renewing **their covenant** with **YHVH**. **She** was spared only to rebel again and again.

The review of **Isra'el's** sins was quite an indictment, but **YHVH** never gave up on **the apple of His eye** and often forgave **them** when **He** would have judged **them**. **He has not treated us according to our sins, or repaid us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10)**. **God** is always faithful to **His** promises; even when we don't allow **Him** to take the steering-wheel of our lives, **He** will accomplish **His** purposes anyway. However, we will miss the blessings that **He** planned for us.

Every believer must trust **ADONAI** to meet their needs one day at a time (easy to say - hard to do for most of us, but that's the goal). If we complain along the way, we're only giving evidence that we don't trust **God** and we think we know more than **He** does about what's best for us. When we come to those **Kadesh-barnea** places in life, we must claim what **YHVH** has planned for us and move forward in faith. We must not rebel against **Him** and refuse to trust and obey. If we do, we may find ourselves wandering through life, failing to accomplish what **the LORD** has planned for us. Claiming our inheritance in **Messiah** is one of the major themes of the book of **Hebrews**, and the writer uses **Isra'el** as the main illustration (**Hebrews 3-4**).²⁶⁵