Title: Analysis of the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:1-10) and its impact on the Sinai covenant in the Pentateuchal text

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the golden calf incident in the Pentateuch and to analyze its impact on the covenant relationship between God and His people. The method chosen for this study is to compare Exod 19-24 with chap. 34 and with other related passages in the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In the process of comparison special attention has been paid to some characteristics of the covenant such as promises, obligations, covenant formula, revelation, and ritual. As an addition to the comparative analysis, this study utilizes a literary approach in the sense of a close reading of the biblical text by concentrating on rhetorical features, syntax, structure, and context.

In the result of this study the following conclusions have been made: The golden calf incident is portrayed in the Pentateuch as a paradigmatic sin and as a serious threat to the covenant. By making the molten image and worshiping it, the Israelites failed to withstand in their relationship with God; thus, the covenant was completely broken from their side.

This study shows that the covenant was not completely restored during the events described in Exod 34, as most scholars assert. God’s promise given in Exod 34:10 marked only the beginning of the restoration process which ended when the rituals of Lev 8-9 were performed.
This study also demonstrates that the golden calf incident greatly affected the relationship between God and His people. Before this incident the Israelite society was described as a community of holy people where every member was promised a priestly status. However, after the incident Israel is presented as a stratified society where priestly functions are restricted to a small group of people and people’s holiness depends upon their status. Nevertheless, through the keeping of the oath of Nazirite everybody in Israel society could for a short time enjoy the style of living which in many aspects resembles that of the High Priest. For this reason, the promise of becoming a kingdom of priests and holy nation can be fulfilled for everybody in Israel.

Another aspect of the Divine-human relationship that was changed is the model of revelation. The book of Deuteronomy introduces a new form of communication between God and the people—through the ministry of prophets which should substitute the direct public manifestation of God’s glory.