

Deuteronomy

Lesson #8

Remember the Lord, Your God

(9: 1 – 11: 32)

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Review

As we continued the introductory section of Moses' 2nd Discourse (Deuteronomy 6-11), Lesson #7 reinforced the Shema (6: 4-9), with God imploring the Israelites to love him with their whole heart, whole being and whole strength, with an absolute, all-consuming and singular devotion.

Whereas the concern in Lesson #6 reflected Israel's fear that the people of Canaan would be too strong for them to defeat, their cities too powerful to overthrow; in Lesson #7 the concern reflected God's fear that once settled in the land and enjoying its benefits, Israel would forget God and attribute their success to their own efforts.

To counter God's fear he reminded the Israelites how he had "tested" them in the wilderness, a "testing" aimed at revealing God's genuine love for his people, while probing the people's motives for loving God.

Preview

In Lesson #8 we continue our introduction to Moses' 2nd Discourse, the main body of which contains a vast collection of laws, ordinances and statutes, spanning chapters 12-26.

In Lesson #8 we continue developing the theme of obedience to God, an obedience rooted not in a system of rewards and punishments, but in a profound love of God, a love that returns in full measure God's extravagant, magnanimous and passionate love for Israel.



The Israelites stand poised on the plains of Moab, looking west across the Jordan River toward Jericho, only a few miles away. It is a massive, fortified city, and beyond it lie more cities, stronger and greater than it.

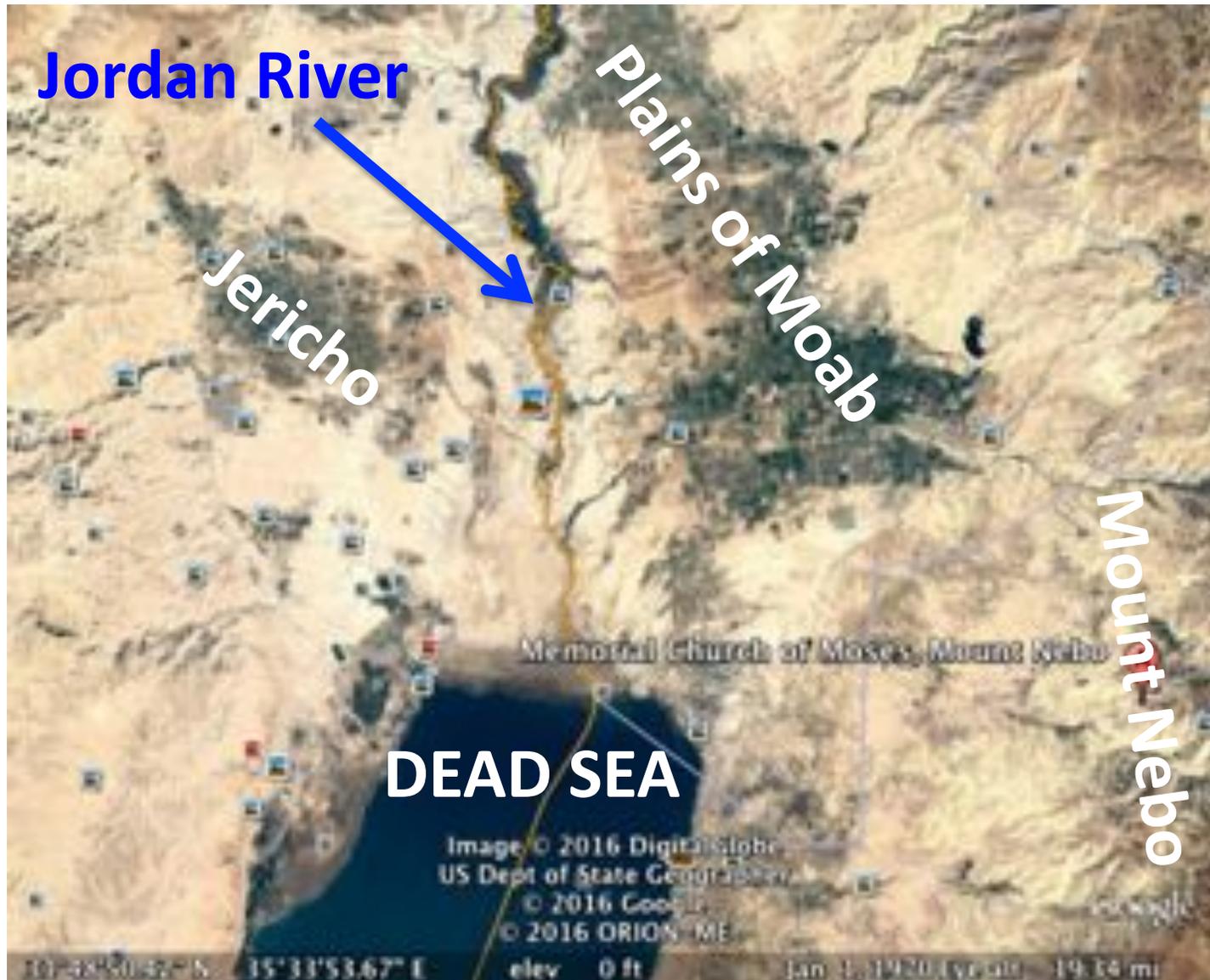
Although the Israelites had decisive victories over Og king of Bashan and Sihon king of the Amorites, and although they had defeated the Moabites and Midianites handily, those enemies were insignificant compared to the enemies looming before them now.



Recall when the twelve scouts return to Moses after reconnoitering the land in Numbers 13, they reported that the land *“does indeed flow with milk and honey . . . however, the people who are living in the land are powerful and the towns are fortified and very large. Besides, we saw descendents of the Anakim there”* (13: 27-28).

“All the people we saw there are huge. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakim are from the Nephilim); in our own eyes we seemed like mere grasshoppers, and so we must have seemed to them” (13: 33).

The Nephilim were demigods, the spawn of fallen angels and human women, “the heroes of old” (Genesis 6: 4).



“Hear, O Israel! You are now about to cross the Jordan to enter in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than yourselves, having large cities fortified to the heavens, the Anakim, a people great and tall. You yourselves know of them and have heard it said of them, ‘Who can stand up against the Anakim?’ Know, then, today that it is the Lord your God, who will cross over before you as a consuming fire; he it is who will destroy them and subdue them before you, so that you can dispossess and remove them quickly, as the Lord promised you.”

(9: 1-3)

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**So, the Israelites need not fear:
God himself will lead the
invasion as the tip of the spear, a
“consuming fire” blazing
before them.**

**We’ve seen this “warrior”
God at the Red Sea during
the Exodus and again in
the theophany at Mt.
Sinai. This is the God king
David knew!**

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Michelangelo. *David* (marble), 1501-1504.
Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

Psalm 18

For the director.

*Of David, the servant of the Lord,
who sang to the Lord the words of this song,
when the Lord rescued him from the grasp of
all his enemies and from the hand of Sheol, he said:*

**I love you, Lord, my strength,
my rock, my fortress, my savior.
My rock is the rock where I take refuge,
my shield, my mighty help, my stronghold.
The Lord is worthy of all praise;
when I call I am saved from my foes.**

**The waves of death rose about me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the traps of death confronted me.
In my anguish I called to the Lord,
I cried to my God for help.**



Psalm 18, cont.

From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came to his ears.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the mountains were shaken to their base;
they reeled at his terrible anger.

Smoke came forth from his nostrils
and scorching fire from his mouth:
coals were set ablaze by its heat.

He lowered the heavens and came down,
a black cloud under his feet.

He came enthroned on the cherubim;
he flew on the wings of the wind.

(18: 1-11)

“After the Lord, your God, has driven them out of your way, do not say in your heart, ‘It is because of my justice the Lord has brought me in to possess this land, and because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord is dispossessing them before me.’ No, it is not because of your justice or the integrity of your heart that you are going in to take possession of their land; but it is because of their wickedness that the Lord, your God, is dispossessing these nations before you and in order to fulfill the promise he made on oath to you ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Know this, therefore: it is not because of your justice that the Lord, your God, is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

(9: 4-6)

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This passage raises some really interesting questions. Why would God do this for Israel?

- It is not because of their “justice.” The Hebrew word translated “justice” is *tsědaqah* [tsed-ah-kah’], more often translated “righteousness.” That is, God has not chosen Israel because of their righteous actions or lofty behavior (quite the contrary, as we’ve already seen!).
- Nor is it because of “the integrity of [their] heart.” Here, “integrity” is *yosher* [yo’-sher], doing what is morally right.



True, God says he is doing this—in part—because of the “wickedness” of the people living in the land: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (7: 1).

But there were certainly people equally wicked as they, and perhaps more so.

So, what is God’s *motive*?



That shouldn't be a mystery to us. God said plainly:

"It was because the Lord loved you and because of his fidelity to the oath he had sworn to your ancestors, that the Lord brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you . . ."

(7: 8)

No. The real mystery is why God loved Israel in the first place!

God complains repeatedly that Israel is a "stiff-necked people." The Hebrew word is *qasheh* [kah-sheh'], meaning "hard," "cruel," "churlish," "severe" and "obstinate."

As the British journalist, William Norman Ewer, once quipped:

"How odd of God to choose the Jews."



To which Leo Rosten, the American
Yiddish humorist, replied:

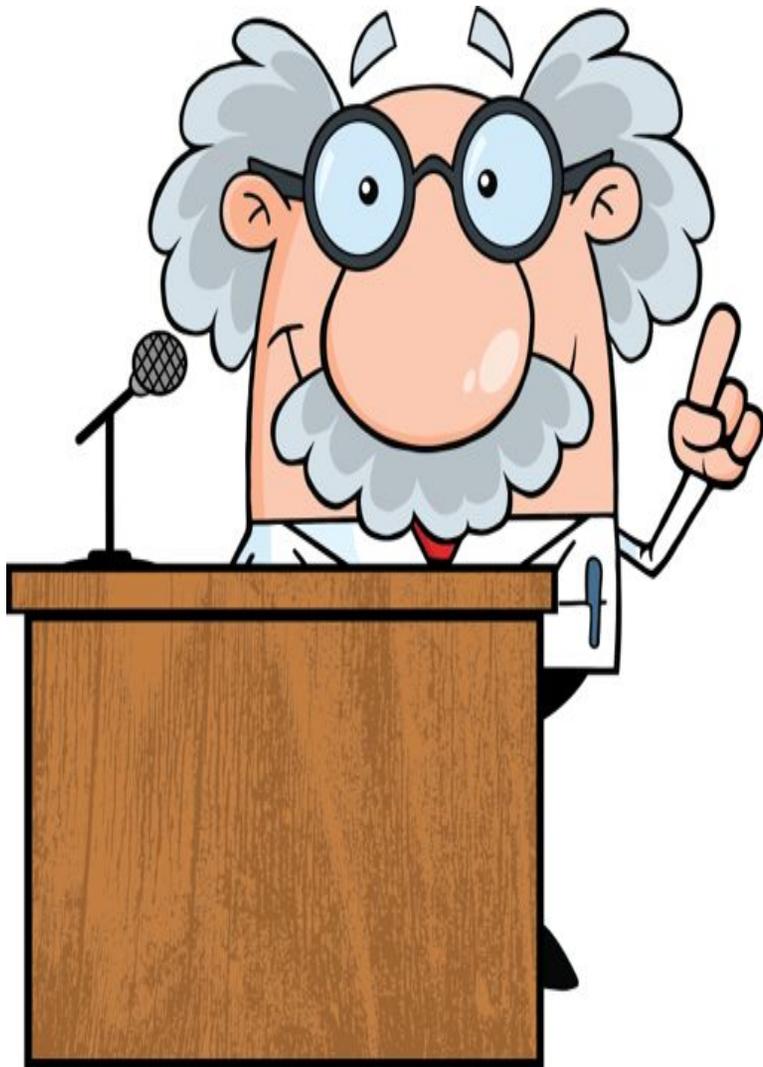
**“Not odd of God,
Goyim annoy ‘im.”**



It is rather peculiar, but the fact is that *God fell in love with Israel*. In the Hebrew Scriptures God “betroths” her:

*“I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you to me with justice
and with judgment,
with loyalty and compassion.
I will betroth you to me with fidelity,
and you shall know the Lord.”*

(Hosea 2: 21-22)

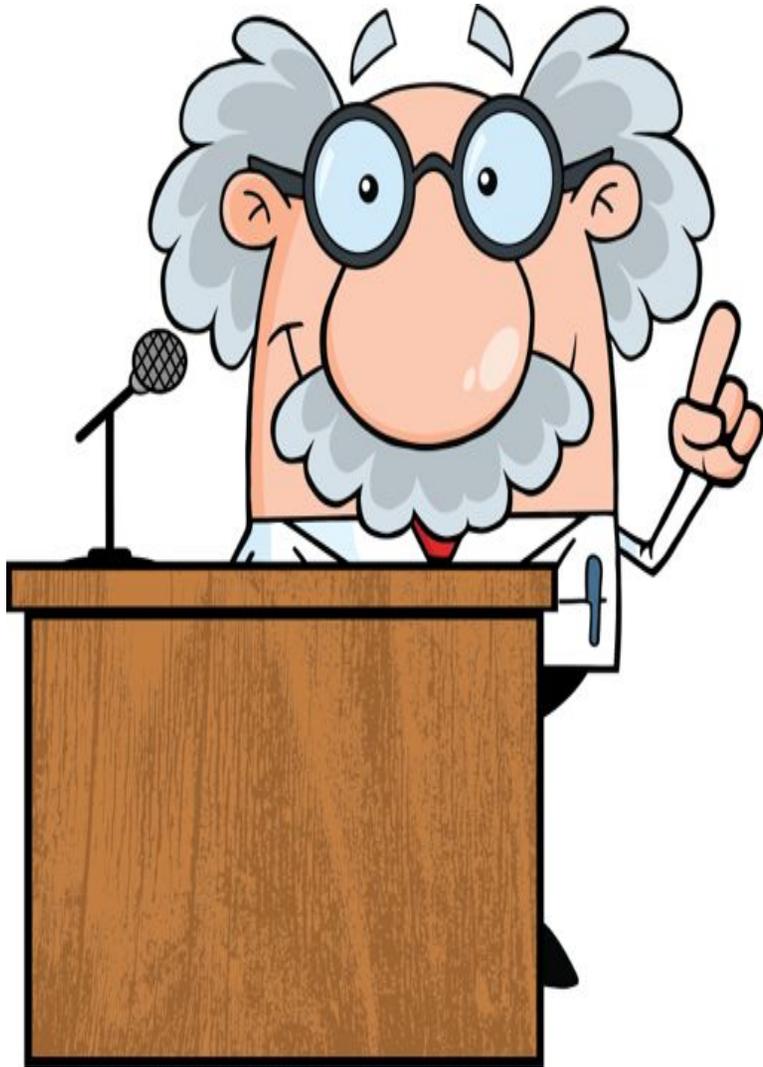


The *Song of Songs* sings of God's passionate love for Israel:

*"How beautiful you are, my friend,
how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves
behind your veil
Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming
down Mount Gilead . . .
You are beautiful in every way, my friend,
there is no flaw in you!
You have ravished my heart,
my sister, my bride;
you have ravished my heart
with one glance of your eyes."*¹

(4: 1, 7, 9)

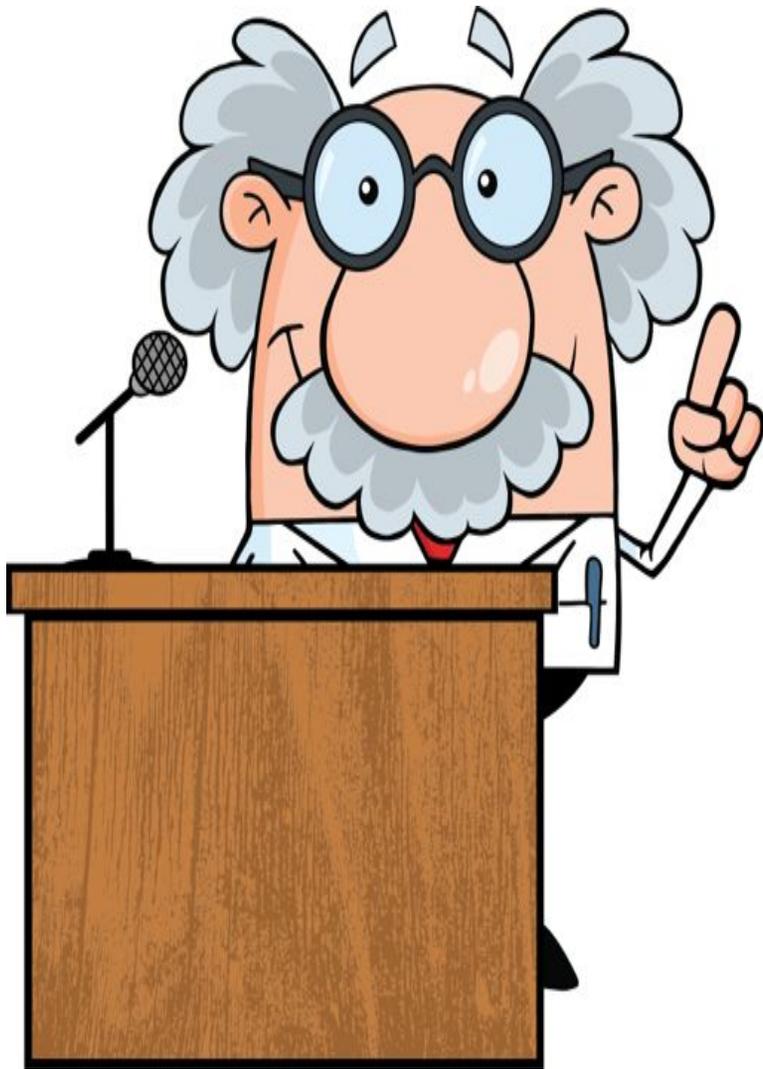
¹ An erotic love poem, the *Song of Songs* has traditionally been read by Jews as an allegory of God's love for Israel, and by Christians as Christ's love for the Church.



And the *Song of Songs* sings of Israel's passionate love for God:

*"I am a flower of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.
Like a lily among thorns,
so is my friend among women.
Like an apple tree
among the trees of the woods,
so is my lover among men.
In his shadow I delight to sit,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banquet hall
and his glance at me signaled love.
Strengthen me with raisin cakes,
refresh me with apples,
for I am sick with love."*

(2: 1-5)



But like many passionate relationships, it is a tumultuous, wildly troubled one, with Israel betraying God, her husband, over and over again. In Ezekiel 16 God rails at Israel:

“On the day you were born your navel cord was not cut; you were not washed with water or anointed . . . no eye looked on you with pity or compassion to do any of these things for you. Rather, on the day you were born you were left out in the field, rejected.

Then I passed by and saw you struggling in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I helped you grow up like a field plant, so that you grew, maturing into a woman . . . I passed by you again and saw that you were now old enough for love. So I spread the corner of my cloak over you . . . I swore an oath to you and entered into covenant with you . . . and you became mine . . .



“I clothed you with an embroidered gown, put leather sandals on your feet; I gave you a fine linen sash and silk robes to wear. I adorned you with jewelry . . . you were very, very beautiful, fit for royalty. You were renowned among the nations for your beauty, perfected by the splendor I showered on you . . .

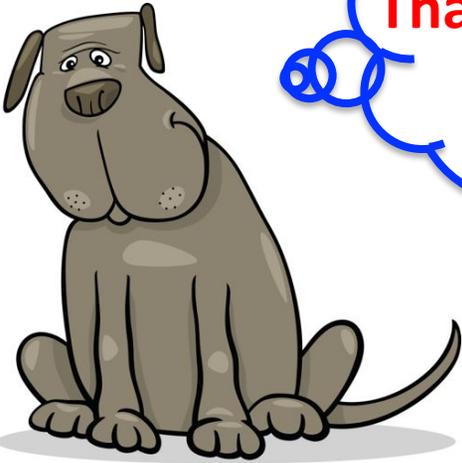
But you trusted in your own beauty and used your renown to serve as a prostitute. You poured out your prostitution on every passerby . . . you took some of your garments and made for yourself gaudy high places, where you served as a prostitute . . . the sons and daughters you bore for me you took and offered as sacrifices . . . was it not enough that you became a prostitute? You slaughtered and immolated my children . . . you degraded your beauty by spreading your legs for every passerby . . . you served as a prostitute with the Egyptians, your big-membered neighbors . . .”

(Ezekiel 16: 1-22)

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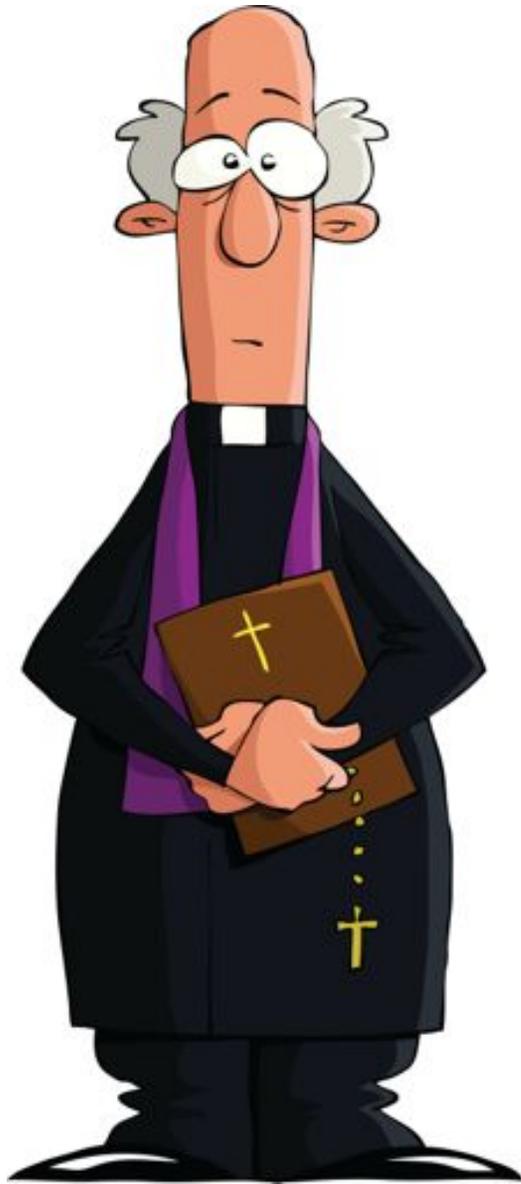


Wow! That's very graphic! Israel utterly betrays God, not once, not twice, but over and over again in the most degrading ways. God demonstrates his pain when he says to the prophet Hosea, *"Go, get for yourself a woman of prostitution and children of prostitution, for the land prostitutes itself turning away from the Lord"* (1: 2).



**Poor Hosea.
That's a lousy job to
have!**

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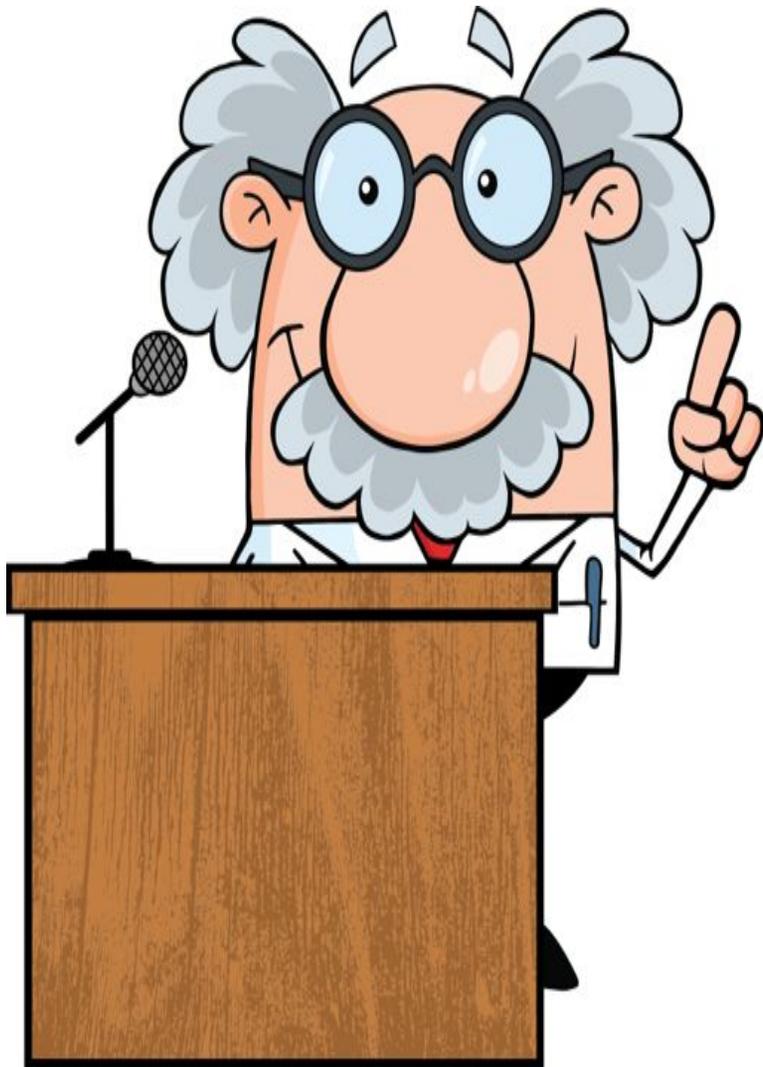


God's passionate love for Israel goes far beyond any rational explanation of "election," in a theological sense. As Proverbs suggests, there's no accounting for such love:

***"Three things are too wonderful for me, yes, four I cannot understand:
the way of an eagle in the sky;
the way of a serpent upon a rock;
the way of a ship on the high seas; and
the way of a man with a woman."***

(Proverbs 30: 18-19)





Understanding God’s love for Israel goes a long way toward understanding both God’s fighting for her, as well as his fears of abandonment by her and his subsequent anger.

After redeeming Israel from captivity in Egypt; after the Exodus journey to Mt. Sinai; after reaffirming the covenant; after providing the Law, writ by his own finger on tablets of stone; after giving the blueprints for the Tabernacle—the Israelites abandon God and turn to worshipping a golden calf!

And that’s where Deuteronomy 9 now turns:

“Remember and do not forget how you angered the Lord, your God, in the wilderness. From the day you left the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious toward the Lord. At Horeb you so provoked the Lord that he was angry enough to destroy you, when I had gone up the mountain to receive the stone tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you When I had come down again from the blazing, fiery mountain, with the two tablets of the covenant in both my hands, I saw how you had sinned against the Lord, your God, by making for yourselves a molten calf

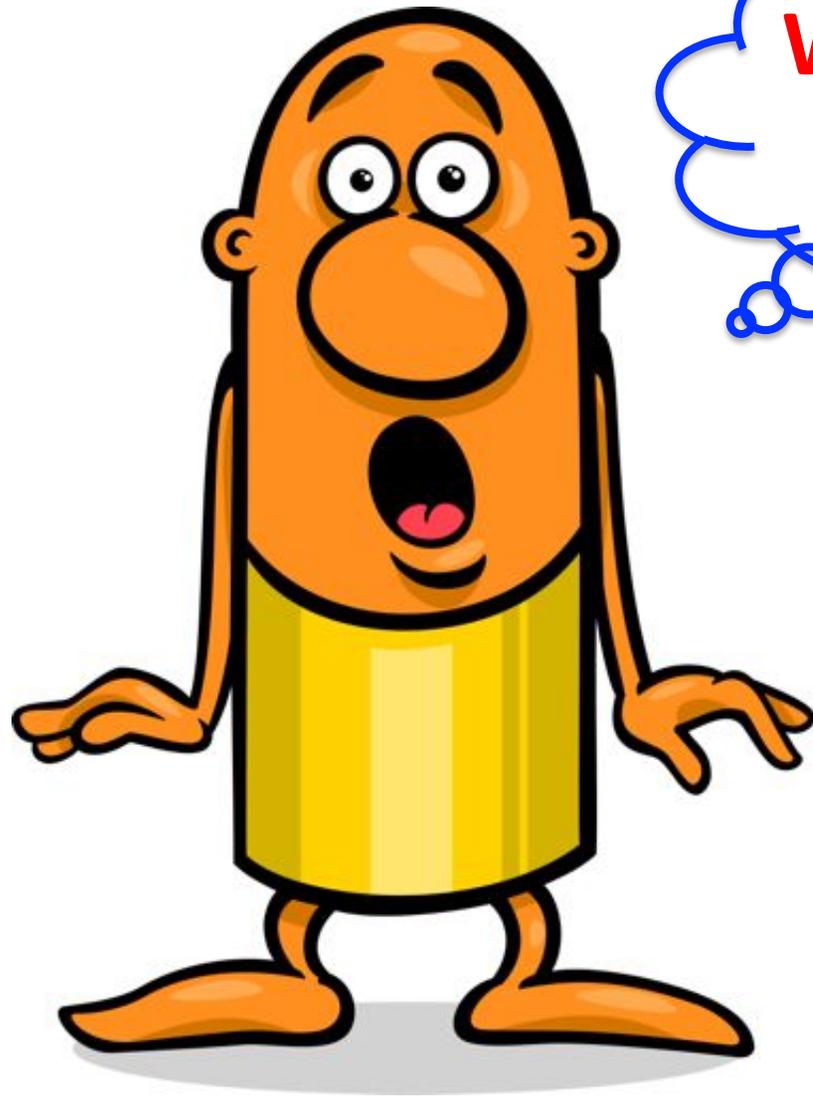


Recall the story:

“When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for that man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him. Aaron replied, ‘Take off the golden earrings that your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me. So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He received their offering, and fashioning it with a tool made a molten calf. Then they cried out, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’

(Exodus 32: 1-4)

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**Why would they
do that?**



When Moses climbed Mt. Sinai and disappeared into the smoke and the fire, 40 days passed without a word. To the Israelites down below—including Aaron, Moses' brother—both Moses and this God who led them out of Egypt had apparently abandoned them in the vast and dreadful wilderness, leaving them as food for the jackals and birds.



If they are to survive, the Israelites need a strong and compassionate god to get them out of this mess!

So they turn to one of the strongest and most compassionate gods in the Egyptian pantheon, a god they know intimately from their four hundred-year stay in Egypt: Hathor.

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Hathor had been worshipped since the Old Kingdom, 2686-2181 B.C., long before Abraham, the Israelites or Moses arrived in Egypt. The daughter of Ra, the sun god, and the wife of Horus, Hathor appears in two primary iconographic forms: 1) as a woman and 2) as a cow.



Ptolomy IV (right) presenting himself to Hathor (center) and her sister, Isis (left) at Temple of Isis, Philae, Egypt.

Photography by And Maria Vargas

As a woman, Hathor's iconography portrays her wearing the headdress of a sun disk and a cow's horns.

She is often referred to as "the golden one" and "she of the beautiful hair." The Greeks will later associate Hathor with the goddess of love, Aphrodite.

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Relief from wall of Deir el-Bahri shows Hathor in bovine form as the nurturing mother goddess.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

As a cow, Hathor represents motherhood. Here Hathor suckles Hatshepsut (lower right) as the god Amon (lower left) looks on.

In our dating system Hatshepsut is the princess who fishes Moses out of the Nile, becomes his adoptive mother and later becomes queen of Egypt herself.

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Giza Plateau, Egypt.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Pyramid of Menkaure, Giza Plateau, Cairo.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas



Menkaure, Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom's 4th dynasty, c. 2530 B.C.

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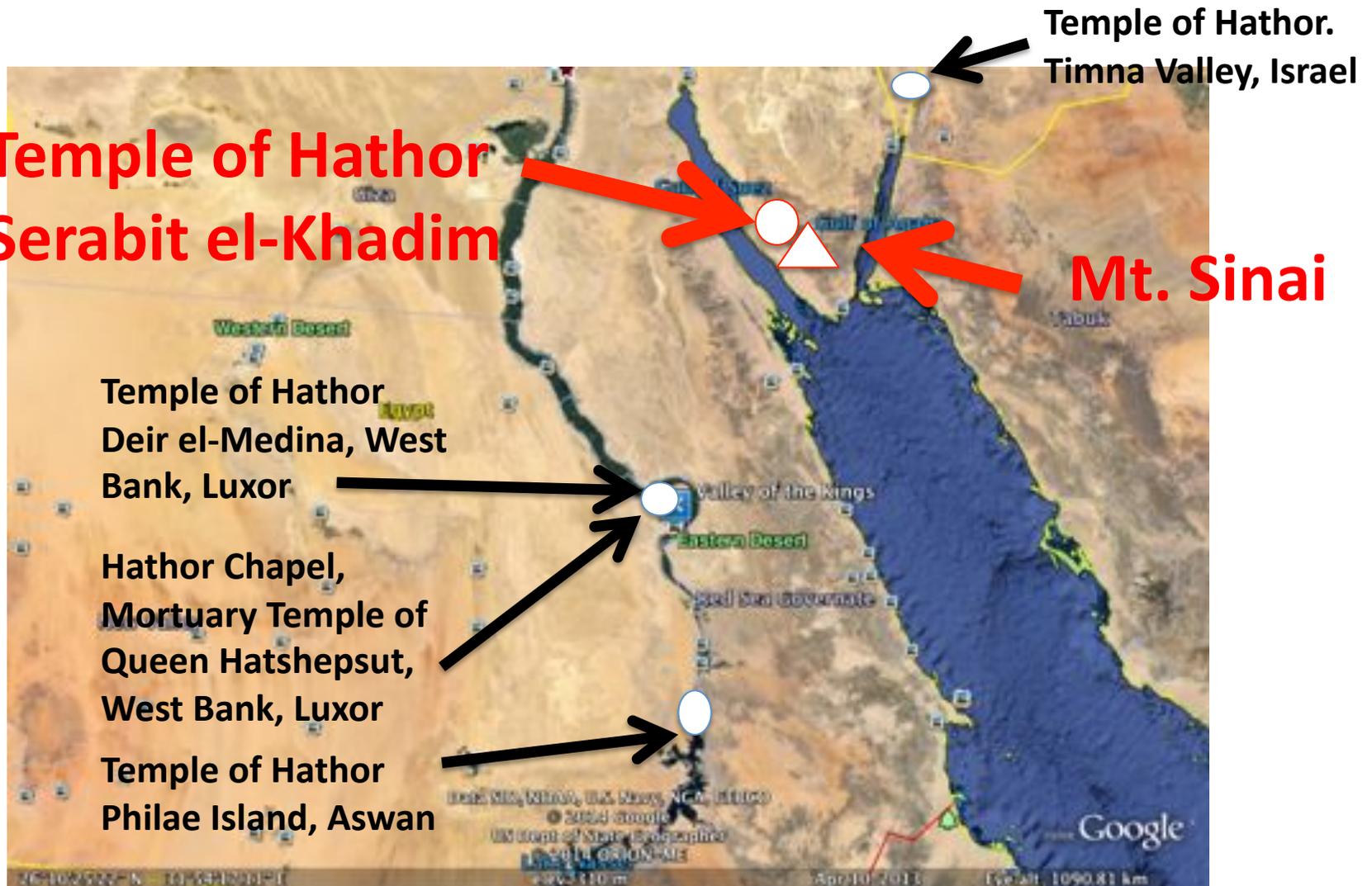


This sculpted triad shows Menkaure flanked by two women, Hathor on the left, who is holding Menkaure's hand affectionately, and Cynopolis, the 17th nome of Upper Egypt, on the right. The inscription on the base reads: "King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Menkaure, beloved of Hathor." Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Temple of Hathor Serabit el-Khadim





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Temple of Hathor, Serabit el-Khadim, Sinai, Egypt.

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Natural rock formation at Wadi el-Dir, a short distance from Mt. Sinai.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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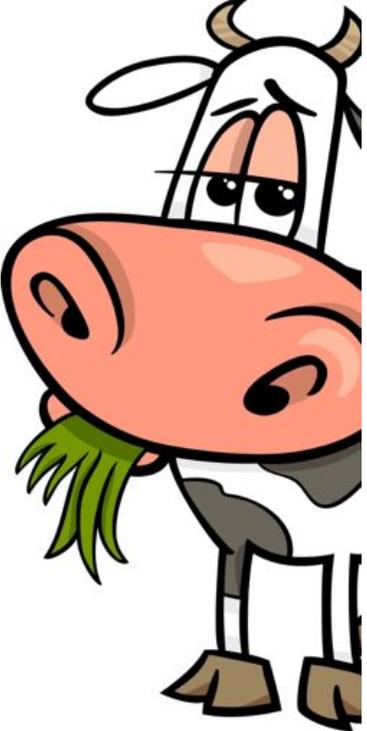
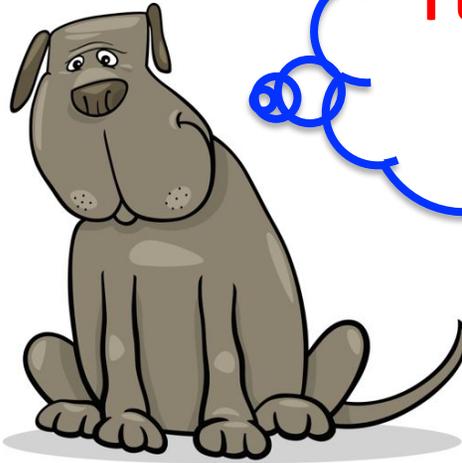
Hathor, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

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Herrad von Landsberg, “The Golden Calf,” *Hortus Deliciarum* (illuminated manuscript), c. 1180.

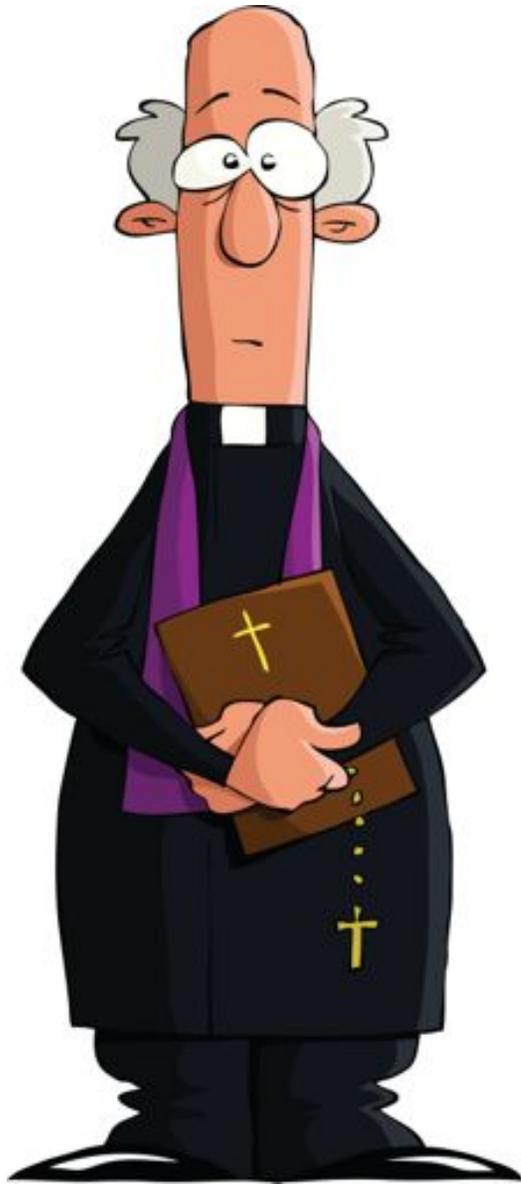
[The *Hortus Deliciarum* was an illuminated encyclopedia compiled by the nun and abbess, Herrad of Landsberg at the Hohenburg Abbey in Alsace, France. It is the first encyclopedia compiled by a woman. The manuscript was destroyed in 1870 when the municipal library that housed it was bombed during the siege of Strausbourg. Fortunately, many of the illustrations survive thanks to Christian Moritz Engelhardt, who copied them in 1818.]



It's no wonder, then, that the Israelites turn to the "golden calf"—the goddess, Hathor—for they know her. It's important to understand that the Israelites are not worshiping the image itself; rather, the image is a symbolic representation of Hathor, an icon of the goddess.

I understand that!

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But worshiping Hathor misses the point, entirely!

God had produced abundant evidence of his power, might and sincerity in bringing the Israelites out of 400 years of Egyptian slavery; in bringing judgment on all the gods of Egypt; and on entering into a covenant relationship with the people, all of whom agreed to the terms of the covenant.

God asked the people to trust him—and they didn't.

As Moses (and God) fear, this will become a pattern.



In Deuteronomy Moses recounts each betrayal:

“At Taberah, at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah likewise, you enraged the Lord. And when the Lord sent you up from Kadesh-barnea saying, Go up and take possession of the land I have given you, you rebelled against this command of the Lord, your God, and would not believe him or listen to his voice. You have been rebels against the Lord from the day I first knew you.”

(9: 22-24)

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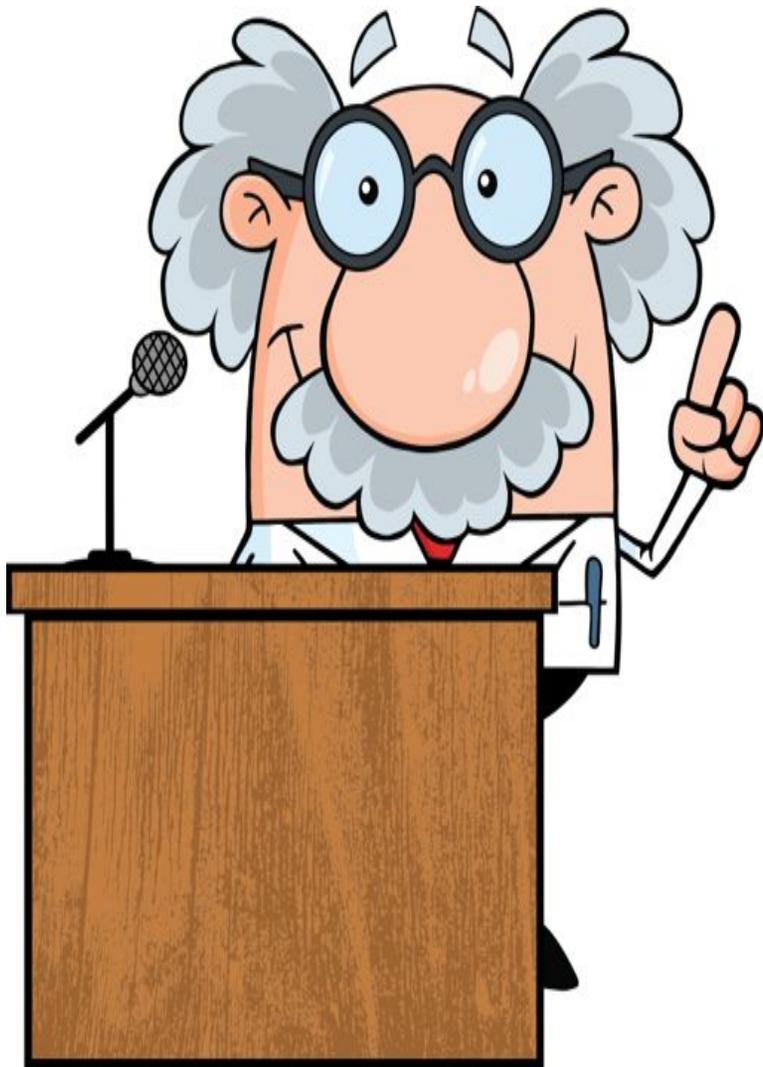


- **Before** the “golden calf” incident, Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights with God on the mountain, eating no food and drinking no water (9: 9).

- **After** the “golden calf” incident Moses spent another 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain, interceding for the Israelites, for the Lord had threatened to destroy them (9: 25).

- And after the Israelites set out from Mt. Sinai, Moses spent yet another 40 days and 40 nights continuing to intercede for the Israelites (10: 10).

Without Moses, the Israelites would have been toast!



Because of the Israelites' pernicious proclivity to abandon God at the drop of a hat, Deuteronomy has gone to great lengths to establish why God has entered into a covenant with Israel to begin with:

1. God loves them, with an extravagant, magnanimous and profound spousal love; and
2. God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he intends to keep it.

Love is God's motive for his relationship with Israel, and he desires that love to be the motive for their relationship with him.

“Now, therefore, Israel, what does the Lord, your God, ask of you but to fear the Lord, your God, to follow in all his ways, to love and serve the Lord, your God, with your whole heart and with your whole being, to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord that I am commanding you today for your own well-being? Look, the heavens, even the highest heavens, belong to the Lord, your God, as well as the earth and everything on it. Yet only on your ancestors did the Lord set his heart to love them. He chose you, their descendants, from all the peoples, as it is today . . . Recall today that it was not your children who have neither known nor seen the discipline of the Lord, your God . . . but it was you who saw with your own eyes all these great deeds that the Lord has done.”

(10: 12 - 11: 7)

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Deuteronomy then closes the introduction to Moses 2nd Discourse by reiterating the “Shema,” Israel’s foundational statement of faith, its credo, and the jewel in the crown of Deuteronomy:

“Therefore, take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them on your arm as a sign, and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Teach them to your children, speaking of them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up, and write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates, so that, as long as the heavens are above the earth, you and your children may live on in the land which the Lord swore to your ancestors he would give them.”

(11: 18-21)

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. **God will lead the attack on the land of Canaan, ensuring victory for the Israelites. Where else in Scripture is God portrayed as a warrior?**
2. **If Israel is totally insignificant as a people in God's eyes, why did he choose them to be his own?**
3. **Why do the Israelites constantly turn away from God, as they famously did at Mt. Sinai while Moses was on the mountain receiving the tablets of the "Ten Commandments"?**
4. **How do you explain God being so "love struck" over Israel?**
5. **Where does Israel stand today in God's eyes?**

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