



### ***The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership***

*<sup>1</sup>Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."*

*<sup>2</sup>Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."*

*<sup>3</sup>Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."*

*<sup>5</sup>Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." <sup>6</sup>So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.— Exodus 32:1–6*

The short time it took the Israelites to go from following the One True God to a golden calf is almost as puzzling to many of us as the multiple prongs of transition which we have witnessed take hold in the mainstream Church in just the past 30 or 40 years. Like the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, who witnessed and experienced an authentic movement of God, many of us older folk came out of an authentic revival from the late 60s and 70s popularly known as the Jesus Movement. And in similar fashion, some of us wonder how it is possible for so many "golden calves" to have been introduced into mainstream Evangelicism in the meantime.

There is no shortage of false replacements to have taken hold from the so-called Emergent Church, the signs and wonders movement, the church growth movement, various ecumenical movements and even the strangest of hybrids such as those calling themselves "New Calvinists" in this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Reformation, to name but a prominent few. But as the preacher told us, "There is nothing new under the sun",

*"The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership", Page 1 of 9*

and in reality what they all share in common harkens back to the original account of the golden calf: a corrupt leadership leads the willing while calling their false practices and teachings by the same terms and expressions as the authentic. They use God's name, they use His things, they reassign the meaning of His Word. They don't outright replace as much as they simply counterfeit the authentic.

To be sure, the account of the golden calf begins with the people. False teachers and false prophets cannot exist without a market. The Israelites went to Aaron and actually asked for a replacement, but in the character of all false teachers to follow throughout the whole of history even to the present, Aaron doesn't make a stand for the truth, but gives them what they want. And, of course, a consistent parallel is that the willfully deceived give up their gold in the process. (Funny how money always and ultimately enters into it.)

There is a short list of false personalities in our time which, because of their own personal testimony, I do not believe have ever been nor currently are actually born again. But this seems to be the exception more than the rule. Most seem to be like Aaron, someone who started out right who is authentically called by God and truly used by Him, but at some point goes egregiously astray. We do not have a scientific survey to confirm it, but at least anecdotally a reasonable case can be made that it most often has to do with when they go from strict adherence to God's will and Word in the course of serving a congregation or fellowship to pleasing the wants and desires of an audience. It is not unprecedented for a faithful pastor or teacher to be ousted from their ministry in the course of taking a stance against an unresponsive group seeking an alternative to the spiritually authentic and scripturally approved, but unfortunately there seem to be a greater number of cases which parrot Aaron's example.

But while there is certainly due blame which cannot be mitigated on the people's side of the equation, neither can we diminish Aaron's response and subsequent approach. He didn't say, "OK, we're all tired of this so let's all leave it completely behind and go create our own thing the way we see it". He did not lead them into creating something new and distinct as part of an exit plan to completely leave the authentic completely behind. No, as the forerunner of all false teachers to come, he took all the things associated with the right way of following God, even the names, terms and practices, and employed them in the counterfeit. They did not attempt to create a separate alternative but rather engaged in a corruption so as to make their counterfeit appear and feel as real as possible.

*"The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership", Page 2 of 9*

We see this when Aaron declares, *“This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”* He is attempting to retain the heritage and history of the authentic in the counterfeit. And then when he builds an altar and proclaims a celebration, legitimate things likewise corrupted for this alternate, he follows it up by employing authentic practices to make the replacement look and feel rooted in the original: *“they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings”*. They did not invent new practices, but took the God-given originals and incorporated them to make it feel like the authentic. But in actual practice their rebellion from the Word and ways of God are ultimately revealed in their behavior, *“and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play”*. They no longer worship, serve, nor act like God’s people.

This same pattern will be repeatedly documented in the cycle of spiritual ups and downs in the book of Judges, and it will become even more acute in the repeated behavior recorded in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles leading up to the Babylonian Captivity. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel splits to become its own separate nation, they will duplicate the temple, the priesthood, and all of the associated practices in two alternate locations of the cities of Dan and Bethel, calling everything by the same definitions of the authentic, even though they are actually worshipping various false gods. They don’t leave Judaism to join someone else’s religion or create an entirely new one, but embrace it by calling it by the same names and terms to make it appear as if they are still following the original. In the ultimate example of irony, they will even set up golden calves in each location. Again, there is nothing ever truly new under the sun. It just gets doubly worse.

But in a parallel to our own times, it will escalate to an almost complete level of corruption in the days of Ezekiel in the shadow of the complete destruction not just of the remaining state of Judah, but the corrupt and false system leadership perpetuated at the behest of the majority who desired it. God shows Ezekiel the dual effects of increasing unfaithfulness on the part of both the people and leadership.

*<sup>1</sup>It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. <sup>2</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. <sup>3</sup>He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth*

*“The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership”, Page 3 of 9*

*and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. <sup>4</sup>And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. <sup>5</sup>Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north."*

*So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.*

*<sup>6</sup>And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations." – Ezekiel 8:1-6*

God takes Ezekiel on a journey from what is visibly wrong within everyone's view, to eventually showing the increasing corruption in the innermost parts which were not outwardly obvious. Anyone coming close to the Temple could easily see this idol standing where it had no business being, something corrupted leadership was providing to satiate the appetite of the corrupted followers. Even at this present hour false teachers love to intone that all paths lead to God or that all religions worship the same God in their own way, but note that God does not simply call this an "abomination", but that it has the effect of driving Him away, "so that I would be far from My sanctuary". The true and authentic God, the true and authentic Son, the true and authentic Holy Spirit will never be found side-by-side with such things. But even non-believers passing by can see this is not a place dedicated to the One True God, just as today non-believers easily observe so many churches obviously dedicated to another Jesus rather than the singularly authentic One.

*<sup>7</sup>Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. <sup>8</sup>He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall."*

*So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.*

*<sup>9</sup>And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here."*

*<sup>10</sup>So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. <sup>11</sup>Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.*

*"The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership", Page 4 of 9*

*<sup>12</sup>Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'"*

*<sup>13</sup>And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing." – Ezekiel 8:7-13*

Ezekiel goes inside so that he can see what is not readily visible from outside passersby. On the inside one could see what was truly being practiced and implemented, but in particular how leadership was using the things of God—the incense in the course of worship, for the pursuit of their false practices to the benefit of their false gods. More pointedly, it was only priests who were allowed to burn incense to God in the Temple, but here we see the elders in a dramatic misuse of the things and offices of God.

Their justification is one revisited again and again throughout history, that the absence of God requires a suitable substitute. Never mind that the previously mentioned visible abomination on display to every passerby is the source for God's self-evacuation from His sanctuary; their adeptness at supplying a substitute for the authentic enables what seems like a plausible explanation for their alternative practices and beliefs. Notice that the focus on the inside reveals that leadership is not merely giving the people what they want, but have become so spiritually corrupted personally that neither are they any longer practicing the authentic.

*<sup>14</sup>Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. <sup>15</sup>He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these." –Ezekiel 8:14-15*

The result of the corruption of worship by the elders is reflected in a like corruption among the people in their worship of Tammuz, a Babylonian fertility god whose worship practices involved ritual prostitution. This is a dramatic picture of their spiritual state depicting them not as merely separated from God, but actively engaged in spiritual adultery in what amounts to a commitment to another god. This is not describing a temporary backslidden state of affairs, but a permanent reassignment of one's worship, service and affection.

*<sup>16</sup>Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.*

*<sup>17</sup>He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. <sup>18</sup>Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them." — Ezekiel 8:16-18*

What is particularly noteworthy is that the worshipers are now facing away from the Holy of Holies—the very seat and presence of God, and instead facing in the complete, opposite direction. And in a demonstration of how such corruption ultimately results in turning 180° away from the authentic, like many today they have turned their backs on the Son to instead worship the sun.

Many commentators regard the reference to *"putting the twig to the nose"* as either a literal act of worship demanded of sun worshipers, or a Hebrew idiom indicating that by their actions they have aroused God's anger to the level of their own destruction. In either case, the consequences of false worship are the same. In the following chapter 9 of Ezekiel, God will detail how he will mark the very few remaining faithful, *"men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst"*, (Eze. 9:4) followed by the complete destruction of the unfaithful. God has repeatedly provided new starts with a faithful remnant in the course of purging the unfaithful majority. In the End Times, however, we know there will be a final rescue of the faithful to the detriment of the apostatized left behind.

None of the false movements of our time are simply a "difference of opinion" or an "alternative way to worship". Proponents of such would love for you to embrace that notion, although you will find they more often aggressively go after anyone who doesn't embrace their particular apostasy. They all precisely replay the character of Aaron and the golden calf, the cyclical patterns of Israel's time of the Judges, the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, and even more emphatically the last days leading into the Babylonian Captivity as here recorded in Ezekiel. In no small prophetic parallel, we are literally living in the last days leading up to the horrific parallel of "Babylon the Great". And like all these

examples, the biggest problem for God's faithful comes from inside its walls where a corrupt leadership is all too willing to give an apostatized majority what they want.

There is an interesting parallel as well in Christ's First Coming where the corruption of leadership is concerned.

*<sup>1</sup>Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."*

*<sup>3</sup>When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:*

*<sup>6</sup>'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,  
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;  
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER  
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" — Matthew 2:1–6*

Note that the religious authorities knew the plain truth of Scripture even though neither they nor the people acted appropriately upon it. They gave the right answer from Scripture as to where the Messiah was to come from even if they did not believe it enough themselves to join with the Magi to seek and worship Him. But in the span of just 30 or so years, when Jesus engaged in His 3-1/2 year public ministry, they had corrupted their teachings concerning the Messiah to such a degree that very few were left who still retained even this basic knowledge of the plain truth of Scripture. A substitute idea had taken hold.

*<sup>27</sup>"However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from." — John 7:27*

We have witnessed the exact, same phenomenon in our own time. In just the past 30 years, Christian leaders, professors and expositors have come to embrace doctrine and positions completely opposite and even contradictory from that which they clung to in the recent past. In fact, it is not a major undertaking to document that all of the false movements and distortion of doctrine which are now being accepted within the mainstream Church and even calling themselves "Evangelical" were all soundly rejected by our fathers and grandfathers just a generation ago. The golden calf scenario which has

*"The Cyclical Corruption of Leadership", Page 7 of 9*

frequently replayed itself over and over in history is even more powerfully present than ever.

*<sup>19</sup>It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup>He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it...*

*<sup>25</sup>Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—<sup>26</sup>then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.*

*<sup>27</sup>He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.'" <sup>28</sup>So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.*

*<sup>29</sup>Then Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today." — Exodus 32:19–20, 25–29*

I would like to say there will be a happy ending, that we can all just “love” each other back into the fold, forget the past, and move on with a corporate clean slate. That is not what happened with the first golden calf, it is not what happened in either the time of the Judges nor the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah leading into the Babylonian Captivity, and is not the prophetic revelation of God’s Word for this time foreshadowing the final Babylon to come.

The only solution to unfaithfulness is faithfulness; the only solution for disobedience is obedience; the only solution to sin is sincere repentance and a return to the Word. There is no substitute “program” which can be implemented.

But at a time when we can be so easily overwhelmed by what is by definition the most negative of situations, there are examples of hope which still keep cropping up. In one of the latest, a brother in the Lord named Cotti Hinn, a nephew of the infamous Benny Hinn, has demonstrated a repeated behavior by which I’ve observed many others coming out from these false movements. Although at one time in the employ of his uncle, Cotti



testifies that he began studying God’s Word and came to realize not just the biblical contradictions of Benny Hinn’s so-called “ministry”, but the unscriptural behavior of friends, family and co-workers involved. By returning to the Word, an authentic Holy Spirit-filled believer could not continue in such corruption and had to come out. His subsequent writings on this have been fascinating in themselves, but his example for others is the most powerful of all. Every revival and spiritual return in history is always marked by a return to the blood—that is, repentance, and a return to the Word.

This is where our prayers and efforts need to be directed where those so wrongly committed are concerned, in seeking a return to the cross and the Word.

*<sup>20</sup>But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup>keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. <sup>22</sup>And have mercy on some, who are doubting; <sup>23</sup>save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. — Jude 20–23*

In Him,

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