

Psalm 106:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

Analysis

This verse interprets the golden calf's theological significance. 'Changed their glory' uses *muwr* (מָוֶר), meaning to exchange or substitute. 'Their glory' refers to Yahweh, Israel's glory and distinction among nations (Jeremiah 2:11). 'Into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass' emphasizes the absurdity—they exchanged the Creator for the image of a grass-eating animal. Paul echoes this in Romans 1:23: humanity 'changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.' The fundamental sin is exchange—trading the infinite for the finite, the Creator for creation. This reveals idolatry's essential foolishness.

Historical Context

The calf likely represented Apis, the Egyptian bull-god, or imitated Canaanite Baal worship. Having lived 400 years in Egypt, Israel was steeped in pagan imagery. The golden calf showed they hadn't mentally separated from Egypt's gods despite physical deliverance. Jeroboam later repeated this sin when he set up golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-30), demonstrating how patterns of idolatry recur across generations.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'exchange' God's glory for lesser things?
2. How does idolatry fundamentally involve exchanging the infinite for the finite?
3. What modern 'oxen' (created things) do people worship instead of the Creator?

Interlinear Text

אָכַל שׁוֹר בְּתָבֵן יְתֵה כְּבָזֵק מִתְּמַנֵּה אֶת יְהֹוָה
Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth
H4171 H853 H3519 H8403 H7794 H398

עַשְׁבָּה

grass
H6212

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 2:11 (Glory): Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

Psalms 89:17 (Glory): For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.

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