

The Golden Calf

(Exodus 19 - 32)

Introduction

Imagine being invited to visit a king in his palace. How would you act? Would you run into the throne room, laughing and talking? Would you ignore the king or call him by his first name? I'm sure you would act quietly and show great respect for a king. Now suppose you were invited to meet with the King of all kings, God Himself. How would you act? The people of Israel had that privilege. How do you suppose they behaved?

Opening Prayer

Father, You alone deserve our reverence and worship. Show us once again in a fresh new way this morning just how awesome and wonderful You are. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

You must not have any other god but me. (Exodus 20:3)

Lesson

During the past two lessons we learned the Ten Commandments.

God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel because he wanted them to be a model for everyone else in the world to follow. He said I want you to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God wanted the children of Israel to be spiritual leaders showing everyone else in all of humanity how to live according to God's way and how to properly serve and worship Him, the only true and living God of the universe.

He told them if you will obey the Ten Commandments, you will be my own special people. And the people promised to obey all of God's laws.

Exodus 19:8

And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded." So Moses brought the people's answer back to the LORD.

So Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai and told God that the people promised to obey His law.

Then, God told Moses to go back down the mountain and tell the people to prepare to meet with God.

Exodus 19:10

Then the LORD told Moses, "Go down and prepare the people for my arrival. Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing.

Why would there have to be such careful preparations before they could meet with God? It was because God is holy and His people must show Him loving respect.

We are not to approach God lightly, as if He were not important. He is the most important One in all the universe! Our great God is holy — He alone deserves our reverence and worship.

God spoke to the people and gave them the Ten Commandments audibly in an awesome display of His mighty power and the people trembled.

Exodus 19:16-18

On the morning of the third day, thunder roared and lightning flashed, and a dense cloud came down on the mountain. There was a long, loud blast from a ram's horn, and all the people trembled. Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently.

After God spoke to the people and gave them the Ten Commandments, God told Moses to remind the people not to forget the 2nd Commandment. Do you remember what that is? (Do not worship idols.)

Exodus 20:22-23

And the LORD said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: You saw for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven. Remember, you must not make any idols of silver or gold to rival me.

God was reminding and warning the people, "You heard me when I told you the Ten Commandments. You know that I am a living God, not one made of stone or wood! Remember, you must not make or worship dumb idols. Worship Me alone."

Exodus 24:12

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and commands so you can teach the people."

At this point, the people had only heard God speak the Ten Commandments. Now God wanted to write the Commandments down for them so they wouldn't forget them.

Exodus 24:18

Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

[Teacher, while you turn the pages of the Bible from Exodus 24 to 31, explain that...] God gave Moses a lot of information while he was up there, that's why it took 40 days to get all that God told him.

Exodus 31:18

When the LORD finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God.

Have you ever had to wait a long, long time for someone to come? The children of Israel grew tired of waiting for Moses to return from Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. "Come on," they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt."

Does Aaron remind the people of God's first two commands? (No!)

Exodus 32:2-4

So Aaron said, "Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me." All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, "O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

Wait a minute! Who brought the people out of slavery? Not a golden calf! It was the Lord! How could they forget God's amazing miracle of parting the Red Sea!?

Exodus 32:5-6

Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!" The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.

Wow! How quickly they forgot they had promised to obey all that God had commanded them! And, God saw what was going on, too...

Exodus 32:7-8

The LORD told Moses, "Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. How quickly they have turned away from the way I commanded them to live! They have melted down gold and made a calf, and they have bowed down and sacrificed to it. They are saying, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.'"

God was so mad that He wanted to wipe the children of Israel off the face of the earth and start over with Moses' descendants.

Exodus 32:9-10

Then the LORD said, "I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation."

But, Moses asked God for mercy.

Exodus 32:11-13

But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. "O LORD!" he said. "Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand? Why let the Egyptians say, 'Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth'? Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.'"

Moses reminds God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make the Israelites a great nation. But God hadn't forgotten His promise; He didn't bring disaster on the people.

Exodus 32:14

So the LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.

Then when Moses came down the mountain, he has a fit when he saw what had been going on while he was gone.

Exodus 32:19-20

When they came near the camp, Moses saw the calf and the dancing, and he burned with anger. He threw the stone tablets to the ground,

smashing them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made and burned it. Then he ground it into powder, threw it into the water, and forced the people to drink it.

Although Moses had pleaded to the Lord for mercy for the people, he was angry that they would even think of dishonoring God in such a sinful way. They seemed to have forgotten how holy God is and how He alone should be revered and worshiped.

Like the Israelites, many people today seem to have no respect or reverence for God. They dishonor Him by what they say and do. We must always remember that God is holy — He alone deserves our reverence and worship.

Even when you are outside of church you should be careful how you speak about God. Never use His name lightly or as a swear word. Your reverence for God shows others that you have a special relationship with Him.

The people of Israel had forgotten their special relationship with God and were behaving in a very sinful way by worshiping the golden calf. But, Moses went back up the Mountain and pleaded with God to forgive the people. And, God gave Moses another set of the commandments.

Closing Prayer

Father, we would never want to bring Your name dishonor. People know that we call ourselves Christian; help us to always reverence you in everything we think, or say, or do. We love you Lord and want our lives to speak to others of your love and mercy and grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. What are God's rules for life called? (The Ten Commandments.)
2. Why did God choose Israel to give His Ten Commandments to? (He wanted them to be spiritual leaders showing everyone else in the world how to live according to God's way and how to properly serve and worship Him.)
3. When Moses told the people God wanted to give them His rules for living, what did the people promise to do? (Obey all of God's laws.)
4. Why did the people have to wash their clothes to get ready to hear God tell them His commandments? (God is holy and the people needed to prepare themselves before coming into His presence.)
5. How did God display His mighty power when He told them His commandments? (Thundering, lightning flashes, sound of trumpets, mountain smoking.)
6. What did the people do when they saw God's display of His mighty power? (They trembled and stood afar off. Then they told Moses not to let God talk to them; they were afraid they'd die!)
7. How many days was Moses up on the mountain? (40)
8. What did the people do while Moses was gone? (They made a golden calf.)
9. Which commandments did they break by making the golden calf? (#1 and #2.)
10. What did God want to do to the people because of His anger? (He wanted to wipe them out and start over with Moses' descendants.)
11. What did Moses remind God of when He said He wanted to wipe out all the people? (His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.)
12. What did Moses do when he got back down the mountain? (He threw the 10 commandments down and broke the tablets of stone. Then he burned the golden calf and ground it into dust. Then he put the gold dust into the water and made the people drink it.)
13. Why is it important for us to show honor and respect for God? (He is holy and deserves our reverence.)
14. What does it show other people when we show our respect towards God? (That we have a special relationship with Him.)
15. How can you show honor and respect towards God? (By being careful how we speak His name. Never use His name lightly or as a swear word.)

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