

The Golden Calf

Message 7 of 8 in the series: "Exodus"

A. After leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, God brought them to Mt. Sinai where He made a covenant with them.

"Then Moses carefully wrote down all the Lord's instructions. Early the next morning Moses got up and built an altar at the foot of the mountain... Then he sent some of the young Israelite men to present burnt offerings and to sacrifice bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses drained half the blood from these animals into basins. The other half he splattered against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again, they all responded, '**We will do everything the Lord has commanded. We will obey.**' Then Moses took the blood from the basins and splattered it over the people, declaring, '**Look, this blood confirms the covenant the Lord has made with you in giving you these instructions.**'" Exodus 24:4a, 5-8 (NLT)

Blood covenant = a binding agreement between two parties. The blood of a sacrificed animal represented its life and showed the seriousness of the agreement. Violating the terms of the covenant meant death.

IMPORTANT! Jesus came to bring us a New Covenant because none of us are able to keep the terms of the old covenant God made with His people at Sinai. "The day is coming, says the Lord, when **I will make a new covenant** with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. **They did not remain faithful to my covenant**, so I turned my back on them, says the Lord. But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the Lord: **I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people**... And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins." Hebrews 8:8b-10,12 (NLT) (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Note: After the covenant was confirmed, God told Moses to come meet with Him on Mt. Sinai. Moses left his brother Aaron in charge while he was gone. "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.**' So, Moses and his assistant Joshua set out, and Moses climbed up the mountain of God. Moses told the elders, 'Stay here and wait for us until we come back. **Aaron and Hur are here with you. If anyone has a dispute while I am gone, consult with them.**' ... To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the Lord appeared at the summit like a consuming fire. Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. **He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.**" Exodus 24:12-14,17-18 (NLT)

B. When Moses didn't return for a long time, the Israelites got restless/impatient and pressured Aaron into making an idol.

"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.**' 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!**' 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.** Exodus 32:1-6 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Answered prayers, miracles, and displays of God's power DO NOT guarantee faith in God. "But **despite all the miraculous signs** Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him." John 12:37 (NLT)

WARNING! When God doesn't do things according to our expectations or timing, it's very tempting to reject His commands, give up on godly friends/leaders and redefine God so that we can live as we please. "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. **They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.** They will reject the truth and chase after myths." 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NLT)

C. The Lord was angry enough to destroy the people of Israel because of their rebellion, but He relented when Moses boldly and reverently interceded for them.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. **They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.** They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” **‘I have seen these people,’** the Lord said to Moses, **‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.** Then I will make you into a great nation.’ **But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God.** ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth”? **Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.** Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.” **Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.**” Exodus 32:7-14 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! It pleases God when we intercede for people in rebellion against Him. “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. **Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf** and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. **This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.**” 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NLT)

D. When Moses came down the mountain, the pagan revelry and idol worship stopped.

“Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, ‘There is the sound of war in the camp.’ Moses replied: ‘It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.’ **When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.** And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and **made the Israelites drink it.** He said to Aaron, **‘What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?’** ‘Do not be angry, my lord,’ Aaron answered. ‘You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, “Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” So I told them, “Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.” **Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!**” Exodus 32:15-24 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! People of faith are God pleasers NOT people pleasers. “Obviously, **I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God.** If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.” Galatians 1:10 (NLT)

“If the godly give in to the wicked, it’s like polluting a fountain or muddying a spring.” Proverbs 25:26 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions.

1. Read Exodus 24:4-8 & Leviticus 17:11. What’s the significance of a blood covenant? How does it make you feel to know that the New Covenant Jesus made between us and the Lord is also a blood covenant? (Hebrews 8:8-12, Luke 22:20)
2. Read Deuteronomy 9:7-21. Forty years after the golden calf incident, Moses retold the story to the next generation of Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. What lessons did Moses want them to learn from the sins of their parents? What lessons can we learn from the story of the golden calf? (John 12:37, 2 Timothy 2:1-4)
3. Read 1 Kings 12:26-30, 14:7-11. Incredibly, 500 years after Moses destroyed the golden calf at Mount Sinai, King Jeroboam set up two golden calves for the people of Israel to worship. Why would anyone commit this act of idolatry again? How did God respond?
4. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4. What can we learn from the following accounts of people in the Bible who interceded for others: Moses (Exodus 32:11-14,30-35); Abraham (Genesis 18:20-33); Stephen (Acts 7:54-60); Jesus (Luke 23:30). How often do we intercede for people living in rebellion against God?
5. What’s the difference between a God pleaser and a people pleaser? (Exodus 32:15-24, Galatians 1:10)

6. Discuss the following quotations:

“After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.” Luke 22:20 (NLT)

“The people made a calf at Mount Sinai; they bowed before an image made of gold. They traded their glorious God for a statue of a grass-eating bull... So he declared he would destroy them. But Moses, his chosen one, stepped between the LORD and the people. He begged him to turn from his anger and not destroy them.” Psalm 106:19-20, 23 (NLT)