

STORY

The Golden Calf - Exodus 24: 12-18; 31:18-32:35; 34:1-7, 28-33

TEACHER PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me to see how easy it is for things to become more important to me than You are. May I through the power of the Holy Spirit fear, love, and trust in You above all things. May the failings and unbelief of Your people Israel be a warning for me lest I also fall. Bless the word which I am about to bring to Jesus' lambs. Amen.

VOCABULARY

idolatry - the worship of a false (non-existent) god

golden calf - a false god worshiped by the Egyptians

rose up to play - a description of sexual immorality

OUTER AIM

The children of Israel commit the sin of idolatry

INNER AIM

Whatever is most important to us becomes our "god"

BACKGROUND

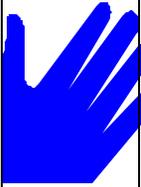
While these sacred transactions (the giving of the Law) were taking place on the mountain with Moses, a different scene was being played out in the camp of Israel. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for forty days and forty nights. Moses went up on the mountain to get detailed instruction about the worship life and ritual of God's covenant people.

The prolonged absence of Moses, who had been gone for over a month, awakened doubts and fears in the minds of the Children of Israel. The people feared the glory of Jehovah (Ex. 24:17). In their sinfulness, they desired a god that they could see and control. Note how the gods of men are physical in nature, i.e. able to be seen. The Israelites had been influenced by the Egyptians. The god Apis in the form of a calf represented the powers of nature. Their sin consisted in their not recognizing the presence of the unseen God. Their fears led them back to the unbelief of idolatry. We too make gods of whatever becomes most important in our lives. The modern idols of money, power, and instant gratification are just as terrible as the golden calf.

Aaron sought to compromise. He made the golden calf but proclaimed a "feast to Jehovah." Aaron gave in to the people and proved himself to be no leader of God's people. This worship was also accompanied by sexual sins and immorality.

God informed Moses of the quick apostasy of His people. "And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf, and worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" (Exodus 32:7-8)

Moses interceded with God for the people (vs. 11-14). These people belonged to Jehovah. God's glory



was involved in their fate. God's gracious promises were pledged to bring the Savior from this people. However, Moses was not prepared for the sight that greeted his eyes (vs.19). Moses was filled with wrath. He broke the two tablets and summoned those who were on the side of Jehovah. The Levites slew 3,000 men. The golden calf was burned, and the powder put into the drinking water. Those slain remained naked, i.e. unrepentant. God warned that He would visit the sins of the people upon them. The Lord would not personally go into the midst of Israel. Now an angel, and not Jehovah, would be Israel's guide.

Moses asked the Lord's forgiveness for this people with an intensity unequalled except by Christ (Exodus 32:31-32). Moses was reassured by the vision of God's glory. This glory consisted of God's grace. The Lord consented to go before His people, and He would give them the rest of Canaan. Moses was only able to see the backside of God's glory (Exodus 33:21-23). We see the glory of God revealed in the face of His son Jesus Christ and in the cross.

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, today we learn about how quickly God's people turned to other gods. Keep anything from becoming more important to us than Jesus and His Word. Take care of us and our families today. We thank You that You love us enough to forgive us when we do forget about You and do bad things. Thank You for sending Jesus to be our Savior from sin. Amen.

PRESENTATION

This incident sets the pattern for the Children of Israel's rebellious relationship with Jehovah. God had made them His own people, led them out of Egypt, and provided manna for them. Their reaction was one of unbelief and ingratitude. We see clearly in the account of Israel's wilderness journey man's sinfulness and God's undeserved grace. This pattern is carried out in the next stories of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and even into the entire history of Old Testament Israel.

Review the account of the revelation of God's glory in connection with the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Read for yourself the detailed description of Israel's worship life in Exodus 22-31. All of this pointed to the coming of Jesus. It is obvious from this account that the Children of Israel could not be saved by the Law. They were guilty of gross idolatry even before Moses came down from the mountain with God's revelation of His holy Law.

Discuss with your children what led the people of God to ask Aaron to make for them a god in the form of a golden calf. Also pursue why Aaron gave in against better knowledge to this request of the people.

Tell the story by outlining what Moses saw when he came down from the mountain. Pagan idolatry was almost always accompanied by wild parties and orgies. Idolatry became an excuse for sexual immorality. The phrase "rose up to play" signifies sexual sins. The punishment was swift and severe. Three thousand people were killed because of their idolatry and nakedness.

When God told Moses that He was going to destroy this people and make a new people out of God, Moses interceded for the people. Moses appealed to God's gracious and merciful nature. Moses argued that Israel was God's special people; that God's own glory was involved in the fate of Israel; and finally that God had promised that He would give "the land" to this people and bring forth the Savior from them. This was indeed a stiff-necked people, and yet, God's gracious promises would preserve them.

APPLICATIONS

What are some examples of gods that can threaten our relationship with Jehovah? Mention things that can become more important than Jesus to the children e.g. money and possessions, fun, and especially the form of peer pressure.

What is the link between God's punishment for sin and His forgiveness? Why does it become necessary to punish transgressions as He did in the case of the Children of Israel? God is a just God visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. This is why God had to send Jesus to die for our sins. God could not simply ignore sin.

Paul applies this account in 1 Corinthians 10:6-7, "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'" This is a strong warning against how idolatry can take over even God's own people.

With older children you might want to touch on the weakness of Israel's future high priest, Aaron, and how spiritual leaders sometimes tell people what they want to hear instead of rebuking them according to God's Word.

Emphasize that in spite of Israel's flagrant disobedience and God's righteous anger, Jehovah did not destroy this people but kept His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses interceded for the people appealing to God's grace and mercy. We also need to pray for one another as well as for ourselves throwing ourselves, upon the mercy of our Savior God.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

Exodus 20:3 - *You shall have no other gods before Me.*

Middle any of the above and...

Matthew 4:10 - *Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'*

Upper any of the above and...

1 Corinthians 10:7 - *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

HYMN CHOICES

"What Is The World To Me" (TLH #420:8)

"I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus" (TLH #428)

"Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus" (TLH #409)