

The Golden Calf



Scripture Reference: [Exodus 31:18-34:35](#)

Suggested Theme: God is the only God and He loves us. Worship Him only.

Memory Verse: “Obey my laws and rules. A person who obeys my laws and rules will live because of them. I am the Lord.” [Leviticus 18:5, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Moses was on a mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God. Down below, the people became anxious that Moses had been gone for so long. They begged Aaron to make a god for them to worship. He collected their gold jewellery and made a golden calf. When Moses came down from the mountain, he found the whole camp partying around the idol. Moses threw down the stone tablets and broke them. Moses ordered a serious punishment for this serious rejection of God. It was only after Moses begged God that God forgave His people.

Background Study:

Although the giving of [The Ten Commandments](#) is covered in another lesson, the events covered in this lesson actually happened simultaneously. The serious nature of the people’s disobedience in these verses relates to their blatant disregard for the covenant God has just made with them. His part of the covenant was to protect and bless them, and their part was to obey. Moses went back and forth up and down Mount Sinai a number of times in answer to God’s call. The mountain shook, and the people witnessed smoke, thunder, and lightning. They even clearly stated their intention before the Lord. There was no excuse for their change of heart.

[\(Exodus 32:1-6\)](#) At the very same time that Moses was up on the mountain with God, everything was going terribly wrong at the base of the mountain. The people convinced Aaron to make an idol for them to worship. He collected their gold jewellery to make an idol for them to bow before. Although he speaks of having a festival to the Lord [\(Exodus 32:5-6\)](#), he pollutes everything about true worship with sacrifices and offerings before the calf idol as well as all kinds of revelry.

[\(Exodus 32:7-14\)](#) All of this starkly contrasts the loyalty and devotion God was instructing Moses with on the mountain. Although Moses (and Joshua, who seemed to be waiting further down the mountain) were unaware, God knew exactly what was happening. Moses’s love for his people was evident in how he faced God’s wrath on their behalf. God was ready to destroy His people and start over with Moses, but Moses unselfishly and bravely reminded him of His promises and how far they had come.

([Exodus 32:15-33:6](#)) When confronted by his brother, Moses, Aaron passed the blame on to the people. Many years before, when the Lord spoke to Moses from a Burning Bush, Moses felt inadequate for speaking and leading the people. God told him that his seemingly eloquent brother Aaron would help him. Now, when comparing the leadership of Aaron and Moses, it is apparent why God had chosen Moses in the first place. Even as Moses confronted Aaron and threw down and shattered the stone tablets, the people continued in their revelry. Moses had just witnessed the wrath of God, so it is no wonder that the punishment meted out to the people was extreme, harsh and swift. About 3,000 Israelites were put to the sword that day. Moses seems determined to cleanse the group of sin and be the people God has just revealed that they can and should be. As the people moved on from the camp and continued on their journey, God told Moses that an angel would go before them, but He (God) would not go with His people (Exodus 33:2-3).

([Exodus 33:7-chapter 34](#)) God was angry with His people but continued meeting with Moses. Moses spoke up for his people; eventually, the Lord relented and accompanied his people. God invited Moses back up the mountain to repeat His covenant and produce the stone tablets again. It was evident to all that Moses had been in God's presence because his face glowed so much that he had to wear a veil in front of the people.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring two instant pudding packets and ingredients to the gathering today (or some other simple recipe). Have one of the children read the instructions (or you read them aloud if you have non-readers) as you follow the instructions. The first time you make the pudding, follow the recipe and set the mix aside. The second time you make it, tell the children that you are going to do it "your way." Put in some silly ingredients you know will not work (soft drink instead of milk, for instance).

Now, compare the two results. "Children, the people who made this packet of mix knew the proper ingredients to use. When I did it their way, I made some very nice pudding. The one where I did it my way did not turn out very well, did it? God knows how we should behave. He knows the best way. When we follow the bible and do what it says then we are doing things God's way. Everything will be fine. If we don't obey God and just do things the way we want to do them then our lives will be like this pudding. It will not be a good life! The children of Israel knew what the Ten Commandments were. They knew they should do things God's way but they chose to try things their own way."

The Story:

After Moses told the people all of the Commandments that God had given them, he went back onto the mountain to hear more instructions from the Lord. While Moses listened, the Lord wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone.

For weeks, Moses had been away from his people. Soon, they began to wonder where he was. They knew Moses had gone up on the mountain to talk to God, but why had he been gone so long? Maybe he would never come down!

"Why should we worry about him? Let's make a god we can see to worship," the people began to say. "That's what the Egyptians did. Let's get Aaron to make us a god!"

Aaron believed in the Lord, but he thought he could change God's commands. He thought the people could worship God by using an idol. Aaron told the people to bring their gold earrings to him. Aaron made a gold idol in the shape of a calf. This was one of the kinds of idols they remembered from Egypt. Then Aaron built an altar and said that the next day, there would be a festival to the Lord.

Aaron and the people were disobeying God. The second commandment was that they should not make any idols. Even though they said they were worshipping God, they were not doing it God's way! They were

trying to worship God the way they wanted to. It did not matter to them what God wanted.

Even though the Lord spoke to Moses way up the mountain, He knew exactly what the people were doing below. The Lord was angry and told Moses that He wanted to destroy the people.

“Oh, Lord, please forgive your people!” Moses begged. Finally, God told Moses to go down to the people. He would not destroy them.

When Moses arrived in the camp, he found the people partying around the idol. Moses was so angry that he threw down the stone tablets and broke them. He was very disappointed in the people. He was the leader, and he knew that they must be punished. He ground up the golden calf, put the powder into the drinking water, and made the people drink it.

Moses told Aaron that Aaron was very wrong and had disobeyed God. Even then, many people still chose to continue their wild party instead of listening to the words of the Lord. There was nothing that would stop them. Moses gathered men with swords, and about 3,000 people were put to death that day.

Many of the people were very sorry. They knew that they had not obeyed God. They had tried to do things their way instead of God’s. After this, those who disobeyed were punished by God. They got sick with the plague.

Obedying God is very important. As time passed, God called Moses back up to the mountain. He wrote on more tablets of stone and told Moses that He would keep His covenant with His people. When Moses came down from the mountain, this time, something was different. Because Moses had stood in the presence of God, his face actually glowed. Every time he spent time in God’s presence after this, his face glowed again. At these times, he had to wear a veil over his face.

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

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Review:

- Why did Moses stay on the mountain for so long? (God spoke to him and wrote the Ten Commandments on stone tablets)
- What did the Israelites ask Aaron to make for them? (An idol)

- What was the idol made out of, and what shape was it? (It was a gold calf made from the people's gold jewellery)
- What is the second commandment? (Do not make idols)
- What did Moses do to the golden calf? (He threw it in the fire, melted it, and then ground it into dust)
- What did Moses have the people do as punishment for making the idol? (He mixed the gold dust from the idol with water and made the people drink it)
- Why was Moses so upset when he came down from the mountain and saw the people dancing around the idol? (Moses knew God's commandments were that the people should not make any idols and that God was the only true God)
- Why did the people want an idol? (They thought Moses wasn't returning from the mountain and wanted a god to worship. They thought they could follow a god that way instead of waiting for Moses and the commands God had given him)

Reflection:

- What do you think the water mixed with the golden dust tasted like?
- What do you think the golden calf smelled like as it melted in the fire?
- The Bible says Moses' face looked like it had been glowing after he'd spent time in God's presence. What do you imagine Moses' face looked like when it glowed?
- What question would you ask God about this story?
- How do you think God felt when He realized the Israelites were creating an idol?
- How do you think Moses felt when He saw the people making an idol?
- Moses was gone for 40 days- that is longer than one month! Would you be uncertain that Moses and God would return after 40 days of being gone?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- [Oh, Be Careful Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- Continue to learn the Ten Commandments.
- Again, use books about Egypt to find pictures of some of the idols they worshipped.
- An idol is something we think is more important than God. Make a collage of some things that are idols today. Write the second commandment on the poster.
- Discuss why God does not want us to use idols to worship Him (there could be many answers to this).
- Compare God and man. Discuss why God should be the one to set the rules.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Guide the children in writing the Bible verse, John 14:15. on a paper and then decorate the border to make a poster. Choose the Bible version you prefer or use the following from the International Children’s Bible, “If you love me, you will do the things I command.”

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page The golden calf & puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Game: ‘Journey to the Promised Land’ \(Christian Crafters\)](#)

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Date

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