



# The Golden Calf

## *Promises Made, Promises Broken*

### About the Story

In Exodus chapters 25 through 31, God gives detailed instructions to Moses about how to create an ark to hold the covenant (Ten Commandments), build the tabernacle (a special tent) where God can reside among the people, and ordain priests to perform acts of worship, acting as the intersection between God and the people. In chapter 32 we find the Israelites waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses speaks with God. The people grow impatient and ask Aaron to create a god for them to worship, so he takes their gold and molds it into the shape of a calf. The Israelites begin worshipping the golden calf, placing their trust in an inanimate object to bless their herds and lives. They offer sacrifices to the calf because they believe it capable of giving them what they desire.

The phrase “rose up to rebel” (verse 6) insinuates the cultic practice of orgies. God becomes outraged the Israelites have turned away from God and embraced earthly ways and so threatens to consume them with wrath. Moses reminds God of God’s promise to Abraham—the promise of innumerable descendants and a land for them to possess—so God spares the people.

Ultimately God is not revealed in golden (or any other material) statues, but through Scripture and God’s interactions with people. Even when God’s chosen people arrive at the Promised Land, they fail to remain faithful to God. Yet God continually forgives the people and keeps God’s promises. This can be of great comfort to us who consistently fail to be faithful to God as well!

### Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of promise, just as your people turned to worship idols during the exodus, so we also put our trust in people and things instead of trusting in you. Turn our hearts to see you clearly, to resist temptation and to worship you alone. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### The Point:

**Even when we turn away, God remembers God’s promises and welcomes us back.** Even when people rebel and do exactly what God told them not to do, God remembers God’s promises and never stops loving them. Through their repentance, God welcomes them back. Even when we make mistakes or break the rules, God continually forgives us and loves us.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we learned about the promises of Passover. This week's lesson continues the story of the flight from Egypt. It picks up the story after the Passover and shows the actions of the Israelites once they have begun the journey to the Promised Land. Next week the people of Israel have arrived in the Promised Land. God's concern for them does not end with their arrival, and the first chapter of Samuel narrates God's continuing concern for a specific Israelite woman, Hannah.

Into the Story

The Israelites grew impatient with Moses and also with God. They also did not like that they could not worship a physical god, so they created their own idol. Take 60 seconds individually to write down ten "idols" you are tempted to worship—or ten things that distract you from following Jesus—in your life today. At the end of the 60 seconds compare your lists and see what top three to five temptations you have most in common. How can we support one another in turning from temptation and focus on worshipping and trusting our true God?

Learning the Story

*The children of Israel do not have the patience to wait for God's elaborate instructions on how to worship and be in relationship with God, so they create their own idol to worship.*

**Read Exodus 32:1-6 – God or a Calf?**

- ❓ Do you ever become impatient with God and take matters into your own hands?
- ❓ Do you think Aaron believed the calf to represent the one true God or did he see it as an idol?
- ❓ Does God ever ask for this type of worship?
- ❓ The people worked together to create the calf, but how could their collective time and energy been better spent in honoring their true God?

**Read Exodus 32:7-14 – God Changes God's Mind.**

- ❓ What is God's reaction upon hearing about the golden calf and festival?
- ❓ What do you think of the fact that God calls them "your people" to Moses instead of God's people?
- ❓ What changes God's mind from being angry with the people?

Living the Story: Worship

Go back to the list you created in the Into the Story section. Each person should take one item from that list and try to think of a way to counteract it. Then, take turns praying around your group, filling in this petition: "God of creation, forgive us for making \_\_\_\_\_ our idol instead of worshipping you. Help us to resist this temptation, and to do \_\_\_\_\_ instead. God of mercy..."

The rest of the group responds: “Hear our prayer.”

Example: “God of creation, forgive us for making money our idol instead of worshiping you. Help us to resist this temptation and to be generous with your gifts to those who are in greatest need. God of mercy,”

### Closing Prayer

If you know the song “More Precious Than Silver” you may sing it through together three times. Otherwise take turns saying, “God, you are more precious than...” and fill in something you value greatly in your life. End your prayer together with “Amen.”

### At Home

- ✚ Find a symbol of something that could be an idol for you and put it away for the week. This might be your credit card, social media, a picture of someone or something who is consuming your thoughts, etc. When you feel tempted to use or focus on it, say a prayer of gratitude and praise or sing a song of worship to God instead.
- ✚ One day this week, instead of focusing on your own need to see or hear God, take time to help someone else connect more deeply with God. That may mean praying with them or accompanying them to a worship service of their choice. Afterwards, reflect on whether or not it brought you closer to God, too.
- ✚ Pray each day that you might notice the needs and suffering of others and for ways you can help relieve them.

### Bible Connections

- ✚ You can find a retelling of the story of the golden calf in Deuteronomy 9:7-21.
- ✚ Jesus summarizes all of God’s law into two commandments in Matthew 22:34-40.
- ✚ Stephen’s speech mentions the golden calf as an example of Israel turning away from the true God in Acts 7:39-42.

### Bible Nuts and Bolts: Importance of The Torah

The Hebrew word Torah can have several meanings, but “teaching” or “instruction” are preferred translations to “law” because it is a gift given by God to the people as a way to order their lives. The Torah often refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament): Genesis through Deuteronomy, which includes the Ten Commandments given to Moses and other instructions laid out by God. It is God’s intent for us to live safely in community with one another and in relationship with God.

## Daily Readings

### **Sunday—Read Exodus 32:1-14**

The people of God make a golden calf to worship, but God remains faithful to the promises made to Abraham. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for a time when you know God was with you even though you did not deserve it.

### **Monday—Read Exodus 32:15-20; 34:1-10**

Out of anger upon seeing the golden calf, Moses broke the two tablets and God rewrote them. Write down God's proclamation in Exodus 34:6-7 and post it on your bathroom mirror so you are reminded all week about God's great forgiveness and love for you.

### **Tuesday—Read Deuteronomy 1:19-33**

Moses reminds the Israelites how they complained in the wilderness that God had led them out of Egypt now that they are afraid to enter the Promised Land. Reflect on a time you were offered an opportunity but were afraid to accept it or take that step forward.

### **Wednesday—Read Deuteronomy 1:34-40; 2:1-8**

God vowed not to let Moses or the generation of Israelites who left Egypt into the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness but made provisions for them for the rest of their days. Pray for the next generation to see the fruits of your labors that you will not necessarily enjoy.

### **Thursday—Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

Moses tells the next generation who will enter the Promised Land how to keep God's commandments and teach them to their children. Journal about ways we can teach the next generation to hold closely the promises of God.

### **Friday—Read Joshua 1:1-9**

After Moses' death, God instructs Joshua to enter the Promised Land. Draw yourself on the edge of a "promised land," imagining what future God would dream for you, not one of wealth and land, but of giftedness and service to others.

### **Saturday—Read Joshua 23:1-15**

Joshua reminds the people of God's faithfulness and encourages them to keep God's laws. Write a prayer about a time you sensed God defended you from hurt, evil or temptation and how that made you feel.