

General Church Education



The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-24

Lesson 14

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 3: The Lord Is Our Lawgiver

For ages 8-9 years

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-24

For Parents and Teachers

Moses remained on Mount Sinai for over a month to receive comprehensive instructions about worship and life for the Israelitish nation. The people at the foot of the mountain became impatient and built a calf made of gold to worship. The Writings explain that calves in the good sense represent affections or desires for good things in this world and for being useful in our natural lives. These are good loves when kept in balance with the priority of developing our spiritual lives. However, when the things of this life become our main goal, they can assume the status of idols. Then the good things of this life hinder rather than help our spiritual development. The Commandments cannot be broken without spiritual harm resulting. This is symbolized by the Israelites being punished for their behavior. But the Lord did not desert them. After the Israelites were punished, Moses returned to Mount Sinai to get another set of the Ten Commandments.

Ideas for Children

- Worshiping the Lord brings happiness.
- Choosing the things of this world before our love to the Lord brings unhappiness.
- People's bad choices bring evil into the world.

From the Writings

Many places in the Word speak of Jehovah's becoming inflamed with anger and growing hot, and also of His consuming and destroying. But the reason why the Word says this is that when a person turns himself away from the Lord, as happens when he does what is evil, it appears to that person as though the Lord acts in those ways. In fact the Lord is never angry and never consumes, for He is Mercy itself and Goodness itself. This shows the true nature of literal statements in the Word, namely that they are made in accord with the appearance as seen by people.

One such appearance occurs where Jehovah is said to repent. In reality, the Lord never repents, for everything is foreseen from eternity by Him. From this also it may be recognized how many errors people fall into who think of nothing beyond the literal sense when they read the Word, thus who read it without the aid of teachings drawn from the Word which show them what the real truth is. Everyone who reads the Word with the aid of such teachings knows that Jehovah is Mercy itself and Goodness itself, and that one cannot say that infinite Mercy or infinite Goodness grow hot with anger and consume. Anger and evil have their origin in mankind and not in the Lord. Anger when spoken of in regard to the Lord means a person's turning away from the Lord. *Arcana Coelestia* 10431

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-24

Words to Understand

engraving tool—a tool used to cut a design or shape into a hard surface

proclamation—something that is announced officially

corrupt—to change from good to bad in manners or actions

wrath—anger

plead—to beg

relent—to give in and become less harsh

On Mount Sinai

We learned how the Lord spoke to the Israelites from Mount Sinai. Do you remember how the people heard His powerful voice giving them the Ten Commandments? These were the laws to guide their lives. At the time the people were shaken with fear and awe. They begged Moses to talk to the Lord and then tell them what He said because they were afraid. So Moses went up the mountain again. He took Joshua part of the way up as well. Do you remember Joshua? He was the brave man who led the fight against the attacking Amalekites.

This time Moses stayed for a long time—forty days and nights. There was much to learn. The Lord told Moses many things that needed to be done so that the Israelites could form their own nation. A large group of people who live together need to work out ways of cooperating with each other. There were many special details to learn about how they were to worship and obey the Lord, which we will learn about in other lessons. How do you think the Israelites felt when Moses was at the top of Mount Sinai for so long? They became discouraged because they could not see him. Then they did a terrible thing. **Read Exodus 32:1-24.**

Aaron Makes an Idol

When Moses was out of their sight, who did the people turn to? They complained to Aaron that they did not know what had happened to Moses. Perhaps he was not going to come back. The Israelites wanted a god they could see. They wanted gods of gold like the ones they had seen in Egypt. The people asked Aaron to make a god to lead them. What did Aaron tell the people to bring to him? Do you remember that they had quite a lot of gold because they had brought items of gold and silver with them out of Egypt? Using the gold from the earrings, Aaron took an engraving tool and fashioned a golden calf. He made an idol for them to worship! The Israelites had certainly seen calves being worshiped in Egypt so they were pleased with it. They said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” And Aaron built an altar before it and proclaimed that the next day would be a feast day.

The people got up early the next day. They brought offerings to their new god. Then they began to eat and drink and play. How could they have forgotten and disobeyed so quickly? How could

they have forgotten hearing the Lord's voice speak the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai? How could they have forgotten the many miracles the Lord had done as they escaped from Egypt and made their way in the wilderness? Now they had done this foolish thing. Could this golden calf help them like the true God could? Do you think the Lord knew what His people were doing?



Yes, the Lord knows everything. He knew that the children of Israel were worshipping a golden calf and He told Moses about it. The Lord was angry with the Israelites and wanted to destroy them. But Moses asked the Lord not to leave the Israelites. He asked the Lord to forgive them for the evil that they were doing.

Moses Returns to the Foot of the Mountain

As Moses came down the mountain with the two tables of stone in his hands, Joshua met him. What kind of noise did the two men hear from the camp below? At first Joshua thought it was the noise of war, but Moses said the noise sounded like singing.

When they came close enough to see what was happening in the camp, Moses became very angry. He was angry because the people had turned away from the Lord and they were worshipping an idol! Prayer and glory should be given to the Lord alone. We are to worship only Him. Moses took the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written and threw them on the ground. The tables of stone broke into pieces. It was a sign that the Israelites had already broken and disobeyed these Commandments. What a sad outcome.

Punishment

The people had done evil so they were punished. Moses took the golden calf, burnt it, ground it to powder, put the powder in water and made the Israelites drink it. Moses then spoke angrily to Aaron for making the calf. Did Aaron say he was sorry for what he had done? No, he made excuses and tried to blame the people. Worshipping the golden calf was a great evil but Moses asked the Lord to forgive the children of Israel. And the Lord did forgive them, for the Lord's mercy is forever. But there were serious consequences.



Disobedience

The Lord called the Israelites a “stiff-necked people.” That means they were stubborn and hard to deal with. He had given them the Ten Commandments. The first commandment teaches “You shall have no other gods before Me.” This means we are to worship the Lord alone and not worship any idols. Had the people promised to do what the Lord said? Yes, they had said, “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Yet they made an idol to worship, proving they were a stubborn and “stiff-necked” people.

Evil comes into the world through disobedience such as this. When someone breaks the Commandments, others often follow the bad behavior they see. This is not the way to help people come to heaven. Each of us can be an example to others when we try to keep the Commandments—even when it is not easy.

Everyone is tempted to disobey the Commandments. But when we are strong and follow the Lord’s laws, we not only keep walking on our path to heaven but we also help others by our example.

New Stone Tablets

Later on Moses cut two new stone tablets. He took them up to the top of Mount Sinai. The Lord wrote the same words on them as had been on the original tablets. Then these tablets were kept by the Israelites in a very special place. We will learn about that next.

Discussion Ideas

- Stone stands for truth. Why was stone used for the Ten Commandments? Do you know the phrase “solid as a rock”?
- Just as Moses disappeared, our connection with the Lord sometimes seems to disappear—especially if we don’t read the Word regularly.

Activity Overview | The Golden Calf

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”
So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. Exodus 19:8

Songs

We Will Serve the Lord

Listen or download at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/song-we-will-serve-the-lord/>

Projects

Choose one or two activities.

- Activity 1 | Idols in our Lives
- Activity 2 | Circle the Correct Word
- Picture to color—The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)

Additional Activity Ideas

- Just as the children of Israel made a mistake, everyone makes mistakes. Although it can be hard to admit our mistakes, and to excuse the mistakes of others, doing this helps restore relationships—with others, and with the Lord. Look for opportunities to apologize to others, and to the Lord this week when you make mistakes this week.
- Paint a plastic toy calf gold, using gold spray paint. Compare the power of the calf with the power of the Lord.



Activity 1 | Idols in Our Lives

The children of Israel made a golden calf and then worshipped it, instead of worshipping the Lord. What kinds of things do you make more important than the Lord in your life?

Materials Needed

magazines or fliers with pictures of toys, electrical products, clothing, etc.

scissors

glue

paper to mount a collage

Directions

1. Find pictures of things people sometimes make more important than the Lord, for example fantastic toys, amazing clothing, computers, cell phones, etc.
2. Choose pictures to cut out.
3. Glue the pictures to a piece of paper, making a collage.
4. Cut out the Second Commandment (below), and glue on to the collage.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. Exodus 20:4-5

Activity 2 | The Golden Calf—Circle the Correct Answer

Read the sentences. Circle the word in parentheses that completes each sentence correctly.

1. Moses was up on Mount Sinai for (a short time, 40 days and nights, a year).
2. The Children of Israel asked Aaron to make them (altars, gods, Commandments).
3. Aaron told the people to give him their (clothes, jewels, golden earrings).
4. From these Aaron made a (bracelet, altar, golden calf).
5. When Aaron saw the golden calf, he built an (altar, house, temple).
6. The next day the people (wept, worshiped, laughed) in front of the golden calf.
7. The Lord (knew, did not know, did not care) what the Israelites were doing.
8. Moses asked the Lord to (forgive, punish, leave) the Children of Israel.
9. When Moses came down the mountain, what was in his hands: (his rod, some stones, the Ten Commandments)
10. When Moses saw the people worshiping the golden calf, he (left them, went back up the mountain, threw down and broke the two tables of stone).

Answers:
1. 40 days and nights
2. gods
3. golden earrings
4. golden calf
5. altar
6. worshiped
7. knew
8. forgive
9. the Ten Commandments
10. threw down and broke the two tables of stone

