



Lesson 55

The Golden Calf

Story Elements

- **Text:** Exodus 32:1-35
- **Setting:** circa 1445 B.C. at Mt. Sinai
- **Characters:** God, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron.
- **Plot:** The children of Israel make an idol while Moses is receiving the Law from God atop Mt. Sinai.
- **Key word(s)** "These be thy _____, O Israel,

which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." (vv 4, 8)

- **Climax:** *Exodus 32:10* *Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.*

Israel's Idolatry

1. (v 1) The Hebrews grew impatient to leave Sinai after Moses did not immediately return from communing with God on the mount.
 - a. As a result, they petitioned Aaron to fashion _____ (Heb: *elohim*) to be go before them in their journey.
 - b. Notice they failed to give God the glory for their exodus and instead said it was _____ "that brought us up out of the land of Egypt."

APPLICATION → Matthew Henry connected Israel's sinful impatience and unbelief with those that doubt the return of our Lord. Henry stated, "Misinterpretations of our Redeemer's delays are the occasion of a great deal of wickedness. Our Lord Jesus has gone up into the mount of glory, where he is appearing in the presence of God for us, but out of our sight; the heavens must contain him, must conceal him, that we may live by faith. There he has been long; there he is yet. Hence unbelievers suggest that they know not what has become of him; and ask, *Where is the promise of his _____ ?*" (2 Pt. 3:4)¹

2. (vv 2-6) Aaron instructed the people to donate their golden jewelry to make an idol; the idol was fashioned after a calf which is a sacred animal in _____ mythology.
 - a. Aaron announced that a dedicatory worship service would be held "unto the _____."
 - b. The children of Israel dedicated the idol with a drunken and perverse feast as was common amongst Egyptian fertility cults and gave credit to their idol for _____ them from Egypt.

APPLICATION → A detail within this story that often goes unnoticed is how the children of Israel were not guilty of paganism as much as they were guilty of worshiping the LORD in a _____ way. If we fashion our worship of God after the appetites of the unbelieving world instead of how the LORD instructs us, then we would also be guilty of the same sin that the Hebrews committed in their worship of the golden calf.

Moses' Intercession

3. (vv 7-10) While speaking to atop Mt. Sinai, God was saw the Hebrews' idolatry and in his holy anger he threatened to exterminate the nation and start over with only _____.
 - a. (vv 11-13) But Moses interceded for Israel by mentioning God's covenant _____.

APPLICATION → Moses' intercession for the Hebrews not only reminds us of the power of prayer but reminds us of our own Great Intercessor. Henry notes, "nothing but the intercession of Moses could save them from ruin,

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 139.

that he might be a type of Christ, by whose mediation alone God would *reconcile the world unto himself*.²

- b. In answer to Moses' prayer "the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." Note:
 - i. *Evil*, in the AV, does not always mean *sin* – it often means *calamity*. Also, *repent* does not mean to quit doing sin – it means to change one's course of action because of a change of _____.
 - ii. God does not change (Mal. 3:6), so when we read language that seems to indicate that God changed, we should understand these as examples of human language explaining how a changeless, infinite Being interacts and converses with faulty and finite people.

"... the manner in which God spoke to Moses served two important purposes—it tended to develop the _____ and intercessory patriotism of the Hebrew leader, and to excite the serious alarm of the people, that God would reject them and deprive them of the privileges they had fondly fancied were so secure."³

Moses' Ire

- 4. (vv 15-20) With the stone tablets in hand (inscribed by the very hand of God) Moses descended the mount accompanied by Joshua.
 - a. As they near the camp of Israel, they are alarmed by what they thought was the sound of war, but soon realized it was the sound of _____ worship.
 - b. Moses in his righteous anger broke the _____ of the Law.
 - c. He then destroyed the golden calf, grinding it to _____ and making the idolaters drink it. Henry notes, "His mixing this powder with their drink signified to them that the curse they had thereby brought upon themselves would mingle itself with all their enjoyments, and embitter them; it would enter into their bowels like water, and like oil into their bones. *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; he shall drink as he brews.*"⁴
- 5. (v 24) Aaron, when confronted with his sin, blamed the people for their tendency to evil and suggests the golden calf _____ formed.
- 6. Moses challenges the Hebrews with the command, "Who *is* on the LORD'S side? *let him come* unto me." The _____ respond to Moses' call and are sent to smite 3,000 of the unrepentant idolaters.
- 7. (vv 31-35) The next day, Moses continues to intercede for the nation and the LORD assures him of his _____ faithfulness; the LORD did, however, smite the idolaters with a plague.

Notes: _____

Answer Key: Key word(s): "gods" 1. a. gods; b. Moses; → coming • 2. Egyptian; a. LORD; b. redeeming; → pagan • 3. Moses; a. faithfulness; b. i. mind; → faith • 4. A. pagan; b. tablets; c. powder • 5. Spontaneously • 6. Levites • 7. covenant

How to use this worksheet for personal Bible study: (1) Read the Bible passage given in the **Story Elements** section. (2) Read through the worksheet and try to fill in the blanks without looking at the **Answer Key**. (3) Check your answers with the key and make the necessary corrections. (Note: some answers are a matter of opinion, and often more than one answer is correct. (4) Write down your own thoughts, applications, and questions for further study in the **Notes** section.

² Ibid., 140.

³ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 69.

⁴ Henry, 141.