

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121- 25 The Golden Calf (Ex 32)

Have you ever lied to someone you loved because you were afraid of them? Or have you left out certain facts in telling a story to make a situation look better, for you to 'save face' and not be shamed before others? If so, you can understand what happened in today's lesson. While Moses was on the mountain with God, Aaron was left in charge of the people. When Moses stayed longer and longer, Aaron was harassed by the people, who wanted a visible god, like they had worshiped in Egypt. Aaron complied with their wishes, perhaps out of fear, but when confronted by Moses, he made up a story that was not true.

Moses stayed on the mountain with God for 40 days. The people grew restless and rebellious, forgetting God, who had delivered them and made a covenant with them. They went to Aaron and said, "We do not know what has happened to this fellow Moses who brought us out of Egypt. Make us a god we can see, one that will go before us." Not only were they giving Moses credit for what God had done, they were openly breaking the second command of the covenant which forbids making idols and images.

So all the people gave Aaron their gold earrings and he melted them down. He then formed the gold into the shape of a calf. The people were happy with this and said, "This is the god who brought us out of Egypt!" So Aaron built an altar in front of the calf idol and announced a festival "to the Lord." How could they think of sacrificing to the one true God in front of an idol? But that is exactly what they did. They sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings to it and sat down to eat and drink what had been offered to the image. The Apostle Paul referred to this when he wrote, "the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry" (1Cor 10:7).

On the mountain, God knew what was happening down below and said to Moses, "Go down to your people, the ones you brought out of Egypt. They have corrupted themselves and turned away from what I told them to do. They have made an idol and bowed down to it with sacrifices. Now, do not stop me for I will destroy them and make your descendants into a great nation."

Moses pleaded with God, "Do not be so angry with your people, the ones you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand. If you destroy them now, the Egyptians will laugh and say you brought them here to kill them. Remember your promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You said their descendants would inherit the land, and become as numerous as the stars in the sky." So the Lord listened to Moses and didn't bring disaster on the people.

Moses then went down the mountain with the two stone tablets God had written on. He got angry when he saw the calf and the dancing. He threw the two tablets down, breaking them to pieces on the ground the way Israel had broken their covenant with God. He burned the golden calf in the fire and ground it to powder. Then he put the powder in water and made the Israelites drink it.

Moses demanded of Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

Aaron replied, “Please do not be angry with me. You know how wicked these people are. They insisted, ‘Make us a god.’ I told them to give me their gold. I threw it into the fire and out came this calf!” Instead of admitting his own sin, Aaron chose to ‘save face’ and blame everyone but himself.

Moses then stood at the gate of the camp. He saw how the people were running wild and still out of control. He shouted, “Those who are on the Lord’s side, come and stand with me!” The sons of Levi separated themselves from the rest of the people and stood with Moses. The Lord commanded them to strap on their swords and kill those who refused to stand with Moses. Three thousand of the people died that day. Because of their obedience, the Levites were blessed by God and chosen to become helpers to the priests.

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can intercede and make atonement for your sin.” With that he left and went back up the mountain.

He told God, “Oh what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves a god of gold. Please forgive the people’s sin—but if not, then blot out my name from your book.”

The Lord responded, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of and my angel will go before you. When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.” And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

The Lord refused Moses’ offer, because the person who sins is responsible for his own sin (Deut 24:16). But Moses, the mediator God had appointed between himself and the Israelites, so identified with Israel that he had made his own death the condition for God’s destruction of the people. Moses’ actions foreshadowed Jesus Christ, the great Mediator, who gave himself on the cross to make atonement for all mankind.

This story is **important** because it shows both God’s holy requirements for His people and His love for them when they fall back into sin.

The main **truth** of this story is God loves sinners, but hates the sin which they continue to commit.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions.

1. Why did God tell Moses to go back down from the mountain?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, "God said, ‘They have corrupted themselves and turned away from what I told them to do’,” you are correct.
2. What was the great sin that they committed?

- A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, “They made a calf idol and bowed down to it with sacrifices,” you are correct.
- 3. What did the Levites do when Moses called the people to follow the Lord?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, “They separated themselves from the rest of the people and stood with Moses,” you are correct.
- 4. What was Moses willing to do to turn away God’s anger?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said, “He offered to have his own name taken out of God’s book,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Then tell the story to someone and ask, “Why did Aaron lie to Moses about how the calf idol was made?” What is the source of such behavior in the lives of believers? Discuss together the possible answers: the tempting of the enemy, fear, self-preservation, loss of spirituality, the desire to ‘save face.’ What should a believer do when he or she feels like giving in to such pressures? Answer: The Psalmist David wrote, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1), therefore we can call on Him to help us in any situation.