

Life Lesson 31
The Golden Calf
Text: Exodus 32

Introduction

How anxious the people of Israel must have been to hear the message God had sent to them! They could see His glory like a fire in the mountain and could hear His voice like a mighty thunder. They were too afraid to go close and hear Him, even if God had allowed it, but Moses would bring God's message to them.

The Story

At last they saw Moses coming down the mountain. He told the people the ten commandments the Lord had given them, and the other rules He had told Moses about, too.

"Whatever God says, that's what we'll do," all the people promised.

Again God told Moses to come up to Mt. Sinai. This time he took his main assistant, Joshua, with him. There on the mountain God gave him more instructions. He told Moses the exact directions for making the tabernacle -- a kind of portable tent-church. It was to be specially made with each part of it telling about God and about the Messiah, Jesus, who would come one day to save His people from their sins. He told Moses He had chosen a man named Bezaleel.

Moses came down from Mt. Sinai aglow from the presence of God, and eager to show his people a message from God's own hand. As he came down the mountain, he heard something.

"What's that noise?" he asked Joshua.

"It sounds like fighting to me. Maybe someone has attacked the people," Joshua answered.

“No,” said Moses. “That’s not the sound of people shouting for victory. It’s not the sound of people crying from defeat. It’s the sound of singing I hear.”

While Moses and Joshua were up on the mountain, the people got tired of waiting for them.

“He’s been up there so long,” they said. “Maybe he’s not coming back at all. Who will lead us out of this desert?”

Wasn’t that foolish of them? They could see God’s glory as a cloud up on the mountain. Moses said he would return. Over and over they had seen God’s faithful care for them. Why should they get anxious and worry now?

But they did worry. They went to Aaron and said, “Moses isn’t coming back and we need a god to lead us out of the desert. Make a god for us to worship.”

Can you believe how quickly they forgot their promise to obey the ten commandments? The very first commandment forbid them to worship another god. The second forbid them to bow down to a graven image, or statue.

I’m sorry to say that Aaron gave in to the people without a murmur and made a golden calf from the earrings they brought to him.

“Here is your god,” he told the people. “This is the god who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

The people worshipped the calf and had a great feast to honor it. They were singing and dancing around the calf when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai. That’s the sound he heard -- the sound of a drunken party.

Moses was so angry when he saw what the people had done! He threw down the tables of stone God had given him and they broke.

Then he took the calf and smashed it into a million pieces. He ground it up and put it into the water and made the people drink it.

“Why did you do such a wicked thing?” he asked Aaron.

“It’s not my fault,” Aaron said. “You know how stubborn these people are. I just threw the gold into the fire and out came this calf.”

How foolish to try to excuse our sin! God knew that it didn’t just hop out of the fire. Aaron “fashioned” it. He also knew that being pressured by sinners is no excuse for doing wrong.

“Who is on the Lord’s side?” Moses asked the people.

“We are,” said the children of Levi.

“Take out your sword and kill every one who is still worshipping the idol.”

That day 3,000 men fell to their death from the swords of the Levites.

Moses again went to stand before God.

“Please forgive these people,” he asked God.

God didn’t destroy the people, but He did send a plague on them. He never appeared to them in His glory like He did before. Because God is gracious as well as holy, He gave the people another set of stone tables written in His own hand.

The Life Lesson

The Israelites seem foolish to us, but sometimes we get impatient for God to answer, too. Sometimes it seems like He isn’t listening or it is taking too long and we feel we must do

something ourselves. When we depend on anything else besides God, it becomes like an idol to us. He wants us to trust Him and wait on Him. He will never, ever fail us!

Review Questions

What did the Israelites say when Moses told them the Ten Commandments?

Whatever God says, we will do.

Who went with Moses back up Mt. Sinai the second time?

Joshua

What did the Israelites ask Aaron to do?

Make an idol for them.

What did Aaron make the idol from?

Their jewelry and earrings.

What kind of idol did Aaron make?

A golden calf.

What did Moses do to the tables of stone when he saw the idol?

He threw them down and broke them.

What did Moses do to the golden calf?

He smashed it, put the gold in water and made the people drink it.

Who fought and killed the idol worshippers?

The Levites.

Did God forgive the people?

Yes