

Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TEACHER'S PACKET

3rd - 5th Grade

Sunday Morning

Study 10

Broken Promises - The Golden Calf

Broken Promises

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective To show that while God always keeps His promises to us, we break our promises to Him all the time.

Key Verses

Exodus 32—Main Teaching Passage

John 14:23

1 Kings 18:21

Hebrew 12:1

Memory Verse - 2 John 1:6

"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."

Hook

Review last week's memory verse, Galatians 3:24

Review the Ten Commandments from last week. Now ask the question, "How many of you have never broken one of these commandments? Is there anyone in the room who is perfect in all of these ten laws?"

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

In Exodus 19:8, the Israelites promised God, “all that you have spoken we will do.” What an incredible promise they made God! They promised to obey and keep all of the laws that the LORD passed down to them through Moses. In Exodus 32, we see the first opportunity for the Israelites to walk in this obedience, and they failed. While Moses was up on the mountain with God, the Israelites, including the High priest Aaron, got impatient with waiting for his return. They took their golden earrings, melted them down in a fire, and molded them into a new god that they could worship. At their first opportunity, they broke the first two commandments, to have no other gods before Him, and not to carve idols to worship. The people all came to this Golden Calf idol and began to worship it, offering sacrifices and bowing down before it.

God was obviously grieved over this. He had delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. He had protected them, fed them, given them water to drink, and even clothed them, only for them to turn away at the first chance. God told Moses that He was going to punish the Israelites, wiping them all out and starting again with a new nation that will come from Moses. Moses, however, pled with God on behalf of the people, and the Lord relented.

Upon coming down from meeting God, Moses realized the people were in the full swing of worshipping this false idol. In fury he threw down the tablets with the law written on them, breaking them apart, before confronting his brother. Moses then cried out, “Whoever is on the LORD’s side, come to me.” The tribe of Levi responded, standing against anyone who had turned away from the LORD. Moses returned to God and again asked leniency for the people. God stayed His hand, but declared that anyone who sinned against Him would receive punishment.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK

It’s easy to obey the rules when someone is watching. Have you ever been riding in a car and suddenly everyone slows down because they see a police car parked on the side of the road? As soon as they have passed the police car, they go right back to speeding again. If your teacher in school is standing right in front of you when you take a test, there is no way that you would ever cheat on it, but what happens when the teacher leaves the room, or turns and looks the other way? Do your eyes start to wander over to someone else’s paper?

LOOK (Continued)

In Exodus 19, when God was standing on the mountain in a cloud with lightning and thunder before the Israelites, they were on their best behavior. As soon as they thought God, and their leader Moses, weren't looking, they showed their true colors. God had promised the Israelites many things up to this point, and had kept His word every step of the way. The Israelites had only promised God one thing, to obey His Word, and they couldn't keep it. Their actions showed God who they really were. What do your actions show God? Late at night when you are alone in your room and no one is watching, how do you act then? Are you a different person in your Sunday School classroom than when you are over at your friend's house?

We all worship false gods. They aren't as obvious as a big golden calf, but it is still true. We worship celebrities, athletes, money, music, our friends, even ourselves. Anything we put before our God is an idol. Anything we love with all our heart is an idol. What does the idol look like in your life?

The tribe of the Levites is really worth looking at here. Everyone in the nation of Israel was presented with a choice. Moses said, "Whoever is for God come to me." Only the tribe of Levi did. They demonstrated to God that they were for Him by standing up for righteousness and not entering into the sin that the rest of the nation was committing. God tells us that we show Him that we love Him through our actions, through our obedience to His Word (John 14:23).

Just like the Levites, God is calling out to us, "If you are for me, come to me." In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah the prophet would challenge the people, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him." The Lord is calling for you to make a decision. If He is real, if He sent His Son to die on a cross for your sins, then follow Him. It is time to take a stand: are you for God or against God?

The biggest problem that we all have is that we are just like the Israelites. We have all broken our promises to God. Even though He has always been faithful, we are not. God gave us His law, but we couldn't keep it. That is why Christ came into the world, to pay the penalty for our sin. To take the punishment for us so that we will not have the punishment we deserve visited upon us (Exodus 32:34).

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

TOOK

As a class, memorize 2 John 1:6.

Have the students pray silently about anything in their lives that God might be asking them to turn aside from. If there is anything that they are worshipping before the Lord. Offer the students an opportunity to stand for God just as the tribe of Levi did.

Pray: Thank the Lord for His faithfulness, that no matter how often we fail, His love toward us never does. Ask the Lord for the ability to put aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and to run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Parent Question: Has the Lord ever asked you to give something up for Him?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Exodus 32 by David Guzik

Exodus 32 - The Golden Calf

1. (1) The people make a request.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

a. **Moses delayed coming down from the mountain:** This troubled the people of Israel. It is true that **Moses delayed**, but God had a wonderful purpose for Moses' delay, and it would soon be over. Yet because the people couldn't see the reason for the delay they allowed it to stumble them.

i. Moses was gone for forty days (Exodus 24:18). This probably seemed like a long time to the people, but a short time to Moses. Certainly it was a short time related to the outworking of God's plan for Israel.

ii. How we handle God's ordained delays is a good measure of our spiritual maturity. If we allow such delays to make us drift off into sin or lapse into resignation to fate, then we react poorly to His ordained delays. If we allow such times to deepen our perseverance in following God, then they are of good use.

b. **The people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him:** This sinful impulse came first from the people, not Aaron. The episode of sin described in this chapter started at the impulse of popular opinion. This is an example of where the will of the people is not always the will of God.

i. This is true in society in general, but it is also true among God's people. When it comes to representing God in the world and in serving mankind, there is danger in starting in what people want or what they feel that they need.

c. **Come, make us gods that shall go before us:** The people wanted gods to go **before** them, leading them to the Promised Land. They knew the LORD led them out of Egypt and they knew the LORD God had revealed Himself at Mount Sinai. Yet, they were willing to trust a god they could *make* to finish what the LORD began.

i. "As later Israel wanted a human king, not the invisible divine king (1 Samuel 8:4-8), so now they want a god 'with a face', like everybody else." (Cole)

ii. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul dealt with the same error with the Galatians: *Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?* (Galatians 3:3) It is possible to begin the Christian life trusting Jesus, and then at a later time to trust self or one's own spirituality. Following our own gods is no better for us than it was for ancient Israel.

d. **We do not know what has become of him:** *Not knowing* led Israel into sin. Frustrated because of this uncertainty, Israel turned to idolatry and sin.

i. "It is likely they might have supposed that Moses had perished in the fire, which they saw had invested the top of the mountain into which he went." (Clarke)

ii. "The clause, 'as for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt' is deliberately cast in coarse language, thus revealing the attitude of the people who had relegated God's works to a mere mortal." (Kaiser)

2. (2-4) Aaron responds to the peoples' request.

And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

a. **Break off the golden earrings...and bring them to me:** God told Moses to receive a free-will offering to gather materials for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:1-7). Before Moses came down from Mount Sinai and received this God-commanded offering, Aaron received this offering of gold to make an idol.

i. The people were generous in response - **all the people broke off the golden earrings...and brought them to Aaron.** By nature people are generous in what they give to their idols. We should be even *more* generous with what we give to the Living God.

ii. "Aaron instructed the people to 'take off' (*paraq*, lit. 'tear off'; contrast *laqah* ['take'] in 35:5) their 'gold earrings.'" (Kaiser)

b. **He fashioned it with an engraving tool:** This wasn't the Spirit-inspired craftsmanship of Bezaleel and Aholiab mentioned in Exodus 31:1-6. This was the sin-inspired work of Aaron. He thought it out, melted the gold, molded it, and **fashioned it** carefully with an **engraving tool**.

i. **A molded calf:** "*Calf* is not a good translation of the Hebrew *egel*. A young bull in his first strength is meant: for instance, the word can describe a three-year-old animal (Genesis 15:9)."

c. **Then they said, "This is your god":** Aaron did not anoint this thing as their god; he simply went along with the people as **they** proclaimed it as their god. He was probably flattered at their admiration of his creation.

i. True leadership would have cried out, "This is idolatry! We must destroy this golden calf. You people are wrong in calling this creation of man your god." But Aaron wasn't a true leader. He was an example of the one who leads by following popular opinion.

ii. "Jeroboam borrowed this statement when he installed the two golden calves at the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. (1 Kings 12:28)." (Kaiser)

d. **That brought you out of the land of Egypt:** This shows the foolishness of idolatry. This statue of a calf did not exist the day before, yet they worshipped it as the god that brought them out of Egypt.

3. (5-6) Ungodly and immoral worship at the golden calf.

So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings;

and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

a. **When Aaron saw it:** Aaron was flattered by the enthusiastic response of the people. When he saw their devotion to this idol, **he built an altar before it**. He began to organize the worship of the idol he just made.

i. It was bad enough to have a golden calf the people praised for their escape from Egypt. This second step of Aaron's was worse. He *honored* and *sanctified* the idol with animal sacrifice. He made the calf, and then he made the altar to worship it.

b. **Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD:** This shows that the creation and the worship of the golden calf was not a *conscious* rejection of the LORD. Aaron and the rest of Israel probably thought that they could give honor to the LORD *through* the golden calf.

i. Aaron was not crass enough to say, "Let's do away with the LORD God." As Israel saw it, Aaron didn't take away the LORD God; he simply added the golden calf.

c. **They rose early on the next day:** They served their idol with eagerness, energy, and personal sacrifice. People usually find a way to rise early for the things that are really important to them. This shows that Israel was willing to give their time, their sleep, and their money in the service of this idol.

i. **Offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings:** "Aaron might make a calf, but the people made it a god, by adoring it." (Trapp)

d. **And rose up to play:** This is a tasteful way to speak of gross immorality among the people of Israel. Their worship included eating, drinking (in the sense of drunkenness) and sexual immorality.

i. "The verb translated *play* suggests sex-play in Hebrew...and therefore we are probably to understand drunken orgies." (Cole)

ii. "The verb *sahaq* signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play." (Kaiser) One Hebrew dictionary uses the phrase "conjugal caresses," as found in Genesis 26:8, 39:14 and 39:17.

iii. Less than two months before this, Israel heard the voice of God Himself thunder from heaven, audibly speaking the Ten Commandments to the nation. That dramatic experience, in and of itself, did not change their hearts. It made many of them desire a *less demanding* god.

iv. "It seems impossible that, so soon after receiving such a lofty revelation, Israel could fall so low: but Christian experience today is often the same." (Cole)

B. The nature and result of Moses' intercession.

1. (7-8) God tells Moses what is happening at the camp of Israel.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"

a. **For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt:** God called Israel **your people**, in the sense that they belonged to Moses, not to God. In this God suggested to Moses that He had or was about to *disown* Israel.

b. **They have turned aside quickly:** This is almost an understatement. They didn't wait long to go their own sinful way.

c. **They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it:** God described to Moses everything that happened, and even quoted the words of the people in their idolatry. God knew *exactly* what happened. The people ignored God, but He did not ignore them.

2. (9-10) God's amazing offer to Moses.

And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

a. **I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people:** God spoke as if He had seen enough, and He made a remarkable offer to Moses. If Moses would only agree, God would **consume** Israel and start over again with Moses (**I will make of you a great nation**).

i. Hypothetically, God could have done this and still fulfilled every promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It would completely change the place of Moses, making him the new "Abraham" of God's plan for Israel. Moses had the opportunity to be as revered as Abraham was, and to be honored by every following generation.

ii. **Stiff-necked:** "This phrase, common in the Bible, is a farmer's metaphor of an ox or a horse that will not respond to the rope when tugged." (Cole)

b. **Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them:** God did not ask for the opinion or participation of Moses in this matter. He simply told Moses, "**Let Me alone** so I can do this." The clear impression was that if Moses did *nothing*, the plan would go ahead.

3. (11-13) Moses intercedes for Israel.

Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'"

a. **Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God:** Moses refused to do *nothing*. He did not fatalistically say, "Well, whatever God will do, God will do." He **pleaded with the LORD**, according to what he believed to be God's heart.

i. Moses' prayer was not long but it was strong. "It is not the *length*, but the *strength* of prayer that appeals to heaven." (Meyer)

ii. "Thus did Jehovah lead His servant into fellowship with the deepest things of His own heart. Therefore his intercession prevailed." (Morgan)

b. **Your people whom You brought out of the land of Egypt:** In his prayer, Moses first gave the people back to God. "LORD, they belong to You and not to me. I don't want to be god over these people; only You can do that."

c. **Your people whom You brought out of the land of Egypt:** Moses then appealed to God on the basis of grace. "LORD, we didn't deserve to be brought out of Egypt to begin with. You did it by Your grace, not because we deserved it. Please don't stop dealing with us by grace."

d. **Why should the Egyptians speak:** Moses next appealed to God on the basis of glory. "LORD, this will bring discredit to You in the eyes of the nations. The Egyptians will think of You as a cruel God who led your people out to the desert to kill them. Don't let anyone think that of You, God."

i. "Undoubtedly Moses was filled with compassion for the people, but his chief concern was for the honor of the name of God." (Morgan)

e. **Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self:** Finally, Moses appealed to God on the basis of His goodness. "LORD, keep Your promises. You are a good God who is always faithful. Don't break Your promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel."

i. "In the want of other rhetoric, let Christians in their prayers urge with repetition. Lord, thou hast promised, thou hast promised. Put the promises into suit, and you have anything. God cannot deny himself." (Trapp)

4. (14) God relents from His anger.

So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

a. **So the LORD relented:** God answered Moses' prayer. God was going to destroy the nation - all Moses had to do was leave God alone and let Him do it. But Moses did not leave God alone; he labored in intercession according to what He knew of the heart of God.

b. **So the LORD relented:** In the King James Version this phrase is translated *the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*. Based on this, some believe God sometimes needs to repent of evil, or that God changes His mind.

i. It is helpful to read other translations of this passage.

- *Then the Lord relented* (NIV)
- *So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people* (NASB)
- *The Lord turned from the evil which He had thought to do* (Amplified)
- *The Lord was moved with compassion to save His people.* (Septuagint Bible)

ii. Numbers 23:19 says, *God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do?* Some say that these two passages contradict each other, and that Exodus 32 shows God repenting and changing while Numbers 23 says God never changes or repents. We can understand these passages by understanding that Moses wrote with what we call *anthropomorphic*, or "man-centered" language. He described the actions of God as they appeared to him. Moses' prayer did not change God, but it did change the standing of the people in God's sight - the people were now in a place of mercy, when before they were in a place of judgment.

iii. Also, we can say that God *did not* go back on His word to either Moses or Israel. We understand the principle that God's promises of judgment are inherently meant to call men to repentance and prayer and therefore avert the judgment (Ezekiel 33:13-16).

iv. Some are frustrated because the Bible describes God's actions in human terms, but they really cannot be described in any other way. "I suppose that I need not say that this verse speaks after the manner of men. I do not know after what other manner we can speak. To speak of God after the manner of God, is reserved for God

himself; and mortal men could not comprehend such speech. In this sense, the LORD often speaks, not according to the literal fact, but according to the appearance of things to us, in order that we may understand so far as the human can comprehend the divine." (Spurgeon)

c. **The LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do:** God did not destroy Israel, and He *knew* that He would not destroy Israel. Yet He deliberately put Moses into this crucial place of intercession, so that Moses would display and develop God's heart for the people, a heart of love and compassion. Moses prayed just as God wanted him to - as if heaven and earth, salvation or destruction, depended on his prayer. This is how God waits for us to pray.

i. "We are not to think of Moses as altering God's purpose towards Israel by this prayer, but as carrying it out: Moses was never more like God than in such moments, for he shared God's mind and loving purpose." (Cole)

ii. Living under the New Covenant, we do not have *less* privilege in prayer than Moses had. We do not have *less* access to God than Moses had. The only thing we may have *less* of is Moses' heart for the people.

C. Moses confronts Aaron.

1. (15-18) Moses and Joshua hear the people in the camp.

And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in his hand. The tablets *were* written on both sides; on the one *side* and on the other they were written. Now the tablets *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "*There is a noise of war in the camp.*" But he said: "*It is not the noise of the shout of victory, nor the noise of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing I hear.*"

a. **Moses turned and went down from the mountain:** In the midst of this great idolatry, Moses and Joshua came down from their extended time up on Mount Sinai. He carried **the two tablets of the Testimony**, written direction by the hand of God.

b. **The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God:** It is significant that the tablets were written by God's direct hand. All law and morality must come from God's standard and character, or be up to the opinion or changing values of men.

i. "For as he is the sole author of *law* and *justice*, so he alone can write them on the heart of man." (Clarke)

ii. Under the New Covenant, God also promised to write His law: *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Jeremiah 31:33)

c. **There is a noise of war in the camp:** We might say that Joshua was correct when he said this. However, the noise reflected a spiritual war instead of a material war.

2. (19-21) Moses puts an end to the disgrace and confronts Aaron.

So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*. And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought *so* great a sin upon them?"

a. **Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them:** Israel broke the covenant by their idolatry and immorality with the golden calf. There was something appropriate about Mo-

ses breaking the stone tablets of the covenant at Israel's breaking of the covenant.

i. Cole called the breaking of the tablets "a significant ceremonial act, not a mere exhibition of anger." Moses acted out the broken law and covenant.

ii. Nevertheless, Moses had to deal with **anger** through much of his life. In anger he killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). In anger he broke the tablets written by the finger of God. In anger he beat the rock God commanded him to speak to (Numbers 20:10-11). This last display of anger kept Moses out of the Promised Land.

b. **He took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder:** This idol had been the object of adoration and immoral rites; yet it seems that no one challenged Moses when he did this. Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the authority and strength of a man who had been with God - and all Israel knew it.

c. **Made the children of Israel drink it:** Moses ground up the calf and made the people drink it for several reasons.

- To show that the so-called god was nothing and could be destroyed easily
- To completely obliterate this idol
- To make the people pay an immediate consequence of their sin
- To make the gold of the idol absolutely unusable, being corrupted with bodily waste

i. "The gold dust sprinkled on the water of the wady, flowing down from the mountain, the water that Israel must drink, reminds us of the 'water of bitterness' to be drunk by the wife suspected of unfaithfulness (Numbers 5:18-22)." (Cole)

d. **What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?** This was a perceptive question. Moses understood that this plan didn't originate with Aaron, but that he allowed it and implemented it.

3. (22-24) Aaron's excuse.

So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set on evil*. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; *as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.*' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it off.*' So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

a. **Do not let the anger of my lord become hot:** Aaron essentially asked Moses to calm down, and to not be so angry. Aaron had no sense of the greatness of his sin. He had no significant sense of the fear of the LORD.

b. **You know the people, that they are set on evil:** Moses knew this as well as Aaron did. Yet Moses had a sense of his need to *restrain* the evil of the people, while in this case Aaron actually encouraged and supported the sin of the people.

c. **Make us gods that shall go before us:** Aaron quoted the people exactly. But he lied when he described his own actions (**I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out**).

i. Aaron no doubt meant that this calf was produced by a miracle - it just happened. But Moses - and everyone else - could see the human engraving marks on it (Exodus 32:4). Aaron claimed this was a miraculous work, but the evidence of his workmanship were all over it.

ii. Aaron gave the classic "it just happened" excuse. But it *didn't* just happen. Aaron thought it out, melted the

gold, molded it, and fashioned it carefully with an engraving tool (Exodus 32:4).

iii. Aaron did this evil thing and made his excuse because at that moment, it seemed harder to stand for the LORD than to go along with the people, and Aaron took the path of least resistance. He was lazy. "Lazy people always find fault with their tools, and those who do not intend to work always find some excuse or other; and then they make up for their laziness by having a delicious spiritual dream. Have the nominally Christian people about us are dreaming; and they consider that thus they are doing the work of the LORD. They are only doing it deceitfully by putting dreaming into the place of real service." (Spurgeon)

iv. "What a silly and ridiculous subterfuge!...Just like the popish legend of the *falling* of the *shrine of our Lady of Loretta out of heaven!* These legends come from the same quarter. Satan can provide more when necessary for his purpose." (Clarke)

v. Aaron's sin was so great that only the intercession of Moses saved his life. *And the LORD was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.* (Deuteronomy 9:20)

D. The call to side with either God or idolatry.

1. (25-26) Moses issues a challenge.

Now when Moses saw that the people *were unrestrained* (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "*Whoever is on the LORD's side; come to me.*" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

a. **The people were unrestrained:** This shows how great the problem was. There is no greater danger than for people to cast off all restraint and do whatever seems right in their own eyes. The darkest days of Israel's national history were characterized by the phrase, *everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* (Judges 17:6)

i. "The idea of the verb 'to cast off all restraints' is that of loosening or uncovering. It would appear that there was a type of religious prostitution connected with the people's worship of the golden calf." (Kaiser)

ii. In our modern culture we regard the absence of restraint as heaven on earth. But the Bible and common sense tell us that this kind of moral, spiritual, and social anarchy brings nothing but destruction.

iii. *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* (Proverbs 14:12) When man follows his own instincts, his own inclinations, it leads to ruin. We need to follow God's way, not our own.

iv. **Unrestrained...no restrained:** "The exact word used twice in this verse is found in the warning of Proverbs 29:18: 'Where there is no revelation [i.e., the message from or attention to the Word of God], the people cast off all moral restraints [i.e., they become ungovernable]'. " (Kaiser)

v. God has given many restraints to us: the curbs of the fear of God, of family, of culture, of conscience, of law, even of necessity. But these restraints can be - and are being - broken down.

b. **Whoever is on the LORD's side; come to me:** Moses gave the people of Israel the opportunity to make a stand for the LORD. The Levites, to their honor, sided with the LORD and with Moses. Sadly, they were the only significant group to come out clearly for God's cause at the golden calf incident.

i. It only makes sense for us to be on our LORD's side. He is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Preserver, and our Best Friend. Yet being on the LORD's side requires something.

· Being on the LORD's side requires *decision*.

- Being on the LORD's side requires *action*.
- Being on the LORD's side requires *separation*.

2. (27-29) The execution of 3,000.

And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

a. **Let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor:** In this case, siding with the LORD meant siding against some people. Those who were more interested in siding with *all* the people could never do what these Levites did.

i. "My one interest is into this separation between those who are 'on the Lord's side' and those who worship their own god, and their own ideas, and their own thoughts." (Lloyd-Jones)

b. **About three thousand men of the people fell that day:** It seems that the sin of Israel at the golden calf involved more than these 3,000 people. Yet these were undoubtedly those most flagrant in their idolatry and immorality, or these were the leaders of the sinful conduct.

E. Moses' second intercession.

1. (30) Moses returns to intercede for the people.

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

a. **Now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin:** Moses already interceded for the people in Exodus 32:11-14. But he prayed again for them because now he saw the sin with his own eyes, and was struck with the depth of the people's sin.

b. **Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin:** Moses also learned on Mount Sinai that God's penalty for idolatry was death. *He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed* (Exodus 22:20). He was more aware than ever of the distance between the people and God, and sensed the urgency to intercede.

2. (31-32) Moses' bold request on behalf of the people.

Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

a. **Oh, these people have committed a great sin:** Moses did not minimize the sin of the people or put it in soft terms. They were guilty of worshipping a **god of gold**.

i. People still worship gods of gold. In August of 1990 a man staggered to the steps of his Los Angeles office. Before he died of the gunshot wound to his chest, he called out the names of his three children. But he still had his \$10,000 Rolex watch clutched in his hand. He gave his life for a god of gold.

b. **Yet now, if You will forgive their sin:** Moses knew the enormity of the people's sin, yet he still asked for forgiveness. This was an appeal to the mercy and grace of God.

c. **If not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written:** Moses asked God to forgive Israel on the basis of his own sacrificial identification with the sinful people. If God would not forgive, Moses asked to be *damned* in sacrificial identification with his sinful people.

i. Moses felt that Israel had sinned so terribly that the blood of a goat or an ox couldn't cover it; it had to be a man who suffered in their place. Therefore he offered to be blotted out of God's book if it could somehow rescue the people. God said "no" to the request of Moses; yet we can say that God looked ahead to the sacrifice of One greater than Moses who would give Himself for the people, bringing full and complete atonement.

ii. "He stands between the people and the wrath of God and says, 'Punish me.' He could not have borne it, of course, it was too much. And yet the noble spirit of Moses shines out so clearly in this great incident." (Lloyd-Jones)

iii. Of course, this sacrificial heart was the same heart Jesus had in dying for our sins (1 Peter 3:18 and 2 Corinthians 5:21). The Apostle Paul also had some of this same heart of Jesus (Romans 9:3).

3. (33-35) The LORD's response to the plea of Moses.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to *the place* of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

a. **Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book:** God agreed to spare the nation as a whole, but He definitely reserved the right to judge individual sinners.

b. **Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you:** This was God's promise to stay faithful to Israel and to keep His presence with them (**My Angel shall go before you**).

c. **I will visit punishment upon them for their sin:** That entire generation of adult Israelites would never enter the promised land. That specific judgment had yet to be pronounced, but God knew it would happen.

d. **So the LORD plagued the people:** This probably describes the death of the 3,000 already mentioned in Exodus 32:28.