

The Golden Calf

While Moses is on the mountain, the people grow impatient and make a golden calf to worship, bringing God's anger.

Exodus 32:1-35

CHARACTERS: Moses, Aaron, The Israelites, God

THEMES: Idolatry, Impatience, Intercession, Consequences of sin

WHEN THE PEOPLE saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'

Aaron answered, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, sons and daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' The people did so, and Aaron took what they handed him, made it into a molten calf, fashioned it with a tool, and declared, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

The next day, the people rose early, sacrificed burnt offerings, sat down to eat and drink, and got up to indulge in revelry.

On the mountain, the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people have become corrupt. They have made themselves an idol and are worshipping it. I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.'

But Moses sought the favor of the Lord. 'Why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt? Why should the

Egyptians say you brought them out to kill them? Turn from your fierce anger. Remember your promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'

The Lord relented.

Moses went down the mountain with the two tablets. When he approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned. He threw the tablets down, breaking them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf, burned it, ground it to powder, scattered it on water, and made the Israelites drink it.

Moses stood at the entrance to the camp. 'Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.' The Levites rallied to him, and that day about three thousand people died.

The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'

He returned to the Lord. 'Please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.' The Lord replied, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out. Now go, lead the people. My angel will go before you.'

In only forty days, the people who had witnessed God's power at the Red Sea had turned to worship a golden statue.