

**OASIS: A COVENANT MADE,
A COVENANT BROKEN - 10.16.11
DONE IN SYNC WITH “THE LIVING GOD’S STORY JOURNEY”
THE PASSAGE – EXODUS 32:1-16**



The Golden Calf

32 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “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.”

² Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.” ⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

⁹ “I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “O LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he

brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' ”

¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

¹⁵ Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. ¹

***Preface:** Welcome to our LC Bible study in our new sermon series “Living God’s Story.” As you know by now, this year we will be working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. We’ve just finished Genesis and last week Pastor Tom preached on God leading Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt. This week we’ll focus on the covenant. These LC studies will complement the sermons, and will focus on specific Biblical text to help us go deeper in personal understanding and application.*

Possible Starter Questions - Describe a time when someone broke a promise to you. Describe the thoughts and feelings you experienced.

Describe a time when you broke a promise to someone. What did you tell yourself to justify it?

Describe a time when you felt God’s answer to a particular prayer or experienced deliverance.

We like to think that if God would simply come and answer our prayers, we will never doubt, sin or fall into temptation again. What does this tell us about the human condition?

(If your group is large, either just have several do this; or better yet, subdivide into small clusters of 4 or 5 so that everyone can get an opportunity.)

Transitional Comment: **This study is focused on covenant-making and the season after deliverance.** As we will see in this account, the Israelites make a covenant with God but as soon as Moses is out of sight for an unexpected extended period of time, the people take matters into their own hands and fall into disobedience that bears terrible consequences. The question we seek to answer is, **“Why are we prone to disobey God so soon after we have encountered Him?”**

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996 (electronic ed.) (Ex 32:1–16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

OBSERVATION:

Personal time to re-read: Take several minutes to read this again on your own. What thoughts stand out to you?

There are 4 key characters to this story. Describe their actions, reactions, sins, words, etc.

Moses:

Aaron:

The Israelites:

The LORD:

O – Discuss the possible reasons for the growing contempt for Moses.
(An example is found quickly in vs. 1, “this fellow Moses.” Also note that Ex. 24:18 records that Moses was on Mt. Sinai with the Lord for “forty days and forty nights.” *Is it possible that the Israelites simply panicked over their leader being gone longer than they expected?*)

O – Describe Aaron’s actions. What reasons could he have had to enable the Israelites’ rebellion? Does he have a change of heart in verse 5?

O – By building the calf out of gold, the people want what the tabernacle was intended to do – provide a direct connection between the people and God. Why do you think they grew tired of waiting for Moses and pushed Aaron to action?

O – God (and Moses) is being disobeyed and undermined. What are the possible reasons for the people’s disobedience? What do you they really want from God? What do they really want from Moses? What do they seem *not* to want?

O – Fortunately, the story does not end here. Rebellion is followed by mediation. God calls Moses’ attention to the people’s feast. It seems that God in His omniscience could have held a shorter meeting with Moses. Why did He wait until the people rebelled to release Moses? What are we to learn from God here?

APPLICATION:

A – What are the “Golden Calves” of our day?

A – It’s interesting to note that the Golden Calf was constructed out of the people’s finest possessions (32:2 records that they took of the gold they were wearing). They were offering the best of what they had. How do we today offer the best of what we have to the wrong altars? In contrast, what do we offer God? According to Romans 12:1, what does Paul instruct us to offer the Lord?

A – Just as the Israelites were growing in their frustration with the leadership of Moses, what are issues with which we modern-day Christ-followers struggle? How do they distract us from what God has called us to do (and who to be)?

A – Describe a time when you have mediated with someone who was offended and angry. How did it turn out? What did you learn? What would you have done differently?

A – Impatience with God is a common theme throughout the Scriptures and likely in our own lives (even after we have had a powerful encounter with Him). Without getting too personal (or disclosing anything uncomfortable), describe how you justified your actions during a time when you regrettably took matters into your own hands.

A – Has God ever surprised you with answering a prayer too quickly?

In your closing time of prayer, ask the Lord that we be His patient and faithful people and ask Him for the strength to keep our covenant with Him.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Why a Golden Calf?

Possibilities include:

- Could have been modeled after the Egyptian bull-god, Apis, who may have symbolized “strong one” or “warrior.” The only other Biblical mention of this is Jeroboam’s construction of two calves in I Kings 12:28 (which points back to this account).
- Some have speculated that there is no intended pagan connection at all but that Israelites wanted a tangible, physical “presence” of the LORD. Verse 4 quotes them in saying “this is the god that brought you out of Egypt.” This is further *loosely* supported in Aaron’s command to have a festival to worship the LORD (vs. 5). Therefore, God is not angered that they are worshipping another false god but that they broke the commandment of making a “graven image.”
 - o There has been thought that calves and bulls functioned in the ancient world as “pedestals for the gods seated or standing above them” (Enns, p. 569). Reading in context of how the Ark was to serve, this idea has support.
 - o Therefore according to Peter Enns, “The calf is thus a pagan representation of the true God (p. 570).”

* The benefits from considering this possibility (1) affirms the backdrop from Chapter 20 to here, (2) shows the Israelites to be more intelligent than we normally give them credit for, and (3) allows us to connect with their anxiousness. While ancient pagan representations are not relevant to us, we can certainly sympathize with the notion that “God takes too long in answering us.”

Moses’ words *seem to change* God’s mind

Verse 14 – “Then the Lord *relented* ...”

‘relented’ in Hebrew is *nhm* meaning “repented” or “reconsidered.”

The wide speculations from commentators to preachers have included the following possibilities:

- Moses *changed* God’s mind. (Before reaching this conclusion, consider 1 Sam. 15:29).
- God was testing Moses.
- God was teaching Moses about mediation, leadership and compassion.

Note that volumes have been written about this. One possible resolution: God’s repentance is an example of an “anthropopathic expression” (a description of God in human forms) (Kaiser, p.479).

The extreme measures taken by Moses

(Note that this happens after verse 16 but still in Ch. 32.)

The melting of the golden calf and pouring it into the drinking water and the slaughter of three thousand Israelites in vs. 28 could be a source of frustration for some in our LC's.

While there are many aspects to consider, perhaps the most important is that **pursuing the Lord's will is the most essential endeavor in life.** God had called the Israelites to be holy and these were the consequences that resulted in the immediate breaking of the Covenant. We can learn that while God is merciful, He is also a God of judgment.

It is interesting to see as the Exodus narrative continues, the cycle of God's compassion, deliverance and judgment continues to repeat. (One could make the case that it still continues ...).

Bibliography:

Enns, Peter (2000). *The NIV Application Commentary Series – Exodus*. Zondervan Pub, Grand Rapids, MI.

Brueggemann, Walter (1994). *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* Vol. 1. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Kaiser Jr., Walter (1995). *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Exodus*. Zondervan, Pub. Grand Rapids, MI.

Advice to study leaders:

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night. Take some time to select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group.
- b. Complement OIA questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: Allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with "difference making" application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching," rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.