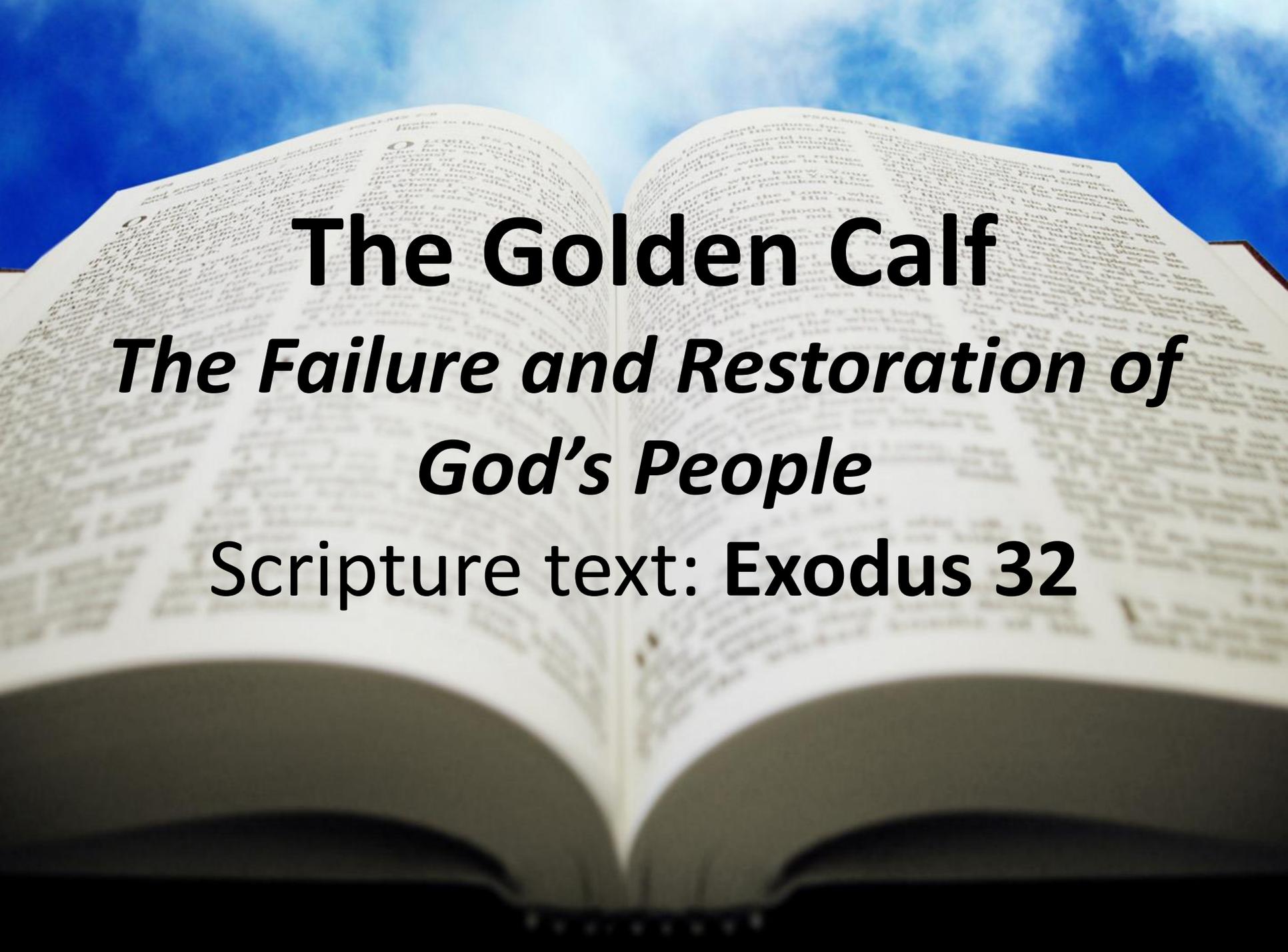


Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church
We're glad you're here!



An open book is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, but it is mostly out of focus. The background is a bright blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid in the center of the book's pages.

The Golden Calf

The Failure and Restoration of God's People

Scripture text: Exodus 32

While Moses was having a “**mountaintop**” experience with the Lord, **the people were sinning in the valley below**. **Spiritual leadership is not all blessing; there are burdens as well.**

Exodus 32:1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. 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."

No matter how you look at this sin, it was a great offense against God. The Jews were God's people, chosen by His grace and redeemed from Egypt by His power. **He had led them, fed them, protected them from the enemy, and made them a part of His covenant.** He had given them **His holy laws and the people had agreed to obey.**

Here at Sinai, the **people had seen the awesome display of God's glory and had trembled at His power.** Yet, in spite of all these marvelous experiences, they **impudently disobeyed the Lord and lapsed into idolatry and immorality.**

Exodus 19:8 All the people answered together and said, "**All that the LORD has spoken we will do.**" And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

Exodus 24:3-7 Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "**All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.**" And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "**All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.**"

While Moses was experiencing spiritual triumph the people of God plummeted to a low point spiritually. God had **repeatedly manifested His power and compassion**, but **they were soon forgotten**.

Repeatedly in the Book of Exodus **the Israelites reacted with insensitivity and rebellion** to God's marvelous displays of His goodness.

The people became fearful because of Moses' delay (he was on **the mountain 40 days, Exodus 24:18**) so **they went to Aaron, their temporary leader (Exodus 24:14)**).

Exodus 20:18-22 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. And the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.

Exodus 24:14 And he said to the elders, "**Wait here for us until we return to you.** And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. **Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.**"

Exodus 24:18 Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And **Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.**

Assuming that Moses would not return to guide and comfort them (*We don't know what has happened to him*), **they asked for a substitute or surrogate** who will go before us. In suggesting that Aaron make them gods they were not asking for gods to replace Yahweh **but for a visible, tangible object to follow.**

Exodus 32:2-4 So Aaron said to them, "**Take off the rings of gold** that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and **fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.** And they said, "**These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!**"

Granting their request, Aaron suggested the people give him their gold earrings (probably acquired from the Egyptians on the day of Exodus, 12:35–36), which he then melted into an **idol cast in the shape of a calf**. Some commentators have suggested that this represented the **Egyptian bull-god Apis**, but this seems unlikely because Apis was not worshiped as an image. Even so, **the bull symbolized fertility and sexual strength**.

This explicitly violated the second commandment (Exodus 20:4–6; cf. 20:23), which the people had already received from God verbally through Moses.

Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself a **carved image**, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation **of those who hate me**, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:23 You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, **nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.**

Perhaps the people considered the calf-idol an image of God. Since only one idol was made, the word gods (Exodus 32:1, 4, 8, 23, 31) may refer both to the idol and to God whom it supposedly represented.

It seems unlikely that Aaron would attribute the Exodus to anyone but the true God.

Exodus 32:5-6 When **Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it.** And Aaron made proclamation and said, "**Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.**" And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Aaron then made an altar, and **the next day in a festival to the Lord...** the people offered burnt offerings and ... fellowship offerings. **But then their activities led to revelry** (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7; ṣāḥaq suggests immorality). This violated the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14).

1 Corinthians 10:6-8 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. **Do not be idolaters** as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." **We must not indulge in sexual immorality** as some of them did, and **twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.**

Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Singing and dancing were included (Exodus 32:18–19) and they were “**running wild**” (v. 25). **Immorality often accompanies idolatry** (Rom. 1:22–24). **Yet they supposed they were worshiping the true God!**

Romans 1:22-24 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,**

Exodus 32:7-10 And the LORD said to Moses, "**Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them.** They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" And the LORD said to Moses, "**I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."**"

While Moses was on the mountain, God told him the people had become corrupt (v. 7) and stiff-necked (v. 9), that is, stubborn and unresponsive (cf. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27).

In His anger God refused to claim the people as His own or even to claim that He delivered them from Egypt (your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, Ex. 32:7; cf. these people, v. 9).

After telling Moses what they had done (v. 8), God said that He would punish their rebellion by destroying them and that He would build a new nation beginning with Moses (I will make you into a great nation, v. 10).

God's servant interceding (vv. 7–14).

Of course the Lord knew what was going on in the camp of Israel. See Heb. 4:13.

Note how God seemed to “blame” Moses for what had happened, but **Moses was quick to remind the Lord that Israel was His people.** It was Jehovah's glory that was at stake and not Moses' reputation, so Moses reminded the Lord of His promises to the patriarchs. When Scripture says that the Lord “repents,” it is using human language to describe a divine response (Num. 23:19; Jer. 18:7–10; Amos 7:1–6).

Numbers 23:19 God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. **Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?**

Jeremiah 18:7-10 If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, **I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.** And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and **if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.**

Amos 7:1-6 This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, "O Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" **The LORD relented concerning this:** "It shall not be," said the LORD. This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, the Lord GOD was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said, "O Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" **The LORD relented concerning this:** "This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

Twice during Moses' lifetime, God offered to destroy Israel and use Moses **to found a new nation** (v. 10; Num. 14:12), but he refused.

Numbers 14:12 **I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.**"

The Jews never knew the price Moses paid to be their leader. How much they owed to him, and yet how little they showed their appreciation! God was even going to kill Aaron, but **Moses interceded** for him (Deut. 9:20).

Deuteronomy 9:18-21 Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, **because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger.** For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the LORD bore against you, so that **he was ready to destroy you.** But the LORD listened to me that time also. And **the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him.** And I **prayed for Aaron** also at the same time. Then I took the sinful thing, the calf that you had made, and **burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust.** And I threw the dust of it into the brook that ran down from the mountain.

Exodus 32:11-14 But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "**O 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 say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against 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 offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'**" And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

Moses reversed God's reference to Israel as his people (v. 7) and **called them Your people** (cf. 33:13). Then Moses **pleaded for mercy on two bases: his testimony to the Egyptians (32:12) and God's promises to the patriarchs (v. 13)**. Such a destruction would vindicate Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and **would cause the Egyptians to mock the true God**. Further, God would be viewed as One who breaks promises. He said He would make the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob) innumerable (Gen. 15:5; 22:17a; 26:4a; 28:14; 32:13) and **would take them into the Promised Land** (Gen. 15:18–21; 22:17b; 26:4b; 28:13; 32:13).

Moses **recognized that the people had sinned** so he did not seek to justify their actions. **As a result God relented of His threatened course of judgment.** The word “relented” does not mean that God changed His mind but that **He embarked on another course of action.**

The Hebrew word *nāḥam* suggests relief or comfort from a planned, **undesirable course of action.** God is not inflexible; He responds to individuals’ needs, attitudes, and actions.

God's wrath judging (vv. 15–35).

In His grace, **God forgave their sins**, but in his **government, He had to discipline the people**. How many tears have been caused by the painful consequences of forgiven sins! **Moses had a right to be angry and to humble Aaron and the people**. By breaking the two tables of the Law, written by God, **Moses dramatically showed the people the greatness of their sin**. Instead of confessing his sins, **Aaron made excuses**. He **blamed** the people for their depravity (v. 22), Moses for his delay (v. 23), and the furnace for its delivery of a calf!