

## 12.17b Punishment Because of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:15-35; 33:1-12; Deuteronomy 9:15-21)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. It also indicates answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools

- “Life of Moses” Series 2 Flash-a-Cards from A Beka Book and/or pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- (optional) *Herein Is Love Commentary Series; Exodus, A Commentary for Children*, by Nancy Ganz, Shepherd Press, 2002. Quotations from this source will be noted by (*Ganz*).

**Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:** Tips and terms are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *to mourn*: to be deeply sad
- *a camp*: an area of land where people stay in tents

### Scripture: (NASB)

Exodus 32:15 Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. 16 The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing engraved on the tablets. 17 Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a sound of war in the camp.” 18 But he said,

“It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,  
Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;  
But the sound of singing I hear.”

19 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.

21 Then Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?” 22 Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. 23 For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ 24 I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

25 Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies— 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. 27 He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” 28 So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29 Then Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”

30 On the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” 31 Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. 32 But now, if You will, forgive their sin--and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” 33 The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. 34 But go now, lead

the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” 35 Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

33:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’ 2 I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.”

4 When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the sons of Israel, ‘You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.’” 6 So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. 9 Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

12 Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ 13 Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” 14 And He said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. 16 For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?”

17 The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”

Deuteronomy 9:15 “So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. 16 And I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. 17 I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes. 18 I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger. 19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also. 20 The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time. 21 I took your sinful thing, the calf which 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 its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.”

### **Introduction/Review:**

Last week we left Moses and Joshua on the mountain of God while the people below worshiped a golden calf that Aaron had made. God threatened to destroy those people and make a new nation from Moses, but Moses pled with God not to destroy the people. What two reasons did Moses give why God should not destroy the Israelites? [(1) The Egyptians would say He wasn't powerful enough to take care of the people

He had delivered from Egypt. (2) God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) that their descendants would be God's people and they would inherit the land of Canaan.]

God chose not to destroy the Israelites, but they needed to be punished for their terrible disobedience.

## **Story:**

### ***Descending the mountain***

As Moses and Joshua descended from the mountain, they heard the people shouting. ✓It must have been a great roar, sounding, perhaps, like a crowd at a Super Bowl game. Joshua thought at first that it was the sound of war, but rather than cheers of victory or groans of defeat he heard—singing!?

And as soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, “his anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.” God's precious law, written by His own hand, was smashed to pieces!

### ***Demolishing the idol***

Moses came to the golden idol. He broke it down, burned it, and somehow made it into powder.\* Then he threw this gold powder into the water and made the people drink. Think of it! A god one can eat or drink! What a useless, stupid thing an idol is!

### ***Disciplining Aaron***

Moses approached Aaron. “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?”

Aaron ✓glibly answered, “Don't be so angry with me. You know the people—that they are set on evil. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who shall go before us. We do not know what has become of Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt.’ So I said to them, ‘Give me your gold.’ They gave it to me, I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

Oh, come on, Aaron! “Out came this calf”?! What kind of a lie is that? You know you carved it out of the gold. Give me a break!

### ***Destroying sinners***

Drinking gold dust was not sufficient punishment for these ✓out-of-control rebels. Moses walked to the entrance of the camp and called out, “Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me.”

All the sons of Levi, men of his own tribe, gathered around Moses. He said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword each of you and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp and each of you slay his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.’”

The sons of Levi did what Moses said. About three thousand men died. ✓Many Bible scholars assume that the ones slain were the chief ringleaders for this great sin against God. Because of their courageous deed, the men of Levi were commended and blessed. Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that God might bestow a blessing upon you this day.” In other words, these men and this tribe would be the ones who served God among the people.

Even the killing of three thousand men was insufficient punishment for the hideous sin. Moses said to the people the next morning, “I'm going back on the mountain to see if I can make things right between you and God because of your sin.”

### ***Debating with God***

Moses did indeed go up to plead with God. “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—.” Then Moses broke off his plea. Continuing, he said, “But if you will not forgive their sin, please blot me out of your book that you have

written.”

What did Moses just say? He was willing not to be saved eternally if it would make a difference in whether or not the Israelites were forgiven. Oh, what love and care Moses had for these people.

But the Lord said to Moses, “The ones who have sinned against me, they are the ones I will blot out of my book. When I visit them with punishment, I will visit their sin upon them.” Then the Lord sent a plague on the people—a third punishment.

### ***Departing God***

But the fourth punishment was greater than all the others: God said His presence would not go with them to the Promised Land. Hear what He said: “Depart, you and the people go up from here to the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will send an angel before you.” ✓This angel was not Jesus whom God had promised before (Exodus 23:20) but a common angel. God continued, “I will drive out the seven wicked nations that now live in Canaan so that you may go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. However, I Myself will not go up in your midst because you are so obstinate that I might destroy you on the way.”

Notice in this speech that at this point God forgave their sin insofar as “he would not cut them off from being a people; yet still he does not call them his people . . . as if they were not under his care and conduct” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/exodus-33-1.html>).

We know Moses always reported God’s words to the people. When they heard the sad word that God would not be with them as He had been, they went into mourning. God had told the people to take off any jewelry they were wearing while He decided what to do with them. Sadness and humility, as well as the command of God made the people take off their ornaments. In fact, from this time at Mount Horeb until they reached the Promised Land, they did not wear jewelry.

### ***Discussing with God***

A side note gives us some information about how God and Moses communicated when Moses was not on the mountain. Moses pitched a tent outside the camp, a good distance from the camp. Moses called this tent “the tent of meeting.” Others who sought the LORD in worship would also go out to this tent of meeting. Every time Moses went out to the tent, all the people would stand at the entrance of his own tent and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent of meeting. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. Seeing the pillar of cloud sat the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship at the entrance of his own tent. In this way, the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses would return to the camp, his young servant, Joshua, stayed at the tent.

At this tent of meeting, Moses, not content that God would not go with the people, again pled with God. He said to the LORD, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But you haven’t let me know whom you will send with me. Also, you have said that I have found favor in your sight. If this is true, let me know your ways—how you do things—so that I may know you and continue to find favor in your sight. In addition, Lord, consider that this nation is your people, not mine.”

### ***Decision reversed***

God answered, “✓All right. My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Moses responded, “If your presence does not go with us, don’t lead us from here. The only way we can know we have found your favor is by your going with us. Your going with us will distinguish us from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth.”

God repeated the reassuring words, “I will do this thing of which you have spoken. You have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name.”

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\*Here are some ideas as to how this process took place: (1) [He] cast it into ingots of suitable size for the operations which follow. . . . [T]he powder of malleable metals can be ground so fine as to resemble dust from the wings of a moth or butterfly; and these dust particles will float in water for hours, and in a running stream for days (Jamison Faussett and Brown); (2) [He] beat the mass of gold into thin plates, and then filed them small (John Gill); (3) “He might easily [if it was hollow] break it to pieces and subject the pieces to the action of fire, whereby they would be calcined [to heat (a substance) to a high temperature but below the melting or fusing point, causing loss of moisture, reduction or oxidation, and the decomposition of . . . compounds (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com>)], and might then be easily reduced to powder” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

### Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:  
“Moses was a faithful shepherd, whose prayer preserved the people. . . . If God answered the prayers of Moses, will He not answer the prayers of His own beloved Son? Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, ever lives to make intercession for us” (Ganz).
- The people seemed to be repentant on this occasion as seen in their willingness to take off their jewelry in honor of God and to worship while Moses met with God in the tent of meeting. May we be repentant and worshipful.

### Activities:

- Play dough: Ten Commandment tablets, written on both sides; tent
- Snack: Gold-covered chocolate candy.
- Sing all stanzas of “The Golden Calf” found in Lesson 12:17a, “Golden Calf.”
- Sing “Stop! It’s the Law!” found in Lesson 12.15 “God Gives Laws,” or on the songs page at [teachingthebibleto kids.org](http://teachingthebibleto kids.org), where an audio and visuals are available.
- Sword drill: What did the people lose by their sin? Place the crossword puzzle found below in a sheet protector. With a dry erase marker, fill in correct answers. Students may need to help with some answers.  
Across: #1 Exodus 32:19 (*tablets*); #2 Exodus 32:28 (*many men*); #3 1 Kings 9:14 (*gold*); #4 Deuteronomy 9:14 (*names blotted from God’s book*)  
Down: #3 Exodus 33:3 (*God’s presence*); #5 Titus 1:7 (*blamelessness of their high priest*)
- Review Questions: (Game: Attach adhesive labels with point numerals written on them to one end of ten 12-inch pieces of yarn. Place the yarn on a flannel board with the labels on the back side of the board so that they cannot be seen. Students who answer questions correctly pull a piece of yarn and get the number of points on the label. The team or student with the highest total wins.)
  1. Why did God’s anger burn against Israel? [They had made and worshiped an idol.]
  2. How was Joshua confused on the mountain when he heard the people? [He thought he heard the sound of war, but the sound was singing.]
  3. What did Moses do as soon as he saw the people worshiping the idol? [Broke the tablets.]
  4. What did Moses do to the idol? [Burnt it and made dust of it; made the people to drink water with the gold.]
  5. What was Aaron’s lie? [The idol just appeared as if he hadn’t made it.]
  6. Who came to Moses when he asked, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” [The tribe of Levi.]
  7. How many men did the Levites slay? [Three thousand.]
  8. What did Moses ask God to do if He would not forgive the Israelites? Hint: “If you will not forgive, then . . .” [Blot out his name from God’s book.]
  9. What did God Himself do to punish the rebels? [Sent a plague.]
  10. Where did God and Moses when not on the mountain? [The tent of meeting outside the camp.]

**Memory Verse[s]:**

- Continue to learn Exodus 20:1–17. An enlarged copy is in Lesson 12.15; motions are in Lesson 12.16.

**Handwork:**

- Older students may do the dot-to-dot found below and color the picture. For younger students, the teacher will complete the dot-to-dot for the tablets; students will color the rest of the picture. (Final dot-to-dot shows a mountain, a path, and a bush on the left side; rocks and mountains on the right side.)

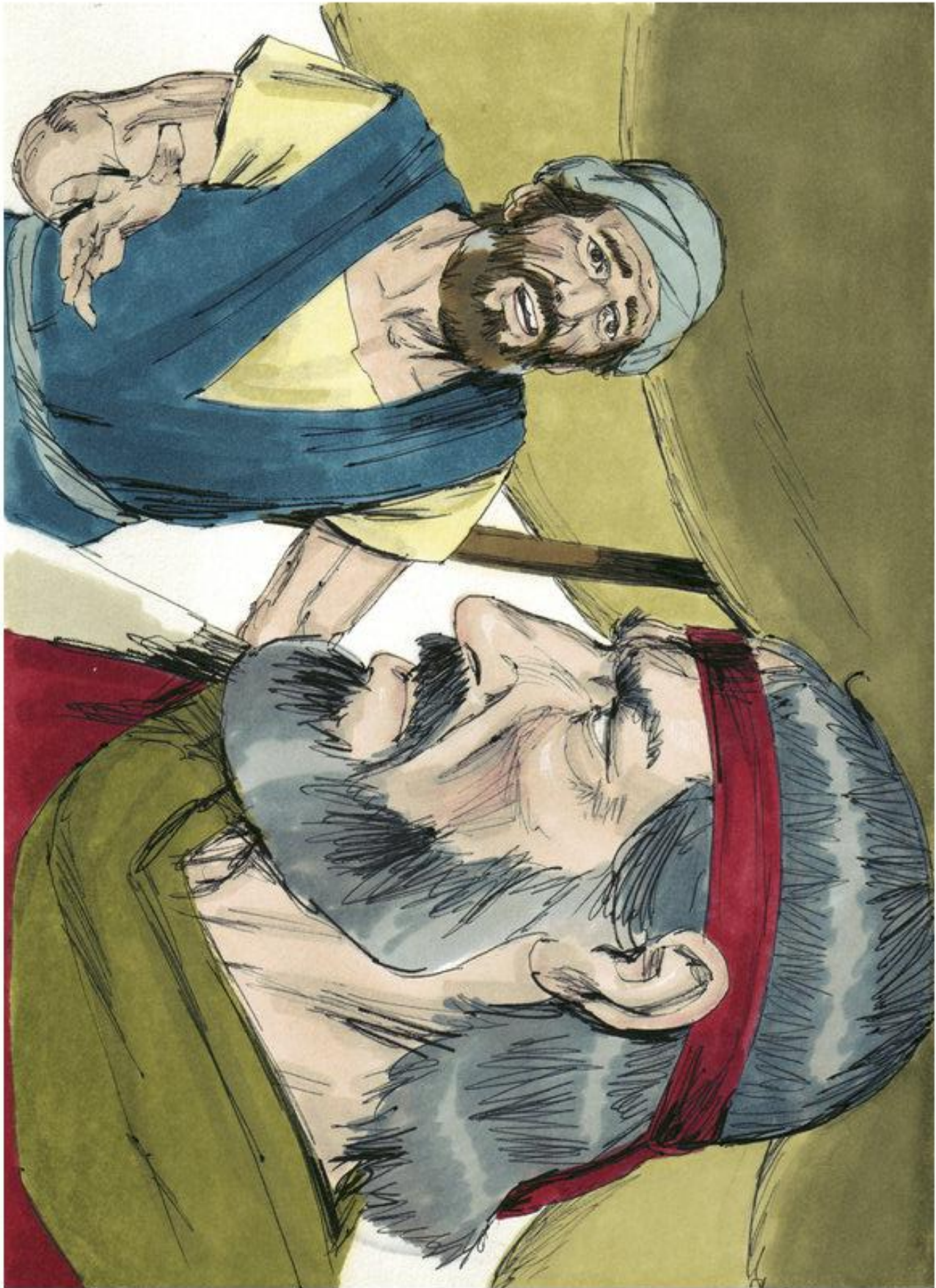
**to mourn**

**a camp**

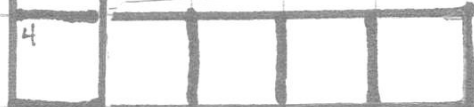












Sword Drill  
12.17b

I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes.

—Deuteronomy 9:16, 17

