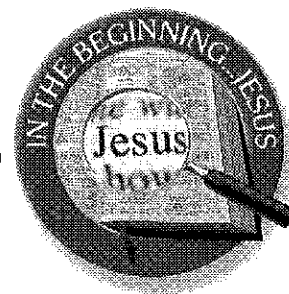


In the Beginning...Jesus



Lesson 21

The Golden Calf and the Renewal of the Covenant

Themes:

- God made a binding covenant with Israel.
- Man is a sinner—Israel was quick to break God's covenant.
- God is right to punish those who break His commands.
- God is merciful and faithful.
- God renewed His covenant with Israel.

Scripture:

Portions of Exodus 31-34

Memory Verse:

John 1:1-2

Visuals for Lesson:

- Bible.
- *In the Beginning...Jesus* poster.
- Resource Packet:
 - GOD—MAN visual (from previous lesson).
 - TABERNACLE, PEOPLE, SACRIFICES, PRIESTS (from previous lesson).
 - WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?—Make a copy of this card for each child.
 - GOD'S JUDGMENT/GOD'S MERCY (from previous lessons).
 - TEN COMMANDMENTS (from Lesson 19).
 - COVENANT ARROW—See instructions on this page in the Resource Packet.
- A set of tablets to represent the Ten Commandments—Use mortar mix (preferred) or Plaster of Paris and follow the directions on the package for proper mixing. Pour the mixture into molds (two oblong, disposable, plastic food storage containers work well). The finished tablets should be about ½ inch thick.
- A pencil for each child.
- Post-It® Notes cover ISRAEL on the GOD—MAN visual.
- Tape.
- Clear glass filled with water, gold glitter, and a spoon.
- A plastic drop cloth or something similar to lay on the floor or table (the Ten Commandment tablets will be smashed on this).

Lesson

Point to the **COVENANT ARROW** (the one with the **TEN COMMANDMENTS**) on the **GOD—MAN** visual. Briefly summarize these past events:

- God decided to make a special covenant agreement with the people of Israel.
- God gave Moses His special laws and commands on Mt. Sinai.
- Moses wrote these down in the Book of the Covenant and came down the mountain and read them to the people of Israel.
- Israel promised to keep these laws and commands.
- God made the covenant official by sealing it with blood.
- Moses went back up the mountain, and God gave him instructions for building the tabernacle.

Remind the children that in our last lesson we learned more about the tabernacle—a special place where God would be present in a special way with His covenant people. God had given Moses special instructions as to how it was to look and what would happen inside the tabernacle. **Display TABERNACLE, PEOPLE, PRIESTS, and SACRIFICES.** Briefly review the purpose of sacrifices and priests in the day-to-day function of the tabernacle: God's sinful people were to kill certain animals as sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. The priests acted as mediators between God and His sinful people. They would place the dead animals on the altar and offer them up to God. Day and night, the priests would work in the tabernacle.

We also had a clue revealed on our poster last time. What was it? [One High Priest.] Does anyone know which Levite man God chose to be the first High Priest? [Moses' brother Aaron.] What could he do that no one else could do? [Enter the Most Holy Place.] What was special about this room? [The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat were there, and God promised that His glory would fill this room—His special presence.] How many times a year could the High Priest enter the Most Holy Place? [Only one time, on the Day of Atonement.]

Explain that there were many more instructions about laws and commands, the tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. But before Moses went back down to the people again, God had something very special for Moses to take with him.

Have the children turn to **Exodus 31:18**:

And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

What are these tablets that God wrote with His own finger? [The Ten Commandments.]

Display the plaster tablets. Ask the children if the Ten Commandment tablets that God Himself wrote would be something very valuable—something to be treated with special care.

Moses had now been up on the mountain for 40 nights. What might the Israelites have wondered about during this time? Do you think they would be waiting excitedly to hear about the special things God had said to Moses? Would the people be in awe of seeing God's commandments? Would they be happy to hear about the beautiful tabernacle God commanded them to build? Would they be amazed that God was going to come down and dwell with them in a special way?

Display the **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?** cards. Pass out a card and pencil to each child. Explain that these cards each list four events to show what happened next in the Bible. However, these events are written in clue or riddle form and are also out of order. Have the children take a few moments to quietly read through each clue or riddle. Explain that as we read through today's Bible passages we will pause to solve each clue or riddle and put it in its correct order.

Sample **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?** card:

Pieces, pieces everywhere!

A powdered drink mix that wasn't sweet.

It was powdered_____.

What man couldn't fix, God remade:

The _____.

A promise made is a promise kept.

Have the children turn to **Exodus 32** in their Bibles. Begin reading verses **1-2, 4-5a**:

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." 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."

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!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it.

*What’s wrong with this picture? [Allow the children to respond.] Is Israel keeping the covenant as they promised? How do we know this? (**Display TEN COMMANDMENTS.**) What commandments had they broken? So the clue, “A promise made is a promise kept,” could not be referring to this event.*

Did Moses know what was going on? Did God know what was happening?

Choose children to read verses **7-9**:

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.”

*Did Israel’s sin go unseen by God? According to God, had the people of Israel kept their part of the agreement? NO! (Carefully tear the **COVENANT ARROW**—the one with the Ten Commandments on the **GOD—MAN** visual—in half, from the bottom upward.) What would God be right to do at this point?*

Read verses **9-10a**:

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.”

Display GOD’S JUDGMENT and then put Post-It® notes over **ISRAEL** on the **GOD—MAN** visual. Explain that the Israelites knew that what they had done was against God’s commands—commands written down in stone that they had promised to obey. God would be right to judge them. They had proven that they did not deserve to be His treasured possession.

God’s wrath is His fierce anger at sin. No one can get as angry as the one, true, holy God. Point to the torn COVENANT pieces and ask: Is this the end of the covenant? Here’s what Moses asked God to do:

Read verses **12b-13**:

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."

*What did Moses ask God to remember? (Point to the **COVENANT ARROW** that points from **GOD** to **ABRAHAM**.) Will God keep the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Here is what God did:*

Read verse **14**:

And the LORD relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people.

Have the children look at their **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?** cards. What clue or riddle points to what happened in these verses? A promise made is a promise kept. (This clue should be marked as first in the box.) God decided to have mercy on Israel. (**Display GOD'S MERCY.**) And God kept His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through the people of Israel.

Do you think everything will be okay now? Will God tell Moses to tell the people something like, "Don't worry about it. Everything's going to be fine. No big deal"?

Choose children to read verses **15-16, 19**:

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

(As soon as the child finishes reading the last word of verse 19, draw the children's attention to the plaster tablets that you are now holding. Carefully—away from the children—but violently, throw the plaster tablets down on the table or floor.

Tell the children to look at their **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?** cards again. The clue to the second event is now on the floor (or table). What is it? [Pieces, pieces everywhere.] Why would Moses do this to God's precious commandments? What had Israel just done to God's commands by their actions? [Broken them.] Explain that Moses was

very angry, and his anger was a small glimpse of God's anger. But that was only the beginning. Their sin had more terrible consequences:

Choose a child to read verse **20**:

He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

Display the glass of water. Sprinkle the gold glitter in the water and stir it. Point out that the clue to the third event is in the glass. What is it? [A powdered drink mix that wasn't sweet. It was powdered gold.]

Point out that this was a small punishment compared to what God next commanded Moses to do. God had Moses gather the all the sons of Levi together (one of the 12 tribes of Israel—the tribe of priests) and gave them this command in verses **27-28**:

And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell.

Emphasize that God is holy. His laws and commands were not some kind of suggestion for His people to obey or not obey. The people of Israel knowingly broke their part of the covenant, and God was right to punish their sin with death since that is exactly what they deserved. However, God did not punish everyone. He also showed mercy to His undeserving people, allowing most of them to live.

What will happen next? The special tablets on which God had written His holy, righteous, and good commands are shattered. Can Israel fix them?

Have the children look at their cards again and read the riddle: What man couldn't fix, God re-made. What event does this fourth clue or riddle refer to?

Choose children to read **Exodus 34:1-2**:

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain."

What is God re-making? [The tablets of the Ten Commandments.] Why is He doing this? [Allow the children to respond.]

Read verses **5-6**:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

Display the new **COVENANT ARROW** and lightly tape it directly over the torn visual so the visual now looks as it originally did. Explain that Israel had a huge problem they couldn't fix—they were sinners. God's commandments had now proven to them just how terrible their sin was. Could they fix this problem? No. Just as they couldn't fix the broken tablets and the broken covenant, they couldn't fix their sinful hearts. They must depend on God's love, mercy, and faithfulness. Only God could re-make the tablets and the covenant. In re-making the covenant God was showing Israel how wonderful and great He is.

Sometimes we read stories like this in the Bible and we say to ourselves, "How could they have been so stupid? Why did they make an idol to worship? What were they thinking? Why didn't they obey God in the first place?" But can this story also teach us something important for you and me? Can you give me an example? [Allow the children to respond. Examples might include: We are sinners just like them. We sometimes praise and worship things or people instead of God. We can't fix our sin problem. We also must depend on God's mercy. God sent Jesus to save sinners, etc.]

Point out that the story of Israel's breaking of the covenant was not a surprise to God. He knew His people would break His covenant, over and over again. He knew sinful people would never be able to keep His covenant perfectly. And that is why the story of the Bible does not end here. The story must go on and bring us all the way to the mystery that has now been revealed to us—Jesus and His death on the cross.

Note: Before the next lesson, carefully remove the tape from the new **COVENANT ARROW** and glue it in place. When finished, the two torn pieces of the first **COVENANT ARROW** will be directly underneath the new visual.

Application

- Tell the children a story of something really foolish you once did (preferably as a child) of which anyone would have thought ahead of time: "This is really stupid. You will get (hurt, into trouble, etc.)." Why did it seem like a good thing at the time? What were the consequences afterward? Could these be easily fixed? What was so foolish about what the Israelites did? Why were they unable to fix the consequences? What do you think

they felt like when Moses came down and smashed the tablets? What do you think they felt like as they drank the golden water? What do you think they felt like when the Levites were going through the camp killing men at God's command? Why was God's response so fierce? What was God saying about who He is and how His people should respond to Him?

- **WORKBOOK**—Have the children turn to Lesson 21 in their workbooks. Was there a new clue revealed today on the poster? What is written in the notebook section of their workbooks? [**Isaiah 42:8.**] What does this verse tell us about who God is and what He is like? Why are these words important for us, too? Have the children look at the box titled: God's Mercy and Faithfulness to Israel. Ask the children to recall examples of God's mercy and faithfulness to the people of Israel from previous lessons. [Examples: God freed them from Egypt; He gave them manna and water in the wilderness; He led them with pillars of fire and cloud; etc.] Have the children write (or draw pictures) of some of these things in the box. What is pictured in the box titled: Israel's Faithlessness? What does the word, "faithless" mean? How did Israel show they were faithless? What commandment(s) were they breaking by making the golden calf? Review **Exodus 20:3-4**. Are there ways to break these two commandments other than by making a golden calf and bowing before it? Why is this important for us? *Do you keep God's commands perfectly? What do you have in common with the Israelites? What would God be right to do? In what ways has God shown mercy to you? Is there any way that you can "fix" your sin problem?*
- Have the children look again at the smashed plaster tablets that were used in the lesson. Have the children pretend the following type of scenario: Suppose your dad came home from work one day with a wonderful gift for you: a new computer of your very own! Immediately, you started to brag to your siblings saying, "Ha, ha! Dad likes me better than you. You'd better never touch MY computer. It's all MINE, MINE, MINE!" Then you watched with amazement as your father took the computer and returned it to the store. Would you have a sudden change of attitude? Why? Would you feel like bragging anymore? What might you be feeling? Why might your dad have done this? What should Israel have been thinking of and feeling after Moses had smashed the tablets? Was Moses really the one they had to worry about? Read **Exodus 34:6** and compare it with **Romans 2:4**. What is repentance? Why is it important? (Read **Romans 2:5**.)
- Recall that God had Moses make a new set of tablets signifying that God was renewing His covenant with the Israelites. Had they earned this? Why not? Would they now perfectly keep the covenant? Why not? What is their real problem? Read and discuss **Romans 3:20**. Did God plan a way to fix this problem? How? Read and discuss **Galatians 3:24**. What clues did the Israelites have that would begin to point them in the right direction?

Review the picture clue cards presented thus far in the curriculum. Did they understand what all of these clues were? Why not? What was missing? (Recall the example of a puzzle. Each piece contains a small part of the picture, but unless you can see the whole picture, you're not sure what the piece is or where it fits in the puzzle. Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament. They did not yet have Jesus. Jesus gives the complete "picture" of what the Bible is all about.)

- Point out that in today's story we can see both God's terrible wrath on sinners and also His unmerited love and mercy on sinners. Remind the children that these Old Testament events and all the ones we have learned in previous lessons are meant to help us understand the most important event of all: Jesus' death on the cross. Ask: *When you look at the poster that shows Jesus' death on the cross, do you see any of God's wrath being shown? (Or, God's judgment.) How? Do you also see God's love and mercy being demonstrated? How? How might today's story of Israel breaking the covenant have something to do with Jesus' death on the cross?*

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