

# God Establishes His People

**Date: 08.30.2026 | The People Worship a Golden Calf**  
**Scripture: Exodus 24-34**

## CENTRAL TRUTHS



### PRESCHOOL:

God is good, and He wants us to love and obey Him.

### YOUNGER KIDS (K5-2ND GRADE):

God's people disobeyed Him, but God showed mercy and remained with them.

### OLDER KIDS (3RD-5TH GRADE):

Even when Israel worshiped a golden calf, God showed mercy and remained faithful to His promises.

### STUDENTS:

Israel broke God's covenant through idolatry, but God graciously forgave them and renewed His covenant, revealing both His holiness and His steadfast love.

### ADULTS:

In Israel's rebellion with the golden calf, God's holiness demanded judgment, yet His covenant faithfulness moved Him to show mercy through Moses' intercession. By renewing His covenant and revealing Himself as compassionate, gracious, patient, and faithful, God demonstrated that His redemptive purposes endure despite the failures of His people.

## MEMORY VERSE

*Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:13-14*



## DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

*Is there any way to escape punishment and be brought back into God's favor? Yes, to satisfy his justice, God himself, out of mere mercy, reconciles us to himself and delivers us from sin and from the punishment for sin, by a Redeemer. - NCC q.19*

## BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

After the Israelites heard the Lord speak from Mount Sinai (*Exodus 20:22*) and agreed to keep the covenant (*24:3, 7*), Moses returned up the mountain at God's command. The Lord called Moses to come near while the rest of the people remained at a distance; Aaron, his sons, and the elders were permitted to worship from afar, but Moses alone could approach the Lord. When Moses relayed all the Lord's words and rules, the people responded with one voice, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do" (*24:3*). Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel went up and "saw the God of Israel." In a remarkable display of grace, they beheld God and ate and drank in His presence (*24:9-11*). The Lord then called Moses farther up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, "with the law and the commandment" written by God Himself (*24:12*). Leaving the elders under Aaron's leadership and Hur's (*24:14*), Moses ascended the mountain with Joshua. The cloud of God's presence covered Mount Sinai, and the glory of the Lord appeared like a devouring fire. Moses entered the cloud and remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights (*24:15-18*).



While Moses was on the mountain, the Lord gave detailed instructions for building the tabernacle (*Exodus 25-31*), a tent where He would dwell among His people. This would be the place where Israel could meet with God, worship Him rightly, and be continually reminded of His holiness, His forgiveness of sin, and His desire to be with His people (*25:8; 29:45*). God instructed Moses to build everything according to the exact pattern He revealed, emphasizing that worship must be shaped by God's design, not human preference. At the conclusion of these instructions, God gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, written with His own finger (*31:18*).

At the very same time that God was establishing one of the greatest blessings imaginable—His presence dwelling among His people—the Israelites were demonstrating their inability to remain faithful. While Moses was still on the mountain, the people grew impatient and began to wonder what had happened to him. Rather than waiting

for the Lord, they gathered around Aaron and demanded that he make gods for them. Aaron collected their gold and fashioned it into a golden calf. Whether intended to represent Yahweh or other gods, this act clearly violated the first two commandments: to have no other gods and to make no idols. The people bowed down to the calf and declared, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" **(32:4)**. They even offered sacrifices and worshiped before it, repeating the very actions they had just pledged to direct toward the Lord.

This blatant idolatry is particularly astonishing because it occurred almost immediately after the covenant was ratified **(32:8)**. The Israelites, who had witnessed God's power in the plagues and at the Red Sea, quickly turned away from Him. When the Lord saw that the people had "corrupted themselves" and "turned aside quickly," He described them as "stiff-necked" and declared His intention to destroy them and begin again with Moses **(32:7-10)**. This moment highlights the conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant, which depended on Israel's obedience. Unlike the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which rested solely on God's promises, the Sinai covenant included the expectation of faithful response: "If you do..., then I will..." **(Galatians 3:15-25)**.

Moses, however, interceded for the people, pleading with God to remember His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God relented from destroying Israel, demonstrating both His justice and His mercy **(32:11-14)**. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the people worshiping the calf, his anger burned. He threw down the tablets, breaking them as a symbol of the broken covenant **(32:19)**. He destroyed the idol, ground it into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it, exposing the foolishness of their sin **(32:20)**. Aaron attempted to excuse his actions. Still, his explanation only revealed the depth of Israel's rebellion **(32:21-24)**. Judgment followed, and about three thousand people were killed **(32:25-29)**.

Yet even after this severe failure, Moses again went before the Lord to intercede for the people, saying, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" **(32:30)**. God showed mercy, though He also sent a plague, and declared, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" **(33:19)**. Moses continued to plead for God's presence to remain with His people so they could receive the promised blessings **(33:12-17)**.

Moses' request to see the Lord's glory was closely tied to his plea for covenant renewal. In response, God revealed His character in one of the most significant declarations in Scripture: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." (34:6-7). The Lord then instructed Moses to cut two new tablets, symbolizing the renewal of the covenant (34:1-4). Although Israel had proven unfaithful, God remained faithful, forgiving their sin and promising once again to dwell among them.

These events reveal both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's mercy. Israel's quick turn to idolatry foreshadows their continued struggle with obedience throughout their history. At the same time, the account highlights Moses' growing role as a mediator who intercedes on behalf of the people, reflecting aspects of the Lord's own character. Even in the face of rebellion, God's purpose to dwell among His people remained, and the instructions for the tabernacle would ultimately be carried out as a visible sign of His gracious presence in their midst.

## TELL THE STORY

### *Exodus 24-34*

The Biggest Story Storybook Bible - A Fancy Tent and a Foolish Cow

Before Moses received the two stone tablets, he was up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights talking with God. When the people saw Moses did not come back quickly, they came to Aaron and said, "Come and make gods for us who will go before us. Moses has left us, and we don't know what has happened to him!"

Aaron asked them to take off all their gold jewelry and bring it to him. He made the gold jewelry into the image of a calf. The people said, "These are our gods who brought us up from the land of Egypt!" They had a big party and made sacrifices to the golden calf.

The Lord knew what the people were doing. He said to Moses: "God down the mountain at once! The people have sinned. They have disobeyed Me and made a golden calf to worship. My anger burns against them!" But Moses said, "Please turn from Your anger and do not destroy the people! Remember the promise You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their children would be as many



as the stars in the sky!” The Lord heard Moses and agreed not to destroy the Israelites.

Then Moses went down the mountain with the two stone tablets in his hands. He was angry when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf. He smashed the tablets on the ground and destroyed the calf they had made. He said, “You have sinned against the Lord. I will go up to Him and ask Him to forgive you.”

Moses returned to the Lord and said, “The people have sinned by making a god of gold for themselves. Please forgive their sin. But if you do not, please punish me with them.” God told Moses that whoever has sinned against Him will be held accountable for their sin. Then God told Moses to lead the people to the place He told Him about.

God instructed Moses to make two new stone tablets, just like the ones that had broken. God said, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious. He is slow to anger and abounding in love and truth.” Moses worshipped God. Then he said to God, “Please go with us, forgive our sin, and make us Your people.” Moses then returned to the people with the two tablets in his hands.

The people chose to worship a golden calf instead of God, and God’s anger burned against them. Moses interceded so that God would forgive them. We are all sinners who deserve the wrath of God, but Jesus interceded for us through His life, death, and resurrection so we can be saved!

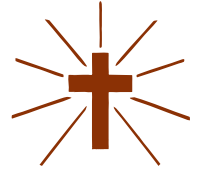
## **REBUILD THE STORY**

1. Why did Moses go up on Mount Sinai, and what did God give him while he was there? (*Exodus 24:12, 18; 31:18*)
2. What did the Israelites do while Moses was on the mountain, and why did they ask Aaron to act? (*Exodus 32:1*)
3. How did Aaron respond to the people, and what did he make for them? (*Exodus 32:2-4*)



4. How did the Israelites worship the golden calf, and what did they say about it? (*Exodus 32:5-6*)
5. How did God respond when He saw what the people were doing, and what did He call them? (*Exodus 32:7-10*)
6. What did Moses do when he came down the mountain and saw the people's sin? (*Exodus 32:19-20*)
7. How did Moses respond on behalf of the people after their sin, and what did he ask God to do? (*Exodus 32:30-32*)
8. How did God reveal His character when He renewed the covenant with Israel? (*Exodus 34:5-7; 34:10*)
9. The Israelites turned to an idol when they became impatient waiting for Moses. What are some ways people today are tempted to replace trust in God with something else when waiting is hard?
10. Aaron went along with the crowd instead of leading them toward obedience. Why is it sometimes difficult to stand for what is right, and how can we grow in courage to follow God?
11. Moses interceded for the people after their sin. How does Moses' role as a mediator point forward to Jesus and what He does for us?
12. In Exodus 34, God describes Himself as "merciful and gracious... abounding in steadfast love." How should this truth shape the way we respond to our own sin and to others when they fail?

## GOSPEL EMPHASIS



Earlier in Exodus, Israel had been rescued from a powerful external enemy—the Egyptians who enslaved and oppressed them. But in *Exodus 32*, they came face-to-face with a far greater and more dangerous enemy: their own sin. Even after witnessing God’s power in the plagues, His protection at the Red Sea, and His provision in the wilderness, the Israelites quickly turned away from Him and gave their worship to an idol. Their failure reveals a deeper problem, one that is true for all people. Like Israel, we are prone to forget God’s goodness, doubt His timing, and turn our hearts toward things that cannot truly save us. Sin is not just something outside of us—it is something within us that separates us from a holy God.

Yet this story also reveals the mercy and grace of God. When the Israelites deserved judgment, God responded with both justice and compassion. He did not ignore their sin, but neither did He destroy them. Instead, He listened to Moses’ intercession and chose to show mercy, revealing Himself as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (*Exodus 34:6-7*). This moment points forward to an even greater act of intercession and mercy. Moses stood between God and the people, pleading for their forgiveness, but Jesus Christ stands as the perfect and final mediator between God and humanity.

The ultimate picture of salvation is seen in Jesus, whom God sent in His mercy and grace to rescue us from our sin. Just as Israel could not save themselves from their rebellion, we cannot save ourselves from ours. Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross in our place, and rose again so that the penalty for sin could be paid in full. Through His sacrifice, God’s justice against sin and His love for sinners meet perfectly. All who trust in Him receive forgiveness, new life, and restoration with God. The story of the golden calf reminds us that our greatest need is not simply rescue from external problems, but rescue from our own sinful hearts—and in Christ, God has provided that rescue completely.

## WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

Use the attributes of God list and determine the characteristics of God that we see in today’s story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true change the way we live in Christ?

## **PRAYER PROMPTS**

God, thank You for Your mercy and grace towards the Israelites and towards us. Please forgive us for the times that we witness Your character and immediately turn the other way. Help us to honor the first two commandments and remember that You are the one true God and that we should never chase after anything else.



## **THIS WEEK'S BIBLE READING**

*Exodus 35-40*