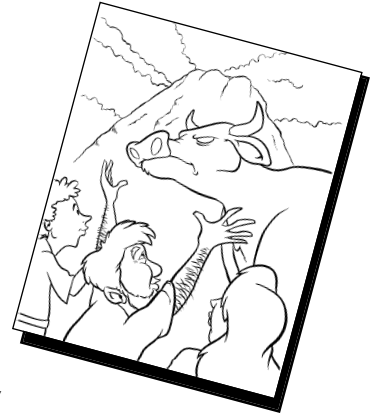




God Punishes Israel's Idolatry

Exodus 32



LESSON GOAL

Students will thank God for His mercy and patience.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Aaron made a golden calf for Israel to worship.
- God wanted to destroy the people.
- Moses prayed that God would have mercy.
- God had mercy on Israel and did not destroy them

KEY VERSE

“So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Exodus 32:14).

APPLICATION

- Identify things that you value more than God (possessions, praise, etc.).
- Ask God for forgiveness for daily sins.
- Thank God for specific acts of mercy in your life today.
- Praise God for the mercy found in Jesus Christ.

NEXT WEEK

God's Presence Fills the Tabernacle
Read Exodus 33–34, 40.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul. You shall teach them to your children." —Deuteronomy 11:18–19

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Israel had intensely experienced God. They had seen God's power in bringing Israel out of Egypt. They had heard His voice proclaim the Ten Commandments. They had felt the ground shake when God's presence descended upon Mount Sinai. Every day, they could see the fire and cloud on top of the mountain, a continual reminder of God's presence. But experiencing the awesomeness and fearfulness of God was not enough to change Israel's heart. While Moses was on top of the mountain receiving plans for God's dwelling place, Israel was at the foot of the mountain fashioning a god of their own choosing. While Moses was being given the stone tables containing the Ten Commandments, Israel was provoking God's wrath by breaking those commandments. Because of Israel's idolatry, God confronted Israel's sin.

Israel's Idolatry

After 40 days of Moses' being obscured by cloud and flame upon Mount Sinai, Israel had become weary of waiting. They were anxious to be away from the mountain and to have a god who would go before them, presumably leading them into the Promised Land (Ex. 32:1). They excused their rebellion against God by reasoning that they did not know what had happened to Moses. Moses' own brother, Aaron, led the people by commanding them to bring gold and by fashioning the gold into a calf (32:4). The people revealed their wickedness by claiming that this calf was the same God who had brought them out of Egypt. Aaron built an altar before the idol and ordered a feast unto Yahweh, the special name God gave to reveal Himself to Israel (32:5). After sacrifices were offered, the people worshiped as they wished: eating, drinking, and playing (most likely a reference to sexual perversion; 32:6).

The Israelites (including Aaron) had exalted themselves above God. They knew God had rescued them from Egypt, but now they chose to worship God as they wished and not as He commanded. Self-styled worship is idolatry. The people had attempted to keep both Yahweh and the idols from the surrounding nations. The result was that Yahweh's name was defamed when Israel attributed to the infinite creator the shape of His creation. Israel neither worshiped God nor desired to do so, even though they used Yahweh's name. The Israelites idolatrously exalted themselves above God when they decided for themselves how they would worship.

Moses' Intercession

God revealed to Moses His fierce anger over the people's idolatry. He no longer called Israel "my people," but instead called them "your people"; God was disgusted to call the people His own. Israel was a "stiff-necked people" who were committed to their own way. God told Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great

Additional Reference Materials

*Moses and the Gods of
Egypt: Studies in Exodus*
by John J. Davis

*The MacArthur Study
Bible* by John MacArthur

nation" (Ex. 32:10). God was going to destroy the people. They had broken the covenant they had made with God and deserved nothing short of destruction. God would have been just to destroy them. And He could have been faithful to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by making a great nation of their descendant Moses.

But Moses knew the character of God, and he knew that God answers prayer. Moses pleaded for the people and offered reasons to God why He should not destroy the people. Moses pleaded with God based upon God's past kindness to Israel; God had rescued Israel "with great power and with a mighty hand" (Ex. 32:11). Moses said that God would be defamed by the Egyptians if He destroyed the Israelites after saving them (32:12). He appealed to God's faithfulness as he spoke to Him concerning His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of countless descendants to whom would be given the Promised Land. Moses' prayer, while in part motivated by love for the people, was devoted to God's glory. Moses was eager that God's name would be exalted by both Israel and the nations. He pleaded for God to show the greatness of His name by showing His mercy.

In answer to Moses' prayer, God "relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (32:14). It is always a mystery how God answers prayer. In God's wisdom, He had revealed to Moses His true hatred for Israel's sin by threatening wrath. Moses knew though that God listens to prayer. God would have been just to answer this prayer with either "yes" or "no," but God chose to have mercy upon Israel, not pouring out the wrath they deserved. In His amazing providence, God showed mercy on the people by listening to Moses' prayer. God's ways are beyond our understanding. What awesome mercy that God should listen to and work His sovereign will through man's prayers!

The Seriousness of Idolatry

Although God withheld the judgment He had threatened, Moses still had to deal with the heinous sin of the people. Moses went down the mountain, carrying the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down the mountain, he was filled with righteous anger at the sight of the calf and the revelry in the camp (Ex. 32:19). Moses smashed the Ten Commandments, a dramatic symbol of Israel having broken the covenant with God. God had established the standard for continuing in a relationship with Him, and Israel had willfully tossed it aside. Their relationship as His treasured people was dependent upon obeying and keeping His laws (19:5). The people did not deserve to continue in that relationship.

Another picture of the depravity of the people was when Moses melted the golden calf, ground it into powder, and threw the dust into a nearby brook (Deut. 9:21). As the people went for water, they essentially drank their god (Ex. 32:20)! What a bitter reminder that must have been of the gross foolishness of choosing to worship a man-made object!

When Moses asked Aaron what the people had done to force him to make the idol, Aaron repeated what had happened. The only change Aaron made was that he denied having formed the calf (Ex. 32:4). Instead, he said that he had thrown the gold into the fire, and the calf had miraculously come out (Ex. 32:24). Aaron was essentially blaming the existence of the calf on a miracle! Deuteronomy reveals that the Lord would have destroyed Aaron if Moses had not prayed for him (Deut. 9:20).

Probably, before breaking and melting the golden calf, Moses had to put down the rebellion in the camp (Ex. 32:25). As Moses walked through the camp, he could see and hear the people continuing in their idolatry. Moses knew that God was

angry and that He hated this sin. In a drastic attempt to put an end to the sin, Moses called apart all who were on the Lord's side (Ex. 32:26). Out of the 12 tribes, only the Levites gathered around Moses. The Levites were commanded to put on swords and go throughout Israel, killing those who were unwilling to obey. The Bible does not disclose how fierce was the battle that followed or who was killed. It does reveal that 3,000 men were killed by the Levites before the idolatry ceased. The end of the chapter also reveals that God sent a plague on the people because of what they had done (Ex. 32:35).

Moses Intercedes Again

Moses had already prayed for God to relent from His fierce anger. God was not going to destroy the people, but Moses felt the heaviness of the people's sin. He knew that Israel needed to be forgiven, even though they were completely unworthy. The next day, Moses told the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). Israel needed to be restored to a right relationship with God.

Moses went up the mountain and confessed Israel's idolatry. He could base his plea on nothing but God's grace in forgiveness. He asked God to take his own life if He would not forgive the people. Paul's concern for Israel to be saved is reminiscent of Moses' concern. Paul wished that he himself "were accursed from Christ for [his] brethren" (Rom. 9:3). Although it is impossible to lose salvation, Paul was willing to be lost so that Israel might be saved. Similarly, Moses was willing to trade his life for that of Israel.

The Lord answered Moses that at the judgment each would bear the weight of his own sins (Ex. 32:33–34). But for now, God revealed to Moses the good news that He would still send His Angel before the people (Ex. 30:34). Although God's justice would one day be performed on the wicked, God in His grace was not going to destroy all the people. God's hatred for idolatry is infinite. Yet He chose to have mercy on Israel.

Israel's idolatry had drastic consequences. Many people were killed in battle and many in the plague. The Ten Commandments were smashed. But the most drastic consequence of their sin was abated through Moses' prayer. God's passion for His own glory and His hatred for idolatry were about to be revealed in His righteous destruction of the people. But in His sovereign plan, God worked through Moses' prayer and graciously saved the people from His anger. In addition to His initial mercy and in response to Moses' prayer, God was willing to continue a relationship with His people, Israel.

Although God answered Moses' prayer and forgave the people as a whole, individually God would punish unrepentant Israelites for their idolatry by eternal punishment. Moses could not die for them. Praise God that in Moses' place, in the place of the godly Israelites, and in the place of the church, Christ died. He alone could satisfy the demand of God's wrath. What amazing mercy!

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth"
(Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

What is the name of the place where God dwelt among the Israelites?

The tabernacle.

Who was allowed to go into the tabernacle?

Only the priests, Aaron and his sons.

What do you call the leader of the priests?

The high priest.

Why did the priests make sacrifices?

To remind the people of their sin.

Why do we not need to make sacrifices today?

Because Jesus was the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin.



Right Worship of God

While this week's lesson deals with how we are not to worship God, it gives us the opportunity to teach the students about true worship. True worship begins with a right view of God. Using a review game of your choice (e.g., tic-tac-toe or prizes for correct answers), ask the students some of or all the following questions:

Is there more than one God? (Deut. 6:4)

Can God lie? (Num. 23:19)

Does God know the future? (Psalm 139:1–6, 15–16)

Does anything happen that God does not know about? (Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20)

Is there anything that God cannot do? (Jer. 32:17, 27)

Did God make the world in seven days? (Gen. 1:1–2)

Is God everywhere at the same time? (Psalm 139:7–12)

Does God hear our prayers? (Prov. 15:29)

Does God ever break a promise? (Num. 23:19)

Did God die for us? (Rom. 5:8)

Is God love? (1 John 4:8)

Is God sinless? (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 1:5)

Is God beautiful? (Psalm 27:4)

Is anything more powerful than God? (Jer. 32:17, 27)

Can anyone live independently of God? (John 15:5)

- Does God's love ever change? (Lam. 3:22–23)
- Does God get impatient or get angry quickly? (Ex. 34:6–7)
- Can we compare God to anything in this world? (2 Sam. 7:22)
- Is God ever unfair? (Dan. 4:37)
- Is God totally in control over all people and circumstances? (Psalm 33:8–11)
- Will God ever die? (Isa. 57:15)
- Is God's Word true? (Psalm 19:7–11)



The Seriousness of Sin

To help communicate the seriousness of sin, review stories that dealt with God's acts of judgment. Use the flash cards to remind the students that when Adam and Eve sinned, God expelled them from the garden. There was a time when people were so sinful that God destroyed everyone in a flood. At Babel, God scattered the people and confused their languages because of their pride. God burned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the people's wickedness.



Nothing but Clay

At the beginning of class, have playtime with Play-Doh. Talk about making any shape the student thinks of, and tell the students they are "creating." Tell the students about the story today and about the silliness of worshiping a Play-Doh object, which has no power and cannot help them. It is not only silly, but also a sin to worship anything except God.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

Reading of the Text

Read Exodus 32:1–4.

God had called Moses up to the mountain, and Moses had obeyed. While he was doing this, the children of Israel became very unhappy. They thought that Moses had forgotten all about them. The people wanted to worship something that they could see. Aaron, who was their present leader, told them to gather all the golden earrings from their wives, sons, and daughters and bring them to him. The people readily obeyed and brought all the golden earrings they could find. From this, Aaron worked hard with lots of tools and craftsmanship and built a golden calf. He told the people, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4).

The next day the people brought offerings to the altar that Aaron had built around the golden calf. The people came with food and drinks. They thought this was a great way to worship. God had a different idea about what was going on. God spoke to Moses and told him, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt'" (Ex. 32:7–8). God was very angry with Israel, because He had told them to have no god before Him. God meant what he said. He also told Moses that they were a very stiff-necked people. In other words, they were very stubborn.

God was very angry and wanted to destroy all of them. The Bible says that His anger burned against them. Moses prayed to God, pleading with Him to not destroy the people and reminding Him that it was by His great power and His mighty hand that they had been brought out of Egypt. Moses was worried for the people of Israel and knew that God could and would destroy them unless He changed His mind. After a long discussion, the Bible says, "The LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Ex. 32:14).

Moses went down the mountain with the two tablets of stone. These were very important writings because they were God's writings engraved on the stones on both sides. As Moses and Joshua came down the mountain carrying the stones, they heard loud noises, and thought it sounded like a war. But to their surprise and anger, they found the people worshiping the golden calf. Moses was so angry that he threw the stones from his hands, and they shattered at the foot of the mountain. This was not a tantrum. It meant that the people had broken their promise to God, and now he was breaking God's special agreement with them.

He took the calf, burned it, and ground it into powder. Then he poured it into water and made the men of Israel drink it. Moses was very angry with Aaron, as well as with all the people of Israel. Aaron told Moses lies about how and why he made the calf. But God was merciful to Aaron and did not kill him. Then Moses went to the gate and called all who would follow God to come to him; but only the men of Levi came. They were instructed to get their swords and to kill all who refused to obey God. About 3,000 men died that day. Then Moses called for the people to repent and dedicate themselves to God. Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30).

Moses went back up the mountain to God and told Him that he was willing to die for the people if God wouldn't forgive them, but God said "No. I will deal with the people who sin against Me, but you go and lead them with My Angel who will go before you."

God cared for His people, Israel. They were punished for their evil ways, but God continued to walk with them and lead them.

We need to know that God hates evil and will punish us when we decide not to obey Him. Jesus died on the cross to give us forgiveness and remove the punishment that would be ours. His mercy to us is great, but we receive His mercy only if we turn from our sin and follow Jesus. Thank Him for all He has done for us to make us His own.



Lesson Questions

Where was Moses at the beginning of our story today?
On the mountain with God.

What was Moses getting from God?
The stone tablets written by God.

What did the people of Israel do while Moses was gone?
They made a golden calf from their gold jewelry.

What was the golden calf used for?
To worship as their god.

What did God think about this?
He was very angry.

What did Moses do about it?
He destroyed the calf and called the people to repent.

What did God do for Moses?
He forgave the people and gave His angel to help him lead the people.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Treasure-Box Object

The object for the treasure box for this lesson is a golden calf. The shape of an animal can be formed from gold foil. The Israelites disobeyed God's second command when they made an idol and worshiped it.

Praise and Worship

Create in Me a Clean Heart

God Is So Good

I Will Sing of the Mercies



Idolatry

Stop and listen, look and see
(Cup hands behind ears; then circle fingers around eyes.)

Israel's sin: idolatry.
(Stretch arms forward and bow down.)

They'd said they would obey the Lord,
(Hand over heart and nod.)

But quickly they forgot their word.
(Keep hand over heart and shake head back and forth.)

They built themselves a golden calf,
(Pretend to mold with hands.)

And worshiped it, which stirred God's wrath.
(Pretend to slowly stir and shake head back and forth.)

Moses asked, "Why did you sin?"
(Turn palms up and shrug shoulders.)

And then he begged God to forgive.
(Palms together, bow head, bend to knees.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Broken Commandments, Broken Heart

Materials: "Broken Commandments/Broken Heart" page, glue sticks, cutout of the Ten Commandments, cutout of the broken heart

Directions: Have students color the heart pieces and the Ten Commandments. Glue the commandments to the side of the page that says "Broken Commandments." Glue the heart pieces to the "Broken Heart" side. The people of Israel committed a great sin. They should have responded to God with fear and repentance. Most of them were sad because God's presence was going to leave them—not because of their sin. When we sin, we should be broken over our sin and not just because we are in trouble. Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."



God's Presence Departs

Cut out a cloud from a piece of white construction paper. Use a brad at one end of the cloud to attach it to the "God's Presence Departs" picture at the back of the lesson. The cloud should fit over the tabernacle and then be able to spin off it. This shows how God threatened to take His presence away. Because Moses prayed and God was merciful, God did not take His presence away from the people of Israel.



Obedience Trials

On pieces of paper, write several things you want the students to do for you, such as "take the book from the floor to the table." Make the requests simple so they can be done quickly. Place the papers in a basket and let students pick a paper and do what it says. Talk about the Ten Commandments and how God's Word has things written for the students to obey just as they have obeyed you today. Talk about how the Israelites disobeyed God's commandments.



How to Pray

Review Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:11–13. First, he prayed about God's past bless-

ings to His people (brought them out of Egypt). Then Moses made a specific request (do not destroy them). Finally, Moses remembered God's promises that were applicable (Abrahamic Covenant). Students can pray in the same way. First, remember God's blessings and thank Him for them. (Dear God, thank you for...) Then make requests. (Tell students about how God is all-powerful and can do anything. However, He will answer prayer according to His will.) Finally, pray to God about His promises to us in the Bible. (Since God does not lie, if He promises something to us, He will provide it!) Teachers should emulate this prayer, too, when praying with the students.



5

Making Moses Memories

Choose a coloring page and reduce it to 4 x 6 inches. Have each student color the page, cut it out, and glue it to the next page in his scrapbook. At the end of the Exodus series, students may take home their completed scrapbooks.

Coloring Sheets

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

"You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).



Tenth Commandment

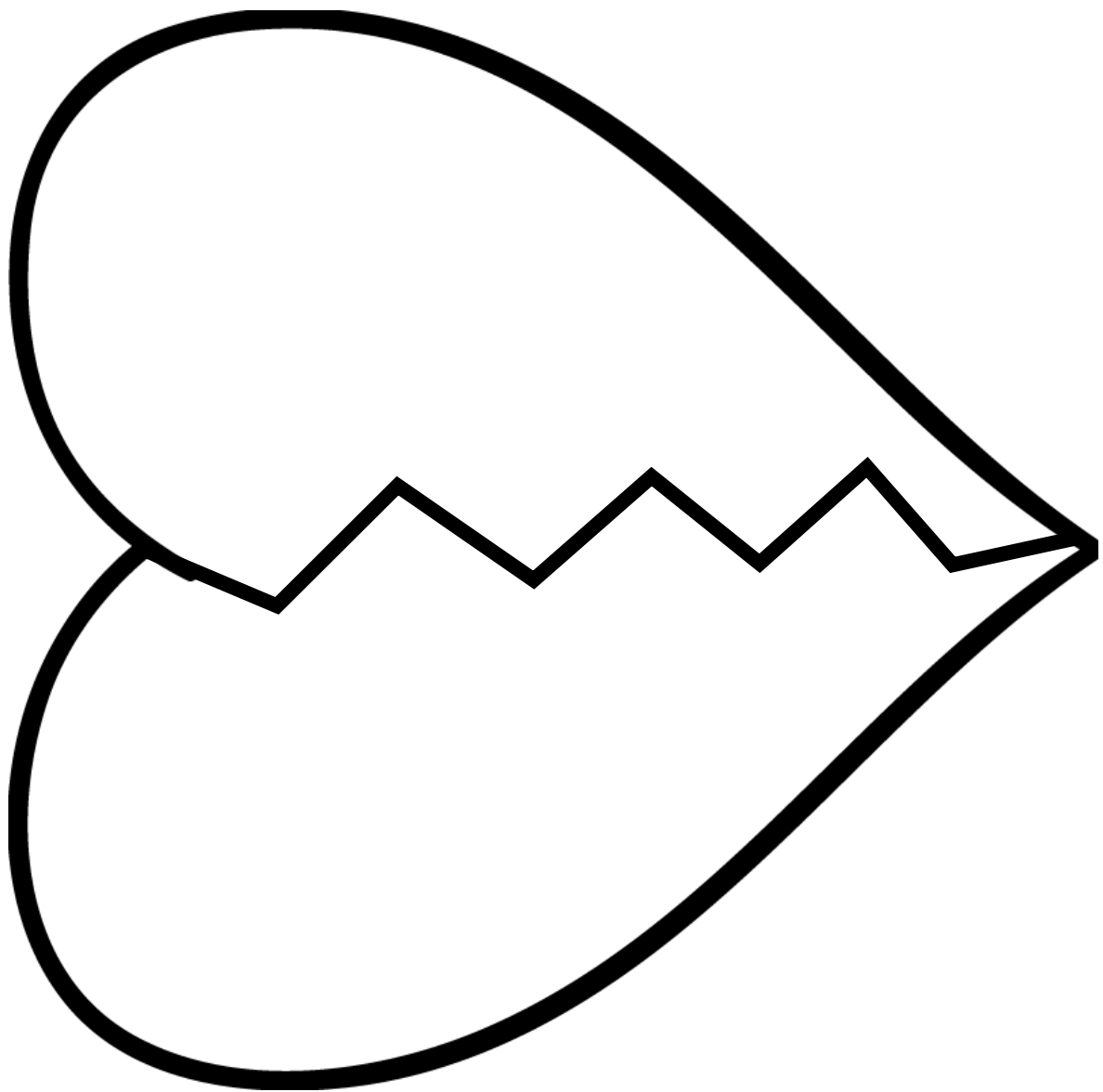
If you have decided to assemble the Ten Commandments as you go through them, post the tenth commandment. What is covetousness? We have learned that covetousness is wrongly wanting something that belongs to someone else. It is based on greed and the desire for more, which are sinful attitudes of the heart. Covetousness is wrong because it is an attitude or belief that God has not given us enough or all that we need and that somehow, He has made a mistake in giving us what He already has. We need to guard our hearts from this sinful attitude and remember that God indeed has given us all that we will ever need.

Broken Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.

6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

Broken Heart



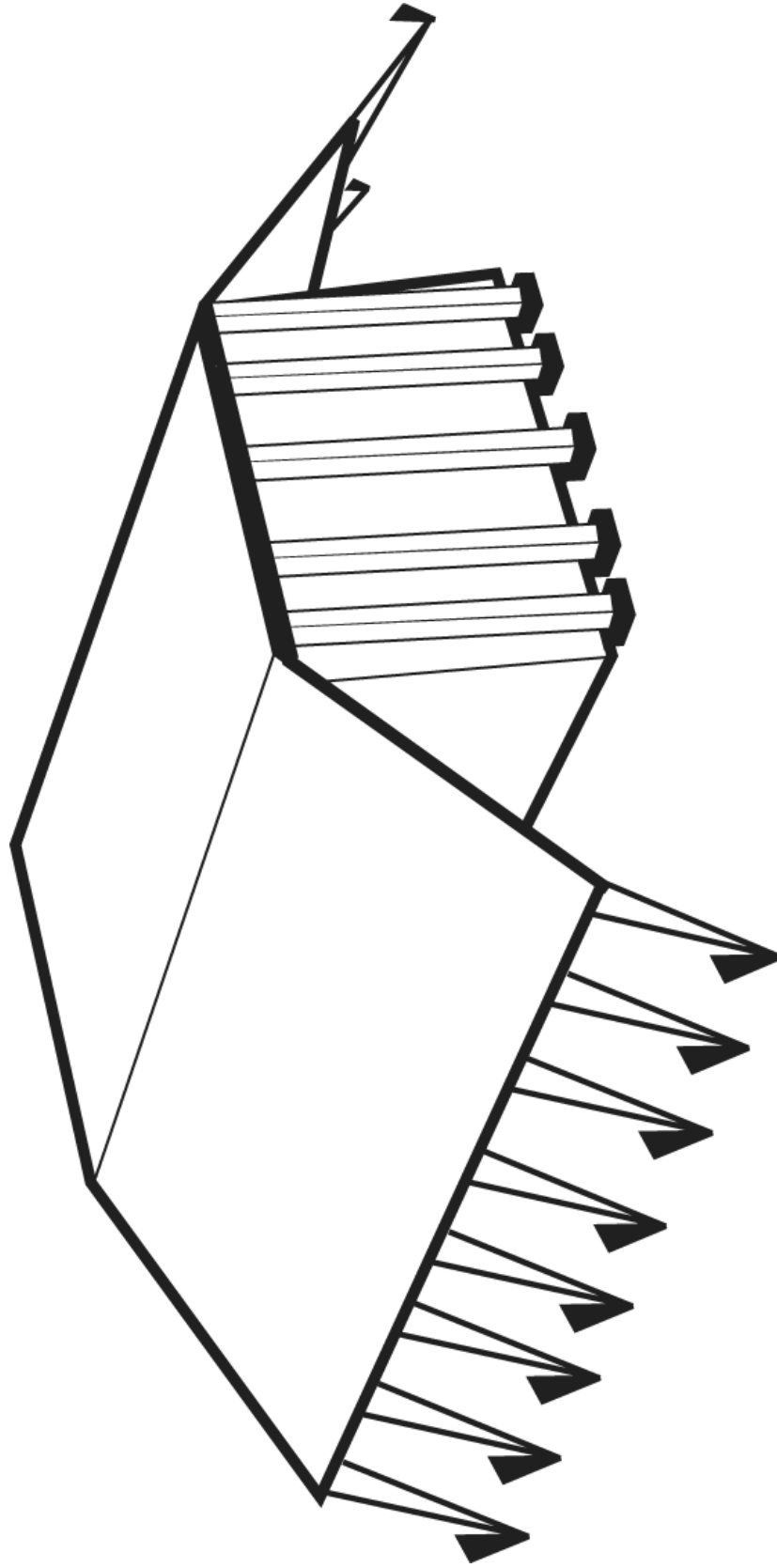
Broken Commandments

Moses Broke the Tablets

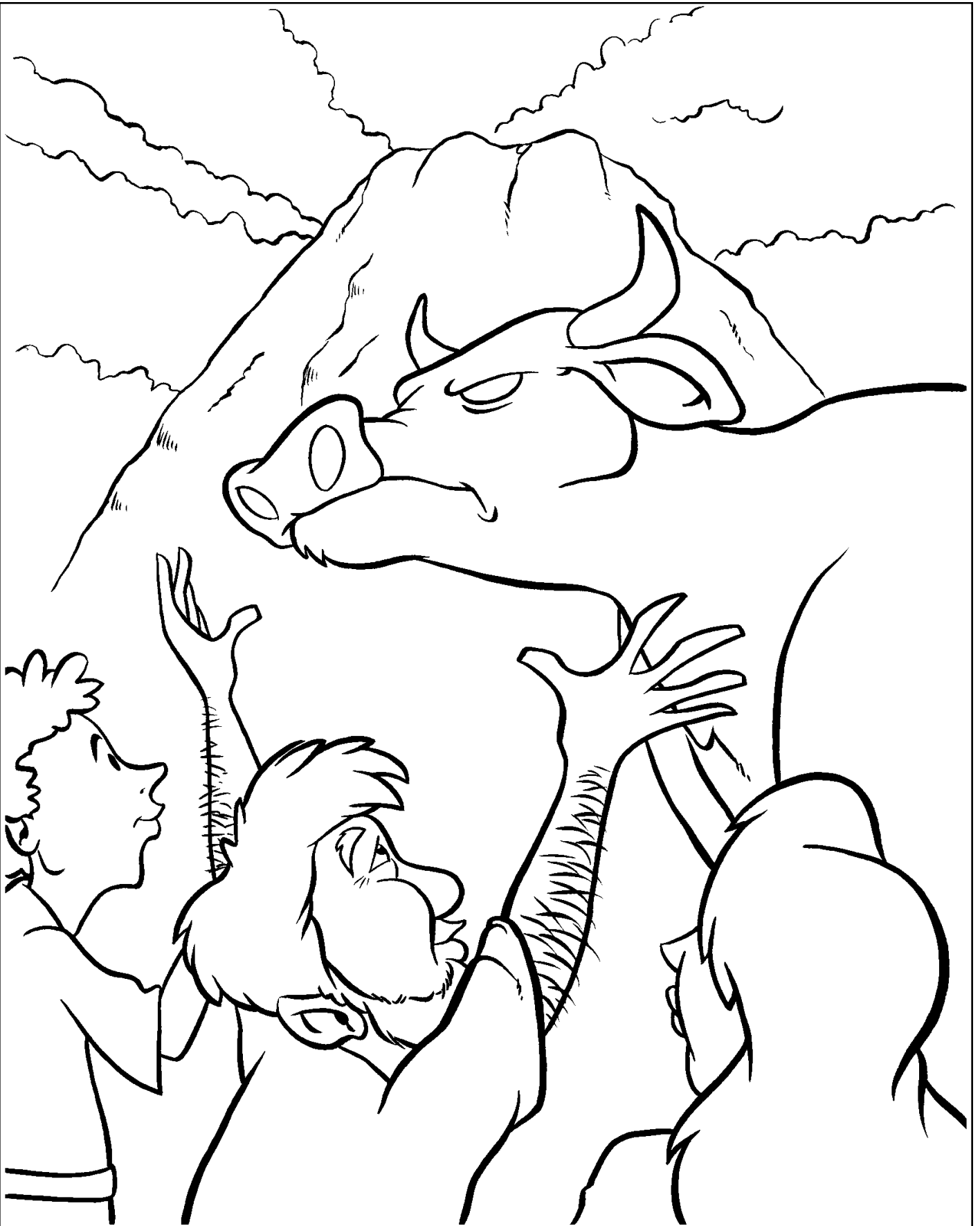
Broken Heart

**“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise”
(Psalm 51:17).**

God's Presence Departs



God threatened to remove His presence from Israel because of their sin. Moses prayed, and God promised to send His presence (Ex. 33:12–16).



**“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘...Your people...have corrupted themselves.... They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it’”
(Exodus 32:7-8).**



Moses prayed, "Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people" (Exodus 32:12c).

