

Unit 5: Into the Wilderness

Unit Description: Through a series of miracles, God had delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. The Israelites headed into the wilderness on their way to the land of promise. Their journey, however, was not just to move them from one place to another; it was also to be a time when their hearts were to be moved in worship for their God, their true Rescuer.

Big Picture Question: What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.



SESSION 1: God Provided Manna Exodus 16–17



SESSION 2: God Gave the Ten Commandments Exodus 19–20



SESSION 3: The People Worshipped a Golden Calf Exodus 32–34



SESSION 4: The People Built the Tabernacle Exodus 35–40



SESSION 5: God Deserves Our Worship Leviticus 1–4



UNIT 5 | SESSION 3

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED A GOLDEN CALF

EXODUS 32-34

KEY PASSAGE:

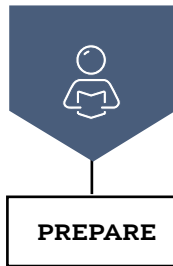
Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Psalm 95:6-7 NIV

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

Moses acted as the people's mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



LEADER Bible Study

After all God had done for the Israelites, the story of the Israelites' worshipping a golden calf may seem surprising. How could God's people turn so quickly from God, who delivered them from slavery and provided for them, even after they explicitly agreed to do everything He had commanded? (See Ex. 24:3.) When we think about the reasons why Israel fell into idolatry, we recognize that we are vulnerable to the same follies.

First, we fail to obey God's Word. The Israelites disobeyed the second of the Ten Commandments: "Do not make an idol for yourself." This might sound like an easy commandment to keep; you aren't crafting little statues to worship, right? Idolatry is dangerous because it's rooted in the heart. Our idols don't always look like golden calves. Idols are anything or anyone our sinful hearts look to, seeking what only God provides—such as true joy, meaning, or hope.

Second, we distrust God's purposes. The Israelites stopped trusting in God, who showed Himself to be powerful and good. They wanted their false god to save them. They thought God's plan wasn't working, so they made a plan of their own. Are you ever tempted to do the same? When we forget who God is and think too highly of ourselves or others, we put a person in the place of God.

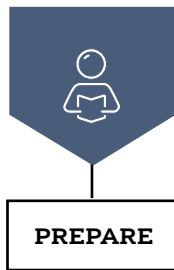
Third, we forget God's grace. Aaron gave credit to the man-made idol for bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. We might convince ourselves that our success comes from the work of our own hands or the favor of other people. When we forget that every good gift comes from God, we fall into idolatry.

Finally, we fail to use our gifts to the glory of God. Don't miss that the Israelites used the plunder from Egypt—God's provision to them—to make the calf. We too can often use the gifts God has given us for our own satisfaction and to draw attention to ourselves, rather than to the One who gave them to us.

God was angry with the Israelites. He is a jealous God who will not give His glory to another. (See Isa. 42:8.) Yet we see how Moses stepped in between God and the people to intercede on their behalf. As those who have Jesus Christ as our Mediator, we trust in His power to overcome our idolatries and empower us for His mission.

TERMS TO KNOW

Idolatry: the worship of idols or excessive devotion to, or reverence for, some person or thing. An idol is anything a person puts in the place of God. Idolatry is a sin.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Image of Gold" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ hula hoop or basket
- ☐ beanbags, 1 per kid

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ yellow clay or play dough



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "The People Worshiped a Golden Calf" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 5, Session 3" questions from kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "The Williamses in Louisiana" missions video

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "Come, Let's Worship (Psalm 95:6-7)" song
- ☐ large, interlocking plastic building blocks
- ☐ dry erase marker
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set
- ☐ world map

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ poster board

Activity Choice (Option 2)

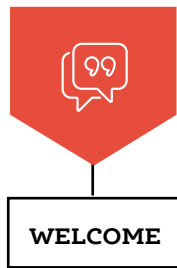
- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster
- ☐ blindfolds
- ☐ obstacle course components (foam pool noodles, chairs)

Journal and Prayer

- ☐ Journal Page
- ☐ "How Did It Happen?" activity page



LIVE



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “Think of a time you did something you knew was wrong. How did you feel? Did you try to make it right? Why or why not?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Image of Gold” on the activity page.

SAY “What is happening in this picture? Today, we will learn how God’s people sinned and made an idol to worship instead of God. Moses talked to God on behalf of the people as their mediator, asking Him to forgive their sin.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: THE GO-BETWEEN

Form two teams of kids. Instruct teams to sit together at one end of the room. Give each team a piece of paper. Appoint one kid on each team to be the Mediator. Explain that when you say go, the Mediator should come to you for an instruction, relay the instructions to his team, and then come back for another instruction. The first team to correctly follow all instructions wins:

1. Two kids should draw a star.
2. All kids must list their names.
3. Rewrite the names in alphabetical order.
4. Circle any names that begin with a vowel.

SAY “Without the Mediator, you wouldn’t have known what instructions to follow. In the Bible story we will hear today, Moses acted as a mediator between God and the Israelites. A mediator is someone who works between two people or groups to settle an argument or dispute.”

☐ OPTION 2: CLAY COWS



Give each kid a fist-sized lump of yellow clay or play dough. Encourage them to knead the clay and form a golden calf.

Applaud kids for their efforts. Then instruct kids to smash their clay cows.

SAY “An idol is anything we love more than God—ourselves, other people, or created things. In today’s Bible story, we will hear about a time the Israelites worshiped a golden calf. Why would they do that? Why would they turn away from the one true God to worship an idol? Let’s find out what happened.”





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hey, everyone! I am so glad you are here. I’m [your name]. If you brought your Bible today, hold it up. [Provide Bibles for kids who need one.] Can anyone tell me what the Bible is about? [Allow kids to respond.] The Bible is God’s Word. It tells us the wonderful story of God’s plan to rescue sinners.

The Bible tells us what is true. The stories in the Bible really happened, and the people we hear about really lived. When we read about people in the Bible, we sometimes discover that what was true about them can be true about us too.”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

SAY “For the past two weeks we have been thinking about a big picture question. Our big picture question helps us remember a bigger truth about God or ourselves. The big picture question is, **What is worship?** Does anyone remember what the answer is? [Allow kids to respond.] **Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.**

As we get to know God and discover who He is, we cannot help but celebrate. Worshiping might look like praying, singing, reading the Bible, hearing from the Bible, or another activity that honors God. He alone deserves our worship. **What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.**”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “In the first books of the Bible, we heard how God created a special people for Himself through the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob’s descendants—the Israelites—lived as slaves in Egypt, but God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt to a land of their own: the promised land.

We have been learning about the Israelites’ time in the wilderness after Moses led them out of Egypt. God did some great things for them by parting the Red Sea and providing food and instruction for how to live. How did God’s people respond? Did they worship God like He deserves? Well, today’s Bible story is called ‘The People Worshiped a Golden Calf.’ Hmm, that doesn’t seem quite right. Let’s find out what happened.”



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Exodus 32–34. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The People Worshiped a Golden Calf.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED A GOLDEN CALF

“Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. While God met with Moses, the Israelites at the bottom of the mountain were getting impatient. They began to wonder, Where is Moses? What is taking him so long? Is he still alive?”

The Israelites went to Moses’ brother, Aaron. “Make us a god to lead us,” they said. “We don’t know what happened to Moses.” So Aaron collected gold from the people and made a statue of a calf that they could worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry. “I will destroy these people,” God said.

Moses said, “Remember the great promise You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You promised to give them as many offspring as there are stars in the sky. You promised to bless them and give them land.” So God did not destroy them.

Moses went down the mountain carrying two stone tablets on which God had written the laws. Moses got closer to the camp and saw that the people were dancing before the golden calf! He threw down the stone tablets, smashing them at the bottom of the mountain. Then he destroyed the golden calf.

The next day, Moses went back up the mountain to talk to God. “These people sinned against You,” he said. “Please forgive their sin.”

God told Moses to return to the people and lead them. “When the time comes, I will punish them for their sin,” God said. God sent a terrible sickness to the people because they worshiped the golden calf.

God continued to meet with Moses and give him laws and instructions. One morning, Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. God came down in a cloud. He said, “The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God ... but He will not leave the guilty unpunished.”

Moses bowed down and worshiped God. “Lord, please go with us,” he said. “Forgive our sin, and accept us as Your people.”

Christ Connection: Moses acted as the people’s mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Use visuals: Draw or print pictures of the Bible story people to hang on the wall. You may use a flannelgraph or felt board if you have one available. Include scenery or relevant objects. Move the pieces around as you tell the story.

Vary your voice: Vary your voice to distinguish between narration, the Israelites’ words, Moses’ words, and God’s words.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ Open your Bible to Exodus 32. When Moses was on Mount Sinai meeting with God, what did the people decide to do? **[Allow kids to respond.]** They grew impatient and asked Moses’ brother, Aaron, to make them an idol to worship. Without their leader Moses, the Israelites were looking for someone to follow. God’s people were out of control. They danced and worshiped the golden calf. God saw their sin, and He was angry.

Do you remember our big picture question? **What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.** Worship is meant to be reserved only for God. No one and nothing else deserves to be worshiped.

[Choose a volunteer to read Ex. 32:7-8 aloud.] God told Moses to return to the people because they had already turned away from what God had commanded of them. What did Moses tell the people when he saw what they had done? **[Select a volunteer to read Ex. 32:30.]**

Moses told the people that they had sinned against the Lord and that he would ask God for forgiveness on their behalf. Moses knew that the people had disobeyed God and what He commanded of them. He knew that they did not deserve forgiveness. Moses acted as their mediator, standing for them before God. God punished His people for their sin by sending sickness, but God showed mercy to them by continuing to meet with Moses and care for the them as His chosen people. ”

3 CHRIST CONNECTION

SAY “ Moses acted as the people’s mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. God’s plan is to rescue His people from captivity, not only physical captivity like He rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but spiritual captivity—slavery to sin. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands before God for us. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. What good news! ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 5, Session 3” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. Why did the people worship an idol? Did they really think a statue could do anything for them?
2. What idols might you be tempted to worship? Why?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

SAY “ Only God deserves our worship, but sometimes our sinful hearts lead us to worship the wrong things—like when the Israelites worshiped the golden calf. Missionaries work to help people



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

learn to worship God alone.

Bobby and LaKeisha Williams are church planters in New Orleans, Louisiana. It's common in North America to think that missionaries have to travel to some place far away, but many missionaries work in the United States. Does anyone remember what someone is called who starts a new church in an area where more churches are needed? (a church planter) ”

Play the missions video. Close in prayer for the Williamses and for any missionaries your church supports.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Before the session use a dry erase marker to write each word from the key passage on a separate interlocking plastic block. Be sure to include the reference. Prepare one set of verse blocks for each group of up to five kids.

Show the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Psalm 95:6-7 together.

SAY ” Our key passage reminds us why we are to worship the Lord. He is our Maker and is worthy of our praise. Let's continue memorizing Psalm 95:6-7. ”

Form groups of five or fewer kids. Distribute block sets. Challenge kids to work together to build a block tower, placing the words to the key passage in order.

Lead kids to sing “Come, Let's Worship (Psalm 95:6-7).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

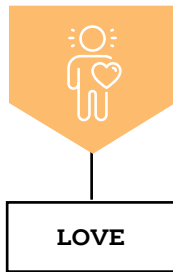
7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning from **LEARN** to **LOVE**.

SAY ” God, thank You for loving us, even in our sin. Thank You for sending Jesus to take the punishment for our sins so we can be forgiven and spend eternity with You. Help us to live in a way that honors You. Amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Exodus 34. Explain that God only allowed Moses to meet with Him on Mount Sinai (19), but God would not show Moses His face because no one could see God's glory and live.

Consider comparing the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where these stories took place. (Tip: Locate the areas in and around modern-day Egypt.) Choose a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 34:6-8.

| SAY “Moses wasn’t able to see God’s face when he was on Mount Sinai, but just being with God caused him to fall down in worship. As Moses considered God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness, he was overwhelmed with the goodness of God. When we experience God’s mercy and forgiveness, we can respond in worship.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| SAY “Does God always punish sin? Why?”

Help kids understand that God is just. That means He will always do what is right. Sin must be punished and the Bible says that the punishment for sin is death. All people have sinned, so all people deserve death. But God, in His mercy and grace, provided a way to be saved from the punishment of sin.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 6:23.)

| SAY “How is Jesus our Mediator?”

Allow kids to share their understanding of a mediator based on today’s story. Help them recognize that Jesus took the punishment for our sin on the cross and gives His righteousness to all who trust in Him. Jesus stands before God on behalf of anyone who trusts Him as Savior. He has paid for our sin, so when God sees us, He no longer sees our sin, but Jesus’ righteousness.

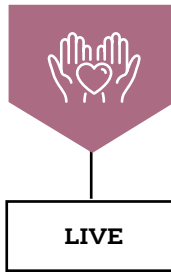
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read 2 Cor. 5:21.)

| SAY “What should we do when we sin?”

Point out that the Bible says that if we confess our sins to Him, He will forgive us. Encourage kids that God wants us to confess that we were wrong and ask Him to forgive us. Once God saves us, nothing can separate us from God, but confessing our sins to God is an important part of developing a close relationship with Him.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 1:9.)





THE MISSION OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: FEED THE NEED



Before the session, learn about a food distribution ministry in your area and how your church could support the ministry.

SAY “The Israelites were wrong to collect gold and build an idol. Church-planting missionaries like the Williamses use donations and offerings they receive for God’s glory. One way Next Level Church helps their community is by giving food to people who need it. One way we can live on mission and show God’s love is by helping people in need. We can donate food, give money, or volunteer our time to help organize or distribute food.”

Tell the kids about a food distribution ministry in your area. With church leaders’ permission, invite kids to make posters to hang in the church that encourage church members to get involved in the food ministry in your area. Consider distributing information for families to be involved together.

☐ OPTION 2: QUICK REACTIONS



Explain that you will announce some news and kids should clap to indicate how excited they are about it. Point out the news that gets the loudest applause.

Read the “news,” pausing for kids to respond each time:

1. You were voted most valuable player on your basketball team.
2. You got an A on the math test.
3. You get to have dinner with a celebrity.
4. Jesus died on the cross for you.

SAY “In today’s Bible story, God’s people sinned against God. They worshiped a golden calf while Moses was up on the mountain. It was wrong for them to worship the golden calf because only God deserves our worship. **What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.**”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for providing Jesus to take the punishment for our sins so we can have forgiveness and eternal life. As time allows, lead kids to complete “How Did It Happen?” on the activity page.



JOURNAL PAGE

1. What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
2. What does this story teach me about myself?
3. Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
4. Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
5. How does this story help me to live on mission better?



Unit 5 • Session 3

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED A GOLDEN CALF

Exodus 32-34

WHAT IS WORSHIP? WORSHIP IS CELEBRATING THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites at the bottom of the mountain were getting impatient. The Israelites went to Moses' brother, Aaron. "Make us a god to lead us," they said. "We don't know what happened to Moses." So Aaron collected gold from the people and made a statue of a calf that they could worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry. "I will destroy these people," God said.

Moses said, "Remember the great promise You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So God did not destroy them.

Moses went down the mountain and saw that the people were dancing before the golden calf! He threw down the stone tablets. Then he destroyed the golden calf.

The next day, Moses went back up the mountain to talk to God. "Please forgive their sin."

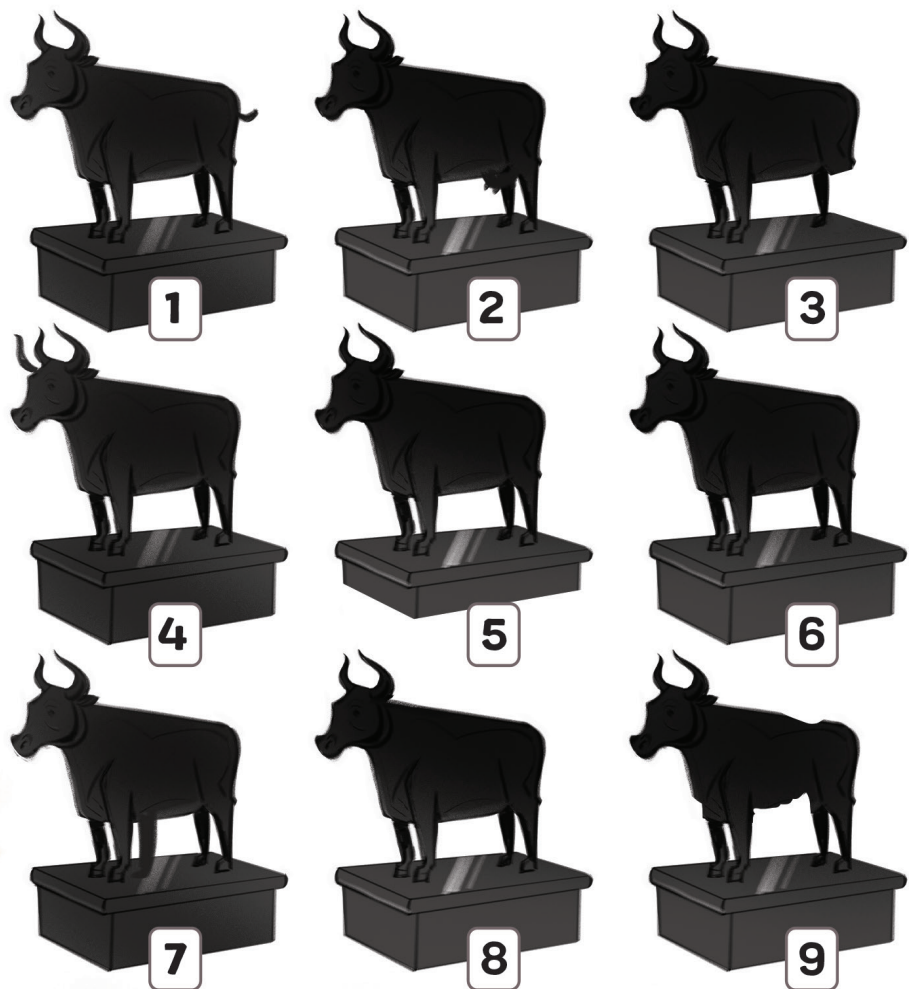
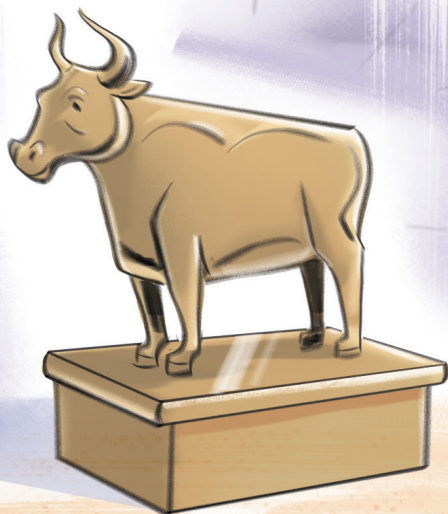
God told Moses to return to the people and lead them. "When the time comes, I will punish them for their sin," God said.

God continued to meet with Moses and give him laws and instructions. God came down in a cloud. He said, "The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God ... but He will not leave the guilty unpunished."

Moses bowed down and worshiped God. "Lord, please go with us," he said. "Forgive our sin, and accept us as Your people."

Christ Connection: Moses acted as the people's mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.

Image of Gold | Only one of the silhouettes here has the same details as the golden calf. Can you tell which and spot the differences in the others?



How Did It Happen? | Number the events from Exodus 32 in the order they happened.

The Israelites wondered if Moses was still alive.

Moses asked God to forgive the Israelites for their sin.

Moses destroyed the golden calf.

The Israelites asked Aaron to make a god to lead them.

God said He is compassionate but will punish the guilty.

Moses bowed down and worshiped God.

NAME: _____



the **GOSPEL** PROJECT

The People Worshiped a Golden Calf

BIBLE STORY SUMMARY:

- Moses stayed on Mount Sinai for 40 days listening to God.
- The people didn't know if Moses was still alive, so they asked Aaron to make them a god to worship.
- Aaron made a calf out of gold, and the people worshiped it.
- God said He was going to destroy the Israelites, but Moses asked God to show them mercy.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

Moses acted as the people's mediator, standing for them before God. Moses could not do anything to make up for their sin, but we have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.

KEY PASSAGE: Psalm 95:6-7

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is worship? Worship is celebrating the greatness of God.

