

The Golden Calf

BIBLE PASSAGE: Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9

MAIN POINT: God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf.

KEY PASSAGE: Hebrews 3:5-6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.

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(25–30 MINUTES)
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

God led His people into the wilderness, but He did not leave them there alone. The Lord was with His people. He provided meat, bread, and water. He guided them to Mount Sinai, where He met with their leader, Moses. The Lord came down on the mountain in fire and He spoke through thunder. The Israelites could not have ignored His presence.

But when Moses went up on the mountain and did not return for several weeks, the Israelites felt abandoned. They appealed to Moses' brother, Aaron: "Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!" (Ex. 32:1)

Aaron's response led the people to commit a terrible sin. He gathered gold from the people and made an image of a calf, and the people worshiped the golden calf. God saw what the people were doing, and He told Moses to go down the mountain at once. Moses confronted his brother. Aaron claimed that when the people gave him the gold, he threw it into the fire, and "out came this calf!" (Ex. 32:24)

God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf, and Moses returned to the mountain to ask the Lord to forgive the Israelites' sin. Moses could not atone for the people's sin; God said He would hold the people accountable for their sins, but the Lord did not abandon the Israelites.

Introduce the kids you teach to the concept of idolatry. An *idol* is anything a person puts in the place of God. Explain that idolatry is a sin. The Israelites deserved to be punished for their sin. In the same way, we deserve to be punished for our sin. Point out that Jesus never sinned. He is greater than Moses, and when we sin, Jesus not only talks to the Father for us, He atones for our sin. God forgives those who trust in Jesus.

4



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The BIBLE STORY

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9

Moses and the Israelites were in the wilderness. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and from Pharaoh and his pursuing army. The Israelites **came to Mount Sinai** (SIGH nigh), and they camped there in front of the mountain. **Moses went up the mountain, and God spoke to him.**

God had a lot to tell Moses, and **Moses was up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. Meanwhile, the Israelites camping at the base 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. "Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don't know what has happened to him."

So Aaron made a gold calf that they could worship.

God saw what the people were doing, and He was angry because of their sin. God told Moses to go down the mountain. "I will destroy these people," God said.

"Please forgive them," 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 decided not to destroy the people.**

Moses went down the mountain. He carried 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 gold calf! He threw down the stone tablets, smashing them at the bottom of the mountain. Then he destroyed the calf they made.

“What were you thinking?” Moses asked Aaron. The people were out of control.

The next day, Moses said, “I will go up to the Lord. Maybe I can do something to make up for your sin.” So Moses went back up the mountain to talk to God.

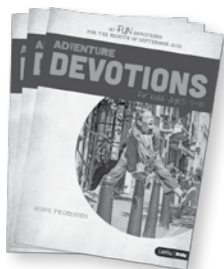
“These people have sinned against You. They made a god out of gold for themselves,” Moses said. “Please forgive their sin.”

God told Moses to return to the people. “When the time comes, I will punish them for their sin,” God said. Then the Lord sent a plague—a terrible sickness—to the people because they worshiped the gold calf.

God continued to meet with Moses and give him laws and instructions. He made two more stone tablets to replace the ones Moses broke. One morning, Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. The Lord came down in a cloud. He said, “Yahweh 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: God’s people sinned against God, and Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses acted as their 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.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover that Jesus speaks to God on our behalf. When we sin, we ask Jesus to forgive us. We must also pray for each other (James 5:16), as Moses prayed for the Israelites. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The Golden Calf

BIBLE PASSAGE: Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9

MAIN POINT: God punished His people for worshipping a golden calf.

KEY PASSAGE: Hebrews 3:5-6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, invite them to talk about idols. Define an idol as anything that we love or treat as more important than God. Talk about how easy it can be to make idols out of the wonderful gifts God gives us, such as family, friends, and our unique talents.

SAY • Sometimes we worship idols; we makes things in our lives more important than God. It can be family, it can be sports, or it can be video games. Because all people are born sinful, it is very easy for us to love and worship other things instead of the one true God. Today, we're going to learn that **God punished His people for worshipping a golden calf.**

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the "The Golden Calf" activity page to find the 10 golden calves in the picture.

SAY • The Israelites created a golden calf to worship as their God. They even said this fake golden cow was the one who led them out of Egypt! As a result, **God punished His people for worshipping a golden calf.**

- "The Golden Calf" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Simon says

Play a traditional game of “Simon Says.” Choose one child to start out the game as Simon. He will give a command, and the kids must do what he says as long as he says “Simon says” before the command. Kids must not do what he says if he does not say “Simon says.”

After a few commands, choose a new Simon and play again. Continue playing until each kid has a turn being Simon. For younger kids, do not eliminate anyone out of the game for doing the wrong action.

SAY • Today we’re going to learn that the Israelites made a big mistake. Moses told them to wait while he went up Mt. Sinai to talk with God, but the Israelites grew impatient. We’ll see what happened when they disobeyed God.

OPTION 2: If you love me, you’ll smile

Instruct the kids to form a circle in the center of the room. Select one kid to be in middle of the circle. The kid in the middle will try to get others to laugh by saying, “If you love me, you’ll smile.” The other kid must respond without smiling or laughing, “I love you, but I just can’t smile.” The kid in the middle can do various things, without touching anyone, to get the other kid to smile. If someone smiles, she will become the kid in the middle. Play as time allows.

SAY • One of the ways we can show God we love Him is by obeying His commands. In today’s Bible story, we’re going to learn the Israelites didn’t always do this.



Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

• bicycle seat,
handlebars, or tire

[Large Group Leader enters, carrying a bicycle seat, handlebars, or tire and looking pretty shaken.]

LEADER • Whoa, everybody! I am so glad to see you! On this leg of the race today, I'm in China, on my way to the Great Wall near Beijing, the capital of China. Did you know that over 20 million people live in Beijing alone? That's a lot of people! Many people ride bicycles in Beijing to help them get around without having to worry about traffic jams.

I borrowed this bicycle from a friend. I promised I'd be pretty careful, since this is the bicycle she uses to get to work every day. I thought I was taking a shortcut down an alley and ended up riding down a pretty steep staircase. As you can see, I wrecked my friend's bicycle pretty badly. I hope she can forgive me. I might even have to pay to get her bike repaired or replaced!

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • My mishap with my friend's bike reminds me of the Bible story today. We've been learning about how God brought His people out of Egypt. In our first Bible story, we learned that the king of Egypt made the Israelites work hard as slaves, but God had a plan. **God rescued Moses to deliver His people from captivity.**

• Giant Timeline

We learned that Moses obeyed God and went to Pharaoh to tell him to let God's people go. Pharaoh didn't want to obey God, so God sent 10 plagues, or troubles, to show who was really in charge. **God proved to the Egyptians that He is the one true God.**

Last week, we learned that God led His people into the wilderness on their way to the promised land. After a few days, they ran out of food and water. God was testing them to see if they would trust Him to take care of them or not. How did the Israelites do? Did they pass the test? Not really. They complained against God. Even though they complained, **God provided for the physical needs of His people** by giving them manna from heaven, quail, and water from a rock!

Today's Bible story is called "The Golden Calf."

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Before we dive into the Bible story, who can remember our big picture question? [*Invite a kid to say the question and answer.*] Great job! ***What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.***

- Bibles
- “The Golden Calf” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9. Tell the Bible story in your own words, or show the Bible story video “The Golden Calf.” For a shorter version of the Bible story, read only the bolded text of the script.

LEADER • Oh no! While Moses was on the mountain talking with God, the people at the bottom of the mountain grew impatient. Moses had been gone for 40 days, and they didn’t know what happened to him. They thought that maybe Moses had died. Without Moses, they went to Aaron and told him to make them a god to worship!

Before we start thinking “The Israelites are silly! I wouldn’t have done that!” we should remember what the Bible says about sin. The Bible says that all of us are sinners. We all want to worship things other than God. [See *Rom. 1:25*.] We may not melt down our jewelry and make a statue, but if we’re honest, there may be things that we treat as more important than God in our lives.

God punished His people for worshipping a golden calf. The punishment for sin is death, but Moses asked God to forgive them. Moses acted as their 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.

Ask the following review questions:

1. How long did Moses spend on top of Mt. Sinai speaking with God? (*40 days and 40 nights*)
2. What did the Israelites make while Moses was

on top of the mountain? (*a golden calf to worship, Ex. 32:1-5*)

3. How did God react when He saw their sin? (*God was angry and threatened to destroy them, Ex. 32:7-10*)
4. What did Moses ask God to do for the people? (*forgive them, Ex. 32:30-34*)
5. How did God punish the people of God for their sin? (*God sent a sickness on the people, Ex. 32:35*)
6. ***What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.***
7. Who serves as a better Mediator than Moses? (*Jesus paid for our sins on the cross and stands for us before God, Heb. 9:15*)

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (optional)

Use Scripture and the guide provided with this session to explain to boys and girls how to become a Christian. Assign individuals to meet with kids who have more questions. Encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Hebrews 3:5-6. Say the key passage together twice.

LEADER • Moses was a great leader, but Moses could not do anything to take away the sins of the Israelites. Jesus is a better Mediator. Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for sin. Jesus rose again three days later so we would know that we can have life with Him forever.

Sing the key passage song.

- Key Passage Slide or Poster
- "Confidence of Our Hope" song

• “Unit 4, Session 4”
discussion starter
video

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Which is better: a copy or the real thing? [*Invite kids to answer.*] Check this video out.

Show the “Unit 4, Session 4” discussion starter video.

LEADER • It seems crazy that the Israelites would so quickly make a golden statue to worship. Remember the Bible is not a story about heroes. The Bible is a story about sinful people and their need for a Savior. The Israelites were real people who made the same sinful choices we make. Remember that an idol is anything we put in front of God. What are some things that can easily become idols for us? [*Invite kids to respond.*]

• “Freedom” song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • Did the Israelites deserve to be forgiven? No! God is compassionate, but He is also holy. He must punish sin. Because of Jesus, we have forgiveness. We also have freedom to live a new holy life in Him!

Sing together “Freedom.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Before transitioning to small groups, make any announcements for your kids ministry. Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus to rescue us from sin and stand before You on our behalf. Teach us how to follow Your ways out of love for You. In Jesus name, amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:19.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Small Group LEADER

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KEY PASSAGE: Hebrews 3:5-6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- index cards
- marker

Line up the class. Give each kid one word of the key passage verses written on an index card. Start at the front of the line and guide each kid to read her word. You may need to whisper the word to kids who are still learning to read. Take up the cards, shuffle them, and play again. This time the kids must line up themselves in the correct order. Help as needed.

SAY • In our Bible story today, Moses asked God to forgive the people for sinning against God. Moses talked to God on their behalf, but Moses could not do anything to make right what they had done wrong. Moses was a sinner too.

We have a better Mediator—Jesus. Jesus is God's Son. He is holy, and He never once sinned. Jesus paid for our sin on the cross and stands for us before God. He is the only One who can! When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we have life forever with God.

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- cloud cutouts
- markers
- tape

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9 and briefly review the Bible story. Before class, cutout cloud shapes

from white or gray construction paper. Write on one set of clouds *Yahweh* (or *the Lord*), *compassionate, gracious, slow to anger*, and *rich in faithful love*. Tape the clouds on a focal wall. Invite kids to form groups of three or four kids and give each group two or three cloud cutouts and markers.

Invite each group to open their Bibles to Exodus 34:1-9 and to take turns reading a verse or two from the Bible passage. Adult helpers may read for kids who may not be confident readers. After kids read God's response to Israel's sin, invite them to write or draw pictures of what the first set of words means and tape the second clouds beneath the first clouds. After a few minutes, talk about God declaring His name to Moses.

SAY • God wanted Moses to know something very important about who He is. God said He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and rich in faithful love. God is forgiving, but He also must punish sin. If God didn't punish sin, He wouldn't be holy. He wouldn't be a good, compassionate God.

But God is so loving, that He sent His own Son, Jesus, who never sinned, to come to earth and die on the cross to take the punishment for our sin. Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that we could be forgiven—receiving God's love instead of punishment—when we trust in Jesus.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Guard the gold

Place a pile of fake gold coins or jewelry in the center of the room. Choose two or three kids to protect the gold from the others who will try to take it. If one of the guards tags one of the kids trying to take the gold, the kid who is

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.



• plastic gold coins or jewelry

tagged must touch a wall before he can return to play. Play as time allows.

SAY • When Moses was on the mountain, the Israelites gathered all of their gold and made a golden calf to worship. Aaron melted down the gold and formed it into a calf. They sinned against God. **God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf.**

Today, we don't usually bow down to statues, but we aren't any better than the Israelites. We are guilty of sinning too! The Bible says that all people sin and all people need a Savior. God sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue us from sin and death.

OPTION 2: Heart art

- paper
- crayons and markers

Give each kid a piece of paper with a red heart drawn in the middle of the page. In the center of the heart write the name *God* or *Yahweh*. Instruct the children to draw pictures outside of the heart of things they are tempted to love more than God. Pray with the kids so that they will be able to put God first.

Be sensitive to kids who have not yet trusted in Jesus as their Savior. Until kids have turned away from sin and trusted in Jesus, they will not be able to put God first! Pray silently that those children will grow to recognize their need for a Savior.

SAY • The Israelites worshiped a golden calf that they made with their hands. **God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf.** Moses spoke to God for the people, and God forgave them. Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that anyone who trusts in Him could be forgiven and live forever with Him.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal and instruct the kids to draw a picture of Moses speaking to God on the mountain for the Israelites. Writers may write down who God is: a compassionate, gracious God who is slow to anger and rich in faithful love. As they draw or write, talk about God's plan to rescue people from captivity to sin.

SAY • Do you think God was surprised that the Israelites worshiped a golden calf? No. God knew they would sin against Him. God told Moses that He would remove the name of anyone who sins against Him from His book. Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says when we trust in Jesus, our names are written in His book of life. God doesn't look at us and see our sin, He only looks at us and sees that we have been forgiven!

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for sending His Son to forgive us for all the times we put other things in front of God. Pray for each child by name. Ask God to help the kids recognize their need for Jesus to rescue them from sin.

Make sure to give kids the big picture cards to take home to reinforce the Bible story with their families.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid
- crayons or markers
- Big Picture Cards for Families: Kids

Journal Page

God the Redeemer

Key Passage: Hebrews 3:5-6

Big Picture Questions: What is God's plan?
God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.

Session 1: Moses Was Born and Called

Exodus 1:8-2:10, 23-25; 3:1-4:20

God rescued Moses to deliver His people from captivity.

Session 2: The Plagues, the Passover, and the Crossing of the Red Sea

Exodus 5-14

God proved to Egypt that He is the one true God.

Session 3: The Wilderness Test

Exodus 15:22-17:7

God provided for the physical needs of His people.

Session 4: The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-35; 34:1-9

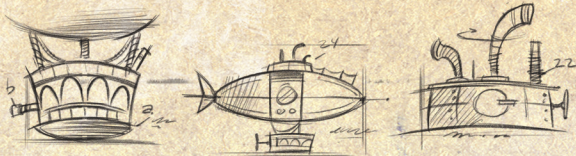
God punished His people for worshiping a golden calf.

Session 5: The Ten Commandments: Love God

Exodus 19:1-20:11; 31:18

God gave us rules to show that He is holy and we are sinners.

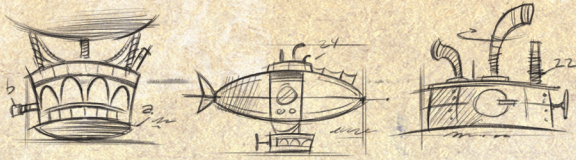




**Moses was faithful as
a servant in all God's
household ... But Christ
was faithful as a Son over
His household. And we are
that household if we hold
on to the courage and the
confidence of our hope.**

Hebrews 3:5-6

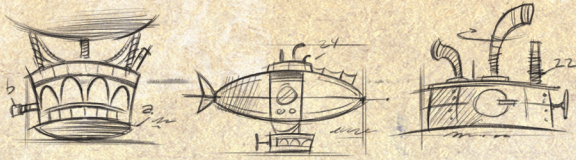




**Moses verily was faithful
in all his house, as a servant
... But Christ as a son over
his own house; whose house
are we, if we hold fast the
confidence and the rejoicing
of the hope firm unto
the end.**

Hebrews 3:5-6



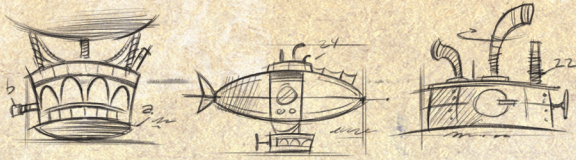


**Now Moses was faithful in
all God's house as a servant
... but Christ is faithful over
God's house as a son.**

**And we are his house if
indeed we hold fast our
confidence and our boasting
in our hope.**

Hebrews 3:5-6





“Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,”

... But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house.

And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Hebrews 3:5-6



**God punished
His people for
worshiping a
golden calf.**





The Golden Calf

INSTRUCTIONS: Find the 10 golden calves hidden in the picture below.

DOWNLOAD THE
TGP FAMILY APP

KEY PASSAGE: Hebrews 3:5-6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

- What is God's plan? God's plan is to rescue His people from captivity.

BIBLE STORY: THE GOLDEN CALF

- Moses talked to God on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights.
- The Israelites asked Aaron to make an idol.
- God punished His people for worshipping a golden calf.
- Moses asked God to forgive His people and be their God.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS:

- Why did Aaron make a golden calf?
- Moses talked to God for the Israelites. Who talks to God for us? (*Jesus*)
- An *idol* is anything a person puts in the place of God. What might be an idol in your life?

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

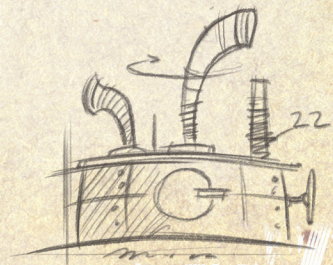
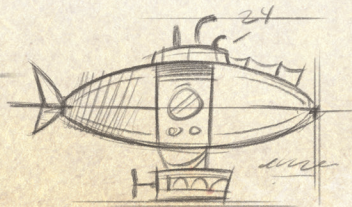
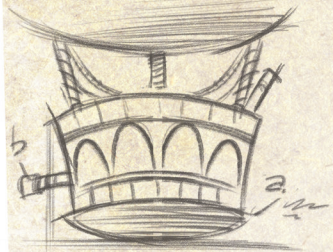
- Talk about things or activities that may interfere with worshipping God. Take steps to remove idols from your home.
- Take it further: Worship God together through singing. Pray that you will keep God first.

Younger Kids Activity Pages
Unit 4, Session 4





What is God's plan?



What is God's plan?

God's plan is to
rescue His people
from captivity.

