

# Message Notes

## A Huge Step Backward

# Scripture Passages

(taken from the New International Version)

**Introduction** – *Lamest excuse in the world?*

**Today's Message:** *A HUGE step backward*  
Exodus 32:1-33:6

**The Context** – *Exodus 32:1a*

**The Conspiracy** – *Exodus 32:1b*

**The Plan** – *Exodus 32:2-4a*

**How did we get here?** – *Exodus 32:4b-6*

*NOTE* – *See the two different agendas:*  
*The People's*

*Aaron's*

**Things ain't right!** – *Exodus 32:7-8*

**The justice of God** – *Exodus 32:9-10*

**The prayer of Moses** – *Exodus 32:11-13*

**The answer to Moses' prayer** – *Exodus 32:14*

**The anger of Moses** – *Exodus 32:15-19*

**The consequences of sin (part 1)** – *Ex 32:20*

**The lamest excuse in history** – *Exodus 32:21-24*

**Choose where you'll stand** – *Exodus 32:25-26*

**The consequences of sin (part 2)** – *Ex 32:27-33:6*

Gospel Implications:

**Counterfeit Gods**

*Romans 1:25*

*Colossians 3:5*

*1 John 5:20-21, 2:15-16*

**The Three Biggies!**

*Sex, Money and Power*

**Your own Personal Jesus**

*Galatians 1:6-7*

*Ways we make our own "Golden Calf"*

**Gospel Application** – *What "calves" need  
barbecuing in your life?*

**Exodus 32:1-33:6** (see screen)

**Romans 1:25**

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

**Colossians 3:5**

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

**1 John 5:20-21**

<sup>20</sup>We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. <sup>21</sup>Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

**1 John 2:15-16**

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

**Galatians 1:6-7**

<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup>which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

THE BOOK OF  
**LAME  
EXCUSES**



THE ILLUSTRATION IS BY DAN PIRARO

Illustrations by Dan Piraro

ARCHIVE

*It's not expensive,  
it  
it looks too cheap  
I cannot remember, but now  
I thought you were going  
to do it right away*



*The crew was in her eye.*



*My other phone is ringing*

*I think I'm coming down  
with something.*

~

*Someone's at the door.*

~

*I just followed the instructions.*

~

*I forget where I parked my car.*

20 pay you back tomorrow

•  
100 pay at the office

•  
101 pay at home



The duck is in the pond

*I'm all tied up*

*I'm on another line.*

*Let me get back to you in a bit.*



*The computer is down.*

The page is framed by a wide, ornate border of floral and foliate motifs in gold, blue, and red. The central text is enclosed in a simple gold rectangular border.

The Gospel  
According to  
**St. Moses**  
a study of exodus

# MOSES GOES UP THE MOUNTAIN



**MOSES COMES DOWN THE MOUNTAIN**



# The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-6

And God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.



**This week's message:**  
*A huge step backward*  
**Exodus 32:1-33:6**



# The Context

## Exodus 32:1a

<sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

We should remember that just a few months prior to this incident, the Israelites and the other ethnic groups among them were still living in Egypt, deeply influenced by its pagan culture, just as they had been for hundreds of years. They had all grown up in a society devoted to the religious system and way of life known as idolatry, and they were understandably, though by no means excusably, not yet used to the rigorous anti-idolatry demands of Yahweh's covenant with them. Because the attractions of idolatry for them were so strong and their recent stance against it so derivative and new, they were, in fact, not at all genuinely committed to its eradication in their beliefs and practices, as the present passage demonstrates all too clearly.

~ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary  
(Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 661.

# The Conspiracy

## Exodus 32:1b

<sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

# The Plan

## Exodus 32:2-4a

<sup>2</sup>Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup>So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool.





The choice of a calf is not arbitrary. It was a common idol image in the ancient Near East. It is commonly accepted by Old Testament scholars today that the ancients did not *equate* an idol with the god, but it was some sort of earthly *representation* of that god. Specifically, it was thought that calves or bulls functioned as pedestals for the gods seated or standing over them. In this sense, the calf is analogous to the ark (the fact that both are made of gold strengthens this connection).

This is important to remember because it is unlikely that the calf *itself* is being declared “god” by the Israelites, as if they actually think that *it* has brought them out of Egypt. Rather, like the ark, it is the place above which God is enthroned, thus ensuring his presence with them. The calf is thus a pagan *representation* of the true God. Put otherwise, the Israelites are not saying that this calf and *not* Yahweh brought them out of Egypt, but that Yahweh’s *presence* is now associated with this piece of gold. By making the golden calf, Israel has broken not the first commandment but the second.

~ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 569–570.

# How did we get here?

## Exodus 32:4b-6

Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel,  
who brought you up out of Egypt.”

<sup>5</sup>When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.” <sup>6</sup>So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

# God informs Moses that things ain't right!

## Exodus 32:7-8

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. <sup>8</sup>They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

# The Justice of God

## Exodus 32:9-10

<sup>9</sup>“I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup>Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

# The prayer of Moses

## Exodus 32:11-13

<sup>11</sup>But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup>Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup>Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' "

# The answer to Moses' prayer

## Exodus 32:14

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

“ In v. 14 the wording concluding the verse is of great importance: Yahweh changed his mind about the disaster he planned to bring on “his people.” They would not have been a people at all had he carried out what he threatened; instead this part of the narrative concludes with a reminder that he remained their God and they his people, his special possession, the kingdom of priests and holy nation—however deeply corrupted they may have been at this point—that he had created them to be (19:6).

~ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary  
(Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 673.

# The Anger of Moses

## Exodus 32:15-19

<sup>15</sup>Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. <sup>16</sup>The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

<sup>17</sup>When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

<sup>18</sup>Moses replied: “It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.”

<sup>19</sup>When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

# The consequences of sin (part one)

## Exodus 32:20

<sup>20</sup>And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

# The lamest excuse in the history of... ever

## Exodus 32:21

<sup>21</sup>He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

<sup>22</sup>“Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. <sup>23</sup>They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ <sup>24</sup>So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

# Choose where you gonna stand

## Exodus 32:25-26

<sup>25</sup>Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. <sup>26</sup>So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

# The consequences of sin (part two)

## Exodus 32:27 – 33:6

<sup>27</sup>Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’ ” <sup>28</sup>The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. <sup>29</sup>Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

# The consequences of sin (part two)

## Exodus 32:27 – 33:6

<sup>30</sup>The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

<sup>31</sup>So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup>But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

# The consequences of sin (part two)

## Exodus 32:27 – 33:6

<sup>33</sup>The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. <sup>34</sup>Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

<sup>35</sup>And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

# The consequences of sin (part two)

## Exodus 32:27 – 33:6

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ <sup>2</sup> I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. <sup>3</sup>Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”

# The consequences of sin (part two)

## Exodus 32:27 – 33:6

<sup>4</sup>When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. <sup>5</sup>For the LORD had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.’ ” <sup>6</sup>So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

# Gospel Implications:

Are “golden calves” a thing today?

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## Romans 1:25

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

**Are “golden calves” a thing today?**

**Colossians 3:5**

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

# Are “golden calves” a thing today?

## 1 John 5:20-21

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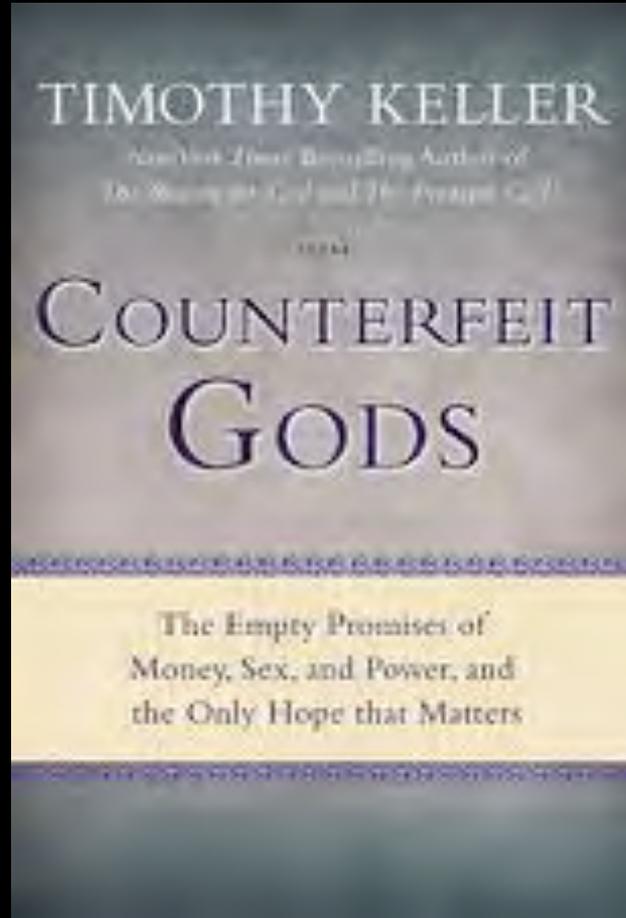
<sup>21</sup>Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

# Are “golden calves” a thing today?

## 1 John 2:15-16

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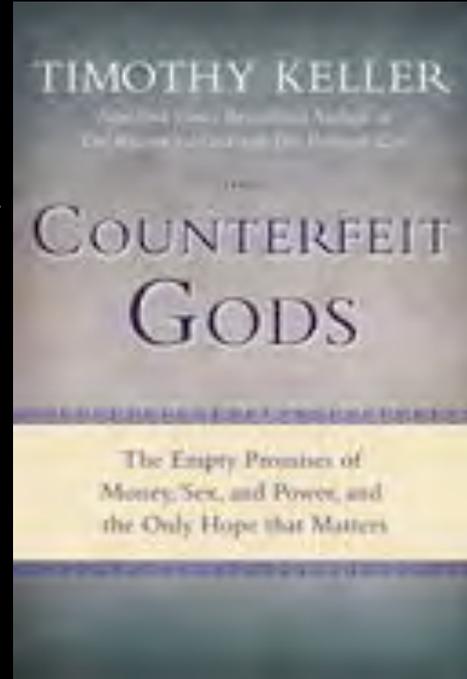
# Are “golden calves” a thing today?



# Are “golden calves” a thing today?

What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give...

An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*.



~ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power and the Only Hope that Matters*, pages xvii and xviii of the introduction.

A silhouette of a human head in profile, facing left. The interior of the head is filled with a bright, glowing red light. The word "SEX" is written in large, bold, red, sans-serif capital letters across the forehead and upper brain area. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a cloudy or smoky atmosphere.

**SEX**





**Power tends to  
corrupt; absolute  
power corrupts  
absolutely.**

**Ways we fashion a “Golden Calf”  
out of Jesus:**

J . D . G R E E R

Y O U D O N ' T

G E T Y O U R

O W N

P E R S O N A L

J E S U S

J . D . G R E E A R  
Y O U D O N ' T  
G E T Y O U R  
O W N  
P E R S O N A L  
J E S U S

One way we can tell if we've remade God in our image is by how often our God contradicts and offends us. If our god only affirms what we already think, we're probably not listening to him and instead deifying our own convictions. After all, any independent person has their own ideas and opinions which unavoidably conflict with ours. How much more should we expect this with God.

~ J. D. Greear, *You Don't Get Your Own Personal Jesus*, page 16.



**JESUS WAS  
A JEWISH  
LIBERAL**



**JESUS WAS  
A JEWISH  
LIBERAL**





What we need to affirm is that Jesus is neither a Democrat nor a Republican. Whenever we marry Jesus to a political party, we are committing the sin of idolatry. We are making Jesus into the image of our political party.

— Tony Campolo —

# Gospel Application

*What “calves” need  
barbecuing in your  
life?*

