

LESSON 23 ISRAEL AT MOUNT SINAI

READING: Exodus 19 and 20; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Galatians 3:21-29; Acts 7:37-38

AIM: To show how God constituted His people a Kingdom with His Law and commandments.

1. BACKGROUND

There are different opinions about the exact geographical position of Mount Sinai in the Bible. Sinai and Horeb are often considered to have been different names for the same place, although it is possible that they may have been different locations. Various scholars consider possible locations for Mount Sinai to be in the Sinai Peninsula, Edom or Nabatea, Saudi Arabia and The Negev. The historian Josephus says that it was within Arabia Petraea, a Roman Province that included modern Jordan, southern modern Syria, the Sinai Peninsula and northwestern Saudi Arabia. The Apostle Paul is even less specific, saying that it was in Arabia.

In the third month after leaving Egypt, Israel came to Mt Sinai. Here they saw this huge mountain block rising abruptly from the plain in awful grandeur. On the north-west side of the mount and hemmed in by other steeply rising mountains of rock, was a plain two miles long and one and a half miles wide where Israel could have camped. Their presence here was a fulfilment of God's promise to Moses who, at the foot of this mountain, had seen the burning bush (Exodus 3:12).

Moses ascended the mountain at least eight times to mediate between God and the people. On the first occasion, God told Moses to tell the children of Israel **"If you will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people"**.

This was a further step in God's great plan with His people (Deuteronomy 26:8).

- (1) They had been redeemed from Egypt by blood and power.
- (2) God was about to make a covenant with them and promised they would be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).
- (3) The people agreed to obey God and became a covenant-people, separated from all other nations because they worshipped the true God and had God-given laws (see Deut. 4:6-8).

2. GOD'S MAJESTY AND HOLINESS EMPHASIZED - Exodus 19:9-25

The people were told to be prepared to hear God's words in three day's time. They were to wash themselves and their clothes, and to be clean in mind and body. God was holy, and His children were to be holy also.

God's greatness was revealed in the mount. It was a holy place and the people were warned not to touch it on pain of death. Thick clouds covered Sinai. The mountain top was concealed by the cloud of the glory of the Lord (Exodus 24:15-18). There was thunder and lightning and the long loud blast of a trumpet.

Moses assembled the people before the mountain. The Lord (angel of the Lord, Acts. 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19) descended in fire; smoke rose to heaven and the mountain trembled. God spoke to the awe-stricken people.

3. **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - Exodus 20:1-17**

The trumpet sounded long and waxed louder and louder, and then God spoke in a voice heard by all, giving the **ten commandments**. Read these from Exodus 20, noting the following points:

The first four have relation to God.

The fifth refers to family life

The last five concern our attitude to others (one's fellow man).

First – God, **Second** – Family, **Third** – Attitude to others.

(1) **GOD** (Exodus 20:3-11)

- a. The first commandment was to remind the Israelites that God had delivered them from Egypt. **He** was, therefore, their Redeemer.
- b. They were to worship Him only, and not to make graven images.
- c. They must reverence God at all times, and never use His name without respect.
- d. They were to keep the Sabbath holy. This would remind them that God was the Creator, who rested on the seventh day from His labours.

(2) **FAMILY** (Exodus 20:12)

- a. They were to honour their parents, the first commandment with promise.

(3) **ATTITUDE TO OTHERS** (Exodus 20:12-17)

- a. They were not to kill or steal.
- b. They must keep themselves pure.
- c. They were not to tell untruths (bear false witness) about anyone.
- d. They should not desire anything belonging to another, or covet what was their neighbours.

The ten commandments provided the “**holy, just and good**” basis of God’s dealing with Israel and of the covenant He made with them through Moses. Further **statutes and laws** were also given. These provided judgements and penalties which regulated the attitude of the Israelites to God and His worship, to each other, and to the nations among whom they dwelt. These various laws and ordinances together came to be known as the Law of Moses, obedience to which would have guaranteed Israel continued occupation of the Land of Promise until Messiah appeared.

4. **THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW**

God gave Israel the Law to make them a holy (separate) people unto Him – to guide their lives that they might be an example to surrounding nations and the Name of their God glorified.

The Law was holy, just and good. It effectively revealed to man that he was a sinner before God and in need of redemption (Romans 5:20: Gal 3:19), and the Law cursed all who did not obey it in every detail (Gal. 3:10) so it revealed that there was no hope of life apart from the promised Messiah (Rom. 3:21-22) for no man apart from Jesus was able to live without committing sin (Romans 3:23).

Although men were unable to save themselves by keeping the Law: God saves those who have faith in Him. Faith means belief in and worship of God. When men have faith they try to please God, and God is pleased and He forgives them. **A faithful man is full of faith** – he has faith in God’s promises and he is true to the covenant he has made with God.

Above all the Law was to be a covenant between Israel and God until Christ should come. The apostle Paul says the Law was their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ (Galatians 3:24). He was the one promised in Eden, the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15)

By fulfilling the Law Jesus “nailed it to his cross”. We come therefore under the dispensation of God’s grace in Christ. All Jews also can only be saved in Christ and the offerings and sacrifices of the Law of Moses all pointed forward to Jesus. They provided salvation through faith in God’s grace to be revealed in Jesus’ perfection and sacrifice.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Paul wrote, **“We are saved by grace” (Eph. 2:5). We cannot obtain eternal life through our own efforts. Our salvation is dependent upon God’s mercy and forgiveness. Before we can obtain God’s grace we must fulfil certain requirements, namely:**

- (a) Belief in the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.**
- (b) Baptism into Jesus.**
- (c) Obedience to God by following the example of Jesus Christ.**
- (d) Faith in God’s mercy and forgiveness.**

Those who accept the Lord in the way laid down are accounted **“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people”** (compare I Peter 2:9 with Exodus 19:5-6) as were Israel. To come unto the Lord truly requires the daily study of God’s word and a willingness to walk in God’s ways.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

- “The Visible Hand of God”, chapter 16
- “Elpis Israel”, part 2, chapter 4
- “The Law of Moses”, chapters 3 and 4.
- “Moses My Servant”, chapter 4
- “Theophany”, chapter 5.
- “God’s Way”, chapter 5.

QUESTIONS

1. What events preceded the giving of the Law at Sinai?
2. List the ten commandments
3. Comment upon the three categories into which the ten commandments fall.
4. For what purpose was the law given? Does it still apply to believers today?
5. Compare Moses and Jesus Christ as mediators.