

## Lesson 25: Preparation for the Giving of the Ten Commandments

In today's lesson, we'll look at how God prepared the Israelites to receive the Ten Commandments. This was a big deal and still is today. The Ten Commandments were given by a holy God and designed to set apart His people from all the other people living during that day.

We live in a day when the 10 Commandments are under assault from the Supreme Court as well as the many who don't want to be reminded that there is the One True God, who is our Creator and He, the Almighty God, El-Shaddai has standards which never change. The Supreme Court may give its stamp of approval to kill an unborn child, or to euthanize the elderly, or endorse homosexuality, but God's standards don't change. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

The Supreme Court can outlaw the 10 Commandments on government property but that doesn't mean that the 10 Commandments are out-of-date, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. They are as relevant for us today as when God handed them down to Moses.

Before we begin today's lesson, let's review last week's lesson.

### Review of Lesson 24, God delivered Israel at the Red Sea:

#### QUESTIONS:

1. How did the Lord show the Israelites where to go? *God led them by a cloud during the day, and the cloud became a pillar of fire at night.*
2. To which land were the Israelites heading? *To Canaan, the land God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*
3. Why did God protect Israel?
  - a. *Because He is loving and merciful.*
  - b. *Because one of their descendants was to be the great Deliverer of sinners.*
  - c. *Because of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*
  - d. *Because He was giving His Word to Israel to give to the world.*
4. What did the Israelites do when they saw Pharaoh's armies coming behind them? *They blamed Moses and said he should have left them in Egypt.*
5. Was there any way the Israelites could save themselves? *No.*
6. What should they have done? *They should have called on the Lord and trusted Him to rescue them.*
7. Why wasn't it difficult for God to open up the sea?
  - a. *Because He created the sea.*
  - b. *Because in the beginning, God had power over the water and the whole earth. He had not changed. He commanded this sea to move back so His people could walk to the other side on dry land.*
  - c. *Because God is almighty. Nothing is too hard for Him.*
8. What did God do to protect the Israelites from the Egyptians when they were walking through the sea? *God placed the cloud behind the Israelites so it was between them and the Egyptians. The cloud shone brightly to show the way to the Israelites, but it was a dark, black cloud in front of the Egyptians.*
9. Why couldn't the Egyptians escape from God? *Because the Lord is greater than all. No one can fight against Him and win. He is almighty.*
10. Can anyone make a way to deliver himself from God's punishment for his sins and make himself acceptable to God? *No.*
11. What new problem did the Israelites face as they began their journey through the wilderness? *They didn't have any food.*

12. Did they remember all the great things God had done, and did they trust in Him? *No, they complained and blamed Moses and Aaron.*
13. Did Israel deserve to be given food by God? *No.*
14. Is there any person who merits God's love or deserves to be rescued from everlasting punishment? *No, we all deserve to be punished by God.*
15. What was the food which the Lord gave to the Israelites? *The Lord first gave them quail, and then He provided manna every morning.*
16. Why couldn't the Israelites get water? *Because they were in the wilderness.*
17. What did God tell Moses that he must do to provide water? *He had to hit the rock with his rod.*
18. When God delivered the Israelites, did He allow them to do things the way they wanted to do them? *No, it had to be done God's way.*

Now as we look at God's preparation for giving the Ten Commandments to his people, we must take note that the Ten Commandments emphasize that God demands perfect obedience from every person. There is nothing of grace revealed in the Law. The purpose of the Law is to show people the impossibility of being saved by their own good works. This is God's way of preparing sinners to receive the gift of salvation through Christ's death on their behalf (Romans 3:19,20; Galatians 3:24).

## A. Introduction

- How do you view the Ten Commandments?
- Are they a set of rules to live by?
- Are they a code of good conduct?
- We're going to see what God says about His Ten Commandments.

But, first of all, we'll take a look at how He prepared His people Israel for receiving these laws. That should be good preparation for us, too.

## B. God brought Israel to Mount Sinai.

**Theme: God is supreme and sovereign.**

READ Exodus 19:1-2 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> Exactly two months after the Israelites left Egypt, they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai.

<sup>2</sup> After breaking camp at Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and set up camp there at the base of Mount Sinai.

The Israelites didn't decide when they would travel or where they would go.

- God made these decisions for them.
- He wanted them to accept Him as their ruler, protector, and provider.

**Theme: God is faithful; He never changes.**

READ Exodus 19:3-4 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup> Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel:

<sup>4</sup> 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

## ON MAP : THE AREA OF THE SINAI PENINSULA AND THE POSSIBLE LOCATION OF MOUNT SINAI.

Precise identification of Mt. Sinai has not been possible, but this mountain, also called Mt Horeb, was the place where Moses saw the burning bush and where God promised Moses that He would bring him and the Israelites back to this mountain.

### READ **Exodus 19:12 (NLT)**

<sup>12</sup> Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, 'Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death.

#### **God is trustworthy.**

- He protected Moses, delivered Israel, and brought them to Mount Sinai, just as He had promised.
- God does not make idle promises; neither does He work only through simple, predictable, "natural" means.
- Humanly speaking, every one of these things was impossible.
- But all things are possible for God.
- Even His choice of Moses as leader was totally against Moses' wishes.
- But God enabled Moses, overcame Pharaoh, and even sustained the grumbling multitudes of Israel.
- God is all-powerful; God is faithful; God is sovereign.
- You can trust God completely to do everything He promises.

## **C. The Lord's promise to Israel**

#### **Theme: God communicates with man.**

### READ **Exodus 19:5-6 (NLT)**

<sup>5</sup> Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me.

<sup>6</sup> And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

The Lord told Moses His message for Israel. God planned to make an agreement with Israel.

#### **Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan.**

#### **This is the agreement:**

- The Lord promised to bless the Israelites if they obeyed Him perfectly.
- If they did everything that He told them, then He would accept them and give them all the good things they needed.

#### **Reference**

#### **Exodus 3:1,2**

**2**This is the second time that God's acceptance has been linked with obedience. The first was when Adam was in the garden. The second is this promise by God to bless Israel on the basis of obedience to the Law. If they obeyed and kept their side of the covenant (perfect obedience), then they would be a

peculiar treasure to God and be separated to His service as a kingdom of priests (Deuteronomy 26:16-19, 28:1-68).

## D. Israel's promise to the Lord

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

### Exodus 19:7-8 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

<sup>8</sup> All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

### Israel promised to obey the Lord in everything.

- They had forgotten how they had doubted God at the Red Sea when the Egyptian armies were behind them.
- They had forgotten how they had complained when they didn't have food and water.
- They were self-confident.
- They thought that they could obey God well enough so that He would give them everything they needed.
- They didn't yet realize that their hearts were full of sin and that they could not please God by their own efforts.
- They were like Cain who thought that he could please God by the things which he gave to God.

The people of Israel did not realize that, under this agreement, God would no longer be able to bless them or give them the good things which they needed.

- The agreement was that, **if they obeyed God perfectly, then He would accept them and bless them, but if they disobeyed, then they would be cursed and punished by God.**
- The Lord knew that, in a very short time, the nation of Israel would disobey Him, and under the agreement of the Law, He would have to punish them for their sins.

Why then did the Lord make an agreement with the Israelites when He knew that they were not capable of keeping their side of the bargain? The Lord did it because He wanted to prove to them that they were sinners and were unable to please Him.

The Lord wanted to teach them that they could not become His friends and earn His acceptance and gifts by their own efforts.

### Illustration:

*A man was swimming across a river, but he became tired and was caught in the swift-flowing current. A group of people were on the bank of the river watching. None of them were capable of helping the man who was going to drown, except for one strong man who was an excellent swimmer.*

*The people on the bank kept urging this man to go to the assistance of the man in the river. But he didn't. He stood watching while the struggling man became weaker and weaker. Finally, when the drowning man became so tired that he gave up his struggle, the strong swimmer dived in and rescued him.*

*When the people criticized the man for waiting so long before he helped the drowning man, he answered, "The drowning man would never have allowed me to help him while he had any strength of his own. I could only help him when he gave up trying to help himself."*

## THE LAW Demands PERFECT Obedience

### **Romans 3:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

<sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

God gave the Law to Israel to show them that they were unable to please God and make themselves acceptable to Him. When they gave up and trusted in Him, then He was willing to save them from everlasting punishment.

This is God's way with all people. God will only deliver those who agree with Him that they are sinners under the control of Satan, sin, and death. This is what God wants us, also, to learn about ourselves. We are helpless sinners.

- We cannot deliver ourselves from sin, Satan, or death.

### **E. The preparation for the Lord's presence on the mountain**

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

#### **READ Exodus 19:9-11 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD,

<sup>10</sup> the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments

<sup>11</sup> and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

The Lord planned to display His great glory, power, and holiness before Israel so they would realize that He is a holy God who hates sin and will not accept those who disobey His Word.

#### **READ Exodus 19:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.

<sup>13</sup> No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

**God told them to set a boundary around the mountain.**

- They had to be sure that they didn't come near to or touch the mountain.

- If an Israelite or animal were even to touch the mountain when God came down on it, they were to be killed.

**The punishment for all sin is death.**

- This is because God is absolutely holy and man is sinful.
- God will not accept anyone or anything that is not perfect.
- He puts all sinners away from Himself.
- They cannot come near to God.

**Recall:**

*Adam and Eve were separated from God because of their sin. Because they sinned, they were put out of the garden, away from God.*

- God hates disobedience to His commands and will not keep company with sinners.

**F. God spoke from Mount Sinai to Israel.**

**Theme: God is all-powerful.**

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

CHRONOLOGICAL PICTURE: NO. 32, "GOD'S HOLY MOUNTAIN"

**READ Exodus 19:16-20 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there were thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

<sup>17</sup> Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

<sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

<sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

<sup>20</sup> The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

It is not surprising that the people were frightened when God spoke to them.

How would you feel if God were to show Himself like this to you? The lightning, fire, thick cloud, and earthquake were to show the Israelites that God is almighty and a God of wrath who hates and punishes all sin.

**Recall:**

*God had already shown the world His mighty power and His hatred and punishment of sin when He destroyed the whole world in Noah's time. He also rained fire and brimstone upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He showed His power and His hatred and punishment of sin when He sent many terrible plagues on the Egyptians and drowned their armies in the sea.*

- God hates and punishes all sin.

**G. God spoke and gave His commandments to Israel.**

**Theme: God communicates with man.**

After Moses had returned to the bottom of Mount Sinai, God spoke to the Israelites from the mountain.  
READ **Exodus 20:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

**Consider:**

*The mountain was still shaking and billowing smoke. Lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, trumpet blasts pierced the air. No wonder the people trembled with fear and kept away from the mountain! Then the Lord spoke to them and gave them His commandments.*

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

The punishment for disobedience to even one of these commandments is everlasting separation from God in the Lake of Fire, which God prepared for Satan and the angels who followed him in rebellion against the Lord.

**Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.**

Why did God give His commandments?

**James 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

God placed piles of boundary stones at the base of the mountain. These were placed there to warn the people that they must not go up to the mountain where God was. God told them they would die if they passed the boundary.

God knew that the Israelites wouldn't be able to obey His commandments perfectly all of the time.

- But He wanted them to realize that they couldn't obey God perfectly and that they could never be accepted by God through their own efforts.
- But God did not give His Law just to prove that the Israelites were sinful and incapable of pleasing God.
- He gave His Law so **all** people would know how sinful they are and that it is impossible for anyone to make himself acceptable to God by the things which he does.
- God also gave His Law so that all people would trust only in His mercy to save them from His punishment for sin.

**Compare:**

*The commands of God are like a mirror. Just as we cannot see our dirty faces until we look into a mirror, so we cannot see our sinful hearts until the Law shows them to us.*

*The Law of God is like an X-ray machine. It shows us what we are on the inside, that is, how God sees us.*

But what if we cannot obey all of God's commandments? Will God accept us if we just do our best and obey as many as we can?

**Consider:**

*We often hear that if we do good works, we can hope that God will weigh them in a balance against our sins. This thought comforts people and often motivates them to do good deeds. They rationalize that their good works will certainly “outweigh” the bad things they have done.*

*This may be a comforting thought and a motivation to do good works, but it is also Satan’s lie! Satan does not want us to know or believe the truth. He wants us to believe that we can “work our way to Heaven.”*

*How many times have you heard it said, “That person has done so many good things! I know he will go to Heaven!” Nothing could be further from the truth. God has one standard--and that standard is perfection.*

*Even if a person were able to do multitudes of good works and even if he obeyed God’s commandments most of the time but failed to obey just one time, that person would still have broken the whole law and would be guilty of sin.*

*It’s like having a vat full of pure mineral spring water, and you take an eye-dropper and squeeze just one drop of India ink into the vat of pure mineral spring water. Is it still pure? No, not all. You can’t see the pollution from the one drop of india ink once you stir it in, but it’s still there. You couldn’t bottle this water as 100% pure mineral spring water because it’s been polluted by the one drop of India Ink. That’s what sin is like in our lives. There are some people who seem so good, so perfect, loving and kind, and yet there is still the imperfection of sin in their lives. It may not be so apparent to you and me, but God sees it and that person, when he or she is honest with themselves, they know their imperfections. They know the thoughts that go through their head and they know the evil that resides in their hearts.*

God punishes sinners even if they only disobey one of His commandments one time.

- How many times did Adam and Eve disobey God before they were separated from God and put out of the garden?
- Adam and Eve only sinned once, and they received the punishment of death.
- God demands that we obey all of His commands all of the time.
- If we disobey one of His commands even only once, then He will not accept us.

#### **Compare:**

*Is a chain still strong if one of its links is broken? Would you go near a vicious dog tied with a chain which had one broken link? But what if I said to you, “What are you afraid of? The chain has nine strong links. Only one link is broken”? Would you be willing to go near that vicious dog if you knew that nine of the links were strong and only one was broken? No, of course not!*

*The chain is only strong if all of the links are unbroken. If one link is broken, then the whole chain is weak and useless. That is just like God’s laws. If we break even one, it is as if we have broken them all. God says that if we disobey just one of His laws, then we have sinned and will be punished.*

**God wants all people to realize that they can never be good enough to please Him and so escape His punishment.**

#### **Suggested Visual:**

Remember in one of our earlier lessons on sin, we had the illustration of shooting arrows at a target and attempting to hit the bullseye. If we hit the bullseye every time, that would be perfection, but all too often...in fact most of the time, we don’t hit the bulls-eye, and we often miss the target completely.



It is impossible for anyone to perfectly keep God's commandments as God demands because we were all born sinners and separated from God.

### Read **Romans 3:9-12 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,  
<sup>10</sup> as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;  
<sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God.  
<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

### Read **Romans 3:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.  
<sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

We cannot know, love, and obey God in such a way that He will be pleased with us and accept us. God gave the law to show us how very sinful we are.

#### **Explain:**

*No preacher, teacher, or missionary is exempt from these truths. All have broken God's laws and deserve to go to everlasting punishment. All are born sinners and cannot please God by their good works. God will never accept anyone because of the good things that they do.*

*As we read God's commandments, He wants each of us to admit that we have done things that He hates, that we are unable to obey His commands perfectly, and that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot please God by what we do. We cannot remove our own sins from before God's eyes. All of our sin must be paid for. The punishment for sin is death, that is, everlasting separation from God in the Lake of Fire.*

## **H. Conclusion**

What do you think now about the Ten Commandments? God's Word can really change our thinking. In our next lesson, we'll consider each of the commandments. It's possible you may have some more changes in your thinking after our next lesson, too!

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What did God promise Moses when Moses saw the burning bush at Mount Sinai? *God promised that He would bring Moses back safely to the same mountain.*
2. Did God do what He promised? *Yes, God always does what He says.*
3. Why did God plan to give His commandments to Israel? *God planned to give them His commandments to prove to them that they were sinners and that they were incapable of pleasing Him or being accepted by Him through their own efforts.*
4. What was Israel's attitude? *They had forgotten the numerous times when they had doubted God and sinned against Him. They were proud and self-confident.*
5. Why did God tell Moses to put a boundary around the mountain? *To emphasize that sinners cannot approach a holy God. God hates sin.*

6. *Why were the people so frightened? Because the mountain was shaking violently, and there was fire, smoke, and lightning.*
7. *What did all of this show the Israelites? It showed them that God is almighty. He is pure, and He hates and punishes sin.*
8. *Who was God's messenger to Israel? Moses.*
9. *How do we hear God's words today? We hear God's message from the Bible.*
10. *Today, has God changed His attitude toward sin? No!*
11. *What is God's punishment for disobeying even one of His commandments? Everlasting separation from God and punishment in the Lake of Fire which God prepared for Satan and his angels.*
12. *Did God think that the Israelites would be able to obey His ten commands? No, God knew that no one would be able to obey them.*
13. *Why is it impossible for any person to perfectly obey God's laws? We were all born sinners and separated from God, so we are not capable of pleasing God.*
14. *Will God accept us if we just do our best and obey as many of His commandments as we can? No.*

***Next Lesson 26: God Gave the Ten Commandments***