

THE LAW AND THE PROMISES OF GOD (THE MOSAIC COVENANT): GOD’S CALL TO TOTAL COMMITMENT EXODUS 19:01–25

Introduction

Picture the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai, over three million people camped at the foot of the mountain. Remember, it had been only three months since the miraculous deliverance from Egypt, only three months since God had delivered His people from four hundred years of Egyptian slavery. In the minds of the Israelites, the Promised Land was only a few more days away. Once they arrived, they could then get on with their lives.

But in the words of Norman Geisler:

Duty follows deliverance. Complete redemption involved more than getting Israel out of Egypt. It also involved getting “Egypt” (i.e., the world) out of them. (Norman L. Geisler. *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 58).

How was God going to get “Egypt” (the spirit of the world) out of His people? Two things were necessary. First, God had to give them His law. God had to...

- describe how they were to live
- tell them what to do and what not to do
- spell out exactly how life was meant to be lived

Second, God had to give them His very own presence — a special manifestation — to help them obey His commandments, to guide them as they journeyed throughout life to the promised land of God.

Simply stated, God had to issue a call to His people, a call to enter a *covenant* with Him. That *covenant* was the law of God, the great commandments of God that are known as the Mosaic Covenant. F.B. Huey says this:

Chapters 19-24 of Exodus (along with Genesis 3) have frequently been called the most important chapters of the Old Testament. In these chapters is found the account of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The covenant was conditioned upon Israel’s obedience to laws which were given to the people at Sinai. The rest of the Old Testament contains the story of how Israel responded to the demands of this covenant relationship. Unfortunately, it is largely a story of disobedience, unheeded warnings of the prophets, and punishment. The history of Israel in Old Testament times has been called a “history of failure” — failure to be the people that God wanted them to be. (F.B. Huey, Jr. *Exodus*, p. 81).

Believers must know this one fact: the call of God is demanding. God’s call is...

- to a life of obedience
 - to a life of trust
-

- to a life of self-denial
- to a life of faith and assurance
- to a life of commitment

This is the great lesson of this passage of Scripture. It is the lesson of: *The Law and the Promises of God (the Mosaic Covenant) (Part 1): God's Great Call to Total Commitment*, Exodus 19:1-25.

- I. The setting and basis for the covenant (vv. 1-4).
- II. The call to obedience (vv. 5-9).
- III. The call to sanctification (v. 10).
- IV. The call to reverence and to fear God's holy presence (vv. 11-16).
- V. The call to approach God only through His appointed mediator (vv. 16-25).

I. *Exodus 19:01–04 The Setting for the Covenant*

There was the setting for the covenant. Note these facts about the setting.

1. The covenant was given in the third month after Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery (v. 1). It was given three months after the very day of their deliverance. This means that the covenant with God was made just seven weeks or about fifty days after God had delivered them from the world of Egyptian slavery to serve Him.
2. The place where Israel set up camp was at the base of Mount Sinai, the mountain that is called the mountain of God (see *Mount Sinai*, Exo 3:1). The Israelites actually camped at Mt. Sinai for almost a year. All the events from this point on through Numbers 10:10 took place before Israel left Mt. Sinai and continued their march to the promised land (Num 10:11-13).
3. The persons involved in the covenant or agreement were threefold (v. 3).
 - ⇒ There was the *LORD*. The Lord gave the covenant to His people through Moses, His appointed mediator.
 - ⇒ There was *Moses*. Moses was God's appointed spokesman, God's appointed mediator between Himself and the people.
 - ⇒ There were *the people*. The people were to hear the message of God and approach God through His appointed mediator, Moses, and they were to agree to the covenant.

Note how God referred to the people: He called them "the house of Jacob," reminding them of their low, humble beginnings, and then He called them the "children of Israel." Why this sudden switch in titles? Remember Jacob's all night wrestling experience with God? Jacob had wrestled in prayer with God all night, until finally, sometime in the early morning hours, he surrendered and made a permanent commitment to serve God with all his heart. (See notes, Gen 32:22-32.) It was at that time that God changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means *he who strives and prevails with God*. God was no doubt arousing His people to think of this great event in Jacob's life. God was challenging His people to be the "children of Israel,"

the nation of people who would surrender and commit themselves to serve God with all their hearts, the people who would truly *strive and prevail with God*.

4. The basis for the covenant was God's great deliverance of His people. God had delivered His people from enslavement, gloriously saved and redeemed them from the evil world of the Egyptians. And God was now leading them to the *promised land*.

Note the graphic picture describing God's glorious deliverance: He had freed and led His people as though He had carried them on eagles' wings. It is said that eagles do carry their young on their wings. This is explained by Scripture itself:

Deu 32:11-12 *Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him [Israel]; no foreign god was with him.*

The picture being painted is that of an eagle soaring upon the currents of the wind, bearing its young upon its wings, the picture of...

- protection and security
- speed and swiftness
- provision and supply
- care and affection

God had done all this and so much more for His dear people, all since He had delivered them from their enslavement. He had saved them time and again...

- by forcing the Egyptians to free them from their enslavement
- by miraculously leading them through the Red Sea and drowning the Egyptian army that was pursuing them
- by leading them with the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night
- by providing water for them out in the middle of the desert
- by supplying their need for food day by day through the manna and the quails
- by protecting them from the Amalekites who viciously attacked them, seeking to wipe them from the face of the earth

God's people lacked nothing as they journeyed through the wilderness of the desert. The LORD was guiding and meeting all their needs day by day. It was as though they were being carried along on the wings of an eagle.

The point is this: it had been fifty days since God had saved and redeemed Israel from the evil world of Egypt. For fifty long days God had been guiding and delivering His people through trial after trial. Now, it was time for God's people to make a commitment to Him...

- a life-long agreement
- a life-long covenant

This is, as stated above, the great subject of this portion of Scripture...

- the great covenant which God wanted signed and sealed with His people
- the great covenant under which God wanted His people to live
- the great covenant that was to establish Israel as a nation ruled by God

II. *Exodus 19:05–09 The Call to Obedience*

There was the call to obedience. In one word, God told His people what He expected of them: obedience. He had saved and delivered them; now He expected them to follow Him, to keep His covenant, to obey His commandments.

Note that God referred to the covenant as “My covenant” (v. 5). The covenant was not to be a covenant between equals. God and man were not to sit down together and work out an agreement between themselves. The covenant of law about to be given to man was God's covenant, the covenant of the LORD God Himself. The laws of the covenant came from the mind and heart of God — not man. They were the laws that God knew man needed, the laws that would bless man and bless the relationship between God and man. Note two significant facts.

1. The covenant of law was conditional (Exo 19:5-6). The covenant was just like the covenant of a king (a LORD, a master) that was being given to his subjects for their benefit. If they kept the covenant, they would be greatly blessed; if they broke the covenant, they would be condemned.
2. God made three great promises to His people if they obeyed His covenant, His laws.
 - a. God's people would be special *treasures* (*sequallah*) to Him. The Hebrew means select, choice, prized, precious, something held dear. The person who obeys God, who keeps God's commandment, is....
 - God's *personal possession*
 - God's *precious treasure*
 - God's *choice property*

Note that God was not to be the property of Israel, but Israel was to be the property of God. Israel was to be obedient to God, available for God to lead and direct as He knew best.

Note another fact as well: all the earth is the LORD's (V. 5). That is, He is the Sovereign LORD and Majesty of the entire universe: He could have chosen any people to be His holy and treasured people, His priests and witnesses upon earth. But He chose Israel. Scripture tells us why:

Deu 7:7-8 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Simply stated, God chose and delivered Israel from the world of Egyptian slavery...

- because Israel was the fewest in number of all people: God could thereby more clearly demonstrate His sovereignty, power and grace
- because He loved Israel

- because He was faithful to His oath, His promise to give the promised land and the promised seed to the forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) (See *Promised Land*, Exo 2:24; *Promised Seed*, Exo 1:6-7.)

Deu 7:6 *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

Deu 32:9 *For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.*

Psa 135:4 *For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession.*

Mal 3:17 *"On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his own son who serves him."*

Titus 2:14 *Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

1 Pet 2:9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

- b. God's people would be a "kingdom of priests" to Him (v. 6). The idea is that of both kings and priests. The person who obeys God becomes both a king and priest to God. The promise is clear: the *obedient* person is victorious over all the enemies of life as he marches to the promised land. The obedient person stands as a priest before God; therefore, when he needs help, he has open access, an open door into God's presence. He cries to God for help and God helps him. Moreover, as a priest, the obedient person is God's witness (His missionary) to the unbelievers of the world.

Rom 5:2 *Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Heb 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

1 Pet 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1 Pet 2:9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Isa 61:6 *And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.*

Rev 20:6 *Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

- c. God's people would be a "holy nation" of people (v. 6). The word *holy* (qadhosh) means to be sanctified, separate, different, pure, righteous within and without, totally consecrated to God and His mission upon earth.

Thought 1. Think for a moment about what has just been studied: concentrate upon the great promises just made by God. If we obey God and keep His commandments, we become...

- the "personal possession" of God
- the "precious treasure" of God
- the "choice property" of God
- a holy — sanctified, pure, righteous, consecrated — people to God
- a king to God
- a priest to God

Deu 7:6 *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

Deu 14:2 *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.*

1 Cor 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

1 Pet 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Rev 1:6 *And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Rev 5:10 *You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*

3. The response to God's call was positive, a resounding commitment to obey God (vv. 7-9). Note what happened.
- a. Moses called the elders together and shared all that the LORD had commanded (v. 7).
 - b. The people — with deep conviction and sincerity of heart — committed themselves to God's covenant, to obey Him and keep His commandments (v. 8). Note: they did not yet know the terms of the covenant. The laws of God had not yet been spelled out. Nevertheless, the people had learned that God loved and cared for them; therefore, they knew that His commandments would be holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12). They were in essence committing themselves to God personally, declaring that they would trust and follow Him. They would go wherever He led, do whatever He commanded.

Now, how do we know that this was what happened, that their commitment was made out of deep conviction and sincerity of heart? Because Scripture says so:

Deu 5:28-29 *The LORD heard you when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"*

- c. Note the great assurance given by the LORD to His dear servant Moses. The LORD promised to give him a *special manifestation* of God's presence. Why? So that people would believe Moses, both people who lived then and people of all time (v. 9). What was the special manifestation? Right there on Mt. Sinai, every time God spoke to Moses, an astounding cosmic spectacle took place:

=> A dense, pitch black cloud hung over the mountain

=> Thunder roared

=> Lightning flashed

=> God's voice pierced and boomed forth from the cloud

Again, God's purpose was to stir the people to believe Moses, to believe his testimony that the Ten Commandments and laws had come from God. They were truly the commandments of God.

1 Cor 10:11 *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.*

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

2 Tim 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

2 Pet 1:21 *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Psa 19:8 *The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*

Psa 119:30 *I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws.*

Psa 119:40 *How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.*

Jer 15:16 *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.*

Deu 4:2 *Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.*

Deu 12:32 *See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.*

EXODUS 19:05–06
MOSAIC COVENANT AND ABRAHAMIC COVENANT;
LIFE AND WALK OF THE BELIEVER

The Mosaic covenant is a continuation of God's covenant with His people, a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant. Remember, in ancient history the whole world had forsaken God. Few if any people were totally following God (see notes, Gen 11:10-32). Thus God had chosen one man and given him the great promises of God. That man was Abraham. God called Abraham to forsake the world, to believe God, and to seek the great promises of God. If Abraham forsook the world and believed God, diligently seeking God's promises, then God would fulfil the promises in the lives of Abraham's descendants. There were three great promises given to Abraham:

- => the promise of the promised land, the land of Canaan (a symbol of heaven).
- => the promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth, meaning that the Saviour and Messiah of the world would come through his descendants and bless the whole world.
- => the promise of the promised seed, meaning both a multitude of descendants who would become a great nation of people and the promised seed of the Messiah (see Gal 3:16).

That great nation of people was Israel. There at Mt. Sinai, God was ready to expand and enlarge His covenant given to Abraham.

- => God called Abraham to believe Him and to seek His great promises.
- => God called Israel to obey Him and to become two things: His holy people and His witnesses to the world.

Simply stated, the Mosaic covenant was simply a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant. The following chart shows both the connection and the additional items of the Mosaic covenant.

<i>The call/challenge</i>	<i>The promises</i>
Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; Acts 3:12; Gal 3:6-8; Gal 3:16)	=> God's people would inherit the promised land => God's people would be a blessing to the entire world, meaning that the Messiah and Saviour of the world would come through his descendants and bless the whole world => God's people would bear the promised seed, both a great nation of people and the Saviour and Messiah

<i>The call/challenge</i>	<i>The promises</i>
Mosaic Covenant (Exo 19:5-6)	=> God's people would become the special people of God => God's people would become a holy nation, marked as the true followers of the only living and true God, a nation set apart to follow God in all righteousness and godliness => God's people would become a kingdom of priests, His witnesses to the world

Note this significant fact: the Abrahamic covenant pictures *salvation* and the Mosaic covenant pictures the *believers' life and walk*.

1. The Abrahamic covenant pictures salvation: if a person forsakes the world, believes God, and diligently seeks the promises of God...
 - he inherits the promised land
 - he blesses the world by possessing Christ, by following Christ, and by offering Christ to the world
 - he *bears seed*, a number of spiritual descendants who become believers
2. The Mosaic covenant pictures the believer's life and walk: if a person obeys God...
 - he becomes a special person, a valuable treasure to the LORD, a person marked as a follower of the only living and true God
 - he becomes a holy person, a member of the holy nation of God
 - he becomes a king and a priest to God, a witness for God to the whole world

Another significant fact needs to be noted at this point: Scripture refers to the Mosaic Covenant as the "old" or "first" covenant. The "old covenant" is often contrasted with the "new covenant" established by Christ. Ronald Youngblood says this about the two covenants:

Our Bible is divided into two Testaments: Old and New. The word for 'testament' can also be translated 'covenant,' a term that implies significant and intimate relationship between two parties (whether collective or individual). Many Scripture passages compare and contrast the 'old' or 'first' covenant with the 'new covenant' (see, for example, Jer 31:31-34; Heb 9:15-22). Although the Bible (particularly the Old Testament) describes many covenants in detail, the terms old covenant and first covenant always refer to the one we are about to study, the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant (see especially 2 Cor 3:14-15; Heb 9:15-20), the most important of the older covenants. The Old Testament, then, is basically the

story of redemption ratified by the 'old covenant' (the Mosaic covenant), and the New Testament is basically the story of redemption ratified by the 'new covenant' (instituted by Jesus during the Last Supper; see Luke 22:20). Both covenants become effective only through the shedding of blood (Exod 24:8; Mat. 26:28). (Ronald F. Youngblood. Exodus. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983, pp. 90-91.) □

III. **Exodus 19:10 Call to Sanctification**

There was the call to sanctification. The word *sanctification* means to be consecrated, totally given over to God; to be separated from the pollutions of the world and committed to God and His service; to be pure, clean, righteous, holy before God.

Note how the people were to *sanctify* and *consecrate* themselves: they were to wash their clothes. While washing and cleaning their clothes, they were to be meditating upon *sanctification*, upon asking God to cleanse them from the sins and pollutions of this world.

The point is this: God was preparing His people to receive His covenant, preparing His people to make a total commitment to Him. One of the first steps to commitment is *sanctification* or *consecration*. Before God could give His covenant to His people, before the people could be totally committed to God, they had to be *sanctified, consecrated*: cleansed from all sin, from all the pollutions and contaminations of this world.

Lev 11:44 *I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground.*

Jos 3:5 *Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

John 17:17 *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."*

John 17:19 *"For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."*

Eph 5:25-26 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*

1 Th 4:3-4 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable.*

1 Th 5:23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Tim 4:12 *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

1 Pet 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

IV. *Exodus 19:11–16 Call to Reverence and to Fear of God*

There was the call to reverence and to fear God's holy presence. God is holy; that is, God is totally different, separated and set apart from everything else. He is set apart in person, being, purity, righteousness, and perfection from the universe and from all that is in the universe. God is totally different and set apart. He is the Sovereign LORD and Majesty of the universe, the Creator and Sustainer of all that is or has ever been or ever will be. God is Light — pure Light — before whom no person or thing could ever stand apart from His will, not without being consumed. Note how God called His people to reverence and to fear His holy presence.

1. God demanded that the people be ready to meet Him. Why? His holy presence was to descend down upon Mt. Sinai on the third day in the sight of all the people (v. 11).
2. God demanded that His holy presence be acknowledged and respected (vv. 12-13). How? => Boundaries were to be set around the mountain, and the people were not to cross the boundaries (v. 12). The boundary pictured the *great distance* between God and man, the *great gulf* that separates God and man. Any person who crossed the boundary — any person who violated and did not reverence and fear God's holy presence — was to be executed, put to death (v. 13).
3. God had demanded that the people *sanctify* and *consecrate* themselves. Note that they followed through with His demand: they washed their clothes, obviously asking God to cleanse their hearts while they washed their clothes (v. 14).
4. God demanded that the people focus totally upon Him. Note how He secured their full attention: they had to abstain from sexual relations during the three days of preparation for God's descent from the mountain (v. 15).

Thought 1. God is holy. Consequently, one of the great duties of man is that we reverence and fear His holiness. Any person who curses and denies God is going to face a holy and just God some day. But in addition, any person who shows disrespect and irreverence — who does not fear God in all His majestic being and holiness — will also face a holy, just God in the day of judgment.

God is so high above man that we cannot even conceive the distance that separates us. Our understanding of God — even with the revelation of Scripture and of the Lord Jesus Christ — amounts to no more than a thimble full of water compared to the seas of the earth. Think about the universe — how vast and enormous — yet God's presence and power extend out beyond the universe.

Man must reverence and fear God. If not, we can expect nothing but the terrifying wrath of the holy, just God. God is love, yes; Jesus Christ showed us that God is love. But the cross, where Jesus Christ bore the sins of the world because of God's holiness and justice, shows us that God dwells in perfect holiness and perfect justice. If God's

holiness judged His very own Son for the sins of the world, then no person must ever think that God's holiness will not judge him.

Exo 15:11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

2 Chr 20:21 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendour of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever."

Psa 47:8 God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.

Psa 89:7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.

Psa 96:9 Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Isa 35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.

Rom 3:18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Eph 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

V. Exodus 19:16–25 Call to Approach God through His Mediator

There was the call to approach God only through His appointed mediator. The memorable day now happened; the appointed day for the glory of God's presence to descend upon the mountain now arrived.

1. The glory of God's presence descended upon Mt. Sinai. The people trembled before God: they stood in awe, reverence and fear, astounded at the spectacle they were witnessing (v. 16). It all happened in the morning, probably early morning. Apparently, the most spectacular storm imaginable was taking place upon the mountain. The storm was filled with the loudest roar and rumble of thunder imaginable and the brightest flashes of lightning ever seen. Most of the people had probably been awakened by the rumble of thunder and the bright flashes of lightning. Scripture describes the scene best: in the morning there was...

- thunder and lightning
- a thick cloud upon the mountain
- the loud blast of a trumpet
- all the people trembling

The storm was so ferocious that no person dared approach the mountain. Everyone was stricken with a deep sense of awe: a cosmic event was taking place; a spectacular stormy cloud was descending upon the mountain. Standing there witnessing what Moses had been telling them — that God was going to descend upon the mountain in three days — everyone was stricken not only with awe and reverence, but with a dreadful sense of fear.

2. This points to the need for a mediator between God and man. A mediator was an absolute essential (v. 17). The Israelites would not approach the mountain, not without Moses, not with sharp lightning flashing every second and thunder roaring so loudly that the earth itself shook under its rumblings. People who live in areas where thunderstorms are a common happening know how dangerous such storms are. Just imagine the most spectacular thunderstorm ever to occur upon earth: it took place when the glory of God's holy presence descended upon Mt. Sinai.

The point is this: there was a great gulf between God's holy presence and man. The laser-like brightness of God's holiness would have consumed any person who dared to approach God. God was clearly demonstrating the truth of His holiness and the utter necessity for man to approach Him through a mediator. (See note, pt. 4, Exo 19:11-16.) The only way any Israelite could approach God was through His appointed mediator, Moses. A mediator between God and man is an absolute essential.

3. Note that six reasons are given why man must approach God through His appointed mediator (vv. 18-25).
 - a. A mediator is necessary because of God's holy presence (v. 18). Note that a volcanic eruption and an earthquake are being described. Both heaven and earth were involved in the spectacular display of God's holy presence descending upon Mt. Sinai. Again, picture the scene as the people drew near and stood at the foot of the mountain. There was the most violent storm ever seen raging around the mountain:
 - => the deep roar and rumbling of constant thunder (v. 16).
 - => the brightest, sharpest and most spectacular flashes of lightning, no doubt flashing every second or two in a continuous display of light (v. 16).
 - => a dense, pitch black cloud hung over the mountain (v. 16). Fire and smoke blazed up out of the mountain as though blazing out of a huge fiery furnace (v. 18).
 - => the whole mountain was shaking and trembling violently (v. 18).
 - => the continuous blast of the trumpet was growing louder and louder (v. 19).

The people were just as we would be if faced with the most violent thunderstorms, life-threatening earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions: they were trembling and stricken with a terrifying fear. But the experience was teaching them a valuable lesson: God is holy and righteous as well as good and loving.

- => God expects His law, His commandments, to be kept.

- => God has the power to judge and punish men if man does not obey Him and keep His commandments.
- => God can never be approached unless God allows man to approach Him.
- b. A mediator is necessary because God speaks only through His appointed mediator (v. 20). Note that Moses alone was called by God to come up the mountain.
 - c. A mediator is necessary because the holy presence of God must be revered (v. 21). When the people saw Moses walk up the mountain into the raging storm, some of them apparently became so excited over the possibility of experiencing the glory of God that they were about to rush up the mountain behind Moses. Note what would have happened: they would have been stricken dead. God's presence and holiness are to be revered and respected. The only person who can enter God's presence — the mediator — is the person appointed by Him.
 - d. A mediator is necessary because even the priests were unclean and worthy of judgment (v. 22). Unless they were sanctified or consecrated, they too would be stricken dead. No person, not even priests, must ever approach God by any means other than through the mediator God has appointed.
 - e. A mediator is necessary because the very earth itself was unclean (v. 23). Note that the mountain itself had to be set apart as holy unto God. A boundary had to be set around the mountain and the land given over totally to God. No person was to cross the boundary, no person except God's appointed mediator.
 - f. A mediator is necessary because everyone must approach God through His appointed mediator (v. 24). Note that God told Moses to bring Aaron up the mountain with him. Why? God was soon to set Aaron and his tribe apart as the priests of Israel. Calling him up to the mountain with Moses would set him apart in the eyes of the people. Note that anyone other than God's appointed mediator would be killed if they violated God's holy presence.

Thought 1. God calls every person to approach Him through His appointed mediator. For Israel, that mediator was Moses. For us, the mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself. Since the coming of the promised seed — the Saviour and Messiah of the world, the Son of God Himself — no person can approach God except through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Acts 4:12 *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

1 Tim 2:5 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

Gal 3:19-20 *Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.*

Heb 8:6 *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*

Heb 9:15 *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Heb 12:24 *To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

1 John 2:1 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ■*