

THE LAW AND THE PROMISES OF GOD (THE MOSAIC COVENANT): GOD’S CALL TO OBEDIENCE EXODUS 19:01–09

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 Obedience*, Exodus 19:1-9.

- I. The setting and basis for the covenant (vv. 1-4).
- II. The call to obedience (vv. 5-9).

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

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.*

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 king to God
- a priest to God
- a holy — sanctified, pure, righteous, consecrated — people 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.) □

THE PURPOSES FOR THE LAW: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE LAW EXODUS 20:18–26

Introduction

Scripture is clear: God gave the Ten Commandments as the basic law to govern all people. But why? Why exactly did God give the Ten Commandments to the world? What were His purposes? What did God have in mind? What were His reasons for instituting the Ten Commandments to be the basic law for all men to obey?

We must understand God's reasons, His purposes for giving the Ten Commandments, in order to gain the greatest benefit from them. A careful study of the present passage tells us why God gave the law. Five very specific purposes can be gleaned from the experience of Israel right after receiving the Ten Commandments. This is the all-important subject of this Scripture: *The Purposes for the Law: Why God Gave the Ten Commandments and the Law*, Exodus 20:18-26.

- I. To reveal the glorious majesty and holiness of God: showing that a great barrier — a great gulf — exists between man and God (v. 18).
- II. To reveal man's need for a mediator, for a person who can approach God on behalf of man (v. 19).
- III. To test man (vv. 20-21).
- IV. To teach that God alone is the Lord: He alone has truly revealed Himself, has spoken to man from heaven (v. 22).
- V. To teach how God alone is to be approached and worshipped (vv. 23-26).

I. *Exodus 20:18 The Ten Commandments Reveal the Holiness, Majesty and Glory of God*

Why did God give the Ten Commandments to man? First, to reveal the glorious majesty and holiness of God's person, to reveal that a great barrier — a great gulf — exists between man and God. Remember what had happened: God's holy presence had descended to the top of Mt. Sinai in what was probably the most spectacular, terrifying storm and cloud ever witnessed upon earth. Note the glorious description: there was...

- thunder and lightning
 - the constant blast of a loud trumpet
 - a flaming fire that engulfed the mountain (19:18)
 - a cloud of bellowing smoke that arose as though from a huge volcanic eruption (19:18)
 - the violent quaking of the mountain that never stopped trembling (19:18)
-

The people reacted just as any of us would: they withdrew from the foot of the mountain; they shrunk back from God's holy presence. They feared for their lives; feared lest the holy presence of God strike out at them (v. 19). Obviously, they were sensing a great gulf between the holy presence of God and their own sinful, human nature. They sensed a deep, terrifying distance between the majesty and holiness of God's person and their own human condition, a condition of weakness, failure, shortcoming, and sinfulness. They knew that the majesty of God being displayed upon the mountain, the majesty they were witnessing, could strike them dead at any moment (v. 19). Thus they shrunk back and withdrew from God's holy presence.

This was the very point that God wished to convey to the people: He is the very embodiment of *majestic glory and holiness*. There is a great gulf — a chasm, an abyss, a terrifying separation — between Himself and man, between what He Himself is and what man is. Again, God is the very embodiment of *majestic glory and holiness*; therefore, the very law of God — the Ten Commandments, the very words which God spoke — were holy and glorious (Rom 7:12, 14, 16). The law of God and the Ten Commandments were the very expression of God's being. Therefore, people were to obey God's law or else face the terrifying glory and holiness of God.

Thought 1. This was the first reason God gave the law: to reveal His majestic glory and holiness, that there is a *great gulf*, a terrifying separation between God and man.

Isa 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

Isa 64:6 *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

Isa 64:7 *No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.*

Luke 16:26 *“And besides all this, between us [in heaven] and you [in hell] a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”*

Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

1 John 1:8 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

Gen 6:5 *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*

Prov 20:9 *Who can say, “I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin”?*

II. Exodus 20:19 Need for a Mediator between Man and God

Why did God give the Ten Commandments to man? To reveal man's need for a *mediator*, for a person who can approach God for man, a person who can represent man before God. Apparently, the people had heard the booming voice of God speaking out from the

cloud covering the mountain. Scripture suggests that God's booming voice actually spoke and gave the Ten Commandments directly to the people:

Deu 5:4 *The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.*

Deu 5:22-27 *These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."*

Two terrifying events were happening: the people were witnessing the awesome sight of God's glory and majesty, and they were actually hearing the booming voice of God Himself declare the Ten Commandments. Both struck a deep sense of unworthiness in the people. They became keenly aware of the vast difference — the enormous gulf — between God and man, the vast difference...

- between God's holy nature and man's sinful nature
- between God's awesome power and man's helplessness before that power
- between what God is like and what man is like

The sight of God's majestic glory and the hearing of God's booming voice revealed a startling fact to the people: there was a *great gulf* between man and God and the people sensed the *gulf* deeply. They were so aware of God's holiness and their sinfulness — so aware of the vast difference between God's awesome person and their humanity — that they did not want God to speak directly to them, not anymore. They obviously feared some pronouncement of judgment upon them (v. 19).

The point is this: they sensed the need for a mediator, for a person to approach God for them, a person who could represent them before God. They wanted God's messenger to be their mediator: they wanted Moses to approach God, to receive God's message, and then to bring God's message back to them. Note what the people promised: they would hear and obey the word of God (v. 19).

This great sense and need for a mediator led to one of the great promises in Scripture, the promise of God's Perfect Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. As God's Perfect Mediator, Jesus Christ was to stand before God for all people of all ages. Note what Moses himself was later to proclaim to the people:

Deu 18:15-19 *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name."*

Thought 1. The law — that is, our failure to keep the law — shows how far short we come, how far away we are from God. The law shows our great need for a mediator, for someone to approach God and to intercede for us. That Someone, that Person, is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our mediator, the person who approaches God for us.

1 Tim 2:5-6 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

Heb 2:14-17 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives [as the mediator] to intercede for them.*

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.*

III. **Exodus 20:20–21** *The Test of Obedience*

Why did God give the Ten Commandments to man? To test man. Note the word *fear*, two kinds of fear are mentioned in this verse:

=> A *tormenting fear* (yare): the fear that defeats a person, that keeps a person from acting and doing what he should.

=> A *respectful, honouring fear* (yirah): the fear of God that arouses a person to reverence and obey God.

Moses encouraged the people not to be gripped with a tormenting fear of God. God

was not out to destroy them but to test them. God had actually given them the Ten Commandments to test them (v. 20).

Remember, the people had earlier promised to do all that the Lord had said. They had made a strong profession and commitment to the Lord. Remember what had happened:

***Exo 19:7-8** So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.*

Now the Lord was going to use the Ten Commandments to test the people:

- => To see if the people would truly walk in the fear and reverence of God. He had given the people a glimpse of the majestic glory and holiness of God. Would they keep the sight before their minds and obey the commandments, the commandments given by the Lord of glory and holiness?
- => To see if the people would truly obey God and not sin, not break the Ten Commandments.
- => To see if the people would trust the mediator appointed by God (v. 21). Note that Moses approached the cloud and thick darkness where God was. He was God’s appointed mediator to represent the people before God. Would the people trust and follow him as they journeyed to the promised land?

Thought 1. Did Israel pass the test of God? Tragically, no. Israel did what so many have done down through the ages: promised to obey God and failed to follow through.

- (1) Many have rejected God: refused to walk in the fear and reverence of God.
- (2) Many have disobeyed the Ten Commandments and lived in sin.
- (3) Many have rejected God’s appointed mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Exo 19:5** Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine.*

***Exo 23:21** Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him.*

***Deu 11:26-28** “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commandments of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.”*

***Deu 13:4** It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.*

***Jos 24:24** And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”*

1 Sam 15:22 *But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”*

1 Pet 4:17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

IV. Exodus 20:22 Revelation of God Himself, The Only True Lord

Why did God give the Ten Commandments to man? To teach that God alone is the Lord: He alone has truly revealed Himself, has truly spoken to man from heaven. Remember, God’s name — the Lord — means the Lord of salvation, deliverance, redemption and revelation.

Think for a moment about all the so-called gods declared and worshipped by people. No matter who the so-called gods are, there is only one Lord, only one true and living God who can save, deliver and redeem people, who can reveal Himself. Who is He? Note this verse:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.’” (v. 22).

The Lord truly revealed Himself; He “has talked with you [man] from heaven” (v. 22). The Lord is the only living and true God who has spoken to man and given man the Ten Commandments.

Thought 1. The point is clear: God revealed Himself; He came down upon Mt. Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments to prove that He alone is the Lord who can save and redeem man. Man must, therefore, obey the Lord; man must do what the Lord says to be saved and redeemed.

Mat 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

2 Th 1:7-8 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Rev 22:14 *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”*

Exo 19:5 *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine.*

Deu 26:16 *The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.*

1 Sam 12:15 *“But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.”*

Heb 2:2-3 *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

V. Exodus 20:23–26 Teaching Men How to Approach God and Worship Him

Why did God give the Ten Commandments and the law to man? To teach how God is to be approached and worshipped. Note three instructions spelled out by God.

1. There is to be no idolatry in worship: no so-called (v. 22) gods are to be made or worshipped (v. 23). This, of course, would include the gods of man's imagination, the gods that men dream up. There is only one true and living God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is to be worshipped. No other so-called gods are to be worshipped.
2. Worship is not to be full of pageantry, not to be ostentatious, flashy or showy: the altar was to be made of earth, the plainest and simplest material of all (v. 24). The altar of earth was, of course, to be a temporary centre of worship until the tabernacle was erected. Note: if an altar of stone were to be built, only undressed stones were to be used. The stone was not to be touched by any tool of man. Touching it with any tool or giving any shape to the stone was considered by God to be a defilement (v. 25). The point being made was that worship was to be totally free of any ostentation or flashiness. Worship was not to be showy, not even the focus of worship, which was the altar. Nothing was to distract from the people's worship.
3. Worship was to involve no unrefined or disrespectful behaviour, none whatsoever: the altar was to have no steps (v. 26). In ancient times, it was the common practice to build high altars with steps leading up to the top of the altars. As the priest climbed the steps of the altar, his nakedness was often exposed to the people standing at the bottom of the altar. God was declaring that there was to be no disrespectful behaviour, no immoral behaviour ever associated or conducted in the worship services of His people.

Note this fact as well: altars of that day were built high, symbolizing that man was ascending up to God, offering himself and his offering to the false god. But God forbids this, forbids it for four reasons:

- => Man cannot climb up in righteousness: he has no righteousness to offer up to God.
- => Man cannot ascend up to God. God has to descend down to man (reveal Himself to man).
- => Man cannot climb up and break through to heaven; he cannot enter the spiritual world; God has to enter the physical world.
- => Man cannot climb man-made steps and reach God; the mediator of God has to stand before God for man.

Thought 1. Three lessons are clearly seen in this point.

- (1) We must never approach and worship any person nor any false god dreamed up by man. There is only one true and living God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He and He alone is the one true and living God; consequently, He and He alone is to be approached and worshipped.

Deu 11:16 *Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.*

Deu 12:5 *But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go.*

Psa 33:8 *Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.*

Isa 42:8 *“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.”*

1 Jn 5:21 *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*

- (2) We must never worship God for show — with a spirit of ostentation or flashiness.

Mat 6:2 *“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”*

Mat 6:5 *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”*

Mat 6:16 *“When you fast, do not look dismal as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”*

Mat 23:5 *“Everything they do is done for men to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”*

- (3) We must never be disrespectful nor irreverent in our worship; we must never pollute nor defile our worship.

Exo 3:5 *“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”*

Lev 19:30 *“You must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.”*

Jos 5:15 *The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.*

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

Eccl 5:1 *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.*

John 2:13-16 *When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”*

1 Tim 3:15 *If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

Hab 2:20 *“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”* ■