

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
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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 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.) □