

Exodus 19:1-20:26 and 23:20 – 24:18
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Before I begin this lesson, I want to address a question that was raised from lesson 4. That was, “Why was the donkey specifically named as having to be redeemed?” Donkeys were useful pack animals and not permitted to be eaten or sacrificed. Since every firstborn male belonged to God, the donkey firstborn had to either be redeemed by payment of five shekels or the offering of a lamb in its place – or its neck was to be broken and the animal destroyed. The point was . . . in the redemption system one could not simply keep the first born for one’s own use since it belonged to the Lord. It had to be redeemed or destroyed. God was preparing Israel for the principle that would be fully realized in Christ’s death. That is: If a life is to be restored, it must be bought back with a price and that payment is often the substitutionary death of something else.

Well, last week we had the overview of 1) the sea: that miraculous crossing and the destruction of the pursuing army; 2) the song, the celebration of victory and deliverance; 3) the sustenance, the provision of water, manna and quail; and 4) the sage advice of Jethro saying, Moses – God doesn’t expect you to carry the whole load, others are capable, get help!

So here we are approaching two of the most exciting lessons in our study this year – the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the establishment of the Tabernacle with its system of worship. These lessons are foundational for the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures and the significance that they contribute to our understanding of the New Testament.

In today’s lesson, Israel’s travels had brought them to camp on the wide desert floor at the foot of Mt. Sinai. We’ve already talked about the vast number of people and the fact that it would take some ten (plus) miles square in area to accommodate a camp for such a large crowd. Moses met God for the first of seven times and brought a message from the Lord – 19:5

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

“Keep my covenant” . . . what is a covenant? It is an agreement between parties of a solemn and binding force. Generally, a covenant (or what we’d term today a contract) is necessary because men cannot trust each other. Isn’t it an astounding thought that God, knowing the custom and hearts of men who have good reason for not trusting each other, should descend to man’s level and bind Himself by a covenant, as though He too could not be trusted?

When Dr. David Reagan of Lamb and Lion Ministries taught a prophecy series here at Eastside many years ago, he shared a chart with us about covenants.

There are 8 covenants in the Bible. Two were “conditional” – meaning both parties (God and man had obligations).

The **first** was the Edenic covenant in the garden of Eden where man was to be fruitful and multiply, subdue and rule creation, and not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That was conditional. Man’s obligation was obedience. This was, of course, annulled by the sin of Adam and Eve who ate from the forbidden tree and it concluded with their expulsion from the garden.

Numbers 2, 3, and 4 were “unconditional” covenants meaning God would perform His word regardless of man’s performance.

God made the **second** with Adam in which He specified the curses man would have to suffer for violating the Edenic covenant, and also it established God’s purpose to redeem man from those curses. In Genesis 3:15 we have the first prophecy about Jesus. It’s in effect until the return of Christ. (Romans 8:18-23)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

God made the **third** covenant with Noah, which had among other things, the sign of the rainbow as guarantee of protection against another universal flood. It’s in effect until the provision of the New Earth. (2 Peter 3:7-13)

Vs. 10 But the Day of the Lord will be like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. . . . Vs. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Number 4 was with Abraham. Again, an unconditional covenant that promised a land and a seed that would produce a Redeemer. It is an eternal covenant. (Genesis 17:7-8)

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.

The **fifth**, the Mosaic covenant was the other “conditional” covenant based on man’s obedience. It was, however, meant to convict man of his sinfulness and inability to save himself, thus pointing to the coming Redeemer/the Messiah. It was annulled by the Cross. (Colossians 2:14)

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he (Jesus) took it (our debt of sin) away, nailing it to the cross.

Number 6 was the Palestinian covenant that amplified the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant by promising the regathering, restoring and blessing of Israel. We’ll see that in Deuteronomy 29. It is an eternal covenant. (Ezekiel 16:59-60)

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant.

Number 7, the Davidic covenant, was one in which the heir of David (the Messiah) was promised an everlasting kingdom. It is an eternal covenant. (2 Samuel 23:5)

“Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me and everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me every desire?”

Lastly, **number 8** is the New Covenant. Again, an unconditional covenant in that salvation is guaranteed through the Messiah. “Whosoever will” may enter this covenant through the shed blood of Jesus Christ by faith in Him. It is an eternal covenant.

Jeremiah 50:5 They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces towards it. They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.

Hebrews 13:20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

That in a nutshell is a summary of Bible covenants.

So, let’s go back to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. Moses brought the message, “Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant . . .” Immediately they pledge, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So far, all God has said was OBEY. The people didn’t know themselves very well, did they? They hadn’t yet learned, and what we often forget, is that the spirit is willing the flesh is weak. From that moment on, God would begin to show them how impossible it is for man to stand before Him on the grounds of obedience and good works alone.

There is a sense in which each person still stands at the foot of Mt. Sinai seeking God on the strength of his own work and obedience, until he recognizes his impotence and impossibility and comes instead to the foot of the cross and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on his behalf.

It has been a long and dusty trip. Time to rest and wash and prepare to meet the Lord who had delivered them; to hear what He would say; to focus away from the daily drudgeries of life; to draw near to a holy God.

Water was one of the most precious commodities for desert living, yet the command was to come clean, not only in body but clothing, before the Lord. Is your appearance important to you, not only during the week, but the weekend too? There used to be a time when most people had "Sunday clothes." I don't intend to really get into that, but the subject of dressing California casual for worship is one I'm sure we all have an opinion on – pro or con. The important thing was preparation.

Holiness is not an emotion, but character. God is holy – we are to be holy. Years ago, Jerry Bridges wrote a book titled The Pursuit of Holiness and he posed the question: What does holiness look like? For starters, it doesn't look anything like perfection. And it doesn't necessarily look like victory. Mostly, it consists of effort, prayer, grace, and obedience. "Scripture speaks of both a holiness we have in Christ before God, and a holiness we are to strive after." In other words, we can't ignore either Christ's role or our own if we're to successfully pursue holiness.

Would you have any problem explaining to someone else what it means to be holy? I hope you understand the position of holiness that is ours as Christians, but you might be fuzzy on the precepts of holy living. Reading Colossians 3 would be a good place to refresh your memory.

Years ago, I made myself a little bookmark from Colossians 3:12-17. It's a little reminder because those verses say: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (vs. 3-17)

The Israelites had little experience with the concept of holiness or godliness, yet they had a heart that wanted guidelines, someone to show them. They wanted to obey and they drew near as God commanded.

It's hard to imagine this awesome sight. A thick cloud descended and Mt. Sinai and it was covered with fire and smoke. It probably looked like what we'd expect of an active volcano. The ground shook and the sound of trumpets was so terrifying the people wanted Moses to speak to them rather than God. So Moses became again a picture of the Lord Jesus as he acted as mediator between God and man.

We are entering into Scripture that is especially rich in what the Bible calls "types and shadows." When Jesus opened the spiritual eyes of the men on the road to Emmaus, it says in Luke 24:27,

"And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures about Himself."

Over and over we'll see a "type" of Jesus (such as Moses and Joshua) or a "shadow" of Jesus in our Tabernacle study next week. It's really exciting! The Holy Spirit is still thrilling us with discovering Jesus in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 20 we have the giving of the Law. In Hebrews it's called the "ten living words," or the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue – several names are used. Now if I could, I'd put on a flashing red light or hit a buzzer to jolt your seats so you'd know what comes next is R-E-A-L-L-Y important!!!

First and foremost, we must understand that the Law was never given as a means to salvation. Salvation has always been by grace. In the Old Testament it is often termed mercy. The problem then and today is the people made it into a system of salvation. Keep more laws than you break, be a "good" person, get religiously strict like the Scribes and Pharisees – God just has to reward that behavior.

So, if the Law is NOT a means to salvation – what is it?

1. The Law does not tell us who God is (that's to be seen in the person of Jesus Christ) – it tells us what man ought to be.
2. The law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19). The Law itself was perfect (don't misunderstand) and it revealed the righteousness of God, but it was powerless to produce that righteousness in people to meet the holiness demanded. Paul in Romans 8:3-4 says, "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." Man is the problem not the Law.

Let me read you a statement from J. Oswald Sanders book titled Light on Life's Problems: (quote)

"It is not that we will not fulfill the Law, but that we cannot. It is impossible of human fulfillment. Someone may object, "If it is impossible, why did God ask us to do something which He knew was impossible?" This objection involves the whole purpose God had in view in giving the covenant.

"When God created man, He endowed him with the most God-like of all His attributes, that of free-will of determination. He made man master of his own destiny, but the fall disrupted his relations with his Maker. Confidence gave way to craven fear of God. Ever since Eden, God has been working to rescue man from the results of his sin, and to bring him back to his old relationship of trust. He could, of course, achieve this by one word of His power, but only at the cost of man losing his free will, and God **always** respects the sanctity of human personality.

"True, God knew man's inability to keep His holy Law, but man did not know it; and God adopted this method of educating him to his own incurable sinfulness and impotence, in order that he might once again be wholly cast upon God for all. In no other way could the Divine and human wills each be given their own rightful place. Thus, the covenant was indispensable to man's spiritual development, and to the furthering of his highest interests. Man must be given an abundant opportunity of demonstrating to his own satisfaction what he cannot do, and the Old Covenant was ideally adapted to this purpose." (unquote)

So, 1) the Law showed man what he ought to be; 2) it revealed God's righteousness and holiness and 3) the Law produced a basis on which God could discipline His people. That's easy enough to see. You know the rule – you know the punishment – you have a choice, obedience or consequences.

I have one other point I want to make to you that I feel very strongly about:

Is the Law in existence today since people quote Colossians 2:14 in the context that "the written code was nailed to the cross"?

The answer is YES. God's law was perfect then and its perfect today. **We can't keep it and earn heaven and equally true is we can't break it without penalty and consequences.** People don't break the Ten Commandments; they only break themselves against them.

In Romans 2:12 Paul says, "all who sin under the Law will be judged by the Law." If you're trying to earn your salvation by keeping the Law, it will be your judge without mercy. You cannot be judged by something that doesn't exist.

It's so important to you and me to see that the Law was a tutor to bring us to Jesus. Righteousness comes by faith, even as it did for Abraham, not by keeping the Law. You need to live in the book of Romans until you fully grasp that truth.

One other little tidbit I studied that was interesting, so I'll share it with you. Remember these were basically illiterate slaves. So, we have the old KISS method – Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Why Ten Commandments instead of eleven? We have ten fingers 1) you shall have no other gods before me, 2) make no idols 3) do not misuse the Lord's name, etc.

But the New Testament says it comes down to two and we have two hands 1) Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. And they both get circulation from our one heart and that heart represents love. God is love in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Our lesson pointed out the fact that the first four Commandments deal with our relationship to God and the last six deal with our relationship to man. But what if God had only given the first four Commandments on one tablet and had made the last six simply a part of the Book of the Law?

The fact that God made man's relationship with man a part of the Great Code is exceptionally significant. First of all, it reveals that God is not a self-absorbed creator. He *could have* placed only the first four Commandments in the "Great Code," and He would have been totally justified in doing so. After all He is God and He deserves all the focus, being the source of everything. But He didn't.

By including the last six as well, He demonstrated that we, His children, have a high level of importance for Him as well. They show that what pertains to God is obviously primary; nevertheless, the last six are on the same tablets show that our well-being has a top priority to God as well.

By *commanding* man to abide by the last six Commandments, God made clear that the welfare of His children is very important to Him. He is not a Being that is merely interested in obtaining man's worship; He wants men to treat each other with utmost dignity. God wants men to recognize that they are equally important before Him, and He will not tolerate that any human take advantage and abuse any other.

Author Bill Payne has offered some thoughts about God as our Lawgiver. What are God's rights?

- . . . God has the right of recognition as Creator, Lord, Savior and Father.
- . . . the right of sovereignty, to reign over His creation.
- . . . the right to intimate relationship with those He created, sustains, and has redeemed through the death and resurrection of His Son.

. . . the right to receive love, devotion, obedience and moral excellence from His children (this includes repentance of every individual, the unity of the church, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.)

. . . the right to freedom from accusation, defamation and blasphemy.

God's rights have no selfish motive, but reflect the highest good and most valuable course of action for mankind. In embracing God's rights, we become the guardian of the rights of others, for God's rights never nullify the rights of His children but establish and protect them."

We didn't structure questions to cover chapters 21, 22 and half of 23 but I hope you took time to read them. There were specific "what to do if . . ." passages that would be guidelines for governing this fledgling nation.

Well, in chapter 23:20 we picked up the story with the people being reassured that God's protective forces were still with them. An angel would lead them and God gave them many specific promises as He led them into Canaan. Think of the encouragement to know that God promised them health, abundance, a full life span, and victory over the peoples already in the land. It was not without warning, however, to make no covenants with the people of the land or worship their gods, because it would become a snare to them. We're going to see how true that was.

Exodus 24 talks about the covenant confirmed – the blood covenant. Again (vs.3) Moses told the people the Lord's words and laws and they responded, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." I want to touch lightly on vs. 9-11. "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites, they saw God, and they ate and drank."

We know that God is Spirit – No one has seen God. But we should get used to the word "theophany" which indicates an appearance of God / Jesus in some form to interact with man in the Old Testament. One dictionary defines a theophany as "a manifestation of God in the Bible that is tangible to the human senses. In its most restrictive sense, it is a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament period often, but not always, in human form." We have examples of God speaking to

- [Adam](#) ([Genesis 3:8](#))
- [Abraham](#) ([Genesis 17:1-4](#), [9-10](#), [15-16](#), [22](#); [Genesis 18:1-3](#), [10](#))
- [Jacob](#) ([Genesis 32:24-30](#))
- [Moses](#) ([Exodus 3:2-6](#))
- [Joshua](#) ([Joshua 5:13-15](#))
- [Daniel](#) ([Daniel 3:22-25](#))

We're not told exactly what form God used in this experience with the 70 elders, other than those present knew they'd been in the very presence of God. It was an incredible instance of God showing that He wanted a personal relationship with men. Imagine the power of an "eye-witness" account as these men went back to be the leaders of this new nation.

We leave the Scripture this week with Moses going up on Mt. Sinai for 40 days / nights to receive God's Law etched in stone. Forty days is a long time, isn't it? Especially if you're sitting around with nothing to do and just waiting. What if Moses didn't come back? All the people could see was the glory of the Lord on top of the mountain and it looked like a consuming fire. That phrase hits home to us especially this time of year as we see the fires on TV, doesn't it?

Any lesson on the Old Testament, and on the Law especially, has to ask, "How does this apply to me today?" This is what I see in this lesson.

1. You need to be prepared to approach God. When you approach His throne, go with a willingness to obey, the sensitivity to hear, the desire to be cleansed, and the attitude of respect He deserves.

2. You need to know that the Law was God's framework for freedom and blessing. Every perfect commandment is from God's heart of love and His concern for the rights and integrity of people. If we'd just obey what we already know pleases God, we'd save ourselves so much pain and heartache.

3. You need to understand the basis for salvation. It is faith in Jesus Christ and not meritorious performance of good works or "keeping the Law" to the best of your ability. Many Christians, though living in New Covenant times, are living under the Old in experience. Justified by faith, they are still striving to be sanctified by works. Having begun in the Spirit, they are endeavoring to be made perfect in the flesh. They are partly carnal in performance and partly spiritual in profession. Salvation is now and has always been by grace.

4. You need to praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Today we are past the wilderness school of the desert. They are to be our examples. We have the Scriptures and we have the Spirit's power within us to conform to God's perfect example, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is working in every Christian to develop our awareness and obedience to the standards of holiness and righteousness God desires. We can do what the Israelites could not!

The Law was good . . . it serves a purpose . . . it reminds us today that our Lord still has high expectations for us because we are a reflection of His holiness.

Next week we'll have the first of our three topical lessons beginning with the Tabernacle. It may seem like you're going all over the place with Scripture references, so

start tomorrow and take your time. What doesn't "come together" for you in your private study will hopefully be clarified in the lecture next week.

Let's pray. Most generous and gracious God, we have much to ponder from this lesson. We ask Your wisdom and guidance and we seek to understand the importance of the Law and how You truly desire a relationship with us. We want to be holy because You are holy; we want to obey You because we love you; and we want to fully appreciate the grace that You extend to us each and every day. Thank You for Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, our hearts want to obey not because we fear you or fear being in your presence, but because we love you and recognize that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of your son, Jesus. You gave the Israelites the Law written on stone, but you have written your law of love in our hearts. We are truly grateful. Help us as we strive to be holy and obedient children and thank you that our shortcomings do not negate your love. For the precious gift of Scripture we are so grateful. Instruct our hearts as we commit ourselves to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.