

EXODUS

Obeying God's Law

Exodus 20:18–26

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **EXPLORE** the divine manifestations and warnings that accompanied the giving of the Ten Commandments; **ASPIRE** to live in more perfect obedience to God's laws; and **SHARE** one way to show God that we are serious about obeying His laws.

In Focus

Describe a time when someone didn't do their part to honor an agreement. In this lesson, we will find out how the Israelites were called to honor their covenant agreement with God.

Keep In Mind

*In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee”
(Exodus 20:24, KJV).*

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Lesson Text

Exodus 20:18–26~NKJV

18 All the people saw the thundering and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off.

19 They said unto Moses, “You speak to us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

20 Moses said unto the people, “Fear not; for God has come to test you, and His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”

21 The people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

22 The Lord said unto Moses, “This you shalt say unto the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

23 You shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall you make unto you gods of gold.

24 An altar of earth you shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen. In all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

25 And if thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon.’

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The Lesson

The People, Places and Times

Moses: Moses plays a prominent role in the events of this passage. Born a Jew, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace. God chose Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Jews out of slavery. In the process, God shaped and molded Moses into His faithful servant who became an outstanding leader of His people.

Mount Sinai: This passage take place at Mount Sinai, often referred to as "*the mountain of God.*" Some believe it's located about fifty miles north of the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, in an area now controlled by Egypt. On this mountain, Moses met God in the form of a burning bush. There God told Moses to go to Egypt and lead God's people out of Egypt (**Exodus 3**). Many years later, the prophet Elijah returned to this mountain (which is also called Horeb) and heard from God in the gentle whisper of a still, small voice. (**1 Kings 19:8–13 KJV**)

Background

The events take place in the third month after God led the Israelites out of Egypt. For nearly three months, a vast multitude of men, women, and children moved slowly across difficult desert terrain. The miracles God performed in Egypt, the night of the Passover and the parting of the Red Sea, were fresh in their minds. They saw the presence of God a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. God led them to water when they were thirsty and delivered manna and quail to eat. The Israelites were aware of the presence and power of God in their midst. Now they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, where God would once again show His mighty power and give the Law to His people through their leader Moses. The Israelites would learn more about God and what He expected of them.

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In Depth

1. Abram God Makes His Presence Known (Exodus 20:18) For three months, God had made His presence known by a column of cloud by day and a column of fire by night. He led them to Mount Sinai, there He would give His people the Law.

The Israelites' stop at Mount Sinai mirrors what happens in a believer's life. We worship the Lord and come to know who He is before we are given commands to obey. The Law outlined how they were expected to live as His people in relationship with Him and in relationship with each other. They were to accept and fulfill the covenant requirements. This is in line with the commands Jesus stated as the first and second greatest commandments for us—to love God and to love people. (**Mark 12:30-31**)

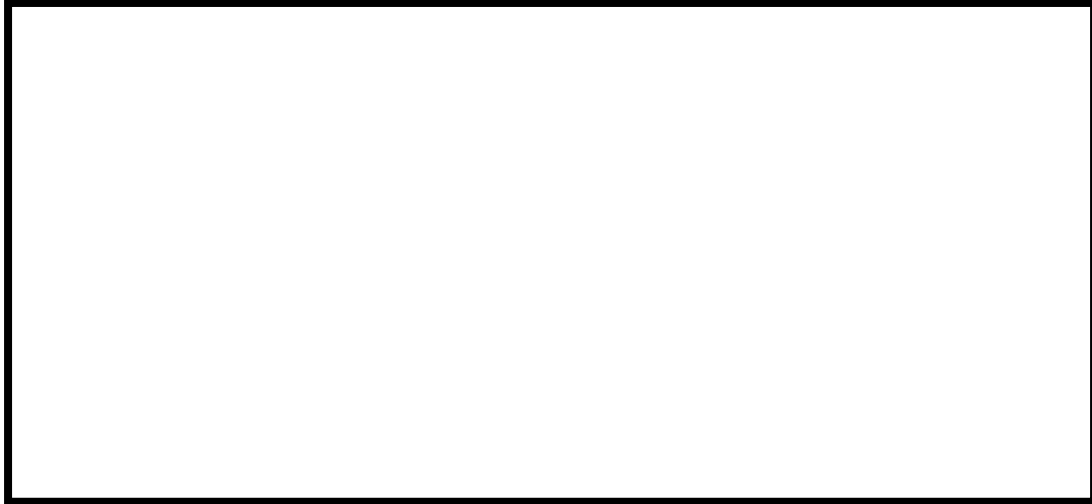
It was important to God to make sure His people knew it was He, Almighty God, the God of their fathers, who gave the Law. He used divine manifestations to cause them to respond in fear and reverence to keep their covenant commitment. He used smoke, thunder, the sound of heavenly trumpets, and lightning. God's manifestation of His presence had the desired effect. The presence of God and His commands bring us to reverence God, receive His words, and obey them.

2. The People Show Reverent Fear (Exodus 20:19–21) The people withdrew in fear, knowing they were truly in the presence of Almighty God. Moses told them, “Fear not, for God is come to prove you” (v. 20). What Moses was telling them they should not depart from God in terror; God intended to use this experience to instill in them a reverence of Him. It was as if God were saying, *“I want you to know I really mean business here!”* Thus, “fear of the LORD” would prompt His people to desire to keep the Law, and not sin. God used these divine manifestations to underscore the importance of His commands; He would be their only God, and they are never to make any idols. After all they saw, heard, and experienced, it is hard to imagine any of the Israelites would consider following any other god! They heard His voice and seen His power, yet they could not see Him in any physical shape or form. But God knows the fragility of human nature, and no matter how many times they experienced God's miracles and presence, they turned to idols. It is the same way with us. We often forget who God is and turn to idols.

3. God Encourages Worship (Exodus 20:22–26) Finally, God gave instructions on the building of altars to be used in worship. While this command seems unusual to us, it was fitting for the culture of the time. From the beginning, God has always desired worship, and at that time worship included sacrifices and burnt offerings. What God wanted to make clear with the commands of verses 24–26 was altars were to be temporary and portable. They were not yet in the Promised Land; their focus was to be on the object of their worship rather than the place of their sacrifice. The stones were to be unhewn, perhaps so no one would be tempted to carve the

stones into some image or idol. The altars were not to have steps leading up to them so their sacrifices would be made in humility and modesty. Again, the focus was then, and is now, on the object of our worship, not on the means, place, or structure.

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Application for Activation

God's greatness and awesomeness compel us to honor our commitment to Him. Here are some ways we can remember to honor God and what He has done for us:

- Create opportunities to worship God in addition to regular worship services.
- Prioritize our relationship with God and improve our communication with others.
- Meditate on a scripture.
- Modify our behavior and respond to God in obedience.
- Re-evaluate the importance of the Ten Commandments in our lives.

Take Aways

Closing Prayer

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Our Read-Ahead for: 10 Sep 2023

EXODUS
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Monday: Genesis 25-26

Tuesday: Genesis 27-29

Wednesday: Genesis 30-31

Thursday: Genesis 32-34

Friday: Genesis 35-37

Saturday: Genesis 38-40

Sunday: Genesis 41-42