

EXODUS CHAPTER 19-20

By Charles Dailey ©2018 NLT CPS
Updated 12/20/23 Printed 12/20/2023

The Lord had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He would give them a choice piece of land and His blessing for serving Him. Jacob had twelve sons and one of them, Joseph, became second-in-command of Egypt. His father and brothers moved to Egypt, but following the death of Joseph, they became enslaved by the government. They cried to the Lord who raised up the prophet Moses who led Israel out of Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea safely and are now being formed into a functioning nation.

ISRAEL MOVES TO MT. SINAI

(19:1) Exactly two months after the Israelites left Egypt, they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai.

- It was **two months** from leaving **Egypt** to the time **Israel** arrived in the **wilderness of Sinai**. God had fed them each day and covered them from the heat. Water had been provided adequate for the need.
- The Greek text of this verse contains *exodos*. The book derived its English name *Exodus* from this.

(2.) After breaking camp at Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and set up camp there at the base of Mount Sinai. (3) Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel:

- They **set up camp** at **the base of Mount Sinai** while **Moses climbed** higher. **The Lord** gave **Moses** explicit **instructions** to give to **Israel**.
- Review the **Lord's** earlier promise to **Moses**:

God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the One who has sent you:

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

(Exodus 3:12 NLT)

That promise is being fulfilled in the unfolding events.

(4) 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

- The Lord reminded Israel that He had brought them safely from **Egypt** and to **Himself**.

(5) Now if you will obey Me and keep My covenant, you will be My own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to Me. (6) And you will be My kingdom of priests, My holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

- Because of the special treatment, Israel is asked to **obey the Lord's voice** (through Moses) and **keep the covenant**. They would then be His **treasured people**.
- They would be a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. This finds an exact parallel in the new covenant and in the church.

It is a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. **"But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.** (1 Peter 2:9 NLT. See also Acts 20:28)

- **Wilbur Fields** addresses Israel as a nation:
When Israel left Egypt, they were hardly a **nation!** They were a band of escaped slaves without homeland, national constitution, an established system of government, judges, or priests. The events at Mt. Sinai brought Israel into nationhood.

(7) So Moses returned from the mountain and called together the elders of the people and told them everything the LORD had commanded him. (8) And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded." So Moses brought the people's answer back to the LORD.

- The faithful prophet repeated what he was told and the **elders** agreed. Then **Moses** spoke on behalf of **the people back to the Lord.**

(9) Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, Moses, so the people themselves can hear Me when I speak with you. Then they will always trust you." Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

- **The Lord** wanted **the people** to **hear** Him speak to **Moses** as a way to confirm that **Moses** was indeed **speaking** for **the Lord.**

(10) Then the LORD told Moses, "Go down and prepare the people for My arrival. Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing. (11) Be sure they are ready on the third day, for on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch.

- **The Lord** ordered a laundry day and preparation for the **third day** when He would appear in the cloud for the nation.

(12) Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, 'Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death. (13) No hand may touch the person or animal that crosses the boundary; instead, stone them or shoot them with arrows. They must be put to death.' However, when the ram's horn sounds a long blast, then the people may go up on the mountain. "

- Moses was to set up **boundary** markers at the base of the **mountain** and **death** would be the penalty for crossing it.
- **The people** would be called by a **long trumpet blast**. The trumpet was the *Shofar*, usually made from a ram's horn.



(14) So Moses went down to the people. He consecrated them for worship, and they washed their clothes. (15) He told them, "Get ready for the third day, and until then abstain from having sexual intercourse."

- Israel got ready and **washed** their garments. This would not be a time for normal **sexual** activities either.

(16) On the morning of the third day, thunder roared and lightning flashed, and a dense cloud came down on the mountain. There was a long, loud blast from a ram's horn, and all the people trembled. (17) Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

- The great **meeting** came off as planned.

(18) All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently. (19) As the blast of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God thundered His reply. (20) The LORD came down on the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses climbed the mountain.

- **Moses** was invited up **the mountain** while Israel was gathered at the base.

(21) Then the LORD told Moses, "Go back down and warn the people not to break through the boundaries to see the LORD, or they will die. (22) Even the priests who regularly come near to the LORD must purify themselves so that the LORD does not break out and destroy them."

- **The Lord** asked **Moses** to go **back down** and warn the **people** to not pass the **boundaries** so they could look at the **Lord**. This would lead to many **deaths**.
- **Priests** were to **purify** themselves, but we cannot identify these **priests**. The sons of Aaron were not yet **priests**. Exodus 24:5 speaks of some young men who functioned like **priests**.

(23) "But LORD," Moses protested, "the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai. You already warned us. You told me, 'Mark off a boundary all around the mountain to set it apart as holy.'"

- **Moses** responded that the warning was already understood by the **people**.

(24) But the LORD said, "Go down and bring Aaron back up with you. In the meantime, do not let the priests or the people break through to approach the LORD, or He will break out and destroy them." (25) So Moses went down to the people and told them what the LORD had said.

- **The Lord** repeated the command to **go down**, but added that **Aaron** should return with **Moses**.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(20:1) Then God gave the people all these instructions: (2) "I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery."

- **God** identifies Himself. This covenant is for those who left **Egypt** as **slaves**. All are moral absolutes, not suggestions.
- In the long term, **God** plans to replace this covenant:

"The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. (Jeremiah 31:31 NLT)

Here is the fulfillment of Jeremiah:

After supper He took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and His people -- an agreement confirmed with My blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. (Luke 22:20 NLT. See also Hebrews 8:13.

(3) "You must not have any other god but Me."

- **#1.** At the top of the list is idolatry. Israel had been exposed to the host of false gods in Egypt as well as Baal, Ashtoreth and other gods in Canaan. God does not allow competition, but very shortly idolatry will break out among the people. Life must be anchored in the one God of heaven.

***New Covenant:* So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. (1 Corinthians 8:4 NLT)**

(4) "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea."

- **#2.** God was not to be *pictured* in any way. He is not represented by any creature in His creation. The Jewish leaders forbade most art work because of this comment, but **Wilbur Fields** puts this in perspective:

Israel was not forbidden to make all statues or paintings. They were just forbidden to make such things "unto thee," that is, as objects of worship. God Himself commanded them to make golden cherubim (angel figurines) upon the ark of the covenant. Presumably these were made by an "engraver" (Ex. 38:23).

Also in Solomon's temple there were decorations of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers (I Kings 6:32), and also of lilies (I Kings 7:22). Decoration of lions, oxen, and cherubim decorated the lavers by Solomon's temple (I Kings 7:29).

Moses made a brass snake at God's command (Num. 21:8-9). Thus it appears not all statues and art work was forbidden in Israel, only those which were objects of worship. (Even the brass snake was destroyed when it became an object of worship. 2 Kings 18:4)

New Covenant: Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.
(1 John 5:21 NLT)

(5) You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected -- even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me. (6) But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love Me and obey My commands.

- Idolatry *now* will affect your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren *later*. On the flip side, **obedience** will bring the blessings of God's **love**.

(7) "You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse His name."

- #3. God demands that His **name** be kept sacred; that it not be used in an empty or meaningless way. It is used that way in our time, but believers must identify and avoid the practice.

New Covenant: Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.
(Matthew 5:37 NLT)

- God's **name** has been used to back up a lie. There are cases in Jeremiah 14:13-14; 29:8-9 and another in 1 Kings 22:12.
- It has been used in a idle, useless or flippant manner. "Oh Lord." Of the over 300 names for God given in the Bible, each is a revelation of the holy, sacred character of God. Never are they to be uttered or treated lightly. Some modify God's holy name to "Gosh" but it still means God. (Check the dictionaries)
- It has been used to speak *against* God and that is blasphemy.
- There should be no "holy smoke" or "holy mackerel" in the vocabulary of one honoring the name of God. His holiness must stand apart for all to see.

(8) "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."

- #4. The **Sabbath** was not commanded for earlier generations, but was first commanded in Exodus 16:23 as Israel was leaving Egypt. The most elementary instructions were given because the **Sabbath** had not been **kept** before. Consider Ezekiel 20:10-12.
New Covenant: This commandment is not repeated.
- The **Sabbath** was and is Saturday. Those who follow Christ now use Christ's resurrection day, Sunday, as their primary day of meeting. Sunday is not a **day** to **keep holy**.

(9) You have six days each week for your ordinary work, (10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.

- **The Lord** allowed a six-day **work** week, but on the **Sabbath** all labor was to cease in the land. Even the **foreigners** were not to **work**.

- The religious leaders took it on themselves to define **work** and this led to the ridiculous rules seen among the Pharisees in the Gospels. They failed at getting Jesus to obey their additions to this law. Mark 2:23-28.

(11) For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

- **The Lord** himself did His creation work on **six days** and rested on the **seventh day**.

(12) "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

- #5. Parents were to be honored. This included assisting them with finances. The reward was a long life.

New Covenant: Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God.

(1 Timothy 5:3-4 NLT)

- **Wilbur Fields** observes:

In our modern society youth is worshiped and old age is dreaded or despised. The result is a folly in which men and women strive to remain eternally youthful, only to find it is an impossible task. We need to return to the Biblical ideal of honoring parents and respecting the elderly.

(13) "You must not murder."

- #6. **Murder** is not exactly the same as killing. As a nation they were to kill their collective enemies and take the life of certain law-breakers. **Murder** is where one person takes the life of another *based on their own decision*. The command does not cover legal executions, death in battle or manslaughter.

New Covenant: Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.

(1 John 3:15 NLT)

- Abortion was not contemplated because babies were a blessing from the Lord. They enriched the family when they were born and led to greater family wealth as they matured. None the less, abortion is **murder**.

(14) "You must not commit adultery."

- #7. The sexual relationship was prized in Israel and sexual purity was required. To be called **adultery**, one person in the relationship must be married.
- The penalty was death in most instances. This will be unfolded later in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.
- The law against **adultery** is absolutely necessary for the security and happiness of homes and family life.
- ***New Covenant: But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*** (Matthew 5:28 NLT. See Ephesians 5:3-5.)

(15) "You must not steal."

- #8. Don't take property that belongs to another person. This covers violence, cheating, embezzlement, forgery, kidnapping and other similar vices. It includes moving property boundaries.
- ***New Covenant: If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.*** (Ephesians 4:28 NLT)

(16) "You must not testify falsely against your neighbor."

- #9. Tell only the truth about all others. This applies to court but general life as well.
- ***New Covenant: So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.*** (Ephesians 4:25 NLT)

(17) "You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."

- **#10.** This is the only commandment having to do directly with attitudes. Don't desire what belongs to someone else.
- ***New Covenant:*** **So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world.** (Colossians 3:5 NLT)

THE DISPLAY OF POWER BROUGHT FEAR TO ISRAEL

(18) When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear. (19) And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!"

- The blinding **flashes**, the crashing **thunder**, the resounding **trumpet** and the **smoking mountain** were too much for the **people**. They **distanced** themselves from the foot of the **mountain** in **fear**. They were willing to listen to **Moses**, but were afraid of **death** if **God spoke** directly with them.

(20) "Don't be afraid," Moses answered them, "for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of Him will keep you from sinning!"

- **Moses** said that the event was a **test**. **God** wanted to be **feared** by these **people** so they would not **sin**.

(21) As the people stood in the distance, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was. (22) And the LORD said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: You saw for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven.

- The main purpose of God was achieved — that **Israel** would know that **God** was speaking to them through His prophet **Moses**.

(23) Remember, you must not make any idols of silver or gold to rival Me.

- A reminder: don't make any gods of **silver or gold**. God had provided **silver and gold** for them as they were leaving Egypt, but He didn't want any of it used for idolatry.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING ALTARS

(24) "Build for Me an altar made of earth, and offer your sacrifices to Me -- your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and goats, and your cattle. Build My altar wherever I cause My name to be remembered, and I will come to you and bless you. (25) If you use stones to build My altar, use only natural, uncut stones. Do not shape the stones with a tool, for that would make the altar unfit for holy use.

- If an **altar** was built of **stone** instead of earth, the **stones** were to left in their natural state and not cut to fit.

(26) And do not approach My altar by going up steps. If you do, someone might look up under your clothing and see your nakedness.

- Perhaps a ramp was to be built instead of steps. **Nakedness** is defined for mankind in Genesis 3. In verse 7, Adam and Eve had made loincloths, but weren't satisfied because when Adam met God in verse 10, Adam described himself as **naked** even wearing his loincloth. In verse 21, God made **clothing** for them and the Hebrew word speaks of a garment that covers from the shoulders to the knees. Hebrew: kúttôneḥ (H3801), a tunic such as Joseph wore. Then Adam was no longer **naked**.

In mounting the **altar**, those offering the sacrifices were not to have their thighs exposed to those standing nearby. That is **nakedness** and the definition seems to hold throughout Scripture.