

## The Giving of the Law



### God's Promise

God's promise to Abraham is first recorded in Genesis 12:1-3.<sup>1</sup> Read Genesis 12:1-3.

The essential elements of the Promise are:

- ☑ Many descendants (13:16; 22:17) and a land (12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:7-8, 18; 17:8).
- ☑ Blessing to Abraham (12:2; 22:17; 26:3; 28:3) and blessing to all peoples (families) and nations on earth through Abraham's offspring (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).<sup>2</sup>

### God's Deliverance (Exodus 1 – 15)

Abraham went to the land of Canaan and lived there for many years. His son Isaac and grandson Jacob (Israel) also lived there, but Israel's family eventually moved to Egypt because of a severe famine. After they moved to Egypt, they were blessed with good land and many children (Genesis 47:27). They became great in number (Exodus 1:6-7; 12:37). However, the king (pharaoh) of Egypt feared their potential, and began to oppress them with forced labor (1:8-14).

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out for help (Exodus 2:23). "God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob" (2:24, NIV). God chose an Israelite named Moses to confront Pharaoh and deliver (set free) the Israelites (3:1-10). Through a series of miracles, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (7:14-15:21).<sup>3</sup>



### God's Provision (Despite the Peoples' Complaining) (Exodus 15 – 18)

As Israel left Egypt, they had lots of people. They were headed to a land – "the promised land." They had leadership. Moses was their leader. (Of course, God is the ultimate leader.) And with the advice of his father-in-law, Moses delegated leadership to others (Exodus 18:17-26).

Next they needed a system of Law. So God led them toward Mount Sinai. Along the way, the Israelites complained. They complained about food (16:2-3) and water (15:24; 17:1-2). Though they had just experienced God's great deliverance, they said they would rather be back in Egypt (16:3; 17:3). Anyway, God graciously provided for their needs (15:25; 16:4, 11-14, 35; 17:5-6).

### God's Covenant with Moses & Israel (Exodus 19 – 24)

About seven weeks after the exodus, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai, the LORD established his covenant with Moses and Israel.

<sup>1</sup> The promise is repeated (in some form) to Abraham on at least four other occasions (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:4-5, 18-21; 17:2-8, 15-16; 18:18-19; 22:17-18). The promise is also repeated to Abraham's son Isaac (26:4-5) and grandson Jacob (Israel) (28:13-15; 35:11-12). The promise is also expressed in the form of a 'covenant' which is generally defined as an agreement between two parties that defines a relationship and enacts obligations.

<sup>2</sup> The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is revealed in the New Testament (Galatians 3:16, 8-9, 26-29).

<sup>3</sup> The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (the 'Exodus') is foundational in the history of Israel. Its significance is both historic and symbolic. Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt symbolizes the Christian's deliverance from slavery to sin and death. The 'Passover sacrifice' (Exodus 12:24-27) pointed to Jesus Christ – the 'lamb of God' (John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:18-19) and 'our Passover lamb' (1 Corinthians 5:7).

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Exodus 19:1-6. What statement does God make to the Israelites? Fill in the blanks.

📖 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,<sup>4</sup> then out of all nations you will be...

my \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup>

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me...

a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>

and a \_\_\_\_\_."<sup>7</sup>

2. The "Ten Commandments"<sup>8</sup> (20:1-17) were central to God's covenant with Israel.<sup>9</sup> Read the Ten Commandments ("OT Commandment" column) summarized on the next page. How are the Ten Commandments different from the law codes and moral rules of other societies?



3. The Ten Commandments (and the Law in general) reflect God's moral will for his people.<sup>10</sup> Briefly review the table again, including "Jesus' Summary" and ask yourself, "How have I done relative to God's commandments? Have I perfectly obeyed God's moral will?"

🕒 If it were possible to earn God's approval and salvation, we would need to answer "yes" to the last question. However, we *cannot* earn salvation! That is not the intent of the Law.

📖 "...a person is not justified by the works of the law" (*Galatians 5:16a, NIV*)

→ See the next question on page 4.

<sup>4</sup> 'Their obedience is not to be a desperate attempt to earn [God's] salvation; it is a response to the salvation he has already achieved for them. But if obedience to the law is not the path to membership in the covenant people of God, it is required for the enjoyment of blessing within the covenant.' (Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 69).

<sup>5</sup> 'treasured possession' – God's special people. God earlier referred to Israel as His 'firstborn son' (4:22-23). Israel has done nothing to deserve God's favor, but God has freely chosen Israel to be His special possession.

<sup>6</sup> 'kingdom of priests' – called to a special service. Israel is to represent God and mediate His presence and blessing to the nations. 'At the heart of God's plan for the people of Israel is the idea that they will become priest-kings. They are to fulfill the role that God had originally allocated through Adam and Eve to all human beings.' (T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008], 84)

<sup>7</sup> 'holy nation' – set apart and consecrated as God's special people (among the nations) to be a 'kingdom of priests.' In the New Testament, followers of Jesus Christ are called 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession' (1 Peter 2:9). By God's grace, Christians are God's special people, set apart for a special purpose.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, 'ten words' (*Exodus 34:28*).

<sup>9</sup> The many other laws/ordinances in Exodus and Leviticus extend from the principles in the Ten Commandments.

<sup>10</sup> The Ten Commandments and the Law were given to Moses and Israel at a specific time in the history of God's people. Theologians disagree on how the Ten Commandments relate to Christians today. In any case, the moral will of God is reflected in the Ten Commandments, and God's moral will transcends the written Law. In the New Testament, God's law is written on human hearts, which is connected to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*). See *God's Will for His People* on the ICF website for application of the Ten Commandments to Christians today.

## The Ten Commandments & New Testament Application

OT Commandment	New Testament Application (the "law of Christ")
"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3)	<i>There is only one true God. Do not allow any person or thing to displace God's rightful authority and priority in our lives. (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8)</i>
"You shall not make for yourself an [idol]" (20:4)	<i>Worship only God, and only as He has revealed Himself. (1 John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 10:14)</i>
"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God" (20:7)	<i>Use God's name reverently, not lightly or irresponsibly. (Matthew 6:9; James 5:12)</i>
"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... you shall not do any work" (20:8-10) <sup>11</sup>	<i>Stop and be reminded that your work is not the sum and purpose of human life. True meaning, purpose and fulfillment (and true rest!) are found only in relationship with God. (Matt 11:28-29; Hebrews 4:1-11)</i>
"Honor your father and your mother" (20:12)	<i>"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'" (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 5:8)</i>
"You shall not murder" (20:13)	<i>Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said... 'Do not murder.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15; Revelation 21:8)</i>
"You shall not commit adultery" (20:14)	<i>Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said... 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27; Romans 13:9; James 2:11)</i>
"You shall not steal" (20:15)	<i>Do not steal. Work diligently &amp; honestly. (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15)</i>
"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (20:16)	<i>Put off falsehood and speak truthfully. Speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15, 25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8)</i>
"You shall not covet your neighbor's [possessions]" (20:17)	<i>Do not long for what is not rightfully yours to have. Do not be greedy. (James 4:2-4; Hebrews 13:5; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:2, 5).</i>

### Jesus' Summary: The entire Law depends on these two commandments:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second one is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Mt 22:37-40)

<sup>11</sup> Theologians disagree on how the Sabbath commandment applies to Christians. For more discussion, see the lesson entitled 'Reverence and Rest' under *God's Will for His People* on the ICF website. In my view, Christians are not under the 'binding authority' of the Sabbath commandment because it is part of the *Old Covenant* with Israel. When Jesus Christ came, he fulfilled the *Old Covenant* and inaugurated the *New Covenant*. In particular, the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, in whom we have the ultimate 'rest' (*Matthew 11:28-29; Hebrews 4:1-11*). Thus Christians are not required to stop working on the seventh day (Saturday) or even on Sunday. Nonetheless, the New Testament application of the Sabbath is important. While Christians may disagree on how the Sabbath commandment applies to us today, setting aside one day of the week (typically Sunday) for worship and rest is, at the least, wise and appropriate.

4. Read Romans 3:20 (below). According to this verse, what is the purpose of the Law?<sup>12</sup>

📖 "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin" (*Romans 3:20, NIV*).

📖 "...a person is not justified (declared right with God) by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (*Galatians 5:16a, NIV*).

5. After receiving God's commandments, the Israelites said, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" (*Exodus 24:7; 24:3, cf. 19:7-8*). However, while Moses was up on Mount Sinai to receive more instructions, the Israelites disobeyed. Read Exodus 32:1-6. What do you think motivated them to do this? What lessons can we learn from this?<sup>13</sup>



6. What progress, if any, do you see in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham? See Exodus 19:4-6 and 23:31.<sup>14</sup>

## Reflection & Application

- Do you want to be a "good person?" What is the basis and motivation for your ethics (moral principles and practices)? How do *your* ethics compare to the Bible's moral instructions? Is loving and serving God included? According to Jesus, *that* is the most important thing! If you do not agree, why not? Continue to seek the truth about these matters.
- Are you relying on your good works to earn God's approval and salvation? The Bible says that is impossible. Salvation is a gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). Do you need to trust in Jesus for your salvation?
- Before giving the Law to the Israelites, God reminded them about who He is and how He had delivered them (*Exodus 20:2; 19:3-4*). Brothers and sisters, commit to begin each day with reflection on who God is and how He has saved you. Then listen to his words and by His grace commit to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (*Ephesians 4:1*).

<sup>12</sup> Concerning the purpose of the Law, Vaughn Roberts lists the following: The law reveals God's standards (*Matthew 5:17-20*); the law reveals our sin (*Romans 3:20*); and the law reveals our [need of the] Savior (*Galatians 3:23-24*). (Vaughn Roberts, *God's Big Picture* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 70)

<sup>13</sup> The Israelites' actions revealed a sense of lost contact with God. They got tired of waiting on God, so they decided to do things their own way. As Christians, we can get tired of doing things God's way. We can get tired of relying on and waiting on the invisible God, so we turn to the world's ways, and rely on things we can see. We need to trust God, wait on God, and remain faithful to Him, even in confusing and difficult times.

<sup>14</sup> Israel is blessed to be called God's 'treasured possession' and a 'holy nation' (*19:4-6*). Israel will be a 'kingdom of priests' (mediators of God's grace), that is, a blessing to other nations (*19:6*). God is preparing them for the promised land. God tells Moses that He will give them the land promised to Abraham (*23:31*).