

God Gives the Ten Commandments (Part 1)

Exodus 19:16–20:21

This week's Bible Background concentrates on the events surrounding the giving of the Ten Commandments, while next week's concentrates on the commandments themselves. You may want to read both Bible Backgrounds before beginning this session.

The Amalekites attacked the Israelites where they were camped. So the Israelites put together an army under the leadership of Joshua and went on the attack. Moses held high in the air the staff that had struck the rock to get water. As long as Moses held the staff in the air, the Israelites continued to win—so Aaron and Hur helped hold Moses' hands up, and the Israelites defeated the Amalekites.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit after the battle with the Amalekites. Seeing Moses burdened with judging disagreements among the two million Israelites, Jethro gave Moses some good advice. He suggested that Moses appoint judges to serve the people so that Moses could concentrate on what was most important—being the people's representative before God. Moses took the advice and then led the Israelites on to Mount Sinai, where Moses had earlier met God in the burning bush. They arrived at Mount Sinai three months to the day from the day they left Egypt.

A significant event is recorded in the next few verses (Exodus 19:3-9): God spoke to Moses and promised him that Israel would be his treasured possession, his holy people—if they would obey him. After Moses told the people what God had said, they responded gratefully: "We will do everything the Lord has said." God responded by telling Moses that God himself would come down and speak with the Israelites from a cloud.

Why was God so concerned about people coming up the mountain to "see" him? Because he wanted them to realize the extent of his holiness and of their unholiness. Certainly his power and majesty were evident through the blast of the trumpet, the smoke and the fire, and the trembling of the earth. Most would not have needed a warning to stay away, but some well-meaning, faithful souls might have too boldly approached God without the warnings. Only Moses and Aaron were allowed to approach God, and then only as the people's representatives, not on the basis of their own holiness.

The law God gave spelled out how the Israelites were to honor him through their obedience. In the thousands of years that have passed since this event, one thing hasn't changed: The best way we can honor God is by obeying him.

Devotion for Leaders

The One Thing: Following Jesus is not about obeying rules; it's about knowing him. However, our obedience in honoring and glorifying God in our everyday lives allows our relationship with Jesus to grow.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: Read Exodus 19:5-6. When have you felt favor from God? How did you experience his favor? How were you following God at the time? Who were the people involved? Were they aware of their involvement in God's work in your life?

When we honor and follow God, blessings come to us and to the people around us. What blessings have you received from teaching these children? Pray that the ministry you are involved in today helps your students experience God's blessing. May you see the fruit of God's work through your obedience.