

**File No. 30**

**EXODUS 19:1 – 20:26; 24:3–11**

Exodus 21:1 – 23:33

**GOD GIVES HIS LAW AND COVENANT TO ISRAEL**

(SBS Bk 1 Story No 45)

*Story Notes*

**Exodus 19**

God had now brought Israel out of Egypt and to himself. He wanted them to know that it was he who had done this. (It was not Moses, and it had been done in spite of their grumbling). They were now God's priest nation on behalf of the whole earth, and they confessed their willingness to be this people. Moses was to be forever authenticated as their covenant head. From now on, faith in God could not be separated from faith in Moses. The fearsomeness of the occasion is linked to this authentication. It is remarkable to see Moses ascending to God. God had chosen to be God to this people, and to have his covenant head approach him without fear.

Later on, Jesus would say, 'Believe in God. Believe also in me' (John 14:1). He has approached God on our behalf, stood in the place of judgement, and led us to God. He is our covenant Leader (Heb. 3:1-2).

The smoke surging upwards from the top of the mountain, like a kiln, and the shaking of the mountain was sufficient to keep the people from approaching. Israel did not even want God to speak to them. But God required that the people be sanctified, be present, and that they not break through to God. The repetition of this latter requirement suggests the wrongful proximity to God sought by arrogant humanity, as in Eden. Later, some would attempt to come unsummoned to God and would pay with their lives.

**Exodus 20**

The commandments were addressed directly to the people. They expressed the closeness of God to Israel and the purity of their relationship to him and to each other. (Note the emphasis on relationships: 'before me', 'a jealous God', 'the name of ... your God', 'a Sabbath to the Lord your God', 'you shall not covet; anything that belongs to your neighbour'.) God's relationship to them had been demonstrated beyond doubt; now, as his priestly people, they were to be holy as he was holy. God, speaking to the people in the sights and sounds from the mountain frightened them. Moses said God was testing them. God wanted to know what was in their hearts (cf. Deut. 8:2). In fact, this law would reveal what was in Israel's heart. It would expose them so that they would not be left with false ideas as to their greatness. It would help them to know the God who kept covenant with them when they did not keep covenant with him.

**Exodus 24**

It was now time for the covenant to be put into effect. The covenant had been explained, and was now read out and agreed to. Sacrifices were offered and the blood (signifying the penalty if either side broke covenant?) was sprinkled on the altar and the people. But the goal of the covenant was communion with God. Seventy elders shared this with Moses on behalf of all the people and they saw the God of Israel. God was willing to be known by his people, and willing to be near them. Then Moses ascended Sinai to actually receive the 'hard copy' of this covenant.

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