

THE TEN LAWS LEADING TO CHRIST

Lesson 1

THE HISTORICAL SETTING FOR THE REVELATION OF JEHOVAH

Exodus 19:1-4

Aim: To reproduce the historical context in which the Ten Commandments were given in order to prepare ourselves to receive the commandments.

- I. When Were the Ten Commandments Given?
- II. Where Were the Ten Commandments Given?
- III. To Whom Were the Ten Commandments Given?
 - A. Participants in an Israel Enlarged by Jehovah—*House of Jacob . . . the Sons of Israel*
 1. *House of Jacob*
 2. *Sons of Israel*
 - B. Eyewitnesses of Jehovah's wonders in Egypt—*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians*
 - C. Beneficiaries of Jehovah's Instruction in the Wilderness—*And How I Bore You on Eagles' Wings*
 - D. Recipients of His Current Favor—*And Brought You to Myself*

Introduction: Many believers are not even able to list half of the Ten Commandments. How well do you know and understand these ancient laws? What do they say? Why were they given? What is their relationship to New Testament believers? Can they still lead us to Christ?

God's writing of the Law marked an advance in His covenant relationship with His people, and He intended it for their good. God gave the law so His people could be unto Him *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (19:6). Moses later testified that God intended the Law to be *for our good always* (Deuteronomy 6:24). Hundreds of years

later Nehemiah described God's laws as *just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments* (Nehemiah 9:13). The Apostle Paul taught that *the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good* (Romans 7:12). As we study the Ten Commandments, we want to take an extended look at the setting into which the Law was introduced, to trace the Biblical teaching concerning each commandment, to understand the relevance of the Law for today, and to know the thrill of seeing how the Law successfully leads us to Christ.

Exodus 19 begins the account of God's renewing of His covenant with His people and His institution of the covenant on a national basis. All of Israel was present at Sinai, and all consented to the terms of the covenant and God's purposes for the covenant. They pledged that their "national goal—unlike the self-seeking of all other nations—was to be sincere and to give complete obedience to His will, walking in fellowship with Him, and making Him the object of their highest loyalty and love" (Gleason Archer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 241).

Understanding the setting into which God introduced the written Law will help us to prepare our own hearts to receive the Law. Lord willing, our own heart response prior to studying the Law will correspond to Israel's response: *All that the LORD has spoken we will do* (Exodus 19:8). We will simply ask basic questions to develop our understanding of the historical setting. When were the Ten Commandments given? Where? To Whom? And Why? (*Why?* is the subject of Lesson 2).

I. When Were the Ten Commandments Given?
(Exodus 19:1)

The Israelites had only recently been delivered from their years of slavery in Egypt. They had gone down into Egypt at Joseph's request in 1876 B.C. (Exodus 12:40; Genesis 15:13; 45:11; Acts 7:6). Four hundred and thirty years later to the very day (Exodus 12:41), God used Moses to lead them out of Egypt (Exodus 14:21-31). The year of the Exodus can be narrowed to 1446 B.C. For as few as 45 days and as many as 90 days, Israel had been journeying out of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. They had traveled approximately 120 miles. Sinai was their eighth recorded camp in Exodus. They had previously stopped at Succoth (12:37-13:19), Etham (13:20-22); Pi-hahiroth (14:1-14), Marah (15:22-26), Elim (15:27), the Wilderness of Sin (16:1-36), and Rephidim (17:1-18:27). They would now remain at Sinai for close to eleven and a half months (Exodus 19:1-Numbers 10:11). This event takes place 480 years before the Temple is constructed (I Kings 6:1). [See *Chronology of Genesis Events* chart.]

II. Where Were the Ten Commandments Given? (Exodus 19:1-3)

Mount Sinai is one of the mountains in a mountain range identified as Horeb in the Bible.¹ The range stretches over nearly the entire southern half of the Sinai Peninsula and extends north along nearly the entire stretch of Israel's journey from Egypt. The mountains in the range average 4,000 feet above sea level. The area of the range in which Sinai sits actually contains the highest elevations in the entire range. Sinai and other mountains close to it reach to almost 7,000 feet above sea level. At the base of Mt. Sinai lies a large plateau, two miles long and one mile wide. This plateau would have made a suitable base for Israel to camp. Their animals could easily have been kept on other smaller plateaus within a short distance.

It was on this mountain purchased with God's right hand (Psalm 78:54) that the LORD appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2). God also

¹ In recent years, fascinating discoveries have been made that bring the traditional understanding of the route of the exodus in some question. It seems possible that the Red Sea crossing occurred at the second finger of the Red Sea (now called the Gulf of Aqaba) rather than the first finger (Gulf of Suez). Early records indicate that both gulfs were known as the Red Sea. These conclusions, if confirmed, would not challenge the Biblical record, but would help us to map the route of the exodus more accurately and direct us to the correct Mt. Sinai. The traditional explanation has done its best to explain the biblical details, but for the most part, has had little archeological support. More information can be found at www.wyattmuseum.com. The lesson in this series presents the traditional exodus route and location of Mt. Sinai not in an effort to withhold support from the new discoveries, but only in recognition that those discoveries and the theories they suggest are still in progress and in need of further verification.

promised that Moses and the Israelites would later return to the mountain to serve God.

And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, [singular]; and this shall be the sign to you [singular], that it is I who have sent you [singular]: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you [plural] shall worship God at this mountain” (Exodus 3:12).

Sinai was the place of God’s appointment for Israel. He had led them “the long way” through the wilderness to bring them here. In Exodus 3:1, Moses refers to the mountain as the mountain of God. Though God could have given His words to His people in any location, He chose Sinai as the place to teach them the written Law. We are never told whether or not Moses had ever previously communicated to Israel God’s specific promise to return him to Sinai. At a minimum, God was leading the children of Israel to Sinai so He could keep His word to Moses.

Sinai’s suitability for a long-term encampment probably contributed to God’s purpose for bringing them here. God wanted them to live in the presence of this mountain and its associated events for an extended period of time (almost a year). In addition, there were elements of Sinai that God saw were suited to emphasize the message He wanted to communicate. The majesty of the surroundings was appropriate for helping to instill a sense of majesty, glory, and an appropriate fear of God in the hearts of the infant nation of Israel. G. A. Chadwick observes that though God often uses particular settings in the preparation of His people to receive certain truths or to prepare for specific tasks, the effect produced by the setting is not itself sufficient.

It is the manner of God to speak through nature and senses to the soul. We cannot imagine the youth of [John] the Baptist spent in Nazareth, or of Jesus in the desert. Elijah, too, was led into the wilderness to receive the vision of God, and the agony of Jesus was endured at night, and secluded by the olives from the paschal moon. It is by another application of the same principle that the settled Jewish worship was bright with music and splendid with gold and purple; and the notion that the sublime and beautiful in nature and art cannot awaken the feelings to which religions appeal, is as shallow as the notion that when these feelings are awakened all is won (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Bible*, G. A. Chadwick, Exodus, 6 vols. 1:188).

As the narrative in Exodus 19 continues, God stops Moses before he ascends the mountain and reminds him of the significance of Moses' presence there. This is more than Moses' simply returning to his old shepherding grounds. God elevates the event with a reminder of the fulfillment of His promise and a solemn preparatory message to be delivered to the people of Israel. God wants to impress indelibly on Israel's memory the magnitude and mercifulness of His relationship with them. Chadwick continues,

What happens next is a protest against this latter extreme [that an emotional response to sensory atmosphere is sufficient all by itself]. Awe is one thing: the submission of the will is another. And therefore Moses was stopped when about to ascend the mountain, there to keep the solemn appointment that was made when God said, *this shall be the sign to you*

that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (3:12). His own sense of the greatness of the crisis perhaps needed to be deepened. Certainly the nation had to be pledged, induced to make a deliberate choice, now first, as often again, under Joshua (Joshua 24:24) and Samuel (1 Samuel 12:14), and when Elijah invoked Jehovah upon Carmel (1 Kings 18:21,39) (Chadwick, 1:188).

F. B. Meyer made the interesting observation, after a visit to the traditional site of Sinai, that the Mount of God resembled a pulpit in shape. “The peculiarity about this huge cliff is that it resembles, as nearly as possible, a colossal pulpit” (*Exodus*, 218).

III. To Whom Were the Ten Commandments Initially Given? (Exodus 19:3b-4)

The message to Moses from God identifies the immediate recipients of the message of the Law.

³*“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.*

A. Participants in an Israel enlarged by Jehovah—
house of Jacob . . . the sons of Israel

B. God's positioning of these two names (Jacob and Israel) for the same person (people) side by side is not accidental.

1. *House of Jacob*

- a. God may have intended to use the name Jacob to remind the people of their less admirable beginnings.
 - 1) Numerically—(The first and only previous time in which this description is used is Genesis 46:27, *all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy*). Four hundred and thirty years previously, the house of Jacob was just a household.
 - 2) Spiritually—to recall Jacob's own faithlessness prior to his wrestling with the angel
- b. God may have intended to cause them to reflect on the spiritual heritage they possessed in Jacob, who was the recipient of promises and blessings of the covenant.
 - 1) God had chosen Jacob (the younger to rule the elder)
 - 2) God had renewed His covenant three times with Jacob (Genesis 28:3-4; 28:12-22; 35:11).
 - 3) God had transformed Jacob into Israel (Genesis 32:27-28)

2. *Sons of Israel*

- a. May be reflecting their numerical blessing—After the years of bondage, God had multiplied them into a nation of considerable size.
- b. May be reflecting their close association with the fulfillment of the promises to Jacob—God

had transformed the deceitful Jacob into trustful Israel. Formerly Jacob could hardly discern the presence of the Lord (Genesis 28:16), but now his family is enjoying Jehovah's constant presence in the visible cloud in the day and pillar of fire in the night (Exodus 13:21).

The people were identified with the names of Jacob and Israel to remind them of God's merciful provision and blessing upon them.

As the mercies conferred on them as a people extended back into the history of the past, it was perhaps designed, by the use of the two names, to remind them of their humble beginnings and their subsequent increase: to suggest to them that they, who were once as lowly as *Jacob* when he went to Padan-aram, were now grown as great as God made him, when he came from thence and was called *Israel* (George Bush, *Notes on Exodus*, 2 vols., 1:237).

B. Eyewitnesses of Jehovah's wonders in Egypt—*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians*

Jehovah reaches beyond His mere blessing of the nation in its rich spiritual heritage and numerical growth. He appeals to events that the children of Israel have observed with their own eyes as a result of their relationship with Him. Israel triumphed over Egypt and departed from the country with a high hand (Exodus 14:8), but would the greater lesson of the plagues and miracles of Egypt penetrate their hearts and incline them

toward the LORD? Would the overpowering display of the sovereignty of Jehovah over the Egyptian deities that had surrounded His people for centuries cultivate a personal, trusting obedience from the heart? [See *Wonders in Egypt* chart for an overview of Jehovah's systematic humiliation of major Egyptian deities on behalf of His people and His preservation of His people in the midst of the plagues].

The appeal is to their personal experience and their gratitude: will this be enough? Will they accept his yoke, as every convert must, not knowing what it may involve, not yet having His demands specified and His commandments before their eyes, content to believe that whatever is required of them will be good, because the requirement is from God? (Chadwick, 1:189).

C. Beneficiaries of Jehovah's instruction in the wilderness—and *how I bore you on eagles' wings*

He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread abroad His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions: The Lord alone guided him (Deuteronomy 32:10-12).

God recalls even more recent testimony to their attention. What had the miracles they observed and were experiencing on a daily basis cultivated within them? In their early wilderness days after their sudden departure from Egypt, they had

experienced a miraculous salvation through the Red Sea, a miraculous healing of bitter water, a miraculous deliverance from enemies, a miraculous provision of meat, a miraculous provision of daily manna and water . . . all in two months or less! What would come of these astounding events? Events in which they had participated and still were participating daily . . . God was bearing them on eagles' wings. He was instructing them and keeping them as the apple of His eye. Appealing to the figure of the eagle that they had seen with their own eyes essentially involves "a direct appeal to themselves, to their own observation and experience, for the truth of what is here affirmed. They could not disbelieve God without first disbelieving the testimony of their own senses" (Bush, 1:237).

The figure of an eagle bearing its young on its wings is a picture of a mother eagle teaching her eaglets to fly or protecting them before they learn to fly. The illustration perfectly pictures Jehovah's relationship with His people in the days since their departure from the land of Egypt. It is "a similitude denoting the speed, the security, and the tender care with which they were, as it were, transported from the house of bondage" (Bush, 1:237; cf., Isaiah 63:9).

How did God bear them on eagles' wings? He instructed them—God informed Moses in Exodus 6:3 that He would make Himself known to Israel by the name of Jehovah. This change marked an advance from the previous revelation given to the patriarchs. When God says, *by My name, Jehovah, I did not make Myself known to them*, it is not necessary for us to conclude that the

patriarchs were completely ignorant of the name Jehovah, but simply to recognize that God had **primarily** revealed Himself to them under a different name.

Closely looked at, Exodus 6:3 does not require the absolute previous unknownness of the word [JEHOVAH]. The statement need mean nothing more than that the patriarchs did not as yet possess the practical knowledge and experience of that side of the divine character which finds expression in the name (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 115).

Instead, God had primarily revealed Himself to the patriarchs by another name, the name of *El Shaddai* or God Almighty (Exodus 6:3, and *I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty*). This name communicates God's unique ability to use all things for His purposes, whether nature, people, or nations. He rules over all. The complete name occurs five times in Genesis (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3) and once in Exodus (Exodus 6:3).

Now, however, God's primary intention was to tutor His people in the understanding of His character as Jehovah (*I am the LORD but by my name LORD, I did not make Myself known unto them. . . I am the LORD*, Exodus 6:2,3,8). God previously had revealed Himself to Moses by the name *I AM* (first person, Exodus 3:14). He had further commanded Moses to tell the people that it was HE IS (LORD, third person rendering of the same name, Exodus 3:15) who had sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. Though the name itself communicated the truth of God's self-existence, God began to reveal other aspects of

His character to His people. The name God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) primarily viewed God in relation to things and people and His surpassing power over them. The name Jehovah would come to describe God in His covenant relationship with His people. **Each time the name appears, it becomes at once both a revelation and a promise. God's names and titles not only reveal to His people what He is, but the names themselves are pledges of Himself to His people in their hour of need. In fact, we can say, that God's character is revealed in His total sufficiency in the face of His people's diverse needs.**

First, let's examine God's determination to make Himself known as Jehovah, primarily emphasizing passages prior to the exodus. In the earliest chapters of the book of Exodus, both Moses and Pharaoh ask important questions. WHO is Jehovah? How does Jehovah make Himself known? How does the answer to that question have bearing on me? Moses allows God to answer the question. Pharaoh refuses to learn. God will see to it that Pharaoh learns His identity. The entirety of the book of Exodus is an emphatic answer to both Moses' and Pharaoh's questions. Eighteen times in Exodus we find the phrase *I am the LORD*. *I am the LORD* appears thirteen times (6:2, 6, 8, 29; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 12:12; 14:4, 18; 15:26; 31:13); *I am the LORD your God* appears three times (6:7; 16:12; 20:2); *I am the LORD their God* appears twice (29:46). In Exodus, God not only demonstrates His desire to answer the questions about His identity, but He demonstrates His desire to make sure specific persons or groups learn of His answer [see *Jehovah's Making Jehovah Known* Chart].

Moses—*What is His name? What shall I say to them?* (Exodus 3:13) *And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice?* (Exodus 5:2)

For Pharaoh

- 7:17** . . . *by this you shall know that I am the LORD*
8:10 . . . *that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.*
8:22 . . . *that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land.*
9:14 . . . *that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth*
9:29-30 . . . *that you may know how that the earth is the LORD's. But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.*

For the Egyptians

- 7:5** *The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.*
14:4 *And I will be honored through Pharaoh, and all his army; and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.*
14:18 *Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh . . .*

For the Israelites/Moses

- 6:7** *Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.*

10:2 *And that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson . . . that you may know that I am the LORD.*

16:6 *So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt:*

For the Nations of the Earth

9:16 *But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.*

Very clearly, God is intentionally and specifically making Himself known not only to His people, but also to those who have a relationship with His people.

Secondly, God is revealing to His people what it means to have entered into covenant with Jehovah. In other words, He is not simply interested in the world's recognition of His self-existence as Jehovah. He is interested in His people's understanding of what His self-existence means for them. The days of the plagues, the exodus, and the subsequent journey to Sinai provide opportunity for Jehovah to teach His people the nature of His relationship with them. In the plagues, the LORD demonstrates His covenant loyalty to His people through the miraculous punishment and destruction of their enemies and through the preservation of His people. In the wilderness, the LORD displays His covenant loyalty primarily through His preservation of His people through miraculous provision and through the continued confounding of their enemies.

The miracles were divine object lessons designed to impress on the people the magnitude and diversity of God's relationship to them as Jehovah. God taught them that the name Jehovah was like a multi-faceted diamond.

Every new difficulty prompted a revelation of a new facet of the diamond. The whole diamond could be represented by the name Jehovah. Yet in one facet of the diamond, Jehovah's ability and promise to heal is accented, so we see Jehovah Healer (Exodus 15:26). As the diamond turns, the light accents another facet and still another and another. Jehovah could at once be their God, their Healer, their Banner, and their Strength. In the book of Exodus alone, the name LORD would appear 341 times (Jehovah appears twice). A simple survey of the passages prior to the giving of the Law reveals the multitude of ways in which the LORD was making Himself known to His people [See *Jehovah Made Known to His People* chart for a non-exhaustive summary of how specifically Jehovah was making himself known to His people prior to giving them the Law].

What Jehovah Does:

- Hears the cries and sees the affliction of His people 3:7; 3:16; 6:5, 7; 14:10
- Hardens the intransigent 4:21; 7:3, 13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12-13, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8
- Hears the cries of His chosen leaders 5:22; 8:12; 8:30 15:11; 17:7
- Keeps His Word to past generations 6:4-8; 12:42
- Delivers His people 7:5; 16:6; 18:1; 18:9-10
- Controls the elements of nature (plagues)
- Protects His people 8:22; 11:7; 12:23
- Gives spiritual privileges 12:14; 13:15-16; 16:29
- Leads His people 13:21
- Abides with His people 13:21; 15:17 ["made" – ordained; arranged]; 17:7
- Overthrows enemies 14:27-28; 15:21; 17:16
- Hears the murmuring of His people 16:8
- Gives daily bread 16:15 and drink 17:6-7

Jehovah revealed His character to His people by His all-sufficiency in the face of their diverse needs.

Who Jehovah Is:

- God—Jehovah Elohim 3:18 (of the Hebrews); 5:3 (of the Hebrews); 6:7; 7:16 (of the Hebrews); 9:1 (of the Hebrews); 9:13 (of the Hebrews); 10:3 (of the Hebrews); 15:2; 16:12
- The Omniscient God 3:18 (4:31); 4:14 (4:27-30); 4:19; 4:21 (5:2-3); 7:3 (7:13, 22); 8:15 (4:21), 9:7 (4:21); 9:12 (4:21); 9:34-35 (4:21); 12:25 As the LORD had said; as the LORD had spoken
- The Self-Existent One 3:14
- The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob 3:15-16; 4:5
- The Creator of man 4:11
- The Greatest of all gods 7:17-19; 15:6; 18:11
- The Eternal God 3:15; 15:18
- The Righteous God 9:27 (Pharaoh says this)
- The Strength, Song, and Salvation of His people 15:2
- The Healer—Jehovah Rophi 15:26
- The Defender—Jehovah Nissi 17:15-16; 3:15-16; 14:4; 14:25-30; 17:15-16

How Men Can Respond to Jehovah:

- Worship Him (Sacrifice) 3:18; 5:3; 8:27; (Song) ch. 15
- Obey Him 7:6, 10, 20; 12:28, 50; 15:26; 16:34; 19:8
- Serve Him 10:8, 24, 26; 12:31
- Tempt Him 17:7
- Murmur Against Him 16:7, 12
- Resist Him 8:15
- Fear Him 9:20
- Disregard Him (Fear not) 9:21, 30
- Exalt Him (Humility) 10:3
- Remember Him 13:3, 8-9; 13:14; 17:14

D. Recipients of His Current Favor—*and Brought You to Myself*

Jehovah fulfilled His pledge to return the people to Mount Sinai to serve Him (Exodus 3:12). The expression nearly conjures up a picture that God had patiently waited at Sinai for Israel to arrive. Yet, God was always present with His people as they journeyed (Exodus 13:21). God is not simply referring to having brought Israel to a physical location, but to a place where He would reveal Himself even more clearly to them. It was here that they had the potential as a nation to enter into an advanced realization of the covenant relationship God had entered into with their father Abraham. It was here they could participate willingly in His continual presence. No more would His presence be occasional. He would live among them through His written Word and continual presence. Here they were invited to enjoy the privileges of relationship with Him (Deuteronomy 6:17-25).

Summary: God was ready to further reveal Himself in the giving of the Law to a people to whom He had already been revealing Himself. The giving of the Law would be a continuation and an advance of that ongoing revelation.

Conclusion: In discerning the historical setting in which the Law was originally given, we have tried to answer three questions: When were the Ten Commandments given? Where were they given? And, to whom were they given? The examination of these questions led us to the study of what Jehovah God was teaching this nation. Why is an investigation of the identity and nature of Jehovah important for the study of the Ten Commandments?

- 1) Because in the giving of the Ten Commandments our attention is immediately drawn to Jehovah (*I am the LORD your God, Exodus 20:2*).
- 2) Because it is the same Jehovah who had been revealing Himself verbally and illustratively through object lessons, who would now reveal Himself through the written Word.
- 3) Because Jesus will be identified as the Jehovah of the Old Testament (Compare the passages below to find helpful examples).

Old Testament Passage	New Testament Quotation
Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:3
Isaiah 43:11	Matthew 1:21
Isaiah 6:1	John 12:41
Isaiah 8:13	1 Peter 3:15
Psalms 68:18	Ephesians 4:7-8
Psalms 97:7	Hebrews 1:6
Psalms 102:25-27	Hebrews 1:10-12

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