



The Covenant at Mount Sinai

Exodus 19:1 - 31:18

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Structure of Exodus⁸

- I. Israel's liberation chs. 1—18
 - A. Israel's affliction (Israel is Egypt's possession) 1:1—2:14
 - B. Deliverance 2:15—18:27
 - A Midian: Moses' commission 2:15—4:28
 - B Enemy: Egypt defeated 4:29—15:21
 - C Water: bitter to sweet and 12 springs 15:22-27
 - D Food: manna and quail ch. 16**
 - C' Water: out of rock 17:1-7
 - B' Enemy: Amalek defeated 17:8-16
 - A' Midian: Moses accepts wisdom ch. 18
- II. Israel's adoption chs. 19—40
 - A Covenant delivered 19:1—24:11
 - B Tabernacle planned 24:12—27:21
 - C Priestly instructions chs. 28—30
 - D Craftsmen's direction 31:1-11
 - E Sabbath instructions 31:12-18
 - F Covenant broken ch. 32**
 - F' Covenant renewed chs. 33—34**
 - E' Sabbath reminded 35:1-3
 - D' Craftsmen and construction 35:4—38:31
 - C' Priests prepared ch. 39
 - B' Tabernacle completed 40:1-33
 - A' Covenant sealed 40:34-38

The Covenant Delivered

- A Narrative The Covenant Offered
 - B Laws (general): The Ten Commandments
 - C Narrative: The People Fear**
 - B' Laws: (specific): The Book of the Covenant
- A' Narrative: The Covenant Accepted

⁸ Constable, Thomas, Notes on Exodus: 2013 Edition (Sonic Light Publishing, 2013) pgs. 4-5.



“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” –Exodus 19:4-6

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Israel's Calling

In the Wilderness of Sinai, YHWH called Israel to special and unique role among the peoples of the earth. YHWH had made himself “known” to Israel (and Egypt for that matter) as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as Redeemer, as Warrior Deliverer and as Healer. Now, that Israel has “seen” who YHWH is through his mighty acts, YHWH will now make known to Israel who *they* are as his redeemed people. YHWH would do this through establishing a new relationship with the people through a covenanted relationship.

Their new relationship would have three components. First, it will involve a privileged status as *YHWH's treasured possession among all the peoples of the world*. Second, Israel was given a high calling as *a kingdom of priests*. That privileged status and high calling would demand a special character from Israel as *a holy nation*.

Mount Sinai

The Israelites camped at Mount Sinai for a year. It is more often in their camping rather than their traveling moments that Israel receives its most dramatic revelations from God. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10). The location of this mountain is no longer precisely known. The experiences of Mount Sinai are recorded and being awesome: massive storm clouds, flashes of lightning, the audible voice of the Lord, trumpet blasts. The reactions of the people were fear, trembling. The people were warned that the Mountain of the Lord would be Holy; they could not even touch it without perishing. “Do not let the priests and people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them. (19:24)

Moses Calling

Just as Israel has a unique status and calling with relationship to the world, Moses has a unique status and calling with relationship to the nation of Israel. He will be the one through whom God will mediate his covenant. He tells Moses in Exodus 19:9: “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.” The mighty act of God in speaking to Moses in a “thick cloud” in the hearing and sight of all of the people gives Moses divine authorization to be the mediator of the Covenant. This will be a role he will play personally until his death.



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Notice how it says, “that the people...may believe you forever.” The covenant offered through Moses would be an everlasting covenant for generations of Israelites long after he is gone. Therefore the Mount Sinai story is recorded here and in the Book of Deuteronomy as a perpetual reminder of the authority of the Mosaic Covenant and the Covenant mediator. The Apostle Peter will use a similar experience, the Mount of Transfiguration, to validate the apostles’ authority to be divine spokesmen and mediators of the New Covenant. (see 2 Peter 1:16-21)

The Narrative of Commissioned Communication:

A commissions **B** to transmit **A’s** message to **C**, and then follows a brief notice of **B’s** faithfully carrying out of his commission (or not). There are thirty-six examples of these types of stories in the Old Testament—twenty eight of which involve Moses. For an excellent example see Exodus 19:3-7.

“Their pervasiveness emphasizes two things. First, they focus on the initiative and importance of the sender, who in most cases is the LORD. Second, they focus on the strategic role of the “sendee”, who in most cases is Moses. More often than not, the Lord chooses to address his people intermediately rather than mediately.”⁹

Consider this story pattern with respect to Israel’s commission as a kingdom of priests, the entire nation of Israel served as a intermediary to the nations. Remember the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12: “Through you all the nations of the world will be blessed.” This role will become more specific as instructions for the temple are given.

Jesus is commissioned to mediate the new and better covenant. The disciples’ are commission to be apostles, and the church’s Great Commission to the World is being fulfilled in our day. Are the “sendees” delivering the message?

“In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

--2 Corinthians 5:19-20

⁹ Hamilton, Exodus, p. 300.



“They are not hints, or suggestions, or opinions, or ideas, but mandates.”

–Hamilton, p. 313.

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Ten Words

First, what is now often referred to as the “Ten Commandments” is never actually called that. Throughout the scriptures they are referred to as the “Ten Words” (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4). The word “Decalogue” comes from the Greek translation for 10 Words, ‘*deka – logoi*’. Regardless, they are commands. While various laws are repeated in other books, the Decalogue is the only one repeated in its entirety and order in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 though with slight differences.

This appears to be a direct address to the people of Israel. There is not commissioned communication sequence here in Exodus 20.

“You shall not...”

The prohibitive nature of the commandments make provide certain limits on what it means to be a “holy nation” and a “holy people”. As with all “you shall not” type rules the limit is clarified in order to avoid disastrous consequences for transgressing the boundary. The “you shall not” as opposed to “do not” carries the force of a “categorical prohibition of binding validity both for the present and the future.”¹⁰ The permanence of the Ten Words is signified by their inscription on tablets of stone.

While the laws are prohibitive (you shall not), Jesus sums up the laws in a more positive performative command (you shall). The first four commands are about loving God rightly, the last six are horizontal in nature. “To love God that passionately rules out other gods and rules out the desecration of God’s name and day. To love one’s fellow neighbor unconditionally rules out disrespect, stealing, any violence against another, bearing false witness, or coveting....The heart of obedience to God is love.”¹¹

Book of the Covenant

Exodus 24:3: “Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules.

¹⁰ Bright, Exodus, p. 187.

¹¹ Hamilton, Exodus, p. 321



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Exodus seems to make a distinction between the “Words” (Hebrew: debarim) and Laws, or rules (Hebrew: mispatim). Exodus 20:22-23:33 contains a large section of the “laws”.

Section Structure:

Altar Law as a prologue (20:22-26)

(Mostly) Casuistic Case law (21:1-22:16)

(Mostly) Apodictic Prohibitive law (22:17-23:19)

A divine sermonette as an epilogue (23:20-33)

Apodictic law: absolutely certain or necessarily true. Example: You shall not steal. (20:15) Casuistic law “structured as an if...then”. “If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”(22:1) The apodictic law in the Ten Commandments is not intended to be the criminal code, where as the casuistic laws do function that way.

There are many similarities to the Covenant Code in Exodus to other Near Eastern legal codes written in cuneiform, such as Hammurabi’s Code (written around 1772 BC). There are significant differences between these codes and the Exodus codes as well. In none of the ancient codes does any deity ever speak. While they may be commissioned from a god or gods, in contrast the voice of YHWH occurs at the beginning of the code (20:22-26) at its conclusion (23:20-33) and throughout (22:22-24, 27; 23:13, 15, 18). Also unlike these other cuneiform law codes, the Covenant Code is set within a historical narrative of redemption and deliverance, a characteristic more of ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties.

The Covenant Confirmed

The ratification of the covenant is made when the “words” and “rules” are read to all the people. The people respond with “every last word the Lord has spoken we will do.” (24:3, 7) The vows are made between God and his people and as a sign of the vows: Blood.

Jesus would institute the New Covenant with a sign, his own Blood: This is my Blood of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins.

And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

--Exodus 24:8



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Instructions for the Tabernacle

God's detailed instructions to Moses regarding the Tabernacle fall into two main sections:

The Tabernacle in Blueprint (25:1-27:19)

The Tabernacle in Operation (30:17-21)

Exodus devotes thirteen chapters to the tabernacle. That such a large portion of scripture would be devoted to one topic serves to highlight how important worship within the community of the nation and the presence of YHWH in the midst of his people. The wilderness tabernacle brought order to the worship of God. It also would provide a tangible sense of God presence in the midst of his people. This would offer tremendous assurance and stability for the people in the midst of the uncertainty and insecurity of the wilderness wanderings.

Future Victory

Matthew 23:1-25:46

The Gospel of Matthew

Discourse: Future Victory Matthew 23:1-25:46

The Seven Woes: 23:1-38

This portion of the discourse focuses on the Pharisees, their false teachings, their abuse of God's people, and their hypocrisies.

Olivet Discourse: 24:1-25:46

- Birth Pangs: 24:4-28
- Fullness of the Kingdom: 24:29-31
- Coming day of glory: 24:32-25:46

The Discourse of Future Victory is prophetic and apocalyptic. It speaks a word of judgment upon the Jewish leadership for their rejection of the Messiah. Jesus longed to gather Jerusalem "like a mother hen gathers her chicks" but she would not have it. The consequences would be a great destruction of the City and the temple complex. But the Son of Man would prevail and gather his righteous on the last day of glory with a great victory and triumph.