

## Moses Bible Study: The Ten Commandments

### Introductory Comments

1. Following God's dramatic victory over the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea, the Israelites sang, worshiped, and feasted as they celebrated their new-found freedom. Then they followed Moses as he began the journey back to Mount Sinai where he had first encountered God. They would take three months to cover the roughly 200-mile journey, and once there they would remain camped at Sinai for the next eleven months.
2. During those eleven months Moses would repeatedly climb Mount Sinai, and God would descend upon the mountaintop to meet him, often in dramatic fashion with smoke, thunder, and lightning. At these meetings God and Moses conversed "face-to-face, like two people talking to each other" (Exodus 33:11). Moses would then bring down from the mountain God's commands for the people, including the ordering of their religious and civil life.
3. Mount Sinai is the setting for Exodus 19-40, all of Leviticus, and Numbers 1-10. In these passages Mount Sinai is referred to in various ways, including Mount Horeb (though in a handful of places this name seems to refer to a separate mountain) and often simply "the mountain of God."
4. Centuries after the time of Moses, in a period of great adversity, the prophet Elijah returned to Mount Sinai to ascend as Moses had done, in the hope of meeting God. Today thousands of pilgrims hike Mount Sinai (though no one can say for sure that it's the same one as the biblical mountain) each year, also hoping to meet God.
5. In today's session we will explore the Ten Commandments, God's basic ordering of society. We will also examine how the commandments offer a vision for how we live, love, and relate to one another. Along with that, we will encounter challenges the commandments place on us in our contemporary culture. And finally, we'll reflect on how we might respond to God's word as revealed in the Ten Commandments.

Questions, then read Exodus 19:3b-6a; 20:1-17

### Questions for Discussion

1. **Why do you think the Israelites complained so much after God freed them from slavery? What did they learn? What do we learn from observing them?**

- 2. The commandments offer a vision of how we live, love, and relate to one another. How would you describe that vision?** *The Ten Commandments help us know life's God-given boundaries. Ignore them, and we cause or experience pain. Abide by them and we begin to live into God's will for humanity. They functioned in this way for the ancient Israelites, and they continue to function this way for us today. Far from stifling us, the Ten Commandments are meant to keep us from harm and from succumbing to thoughts and behaviors that enslave. They are essentially a "top-ten" list of the key temptations and tendencies with which humans wrestle.*
- 3. What are some aspects of our contemporary culture that pose a challenge to us as we seek to be faithful to the commandments? Are there certain commandments with which you struggle in particular?** *Many of us struggle to keep God first, or to have no other gods before God. We often worship the gods of status, sex, sports, power, shopping, politics, etc. We often struggle with coveting as well, the desire that leads to both stealing and adultery, especially where discontent is cultivated in our economy.*
- 4. What do the commandments have to say about the relationship (for the first four commandments) of God to the people, and about the relationship (for the remaining six commandments) of the people to their neighbors?** *The focus of the first four commandments has to do with God's liberation of humanity. Abide by these commandments and you will remain truly free. God frees, but humanity still must choose how to best live. So the latter six commandments cover the basics of how to exist in community without rending the fabric of that community.*
- 5. Read Exodus 24:3-8. This passage makes reference to the blood of the covenant, an integral part of the ritual in which the people promise to be obedient. What parallels can you see between this ritual in Exodus and the words of institution that Jesus says at the Lord's Supper (read Luke 22:14-20)?** *As Jesus takes the wine, he says, "This is my blood of the covenant." He himself would be the sacrifice, the ensign, and the means of a new covenant between God and all humanity. In God's covenant with Israel, it included the slaughter of an animal, the sprinkling of blood, and the sharing of a meal. This seems to be the backdrop for Jesus' words at the Last Supper and the Christian pattern of remembering and marking this covenant with bread and wine, a communing not only with fellow believers but with God. Each time believers share in this meal, they receive and renew Christ's covenant with them and they with him.*

*\*\*\*For next session, read Numbers 14:2-4; Exodus 18:13-27*