

**GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL (through Moses)**  
**Exodus 19–24; 31:12-18**

**Memory Verse:** *“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal. 5:14 ESV).*

**Background Helps:**

Exodus 19–24 records the establishment of a covenant with Israel through Moses. It is sometimes called the Mosaic covenant or the Law of Moses. In the New Testament this covenant is referred to as the “old” (2 Cor. 3:14) or “first” (Heb. 8:7) covenant in contrast to the “new” covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12). This covenant through Moses represents a fuller development of the earlier covenant that God established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now that the descendants of Abraham have multiplied and become a “great nation” (Gen. 12:3), God enters into a national covenant with them consisting of various laws and ceremonies. Since this covenant with Israel will occupy our attention for the next several months and since it will come up repeatedly during our study of “God’s Covenant Story,” we give considerable background to it in this forecast.

Specific reference to this covenant occurs for the first time in Exodus 19:4-6, where God is speaking to Israel through Moses: “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.” Notice how God has already dealt graciously with the nation (v. 4), how he now requires their obedience to the covenant (v. 5a), and how he promises to bless them as his chosen people (vv. 5b-6). (Note also how these promises are applied to Christians in 1 Peter 2:9.) The people respond to these words by pledging their complete obedience (Ex. 19:8).

In the rest of Exodus 19 and 20, God descends on Mt. Sinai with “shock and awe” and delivers the Ten Commandments to the nation. These Ten Commandments form the heart of the covenant and were inscribed by God himself on stone tablets (Ex. 24:12; 34:27-28). They consist of instructions from God to a people he has redeemed and made his own (Ex. 20:2), instructions that concern their relationship to God (20:3-11) and to their neighbors (20:12-17). In Exodus 21–23, God elaborates on these commandments, giving specific ways in which the Israelites were to love God and love their neighbors. These laws include various moral, civil, and ceremonial instructions. In Exodus 24 Moses wrote down all these words of the LORD (v. 4), a writing which is called “the Book of the Covenant” (v. 7).

In Exodus 24:1-11 there is a formal ceremony ratifying this covenant, a ceremony which involves animal sacrifices, the application of the blood to pillars representing God and the twelve tribes of Israel, the promise of the people to obey all the covenant instructions (twice!), and a communion meal involving select leaders of Israel with God himself. Moses’ words instituting the covenant (v. 8) seem to be echoed by our Lord at the Last Supper when he instituted the new covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

This week's readings also include Exodus 31:12-18 where the LORD cites the Sabbath commandment as a sign of the covenant that he is establishing between himself and Israel.

The apostle Paul makes clear that the covenant with Moses did not annul the previous covenant that God had made with Abraham (Gal. 3:15-18). "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). The law of Moses was given to reveal, provoke, and condemn sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7-11) and thereby lead people to Christ for salvation (Gal. 3:24).

Is the Law of Moses still applicable to our lives as Christians today? Different answers are given to this question. Some separate the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial commandments and argue that the moral law (mainly the Ten Commandments) continues to apply to believers today as a guide to their moral conduct (Matt. 5:17-30; Rom. 13:8-10). Others argue that the Law of Moses should be treated as a whole, and that Christians are no longer under that law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6; Gal. 5:18). We are, however, under the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). What is clear is that believers in both the Old and New Testaments were subject to the righteous standards of a holy God. The Ten Commandments were a fundamental revelation of those righteous standards to the nation Israel, and (with the possible exception of the Sabbath commandment, Col. 2:16) all of these commandments are reiterated in some form in the New Testament to Christians. (See, for example, Eph. 6:1-3.) Of course, we are only able to obey these commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-13; Gal. 5:16-26), who is God's gift to us under the new covenant.

### **Lesson Helps:**

A possible aim: My students will learn about God's establishment of a covenant with Israel through Moses, so that they will (1) be convicted of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation or (2) rely on the Holy Spirit to obey God's commands.

Use any of the material given in Background Helps above that you feel is suitable for your class. Be sure to include in your lesson the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 19-20 and the ratification of the covenant in Exodus 24:1-11. These passages give you an opportunity to use story elements in your lesson, especially important for children.

Go over the Ten Commandments in some detail. They are often summarized by the two great commandments in Matthew 22:34-40. (See also the memory verse, Gal. 5:14.) Use a chart with "stone tablets" as a visual aid. Use these commandments just as God intended: to reveal, provoke, and condemn sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7-11) and lead your students to faith in Christ (Gal. 3:24). We cannot keep these commandments in our own strength. We need Jesus to save us. And after we are saved by grace through faith, we need the Holy Spirit to enable us to fulfill these righteous standards (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16-26—use selected verses). Under the new covenant, God writes his law on our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16), giving us new desires to obey and new strength to obey through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### **Home Assignment:**

 Read Exodus 32-34.

 Memorize 1 John 5:21 ESV.