Two Mountaintop Experiences
Exodus 16-24
October 25, 2026

We took another break last week from the Israelites exit from Egypt to celebrate CBC Sunday and emphasize Jesus' Commission to Go, Make, and Baptize. I pray that you have been going and making this week and we are planning to baptize soon. Let me know if you or someone else might be interested. We rejoin the Israelites today on the east side of the Red Sea after watching Pharaoh and his massive army drown as the walls of water collapsed upon them. We also noted that the Bible tells us there were 600,000 men meaning that the whole group was about 2 million or so, which is roughly the population of Houston, TX or Paris, France. No small bunch. And today we're going to visit Mt. Sinai where God gave the 10 Commandments, which was the first time anyone ever down-loaded from a cloud onto a tablet. Actually, the first time, even that didn't happen. To learn what **did** happen at this mountaintop experience, please open your Bibles to Exodus 19.

After exiting the sea, the Israelites head east. And as they journey into the desert, they can't find any water until they come to Marah. Unfortunately, the water at Marah is bitter and they can't drink it and so they grumble against Moses. Which is where God sings Moses the first rendition of, "You better get used to it." Nevertheless, in His mercy and His grace, God tells Moses what to do. He shows him a certain piece of wood which he throws into the water and it became sweet which is another foreshadowing of how the wood of Jesus' cross makes our bitter sin sweet. But can you imagine the profit Culligan would make if they could get ahold of that kind of wood today?

At the end of Exodus 15, God makes some incredible promises. Look at vs 26 He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you." And He still is, Amen? Vs 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water." Once again, researchers have found evidence of an oasis with 12 springs in Saudi Arabia that would be at just the right distance from the Red Sea to meet all the qualifications to be Elim as described here.

In chapter 16, the people grumble again because their stomachs are rumbling. And God miraculously, graciously provides them with manna, which sounds a bit like frosted flakes lying all over the ground. They would eat this for the next 40 years. In Chapter 17, the Amalekites attack them and they face their first battle which God fights for them and

gives them victory while Aaron and Hur hold up Moses' arms on the mountain up above. Praise God for those who hold up the arms of Christian leaders today through prayer and encouragement!

In Chapter 18, Moses' father-in-law Jethro teaches him an important lesson in delegation that will be vital if he is going to last as a leader. It's still an important lesson for us today. Unfortunately, some followers don't always like it because they don't get the full attention of the leader who sometimes has other priorities God has given him. But Moses cannot do what God has called him to do if he is constantly wiping noses and moderating petty quarrels among 2 million people.

Then in Exodus 19, we come to another mountaintop experience in the Bible. Literally. The whole group arrives at the base of Mt. Sinai and Moses will meet with God just as God promised him as a sign back at the burning bush before all this excitement began. Now here they are. And to hear what happened there at the mountain, please stand as we read from Ex 19:3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 **you** will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." 7 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Say special. God tells the Israelites people they are His special people! I love His description of carrying them on eagles' wings. Can you that picture? Carefully, powerfully, majestically, rescuing them from Egypt and flying them to this mountain to Himself! And then, a tremendous promise! If they obey Him fully, if they keep His **covenant**, they will be God's treasured possession! Talk about special! **God's** own people! They will **all** become priests and their whole nation will be holy! Set apart. Sacred and dedicated to God! Leading all the other nations in worship and obedience to the Great I AM! What a high and holy privilege! What a unique honor! To be Yahweh's own people! But they have to agree to the Covenant, which we'll get to in a bit.

So Moses hurries down the mountain, eager to tell the people that the Almighty God of the Universe has chosen **them** to be His own! Wait till you hear this! Then he tells them and they respond, "We'll do it! Everything God says, we'll do it!" Moses beats it back up the mountain. How old is he now? Yes, up and down the mountain at 80. When he gives the answer to God, vs 10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes 11 and be ready

by the third day, because on that day the Lord **will come down** on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain."

Whoa! What's all this? Yahweh is holy! They are not to rush into the presence of the Great I Am without recognizing who He is and how unholy they are. They are to prepare themselves and keep their distance until God says it's time. Too often, I fear, we rush into God's presence without recognizing His holiness and our sinfulness. Without taking time to confess our sins and ask for His mercy and grace. Without realizing He is the Almighty King of all, eternal God, whose gaze alone will destroy us eternally, except for His mercy.

Yes, God does love us. He has sent Jesus to pay for our sin and to allow us to enter His presence, but I fear we take this for granted and fail to fear Him as we should. The **only** reason we can approach God with any prayer at all ever is because of His mercy and grace through Jesus. We have **nothing** good to offer Him. We deserve **nothing** from Him but hell. And so as we come before Him in private worship each day, in corporate worship each Sunday, let us remind ourselves of this scene here at Mt. Sinai. And realize what a high privilege we have. And come before God in humility and repentance. To recognize that when we worship Him, He is, as we sang, Almighty God! There is none like Him! Let us think about what we sing and let us mean what we sing worshipping the Almighty God in spirit and in truth. And prepare our hearts to worship Him every time we approach Him! For He is Lord above the heavens, Lord in all the earth
Lord of all the angels, Worthy to be served. Let us bow down before Him.

Vs 14 After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. 15 Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations." 16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. 20 The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain.

Imagine you were there! Imagine watching as the mountain shakes with a mighty earthquake. The thunder roars and the lightning flashes! And the trumpets getting louder and louder! There is fire up yonder with lots of thick smoke billowing up to the sky. It

doesn't tell us, but I'm guessing by now that all of them are on their faces before God! Everyone trembled! Little children and grown men! Teenagers and old women. Falling on their faces before God! And in the midst of it all, God descends from His heavenly sanctuary to meet with a human being on top of Mt. Sinai. A mountaintop experience in all of human history.

After Moses goes back down to deliver a final warning for the people to keep their distance, God then spoke the Ten Commandments of His Holy Covenant. Later, He would write them with His finger on stone tablets which Moses would break. But first, it appears from this passage that He spoke them in the hearing of all the people gathered there at base of Mt. Sinai.

What does it look like to be God's special people? It looks like the 10 commandments. It looks like them living differently than all the other people on earth. It did then and it still does today! It looks like not having any other gods or things that we look to for our protection, happiness or healing. It looks like not making any images to worship or to pray to. It looks like not taking His holy name in vain or using it to make false promises or to curse others. Not to use His name for personal or political gain. It looks like honoring one day of every week as holy, setting it aside to worship and glorify God, not to do whatever WE want, but to do what God wants. To worship Him with other believers. To rest from our labors and our running. To stop, to be still and to know that He is God.

God's people also honor their parents and don't murder anyone. They will value all human life and the sanctity of marriage by keeping the marriage bed holy by not committing adultery. That's different than the way all other people on earth acted and behaved, both then **and** now. God's people won't steal or even covet anything of anyone else's. And they won't lie, they won't give false testimony. And there you have it. God's will for God's people in 10 basic laws. Are you up for that? Do you **still** want to be God's people? God's priests? God's chosen nation? If so, **this** is how you are to behave. This is God's covenant!

Ex 20:18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

This event was so traumatic that the Israelites became very fearful of God, which Moses said was a very good thing! Their fear of God would keep them from sinning and it should keep us from sinning too! God's not joking. He's not playing games. His commands are real commands and His laws are real laws and yes, He does expect those who are called by His name to honor them and keep them! All of them! It's not multiple

choice. Choose 7 of the 10. No! But Moses did say, don't be afraid. Don't live in fear, but in holy reverence. Remember how mighty and awesome God is! We are to approach Him with true and reverent awe, amazement, and humility and not rush carelessly or thoughtlessly or wickedly into His presence. But after God spoke, the people didn't want to hear from God directly anymore. They wanted Moses to be their intermediary, their go-between.

In the following verses, God goes into more detail about how His holy nation of priests is to live. He fleshes out various aspects of His law, His will, so they will know what He expects from them. He rescued them and freed them from slavery and now He is giving them rules for **their** own good and for His own glory. These are the stipulations of the covenant with God to be His own people. A covenant is a formal binding agreement or a promise between two or more parties, in this case between God and the Israelites. How will they respond? Will they agree to the covenant? After God finishes detailing it, Ex 24:7 Then he (Moses) took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We **will do** everything the Lord has said; we will obey." 8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

"Everything the Lord has said we will do, they said. Yes, they said. We affirm the covenant, the love agreement The Great I Am is making with us." To seal or sign the covenant, sacrifices were made, blood was shed, and Moses sprinkled some of that blood of the covenant on all the people. God would now be **their** God, they would now be **His** people. They would fall woefully short of keeping His covenant, even in a month or so when they will worship the golden calf, but God held fast to them in love anyway. He **did** protect them, love them, and care for them. There were times they faced judgement for failing to keep their end of the Covenant but God always kept His. For He is the God of the Covenant! He is a faithful God and He keeps His covenant for a thousand generations!

A covenant is sometimes called a testament and this was the **Old** Testament here at Mt. Sinai, a mountaintop experience for sure. But the Old Covenant would be superseded on an even higher mountaintop of Mt. Calvary when Jesus poured out His blood to cleanse us from all sin and empower us to live holy lives with the power of His Spirit. The night before, Jesus said, "This cup is the **new** covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." And Heb 8:13 tells us, "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete." We no longer live under the old covenant, but to properly understand the new, we have to understand the Old. Which is why we visited Sinai today.

To all who are Christians, 1 Peter 2:9-10 declares, "… you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but

now you have received mercy." Praise God we can be participants in God's New Covenant. What a holy privilege to be God's own holy people today! Living under the authority and protection of Jesus, who Heb 12:24 says is the mediator of this new covenant. Jesus is now our go-between, our intermediary. Like Moses, only better. For unlike Moses, who was sinful and flawed, Jesus came to us from God, as God. He came to keep the 10 commandments for us and to show us how to keep them ourselves. But let us never mistake His mercy for permission to sin. Let us not take His grace to mean that He no longer cares how we behave. He does! Which is why in the **Covenant** Brethren Church, we covenant together with each other and with God to be His holy priests in our world today together with all true believers everywhere. Covenanting, agreeing, with the Holy Spirit's help to live into and keep the Statement of Faith and to live as true followers of Jesus. We have been sprinkled by the blood of the New Covenant and drink from its cup every time we celebrate Holy Communion. As He is the God of the Covenant, may we be His people of the Covenant, keeping His commandments and doing His will and serving as Holy Priests before Him. Let's ask for His help to do that right now.