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**Lesson 6 – The Mosaic Covenant**

***Note to teachers:*** *This lesson primarily covers 5 chapters, obviously too much to read. My suggestion would be that you take time to read through chapters 19 and 24 when you come to them in the lesson, and summarize the rest of the material. One possibility would be to read through the chapters as you study the lesson, and if there are certain verses you think would be helpful for the group to read to get the big picture, writing those verses in the margin.*

God made deals with several individuals: Noah, Abraham, David. But at least once, he also made a deal with an entire nation. This covenant is called the Mosaic covenant, even though it wasn’t made with Moses. Sometimes it is called the Sinai or Sinaitic covenant, and it is sometimes called the Old Covenant. All of these are terms describing the deal that God made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt, a deal we will be looking at in greater detail today.

1. **God and Israel enter a covenant at Sinai (Exodus 19-24).**

After Israel left Egypt God brought them to Mount Sinai and he entered a covenant with them. The main core of this covenant is found in the middle of the book of Exodus, although it is expanded and reiterated throughout the rest of the Pentateuch.

1. **The preparation for the covenant (Exodus 19).**

The story of the covenant with Israel really begins back in Egypt, when God remembered the covenants he had made with Israel’s ancestors (Exodus 2:23-25). Things looked pretty dark for Israel at the time, but behind the scenes God was remembering his covenant that he had made. So he prepared and sent Moses and the Hebrews were brought out of the land of Egypt.

***What does this teach us about God’s work in our lives? In what ways have you seen God at work behind the scenes to fulfill his promises to you?***

Once Israel came out of the land, God brought them to Mount Sinai and prepared them to enter a covenant with him. God begins with precious promises to his people of the incredible gift they were being given (19:3-6). Moses then sits down with the elders and lets them know that they are going to meet with God, and they had better prepare for it (19:7-15)! When God does show up, he shows up with a display of power and glory that requires the people to maintain their distance (19:16-25). The people are rightly terrified by this presence, and after God gives the ten commandments request that Moses go and meet with God rather than all the people (20:18-21).

***How does Hebrews 12:18-29 build on this theme? In what ways do we have a similar response?***

***How does this picture of God fit with most of American Christianity’s view of God? Why is that? How can this passage help us get a better view of God?***

1. **The content of the covenant (Exodus 20-23)**

God gives Israel the terms of a relationship with him. In Exodus 20:1-2, he reminds Israel of what he has already done for them, and tells them how they should then live. In other words, these commands aren’t about earning a relationship with God, they are about how Israel should live before God since they have a relationship with him.

***What happens if we misunderstand this important truth? How does this truth parallel the New Testament?***

God begins by giving the entire people the 10 commandments personally. Then Moses goes up to speak with God and is given the rest of the rules of the covenant. These commands cover a wide array of topics, including both religious commands but also laws that require that people treat one another fairly. These laws require honesty, integrity, compassion, and spiritual purity of the people of Israel. God saw all of life as being unified, and to be in a relationship with God you had to interact properly, not just with him, but with your neighbor as well.

God concludes this section (23:20-33) by promising reward for blessing and punishment for disobedience. This covenant was never unconditional – Israel had to do their part for God to do his part.

***Scan these verses. What are the promises God makes? What are the warnings he gives?***

1. **The ratification of the covenant (24)**

Moses then goes down to the people and tells them everything that God has said. Their response? “All the words which the LORD hath said we will do” (24:3). Moses initiates the covenant with a blood sacrifice (24:4-8) and has a special fellowship meal with the major leaders of Israel and God (24:9-11). This meal represented the fellowship that the entire nation of Israel enjoyed with God as a result of the covenant.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. **God reiterates the covenant (Deuteronomy).**

When we get to Deuteronomy we are looking at Israel 40 years after the covenant was made. Most of the people listening to Moses speak weren’t even alive during the initial covenant ceremony. As Moses prepares to send the next generation of Israelites into the promised land, he reminds them one last time about the covenant they had with God. This is contained for us in the book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy literally means “second” [*deuteros*] “law” [*nomos*]).

1. **God calls his people to love (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)**

As Moses instructs the people about the need to keep God’s law, he prefaces his remarks by giving the core behind all the commands: a love for God. This passage is cited by Christ as being the most important command (Matthew 22:36-37). The Jewish people would cite this passage often as a reminder of their primary duty before God.

***Why is it important that this command leads off this second giving of the law? Why do people often fail to think of this verse in connection with the Old Testament?***

1. **God calls his people to obedience (Deuteronomy 12-26).**

In the following chapters, God gives his people very specific commands he wanted them to obey. As before, these commands included commands about how to worship and how not to worship, how to treat other people, and how to remain ritually pure before God.

1. **God gives warnings and blessings (27-28)**

Again, Moses reiterates that following God will result in blessing; disobeying him will result in judgment.

***Consider having the group scan the blessings and curses of these two chapters and summarize several of each. How do we see these developed in the history of the Old Testament?***

1. **Israel breaks the covenant.**

Sadly, Israel broke the covenant. They failed repeatedly to fulfill their end of the bargain by breaking all the 10 commandments throughout their history. The rest of the Old Testament is the sad story of Israel’s repeated and ridiculous rebellion.

1. **The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)**

It didn’t take Israel long before they rebelled against God. A little over a month after Moses goes up to get the blueprints for the tabernacle Israel collectively breaks the 10 commandments.

***What was it that caused Israel to abandon God so quickly (Exodus 32:1)? How can we fall prey to the same weaknesses in our walk with God?***

1. **The Judges**

During the period of the judges, Israel fell into a constant loop of rebelling against God, serving idols, facing his wrath, repenting, being rescued, only to go back to following idols. This pattern continues over and over, and leads to the observation by the author of the book “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:5). Israel needed someone to lead them in the ways of righteousness, which leads us to…

1. **The Kings**

Kings were supposed to be covenant enforcers. They were supposed to lead people in the ways of God’s law. In fact, they were all supposed to copy by hand the Pentateuch and study it regularly (Deuteronomy 17:18-19)! Unfortunately, Solomon followed other gods, and after him the kingdom split and eventually both the North and the South were exiled because of repeated idolatry, among other crimes.

 ***What do we learn that we can personally apply as we look at the failures of Israel?***

1. **God promises a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).**

If the Mosaic covenant was conditional, and if Israel broke it over and over, then will God every just fully quit? The answer is yes… and no. God finally cancelled the Mosaic covenant. He sent his people into exile and left the temple. But although he gave up on the covenant, he didn’t give up on Israel. In fact, he promised that there was coming a day when he would make a new covenant, a better covenant. The Mosaic Covenant (or Old Covenant/Testament) was defective because it relied on fallible people to fulfill their obligations, and if there’s one thing the Old Testament teaches us, it’s that we can’t do it. So God fixes the problem by promising a new, far better program. We will examine this covenant more fully next week in our final lesson.

As we come to the end of the Old Testament we are left with a pretty bleak picture. Some big promises have been made, but a lot of faith is needed to see how those promises could come to pass. We’ve seen God’s faithfulness and human failure, and by the time we finish Malachi it seems like human failure will have the last word. Every time God tries to move his plan forward even the best people fail him. As a result, things could hardly be worse. God’s Spirit has left the temple. He’s promised that Abraham’s descendants would become a blessing to all the nations, but right now they’re not even a nation themselves. David was promised an eternal dynasty, but Israel is a state, not a nation, and has governors, not kings. The Old Covenant has been cancelled, but a New Covenant is coming, eventually. And this is where the story ends. God’s people are left waiting to see how in the world God could come through and do all the things he said he would. And wait they did. For four hundred years. Until one day a baby was born in Bethlehem…

1. This is a difficult passage to cover quickly in this lesson, and for that reason it might be best to avoid going over it. Commentaries are divided on what exactly is going on here, but let me leave the teachers with 3 thoughts/observations. 1) When Moses is denied a direct look at God later, he specifically asks to see God’s “glory” and is told no one can see God’s “face” and live (33:18, 20). Nothing here states that God’s full glory and face were seen. 2) In fact, the emphasis of this passage is on the ground, not on God himself, hinting that perhaps these elders, priests, and Moses didn’t look any further up [side note: Modern readers aren’t the only ones troubled by this passage. In the Greek translation of the Bible in Christ’s times the translators translated this phrase “they saw the place where God stood” instead of “they saw God.” The Hebrew clearly reads “They saw God”] 3) We have to be honest with what the words of this passage clearly say. We can’t just change the text because we find it difficult. While not seeing the full, unhindered glory of God, these men were given a vision of God so impressive that the only thing they can describe later is the floor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)