

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(Galatians 3:24)

Purpose: To teach the true purpose of the Ten Commandments.

The mountain of Sinai will always be remembered by the people of Israel for a very important reason. It was here they heard the mighty voice of God...speaking the Ten Commandments!

The nation of Israel had been chosen by God to be a kind of messenger between Himself and the world. And now, under the great leader Moses, God was taking them from Egypt to the beautiful land of Canaan.

But the Israelites weren't ready for the Promised Land. Like other people of the world they had sinful hearts. They always wanted their own way, and when they couldn't have it they were rebellious and disobedient.

If these were to be known as God's chosen people, they must learn to live in a way that would honor Him, and be obedient to His laws.

And if Canaan was to be a place of peace and happiness for God's people, then the law of the land must be His law, based on His holiness, truth and justice.

So at the Lord's bidding, the Israelites made camp on the broad plain at the foot of Mount Sinai.

And Moses, their leader, went up the mountain alone to hear what God had to say to His people.

Suddenly, Moses heard the voice of God speaking to him.

As Moses listened, God said, *"This is what you shall say to the people of Israel. 'You have seen with your own eyes how I brought you out of the land of Egypt as though you were on eagles' wings, and what I did to the Egyptians when they tried to take you back into slavery.'*

"Now, if you will obey my voice and do as I command, you shall be a special people unto me, a holy nation."

When Moses came back and told the Israelites what God had said, the people promised, *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do."*

Then Moses told them God had said that in three days He would come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people, and they would hear Him speak. They must get ready for this tremendous event. So the people began to prepare.

First they fenced in all the cattle, for God had warned that even the animals would die if they touched the holy mountain.

Then they washed all their clothes to get them free from the dust and dirt of the desert.

Finally they scrubbed and washed themselves as clean as they could possibly get, so they would be ready to meet with the Lord. Then came the third day!

Early in the morning a thick, black cloud appeared on the mountain.

The people trembled with terror for they knew the moment had come to meet with God!

Fearfully they followed as Moses led them outside the camp. And they stopped at the foot of Mount Sinai.

What a sight was before them! The mountain smoked like a great furnace. It quaked and trembled in a frightening way, for the Lord descended upon it in fire!

The people waited in fear and wonder.

Then out of the smoke and fire God spoke! And the word were plain and clear.

“I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.

“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.

“Honor thy father and thy mother.

“Thou shalt not kill.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.

“Thou shalt not steal.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness.

“Thou shalt not covet.”

As they heard God’s voice and the words He spoke, the people began to act strangely.

Would they be destroyed this moment by the fire and thunder, and the smoking, quaking mountain?

The sin in their hearts made them afraid of God, so the people moved back, far away from the mountain.

The chief men came to Moses and said, *“If we hear God speak again we will surely die. You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, or we will die.”*

And the people promised again, *“All the words that the Lord has said we will do.”*

So Moses went alone into the thick darkness to tell the Lord what the people had promised. And God said to Moses:

“The people have spoken well. Oh that their hearts were like their words, that they would fear me and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children forever.”

So Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, while God talked with him, giving all His laws and judgments.

Then in order to confirm the words He had spoken to the people, God gave to Moses tablets of stone on which God himself had written the Ten Commandments. But while Moses was up on the mountain...

...the people down below quickly forgot what they had promised. Just a few days after they had heard the mighty voice of God and seen His glory and power, they turned again to their wicked and deceitful ways.

They even made an idol and began to worship the lifeless image of a golden calf saying, *"This is the god who brought us out of Egypt."* Already they had broken the first commandment which they had so recently received: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*

Hearing the law from almighty God himself did not change these people. They were still sinful and rebellious. The purpose of the law was to show the people God's holiness and reveal to them His standard of righteousness. The law itself could not change their hearts.

When we look at the law, we realize how holy God is and how sinful we are. And in order to be made acceptable to God we must turn in faith to His Son who paid the penalty for our breaking of the law. This is the real purpose of the Ten Commandments, for the Bible says,

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24)