

LESSON 7



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MAY 13 2023

the covenant of love

Scripture Story: Exodus 19–24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 27, 29, and 32.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The Israelites were led from a life of bondage to a place where they could begin a new life with new possibilities. But the idea of being children of God was new too. The religion of Egypt had so corrupted the children of Abraham that they had no idea what it meant to serve the God called Jehovah. And much like an awkward introduction between two strangers, the relationship between God and Israel began with the wonder of what God was like and what He wanted from them.

The very foundation of God's relationship with Israel was based on the reality of their deliverance. "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4, NIV). Free from the oppression of slavery and the influence of idolatry, the Israelites were chosen to enter into another chapter of humanity's covenant with God (a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties)—to be a people with a purpose for the world. Ellen White claims that "God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305).

In the same way that every healthy relationship has rules that shape the way two parties think and behave toward each other, so God and Israel entered a sacred covenant together. The Ten Commandments were a specific, timeless series of precepts clearly outlining

the legally binding relationship contracted with God, which also affected their relationship to one another. The underlying principle of all the commandments was the plea to love God with all their "heart, soul, and strength." Such a passionate approach to thinking and believing could potentially urge a self-absorbed, ignorant world back to their Creator. This lesson is the story of how those laws were communicated and their intent.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Think about the nature and purpose of God's law. (*Know*)
- Sense God's earnest desire for an intimate walk with people in the commands He gives. (*Feel*)
- Choose to live in harmony with the God who redeemed them from sin. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

The Law of God, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 19

"The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Savior. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian

character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness” (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

- What did you rank first, second, and third and why?
- What command, if earnestly kept by people, would make the most difference in the world and why?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Kenneth James managed a large village of apartments. The massive apartment complex had tremendous need for upkeep, care, and repair, so Ken would hire a top-notch maintenance crew for whom he had high expectations. Ken had three rules for the maintenance team:

Always be kind and respectful to the tenants—no matter what the circumstances may be.

Always be willing to do the little things to make the tenants feel comfortable and cared for.

Always promise less and deliver more.

When a sink leaked or a door needed to be fixed, Ken’s crew faithfully obeyed the simple rules that were communicated to all employees. Sometimes a team member would compromise one of the three rules, and Ken would take them to his office and show them pictures of himself and the people who lived in the complex. He would remind them: “These people are why we are here. I am good friends with many of them and hope to be with the rest. If you want to work here, you need to be kind, you need to do the little things, and you need to deliver more than you promise.”

Over time the maintenance team began to see the impact of such a work ethic and started to take great

pride in the whole system. Working for Ken and for the tenants that lived in the apartment village became a joy, and the “rules” became a joy, and ultimately second nature.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Is it possible that getting the law of God into your heart as it states in Hebrews 10:16 and Jeremiah 31:33 occurs through a similar process to the one outlined in the illustration above?

What came first, the pride, the joy, or the obedience?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Exodus 24:10 says Moses and others “and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (NKJV). Hebrew tradition has it that the Ten Commandments were cut from the pavement of sapphire. Compare this verse with Numbers 15:38-40. Why do you think the tassels were supposed to have a blue cord? What color is a sapphire?
- A covenant is a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties. Where in this story do you see some elements of a covenant? Check the *Punch Lines* as well.
- Why do you think Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights?
- Why do you think this story of God giving His law to people is significant today?
- When the children of Israel were given God’s law to live by, they had already been delivered from Egypt and liberated from their oppressors. How would you describe the relationship between salvation (being redeemed by God’s grace) and obeying His law?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Seeing the Face of God in the List

The law of God is often referred to as the “transcript of God’s character.” If you think of the character traits of people you know, you can also think of rules they live by. In many ways, God’s law, even in the form of a list of things to do and not do, outlines and sketches out what God is like.

Why is it so important that we “shall not murder”? Because God is the source of life, and He has deemed that life is sacred. We “don’t lie” because God is truth. We are to remain faithful to our spouse because God is pure and faithful—always. In every command there is an enduring quality that conveys something about who God is. Examine the Ten Commandments in groups or pairs and look not only at what God wants you to do or not do but also at what each command says about God’s character.

The Blue Stone, the Throne, and Christ

Hebrew tradition has it that the law of God was cut out as a solid piece of sapphire stone from a specific place on Mount Sinai. The Bible seems to support it as well:

In Exodus 24:10 the Bible says that Moses and others “and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (NKJV). When the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of the throne of God, there is a significant resemblance to what Moses saw on the mountain: “And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Study Tools: Concordance

Teaching young people to use a concordance to research a topic, word, or theme is an example of higher-order thinking. A concordance is an index of every word used in Scripture and where it is found.

For example, if your young people want to continue this week’s study further, they can look up in a concordance the word “throne,” and they will find that “throne” is used at least 150 times in the Bible and where they can find each reference. Some passages might be irrelevant, but others might be illuminating. It is very exciting to see them make discoveries and search on their own initiative. When we empower them with the tools of study, they can be “thinkers and not mere reflectors.”

of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it” (Ezekiel 1:26, NKJV). It may be that the law of God was cut from the very throne of God. Furthermore, the Israelites were commanded to remember to keep God’s law by wearing tassels on the hem of their garments with a blue cord woven in (Numbers 15:38-40).

Other passages identify a specific rock on the

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

mountain that when struck provided water for the children of Israel (Exodus 17:6). In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul states that the Israelites “all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (verses 3, 4, NIV). Even the scene of God’s throne in heaven in the last chapter of the Bible makes a connection between God’s eternal throne and water flowing from it: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1, NIV). There is an interesting connection between God’s law, His throne, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have each student answer the following question on their own: If everyone in the world would fully keep one of the Ten Commandments, which command would make the greatest impact on the welfare of humanity? Have them write on a piece of paper the one they think would most change the world, and then have them pair up and compare notes. Ask the class to share which command they chose and why.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

In Egypt, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had forgotten who God was and who they were as well. When God delivered His children from their oppressors, they didn’t know who He was. The law was given to them both in a general way—Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength—and in the more specific “dos and don’ts” of the Ten Commandments. These commandments were not given in order for them to earn their salvation but were given to enable them to more fully understand the One who saved them.

Every enduring relationship is framed by rules. God’s law was a portrait of His goodness and fairness. And in keeping God’s commands we get to know Him more fully. God’s command to be faithful, honest, selfless, content, respectful, and connected to God as Creator will only enrich your understanding of God. It was God’s plan that as people experienced these qualities in their own life, others in the world who did not know God would be drawn by the character of the children who lived in harmony with His law. What might happen in your world if you were to allow God’s law to be written in your heart and in your life?



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 27, 29, and 32.



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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Exodus 19–24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 27, 29, and 32.

the covenant of love



Photo by Jennifer and Company

flashlight

“The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellow man; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305).

keytext

“This is what you are to . . . tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.’ ”

(Exodus 19:3-5, NIV)

what do you think?

Rank the following Ten Commandments in order of the way they impact your daily life (1 being the most and 10 being the least).

- ___ "You shall have no other gods before me."
- ___ "You shall not make for yourself an image. . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them."
- ___ "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God."
- ___ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."
- ___ "Honor your father and your mother."
- ___ "You shall not murder."
- ___ "You shall not commit adultery."
- ___ "You shall not steal."
- ___ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."
- ___ "You shall not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:3-17, NIV).

did you know?

When Moses and the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites, the Israelites were winning as long as Moses held his hands up. The Hebrew "*ki yad al kas yah*" literally says, "a hand was on the throne of the Lord." Even though Moses had assistance (Aaron and Hur, and a couple of stones), his experience was described in the New Testament in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (NIV).

INTO THE STORY

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.'

"When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.' Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

"He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. . . . Then he 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.'

"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.'

"Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.'

"Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, 'Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.'

"When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

(Exodus 24:1-5, 7-17, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Circle the different characters mentioned in this story.

Read the story and underline three to five key points in the story that are interesting to you.

What part of this story do you wish you could see? Why?

What are some questions you have about this story that don't seem to be answered in the text?

A covenant is a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties. Where in this story do you see some elements of a covenant? Check the *Punch Lines* and *Key Text* as well.

Why do you think this story of God giving His law to people is significant today?

When the children of Israel were given God's law to live by, they had already been delivered from Egypt and liberated from their oppressors. How would you describe the relationship between salvation (being redeemed by God's grace) and obeying His law?

punch lines

“**Teacher, which is the greatest** commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments’ ” (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV).

“**For he remembered** his holy promise given to his servant Abraham. He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy . . . that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws” (Psalm 105:42, 43, 45, NIV).

“**This is the covenant** I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Hebrews 10:16, NIV; see Jeremiah 31:33).

“**Hear me, you who know** what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults. . . . But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations” (Isaiah 51:7, 8, NIV).

further insight

“**With a loving spirit we may perform life's humblest duties. . . . If the love of God is in the heart, it will be manifested in the life. The sweet savor of Christ will surround us, and our influence will elevate and bless.**”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 82.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Isaiah 51:7, 8.

Answer the *What Do You Think?* section of this lesson and consider how your choice is relevant to your life. Some might suggest that rules written 4,000 years ago might not have a place in the modern world today. Rewrite in your own words the passage from today's reading. What phrases or parts of the passage speak to you today?

Sunday

Read Exodus 34:6.

Read the *Into the Story* passage. Respond to the study questions provided. As you examine the way God gave His law to Israel, reflect on the parts of the story that might be new to you. Have you thought about why the Ten Commandments would be necessary for the children of Israel? What do you think is the basic value in having specific rules, and why do you think people might recoil at being commanded to obey?

Although the Ten Commandments may seem like "dos and don't's," how does the law of God portray what He is like?

Monday

Read Exodus 19:3-5.

Consider the message of the *Key Text*. It is important to note that God first saved the Israelites from bondage and then offered the terms of His covenant with them (a legally

binding relationship contracted between two parties) in the form of the Ten Commandments.

How would you explain to someone three to five years younger than you the relationship between being obedient to God's law and embracing the salvation that comes to all by faith? What creative ways could you use to describe grace and obedience? What message do you think is easier to convey to a child—the notion that God's grace is free, or the challenge to obey God faithfully with your behavior?

Tuesday

Read Matthew 25:36-40.

In the *Flashlight* section Ellen White extends the purpose of the commandments. She says that they are not only for those who believe in God, but also for those who may come to receive Him.

Read the quote and think of someone you know who models the character of God to you. In what specific ways do you see the marks of God in their life? What are some of the traits that endear them to others? When you consider that the bottom-line principle in God's law is "love," how will "loving people" be a testimony to unbelievers and seekers of God?

Can you think of someone you know who has come to know God because of the loving kindness of someone else? Write that person a note or send them a message thanking them for their witness of love.

Wednesday

Read the passages listed in the *Punch Lines* and *Key Text* sections and underline

or identify the phrase in each verse that captures your attention the most. Why? Continue to reflect on the passages about God's law this week and ask God to give you an opportunity to share your insights with someone else.

Thursday

Read Psalm 105:42-45.

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 27, you will find a rich commentary on the law of God and the purpose He had for His people to bless the world. As you read, highlight the parts of your reading that convey a new insight to you.

Friday

Read Hebrews 10:16 and Jeremiah 31:33.

It's not difficult to be overwhelmed by a list of rules to obey and miss the ultimate purpose for their existence. It seems clear that God gave the law to orient His children toward the abundant life of loving relationships and to detour them away from disappointment and destruction. But it is not enough to simply hear and know what God proclaims as the way to a fruitful life; we must find a way to integrate those principles into our lives. How you might put God's laws in your heart and mind?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 27, 29, and 32.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URLhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.