

## 7. Covenant at Sinai (2Q 2021—The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant)

**Biblical Material:** Deut. 1:29–31; Hos. 11:1; Rev. 5:9; Deut. 29:10-13; Exod. 19:4-6; Rom. 6:1, 2; Rev. 14:12; Rom. 10:3.

### Quotes

- The road to the promised land runs past Sinai. The moral law may exist to be transcended: but there is no transcending it for those who have not first admitted its claims up on them, and then tried with all their strength to meet that claim, and fairly and squarely faced the fact of their failure. *C. S. Lewis*
- God may thunder His commands from Mount Sinai and men may fear, yet remain at heart exactly as they were before. But let a man once see his God down in the arena as a Man-suffering, tempted, sweating, and agonized, finally dying a criminal’s death-and he is a hard man indeed who is untouched. *John Bertram Phillips*
- Sorrow is Mount Sinai. If one will, one may go up and talk with God, face to face. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- No authentic Messiah would inspire a religion that ended up calling upon the Jews to reject the manifest meaning of Sinai. It is really that simple. *David Klinghoffer*
- The Mosaic Law is one of six covenants that God made with Israel, all six of which have five concepts in common: their authority resides in Him, they all came at a time of crisis, no covenant nullifies a previous one, salvation from sin is not obtained by keeping any covenant, and significant negative events followed the instigation of each. *William D. Barrick*

### Questions

How does the experience of Israel at Mount Sinai reveal the dangers of relying on the provisions of a covenant? Why did God choose this method of dealing with his people? What do we learn from the story of the giving of the Ten Commandments and the pledge of obedience by the Israelites? How can we best explain the real relationship that God wants when it does seem to come down to legal observance of the covenant?

### Bible summary

In Deut. 1:29–31 God promised the Israelites he would fight for them and carry them to the promised land. “I loved Israel when he was a child. He’s my son I called out of Egypt.” Hos. 11:1 FBV. Rev. 5:9 is the song of worship to the Lamb. Deut. 29:10-13 is the covenant given in Moab. Exod. 19:4-6 the the beginning of the covenant given at Sinai including the Ten Commandments. “So what’s our response? Should we continue to sin so we can have even more grace? Of course not! Since we’re already dead to sin, how can we continue to live in sin?” Rom. 6:1, 2 FBV. Rev. 14:12 is the reaction of the saints to the third angel’s message. The sad response to the covenant was as Paul described: “They don’t understand how God makes us right with him, and they try to make themselves right. They refuse to accept God’s way of making people right.” Rom. 10:3 FBV.

### Comment

As the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, “everyone... shook with fear” (Exodus 19:16 FBV). They watched in terror as the mountain quaked and smoke poured out,

accompanied by thunder and lightning. They had already promised, “We promise to do everything the Lord says.” Exodus 19:8 FBV).

While the Lord wanted to emphasize the holiness of the place, and had sections fenced off to indicate this, he *did* want his people to come up the mountain to meet with him (19:13). However the people refused, telling Moses to talk to them, because they were afraid God would kill them (20:19).

All this reveals that the people had a very defective picture of God, and that God was having to deal with them at their level. The covenant at Sinai must be seen against this background of a people who had only just been liberated from slavery, whose primary religious experience was colored by the practices of the Egyptians.

In the smoke and thunder, lightning and flashes of Mt. Sinai, God demonstrated his presence, trying to meet with his people where they were. When Moses came down from the mount, his face gleamed with the reflected glory of being with God. So too in the Shekinah glory that filled Solomon’s temple, God said, “I am with you.” Really. Truly. Practically. God wants to be with us, and all his efforts are directed to that goal.

Yet all this was not enough. All the symbols and signs, all the thunder and lightning, could not truly express the presence of God. Not even the ark of the covenant, nor the glorious temple, could say enough about God living with us. So “God sent his Son...” He is here. God is now present with fallen humanity. He has arrived. Through all of Jesus’ life, and death, and resurrection comes the proof of the truth of his name. Because though he was truly God with us, Jesus came not as the glorious king but as the suffering servant. His Messianic titles are disregarded, and Jesus referred to himself simply as “the Son of man.” A man among men; human. And this Jesus, this God with us, died with us as a criminal nailed to a cross.

Jesus, the Son of God, is the promise-maker and the promise-keeper is killed because he claimed to be the Son of God, say the Jewish leaders. How ironic—that God is killed because he claims to be God. Nor is it primarily a question of claims, for anyone can make assertions. The truth is that Jesus is God, and reveals him in the clearest way. The fact that religious leaders refuse such clear revelation demonstrates that they have a very different picture of God. So Jesus, God-revealer, is rejected, since the God he reveals is not the God that people want.

### **Ellen White comments**

Soon after the encampment at Sinai, Moses was called up into the mountain to meet with God. . . . Moses returned to the camp, and having summoned the elders of Israel, he repeated to them the divine message. Their answer was, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Thus they entered into a solemn covenant with God, pledging themselves to accept Him as their Ruler, by which they became, in a special sense, the subjects of His authority.

In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. . . . Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. . . . God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience. . . . The people did not realize . . . that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law. . . . Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7). {AG 135}