

WATER•FIRE•STONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSES

Session 9 – Indispensable Truth, Part One | Exodus Chapters 19–20:1–11

Three months after leaving Egypt, Moses brought the multitude to the mountain. The people may have expected to camp a few days before resuming their journey, but Moses knew this was more than a stopover. To be in this place, with millions of Israelites safely in tow, was a personal milestone for Moses. It was familiar ground, made holy by a burning bush encounter. Did he trace his steps back to that memorable spot?

Now these freshly former slaves would hear from God and learn His ways. Moses remembered the Lord’s command, “When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return to worship God at this very mountain.”



In our culture, the Ten Commandments have gone the way of Pee-Chees and the PennySaver. Meant for another time, sure—but not here, not now in our connected, *post-Christian** society. These days, information moves at the speed of light and archaic rules simply can’t keep up.

Some teach that the Ten Commandments have no relevance to the lives of believers today. But Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17 NIV).

This three-part series, *Indispensable Truth*, explores God’s Love, Law, and Liberty.

Icebreaker

How many of the Ten Commandments can you recite from memory?

Goals for this Session

- Discover what God’s presence on Mt. Sinai reveals about His power and glory.
- Consider why keeping the First Commandment is the plumb line for the other nine.
- Pray honest prayers that live to worship and embrace obedience.

* We use this term to describe the cumulative effects of a culture no longer rooted in Biblical truth as the universal standard of right and wrong.

1 “Moses went up to God . . .” | At the base of the mountain is a wide swath of land called the Plain of er-Raaha (“palm of the hand”) surrounded by craggy mountains that form a natural amphitheater. The only way up are rocky paths better suited for mountain goats than men. Seen from above, the mountain drops straight to the desert floor with no foothills or natural barrier between the sand and the mountain wall.

From here, every last Israelite standing in the camp below had an unobstructed view of Mt. Sinai when God’s presence came down.

- a. Read Exodus 19:1–11 | What is happening? Describe the scene in your own words.

Before anything else, God calls Moses up to convey His message for the people. Highlight what stands out to you about:

→ God’s kindness and welcome to the people.

On eagles’ wings.

Eagles are born to soar. But they are reluctant learners, preferring to stay safely in the nest. While a fledgling eagle learns to fly, the parent eagle flies beneath with wings spread wide, to catch them if they fall.

→ The people’s response to God.

- b. Imagine the conversations in the camp as they washed up, scrubbed their clothes, and got the kids ready for the big reveal.

Remember. They’d seen it all. Plague-ridden Egypt. Pharaoh’s army buried at sea. Manna in the morning. Quail in the evening. Water from the rock. Amalek defeated. A cloud by day. A fire by night. Visible manifestations of God’s power and presence were a part of daily life, but nothing like this! What do you think they might have anticipated?

2 God reminded the people of how He had demonstrated great love for them. “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” Now He shows His love another way. In preparation of coming down to them, God tells Moses to warn the people to keep their distance.

a. Read Exodus 19:12–17 | Can you picture it? They see Moses directing a crew of guys piling rocks and posting warnings to stay away from the mountain. Put yourself in their place. What would you be starting to realize about the Lord your God?

b. Read Exodus 19:18–25 | God’s holy presence came down in an unforgettable scene. When you use the same word to describe everything, it describes nothing—but this encounter with God was frighteningly, fearsomely *awesome*. Mt. Sinai suddenly came alive!

What was happening high above, all around, and underneath their feet? Describe all you notice and what they would have seen and heard and experienced.

c. Where was Moses and what was he doing during all of this? Share what makes the deepest impression on you and why.

3 Smoke on the Mountain. | Everything about this encounter was intended to inspire fear and awe. The people were terrified and actually, so was Moses (Hebrews 12:21). There are lots of takeaway lessons, but let's consider the difference between fearing God and *being afraid* of God.

Moses tells 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" (Exodus 20:20 NIV, emphasis added). How would Moses know that? Well . . .

Fear was their default mode (cue the chronic grumbling) and Moses knew it. Plus they still had some *Egypt* in them. Sure, they got on his nerves but they were only three months out—and he knew how long it took for the *Egypt* to get out of him (besides, he loved them like family). Feel free to add any other observations you may have about this, but note what God's Word says about the *fear of God* and obedience.

Isaiah 6:1–5

Job 42:5–6

Proverbs 3:5–7

Memory Verse

"You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol of any kind . . .
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain . . .

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Exodus 20:3–4a, 7a, 8 NIV / NKJV

Which part of these verses resonates most with you today? How or in what way?

4 As we look at the Ten Commandments, the first four address our relationship with God and the last six refer to our relationship with others. We will focus on the first four commandments in this session and cover the rest over the next two sessions.

- a. Exodus 20:1–3 | **You shall have no other gods before Me.** God makes no room for anything or anyone to take His place as Lord of our life and center of our worship. What can become “other gods” in our life?

In normal, everyday life, what might be a strong indication that something or someone is taking the Lord’s place as the center of our life and worship?

- b. Exodus 20:4–6 | **You shall not make for yourself an idol of any kind.** How is this different from the first one? The distinction might be in the phrase *make for yourself*. We tend to see what we want to see. Have you ever heard someone say, “My God would never . . .” or “For *me*, God is . . .”

This commandment guards us from choosing to think only of God in ways we prefer and ignoring the hard parts. The danger with that is a distorted image of God. Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Use the verses below to explain how we learn to know and worship the true and only God.

John 14:6–9

John 14:16–17

Colossians 1:15

Hebrews 1:3

John 17:25–26

5 A TEACHER OF RELIGIOUS LAW CAME TO JESUS AND ASKED, ““OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS, WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?’ JESUS REPLIED, ‘THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT IS THIS: “LISTEN, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS THE ONE AND ONLY LORD. AND YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL, ALL YOUR MIND, AND ALL YOUR STRENGTH.” THE SECOND IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” NO OTHER COMMANDMENT IS GREATER THAN THESE’” (MARK 12:28–31 NLT).

- a. Exodus 20:7 | **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.** This includes more than just as a common swear word. The word *in vain* means: empty, worthless, insincere, false. It describes invoking God’s name in a careless, casual, or even hypocritical way.

Give some examples of how this commandment is routinely broken, even by Christians.

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Hypocrisy in the church
is far worse than
profanity in the street.
Let’s be careful not to
take His name in vain.

Greg Laurie

- b. Exodus 20:8–11 | **Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.** We first read about this in Exodus 16. Moses explained that the Sabbath was a holy day set apart *for* the Lord and it was a gift *from* the Lord. Do your best to explain the purpose of Sabbath.

How, and in what way, do you practice the Sabbath?

Give at least one practical reason:

Give at least one spiritual reason:

Action Steps ►► As you think through this part of Moses' story, what is the most important takeaway point for you personally? How will you put what you've learned into action?

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

Adoration – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

Confession – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

Thanksgiving – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

Supplication – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.



Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A·C·T·S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound, just authentic.
