

Episode: Promised Land Series No. 06

Narrator: Moses

Primary Scriptures: Exodus 19-24, 32-34

Story Summary: Mount Sinai, the golden calf, the tablets of stone

Location: Mount Sinai

Time: c. 1526 BC Birth of Moses

c. 1446 BC The plagues and exodus

c. 1445 BC. The Ten Commandments

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Exodus 19:5-7; 20:1-17; 22:22; 23:33; 24:3-4; 32:14; 32:28-29; 33:11; 34:14

The Israelites leave Egypt, cross the Red Sea, travel through the desert without water, start receiving manna and quail, and arrive at Sinai. How long does that take? Only two months! Apparently, God thinks that is long enough for the Israelites to be ready to become his people...or God wants to show them that they are far from ready.

It is not much of an overstatement to say that Exodus 19:5-8 sets the stage for the rest of the Old Testament. God says that if the Israelites obey him completely and keep his covenant that they will be his treasured possession. The people agree to do everything the Lord said.

Moses goes to the mountain and meets with God. In a long process of consecration and revelation, God ends up giving his all laws and revelations to Moses, including the Ten Commandments. The people and the elders agree to all of God's conditions again¹, and Moses goes back on the mountain for forty days.² At the end of that time, God sends Moses down from the mountain carrying two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written by the very finger of God.³

While Moses is on the mountain with God, the fickle Israelite people make mischief. They convince Aaron to take their gold and fashion an idol in the shape of a calf. They worship the calf and give it credit for bringing them out of Egypt.

There are many ways to anger God, but the surest is to credit his powerful work to a false idol. God burns with anger and threatens to destroy the Israelites, but Moses intercedes. In an ironic twist, the tribe of Levi comes to back Moses (remember: Moses was of the tribe of Levi), and though they punish the people, they save them from complete destruction.

For their courageous action, the Levites become a tribe forever consecrated to God. Who becomes the leader? Aaron, the one who fashioned the golden calf idol! God works in mysterious ways.

¹ Exodus 24:7

² Exodus 24:18

³ Exodus 24:12, 32:16

Discussion Questions:

1. How long do the Israelites travel before reaching the Desert of Sinai?
2. Summarize the agreement God made with the Israelites when they reached Sinai.
3. At Sinai, when the Israelites agreed to obey God completely, did they know what they were agreeing to? (Exodus 19:8)
4. Why were the people not allowed to join Moses in meeting God on the mountain?
5. What were the first commandments given for the Israelites to follow?
6. Why did God want to instill a healthy fear into the people?
7. What does Exodus 21-23 comprise?
8. After God detailed more laws, did the Israelites still agree to follow them?
9. What did the Israelites do while Moses talked to God on Mt. Sinai for just over 6 weeks?
10. Who wrote down the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone the first time?
11. Why did the Levites become the tribe dedicated to the Lord?

1. Two months. 2. If the Israelites will obey God completely, he will take them as his people and protect and treasure them. The Israelites agreed to obey God completely. 3. Probably not. 4. They would have died. 5. The Ten Commandments. 6. To keep them from sinning (Ex. 20:20) 7. Specific, detailed laws for the Israelites. 8. Yes, Exodus 24. 9. They got tired of waiting and made the golden calf under the direction of Aaron. 10. God 11. They led the punishment of the people because of their making the golden calf. Exodus 32:29.

Application Questions:

1. The Israelites agreed to obey God completely before they knew what that entailed. Have you ever done that in your life? What did you do about it when you later found out you had agreed to so much? (maybe your marriage vows? When you were baptized? When you got a new job?)
2. The Israelites waited only a little over six weeks before making the golden calf. Have you ever gotten impatient for God and moved forward with your own plans and desires even though they were contrary to what you knew God wanted from you?
3. Look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. Which one tends to get you in trouble the most? How could you overcome that behavior?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Would you be considered obedient if you obey only when you want to?
2. The golden calf was a sign that the Israelites wanted something to worship instead of God. Most people have some kind of golden calf in their lives. What do you see people worship? What in your life might be a kind of golden calf? What does your "worship" look like?
3. Look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. Which one tends to get you in the trouble the most often? How could you overcome that behavior?