



The Giving of the Law



God's Promise

God's promise to Abram (Abraham) is first recorded in Genesis 12:1-3.

📖 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you’” (*Genesis 12:1-3, NIV*).

This promise is repeated (in some form) on at least four other occasions (*Genesis 13:14-17; 15:4-5, 18-21; 17:2-8, 15-16; 18:18-19; 22:17-18*). The promise is also repeated to Abraham’s son Isaac (*Genesis 26:4-5*) and grandson Jacob (*Genesis 28:13-15; 35:11-12*).

The essential elements of the Promise are:

- Many descendents (*12:2; 13:6; 22:17*) and a land (*12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:7-8, 18; 17:8*).
- Universal blessing through Abraham’s seed (offspring) (*12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14*).¹

God's Deliverance

Abraham went to the land of Canaan and lived there for many years. His son Isaac and grandson Jacob (Israel) also lived there, but Israel’s family would eventually have to move to Egypt because of a severe famine. After they moved to Egypt, they were blessed with good land and many children (*Genesis 47:27*). They became great in number (*Exodus 1:6-7; 12:37*). The king (pharaoh) of Egypt feared their potential, and began to oppress them with slave labor (*1:8-14*). The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out for help from God (*2:23*).

“God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (*Exodus 2:24, NIV*). God chose an Israelite, named Moses, to deliver (set free) the Israelites (*3:1-10*). Through a series of miracles, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (*7:14-15:21*).²



God's Provision (Despite the Peoples' Grumbling)

As Israel leaves Egypt, they have lots of people. They are headed to a land – the promised land. They have leadership. Moses is their leader (of course, God is the ultimate leader). And with the advice of his father-in-law, Moses later delegates leadership to others (*Exodus 18:17-26*). Now they need a Constitution – a system of Law. So God leads them to Mt Sinai. Along the way, the Israelites grumble. They grumble about food (*16:2-3*) and water (*15:24; 17:1-2*). Though they have just experienced God’s great deliverance, they say they would rather be back in Egypt (*16:3; 17:3*). Anyway, God graciously provides for their needs (*15:25; 16:4, 11-14, 35; 17:5-6*).

Reflection: As a Christian, do you grumble when things get difficult? Do you forget who God is, and what He has done in the past, and begin to doubt God’s ability, love or faithfulness?

¹ The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is revealed in the New Testament (Galatians 3:16, 8-9, 26-29).

² The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (the “exodus”) is foundational in the history of Israel. Its significance is both historic and symbolic. Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt symbolizes the Christian’s deliverance from slavery to sin and death. The “Passover sacrifice” (Exodus 12:24-27) symbolizes Jesus Christ – the “lamb of God” (John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:18-19) and “our Passover lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Discussion Questions

1. Read Exodus 19:1-6. What statement does God make to the Israelites concerning their status?

“Now, if you obey me fully, and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be ...

□ my _____³

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me ...

□ a _____ of _____⁴ and

□ a _____.”⁵

2. Read Exodus 20:1-17. What are the “Ten Commandments?” How do the “Ten Commandments” apply to us today?⁶



Application: Review the table on the Ten Commandments. How is your obedience to God?⁷

3. Read Romans 3:20. What is the purpose of the Law given in this passage?⁸

Application: Read Romans 3:9-26. If you are not a Christian, what does this say to you?

4. After receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites said, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey” (*Exodus 24:7; 24:3, cf. 19:7-8*). However, while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai to receive more instructions, the Israelites disobeyed (Read Exodus 32:1-6). What do you think motivated them to do this? What lessons can we learn from this?⁹



5. What progress, if any, do you see in God’s fulfillment of his promise to Abraham? See Exodus 19:4-6; 23:31; 33:1-3, 12-17.¹⁰

³ “treasured possession” – God’s special people. God earlier referred to Israel as His “firstborn son” (4:22-23).

⁴ “kingdom of priests” – called to a special service. Israel is to represent God and mediate His grace to the nations.

⁵ “holy nation” – set apart as God’s peculiar people (separate among the nations) to be a “kingdom of priests.” In the New Testament, Christians are called “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9). Christians are God’s special people, set apart for a special purpose. We should remember that!

⁶ The Ten Commandments and the Law were given to Moses and Israel at a specific time in the history of God’s people. Theologians disagree on how the Ten Commandments relate to the modern Christian. See the book *Five Views on Law and Gospel*. In any case, everyone would agree that the moral will of God is reflected in the Ten Commandments, and God’s moral will transcends the written law. In the New Testament, God’s law is written on human hearts, which is connected to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

⁷ If we truly love God, we will obey Him (John 14:15, 24). We obey a Person, not merely a set of rules.

⁸ God gave the Law to His people for instruction in living, but it also reveals our need for His grace (Rom 3:20-22a).

⁹ The Israelites’ actions revealed a sense of lost contact with God. They got tired of waiting on God, so they decided to do things their own way. As Christians, we can get tired of doing things God’s way. We can get tired of relying and waiting on the invisible God, so we turn to the world’s ways, and rely on things we can see. We need to trust God, wait on God, and remain faithful to Him, even in confusing and difficult times.

¹⁰ Israel is blessed to be called God’s “treasured possession” and a “holy nation” (19:4-6). Israel will be a “kingdom of priests” (mediators of God’s grace), that is, a blessing to other nations (19:6). God is preparing them for the promised land. God tells Moses that He will give them the land promised to Abraham (23:31; 33:1-3).

THE "TEN COMMANDMENTS"

Old Testament Commandment ¹¹ (from Exodus 20)	New Testament Application (the "law of Christ")	Have you <i>always</i> obeyed this commandment <i>perfectly</i> ?
"You shall have no other gods before me" (20:3)	<i>There is only one true God. Do not allow any person or thing to take precedence over Him.</i> (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8)	Yes No
"You shall not make for yourself an idol" (20:4)	<i>Worship only God, and only as He has revealed Himself.</i> (1 John 5:21; 1 Cor 10:14, Rev 21:8)	Yes No
"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God" (20:7)	<i>Use God's name reverently, not lightly or irresponsibly.</i> (Matthew 5:34-37, James 5:12)	Yes No
"Honor your father and mother" (20:12)	<i>"Children, obey your parents"</i> (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 5:8)	Yes No
"You shall not murder" (20:13)	<i>Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said... 'Do not murder.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."</i> (Matt 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15; Rev 21:8)	Yes No
"You shall not commit adultery" (20:14)	<i>Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said... 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."</i> (Matt 5:27; Romans 13:9; James 2:11)	Yes No
"You shall not steal" (20:15)	<i>Do not steal. Work diligently & honestly.</i> (Eph 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15; 1 Corinthians 6:7-8)	Yes No
"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (20:16)	<i>Speak the truth in love. Put off falsehood and speak truthfully.</i> (Ephesians 4:15, 25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8)	Yes No
"You shall not covet your neighbor's [possessions]" (20:17)	<i>Do not long for what is not rightfully yours to have. Do not be greedy. Be content.</i> (Hebrews 13:5; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:2, 5).	Yes No

THE "HEART OF THE MATTER"

Jesus said that these two commandments are at the heart (center) of the Law:	Have you <i>always</i> obeyed these commandments <i>perfectly</i> ?
<i>"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 one is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."</i> (Matt 22:37-40)	Yes No

If it were possible to earn salvation, all of your answers must be "Yes." However, this is not the intent of the law (Romans 3:20; 4:13-15; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:24). We cannot earn salvation!

¹¹ Theologians disagree on how the Sabbath commandment applies to modern Christians. The New Testament repeats the other nine commandments, so they are included in this table. Nonetheless, the principle of the Sabbath is good, and setting aside one day of the week (typically Sunday) for worship & rest is, at the very least, appropriate.