

The Ten Commandments

At Mount Sinai, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone amid thunder, lightning, and the mountain smoking.

Exodus 19:1-25 • Exodus 20:1-21

CHARACTERS: Moses, The Israelites, God

THEMES: God's law, Holiness, Covenant relationship

THREE MONTHS AFTER leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at the wilderness of Sinai and camped before the mountain. Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain.

'Tell the Israelites: 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, you will be my treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The people answered together: 'We will do everything the Lord has said.'

God told Moses to consecrate the people and have them wash their clothes. On the third day, the Lord would come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all.

On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire. The whole mountain trembled violently. The trumpet sound grew louder and louder. Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Then God spoke these words:

'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. 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. You shall not covet.'

The people trembled with fear at the thunder, lightning, trumpet, and smoke. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'

Moses said, '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.'

Moses approached the thick darkness where God was, and God gave him laws for Israel—not just the Ten Commandments, but detailed instructions for justice, worship, and daily life. After forty days on the mountain, God gave Moses two tablets of stone, inscribed by the finger of God.