

# EXODUS 18–20

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## **Exodus 18:1–6**

Sometime between the time that Moses and Zipporah had gone to Egypt in Exodus 4:20 and Exodus 18, Moses sent Zipporah and their sons back to Midian to live with Zipporah’s father, Jethro—perhaps for safety reasons. Jethro had heard of all that God had done for Moses in delivering the Israelites out of Egypt. In verse 5, Jethro, Zipporah, and her sons rejoined Moses, who was in the desert, encamped near Mount Sinai (the mountain of God).

### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

## **Exodus 18:7–12**

Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, seemed to have a healthy relationship. As Jethro arrived at the camp, Moses went out to meet him. Moses shared his good and bad experiences in Egypt with Jethro and told him how the Lord had delivered him and his people out of Egypt. Jethro said in verse 11, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods.” This was exactly the point that God made to the Israelites during the plagues: “And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your god, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:7). Jethro rejoiced in the marvelous outcome for the children of Israel and offered up a burnt offering to God and feasted on bread with Moses, Aaron, and others.

### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 18:13–18**

Moses became a judge for his people. The people waited in line from morning to evening for Moses to resolve their problems or to instruct them concerning the statutes and laws of God. Moses’s father-in-law, however, believed that Moses was wearing himself out by trying to be the only judge for all the people.

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 18:19–23**

It was not good for Moses to be the only judge over all the people. Because of his concern for Moses, Jethro counseled with him. Jethro suggested that Moses prayerfully instruct his people in laws and ordinances to help them stay on righteous paths. But he also suggested that Moses delegate some of that responsibility to others so that the total burden of teaching and judging would be lifted off Moses’s shoulders. Moses could still handle “great matters,” but smaller matters could be handled by those whom he delegated. Moses’s delegates needed to be God-fearing, honest, free of greed, and capable of being good leaders. By delegating the work, Moses—and his people—would greatly benefit.

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 18:24–27**

Moses accepted the counsel of his father-in-law by choosing capable leaders from those who had left Egypt. Some became judges over many people, and some were judges over only a few. They handled the small matters; Moses handled the “hard causes.”

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 19:1–2**

The first half of the book of Exodus narrates the freeing and the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. The second half deals primarily with the events on Mount Sinai, the preparation of the children of Israel to receive laws and covenants from the Lord through Moses, and a list of the contents of the laws and covenants. Scholars call this the legislative portion of the book of Exodus.

By this point, it had been about three months since Moses and his people were freed from Egypt. The people camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, the mountain of the Lord, where they stayed for almost a year (see Numbers 10). It was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Moses at the burning bush: "I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

### **Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 19:3–6**

Moses went to Mount Sinai to communicate with God. God would visit the mountain when He needed to speak with Moses or His people (who are referred to as both the house of Jacob and the children of Israel). Therefore, Mount Sinai represented God's temple for the children of Israel. Conversely, the Lord's temples are also referred to as the mountains of the Lord in reference to Mount Sinai. See Isaiah 2:3, for example: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob."

Exodus 19:4 holds beautiful imagery: God spoke to Moses and said, "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." We see this imagery again in Deuteronomy 32:11 in reference to Moses: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him."

In Exodus 19:5–6, the Lord instructed Moses on how to prepare his people to receive new covenants. If they obeyed the covenants, the children of Israel would become a holy nation and a "peculiar treasure." The word *peculiar* in Hebrew also means "special." In Deuteronomy 14:2 we read, "For thou [the children of Israel] art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations."

### **Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 19:7–9**

Moses told the people of Israel what the Lord had told him. The people responded that they would obey the Lord's commands. The Lord, seemingly pleased with that response, appeared in a cloud so

that the people could hear as He spoke further with Moses. The Lord spoke directly to Moses, the mouthpiece of the Lord.

***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 19:10–13**

The Lord instructed Moses to sanctify the children of Israel (prepare them to be clean or purified) because they would be encountering God in three days. This preparation included washing their clothes so they would be clean and presentable before God. However, the people themselves would not be allowed to go “up into” the holy mountain, as they would not survive God’s presence. They would be able to go “up to the mount” when a certain trumpet sounded.

***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 19:14–17**

Moses went back down to his people, and the people cleaned and purified themselves as he instructed them. Part of the instruction included to “come not at your wives” (verse 15). The original Hebrew of that phrase can be rendered as “do not have sexual relations with a woman.” In other words, to come near God’s presence, men and women had to abstain from sex. On the third day, the trumpet sounded and thunder and lightning accompanied a thick cloud (God’s presence). The people came out of their camp but kept their distance at the base of the holy mountain.

***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 19:18–22**

As the trumpet sounded and God’s presence was at the top of Mount Sinai, the holy mountain was ablaze with fire and smoke and there was quaking. Moses was called to go to the top of the mountain. It seemed that some of the people at the bottom of the mountain wanted to get closer to see God, so God instructed Moses to go back down and warn the people, including the priests, not to break through nor cross the boundaries to the mountain or they would die.

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 19:23–25**

As instructed, Moses went back down the mountain to warn the people to not get too close to God’s presence. After that, Moses would go back up the mountain with Aaron, his brother.

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 20:1–2**

Included within the book of Exodus is text that is typically called the Covenant Code or Book of the Covenant (see Exodus 24:7). It is also often referred to as the Mosaic law. The Ten Commandments make up a portion of that text, together with other rules and laws. In this chapter we read about Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, which are a set of laws associated with moral and other fundamental principles of behavior and of worship. They teach us the proper relationship between us, God, and other people. These commandments play a central role in both Judaism and Christianity.

Moses and Aaron were at the top of Mount Sinai in the presence of God. The children of Israel were not allowed there; however, they were able to hear God speaking to Moses. In verse 2, we see that God identified Himself and reminded everyone that it was He who brought the people out of Egypt and out of slavery. This was also a reminder that God acts on behalf of the children of Israel.

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 20:3**

The first four commandments pertain to our relationship with God. First commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Moses made it clear in Deuteronomy 4:35 that no other god exists: “Know that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him.”

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 20:4–6**

Second commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.” This refers not only to sculptured images but also to any object, picture, or false god that replaces the true and only God. God, whom we worship, is not a manufactured entity. Moses was apparently referring to the Egyptians in verses 4 and 5, who worshipped objects in the heavens (for example, the sun and moon), on the earth (for example, insects, birds, and animals), and in the waters (for example, fish and crocodiles). Moses’s people were not to be idolatrous and needed to take care to not pass down this forbidden behavior to future generations. As we love and worship the true God and keep His commandments, He will bestow His mercy on us.

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 20:7**

Third commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.” “In vain” refers to a couple things. If we make a covenant in the name of the Lord but do not honor that covenant, we are taking His name in vain because our covenant making lacks substance. Secondly, when we use the name of God disrespectfully, as in using profanity, we are taking His name in vain.

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 20:8–11**

Fourth commandment: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The word *sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, which means “to rest (from labor).” In the Christian world today, the Sabbath is typically observed on Sunday, the first day of the week. It is a day to turn our focus and efforts away from regular pursuits of the weekday and toward God.

#### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

### **Exodus 20:12**

The next six commandments pertain to how we should treat each other.

Fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother.” To *honor* means “to show respect toward and to bring tribute to someone.” If the children of Israel honored their parents, they were promised that their “days may be long in the land.” This does not necessarily refer to just a long life but infers that the honoring of parents would allow the children of Israel to remain in their promised land for a long time.

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 20:13–17**

Sixth commandment: “Thou shalt not kill.” This commandment refers to intentional murder for gain. It does not apply to genuine self-defense.

Seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” “Adultery” refers to extramarital relations, which undermine and damage the sacred marriage relationship.

Eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” Stealing is taking property from another person or organization without their permission. Notice that this eighth commandment does not include a direct object. Therefore, the children of Israel were not to take *anything* that did not belong to them without the consent of its owner.

Ninth commandment: “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” Specifically, the commandment says that “thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” This includes the intent to harm another person’s being, character, or reputation by lying, gossiping, or slandering.

Tenth commandment: “Thou shalt not covet.” This refers to envying something that belongs to another. That could mean someone else’s property or even someone else’s spouse.

**Source**

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

**Exodus 20:18–21**

The children of Israel were not on the mountain with Moses, but they did witness the thunder and lightning associated with God’s presence on the mountain. They feared His presence and stayed away. However, they did have a desire to hear His message through Moses. Moses tried to comfort the people and assure

them that the fear of God was meant to test them. Deuteronomy 6:1–2 gives us the relationship between the fear of God and obedience to Him. There, Moses proclaimed, “Now these are the commandments, [and] the statutes . . . which the LORD your God commanded to teach you . . . [t]hat thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments.” While the people stood back from God’s presence, Moses drew closer. He had a relationship with God that the people did not have.

### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

## **Exodus 20:22–26**

These final verses of the chapter give instructions on how the children of Israel should worship. They were reminded to not make idols, specifically of silver and gold. However, they could make an altar and burn sacrifices for the Lord. The altar was made of unhewn stones (sometimes referred to as whole stones).<sup>1</sup> Hewn stones were shaped and cut with tools and were often used to make idolatrous objects. The tools used to make idols were therefore considered unclean. The Israelites were also instructed to not use steps (but perhaps ramps) to access the altar.

### ***Source***

Book of Exodus Minute by W. Breitenstein

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<sup>1</sup> Moses made a reference in Deuteronomy 27:5–6 to the use of whole stones for altars: “And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. . . . Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole [unhewn] stones.”