



New Commands

A narrative about God's desire for His people to live differently than the rest of the world.

THE BIBLE

Exodus 16-17, 19-24, 32-34
Deuteronomy 4-7

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

- Growing up, we all had to deal with the rules that our parents had that we didn't like or agree with. What were some of the rules your parents had that you would have changed?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Joseph – Dreams and Deliverance
- Moses – God rescues and redeems
- Liberation – God's people leave Egypt

Hear the Story

Scene One: Griping and Complaining

It wasn't long after the Israelites left Egypt that they began complaining again to Moses. They complained about not having enough to eat and not having water to drink.

They kept nagging him, asking, *“Why did you make us leave Egypt? We had plenty to eat and drink there. Did you lead us into the wilderness to die? It would have been better to die in Egypt!”*

Moses cried out to God, “What am I going to do with these people? They’re about to kill me!” So, each time the Israelites ran out of food or water, God provided for them through a miracle; He sent birds to their camp for them to eat, He covered the ground with a flaky bread-like food called manna, and He even made water pour out of a rock for them to drink!

Scene Two: New Commands

Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites set up camp at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses climbed up the mountain so he could meet with God.

There, God spoke to him, saying, *“Tell my people this, ‘You saw how I carried you on eagles’ winds and rescued you from Egypt. Now, if you obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured people – a kingdom of priests – set apart to represent me.’”*

When Moses came down the mountain, he told the people what God said. They all agreed, *“We will do everything that God asks us to do.”* Then God told Moses, *“Gather the Israelites at the base of the mountain so I can speak to them.”* As the people gathered, God warned them, *“Do not climb the mountain or even touch the edge, or you will be put to death.”*

Right then, a powerful storm rolled in, and dark clouds covered the mountain. God spoke to them from a blazing fire on top of the mountain, giving these commands: *“I am your God who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. Put me above everything else. Do not worship other things. Do not misuse or disrespect my name. Remember to set aside a day each week to rest and worship me. Honor your parents. Don’t murder or steal or lie. Do not sleep with anyone but your husband or wife – be faithful. Don’t lust after what others have – be satisfied with what I give you.”*

As God spoke, the people trembled with fear and moved away from the mountain! Moses told them, “Don’t be afraid. God is showing you His awesome power. From now on, let your fear of Him keep you from sinning!”

As the people stood in the distance, Moses climbed up into the dark cloud. Up on the mountain, God gave Moses more instructions, called laws, to give to Israel. These laws gave specific details about things like ... *how to treat neighbors and enemies, how to handle conflicts, what is a fair punishment, when to work and rest, when to celebrate and worship, and what offerings are acceptable to God.*

Moses was up on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights with his helper Joshua. God gave Moses two stone tablets. On these tablets were the details of the covenant written by God's finger.

Scene Three: Golden Calf

While Moses was away on the mountain, the people went to his brother Aaron and said, *"We don't know what happened to Moses. Make us a god that we can see who will lead us!"* So, Aaron created an idol in the shape of a golden calf and put it on an altar for them to worship. He told them, *"Here is the god that saved you from Egypt!"* The next day, the people had a wild party as they worshipped the golden calf.

When God saw how the Israelites were acting, he said to Moses, *"Go down to your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt; they have corrupted themselves. I have seen enough stubbornness and rebellion from these people. Leave me alone so that my anger can burn against them. I am going to destroy all of them with fire, and then I will make you into a great nation."*

But Moses begged God not to kill them, and God withdrew His threat and allowed them to live. When Moses returned to camp and saw the people worshipping the calf, he was so angry that he smashed the stone tablets on the ground! Then he took the calf, ground it up into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it!

The next day, Moses returned to the mountain to ask God to forgive His people. God responded, *"Whoever has sinned against me must be punished."*

And God sent a plague to punish those who worshipped the calf. About 3,000 of the Israelites died from this plague.

Scene Four: Covenant

Soon after that, God said to Moses, *"I am full of mercy and grace. I am slow to get angry and full of love and faithfulness. I show my love by forgiving rebellion and sin, but I will not let sin go unpunished."*

This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel: I will show my awesome power through you and remove those who oppose you, but you must always listen to me and obey my commands."

Moses met with God for another 40 days and 40 nights. On a new set of tablets, God wrote the details of how to live in His covenant. Moses gave these tablets to the people of Israel so they could follow them, live in his ways, and enjoy his blessings.

Retell the Story

- What did the people do after they left Egypt?
- How did God provide for them?
- What was God's plan for the Israelites?
- How did God deliver the 10 Commandments?
- While Moses was away, what did the Israelites do?
- What reaction did God have to the Israelites' rebellion?
- What did Moses do?
- What followed as a punishment?
- What promise followed their punishment?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?

- What do you think God meant by saying, "You will be a kingdom of priests?"
- What is the purpose of the Commandments and Laws? Why were they needed?
- Why do you think God is so specific about these items?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

Join the Story

1) THE WANDERING WHINERS

One of the first things the text mentioned is how the Israelites complained about the conditions as they left Egypt. Why do you think they complained? Do you think they had forgotten what God had already done for them? What did He do to provide for their concerns and complaints? What lesson do you think God was trying to teach them? How does your experience compare to that of the Israelites in this part of the story?

2) GOD'S PLAN

God's plan for His people was that they would live differently than the world around them, to show the world who this God was. To help them in this task, He gave them specific instructions on how to live – a new set of commands. What do these laws show us about God's character? What do they show us about His desire for us?

3) CHANGING THE MIND OF GOD

Read Exodus 32:7-14. In this passage, Moses argues with God, and it appears that he changed God's mind. What does Moses use to convince God to relent? What might this tell you about God and about what He values? Using your answer(s), how might that apply to us today?

Pray

God,

You have revealed Your will and Your ways in Your Word. In its pages, I discover truths about You, about myself, about others, and about Your world. Grant me the grace to overcome the spiritual and moral inertia that keeps me from digging deeper into Your word. May I read its pages, meditate on its truths, and hide Your word in my heart so that I might not sin against You. May Your words become the patterns and practices of my life so that in all I do I would honor You.