God’s Covenant with Israel
Exodus 19:16-25
SS Lesson for 10/08/2017

Devotional Scripture: Ps 111:1-10

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the events preceding the giving of the Ten Commandments and the eventual creation of God’s Covenant with Israel. The study’s aim is to sense the solemnness and fearfulness of God’s covenant with Israel. The study’s application is to have a proper sense of fear and respect in our relationship with God. (Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Exodus 19:17

And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

19:1-2. Exactly three months after the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites entered the Desert of Sinai and camped by the mountain, Mount Sinai. The term “desert” does not always mean a dry wasteland but sometimes uninhabited grazing country. The exact location of Mount Sinai is unknown, but traditionally it is identified as Jebel Musa in the southern portion of the Sinai Peninsula. This is the same as the mountain of God (cf. 3:1; 4:27; 18:5; 24:13), also called Horeb, where God appeared to Moses in a burning bush.

19:3-4. As the Israelites were camped by Sinai, Moses went on the mountain and there God spoke to him about the pact He would ratify with the people (Jacob and Israel were synonyms for the nation). God compared His delivering the people out of Egypt, across the Red (Reed) Sea, and to Sinai to His carrying them on eagles’ wings (cf. Deut. 32:10-11). When young eagles are learning to fly, the mother eagle flies under them with her wings spread out to catch them.

19:5-6. This proposal made by God (My covenant) would give Israel an exalted position among the nations in view of their acceptance of God’s righteous standards. If they accepted and obeyed the covenant stipulations, God promised to make them His treasured possession (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17). They would be His own people, highly valued by and related to Him. Also they would become a kingdom of priests, that is, each member of the nation with God as his King would know and have access to Him and mediate on behalf of each other as did priests. Also they would be a holy nation, a nation morally pure and dedicated entirely to the service of God. God redeemed Israel so that she might be in touch with and separated to Him.

19:7-15. Moses then informed the elders of Israel and the people about God’s covenant and His plan to possess them uniquely. The people heartily responded by promising to obey His laws strictly. In anticipation of the covenant God ordered the people to separate themselves from impurity and to consecrate themselves to God. The three-day purification ritual included washing their garments and abstaining from sexual intercourse. Also during the three days no person or animal was to contact the mountain or he or it would be put to death. Such careful preparation underscored the significance of the event that was about to transpire. The God of the heavens was about to make a covenant with His people. Unlike pagan deities who supposedly dwelt in the mountains, the God of Israel descended from heaven (1 Kings 8:30, 49) to the mountains to converse with His people. Only when summoned by the blast of a ram’s horn (cf. Ex. 19:16, 19) were the people to go toward the mountain (v. 13).

19:16-25. Then on the third day of preparation the God of heaven descended to Sinai in a display of power and majesty. God demonstrated His holiness and awesomeness; little wonder that the people trembled, standing at the foot of the mountain (v. 16; cf. 20:18). The people heard crashing thunder and a very loud trumpet blast (cf. 19:13); they saw flashing lightning.... fire, and dense billowing smoke as from a smelting furnace; and they felt the mountain trembling in a violent earthquake. The “black cloud” of smoke brought “darkness” to the sky (Deut. 4:11; cf. Ex. 20:21). Only Moses (19:20) and Aaron (v. 24) were permitted on the mountain; the priests and the people were to stand before it. If they in curiosity saw the Lord they would perish (cf. comments on 33:11, 20; and comments on John 1:18). Though the Levitical priesthood had not yet been established, the elders (Ex. 3:18) or some young men (24:5) served as priests. Moses made three trips to the mountaintop and back (19:3; 7; vv. 8-9; vv. 20, 25). These instructions vividly reminded the people of the immeasurable chasm between the divine and the human, as well as the miracle of divine revelation.
God's Covenant with Israel

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Despite its seemingly modest content, this text is very significant. God called Abram into a covenant relationship with Himself. This was later extended to the other patriarchs of the faith, Isaac and Jacob. And in this important passage, the covenant was shown to include the whole nation. After the passing of the patriarchal era, Israel grew to become a nation even while enduring slavery in Egypt. God delivered them from bondage, and they made their exodus. At the "nether part of the mount" (that is, Mount Sinai), the nation met with God, and the Mosaic covenant was instituted between Him and them. They became the inheritors of God's great messianic promise. Through them salvation would come to the world. What a privilege to be included in this great covenantal plan and promise! There are two things we should notice about this extension of the covenant to Israel. First, it was a holy transaction. As the people were led by Moses into the vicinity of the mount, there was great stress laid upon what a holy moment it was. All sorts of phenomena broke out that conveyed the awesome presence of God. There was a thick cloud, as if to obscure the unseeable God (Exod. 19:9); there was a demand for the washing of clothes and for cleanliness (vs. 10); there was instruction that the people not come closer (vs. 12); and there came thunder and lightning, fire and smoke (vss. 16,18), as well as the sounding of the trumpet (vss. 16, 19). The whole mountain "quaked greatly" (vs. 18). What an experience! By all this God was saying to His people, "It is a holy thing when you come to know Me. I must be approached with reverence, humility, and care." This teaches us that when we are redeemed, we have entered into a relationship with a holy God. Our lives become holy to the Lord, set apart to Him. A covenant with God is a holy thing because God is holy. Everything changes when we are in a relationship with Him. Are we living holy lives? The second thing we should notice about God's covenant with Israel is that it is a blessed thing. We might be tempted to think it is a heavy burden to be called into a covenant with God. We are going to have all kinds of responsibilities; we have expectations placed upon us. However, these concerns pale in comparison to the privilege it is to belong to God and to inherit all His precious promises. Today, being part of God's new covenant not only grants us redemption in Christ; it also unites believers together as part of His "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). Those who enter a covenant with God are a treasure unto God. There is great joy in realizing that through His covenant-keeping love, God has made us His special people, saving and securing us for all eternity for Himself. The Apostle Peter was filled with the glory of this truth as he wrote to the early Christians and used the same kind of language. What a blessing to inherit all the precious promises of God, sealed by a faithful, covenant-keeping God.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Tommie Woodward moved from St. Louis to Texas in 2015. Shortly after arriving, the 28-year-old saw signs warning that alligators were in the waters of Burkart’s Marina. He was more than a little skeptical. A marina employee warned him to stay out of the water. Woodward scoffed. A justice of the peace summarized the ensuing incident this way: “He removed his shirt, removed his billfold, jumped in to the water and almost immediately yelled for help.” As a result of his disbelief, Woodward became the first person killed by an alligator in Texas in almost 180 years.

We have seen warning signs many times and in many places. God himself expresses his desires via warnings. He has warned his people frequently about the conditions regarding keeping God.

As noted in last week’s study of Abraham, part of the Lord’s message in the covenant-making ceremony with that man was that Abraham’s descendants would be in “a country not their own” for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). After that they would “come out with great possessions” (15:14). That coming out was the exodus, which occurred under the leadership of Moses. Today’s lesson takes us to “the third month” following the exodus (Exodus 19:1). Acting ungrateful along the way (15:24; 16:2; 17:3), the Israelites came to the “Desert of Sinai” and “camped . . . in front of the mountain,” which was Mount Sinai (19:2). There they prepared themselves to hear from God. He had delivered them from hard bondage in Egypt and was about to initiate a covenant relationship with them. The forthcoming covenant required preparation. Having called to Moses “from the mountain” (Exodus 19:3), the Lord instructed him to convey a message to the Israelites that focused on (1) what God had done for them, delivering them “on eagles’ wings,” and (2) what God intended to do for them in making them “my treasured possession. . . . a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (19:4-6). When Moses relayed the Lord’s words to the Israelites, they voiced their willingness to obey (19:8). Such a profession of commitment is admirable. But did the people really understand the challenges and responsibilities being placed before them? Moses informed the people that the Lord would come down upon Mount Sinai to speak to them. But limits or boundaries around the mountain meant the people weren’t to get too close. Only when they heard...
the sound of the trumpet were they allowed to approach (Exodus 19:13). The people were also told to wash their clothes before meeting with God (Exodus 19:14); this symbolized cleanliness. The command to abstain from marital relations (19:15) was given so the people would avoid ceremonial uncleanness (see Leviticus 15:18). They were to be as fully prepared as possible when he descended on the mountain.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

**The Power of God in His Covenant (Exodus 19:16-19)**

16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.
17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.
18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.
19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

**Power in His coming (16-17)**

*Power in His coming causes fear in people (Jer 5:22)*

22 Should you not fear me?" declares the Lord. "Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.

*Power in His coming causes trembling in people (Heb 12:21)*

21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

*Power in His coming causes God to warn people (Exod 19:10-12)*

10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes 11 and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.

*Power in His coming because of holy ground (Exod 19:23)*

23 Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'"

*Power in His coming could cause death for people (Josh 3:2-5)*

2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 3 giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. 4 Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."
Power in His presence (18-19)

Power in His presence because He is high and exalted (Isa 6:1-5)

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Power in His presence because His presence is holy (1 Kings 8:10-11)

10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

Power in His presence because the radiance of His glory is too much to be experienced (Ezek 10:1-4)

1 I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim. 2 The Lord said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And as I watched, he went in. 3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord.

Power in His presence because His throne has power life a flaming fire (Dan 7:9)

9 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

The Holiness of God in His Covenant (Exodus 19:20-25)

20 Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them." 23 But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.' " 24 Then the Lord said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

Holiness related to His call (20-21)

Holiness because it is a call to life (Deut 30:15)

15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

Holiness because it is a call to service (Josh 24:15)

15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Holiness because it is a call to follow (1 Kings 18:21)

21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.
Holiness because it is a call that if rejected will bring disaster and calamity (Prov 1:22-26)

22 "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? 23 If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. 24 But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, 25 since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, 26 I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you.

Holiness because it is a call that when heard, the heart must not be hardened (Heb 4:7)

7 Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Holiness related to His leaders (22-23)

Holiness because leaders sometimes almost die for the work of Christ (Phil 2:29-30)

29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Holiness because leaders must give an account of their watch-care (Heb 13:17)

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Holiness because leaders carry on the work of Jesus (1 Cor 16:10)

10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.

Holiness because leaders risk their lives for the name of Jesus (Acts 15:25-26)

25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Holiness because leaders should be above reproach (1 Tim 3:2)

2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Holiness because leaders should be morally tested (1 Tim 3:10)

10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

Holiness related to His people (24-25)

Holiness in His people because Jesus will bring them to God (1 Thess 3:13)

13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Holiness in His people because God called His saints to be holy (Eph 1:3-4)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Holiness in His people because the firstborn is holy, then all His people are holy (Rom 11:16)

16 If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Holiness in His people because Jesus was sacrificed for His Church (Eph 5:25-27)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
Holiness in His people because Jesus reconciled His people (Col 1:22)

22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Manifestation of God on the Mountain (19:16-25)

Don Curtis, one of my friends with whom I have studied this text, shared with me that he has come to view chapter 19 something like a wedding ceremony. First, there is the engagement, the announcement of the purpose of a man and woman to be married and to enter into a new and wonderful relationship. Then, before the wedding ceremony, there is a period both of preparation (making plans, perhaps making the wedding dress, showers, etc.) and of anticipation. Traditionally, the groom does not see the bride before the ceremony, heightening the sense of expectation. Then, there is the ceremony, a time of beauty and joyous celebration.

Don’s suggestion caught my attention, for this is very much what we see in this passage. The first section (vss. 1-6) contains God’s announcement: His purpose to have a unique relationship with Israel, set apart from every other nation. The second section (vss. 7-15) describes the preparations which were required for the appearance of God to come. And now, in this final section, we are overwhelmed with the splendor and the majesty of God as He manifests Himself to Israel on the mountain. Here is the grand finale, the manifestation of God in all of His majesty, purity, and power.

The sights and sounds are impossible to fully comprehend, and not easily brought to our conscious minds as we read the chapter. But let us use our imaginations for a moment and try to recreate in our minds what it must have been like to have been standing at the base of that mountain as God descended upon it.

On the morning of the third day, you are already tingling with the sense of expectation your two days of preparations have produced. While still in your tent, thunder and lightning commence (v. 16). A thick cloud encompasses the mountain. Then, the piercing blast of a trumpet fills the air. Along with all the other Israelites, you begin to tremble, with excitement, but mainly with fear.

At the command of Moses, you gather with the whole congregation of the Israelites at the base of the mountain (v. 17). As you look on, the Lord descends upon the mountain in fire, with smoke billowing from the mountain (v. 18). Suddenly, the whole mountain quakes violently. The trumpet begins to sound again, each time getting louder and louder (v. 19). Moses speaks and God responds with thunder. It would seem that all of the forces of nature have been summoned to salute their Creator, as He manifests Himself to His people on Mt. Sinai. If the sight of the burning bush was awesome to Moses, what impact must this scene have had on the Israelites? Other portions of Scripture signal the fact that this made a great impression on the people of God.

Moses alone was summoned to the top of the mountain to meet God (v. 20). He was told to go back down to the people and to warn them not to draw too near to the mountain to gaze at the spectacular scene which was taking place (v. 21). The priests, too, were to consecrate themselves, lest they be smitten of God (v. 22). When Moses descended this time, he was to return with Aaron (v. 24). Their leadership was thereby confirmed.

The Problem With Our Passage

If we grasp the mood of Exodus 19 as one of glory and splendor, then we must come to the conclusion that the way the giving of the Law is portrayed here is in contrast to the way we look at the Law from the perspective of the New Testament. The problem we face is this: the giving of the Law was not the tragic imposition of a horrible system upon a reluctant nation, but rather the glorious giving of the Law by God to His people, in an occasion marked by splendor and the glory of God. The problem with acknowledging this fact is that it seems to fly in the face of the New Testament, which, we believe, speaks disparagingly of the Law, and describes its coming more in terms of a curse than a blessing. In the New Testament we do find texts which seem to disdain the Law:

But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? (2 Cor. 3:7-8).

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them.” Now that no one is justified by the
Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them” (Gal. 3:10-12).

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain (Gal. 4:9-11).

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law (Gal. 5:18).

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under Law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

Our problem, then, is to attempt to reconcile the positive perspective of the Law which we find in the Old Testament with the negative connotations it has in the New. Our approach will be to gain a broader grasp of the Law, as it was viewed in both the Old and the New Testaments. We will begin by considering the Law as a corporate entity, defining the relationship between God and the nation Israel, and then as a private source of revelation and inspiration to the individual Old Testament saint. From here, we will move on to the New Testament perspective of the Law as indicated by our Lord’s attitudes and actions, and those of the apostles.

The Law was Israel’s corporate covenant with God and her constitution as a nation. Repeatedly, the Law which God gave Israel through Moses was referred to as a covenant (Exod. 19:5; 24:7-8; 34:10, 27-28; Deut. 4:23; 5:2). The three principle covenants of the Old Testament were the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:11-16; 1 Chronicles 17:10-14), and the Mosaic (or Sinaitic) covenant. The Mosaic covenant is different from the other two covenants. This was a covenant which was provisional, and which was to be replaced by a “new covenant” which would be an eternal covenant:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. also Isaiah 55:3; 61:8; Ezekiel 37:26).

The Law contained not only the regulations of God, but also the account of God’s mercy and grace in saving and keeping His people. Each generation was to teach the next generation the goodness of God, and each new generation was to ratify the covenant for itself:

For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a Law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their children; That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born. That they should put their confidence in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments (Ps. 78:5-7).

Thus, the second generation of Israelites was reminded of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and of God’s care and protection up to the time of their entrance into the promised land (Deuteronomy 1-4; also the account of the Exodus, as recorded in the Book of Exodus). It was necessary for this new generation to ratify the covenant for themselves (Deuteronomy 5). Later, when the Law was misplaced and then discovered, that generation also ratified the Law (2 Chronicles 34:14ff.). The Israelites who returned to Jerusalem upon their return from captivity heard the Law and accepted the covenant for themselves (Nehemiah 8 and 9; cf. especially 9:38).

The Mosaic covenant was never given as a means of earning righteousness by Law-keeping. The covenant was given to the Israelites after God had delivered them from Egypt. The Law could not be kept, except by God’s grace, and provisions were made (the sacrificial system) for men when they would fail to abide by the Law. The new covenant was promised because the Mosaic covenant could not be kept by Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Whenever Israel failed with regard to the Law, it was not just a matter of violating the Law in some minute particular, but it was a result of unbelief: “Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath, And a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also mounted against Israel; Because they did not believe in God, Nor trust in His salvation” (Ps. 78:21-22; cf. also, vss. 32-33, 37).

The proper interpretation and application of the Law can best be determined by a study of the Old Testament prophets, whose task it was to call Israel to obedience to the Law. These prophets persisted in fighting a
legalistic interpretation and application of the Law. They always sought to focus upon the essence of the Law, rather than upon mere particulars of its expression:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me (Hosea 6:6-7).

With what shall I come to the Lord And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8).

The Law (in its broadest form—the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible) was intended to serve as a record of God’s faithfulness to His promises and to His people. The ten commandments, along with the rest of the laws of God, was given to serve as the covenant between God and His people, and as their national constitution, by which the nation would be guided and governed.

**The Law was also God’s personal revelation to individual saints.** In addition to the public, corporate role of the Law as Israel’s (collective) covenant and constitution, the Law also had a private role to play in the life of the Old Testament saint. This role of the Law is readily seen in the Psalms. We shall focus our attention on two specific psalms, Psalms 19 and 119. Notice the crucial role the Law has in the life of the individual saint, as reflected by the psalmist in Psalm 19:

The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

Let me suggest some of the specific ways which the Law applied to the individual saint:

1. **The Law was seen as a source of personal edification, through which God spoke personally to the individual saint:** Restoring his soul (19:7); Making the simple wise (19:7); Rejoicing his heart (19:8); Enlightening his eyes (19:8); Providing guidance (119:105); Reviving him (119:154); Convicting him of sin (119:80, 126, 133; Ps. 19:11-14).

2. **The Law was a revelation of God’s character** (Ps. 119:138, 156).

3. **The Law was a promise of future salvation** (Ps. 119:166, 174). The psalmists never view the Law as the standard they must keep in order to be saved. In fact, they viewed salvation as something which the Law anticipated, but did not produce itself. Thus, the psalms look forward to a future salvation, one which the Law itself will not bring about.

4. **The Law was a consolation to the sufferer, but it was not viewed as a means by which one could earn blessings or avoid adversity** (cf. Ps. 119:67, 71, 75). Rather than seeing the Law as the means to keep him from suffering, the psalmist saw suffering as God’s means of bringing him to the Law.

5. **From the Law the psalmist learned that he could neither understand nor apply this revelation, apart from God’s grace** (Ps. 119:68, 73, 124-125, 144, 169). The psalmist understood that the Law required God’s grace to understand and to apply.

6. **The Law was simple, yet profound. It would not be grasped quickly and easily, but only through study, prayer, and meditation** (Ps. 119:114, 123, 147).

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/preamble-israel%E2%80%99s-constitution-exodus-19)
Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Passages such as the one studied in this lesson have led some to see the God of the Old Testament as remote and aloof; by contrast, the God of the New Testament is one of mercy and love. The New Testament presents Jesus, who came in love to save the world (John 3:16). To this viewpoint, the foreboding, threatening God-of-law has given way to the welcoming God-of-grace. One result of this faulty viewpoint is that some people minimize or ignore the Old Testament. But are the presentations of God in the two testaments really all that different? No. A close look reveals many references to God’s love and compassion in the Old Testament and many references to judgment and wrath in the New. Within the book of Exodus, source of today’s lesson, we may consider the words of the Lord when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive again the law on tablets of stone: “The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6). The Old Testament prophets, who are sometimes characterized as little more than harbingers of gloom and doom, are just as passionate about declaring the depths of God’s love. “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” says God through his prophet (Jeremiah 31:3). God is the one who “pardons sin” and “delight[s] to show mercy” (Micah 7:18). He is the one who casts all our sins “into the depths of the sea” (7:19). The picture of God’s compassion is just as pronounced in the Old Testament as it is in the New. As for God’s wrath and judgment in the latter, one need only flip through the book of Revelation to be convinced. That book affirms existence of the “fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Hebrews 12:29 tells us that “our God is a consuming fire,” and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 pictures the return of Jesus as a day when “he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” The Scriptures clearly and consistently teach both the mercy and the wrath of the Lord in both testaments. A passage such as today’s should not result in viewing God as unloving. And the fact that he has come to us lovingly in the person of his Son, Jesus, should not lessen our sense of fear (in the sense of reverence) toward God. If anything, grace should enhance our reverence for the God who put strict limitations on the Israelites at Mount Sinai, yet removed such limitations when he broke forth into our world through a human mother’s womb.

When I was growing up in rural south central Indiana, it was not uncommon to see signs (sometimes rather crudely constructed) along country roads with the message “Prepare to Meet Thy God” (from Amos 4:12). The Israelites in today’s text were told to prepare very diligently and specifically to meet God at Mount Sinai. Today we do not meet with God under the same circumstances as the Israelites did. Nevertheless, we can draw lessons from their experience regarding our own preparation for worship. Many times we get so busy during the week, crowding our days with activities, that we find ourselves having little time to prepare properly for Sunday worship. As a result, Sunday morning finds us scrambling to get to Sunday school or worship—and perhaps arriving late at that. Our bodies may be seated and stationary, but our minds are racing in a hundred different directions. We are not really prepared to meet God. A well-organized preparation for worship can seem impossible at times, especially in households with small children. But we can and should do better. We may simply need to become more intentional and deliberate about our preparation, formulating a plan for addressing distractions. As with other areas of our lives, it is all too easy to lapse into less than ideal patterns of behavior and then become content to leave those behaviors unchallenged and unchanged. The ancient Israelites had a three-day warning to prepare to meet God. What would happen if we committed ourselves weekly to even a three-hour time during which we prepared to meet God in worship?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Christians must prepare themselves every day to meet an all-powerful and holy God (Exod. 19:16-17)
2. God chose to display His glory and power in various ways and at various times (vs. 18)
3. God is holy and powerful beyond our understanding; yet He longs to draw near to His people (vss. 19-20)
4. Our sin separates us from God, but through Christ, God has made a way to approach Him (vs. 21)
5. We must remember that our leaders are merely human, so we must resist the tendency to idolize them (vs. 22)
6. Obedience to God is critical for those who lead His people (vss. 23-25)