

Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Giving of the Law

Shemot – Chapter 19

ARRIVAL AT SINAI

(1)In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. (2)And when they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mount.

G-D'S PROPOSAL

(3)And Moses went up unto G-d, and the L-rd called unto him out of the mountain, saying: 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: (4)You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. (5) Now therefore, if you will hearken unto My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine; (6)and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak unto the children of Israel.' (7)And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the L-rd commanded him. (8)And all the people answered together, and said: 'All that the L-rd has spoken we will do.' And Moses reported the words of the people unto the L-rd. (9)And the L-rd said unto Moses: 'Lo, I come unto you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.' And Moses told the words of the people unto the L-rd.

PREPARING FOR THE TORAH

(10)And the L-rd said unto Moses: 'Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, (11)and be ready against the third day; for the third day the L-rd will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai. (12)And you shall set bounds unto the people round about, saying: Take heed to yourselves, that you go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death; (13) no hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live; when the ram's horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mount.' (14) And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their garments. (15)And he said unto the people: 'Be ready against the third day; come not near a woman.'

THE DAY OF REVELATION

(16)And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. (17)And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet G-d; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. (18)Now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the L-rd descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. (19)And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and G-d answered him by a voice. (20)And the

L-rd came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mount; and the L-rd called Moses to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. (21)And the L-rd said unto Moses: 'Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the L-rd to gaze, and many of them perish. (22)And let the priests also, that come near to the L-rd, sanctify themselves, lest the L-rd break forth upon them.' (23)And Moses said unto the L-rd: 'The people cannot come up to mount Sinai; for thou didst charge us, saying: Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.' (24)And the L-rd said unto him: 'Go, get thee down, and you shall come up, you, and Aaron with you; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the L-rd, lest He break forth upon them.' (25)So Moses went down unto the people, and told them.

Shemot – Chapter 20

ASERET HA-DIBROT

(1)And G-d spoke all these words, saying: (2)I am the L-rd thy G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (3)You shall have no other gods before Me. (4) You shall not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; (5)you shall not bow down unto them, nor serve them; for I the L-rd thy G-d am a jealous G-d, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; (6)and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments. (7)You shall not take the name of the L-rd thy G-d in vain; for the L-rd will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain. (8)Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9)Six days shall you labor, and do all thy work; (10)but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the L-rd thy G-d, in it you shall not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; (11)for in six days the L-rd made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the L-rd blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (12)Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the L-rd your G-d gave you. (13)You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (14)You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's. (15)And all the people perceived the thunder, and the lightning, and the voice of the horn, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. (16)And they said unto Moses: 'Speak you with us, and we will hear; but let not G-d speak with us, lest we die.' (17) And Moses said unto the people: 'Fear not; for G-d is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that you sin not.' (18)And the people stood afar off; but Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where G-d was. (19)And the L-rd said unto Moses: Thus you shall say unto the children of Israel: You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (20)You shall not make with Me - gods of silver, or gods of gold, you shall not make unto you. (21)An altar of earth you shall make unto Me, and shall sacrifice thereon your burnt-offerings, and your peace-offerings, your sheep, and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come unto you and bless you. (22)And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones; for if you lift up your tool upon it, you have profaned it. (23) Neither shall you go up by steps unto Mine altar, that your nakedness be not uncovered thereon.

Moses also taught the Children of Israel the following:

The civil law

Laws regarding the Jewish bondsmen

Laws regarding the “sale” of a daughter

Laws regarding murder and manslaughter

Laws regarding the killing of a slave

Laws regarding the penalties for bodily injury

Laws regarding death caused by an animal

Laws regarding open pits

Laws regarding an animal damaging property

Laws regarding the stealing of livestock

Laws regarding self-defense and the payment for theft

Laws regarding damages caused by livestock

Laws regarding custodians

Laws regarding a borrower

Laws regarding seduction

Laws regarding sensitivity to the helpless and abandoned

Laws regarding free loans

Laws regarding the integrity of the judicial process

Laws regarding the Shabbat

Laws regarding the three Pilgrimage Festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot)

G-d’s promise to send an angel giving the Hebrews swift passage to, and conquest of, Eretz Yisrael

Shemot – Chapter 24

WE HEAR AND WE OBEY

(3)And Moses came and told the people all the words of the L-rd, and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said: 'All the words which the L-rd hath spoken will we do.' (4)And Moses wrote all the words of the L-rd, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (5) And he sent the young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the L-rd. (6)And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. (7)And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said: 'All that the L-rd has spoken will we do, and obey.' (8)And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said: 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the L-rd has made with you in agreement with all these words.'

After these teachings, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascended the mountain. Moses alone ascended to the presence of G-d where he remained for forty days and forty nights. G-d instructed Moses as to the building of the Tabernacle – and all the holy objects that were to be contained in the Tabernacle – as well as the appointment, vestments, inauguration, and succession of the kohanim (priests). Moses was also instructed as to the tamid offerings (morning and evening offerings).

Shemot – Chapter 31

SHABBAT

(12)And the L-rd spoke unto Moses, saying: (13)'Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying: Verily you shall keep My sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the L-rd who sanctify you. (14)You shall keep the sabbath therefore, for it is holy unto you; every one that profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. (15)Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the L-rd; whosoever does any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. (16)Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. (17)It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the L-rd made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested.'

MOSES RECEIVES THE TABLETS

(18)And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of G-d.

Unfortunately, while the Children of Israel were waiting for Moses to return from the mountain, they began to doubt whether he would return. The Children of Israel felt that they needed a tangible presence to take Moses' place as an intermediary between themselves and G-d. So, in their misunderstanding and lack of faith, they created the Golden Calf. G-d becomes enraged and told Moses what had occurred. G-d told Moses that He would destroy the Children of Israel but Moses successfully prayed and begged G-d to not do away with the Children of Israel. Moses descended from the mountain and in a rage, he smashed the tablets that were just written by the finger of G-d. Moses pleaded for guidance and for the closeness of G-d and again ascended the mountain. While on the mountain, G-d instructed Moses to carve two stone tablets and write the Aseret ha-Dibrot. Moses remained on the mountain for forty days and forty nights and then descended from the mountain with the tablets.

It is said that Moses received not only the Aseret ha-Dibrot while on the mountain but also the 613 mitzvot and the mystical teachings (Kabbalah). Moses was to teach the people all the mitzvot during their wanderings in the desert. This was to prepare them for their service to G-d and their future roles in Eretz Yisrael. The giving of the law is the only time where an entire population was privy to the revelation and lived to tell about it. The law has been passed down from Moses to the present-day rabbinim (rabbis) and students.

Text based on "The Holy Scriptures" – Jewish Publication Society, 1917

*The usage of G-d and L-rd is in compliance with the command to not take the Name of G-d in vain or to erase His Name. If you print out these pages, please treat them with respect. If you need to get rid of them, please take them to a synagogue and ask that they be reused or placed in a geniza.

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rachel-esther@becomingjewish.org