

# Covenant at Sinai

**Sabbath Afternoon, August 16**

God's favor toward Israel had always been conditional on their obedience. At the foot of Sinai they had entered into covenant relationship with Him as His "peculiar treasure . . . above all people." Solemnly they had promised to follow in the path of obedience. "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," they had said. Exodus 19:5, 8. And when, a few days afterward, God's law was spoken from Sinai, and additional instruction in the form of statutes and judgments was communicated through Moses, the Israelites with one voice had again promised, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." At the ratification of the covenant, the people had once more united in declaring, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient," Exodus 24:3, 7. God had chosen Israel as His people, and they had chosen Him as their King. —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 293.

God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." Exodus 24:7. They had witnessed the proclamation of the law in awful majesty, and had trembled with terror before the mount; and yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant. . . .

The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth "the fruits of the Spirit." Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked. Through the prophet He declared of Himself, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. And when among men He said, "The Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." John 8:29. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371.

Sunday, August 17

# At Mount Sinai

The preparations were made, according to the command; and in obedience to a further injunction, Moses directed that a barrier be placed about the mount, that neither man nor beast might intrude upon the sacred precinct. If any ventured so much as to touch it, the penalty was instant death.

On the morning of the third day, as the eyes of all the people were turned toward the mount, its summit was covered with a thick cloud, which grew more black and dense, sweeping downward until the entire mountain was wrapped in darkness and awful mystery. Then a sound as of a trumpet was heard, summoning the people to meet with God; and Moses led them forth to the base of the mountain. From the thick darkness flashed vivid lightnings, while peals of thunder echoed and re-echoed among the surrounding heights. "And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." "The glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount" in the sight of the assembled multitude. And "the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder." So terrible were the tokens of Jehovah's presence that the hosts of Israel shook with fear, and fell upon their faces before the Lord. Even Moses exclaimed, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Hebrews 12:21.

And now the thunders ceased; the trumpet was no longer heard; the earth was still. There was a period of solemn silence, and then the voice of God was heard. Speaking out of the thick darkness that enshrouded Him, as He stood upon the mount, surrounded by a retinue of angels, the Lord made known His law. Moses, describing the scene, says: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints: from His right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words." Deuteronomy 33:2, 3.

Jehovah revealed Himself, not alone in the awful majesty of the judge and lawgiver, but as the compassionate guardian of His people: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." He whom they had already known as their Guide and Deliverer, who had brought them forth from Egypt, making a way for them through the sea, and overthrowing Pharaoh and his hosts, who had thus shown Himself to be above all the gods of Egypt—He it was who now spoke His law. — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 304, 305.

# Preparing for the Gift

The Lord then gave Moses express directions in regard to preparing the people for him to approach nigh to them that they might hear his law spoken, not by angels, but by himself. "And the Lord said unto Moses, go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day; for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai." The people were required to refrain from worldly labor and care, and to possess devotional thoughts. God required them also to wash their clothes. He is no less particular now than he was then. He is a God of order, and requires his people now upon the earth to observe habits of strict cleanliness. And those who worship God with uncleanly garments and persons do not come before him in an acceptable manner. He is not pleased with their lack of reverence for him, and he will not accept the service of filthy worshipers, for they insult their Maker. The Creator of the heavens and of the earth considered cleanliness of so much importance that he said, "And let them wash their clothes."

"And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it. Whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through, whether it be beast or man, it shall not live. When the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount." This command was designed to impress the minds of this rebellious people with a profound veneration for God, the author and authority of their laws.

"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." The angelic host that attended the divine Majesty summoned the people by a sound resembling that of a trumpet, which waxed louder and louder until the whole earth trembled.

"And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." The divine Majesty descended in a cloud with a glorious retinue of angels, who appeared as flames of fire. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 262–264.

# The Gift of the Decalogue

“And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount, and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them.” Thus the Lord, in awful grandeur, speaks his law from Sinai, that the people may believe. He then accompanies the giving of his law with sublime exhibitions of his authority, that they may know that he is the only true and living God. Moses was not permitted to enter within the cloud of glory, but only draw nigh and enter the thick darkness which surrounded it. And he stood between the people and the Lord.

After the Lord had given them such evidences of his power, he tells them who he is. “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The same God who exalted his power among the Egyptians now speaks his law. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 264, 265.

The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellow man; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Luke 10:27. See also Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Leviticus 19:18. In the Ten Commandments these principles are carried out in detail, and made applicable to the condition and circumstances of man. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305.

The great principles contained in the law of God enjoin upon us the duty of loving God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves. Those who love God will keep the first four precepts of the Decalogue, which define the duty of man to his Creator. But in carrying out this principle through the grace of Christ, we shall express in our characters the divine attributes, and will work out the love of God in all our dealing with our fellow men. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” [John 3:16.] God gave His best gift to the world, and whosoever has the attributes of God will love his fellow men with the same love wherewith God has loved him. The Spirit of God dwelling in the heart, will be manifested in love to others. —“Our Duty to the Poor and Afflicted,” in *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 9, par. 3.

# Different Functions of God's Law

The Lord Jesus came to our world to represent the character of his Father. He came to live out the law, and his words and character were daily a correct exposition of the law of God. His own personal example testified to the world, to angels, and to men that he was keeping the law of God, and was a standard and pattern to mankind. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Jesus was a living manifestation of what the law was, and he revealed in his personal character its true significance, and showed it to be the only remedy for the existing evils, when it was set free from the rubbish of men's traditions and maxims. As it was expounded by the scribes and Pharisees, it was misleading because misrepresented, and it perverted the characters of those who received the traditions and commandments of men.

The Lord Jesus gave to men a representation of the character of God in his life and example. The law of God is the transcript of the character of God. And in Christ they had its precepts exemplified, and example was far more effective than the precept had been. Christ founded his kingdom upon the law of God, and those who followed Christ, imitating his life and character, were pronounced loyal and true to all God's commandments. Jesus was a living illustration of the fulfillment of the law, but his fulfilling it did not mean its abolition and annihilation. In fulfilling the law, he carried out every specification of its claims. —"Christ the Impersonation of the Law," *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1895, par. 8, 9.

The plan of redemption is perfect in all its parts. It does not lessen the claims of the law of God in one jot or one tittle, in saving the sinner from the just penalty of the law. Through the provision of the death of God's only-begotten Son in sinners' behalf, the immutability of the law of God is demonstrated for time and eternity. Justice honors the law of God in providing a substitute for the transgressor; for Christ gave his own life a ransom in order that God might be just and yet be the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. The work of saving the lost through the merit of Christ magnifies the law, and harmonizes with every perfection of Jehovah. In the plan of salvation the highest honor is paid to the law of heaven's government, and yet mercy is freely dispensed to the fallen sons of Adam. Every believing soul, cooperating with the Great Restorer, is blessed with heavenly grace and endowed with the richest treasures of the glory of God. The imagination can not picture anything more glorious than that which is attained through the plan of redemption. Well may we exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" —"Christ Revealing the Character of the Law," *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1896, par. 3.

# The Law as God's Promise for Us

"Till heaven and earth pass," said Jesus, "one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." By His own obedience to the law, Christ testified to its immutable character and proved that through His grace it could be perfectly obeyed by every son and daughter of Adam. On the mount He declared that not the smallest iota should pass from the law till all things should be accomplished—all things that concern the human race, all that relates to the plan of redemption. He does not teach that the law is ever to be abrogated, but He fixes the eye upon the utmost verge of man's horizon and assures us that until this point is reached the law will retain its authority so that none may suppose it was His mission to abolish the precepts of the law. So long as heaven and earth continue, the holy principles of God's law will remain. His righteousness, "like the great mountains" (Psalm 36:6), will continue, a source of blessing, sending forth streams to refresh the earth.

Because the law of the Lord is perfect, and therefore changeless, it is impossible for sinful men, in themselves, to meet the standard of its requirement. This was why Jesus came as our Redeemer. It was His mission, by making men partakers of the divine nature, to bring them into harmony with the principles of the law of heaven. When we forsake our sins and receive Christ as our Saviour, the law is exalted. —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*, pp. 49, 50.

God has given us His holy precepts, because He loves mankind. To shield us from the results of transgression, He reveals the principles of righteousness. The law is an expression of the thought of God; when received in Christ, it becomes our thought. It lifts us above the power of natural desires and tendencies, above temptations that lead to sin. God desires us to be happy, and He gave us the precepts of the law that in obeying them we might have joy. . . .

When the law was proclaimed from Sinai, God made known to men the holiness of His character, that by contrast they might see the sinfulness of their own. The law was given to convict them of sin, and reveal their need of a Saviour. It would do this as its principles were applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. This work it is still to do. In the life of Christ the principles of the law are made plain; and as the Holy Spirit of God touches the heart, as the light of Christ reveals to men their need of His cleansing blood and His justifying righteousness, the law is still an agent in bringing us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Psalm 19:7.

"Till heaven and earth pass," said Jesus, "one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." The sun shining in the heavens, the solid earth upon which you dwell, are God's witnesses that His law is changeless and eternal. Though they may pass away, the divine precepts shall endure. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Luke 16:17. The system of types that pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God was to be abolished at His death; but the precepts of the Decalogue are as immutable as the throne of God. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 308.

Friday, August 22

## For Further Reading

"Christ the Impersonation of the Law," *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1895.  
"The Law and the Gospel," *Signs of the Times*, February 25, 1897.