

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

Moses on Mt. Sinai

We're so enjoying our new home in the Appalachian Mountains. Every time I walk or drive anywhere with my grandkids, we sing, "We're going up the hill and down the hill. Up the hill and down the hill." Because we can't go anywhere without doing just that!

As Lyndsey and I prepared for this week's study on Moses, I was reminded of our little song when Moses goes *up* Mt. Sinai and *down* Mt. Sinai again and again, taking on the role of messenger between our REAL GOD and His REAL PEOPLE, Israel.

The REAL GOD Reveals Himself

We'll skim a lot of Scripture today (Exodus 19-34), so you may want your Bible close by to follow along. As we begin, it's important to remember that Moses isn't just out for a stroll...he's 80 years old while making these treks up and down this rugged mountain.

A 3-part pattern develops as we go through the first part of our story:

Moses goes:

- 1) *up the mountain*
- 2) *down the Mountain*
- 3) *"and all the people said..."*

Let's begin with **Exodus 19**.

- **19:1** – On the 3rd New Moon (3 months) after leaving Egypt, Israel camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai.
- **19:3** – Moses **up the mountain** – God promises to make Israel a holy nation of priests if they obey.
- **19:7** – Moses **down the mountain** to relay Yahweh's message
 - **All the people said**, "We will do everything the LORD has said."
- **19:8** – Moses **up the mountain** – reports to LORD what they said (LOL! Really? Like God didn't hear them?).
 - Yahweh tells Moses to have people consecrate themselves because God will speak to them directly in 3 days. Warns not to touch mountain or they'll die.
- **19:14-15** – Moses **down the mountain** – relays God's message to consecrate themselves for the LORD's direct encounter.

- **19:16-24** – God shows up (thick cloud over mountain, sound of loud trumpet, everyone in camp trembled). Moses speaks to Him and God calls Moses **up the mountain** to warn people *again* not to touch mountain or they’ll die.
- **19:25** – Moses **down the mountain** to warn people *again* – and God speaks 10 Commandments in people’s hearing.
- **20:18** – People *see* God’s voice/presence in thunder & lightning, hear trumpet, and see mountain draped in smoke. They tremble and stay at a distance. **All the people said**, “Don’t have God speak to us or we’ll die.”

Why Was God Scary?

A healthy fear (reverence) of God was intended to keep the Israelites from sinning. God didn’t intend to make them cower. Notice He first said, “Don’t be afraid.”

“Moses said, ‘Don’t be afraid. God is testing you *so that* your fear (reverence) will keep you from sinning.’” **Exodus 20:20**

Our REAL GOD intended to strike fear into their hearts because He knew it was good for them, and it’s good for us today. Solomon knew it a few hundred years later too:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” **Proverbs 9:10**

It’s like when a loving father broadens his shoulders, puffs out his chest, points his finger, and says in a stern voice, “I don’t *EVER* want you to do that again!” A healthy father/child relationship has no fear of abuse. The father is simply being...mighty. He’s reminding the child where the power lies and there will be consequences if the child disobeys, but His heart is set on keeping His child safe.

More Hiking for Moses

Moses goes back **up the mountain** in chapter 20. God tells him to return to camp and bring up Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of Israel’s elders (**24:1**).

- **24:3** – Moses **down the mountain** to tell people all the LORD’s words and laws.
 - **And all the people said**, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.”
 - Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.
 - He got up early the next morning, built an altar (of 12 stone pillars), presented burnt and fellowship offerings.
 - Then he read the Book of the Covenant to the people.

- **And all the people said**, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”
- **24:9**—Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of Israel’s elders went **up the mountain**. They ***SAW the God of Israel and ate and drank with Him!***

Fellowship Restored

Not since the Garden of Eden had men (or women) eaten in God’s presence (**Genesis 2:16-17**, when God told Adam and Eve they could eat from any tree in the Garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil).

Even though Aaron, his sons, and the elders were undoubtedly terrified to enter their REAL GOD’s presence, they made the trek up the mountain—and God gives them an encounter like no one else on earth had ever experienced! Yahweh eats with them. The epitome of fellowship in their culture. The essence of fellowship with God.

New Covenant Foreshadowing

The Sinai meal foreshadows two other meals that welcome new epics in God’s Kingdom. Remember the Covenant God made with Abraham? Well, here, on Mt. Sinai, God makes a new covenant with Moses—the Covenant of the Law—that will govern His REAL PEOPLE, Israel, until Jesus comes.

Jesus, on the eve of His suffering, ate a very special meal with His disciples that Christians commemorate each time we celebrate Communion. One day, those who are waiting for Jesus’ return will eat another meal with God—the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19)—and rejoice in His presence for eternity!

Moses Goes Higher

After feasting with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of Israel’s elders, Yahweh calls Moses higher...

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.’ Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and...said to the elders, ‘Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.’ When Moses went up on the mountain...[he waited] For six days...and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud...Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” **Exodus 24:12-18**

Why Did God Give the Law?

The Law is significant in how our REAL GOD *relates to* and *reveals Himself to* His REAL PEOPLE. It's sort of like if Lyndsey or I would write a manifesto of *Life, Love, Liberty, and Community: Everything You Need to Know to Survive and Thrive*. You would learn a LOT about *us* by reading our manifesto. In the same way, we learn a lot about our REAL GOD by looking at the Law He laid out for His people.

If you haven't read Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy lately, try reading one of them and ask yourself, "What do these laws reveal about the nature of God, His character, and His heart?" It may shine a new light on these Scriptures that sometimes feel dry and boring. Here are a few examples:

- **Numbers 35:9-12** – Cities of refuge reveal God's heart to protect people against vigilante justice. By establishing these cities, He makes a way for a fair trial.
- **Leviticus 11-15** – The laws regarding cleanliness and quarantine for skin diseases became a sort of medical journal for a people who had little or no medical knowledge.
- **Leviticus 21-23** – The commands regarding feasts and festivals are given because our REAL GOD knows that REAL PEOPLE are FORGETFUL PEOPLE. We will not remember to worship Him, to rest, or to celebrate life unless He commands it.

REAL PEOPLE Are Forgetful People

While Yahweh was revealing His heart to Moses through the laws and commands of His Covenant, the Israelites were counting the days of Moses' absence and getting more nervous with every sunset.

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for *this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt*, we don't know what has happened to him.’” **Exodus 32:1** (*emphasis added*)

It took the Israelites a little over a month to forget their fear of Yahweh and attribute their freedom to a man. Because Moses was the REAL PEOPLE's only connection with their REAL GOD, they felt a spiritual vacuum in his absence and grasped at anything when Yahweh seemed silent and distant. Remember, they didn't want to get too close to their REAL GOD. They preferred a *comfortable* relationship with God, one in which *they* held control. But a comfortable God is easily forgotten when life gets hard.

Are You Relying on a Messenger?

Even today, we can settle into a “comfortable” spirituality rather than draw near to our mighty God. Of course, because Jesus is our High Priest, we no longer need an earthly messenger or priest to be a go-between, but sometimes we let lazy spirituality keep us at a distance...

- Do you rely on what someone else says about the Bible for your spiritual life and health? Sermons, Bible studies, and/or podcasts? How much time do you spend alone in God’s Word listening for His voice to teach you?
- Do you pray without a list for at least part of your prayer time? Why not let His Holy Spirit guide your words and subject matter?

Moses and the REAL GOD Get Real Angry

When God finishes inscribing the Law on stone tablets, He tells Moses to go **down the mountain** to the stiff-necked, short-sighted Israelites, who built a golden calf in Moses’ absence. Moses goes down the mountain and shows a little wrath of his own.

- **32:19** – Moses throws down the God-inscribed stone tablets, shattering them.
- **32:20** – Moses burns up the calf, grinds it into powder, and makes the Israelites drink it.
- **32:29** – Sons of Levi (who are on the Lord’s side) kill 3000 of their brothers, companions, and neighbors in “the service of the Lord,” who built/worshiped golden calf.
- **32:35** – God sends a plague on all the people because of the golden calf.
- **33:1-3** – Moses goes back **up the mountain**, and God threatens *not to go with* Israel to the Promised Land.
- **33:4-6** – Moses goes **down the mountain** telling the people about the Lord’s wrath. People mourn and strip off their gold and silver ornaments—as the Lord instructed.

Moses Continues His Conversation

It would seem at this point in the story that Moses was tired of running up and down the mountain. He chooses to chat with Yahweh in the special tent erected for ALL Israelites to meet with God.

“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the ‘tent of meeting.’ Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents...As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance...Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud...they all stood and worshiped.” **Exodus 33:7-10**

The Israelites *really seemed to want to seek after God and follow Him*. But their faith, as we've seen, was too wishy-washy, and Yahweh's holiness too pure. He suggested to Moses that perhaps Israel would be safer if an angel (rather than Yahweh Himself) led them to the Promised Land...

“Then Moses said to him, ‘...What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’ Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory...’ Then the Lord said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by...’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then *come up on Mount Sinai*. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain.’”

Exodus 33:15-17; 34:1-2 (*emphasis added*)

Another Trip Up the Mountain

Early the next morning, Moses goes back up the mountain, and encounters Yahweh in a way like no other person in Scripture!

“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of [YAHWEH]. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord [Yahweh], the Lord [Yahweh], a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.”

Exodus 34:5-10

God revealed Himself to Moses in a “cleft of a rock”—a broken place—on the mountain. Broken places are where we learn about God best. His mercy. His patience. His abounding forgiveness. And His steadfast love and faithfulness.

Yahweh also reminded Moses that He's holy and just and will not leave the guilty—those who refuse to repent—go unpunished. He lets the consequences of those rebellious people's sins visit their children to the 3rd and 4th generation.

If that sounds harsh, remember the context. God had just promised the Israelites (in His first Ten Commandments) that He'd show *love to 1000 generations* of those who loved Him and kept His commands. Punish 3-4 generations and love 1000 generations. That's the nature of our God.

Moses spends another 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain while God reestablishes the covenant with His people and writes on the tablets of stone Moses prepared. The laws mentioned in this section (Exodus 34) specifically help the Israelites *remember* their God. Why? Because REAL PEOPLE are FORGETFUL PEOPLE.

Last Trip Down the Mountain

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.” **Exodus 34:29-31**

Moses instructs them to bring their gold and silver and bronze, precious stones, expensive yarns—the best they had. Remember the first time they gathered their gold/silver? It was to make a golden calf...

This time, it's to make a Tabernacle to worship Yahweh according to His specific instructions. Come back for our next audio study to hear how each instruction holds significance and meaning. We serve an awesome God!

Today's Question:

- How can you cut out the middleman in your spiritual life?

Originally posted by Mesu Andrews on Nov 4th, 2016