

## EXODUS 18–20

### Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Exodus 18–20.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

### LDS Study Focus

The LDS study guide focuses on the theme: “All That the Lord Hath Spoken We Will Do.” The LDS summary of this week’s content is:

*The Israelites’ journey from Egypt to the foot of Mount Sinai was filled with miracles—undeniable manifestations of the Lord’s matchless power, love, and mercy. However, the Lord had blessings in store for them that went beyond freeing them from Egypt and satisfying their physical hunger and thirst. He wanted them to become His covenant people, His “peculiar treasure,” and a “holy nation” ([Exodus 19:5–6](#)).*

*Today, the blessings of this covenant extend beyond just one nation or people. God wants all of His children to become His covenant people, to “obey [His] voice indeed, and keep [His] covenant” ([Exodus 19:5](#)), for He shows His mercy “unto thousands of them that love [Him], and keep [His] commandments” ([Exodus 20:6](#)).*

You might be thinking, “That all sounds very Christian.” However, one will need to dig deeper and ask, **“What is the primary purpose of God’s law, and who is able to keep it?”**

In their reading and application of these chapters, Christians and LDS will find significant differences in their beliefs about the purpose of the law. LDS believe that

*God gives laws and commandments to His children to provide the only possible means whereby they may become like Him. If we do not conform to the bounds and conditions of a law, we are not justified in receiving the blessings associated with it. Each of us must be able to abide by the law of the kingdom we inherit. [Doctrine and Covenants Study Manual: The Nature and Purpose of Law](#)*

As you study together, look for ways to guide readers to discover *why* God gave Israel the Ten Commandments.

### Biblical Focus

The entire content of the Scripture of God can be rightly divided into two parts: commandments—the law, and promises—the gospel.

The basic distinction is straightforward: The law tells us what we ought to do; the gospel tells us what God has done. The law, with its “you musts” and “you must nots,” both define the universal standard of divine goodness and reveal human weakness. It typically does its work of accusation in the form of a commandment attached to a condition. “If you do/are \_\_\_\_\_, then you will \_\_\_\_\_.”

God’s law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, reflects God’s perfect expectations for us. Any infraction is a severe offense to God punishable by eternal death. Every single law we break proves our unworthiness and earns us eternal punishment. Because God’s standard is perfection, breaking even a

single commandment is the same as breaking the whole law. The absolute nature of the law means that even one sin is enough to damn us.

## ***EXODUS 18***

### ***Moses shares the load***

The chapter about Jethro's managerial encouragements for Moses is interesting, but there aren't a lot of law and gospel applications to be made or many opportunities to witness from the content. However, Christians would do well to consider how they can spread out the church's work. Are there ways to support your pastor so that he can focus on the specific work of preaching, teaching, and equipping believers that you have called him to do? What logistical or administrative work could you help him spread out among others?

## ***EXODUS 19***

### ***God gives Ten Commandments on Sinai***

Three months had passed since the Israelites witnessed God's might displayed in the ten plagues. The Israelites experienced delivery from slavery, were provided with safe passage through the Red Sea and watched as the enemy Egyptians got annihilated. God's chosen people were daily and miraculously fed by manna. These wandering people had even seen water burst forth from a rock at God's command. They were gradually becoming acquainted with God and his characteristics. Now at Mount Sinai, it was time to learn more about the nature of God and what he demanded from them.

This covenant with God is different from the one he made previously with Abraham ([Genesis 12:1-3](#)). That earlier covenant was one-sided. God would do all the acting and keep all the promises. Here there is a two-sided covenant that comes with a conditional *if*.

*"If you obey."*

Many read this and say, "I will get to work trying to obey the commandments. I will work hard and strive to keep them." But that's not what God is saying. It's a do or didn't do proposition. When it comes to transactions with God, "*ifs*" are a loud and clear preaching of the law that condemns.

Christians understand that they have been breaking God's laws all their lives and will continue to do so until the day they die.

Like many today, including Mormons, Israel responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said" ([Exodus 19:8](#)). But if you know anything about Israel's history, it is easy to see that they broke this covenant with God. Moreover, they will do so obviously with the golden calf incident in Exodus 32.

Was Israel being hypocritical? Probably not. They wanted to obey the God that rescued them from slavery. They honestly thought that they *could*. Although a naive confession, it is natural for fallen humans to believe that they can save themselves by keeping the law. Martin Luther called this the *opinio legis*, or "the opinion of the law." It's the idea that I can save myself by keeping commandments and doing what I can to please God.

This concept will present a noticeable difference between you and your LDS friends. Their blessings and eternal outcome are dependent on the *ifs*. LDS theology teaches that God would not give his people a command that they could not keep. This week's LDS materials focus on the beauty of being God's

peculiar (treasured) possession. Indeed, it is beautiful, but it is beneficial to discuss how uncertain that status is when conditions that depend on humans' works or efforts are involved in this context.

### **Why did God bother to give Israel this list if he knew how thoroughly they would violate his law?**

God was preparing his people Israel to see their failure, sin, and need for a savior. God showed them that absolute obedience was required to have a right relationship with him. But, again, the law was written in absolutes and did not leave room for good intentions or improvement over time. In the coming days, Israel would become acquainted with the reality of their inability to obey. They would learn that they could not have a relationship with God based on their obedience. *They needed another option.*

What do you get when you mix an earthquake, volcano, thunderstorm, loud trumpets, and death threats? Not the setup for an apocalypse joke. You get the way God chooses to reveal his law. How God created such a terrifying scene showed his seriousness about the law and gave the Israelites a glimpse of his wrath. We cannot know how sweet his grace is unless it is contrasted with his justice and wrath.

### **Conversation Starters:**

- **How do two sided-covenants with God make you feel and why?**
- **Describe the scene. Why did God make it so terrifying?**
- **How do descriptions of the final judgment remind us of Mount Sinai? Why is this a meaningful connection?**
- **What CAN God's law do? What CAN'T God's law do?**
- **If he knew we couldn't keep all of his commandments, why did God give them in the first place?**
- **Why do humans tend to trust themselves and their works rather than God and his works?**
- **Why is it important to understand that God is not merely looking for superficial compliance regarding his commandments? Why is it dangerous to say that all God demands is that we "try" or "do our best?"**
- **Examine the picture. How are we spared from the wrath of God? [Full of Eyes » 1 John 4:10 \[Propitiation\]](#)**

### **Sharing Personally:**

When I read about God's two-sided covenant in Exodus 19, I am terrified. *"If you obey..."*

"If" means that something depends on me.

"If" means something might not happen.

Since I am well acquainted with my sin, I already know it didn't happen. I have already failed. Although this covenant was never possible for me to fulfill, it still has a righteous purpose; it teaches me that I could not rescue myself or be my own savior.

God knew that the two-sided covenant would offer no hope for his people, but rather it would drive them to cry out to him for rescue. So, in his mercy, God provided a New Covenant. This one-sided covenant depended only on Jesus. Because of his perfect obedience and sacrificial death, the demands of the law have been satisfied.

Through Jesus, all “ifs” have been fulfilled.

Because Jesus obeyed, I am God’s treasured possession forever.

### **Additional Resources:**

You can learn more about how and when to talk with Mormons about God’s Law in the article [The Purpose of the Law](#) on TILM.org. Additionally, you could direct LDS members to the article [A Humanitarian by Giving the Law](#), from the study of *God—The Ultimate Humanitarian* on BeYePerfect.org or [chapter 5 of the book by the same name, available in our online store.](#)

## ***Exodus 20***

### **The Giving of the Law**

LDS resources encourage people to examine themselves with the Ten Commandments and find ways in which they can improve.

*As you read [Exodus 20](#), consider noting which of the Ten Commandments you feel you are obeying and which you feel you could obey more faithfully. You could choose one commandment to work on and then study it in more detail by reading related scriptures... Consider including in your study the blessings that come to those who obey the commandment. How do these blessings show God’s mercy and love for you?*

Christians can use this as an opportunity to demonstrate that God’s law serves first as a mirror that shows us our sins. Because Christians are secure in the gospel, it is safe to admit how corrupt and deeply flawed we are. Mormons do not readily confess their sins because they receive forgiveness through obedience. Honesty about sin puts their certainty in jeopardy. Model for your LDS friends what sincere and secure confession looks like.

Mormons are conditioned to minimize the law so that obedience seems possible. Therefore, you may find it helpful to show how adherence to the commandments includes obedient thoughts. For example, Jesus taught that lust is just as bad as adultery and that hate, in his view, is the same as murder. From our human perspective, that is ridiculous. We would never put one who commits “hate” in prison. However, God’s perspective is what truly matters. There is no place for even wrong thoughts in his kingdom. Examining what Jesus says about the law in Matthew 5 can be an excellent place to start a conversation on the law.

After you confess that you are sinful and specific sins you have committed, share why you aren’t afraid of eternal separation from God. God understood that humans could not possibly eradicate evil from our lives and fully keep all of his commandments. Therefore, he sent one who could be our substitute. Jesus never sinned once in thought, word, or action. Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly on our behalf and wrapped us in his robe of righteousness.

### Conversation Starters:

- Describe the relationship God commands us to have with him.
- Describe the relationship God commands us to have with our neighbor.
- How did Jesus make obedience seem even more impossible? ([Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28](#))
- Describe various ways in which Jesus obeyed these commands.
- Does God give us commands we cannot keep? What are the different implications of a “yes” and a “no” answer?

### Sharing Personally:

*When I read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, I know my obedience falls short.*

*I may not bow down to gold statues, but God doesn't always have first place in my heart.*

*I'm pretty good about avoiding OMGs, but I wear his name as a Christian and misrepresent who he is when I am selfish.*

*I go to church, but I fail to rest, to sabbath, trusting in God to provide.*

*I roll my eyes at the authorities.*

*I've never murdered, but I have certainly hated.*

*I have never physically cheated on my spouse, but I have lusted.*

*I haven't stolen anything big, but does time from my employer count?*

*I don't knowingly spread lies about others, but I have retold information that makes others look bad so that I look good.*

*And coveting? I'm an American. I am conditioned to want what I don't have.*

*Honestly, I need a Savior to rescue me!*

*And*

*At first glance, Exodus 20 might appear to be a list of commandments God has given so that I can gain his favor. Is that possible? How high are his demands? I'm doing fantastic if God meant that I only need to avoid bowing to statues, murdering, and having sex outside of marriage. My record is perfect!*

*Progress is possible when I simplify God's demands, and perfection seems like a realistic hope.*

*However, diminishing God's law in that way would give me a false sense of achievement, and it would even eliminate the need for a substitutionary Savior. I would be able to save myself. God's law is much higher. It demands clean thoughts and a pure heart—always.*

*When I understand how impossible it is to meet the demands of the law, I turn away from hope in myself to crying out to my Substitute Jesus for help.*

*And*

*In Exodus 20, when God gave his people Israel and us the Ten Commandments, he did so to convince us that we are in terrible trouble before it is too late.*

*He not only gave commandments to reveal our sinfulness, but he also gave an **abundance** of commandments to make **it abundantly clear** how sinful we are. God did this even though Jesus, therefore, had to pay the price for every last sin.*

*Jesus' willing obedience to the law demonstrates how much God loves us. Even when it comes to making us aware of our sinful condition, he is the Great Physician. He is not afraid to show us our sins so that we will see our need for the only possible solution, Jesus.*

**Additional resources:**

For a thorough explanation of the Ten Commandments, as a whole and individually, [see Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation](#).