

LESSON 12: MOSES (COVENANT WITH ONE NATION II)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 7	:	Cover points 1 to 15
For Intermediate Level / Age 10	:	Cover points 1 to 15
For Advanced Level / Age 13	:	Cover points 1 to 16

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned that the descendants of Jacob's sons in Egypt were forced into slavery. God heard their cries and raised up a prophet, Moses, from among them to deliver them from slavery. They had now left Egypt by crossing the Red Sea which God had parted for them to cross over safely on dry ground, and were now in the wilderness (desert) of Sinai. In this lesson, we learn about how God took care of them as they were wandering around the desert.

Current lesson:

1. After God had freed the Israelites as slaves in Egypt, they had to be kept wandering in the wilderness for an extended length of time as God took time to teach them what it meant to turn away from their old Egyptian way of life and embrace their identity as His People. It was easier to take the people out of Egypt than it was to take Egypt out of the people! Only forty years later would they enter into the Promised Land.
2. God needed to teach them how to be human again, since they had been treated worse than animals for so many years and no longer knew how to behave themselves properly. More than just teaching them how to be human, He wanted them to learn how to live like they were His people. But Moses had a very difficult task teaching them because they were a terribly stubborn people. They were often complaining against God and Moses, refusing to follow the instructions and laws that God gave through Moses. They were unable to trust God.

Whenever they misbehaved, God would eventually discipline them by punishing them. They would then repent and ask Moses to pray for God's forgiveness on their behalf, which God always granted (but not without them having to experience consequences for their sinful actions, otherwise they would not learn!)

3. A good example of their sinful actions was their rebellion against Moses and God at the border of Canaan (Numbers 13-14). A few years after they left Egypt, God led them to the border of Canaan, the land that He had promised them. Moses sent out twelve spies to check out the land. Forty days later, ten of the twelve spies (except for Joshua and Caleb) reported that the Israelites were too weak to take the land from its current inhabitants. The people immediately believed their exaggeration and rebelled against Moses and God. As a result of this, God made them wander around the desert for forty years before they were allowed to enter into Canaan, the Promised Land.

Towards the end of the forty years, the Israelites felt weary from their long journey and once again spoke out against Moses. They complained about how bad life was in the desert, with lousy food and insufficient water. As a punishment for their ingratitude, God sent poisonous serpents to bite them and many of them died. When they became fearful, they started begging Moses to help them, asking him to pray that the Lord would take the serpents away from them. When Moses prayed, God told him to make a bronze serpent and place it on the top of a pole so that all who had been bitten would be healed if they gazed upon it. Just as God had promised, those who were bitten recovered when they gazed upon the bronze serpent.

Such was the attitude of the Israelites all throughout the time that God was leading them in the desert. They did not have an attitude of trust in God and gratitude for the freedom that He had brought them from slavery in Egypt. They constantly focused on the inconvenience of life in the desert and the impossibility of things despite all the miracles that they had witnessed, which resulted in their constantly blaming God and Moses.

4. But God would not give up on them. He remained with them, constantly leading them and giving them instructions for living. He went ahead of them all the way as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). He ensured that every aspect of their lives was properly taken care of, and things would have been all right if they had just obeyed God and followed His instructions.
5. God took care of their **food and drink**. At Marah, the water was found too bitter to drink. But Moses threw a piece of wood into it which sweetened the water for them (Exodus 15:23-26). When they complained that they were hungry, God promised to feed them. That evening, a large flock of quails (birds) flew into their camp (Exodus 16:1-13, Numbers 11:4-32). Each morning, God fed them with manna to eat, which was a small white seed that looks like frost on the ground, and which tastes like wafers made with honey (Exodus 16:14-36).
6. God provided their **safety from enemies**. At Rephidim, they were attacked by a large force of Amalekites. Moses watched the battle from a hilltop with his hands raised to the Lord in prayer all day. God wins the battle for Joshua's forces, and the Israelites amass weapons and armoury from the Amalekites whom they had defeated. (Exodus 17:8-14)
7. God provided them with **good leadership**. Advised by Jethro, his father-in-law who visited Moses as the Israelites passed through Midian, Moses appointed judges to hear the minor grievances of the Israelites so that Moses would not have to waste all his time attending to the petty complaints of the people and could focus on the more important matters (Exodus 18:13-27, Deuteronomy 1:9-18). Later on, a group of 70 elders was appointed to help Moses to bear the burden of leading the nation (Numbers 11:16-17).

God had even planned for the succession of leadership over Israel. From the time Moses went up to Mount Sinai to meet with God on behalf of the Israelites, his young assistant Joshua was already with him (Exodus 24:12-13). When Moses went to the Tent to speak with the Lord "as a man talks to his friend," Joshua would accompany him (Exodus 33:9-11). And very often, after Moses left the Tent, Joshua would remain within it to speak with the Lord. It would seem that Joshua had the special privilege of being privy to Moses'

relationship with God more than anybody else in Israel. All this pointed ultimately to God's plan to make Joshua the successor of Moses (Numbers 27:15-23). This is why, when God instructed Moses about entering into the Promised Land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, he made it a point to have Joshua present (Exodus 33:1-23).

8. God gave them **laws for living**. Because of everything He had done for them, God called for the Israelites to be His people forever, with the condition that they should obey His commands. Moses entered into the thick cloud covering the top of Mount Sinai to meet with God where He had appeared to Moses in the burning bush about six years earlier, while the people remained at a distance. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on this mountain (Exodus 20:1-17). After descending the mountain to deliver the Ten Commandments to the people, Moses went up again to receive more lengthy instructions from God on their behalf (Exodus 20:19 to 23:33). In total, Moses ascended and descended Mount Sinai at least seven times to deliver God's messages to the Israelites and also to fulfil what God had instructed for him to do.
9. God gave them an **economic system** that was based on the law of justice and mercy (Deuteronomy 15:1-10). Debts had to be cancelled at the end of every seven years. They were to be generous in giving and lending to one another. Those who gave generously were promised blessings in all the work of their hands.
10. God taught them **education** techniques (Deuteronomy 11:18-21). Parents were to teach His decrees to their children by talking about them to their children daily. They were to write these decrees on the doorframes of their houses and their gates so that their children would be reminded of them as they entered and exited their houses each day. This was in order to ensure that the children would remember and observe the laws that God had given to their parents, which God now wanted the parents to ensure to pass them down to their next generations.
11. God gave them instructions on **hygiene**. The laws given by God required for them to keep themselves physically clean, and there were procedures for purifying themselves when they became unclean (Leviticus 15). People were to leave the place of the camp whenever they needed to pass motion, dig a hole in the ground and cover their excrement up (Deuteronomy 23:12-13). People who suffered from contagious skin disease were also to follow certain specific instructions and undergo certain rituals for purification (Leviticus 14:1-32). Instructions were also given for people who had been in physical contact with dead bodies on how to avoid disease (Numbers 19:1-16).
12. God gave them laws on how **family relationships** were to be regulated (Leviticus 18:5-24). They were not to have any kind of improper relationships among family members that contradicted the natural role given by God for each member in the family. Children were to honour their parents (Exodus 20:12).
13. Most importantly, God restored their **worship of the true God**. Remember that after all those years in Egypt, the people of Israel had become idolatrous. God wanted them to come back to the worship of the One true God. He instructed Moses to build a sanctuary where God could dwell among His people (Exodus 25:1-40, 40:16-21). The outer portion of this sanctuary would be called the Tent of Meeting, and it was to be made from rams' skins

with a covering of fine leather made from the hides of sea cows or dugong (Exodus 26:1-37). At the heart of the Tent of Meeting would be the Tabernacle, a structure of curtains made from the finest linen and expensive yarns forming the Holy of Holies (or the Most Holy Place). Within this Holy of Holies, concealed by the curtains, was to be found the Ark of the Covenant (a gold-covered wooden chest containing the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed), the most important item in the entire sanctuary. To be present in the Tabernacle were also a gold-covered table containing twelve loaves of unleavened bread, and a gold lampstand with seven candles. This Tent of Meeting was to be mobile, so that it could be packed up and reconstructed as the people wandered around the desert. Whenever they made an encampment, the Ark of the Covenant would then be housed inside the Tabernacle.

Moses also received instructions about the construction of two altars, a large bronze sacrificial altar and a smaller gold-covered incense altar, each with four horns. The Levites were set apart to serve at the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 1:47-50, 8:1-26). The priests (Aaron and his sons, who were also Levites), were to be provided with a bronze washing bowl to purify themselves when entering the Tabernacle. The garments of the priests were to include a linen “ephod” (a sleeveless top with golden shoulder straps incorporating onyx gemstones engraved with the names of the Twelve tribes of Israel), a gold and linen breastpiece, a woven linen tunic, a blue robe, an embroidered sash and a linen turban. (Exodus 27-30, 35-39)

The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) was instituted to be held around the end of September each year. On this day, the High Priest would sacrifice a bull for his own sins and those of the other priests. And then, a lamb would also be sacrificed for the sins of all Israel. In addition to that, the sins of the people were to be placed symbolically on the head of another goat by the High Priest. This scapegoat was to be driven into the desert to take the sins of the people away. (Leviticus 16)

14. The Lord never left them. His presence (called the *shekinah*) was like a cloud hovering over the Tabernacle during the day, and it appeared to be fiery during the night. It could remain there for indefinite durations, “two days, a month, or a year”. But whenever it lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites knew that it was time to move on (Exodus 40:34-38, Numbers 9:22).
15. Despite all this faithful care given by God, the people of Israel never really left their idolatrous ways. On one of the occasions when Moses was away for 40 days on Mount Sinai, the people had grown impatient waiting, and they decided to rebel against him (Exodus 32:1-35). They demanded to worship the ancient gods they had left behind in Egypt. Moses’ brother, Aaron, made a golden image of a young bull and the people offered sacrifices to it. When Moses returned to the camp with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, he was so furious that he smashed the tablets and destroyed the golden calf. He sent armed Levites into the camp to restore order there. After that, Moses had to ascend Mount Sinai again to receive another two new stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:1-35). On his return, his face was radiant with the glory of God.

16. Ingratitude is a natural state of the sinful human heart. If you ask most people what their complaints are about life, many of them would immediately have a litany of complaints to share. But ask them what they are grateful for about life, they would need quite some time to think about what to be thankful for. The reason for this problem is sin. The world is filled with grumblers and complainers, like the ancient Israelites. No matter what God did for them, it was never enough to make them grateful. In fact, after all that God had done to set them free from slavery – because they had cried out to Him, in the first place – they complained that since life in the desert was so hard, it would have been better for them to go back to Egypt as slaves (Numbers 14:2-4)! How insulting this must have been towards God, and yet He remained faithful and patient with them.

Being ungrateful is a form of being rebellious. It is natural for us to feel that things are sometimes not going in the way we want them to go in our lives, but to remain complaining about them and to allow them to bring us down a path of ingratitude makes us end up being cruel towards our families and the people who love us, as well as towards God who has given us so many other blessings for which to be thankful (which we conveniently forget because of the few things that cause us dissatisfaction). To keep our hearts from being ungrateful, we need to take time each day to reflect on every single thing that we can be thankful for in our lives. In our prayers, we must thank God for His providence and blessings. Towards our families, we must be grateful for the homes that they have provided for us even if they are imperfect.



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