

CHAPTER 5 New Commands and a New Covenant

TIMELESS TRUTH: Be Different - Set Apart - For God's Purposes.

CHAPTER SUMMARY: (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

The journey had begun. And, like all journeys, there is a “from” and a “to.” God saved Israel from slavery, and He saved them to become a holy nation - set apart for His purposes. Israel was to be different than the pagan nations surrounding them; they were called to honor God and to point others to this LORD. Just weeks after the exodus, God inaugurated a new covenant with Israel that, if obeyed, would shape them into the holy nation that He intended them to be.

God had worked through Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and now they were assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai in the desert wilderness. A holy God requires a holy people, so they were to consecrate themselves (p. 60) to prepare to meet with Him. When God's presence filled the top of Mount Sinai with thunder and fire the people were terrified. They were invited to a direct relationship with the LORD, but opted for Moses to act as an intermediary on their behalf. Moses met with God on the mountain and received the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone. These commands and ordinances revealed God's expectations for His covenant people. This covenant was sealed with blood and ratified by Israel's full commitment to obey.

That commitment, however, did not have the spiritual character to back it up. Just days after Israel agreed to obey God's laws, they were up to their ears in idolatry and then some. While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people traded their golden opportunity for a golden calf. When Moses caught sight of their depravity, he shattered the tablets and took immediate action. He assembled the faithful and put to death the corrupt. Sin, as always, was pricey, painful, and never worth the cost.

When God proposed to send Israel on to Canaan without Him, Moses prayed for God's presence to remain. God graciously agreed and promised He would remain with Israel, in the form of a cloud over the Tabernacle. God then graciously answered another prayer of Moses to “show me Your glory” (p.67). God passed before him allowing Moses to only see His back because “my face must not be seen.” What an expression of God's compassion and grace! After spending forty days with the LORD on Mount Sinai, Moses came down with two new tablets of the covenant law. Moses' face was so radiant after time with God that he had to be veiled because the people were afraid.

God's grace compels a devotion to Him alone. He is a jealous God for our benefit; all other gods lead to sin and death. His people are free - not to act any way they want, but free to become who He created them to be - holy, different, and designed to point the world to him. God didn't just redeem Israel from slavery; He redeemed them for holiness. Their freedom did indeed carry a purpose.

DISCUSSION STARTER:

What was the worst discipline you received while growing up? What had you done to deserve it?

GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. What do the Ten Commandments reveal about the nature of God and His desire to have a relationship with us (p. 61-62)?
2. What does it mean that God is holy? What are the implications of God's holiness as we seek Him?
3. Moses said, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (p. 61). How does the fear of God restrain sin?
4. The Lord spoke to Moses "as one speaks to a friend" (p. 67). What was there about Moses that God found so pleasing? How would you rate your relationship to God, from 1 = Total Stranger to 10 = Close Friend.
5. God describes Himself as jealous. What does this tell us about God? Why is it okay for God to be jealous?
6. How did Israel go from "everything the Lord has said we will do," to building a false god in scarcely over a month? Why is it so easy to become forgetful of God's mercies?
7. God reminded Moses that children live with the consequences of their parents' sins (p. 68). How have your parents' choices (good and bad) affected your life? How are your choices possibly affecting your children? What needs to change?
8. God showed Moses His glory because He is "gracious and compassionate." Describe a time when God showed grace and compassion to you (yes, this is a trick question).
9. After punishing the Israelites for the golden calf, Moses immediately sought reconciliation with God. How should believers today hold one another accountable? How can we do this gracefully?
10. God describes Himself as compassionate, slow to anger, gracious, and abounding in loving-kindness (p. 68). Where do you see these qualities in this chapter?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.