



Glorious Sinai

Part One

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Some of our readers are likely to be rather puzzled, if not actually surprised, by such a title as the above. Those accustomed to weigh words may regard the adjective as a strange or even incongruous one. “Forbidding Sinai,” “terrifying Sinai,” yes, but scarcely “glorious!” If such be the reader’s concept of Sinai, then it is certainly a most inadequate one, if not erroneous. That the solemn transactions of that mount were indeed awe-inspiring—yea, repellent to the natural man—is readily admitted; yet that is by no means all that they were. There was another side to them, a blessed and praise-inducing one, which also needs to be taken into consideration. Referring to the covenant and economy which was there established, the Holy Spirit declares that it “was glorious” (2 Cor. 3:7)—yea, “glory” in the abstract (verse 9), and “was made glorious” (verse 10). True, He likewise tells us in the same passage that it was a “ministration of condemnation and death” unto the guilty, yet that in no wise altered its blessed character. True also *that* “glory” pales before another covenant and economy which exceeded it in glory (verses 9 and 10); nevertheless it *was*—in itself and in its attendants—exceedingly splendid and impressive.

At Sinai, there was vouchsafed a glorious manifestation of the majesty of Jehovah. At Sinai, there was given a glorious revelation of the divine will and moral perfections. At Sinai, there was a glorious inauguration of a most excellent economy—all of which contained a glorious typification of things to come. As another has well said, “No event in our world has been more magnificent in its circumstances of external majesty and splendour than the giving of the Law on mount Sinai.” Such a statement is fully warranted by the language of Holy Writ. Take a single specimen from the Psalms: “The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel” (Psa. 68:8). When Jehovah descended to deliver the Law, He bowed the heavens, shook the earth, and made Sinai quake to its very foundations. Even more grandiloquent are the strains used by the prophet: “God came from Teman [the south], and the Holy One

from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light” (Hab. 3:3-4). One of the greatest and grandest displays of the divine majesty was given by the LORD at Sinai, and it is often referred to in the Sacred Volume.

Far too many restrict their thoughts to Exodus *twenty* when asked to contemplate Sinai. Not only is it impossible for us to make a right approach unto or obtain a due perspective of the Decalogue without first keeping before us all that is contained in Exodus 19, but for a true understanding of both, it is also essential to bear closely in mind the contents of the seven preceding chapters. It was no isolated event which occurred there, wholly separate, but rather one that was intimately related to foregoing ones. Yet one influential writer began his remarks on Exodus 19 and 20 by affirming, “A new dispensation is inaugurated in those chapters;” and he has been blindly followed by many, including the Scofield Bible. Far more accurate would it be to say that a new dispensation or order of things commenced at Exodus 12, for it is from the *Passover night* that the national history of Israel is to be dated! Previously, they had no corporate existence, being merely a disorganized company of slaves. But on that notable night, long to be remembered, everything was changed for them. Then for the first time, they were designated the “assembly of the congregation of Israel” (Exod. 12:6).

That it *was* the Passover which marked not only the beginning of the national existence of Israel, but of the Mosaic era also, is unequivocally demonstrated by the fact that their *calendar* was then *changed* by divine orders (Exod. 12:2). That new dispensation was commenced by the establishment of a new relationship between Jehovah and His people: they then became His *redeemed*—“bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20), by the blood of a lamb “without blemish” (Exod. 12:5-7, 13, 22). And redemption, my reader, is so far from annulling God’s claims upon us as creatures, that it imposes an additional obligation to serve Him; and it supplies a further and most powerful motive for our recognition of God’s claims upon us and an earnest endeavour to meet the same. “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God *redeemed* thee: *therefore* I command thee this thing to day” (Deut. 15:15). Precisely the same is the teaching

of the New Testament: “That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies [the world, the flesh, and the devil] might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74-75). “Our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:13-14).

Redemption effects a change of masters. Israel were delivered from the tyranny of Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt in order that they might be free to delight themselves in their God, and to worship and obey Him. That was plainly announced unto Moses at the first appearing of the LORD unto him: “When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall *serve God* upon this mountain” (Exod. 3:12—see verses 1 and 2). All that transpired between Exodus 3 and 19 was but preparatory and means unto that grand end. Previously, they had seen God’s judgments upon Egypt, beheld His mighty power at the Red Sea, witnessed His guiding hand in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, experienced His mercy in providing food from heaven and water out of the rock, and now they were to receive a manifestation of His exalted sovereignty and a revelation of His ineffable holiness. “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (Exod. 19:4-5). Having brought them into a relationship so blessed, they must now be instructed how to walk worthily of the same.

Not only has the Decalogue been insufficiently pondered in the light of its historical setting, but the whole transaction of Sinai has been far too often divorced from much that preceded it. In order to apprehend the outworking of the divine plan, it ever requires to be kept in mind that it proceeds along the principle of progressive development. Unless that fact be heeded, we shall not arrive at a correct understanding of either His plan as a whole, or of its characteristic features and special arrangements which have distinguished its manifestations at any one period, as compared with another. What took place on the mount undoubtedly marked a definite stage and advance in the gradual unfolding of the divine

purpose, as well as signalized a memorable epoch in the history of His chosen people; nevertheless, it was as intimately related to what preceded as to all that followed. It was by no means an isolated action, but a progressive one. The redemption from Egypt was itself the fulfilment of a promise which Jehovah had made with Abraham; and that redemption had for its direct object the establishing with Israel of that covenant which God had made with their fathers.

An unmistakable linking up of the Mosaic economy with what had gone before appears in the symbol in which Jehovah was revealed to Moses, when he received from Him his call and commission. That symbol most definitely pointed back to the “smoking furnace” and “burning lamp” which passed in vision before the eyes of Abraham when he was informed of the future sufferings of his posterity in a land which was not theirs (Gen. 15:13, 17). That “furnace” was now again made visible to Moses (Exod. 3:2), yet the little thornbush—emblem of the covenant people, the tree of God’s planting—stood uninjured in the midst of the flame, because the covenant God Himself was there. Any doubt as to the correctness of that interpretation should be removed by what is said in the immediate context, for there we are told, “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them” (Exod. 2:24-25)—i.e. the covenant (Psa. 74:20).

What we have just pointed out opens more intelligently what follows, for when Moses demurred at the mission entrusted to him and asked, What shall I say unto Israel when I tell them, “The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you,” and they shall inquire, “What is his name?”—God answered him, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: *this* is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exod. 3:13-15). That glorious “name” is linked equally to the past and the future. He who affirmed Himself to be the incomprehensible “I AM THAT I AM” (Exod. 3:14)—as a description of His distinctive name of Jehovah—did so for the

express purpose of enabling Israel to recognize Him as the God of their fathers, as the One who had in the past solemnly covenanted with them, and who now, in the immediate future, was going to make good unto their children what He had promised them.

As Jehovah, the great I AM—explained in the “him which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Rev. 1:4, and compare 4:8 and 16:5 for variations)—He would show unto His people that He is the God who changeth not (Mal. 3:6). Having made an everlasting covenant with the patriarchs, He continued to abide in the relationship which it established, for He could no more fail to fulfil its engagements than He could cease to be. If the symbol of the burning bush was fitted to turn the thoughts of Moses unto Genesis 15, still more appropriate was the divine revelation vouchsafed unto him there: not only unto the urgencies of Israel’s case in their Egyptian bondage, but as a sure pledge of their coming deliverance—ratified by the significance of His peculiar covenant name. His people were thereby assured that however conditions had changed for the worse—a temporal darkness veiling their fair prospects—nevertheless, the God of their fathers remained without variableness or shadow of turning, being the immutable God of the present and the future, as well as of the past. It was both a pledge of a grander manifestation of His faithfulness and love, and an intimation they might expect a yet fuller revelation of His character. With such encouragement was Moses sent forth to execute in the name of God and commission given to him.

It was then in pursuance of His covenant with Abraham that God delivered his descendants from the tyranny of Pharaoh; and it is *that* which supplies the key to all the subsequent dealings of the LORD with his descendants. As Moses told them plainly at a later date, “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would *keep the oath* which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen” (Deut. 7:7-8). It was in fulfilment of that same oath He opened a way through the Red Sea, and that He continued to show Himself strong in their behalf. That nothing whatever occurred at Sinai which in any way annulled or even modified the

covenant with Israel's progenitors is evidenced by the fact that whenever any serious crime was committed by the nation, those who interceded for them sought forgiveness on the ground of the promises made to Abraham: see Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27-29; 2 Kings 13:23.

The glorious transactions of Sinai are prefaced by this statement: "In the *third* month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the *same* day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount" (Exod. 19:1-2). Like all the time-marks of Scripture, this one requires to be carefully noted, for it intimates to us the significance of what follows. Three is ever the number of *manifestation*: as God Himself is made known to us in His three Persons, and hence, too, it is the number of resurrection (Christ rising on the third day, etc.), for it is then life is seen emerging from death. Jehovah was now to give unto His people a further and fuller disclosure of Himself: of His majesty, His holiness, and His will concerning them; and most appropriately was that vouchsafed upon *the mount*—the place of eminence and vision. It was a testification of His goodness unto them—as much so as were the awe-inspiring phenomena at Pentecost. As Moses subsequently reminded them, "Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 5:24).

"And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exod. 19:3-4). First, mark the *double appellation* here given unto the Hebrews: the former to humble them by a reminder of their lowly origin; the latter to evoke praise for the dignity and blessing which God had conferred upon them. But there was a deeper significance thereto, and something we need to closely observe: that double appellation supplies more than a hint of the twofoldness of what follows. As the "seed" of Abraham included both an earthly and a heavenly one, and was therefore symbolized by a dual figure—"the stars of the heaven" and "the sand which is

upon the sea shore” (Gen. 22:17); and as the promises made to him received both a “letter” or literal, and a “spirit” or mystical fulfilment—the one in his natural descendants, and the other in his spiritual children (Gal. 3:7, 29!); so the transactions of Sinai require to be viewed in their bearing upon both national Israel and the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

What has just been pointed out is very far from being something which *we* desire to “read into” (Exod. 20): it is *demand*ed by the clear teaching of the New Testament. The fact that we are told, “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7) *obliges* us to view Israel’s deliverance from Egypt as a type of the Church’s redemption from the dominion of sin and Satan; while their miraculous passage through the Red Sea obviously foreshadowed the Church being brought onto resurrection ground. Equally clear is it that the furnishing of them with the manna was a foreshadowing of Christ, “the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32) as the food of His people. The bringing forth of water from the smitten rock was manifestly a figure of the Holy Spirit being given to Christ’s people—the mystical meaning of that incident being expressly defined for us in the “*spiritual* drink” and “that spiritual Rock” of 1 Corinthians 10:4. What anointed eyes then can fail to see in Jehovah’s statement regarding the national Israel, “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exod. 19:4) a declaration of His amazing grace in Christ unto the spiritual Israel, who “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*” (1 Pet. 3:18).

Next, they were reminded of what the LORD had done for them: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians” (Exod. 19:4), righting and avenging you from their cruel oppression and persecution, accepting the challenge of the haughty Pharaoh (Exod. 5:2), and humbling that mighty monarch into the dust. And how I “beareth [you] on [eagles’] wings”—a figure of the gracious tenderness which Jehovah had shown them (Deut. 32:11-12): protecting them from His judgment-plagues upon Egypt, sheltering them from the angel of death, and interposing His pillar of cloud and fire between them and their pursuers. “And brought you unto myself:” not only into a state of liberty and honour, but into covenant and communion with the living God, that they might delight themselves in Him and

serve Him. “Ye have *seen*” all this, He reminds them, appealing to their own observations and experience. They knew it was entirely of the LORD’s doing, and must be marvellous in their eyes. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “It was not they that reached toward God, but it was He that brought them to Himself.” With what *design* we are about to consider: certainly not to impose upon them a harsh and tyrannical regime, but to give them further proofs of His lovingkindness.

“Now *therefore*, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Exod. 19:5-6). Weigh attentively that “*therefore*,” for it is a conclusion drawn from what is said in the previous verse, and shows that God was addressing His redeemed people as already standing in such a relation of nearness to Himself as secured for them an interest in His faithfulness and love. He appeals to the proofs which He had already given of this, as amply sufficient to remove all doubt from their minds, and to warrant them expecting whatever else might be needed to promote His glory and complete their happiness. “Now *therefore*, if ye will obey my voice:” it was not because they had been obedient that God had done such great things for them and unto them; but since He *had* done them, that they might now be sensible of their privilege and duty in henceforth rendering submission to Him, and by obeying, fulfil the high destiny to which He had called them.

There was nothing in the above declaration which in any wise conflicted with the LORD’s dealings with Abraham himself. After He had, in sovereign grace, effectually called him, and averred, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1), He appeared unto him again and said, “I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1)—a word which was comprehensive of full subjection to Himself and of righteous behaviour on the patriarch’s part. Whatever there was new in *form* in that which was given at Sinai, there was nothing new in principle from what had been revealed long before—God has ever maintained His claims upon and required the fruits of holiness from the objects of His grace, and has dealt with them accordingly—ordering His

providences in consonance with their conduct. “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; *that* [in order that] the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19). The patriarch must walk obediently, in conformity with God’s revealed will, if he was to receive the fulfilment of the divine promises!

When Jehovah confirmed His covenant to Abraham by oath, He expressly declared, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee...And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; *because* thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:16-18). It is true, blessedly true, that God dealt with Abraham in pure grace; but it is equally true that He dealt with him as a *responsible* creature, as subject to the divine authority. God has established an inseparable connection between holiness and happiness, between our pleasing Him and our enjoyment of His providential smile. So far is it from being the case that “the father [or prototype] of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11) was “never under law,” when the LORD renewed the covenant with Isaac, He distinctly affirmed, “And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed [the original covenant promise]; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen. 26:4-5)—such a piling up of terms renders misapprehension excuseless.

Equally clear is it from Scripture that the Hebrews themselves were under Law before they reached Sinai: “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee” (Exod. 15:26). Is it not strange to find men who claim to be “Bible teachers” ignoring such plain passages! Should the quibble be raised that the reference there unto God’s “commandments” and “statutes” was *prospective* (i.e. anticipatory of the Law which was shortly to be given them), it is removed by a reference to “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and

gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in *my law*, or no” (Exod. 16:4). The meaning of that is partly explained in “To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD” (Exod. 16:23). Alas for their response: “That there went out some of the people on the seventh day for *to gather*” (verse 27). Mark carefully God’s complaint, “*How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?*” (verse 28). Thus the reference in Exodus 15:26 and 16:4 was retrospective.

It has been necessary to labour the point in order that decisive evidence should be produced to show that it is a flagrant error to assert God’s people were brought under the Law for the *first time* at Sinai. The Scriptures cited above make it abundantly clear that God introduced no change in His dealings with Abraham’s descendants when He said to them, “Now therefore, if ye will *obey* my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (Exod. 19:5). Let it also be carefully noted that the LORD did not now impose His Law upon the nation by mere sovereign authority, but instead proposed it as the basis of a covenant with them, as is evident from the hypothetical “if.” A covenant is always a *mutual* contract, voluntarily entered into by two parties, and consists both of conditions or terms and promises or bestowments. The LORD was about to enter into a formal agreement with Israel, and He first made known the ground of the same: their being brought into intimate relation to Himself, then the terms thereof—their obedience to Him; then the advantage accruing to them—“ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me;” then its design—“ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exod. 19:6).

Because the LORD had identified Himself so closely with Israel, it was but meet that they should now identify themselves with Him. Brought into near relationship and favoured communion with the Holy One, it was equitable that henceforth they should conduct themselves accordingly. As God’s “peculiar treasure” (Exod. 19:5), they owed it to Him to comport themselves *as* His separated people. If *He* was willing to enter into a covenant engagement with them, then surely *they* should respond thereto. Upon their so doing, He would make them “a kingdom of priests” (verse 6), vouchsafing communications of His will, and admitting them into His presence

as accepted worshippers. They would hereby become “an holy nation” (verse 6), distinguished from all others as devoted to Jehovah’s honour and service, and exemplifying the same unto the world around them. Moses accordingly summoned the responsible heads of the tribes and made known to them this gracious overture, and we are told, “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (verse 8). Convinced of the benignity and propriety of such a proposal, they readily and unitedly signified their consent thereto.

Moses at once reported unto the LORD of Israel’s willingness. And He, be it noted, no more regarded their promise of obedience as a carnal and presumptuous boast than He did Joshua’s when he affirmed, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Jos. 24:15). So far from being displeased, “And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever” (Exod. 19:9)—that is, all room for thinking he might have imposed upon them, would be removed. When he first informed them of the LORD’s appearing to him at the back side of the desert, and that He had looked upon their affliction, “the people believed” (Exod. 4:29-31); but a little later, upon Pharaoh’s increased severity, they murmured against Moses and Aaron; and when he announced that the LORD would redeem them with a stretched out arm and bring them into the land which He swore to give unto their fathers, “they hearkened not unto Moses” (Exod. 6:9). But now they should *know* that the Law he would deliver unto them was indeed the LORD’s, since they had heard with their own ears that which He spake unto them.

That “thick cloud” intimated they were not to pry into “secret things;” and since dreadful thundering and lightnings issued from it continually, to command an awe-inspiring adoration of that which *was* “revealed” (Deut. 29:29). The Voice speaking out of that cloud was, as said above, also designed to put honour upon Moses, to firmly establish him in the confidence of Israel as Jehovah’s vicegerent, that henceforth they should believe his testimony and receive the commandments of God without question. “In like manner, the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon Christ at His baptism, and all that were present heard God speaking to Him

(Matt. 3:17), that afterward without the repetition of such visible tokens, they might believe Him. So likewise the Spirit descended in cloven tongues upon the apostles (Act 2:3) that they might be believed. Observe, when these had declared themselves willing to obey the voice of God, then God promised they should hear His voice; for if any man be resolved to do His will, he shall know: John 7:17”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Our readiness to hear and heed the LORD’s ministers is often rewarded by His speaking to us, in power, direct from His Word.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, 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” (Exod. 19:10-11). Here again there is a double emphasis placed upon that to which we called attention in connection with the opening verse of this chapter: it was not only in the “third month,” but on the third day of it that this glorious transaction took place—three being the number of *manifestation*, for it was here at Sinai that the person and perfections of Jehovah were so illustriously displayed (compare Deut. 5:24). The demand for them to be sanctified was a call to turn aside from their ordinary activities, and devote the intervening time to self-examination, meditation, and prayer, that their hearts and minds might be prepared for a drawing nigh unto the Holy One. The washing of their clothes was to teach them the LORD will only draw nigh unto those who are morally clean (see James 4:8)—it is sin which separates from God (Isa. 59:2).

“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” (Exod. 19:12). All of these instructions were duly carried out by Moses and the people. “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. 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” (Exod. 19:16-18). Everything was designed to fill them with reverence and godly fear as they assembled to meet with their mighty Redeemer and King. The visible tokens of His presence, His tremendous appearance before them, the terrifying phenomena, were the insignia of the dignity and honour of such an august Being. The manifestation of Jehovah’s glory and the splendour of His majesty demonstrated the loftiness and holiness of the One with whom they were here covenanting.

Turning now to Exodus 20, the first thing which requires to be attended to is that the One who promulgated the Law on this memorable occasion was none other than God the Son! This is made clear from Psalm 68. First, we are told there, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place” (verse 17): “When the Law was given, for Christ was there then...which Sinai is called the holy place from the presence of God there and the Law given from it”—John Gill (1697-1771). Then, in the next verse, we are enabled to definitely identify which of the Persons of the Godhead is there specifically in view: “*Thou* [the One just mentioned, ‘the Lord’] hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.” That very passage is quoted in Ephesians 4:7-13 and is expressly appropriated unto Christ Himself. There was a vast assembly of the angels congregated at Sinai, and Christ, the great “Angel” or “Messenger” (same word) of the covenant (see Exod. 23:20; Isa. 63:9; Mal. 3:1) was at the head of and in the midst of them.

In the above passage, Christ is pictured as a mighty Prince and Conqueror, with a retinue of the celestial beings as His attendants, coming forth to take possession of His throne in Israel’s midst. How that added to the lustre of glorious Sinai on this unprecedented occasion is at once evident. Most blessed, too, was what it foreshadowed: “The glorious ascending of God from Sinai, after the giving of the Law, was a representation of His ascending up far above all heavens that He might fill all things; and as He then ‘led captivity captive’ in the destruction of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who had long held His people in captivity and cruel bondage, so

dealt the Lord Christ in the destruction and captivity of Satan and all his forces (Col. 2:15)”—John Owen (1616-1683). Christ, attended by the celestial hosts at Sinai, was designed to adumbrate the blessed fact that the holy angels are “all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14). As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) remarked on Psalm 68:17, “The Psalmist speaketh of Christ as the Mediator and King of His Church: no kingdom hath such defence, and such potent and numerous armies to fight their battles as the Church hath.”

Though no direct mention of this striking feature be made in Exodus, yet there are quite a few passages in Holy Writ which refer to the same. Thus, “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 [holy ones]” (Deut. 33:2). “Who have received the law by the disposition of *angels*” (Acts 7:53). “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). “For if the word spoken by *angels* [i.e. the Law] was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!” (Heb. 2:2-3), which is now proclaimed by the Gospel. Christ *was* the One in their midst and the Speaker of what was said on Sinai, as is further proved by Acts 7:37-38: “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me [Moses]; him shall ye hear. *This is he*, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him [Moses] in the mount *Sina* [or *Sinai*], and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.”

In the second place, let us attend closely to the particular aspects in which the divine Lawgiver presented Himself unto Israel on this occasion. This comes out clearly in His opening words to them. The “God spake all these words, saying,” of Exodus 20:1 is simply an introductory remark of the inspired historian; it is the next verse which records His initial declaration, namely, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” That personal announcement prefacing the Ten Commandments calls for our study and admiration. There God

announced Himself in a threefold character. First, “I am Jehovah,” the self-existent and self-sufficient One, the Fountain of all being, and therefore having the incontestable right to command them, and all creatures. It was the great “I am” who addressed them, the eternal and immutable One—a representation infinitely elevated above all the concepts of idolatry and ancient philosophy. Second, He was *their* God in covenant with them, and that, with their own free consent. Jehovah had promised unto Abraham, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee*, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7; and see Exod. 3:6; Heb. 8:10). “He had laid Himself under obligation to them by promise, and therefore, He might justly lay His obligations upon them by precept”—M. Henry (1662-1714).

Third, God here presented Himself to them as their gracious *Redeemer*: “Which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt,” thereby pledging His faithfulness, love, and sufficiency to further deliver them from evil and bring them into His designed good. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars [subdued] unto thee” (Deut. 33:29). It also placed them under additional obligation to Him, for they were now bound by personal gratitude to serve and render obedience to Him. Redemption always confers a right unto the redeemer. In coming forth to them in such a character to declare the Law which was henceforth to bind their conscience and regulate their conduct both toward the LORD and one another, there was embodied the all-important and salutary principle that redemption carries in its bosom a conformity to the divine will, and that only when the soul is so conformed is the work of deliverance from bondage complete. Such, too, is the plain teaching of the New Testament: see 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Finally, “I am the LORD your God” (Exod. 6:7) was addressed *singly* to each one in the camp of Israel. It was not “your” collectively, but “thy” individually, as though spoken directly to each one separately. Not only did that divine declaration point immediately to each one present at Sinai when the Law was delivered and the Covenant established, but it also looked forward

to all succeeding generations, so that God said to each of Abraham's posterity entering this world, "I am the LORD *thy* God" as truly as He did to those assembled at Horeb. Moreover, no sooner did one out of the nations join himself to the commonwealth of Israel, than the same was said to *him*, so that in this respect, a door of hope was opened unto the Gentiles.

It is deeply important that Christians today should obtain a clear and correct concept of the nature and meaning of the august transaction which took place at Sinai. Unless they do so, they will lack the principal key which opens much of the Old Testament and which explains the providential dealings of God with the nation of Israel—not simply in judgment, but in long-sufferance and mercy also. Not only so, but they will be without that which is essential to a right apprehension of its typical import, and therefore, are sure to err when attempting to trace out the antitypical fulfilment and application of the same unto themselves. We have already pointed out that the LORD God was not treating at Sinai with a people who were strangers to Him, but with those to whom He was intimately related; that it was not to aliens He there revealed His glory, but to the favoured seed of Abraham; that nothing occurred on that mount which to the least degree militated against His dealings with their fathers, but rather was the fulfilment of His promises to them. It is impossible to understand aright the contents of Exodus 19 and 20, unless they be viewed in their historical setting.

The promulgating of the Law from Sinai was not given independently, as though it laid the foundation of an entirely new relationship between Jehovah and Israel, for, as shown previously, the patriarchs themselves were under law (Gen. 26:5). Nor should the proclamation of the Law be regarded as an isolated event: rather ought it to be contemplated as complementary of and the necessary sequel to the LORD's deliverance of Israel from their Egyptian bondage, His opening of the Red Sea for them and the destruction therein of their enemies, and His gracious provision of food from heaven and water from the smitten rock; while the Law itself needs also to be viewed in the light of what immediately *followed* its publication, namely, the erection of the tabernacle, the appointment of the priesthood, the assigning of sacrifices for the putting away of Israel's sins, and the LORD's taking up His abode in the midst of

His people. Moreover, as we have shown in the preceding article, though God had dealt with the Hebrews in amazing grace, yet they too were under law before they came to Sinai: Exodus 15:26; 16:4, 27-28).

Nevertheless, it is obvious that a *further advance* was made at Sinai. As the eternal purpose of God is gradually unfolded before the eyes of men, its manifestation is seen to be according to the principle of orderly and progressive development, as in nature there is first the blade, then the ear, and later the full corn in the ear. It was thus on this memorable occasion. This appears in the very first words of Jehovah unto Israel upon the mount. After reminding them of what He had wrought on their behalf, and that He had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them unto Himself, He proposed unto them the terms of a covenant, promising that if they would abide by the same, they should be unto Him "a peculiar treasure...above all people," and that they should be unto Him "a *kingdom* of priests, and an holy *nation*" (Exod. 19:4-6). Formerly, He had dealt first in sovereign grace with individuals, such as Abel and Enoch; then with households like Noah's (Gen. 7:1) and Abraham's; but now He would organize and rule over Israel *nationally*. Moreover, an advance was made over all previous calls and appointments by the obligations which rested upon the heirs of promise being now cast into categorical and imperative form, which included the whole round of their moral and religious duty.

It was not that Israel might, by their obedience to the divine Law and their keeping of the covenant, win for themselves a new and more blessed relation to God, but rather that because they had been taken into the place of privileged nearness unto Him, they should walk worthily of the same and be filled with such fruits of righteousness as would alone evince their being the people of God or fulfil the calling which they had received from Him. Special nearness to God involves as its necessary corollary and consequence the knowledge and reflecting of His character, entering into His mind and will, striving to be holy as He is holy. That was the grand end unto which all was directed, the purpose for which they stood before the LORD as a separate people, and were here gathered at Sinai to hear the Law from His own mouth. If the Law had been aught else than a revelation of God's requirements from His people

toward Himself and toward each other in the vital interests of righteousness and truth, it had neither been in accord with His own unchanging character, made known to them that homage and subjection which are His due, nor have set before Israel that holy standard which it was their calling to constantly endeavour to realize in their behaviour.

The particular character in which Jehovah announced Himself at Sinai is in full accord with all that has been said above: “I am the LORD [‘Jehovah’] thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exod. 20:2). First, “I am the LORD [‘Jehovah’]” which is the essential title of Deity, and signifies the eternal and unchanging One: “Him which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Rev. 1:4). This Name is common to each Person in the glorious Trinity: Father (Psa. 110:1), Son (Jer. 23:5), and Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2) who are one God; though it was Jehovah in the Person of the Son who promulgated the Law from Sinai (Psa. 68:17-18; Acts 2:37-38). Second, “I am the LORD [‘Jehovah’] *thy* God,” the latter greatly softening the former. The Jews deemed the title “Jehovah” so ineffably awful and sacred as never to utter it. The terror and majesty of His infinite greatness is indeed sufficient to amaze and affright all mankind, but when He adds, “I am God,” yea “even thy [own] God.” (Psa. 50:7), that renders Him delightful and desirable unto the renewed heart. “Thy God” signifies thy *covenant* God (Exod. 3:6; Heb. 8:10). It was both a statement of fact, and a gracious assurance unto Israel. He had promised Abraham to be a “God” unto him and to his seed (Gen. 17:7), and here He meets with his seed and declares Himself to be the same promising One.

“I am the LORD” affirmed His high sovereignty over His people; “thy God,” His condescending grace unto them. Such is His covenant name unto all generations (Exod. 3:15-16). Christians also are to both acknowledge His sceptre over them and rejoice in His benign relation unto them—we must not render asunder those two things. If we do not—in a practical way as well as with our lips—own Him as *our* “LORD,” then we do but deceive ourselves if we regard Him as our “God” in covenant with us. As one rightly said, “We must not reject the awful part for the amiable part.” Third, “which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the

house of bondage:” therein the LORD their God presented Himself before them as their benevolent and mighty Redeemer, assuring them of His love; as well as reminding them of the additional obligation this laid upon them to glorify Him in their bodies and in their spirits which were *His* by ransom-price. Nor must this be severed from the former. They who have not surrendered themselves unto Christ as their Lord, and yet persuade themselves He is their Redeemer and Saviour, are deluded: note carefully the *order* in Luke 1:46-47; Acts 5:31; 2 Pet. 2:20, 3:18! We must take upon us His yoke before He bestows upon us His rest (Matt. 11:29).

God is alike the Ruler and Redeemer of His people, as He is their lover and Lord. While rejoicing in His tender pity and abundant mercy, we must also revere Him for His sovereign dominion and ineffable holiness; otherwise, we at once identify ourselves as belonging to the same class as the Jews of Christ’s day, who welcomed Him as a Healer of the Sick, but declared, “We will not have this [One] to *reign over us*” (Luke 19:14). Jehovah had not delivered the Hebrews from the land of Egypt in order for them to remain the slaves of sin and Satan, but rather that they should be made free to serve Him—walking according to His precepts is the only true *liberty* (Psa. 119:45). In the call to obedience in Exodus 19:5, the whole of the divine Law was implied, so far as was concerned the ground of Israel’s obligation and the germ of its requirements; and what was actually promulgated in Exodus 20 was simply the utterances of that Voice which they had promised to heed. The Law was a revelation unto Israel of the righteousness which God required from them as His chosen people in the land of their inheritance. There, they were to be a witness *unto Him* before the surrounding nations, showing forth the glory of His government by exemplifying the same in their character and conduct.

But while the Law was an enforcing of Jehovah’s authority over His people, let us observe in the next place that it also issued from His *love* unto them. Proceeding from the LORD in His character as Israel’s Redeemer, it is only to be expected that it bears a benign aspect and aims at happy results. It was on that very ground Moses extolled the condition of Israel above all other people: “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what

nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:7-8). Very far indeed was he from entertaining the God-dishonouring idea that the Law was a tyrannical enactment, a cruel bondage imposed upon them, from which they might well hope to soon be delivered. The same sentiment was echoed by the sweet singer of Israel. Among the signal acts of mercy and lovingkindness, for which he praises the LORD in Psalm 103:7, is the fact that "he made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel;" or as explained in another Psalm, "He sheweth...his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Psa. 147:19-20).

The Law of Sinai issued from love, enjoined naught but love, and is fulfilled by love. How could it be otherwise? Like everything else which God has given to His people, the Decalogue was alike a manifestation of His holiness, a provision of His mercy, and an expression of His love—which ever seeks the good of its objects. Before bestowing his parting blessing upon the tribes of Israel, Moses reminded them, "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" (Deut. 33:2-3): the juxtaposition of those two statements demonstrates that Law was a proof of God's special love for them—as the giving up of a people unto lawlessness (their own evil lusts) is the surest sign of His hatred of them (Rom. 1:21-28). It was designated "a fiery law" (Deut. 33:2), because it was given to them out of the fire (Deut. 4:33)—emblem of divine holiness, as the Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost in "cloven tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3). Observe, Moses said, "a fiery law *for* them," not "unto," and still less "against"—"in favour to them"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

As the Law issued from divine love, so it requires naught but love from the recipients of it. This is clear from the Saviour's words, for He summarized its claims thus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-39). Furthermore, its requirements are met by love: "Love is the

fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). That is, as love delights in the happiness of others, it effectually prevents from injuring its objects, and consequently leads to the doing of what Law requires—for it enjoins nothing which is not to the best interests of our fellows. It is love which influences and prompts unto a compliance with God’s commandments (1 John 5:2). Then what must be the spirit of those who speak evil of God’s Law, and regard it as a harsh imposition on their liberty? Very different indeed was the mind of the apostle: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). God’s writing of His laws upon the hearts of His redeemed (Heb 8:10) is a sure evidence of His love toward them. “We must regard God’s Law as one of the gifts of His grace”—Matthew Henry.

There can be no adequate apprehension of the revelation of Law, nor of its real nature and place in the divine economy, without perceiving its relation to the grand principle of love—alike in those who receive it as in Him who gave it. Viewed apart from that, it is but a body without a soul, a call to obedience without the least likelihood of an acceptable response. The Law aims at a conformity of moral purpose and character between a redeeming God and a redeemed people; and not one of its precepts could reach the desired end, unless the love which had been exhibited as the governing principle in the One should find in the other a corresponding love which should be stirred and guided into proper action. To make this unmistakably plain, Moses, as soon as he rehearsed the Decalogue, declared, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart,” etc. (Deut. 6:4-5).

We do not now propose to enlarge upon that divine declaration: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12), by giving an exposition of the Ten Words (having done so on a previous occasion), but will next take notice of what is recorded in Exodus 20 immediately after their publication. “And all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exod. 20:18-19). That was a plain acknowledgement that they felt themselves to be utterly unfit to

deal with the LORD directly on the ground of the Decalogue. They realized that some provision was required to be made for them, that a *mediator* was needed—Moses must treat with God on their behalf. Very far indeed was such language from evincing a proud and self-sufficient people. It not only repudiates the view of those who insist that their agreement to Jehovah’s proposal (Exod. 19:5; 24:7) betrayed their carnality and presumption, but it manifested their spirituality and humility.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not” (Exod. 20:20). In those words, Moses explained unto them the design of the glorious, yet terror-provoking, attendants of the divine majesty, which they had just witnessed. Negatively, he assured them that those convulsions of nature did not portend that Jehovah was about to destroy them as He had the Egyptians, and therefore that He had no thought of slaying them; and thus, the Law had not been given for the purpose of condemning and cursing them. Positively, he informed them that God’s intention was to put them to the test, to ascertain whether they would acknowledge Him as their King and be subject to His government, and thereby give proof that they meant what they said when they declared, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Exod. 19:8). Further, those awe-inspiring phenomena were designed to fill them not with a slavish fear which gendereth to bondage, but rather to produce a godly reverence for the LORD in their hearts, while those displays of His mighty power were to act as a deterrent upon them from displeasing One who was not to be trifled with—as *we* are enjoined to “stand in awe, and sin not” (Psa. 4:4).

Just before, we saw that, upon Jehovah’s awe-inspiring appearance on the mount and His proclamation of the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel said unto Moses, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exod. 20:19)—which was tantamount to an acknowledgement that they felt themselves unfit for dealing with the LORD directly on the ground of the Decalogue, that a mediator was needed, that Moses should treat with God on their behalf. We must now carefully consider the divine response to that request: “And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick

darkness where God was. And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee” (Exod. 20:21-24).

In the last-quoted verse, there is something which is very rarely, if ever, referred to by those who write upon “The Law,” yet it should surely arrest the attention and impress the most casual reader. Here upon Sinai itself divine instructions were given for the making of an ALTAR upon which Israel were to “sacrifice!” Furthermore, this was accompanied by the most gracious promise of the LORD’s coming unto and (not cursing, but) *blessing* them! Let us consider this “altar” first in the light of Israel’s request in verse 19. The LORD was here informing them that the mere provision of a mediator did not fully meet the exigencies of the situation. It met the need from *their* side, but not from *God’s*. The Lawgiver was holy and the righteous demands of His Law must be fulfilled. The transgression of His Law could not be dealt with simply through a mediator as such: satisfaction must be made, *sin must be expiated*, God propitiated—only thus could the demands of divine justice be met. Accordingly, this is the very thing which was set before Israel in the immediate sequel. The “altar,” divinely appointed at this time, told of the provision of God’s grace and mercy unto them.

It must be remembered that for upwards of two centuries, the descendants of Abraham had resided in Egypt, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture, it is clear that, after the death of Joseph, the majority of them learned the ways of the heathen and became idolaters. Thus Joshua reminded them in his day that their forebears had served other gods, not only “on the other side of the flood” (i.e. in Chaldea, from which the LORD called Abraham), but also “in Egypt” (Jos. 24:14). Likewise we are informed by one of their prophets that while there, the LORD expostulated with them, saying, “Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me:

they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake" (Ezek. 20:7-9). That casts a flood of light upon the early chapters of Exodus and shows that the Holy One was employing Pharaoh as His rod upon the disobedient Israelites.

After chastening them sorely, the LORD visited the Hebrews and delivered them from the house of bondage. Before so doing, He most impressibly showed all who had eyes to see that they too deserved the same fate as befell the Egyptians—only a substitutionary lamb saving them therefrom. By that pascal sacrifice, they were redeemed for Jehovah and brought unto Himself. That was the first intimation which they had yet received of the LORD's particular requirements; and even now in Exodus 20, no part of the ceremonial law had yet been made known. But the "altar" there erected was God's gracious provision for fully meeting His governmental claims, and which made it possible for a people full of infirmity and sin to approach Him without fear of death. Thus from the very outset of the divine dealings with Israel nationally, provision was made to maintain God's holiness and meet their failures. True, it was their transgression of the divine Law which made this altar necessary, yet it was God's grace which supplied the same. *That* requires to be taken into most careful consideration if the grand transaction of Sinai is to be correctly apprehended. Jehovah did not there propose to deal with Israel on the alone ground of His righteousness, but on that of His rich *mercy* also. Let "dispensationalists" duly note.

It is deeply important that we understand the relation between the two principal objects set before us in Exodus 20: God's giving of the Law, and God's furnishing instruction concerning the altar which must be made unto Him. In the Decalogue, there was presented a holy standard which made known the just requirements of God, defining the conduct of the individual both unto Himself and unto his neighbour. That Standard was a perfect one in all its parts, requiring both internal and external purity. As such, it brought to light the sinfulness of man, for as a fallen creature, he was incapable of measuring up to its exalted demands. And therefore, as

such, it was (and still is) admirably fitted to convince the fallen creature of his need of a Saviour. That it served this dual purpose at Sinai, we have seen: Israel were made conscious of their unfitness to deal immediately with Jehovah on the basis of the Law, asking for a mediator. But something more was required, and that need was met by the LORD's provision of the altar. Thus, it is quite clear from Exodus 20 itself that the Ten Commandments were never given to Israel as a means of salvation, or that they were to procure the divine favour by their obedience to them! Such an idea is completely ruled out.

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen” (Exod. 20:24). The tabernacle was not yet erected, nor had any instruction been given concerning it. Clearly, then, what we have here was a divine ordinance, for Israel's immediate compliance; an altar was to be built *at the foot of Sinai!* It was not the future which was in view, but the present. All doubt as to the correctness of this conclusion is removed by a reference to Exodus 24:4—what is recorded in 22 and 23 being a connected account of what God made known to Moses in the mount for communication unto His people. There in 24:4, we read, “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exod. 24:4). That there may be no uncertainty in identifying *this* altar, it is immediately added, “And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered *burnt* offerings, and sacrificed *peace* offerings of oxen unto the LORD” (Exod. 24:5)—the “young men” who performed this priestly work were probably the “firstborn” who had been sanctified unto the LORD (Exod. 13:2, etc.), the Levites not yet being set apart to their office.

It was here and at this time that the covenant was formally entered into and ratified. First, “Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD [in Exodus 20], and all the judgments [of Exodus 21-23]: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exod. 24:3). Previously, they had given a general assent to be under Jehovah's government (Exod. 19:8), but now they agreed to be obedient in particular unto the laws which Moses had just

enumerated unto them. Instead of rebuking them for what some regard as an arrogant boast on Israel's part, the LORD approved of their avowal: "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have *well said* all that they have spoken" (Deut. 5:28), only further breathing the wish, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" "And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD" (Exod. 24:4), which was the first time that any part of God's Word was committed to writing!

The altar being built and the young men having offered the sacrifices unto the LORD, "Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words" (Exod. 24:6-8). Everything here was of the nature of a formal and binding transaction. The "altar" was the token of God's presence, the "twelve pillars" the memorial of their presence. Half of the blood being sprinkled on the altar was the LORD's portion, and the other half sprinkled on them, Israel's—thereby the *mutual* agreement between them was indicated. First, the terms of the covenant were verbally made known unto them (Exod. 24:3); and upon their free and universal approval of the same, those words were recorded in writing (Exod. 24:4), designated "the book of the covenant" (Exod. 24:7), which was also sprinkled with the blood (Heb. 9:19).

Since the covenant which Israel entered into with Jehovah at Sinai formed the basis of all His subsequent dealings with them, it is most essential that we spare no effort to obtain a right conception of its character. In order thereto, it must first be clearly recognized that this contract in no wise set aside the earlier covenant with their fathers, in which Jehovah made donation of the land of Canaan unto them and promised to be a God to them and their seed (Gen. 17:7; 18:13). This is abundantly clear from Exodus 19:4-6: for there God addressed the Hebrews as already standing in such a relation of nearness to Himself, as secured for them in interest, in His love and

faithfulness, and ensured the supply of their every need. It is further proven from His preface to the Ten Commandments, for in affirming, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt” (Exod. 20:2), He rested His claim to their obedience on the ground of their favoured relation to Himself—His chosen, covenanted, redeemed people. Thus, both from the time when the Law was given and the language in which it was introduced, we see that it was never designed to interfere with the prior covenant of promise, but rather was something supplementary thereunto.

To affirm that the covenant at Sinai made void the provisions of the Abrahamic, which secured for his seed the inheritance as heaven’s free gift, or to insist that its object was to establish *a new title* to gifts and blessings already conferred, is to grossly misinterpret the transaction and utterly confound the proper relation of things. Rather was this latter compact to be the handmaid of the former, to minister in an inferior though necessary place to the higher ends which the former had in view. The Abrahamic was the root of life and blessing; the Sinaitic, being grafted thereon with the design of making more fully known the requirements of divine righteousness. The seed of Abraham as God’s acknowledged people and heirs were going to receive for their possession that land which He claimed as peculiarly His own. But they must occupy it as the partakers of His character of holiness, for thus alone could they either glorify His name or enjoy His blessing. Delivering them as He had from the region of idolatry and pollution, He would not suffer them to enter Canaan until He had set before them that standard of character and conduct at which they must ever sincerely and diligently aim.

They bound themselves by the most solemn engagement to realize as far as possible the pattern of excellence which had been set before them on the mount. As an abler pen than ours has pointed out, “Had they been faithful to their engagement—had they as a people striven in earnest through the grace offered them in the one covenant to exemplify the character of the righteous man exhibited in the other, ‘[delighting]... in the law of the LORD...[meditating therein] day and night’—then in their condition, they should assuredly have been ‘like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that

bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper' [Psa. 1:2-3]. Canaan, would then indeed have verified the description of a land flowing with milk and honey"—Patrick Fairbairn (1874-1905). A clear demonstration of that was furnished under the leadership of Joshua, for while Israel abode by their agreement and were obedient to the LORD, His smile of approbation was manifestly upon them. But alas, the next generation kept not the covenant, and dire were the consequences—as the book of Judges sadly exhibits.

Again: the nature of the Sinaitic covenant can only be rightly apprehended as we perceive and keep steadily in mind its *mixed* nature. In all of God's dealings with His people, He acts in His twofold character as "light" (1 John 1:5) and as "love" (1 John 3:11). While He dealt in sovereign grace with the father of all them that believe, He pressed upon him the obligation which privileges entailed: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect [upright]" (Gen. 17:1); and as we have pointed out previously, God bore testimony unto Isaac that "Abraham *obeyed* my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5); though that is no more to be understood absolutely (i.e. that his conduct was flawless), than we are to take Christ's words concerning His apostles, "they *have kept* thy word" (John 17:6) as signifying they had done so perfectly. In like manner, whereas God had most conspicuously manifested His favour unto the Hebrews in Egypt and in the wilderness, at Sinai, He enforced the requirements of His holiness. First, in the Ten Commandments; yet even in them, definite mention was made of His "shewing mercy" (Exod. 20:6), which was a vastly different and more blessed thing than His "taking vengeance" on transgressors. Second, in the ceremonial law which followed, wherein He not only declared the purity required from them, but appointed means for the removal of their impurities. And third, in the plans for the tabernacle, where He took up His abode in their midst, and the provisions of the priesthood to maintain their communion with Him.

Had there been nothing more than law in the Sinaitic covenant, nothing but a strict regime of unrelieved justice, then obviously there had been nothing further in Israel's experience save their suffering penalty, which was the just desert of sin. But as we read

their subsequent history, we see clear evidences of something else—their availing themselves of the provision which mercy had made: the turning unto God as the Pardoner of sin and the Healer of iniquity, and a falling back from the covenant of Law to the covenant of grace and promise, to which it was added. Thus we find, that upon Israel's making the golden calf and Jehovah's wrath thereat, Moses pleading with Him for clemency on the ground of His promises to the fathers (Exod. 32:13). So too we find that however sinful one individual or one generation might be, yet if the next in descent heartily turned unto the LORD, they were received into forgiveness and blessing. It was only those children who persisted in the wickedness of their fathers who had visited upon them the guilt of their forebears. Thus, in Numbers 14, we find Moses entreating the LORD “according unto the greatness of thy mercy,” and He declared, “I have pardoned according to thy word” (Num. 14:19-20); and though that unbelieving generation was debarred from entering Canaan, their children had that privilege.

Glorious Sinai! Let us indeed stand in awe before its solemn revelation of the majesty of Jehovah. But let us also admire the wondrous co-mingling of law and grace, justice and mercy, holiness and leniency, which was there displayed. That marvel of divine wisdom—for there is nothing in the least resembling it in all the productions of the human mind—appears at every point. We behold it in the “adding” of the Sinaitic covenant to the Abrahamic (Gal. 3:19), for whereas promises predominated in the one, precepts were more conspicuous in the other. We see it in God's gracious delivering of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and then bringing them under His government. We see it in the joining of the ceremonial law to the moral—for while the latter enforces the requirements of that purity which the LORD demanded from His people and His condemnation of all that was contrary thereto, yet full provision was made for the promotion of the one and the removal of the other. The whole may well be summed up in that admirable dictum of Augustine: “The law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled.”

In all our approaches unto God in Christ, two things should ever be borne in mind by us. First, the amazing and sovereign grace

which has delivered us from a bondage immeasurably worse than that experienced by the Hebrews in Egypt, and which grace has “brought us unto God” (1 Pet. 3:18) and made us “a kingdom of priests” unto Himself (1 Pet. 2:9). Second, the awe-inspiring majesty and ineffable holiness of God, and our native meanness and depravity. If either of these be lost sight of, we shall entertain an ill-formed concept of the Divine character, and if we be unduly occupied with one to the virtual exclusion of the other, then our own characters will suffer and the worship which we offer unto God will be sadly defective. On the one hand, we should approach the Divine footstool in the freedom and joy of those who are accepted in the Beloved (Heb. 10:22), otherwise the spontaneity and fervour of our praise will be choked. On the other hand, it is equally necessary that we draw nigh unto the Majesty on high “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28), or, because of an unholy and unbecoming familiarity, we are in grave danger of offering “the sacrifice of fools” (Eccl. 5:1). “Hallowed be Thy name” should ever be our first concern when approaching the Father!

That holy balance was blessedly preserved on glorious Sinai. It has been far too generally overlooked by our moderns that, whatever awe-inspiring grandeur and solemn majesty attended the promulgation of the Decalogue, uttered as it was amid sounds and sights which filled the beholders with amazement and terror, yet that very Law proceeded from Him who is love, and was given by God in His character of the gracious and faithful Redeemer of His people, as well as their rightful Lord. Nevertheless, the whole transaction was manifestly designed to teach His ransomed people their proper place, and to show them that while the Lord had brought them unto Himself (19:4), yet an infinite distance separates between the Creator and the creature, the Infinite and the finite. As we said in ‘Studies in the Scriptures’ (in our “Gleanings in Exodus”) more than twenty years ago, “Such a view of God’s majesty as Israel were favoured with at Sinai is the crying need of our day. The eye of faith needs to see Him not only as our Father and as the God of all grace, but also as the ‘High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity’ (Isa. 57:15), as the ‘great and dreadful God’ (Dan. 9:4), as the apostle beheld Him in Revelation 1:13-18. Let it not be forgotten that the God of the Old Testament and the

God of the New Testament are one and the same.” Though the Decalogue proceeded from God as Israel’s Redeemer, it did not on that account assume a less stringent character. Being an expression of the Divine dominion and a revelation of Law in form as well as in substance, it could not but assume a predominantly authoritative tone. Its precepts were therefore given in the form of explicit announcements of duty and stern prohibitions against the ways of transgression. The benign spirit which breathes in its preface is not absent from the body of its enactments, as appears in the assurance of mercy unto the thousands who should love God and keep His commandments, and in the promise of long life in the land to those who honoured their parents. But those were more “the relieving clauses of the Code” as one expressed it; the substance of the whole being in the imperative form. “Thou shalt not do this,” “thou shalt do that,” leaves no doubt that the course prescribed is the one which *ought* to be taken, which *must* be taken if the Divine approbation is to be enjoyed. As Calvin pointed out, the Moral Law throughout both commands and prohibits: each duty prescribed implying an abstention from everything contrary thereto, each prohibition involving the performing of the opposite good. As the Psalmist said, “Thy commandment is exceeding broad” (119:96).

None but the Ten Commandments were spoken by Jehovah in the hearing of Israel, and they alone were inscribed by His own finger upon the tables of stone—thereby intimating *their* fundamental and lasting nature. Subordinate to them and closely related are the statutory directions recorded in Exodus 21-23, there called “judgments.” Therein a series of particular cases are legislated for by way of illustrative examples of how the Moral Law was to be applied to the everyday life of the Hebrews, restricting and regulating them, yet without unduly cramping their liberty. We urge each reader to give a careful consideration to those three chapters, noting how the principle of *brotherly love* is enforced throughout. *That* was to be exercised even toward him from whom an injury had been received. Where one had acted unjustly toward another, the wronged one was forbidden to take revenge. Even though an enemy, if a neighbour’s ox strayed or his ass fell helplessly beneath a burden, assistance was to be rendered (22:4-5). Love to every neighbour was enforced (Lev. 19:18), not in words merely, but also

in giving to him in time of need without usury, thereby manifesting toward him the spirit of Divine beneficence (22:25-27 and cf. Eph. 5:1-2).

Glorious Sinai! From it was given the wisest, justest, and best legislation which was ever furnished a nation for the regulation of its social, economic, and domestic life, as well as its religious; statutes which inculcated the exercise of justice and mercy alike and which exemplified a spirit both of holiness and magnanimity. Selfish or careless disregard of animals was penalized (21:33-34). The rights of private property were protected (22:5-6). The special regard of God for the widow and fatherless was pressed on the people (23:22-24). Consideration for the poor was enjoined (22:25-27; 23:10-12). Kindness unto strangers was inculcated (23:9). The plea which some might take, that any loss sustained by a neighbour (as from the kindling of a fire which spread to another's vineyard, or leaving open a pit into which his ox fell) was the result of *inadvertency* rather than malice, was ruled to be invalid, because men were held responsible to promote the good and avoid the injury of all around them. The death penalty was indeed attached to the more flagrant violations of the Decalogue (as of witchcraft, which involved an act of homage to the Devil), yet while wilful murder must be avenged, provision was made for the unwitting man-slayer (21:13-14). Very, very different were such benign precepts from the principles which regulated all the nations of antiquity.

Such was the moral and judicial law which constituted the charter upon which the nation of Israel was incorporated under the immediate and special government of God, and which formed the terms of that covenant mutually entered into at Sinai. Under it God engaged to grant Israel an entrance into Canaan, to protect them in it, to make the land fruitful and the nation victorious and prosperous, to continue His oracles and ordinances among them so long as they did not, as a people, reject His authority, apostatize to idolatry, or tolerate open wickedness. *Those* corporate offences, or those offences when committed by a majority and countenanced by their leaders, constituted a *breach* of the covenant and a forfeiture of its privileges, as also did the national rejection of Christ afterwards. True believers, or the regenerate minority among them, God treated with personally according to the everlasting Covenant

of Grace (2 Sam. 23:5), even as true Christians now are; whereas the unbelieving majority were, as individuals, under the Covenant of Works, as at present (Rom. 5:12, 18); but the *national* covenant with the Hebrews was not, strictly speaking, either the one or the other, but had something in it of the nature of each—which must ever be the case where God is enforcing human accountability.

The Sinaitic Covenant can only be fully understood as it is viewed, first, as a system of religion and government designed for the immediate use of Israel as a nation during the Mosaic era. While they remained obedient to its terms, they continued to occupy Canaan and enjoy all the blessings of the Theocracy—under the dominion of God as *King* (1 Sam. 8:7)—but it had no relation to the spiritual and eternal salvation of individuals. Second, that it was of a mixed nature, being neither purely evangelical nor purely legal. Third, that it was preparatory to another and better economy by which it was to be succeeded when its temporary purpose had been fulfilled. Its initial design was to order the religious and civil life of Israel; its ultimate, to pave the way for the appearing of Christ. “The economy of Moses, whatever prominence it gave to the Law, was unquestionably a dispensation of the Covenant of Grace. So far from superseding the promise given to Abraham, or making it void or of ‘none effect,’ it was expressly founded upon it, and designed to carry it on to its accomplishment. That economy gathered up into itself all prior revelations of Divine truth” (James Buchanan, on “The Doctrine of Justification”—Cunningham Lectures, 1867).

The charter which contained the articles of the Covenant was written in a book (Exod. 24:4, 7) and was “sealed” or ratified with blood. As John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out (in his exposition of Hebrews 9:19), “The same blood was on the book, wherein the covenant was recorded, as upon the people that entered into it...It was sprinkled as it lay on the altar where atonement was made, and this was plainly to signify that atonement *was to be made* with blood for sins committed against that book, or the Law contained in it. Without *this*, that book would have been unto the people like that given to Ezekiel, that was written within and without, and there was ‘written thereon lamentations and mourning and woe’ (2:10)—nothing but curse and death could they expect from it. But the sprinkling of it with blood as it lay upon the altar was a testimony

and assurance that atonement should be made by blood for the sins against it.” How fully and emphatically that statement is borne out, the first half of the book of Leviticus and the whole subsequent history of God’s dealings with Israel clearly shows; and how much better taught were the despised Puritans than our conceited Dispensationalists appears to any spiritual eye which takes the trouble to compare the writings of one with the other.

Immediately following upon the confirmation of the covenant by the shedding and sprinkling of blood, a scene is presented which, for wonderment and blessedness, has no parallel elsewhere in the whole of the Old Testament. Here we behold not only Moses and Aaron and his two sons, but also seventy of the elders of Israel in the very presence of God: yea, thoroughly at ease there, eating and drinking before Him! To duly appreciate that amazing event, we must mark closely its setting. In the immediate context (24:5-8) we are shown the division made of the blood of sacrifice between Jehovah and the Hebrews, and the sprinkling of the latter with the portion assigned to them, the manifest design of which was to give an emblematic but palpable exhibition of *the oneness* which now subsisted between the two parties of the covenant. By nature they stood far apart from each other, for sin had made a fearful breach between man and his Maker—a breach which no human efforts could possibly bridge. But what man could not do the Lord most graciously accomplished. He appointed an altar and suitable offerings to be sacrificed thereon, and having accepted for Israel the blood of atonement, by that portion of it which was sprinkled upon the altar, they were thereby brought into a capacity of union and fellowship with Him.

Let the reader pause and attentively ponder and admire what has just been pointed out. Glorious Sinai! The Gospel of the grace of God was there proclaimed in the hearing and acted out before the eyes of the Lord’s people on that very mount. It is too often lost sight of that, as the Gospel published by the Lord Jesus and His apostles contained a renewed revelation of the Law (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 3:31), so at the promulgation of the Law there was made a clear revelation of the Gospel. Such was indeed the case, and failure to perceive those facts will be imperfectly to apprehend either the one or the other. After God had graciously accepted on Israel’s

behalf the blood of atonement, and they had solemnly declared their adherence to the terms on which the national agreement was to be maintained, as recorded on the tables, or the covenant and the “judgments” or statutes connected therewith, the compact was formally ratified by the sprinkling of the other half of the blood upon them. Thus were they impressively taught the grand truth that God and His people *shared* part and part: the pure innocent life which He provided and accepted on their behalf was also regarded as *theirs*: a vital and sacred bond united the two into one: they were now the *friends* of Jehovah, admitted into close communion with Him!

“Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel” (24:9-10). Note well the opening word. Each time we meet with this “then” in the Scriptures, we should stop and ask *when*, seeking in the context the answer, thereby obtaining the key which opens the significance of what immediately follows. In the present instance, the answer to our “when” is, right after the blood had been applied! Precious beyond words is this, revealing as it does the inestimable value of the sacrificial blood, and the wondrous privileges it procures for those who are sprinkled with it. Here we behold how that atoning and applied blood secured for Israel’s leaders, and the seventy elders as the representatives of the whole nation, the right of access into the immediate presence of their reconciled and covenant God. Most blessedly did that prefigure what we are told in Hebrews 10: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us” (verses 19, 20); and again, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (Rev. 7:14-15).

“And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (24:10). Having averred their submission to God and been sprinkled with the blood, they were now honoured with special tokens of His favour and manifestations of His glory. It is worthy of particular mention that this was the first time the Lord

took the title of “the God of Israel,” that is their *covenant* God. Pertinently did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out: “Nothing is described but that which was under His feet, for our conceptions of God are all below Him, and fall infinitely short of being adequate.” The description which is here given of the “paved work” which was under the feet of Israel’s God is both highly significant and exquisitely beautiful. The “sapphire stone” is the symbol of the Divine government, the throne of God, as a reference to Ezekiel 1:26, shows, and its mention *here* intimates that the Sinaitic covenant formed the basis of all the future providential dealings of God with Israel. The “body of heaven in his clearness” seems to speak of the Divine *counsels*, for in Christ God has made known His mind and will in perfect clarity (John 1:18; Heb. 1:1-2).

“And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink” (verse 11). What a truly amazing and blessed occasion! “But yesterday it would have been death to them to ‘break through and gaze,’ but now they saw God! And such was their ‘boldness,’ due to the blood of the covenant, that they did ‘eat and drink’ in the Divine presence”—Sir Robert Anderson. That the God of Israel “laid not His hand upon” the official representatives of the nation was a negative way of saying that He was reconciled to them, that His smile of approbation was upon them. Not only was the Gospel of the grace of God visibly enacted upon “the mount of the Lord,” but the precious privileges and benefits which it confers upon those who savingly believe the same were most blessedly adumbrated. Here we behold not only a bringing nigh unto God of those who availed themselves of its provisions, but a granting of a sight of Himself. Nay, more: they are at perfect peace with Him, in intimate fellowship with Himself! Glorious, glorious Sinai, for it is *there* we witness a redeemed people treated as God’s friends, partaking of the meat of the peace offering, eating and drinking, thoroughly at home in His immediate presence! Heaven itself contains no grander experience.

The first of two booklets.

