

AT HOME FAITH TIME FOR PRETEENS

PRETEEN SECTION

Make sure your parents read the Bible story too! You may read together, or separately.

BIBLE STORY: GOD'S COMMANDMENTS (EXODUS 19-40)

On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

Notice: *What new role is God asking Israel to serve?*

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

The Lord said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.” Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said.

And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.’ Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain.”

Pro Tip! *Consecrate is a way of preparing for something special by taking extra care of oneself and not doing certain things. Think of it like a religious spa day combined with a cleansing diet.*

After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations."

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Notice: *What natural phenomenon does this sound like?*

The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them."

Notice: *We always think of God as good. What word would you most associate with God in this story?*

Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'"

The Lord replied, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them."

So Moses went down to the people and told them.

And God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any

work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Notice: *The first commandments have to do with our relationship with God. What do these last commandments have to do with?*

Pro Tip! *Covet means “desire” or “envy.”*

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

Moses said to the people, “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.”

Notice: *How do the people respond to God’s presence?*

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

The Lord gave Moses many commandments to guide this new community. The laws were meant to protect people who had been harmed and ensure those without power would receive justice.

Many laws recalled God’s Sabbath rest and a remembrance that the people had been slaves in Egypt. Unlike how they were treated, working every day without break or pay, the Israelites were to make sure that everyone in their community was treated right.

Notice: *What two big ideas shape God’s laws?*

When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.

Then the people made a covenant with God to obey.

The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”

Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.”

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Notice: How long was Moses gone?

While Moses was on the mountain, the Lord gave him instructions on how to a Tabernacle, a moveable tent where the people could worship God as they traveled through the wilderness, and the Ark of the Covenant, an elaborate box that would hold the Tablets that had the 10 Commandments and the other laws written on them.

When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

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

Notice: Why do the people want Aaron to make gods?

Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded

Notice: How does God feel about what the people did?

them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Notice: How does Moses respond to God's anger?

Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

Notice: How does Moses feel about what the people did?

And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.

Then he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

Notice: Did God say this to Moses?

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

Pro Tip! Atonement means to right a wrong, to make us “at one” again.

So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

The Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”

Moses said to the Lord, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Notice: *What can't Moses see?*

The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain."

So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Notice: *What words does God describe himself with?*

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. "Lord," he said, "if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

Then the Lord said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you. Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

The Lord reminded Moses of all that he had commanded, all the words written on the stone tablets that Moses had destroyed.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai.

Notice: What happened to Moses because he was in God’s presence?

Ready to follow God, Moses and the Israelites went to work building the Tabernacle, a tent of meeting where Moses could talk with God, and the Ark of the Covenant, a large chest that would hold the stone tablets. They built and assembled everything, just as the Lord had commanded.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

Notice: How are the people being guided through the desert?

LET’S SUMMARIZE!

Answer each question yourself.

What is God doing in this story?

What does this story tell me about God?

What does this story tell me about me?

What does this story tell me about my relationship with God?

MEMORY WORK: THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostles' Creed is a statement of faith accepted by almost all Christians as a true summary of our faith. "Creed" simply believe, "I believe." This is a short summary of what we believe.

Memorize the third "I believe" statement about the Holy Spirit.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

THINGS TO NOTICE

This article particularly focuses on the Holy Spirit. What type of things are identified with the Holy Spirit?

AT HOME FAITH TIME FOR PRETEENS

PARENT SECTION

As you discuss questions with your preteens, these thoughts might help you go deeper.

CONVERSATIONS – BIBLE

What new role is God asking Israel to serve?

They are to be God's priests on earth. A priest (or pastor) is someone who represents God to others and helps people when they come to God. The Israelites are asked to be God's representatives to the whole world. When we are baptized, we are asked to do the same thing. How do you represent God to the world?

What natural phenomenon does this sound like?

A volcano. God shows up in the Bible in many ways. We've already seen God show up as a burning bush. Another time in Scripture, Elijah is on this same mountain, but instead of showing up in clouds and fire and earthquakes, God shows up in the sound of complete silence. At Jesus' baptism, God shows up as a dove. Once in my life, God showed up as an autumn leaf falling to the ground. Have you ever felt like God has shown up in your life? How have you seen God in your life?

What word would you most associate with God in this story?

Scary! God seems very scary. A volcano and now a warning that people might die if they come before God inappropriately. Why do you think God wants the people to be afraid? Do you ever think of God as scary? The Bible often tells us that we are to fear and love God. What do you think it means to both fear and love God?

What do these last commandments have to do with?

Our relationship with each other. God wants us to have good relationships, and he tells us what makes for bad relationships. Which of these commandments do you think is easiest to follow? Which one is the most difficult?

How do the people respond to God's presence?

They are afraid; they ask Moses to talk to them instead of God. Why do you think everyone's afraid of God? How does God respond to this; does God get angry or respect the people's request? God appears to respect their request, because this is the only time in Scripture that God clearly talks to all the people.

What two big ideas shape God's laws?

Justice and righteousness. Those who are harmed will have a way of addressing their harm, and everyone is treated right, as real humans and not slaves or less than others.

How long was Moses gone?

47 days. Remember, he went part way up the mountain with Joshua and was there for 7 days. Then he left Joshua behind and went the rest of the way up the mountain, and was there for 40 days. 47 days total. That's a month and a half!

Why do the people want Aaron to make gods?

Moses has been gone for a long time! That's a long time! Even though the mountain is still covered in cloud and fire, they feel Moses and God have either abandoned them or died. They want someone to lead them. Have you ever felt like God wasn't there for you? When it feels like God isn't present, what do you do? Where do you turn for help?

How does God feel about what the people did?

God is angry! God is so angry he's ready to destroy everyone like he did in the Flood. This is bad. What made God so angry? What do you think of God's reaction? What does it feel like when you get angry? When your anger is huge, what do you think about doing because of your anger?

How does Moses respond to God's anger?

Moses reminds God of his love and compassion. He reminds God of his commitment to these people and his promises to their ancestors. He also appeals to God's reputation; what will people say if you do this!? When someone is angry at you, how could you remind them of their love and compassion for you?

How does Moses feel about what the people did?

Moses is angry! Very angry! Sometimes when our parents see the things we do, they can suddenly get very angry, can't they? In Moses' anger, he breaks things, punishes people, and even commands that people be executed. Imagine if our President got angry like that! That wouldn't be good. How do you suppose people keep a level head when they want to explode in anger? One way might be what Moses just did for God. Moses reminded God of his love and compassion. What do you think would have happened if Aaron or Miriam reminded Moses of his love and compassion for his fellow Israelites? When you're angry, how do you remember your love and compassion for someone?

Did God say this to Moses?

Probably not; at least, there's no indication Moses talked with God about this. In fact, God just decided not to harm the people, but then Moses, in his anger, declares that God commanded this punishment. Sometimes in the Bible we need to read the story carefully; we cannot always assume that just because someone claimed God said it that God really said it. Many, many people find the Bible to be a true witness of God's voice, but that doesn't mean there aren't stories within the Bible where someone says something that isn't true to God. How do you think we can tell what's true to God and what isn't?

What can't Moses see?

God's face. Why do you think Moses isn't allowed to see God's face? In the Bible, Sin is not allowed to enter God's presence; heaven wouldn't be heaven if bad things were there, right? Whenever someone has a vision of God, they always hide their face because we all have sin in our lives. But there's a promise one day that won't be true. When we're finally allowed to see it, what do you think God's face will look like?

What words does God describe himself with?

Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiveness. Are these the words you would use to describe God? If you had to describe God, what words would you use? One of the challenging words in this list is "anger". God is slow to anger, but apparently does get angry (as we just saw). How do you feel about God's anger? When people feel God is angry, they remind God of his other characteristics (just like Moses did). God's compassion and love seem to be more important and powerful than God's anger. Which word is your favorite to describe God?

This description of God is one of the ways we determine what's true to God. If we hear people claiming things about God that make it sound like God is always angry and has no room for grace or forgiveness, we are right to question what they are saying.

What happened to Moses because he was in God's presence?

His face glows. This scared everyone. After this moment, Moses will start to wear a veil whenever he comes down the mountain so that people won't be scared. Why do you think his face glows? Today we talk about people beaming with joy. When have you beamed with joy? How does God bring light into our lives?

Fun fact: Sometimes it's hard to know what words mean, and at one time scholars thought the word for "radiate" or glow actually meant "horned". If you look at old paintings of Moses, he'll have two horns on top of his head. How strange!

How are the people being guided through the desert?

By the pillar of cloud and fire that first showed up when they were escaping Egypt. It stays with them and leads them throughout their whole journey. This pillar of cloud and fire seems to be a special thing for this moment; no one else has ever been led by it. But we believe God guides us! How does God guide you?

LET'S SUMMARIZE!

Answer each question yourself. I've put in some of my answers but remember: Our answers don't have to be the same. You may have heard and seen things I didn't even notice!

What is God doing in this story?

Treasuring, appearing in a cloud, warning, commanding, getting angry, changing his mind, revealing his glory, leading, and guiding

What does this story tell me about God?

God can be scary at times and God can even get angry, but God's primary characteristics are compassion and grace, love and forgiveness. God is always slow to anger and ready to quickly change his mind.

What does this story tell me about me?

I am God's representative! How I relate to other people matters. When I am angry, it's important to remember God's love for me; otherwise, my anger might explode!

What does this story tell me about my relationship with God?

When I feel God is angry with me, I can remember all the love and grace God has given to me throughout my life, along with the promises God has made. Though it may be difficult when it feels like God is angry, I know that God's anger is not forever; God's love and mercy are.

CONVERSATIONS – THE APOSTLES' CREED

This article particularly focuses on the Holy Spirit. What type of things are identified with the Holy Spirit?

It's all about us. The Church and saints are the people of God. Forgiveness of sins is the thing we need. Resurrection and life everlasting are the things we will receive. The Holy Spirit appears to be the way we describe God's effect on our lives and the way God is working in and through us.