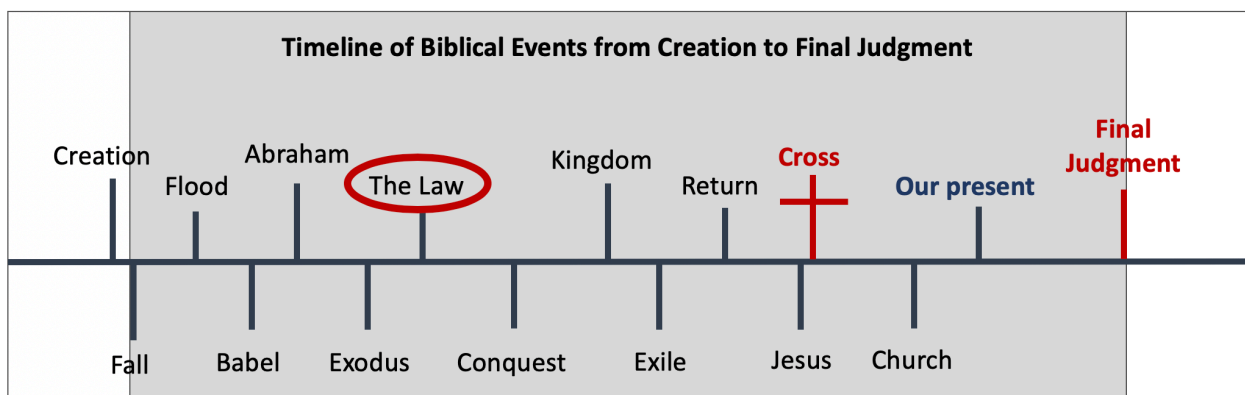


# Lesson 15: Revelation and Rebellion at Sinai

## Previously...

From Abraham's family, God established the nation of Israel. His purpose was for Israel to be a blessing, preserving and sharing God's history and truth with the whole world. At Mount Sinai, God gave them a comprehensive set of laws that spoke into all aspects of their lives. His laws were instructions to them on how to live well as individuals and as a community and how to relate to Him and each other.

Yahweh's Law was from Him as a father to His son, Israel, and it was addressed to their hearts. God wanted them to obey His Law out of gratitude for what He had done for them. God told the people that to love Him is to obey Him.



## The Writing of the Law

How did God give His Law to the people? God spoke to Moses who recorded His words in the Book of the Law. God also wrote a summary in the form of the Ten Commandments.

### Exodus 31:18

When the LORD finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God.

God carved the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets. Carving them in stone showed permanence. No one was supposed to change it, erase it or add to it.

### The Book of the Law



### The Ten Commandments



When Moses gave the law to the Israelites, this was exactly what he told them.

**Deuteronomy 4:2**

Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you. Just obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you.

It was important that no one added or subtracted from it because the laws were a covenant, a legal contract between God and the Israelites.

Even today, people are not allowed to just add to or subtract from a contract just because they feel like it! Neither are people supposed to add other parties into the contract after it has been made. This is not how legal contracts work.



Legal Contracts

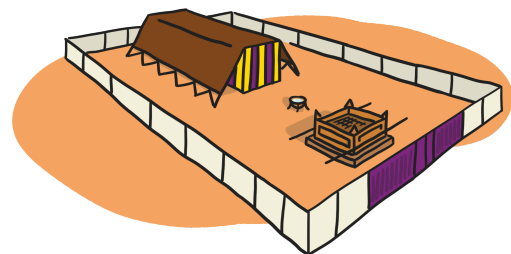
Why did God have two stone tablets and not one?

These tablets were contracts. In human contracts, each of the parties who made the agreement would have a full copy of the legal document. Each party would then store their contract in a safe and meaningful place.

Similarly, both of these tablets would be copies of each other and both contained all Ten Commandments.



God told Moses to store the tablets in the Tabernacle. “The Tabernacle” is God’s temple. God had given them instructions on building this portable temple while they were at Mount Sinai.



Specifically, Moses was to store the tablets in the “Ark of the Covenant”. This was a very special box within the Tabernacle that was to hold the contract.

**Deuteronomy 10:5**

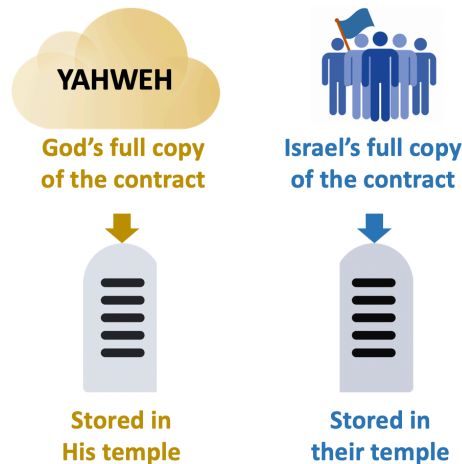
Then I turned and came down the mountain and placed the tablets in the Ark of the Covenant, which I had made, just as the LORD commanded me. And the tablets are still there in the Ark.



Why were both tablets stored in The Tabernacle?

- **God's tablet:** God stored His tablet in **His temple**, the Tabernacle.
- **Israel's tablet:** Israel also stored their tablet in **their temple**, the Tabernacle.

Both copies were kept in the Tabernacle because God met Israel at this temple.



Aside from the tablets, Moses also wrote out the entire law. And this law was to be read publicly every seven years to all the people of Israel. God wanted all the Israelites to know and remember them.

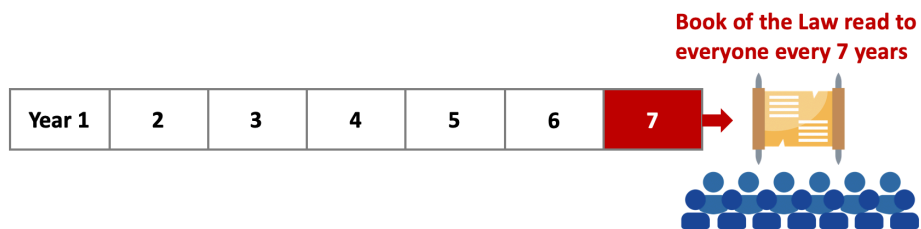
### Deuteronomy 31:9–13

<sup>9</sup> So Moses wrote this entire body of instruction in a book and gave it to the priests, who carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, and to the elders of Israel.

<sup>10</sup> Then Moses gave them this command: “At the end of every seventh year, the Year of Release, during the Festival of Shelters, <sup>11</sup> you must read this Book of Instruction to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the LORD your God at the place he chooses.

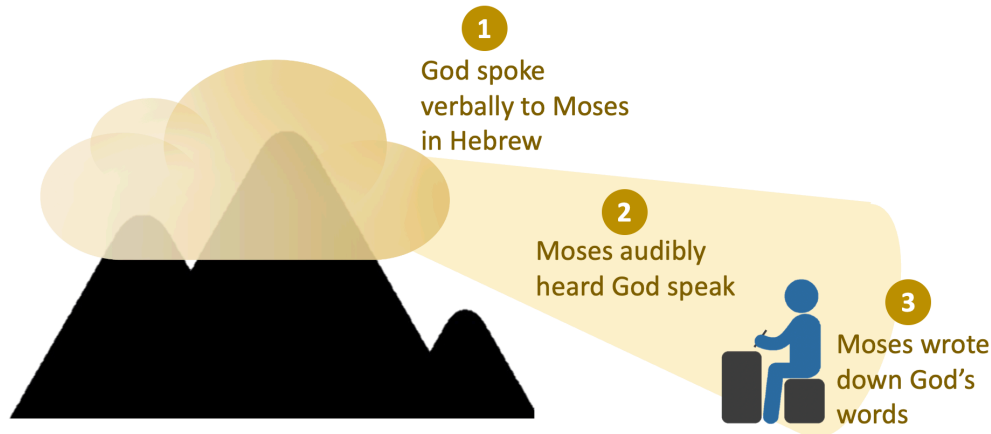
<sup>12</sup> Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may hear this Book of Instruction and learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully obey all the terms of these instructions.

<sup>13</sup> Do this so that your children who have not known these instructions will hear them and will learn to fear the LORD your God. Do this as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.”



## Revelation: God Reveals Himself to Man Using Language that Man can Understand

The way God gave the Israelites the Law teaches us about how God communicates with man. On Mount Sinai, God verbally spoke His words to Moses. Moses could audibly hear Yahweh speak. He did not “feel” God speaking to him in his mind nor did he have an “impression” of God speaking. He literally heard Yahweh’s voice.



The people standing around also heard His voice. It was public revelation. This is what Moses recorded.

### Deuteronomy 5:22–24

<sup>22</sup> “The LORD spoke these words to all of you assembled there at the foot of the mountain. He spoke with a loud voice from the heart of the fire, surrounded by clouds and deep darkness. This was all he said at that time, and he wrote his words on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

<sup>23</sup> “But when you heard the voice from the heart of the darkness, while the mountain was blazing with fire, all your tribal leaders and elders came to me. <sup>24</sup> They said, ‘Look, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice from the heart of the fire. Today we have seen that God can speak to us humans, and yet we live!’

The only way we can get to know a person is if they choose to talk or write to us. Then we will learn who they are, what they think, how they think or why they think a certain way.

Likewise, the only way we can know about God is if He revealed Himself to us. God does want us to know Him, so He chose to use words, verbal and written, to communicate with man.

The Bible shows that this is His preferred form of communication with mankind. Through His own words, we can know the heart of God. We don't have to imagine it, dream it or feel it. We can know His thoughts because He speaks.



In fact, language is very important to God. It was not just a tool to communicate with man. Language was also the tool He used to create. Whatever God thought of in His mind, He used language to “convert” that into actual physical creation. From His mind, He thought of animals, plants, biology, physics, chemistry, cell structures, the structure of the universe, etc. And He spoke all these things that were on His mind into existence! That is why we can say that the universe is a reflection of Yahweh Himself! And why we can also say that human language is sufficient for God to use to communicate with us as He has done in the Bible.

### **Psalm 33:6, 9**

<sup>6</sup> The LORD merely spoke,  
and the heavens were created.  
He breathed the word,  
and all the stars were born.

<sup>9</sup> For when he spoke, the world began!  
It appeared at his command.

### **John 1:1–4**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

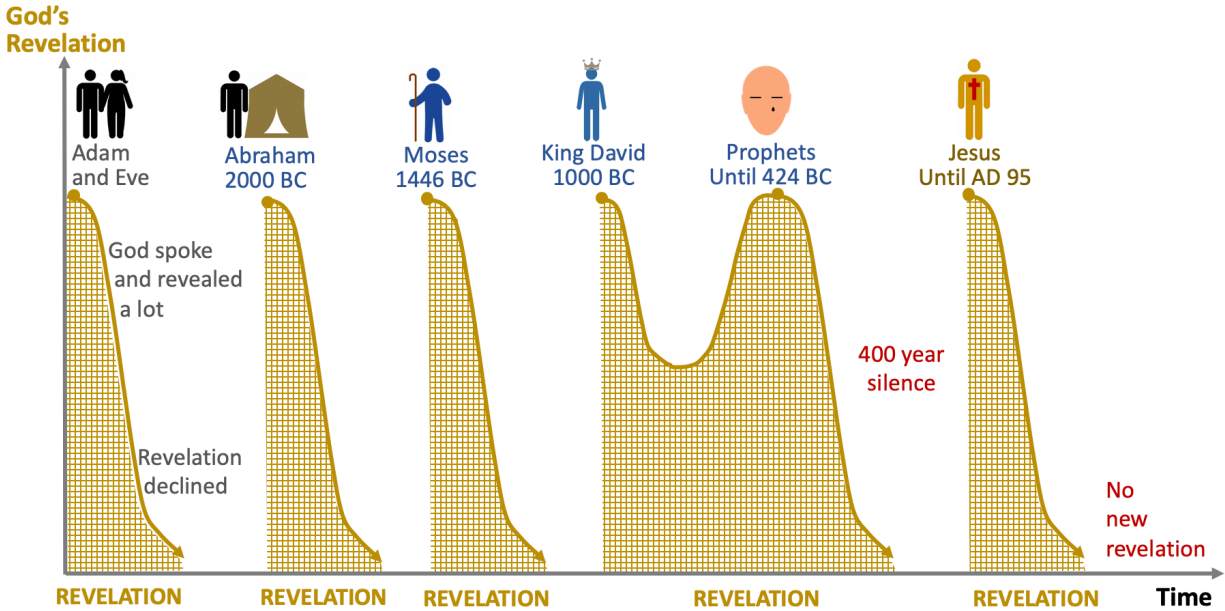
<sup>2</sup> He existed in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup> God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.

<sup>4</sup> The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.

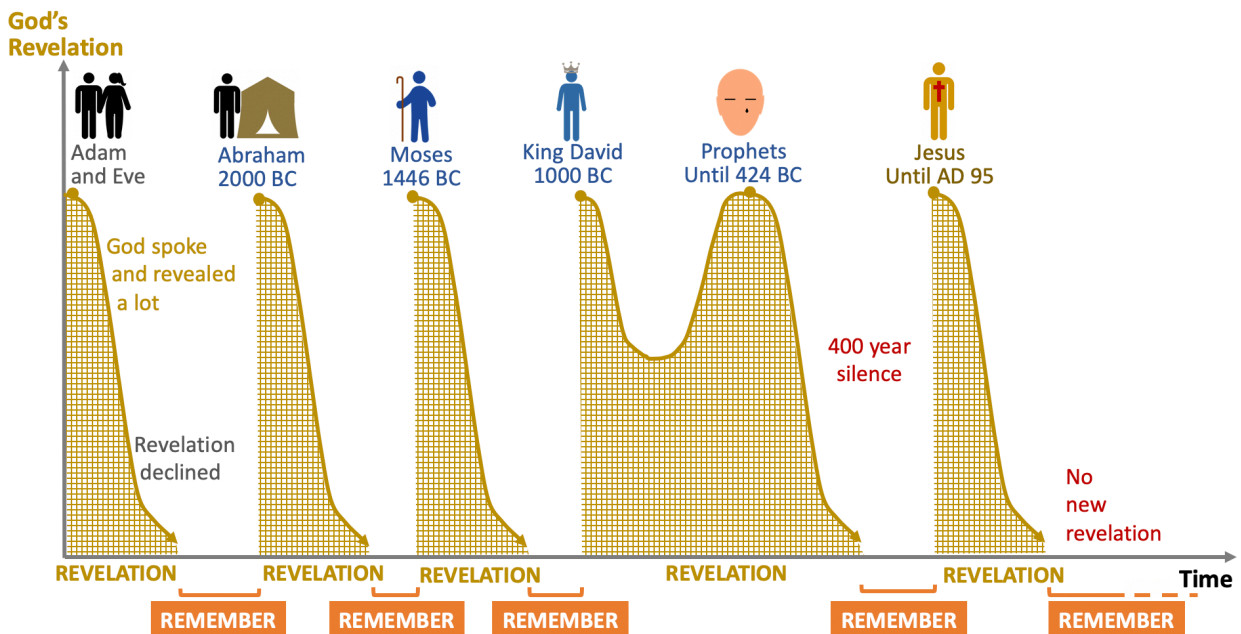
## God’s Communication Pattern: Revelation then Remembrance

While God spoke to man from time to time in history, He did not speak continuously. And God did not reveal Himself directly to every generation. Rather, this is the biblical pattern:



For example, God spoke to man in a verbal, audible form during certain generations such as during the time of Abraham, Moses, the prophets and Jesus. After that, there would be a gap of several centuries where very little or even nothing was recorded of what God said.

Why did God do this? How would people in the “in-between” generations know what God was thinking? God’s command was that whatever He had said (that is, His revelation), be remembered from generation to generation afterwards. Revelation happens and then it is remembered. Another revelation happens and then it is remembered.



How do we know that this is the pattern that God is expecting? Here is one example. After the Exodus and the Passover, God told the people to remember these events yearly.

**Exodus 12:14, 17, 24–27**

<sup>14</sup> “This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD. This is a law for all time.

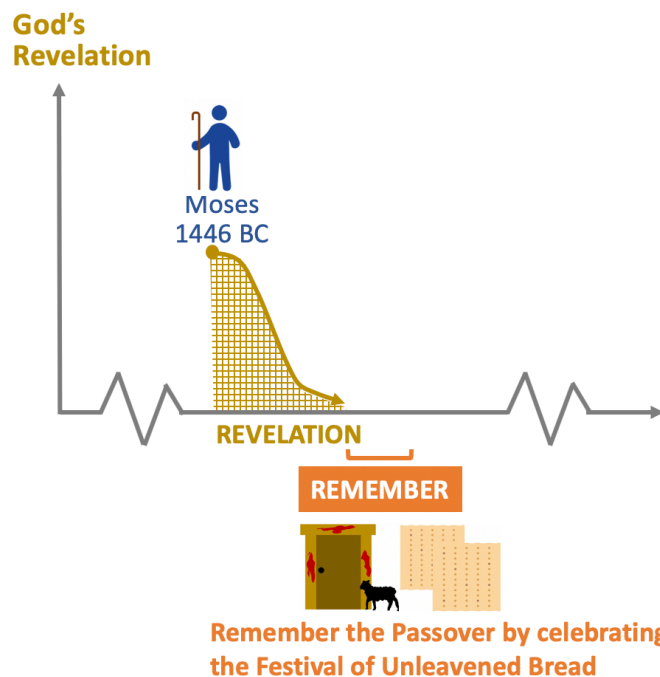
<sup>17</sup> “Celebrate this Festival of Unleavened Bread, for it will remind you that I brought your forces out of the land of Egypt on this very day. This festival will be a permanent law for you; celebrate this day from generation to generation.”

<sup>24</sup> “Remember, these instructions are a permanent law that you and your descendants must observe forever. <sup>25</sup> When you enter the land the LORD has promised to give you, you will continue to observe this ceremony.

<sup>26</sup> Then your children will ask, ‘What does this ceremony mean?’ <sup>27</sup> And you will reply, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. And though he struck the Egyptians, he spared our families.’”

The pattern of “God speaking” in the Bible is therefore this:

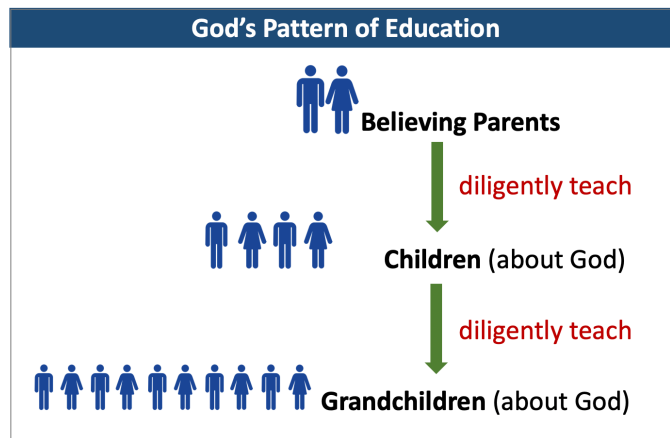
- God will **reveal** Himself in a certain way to some people or through certain events.
- All the people **must remember** what God revealed and they are to tell them to their children from generation to generation.



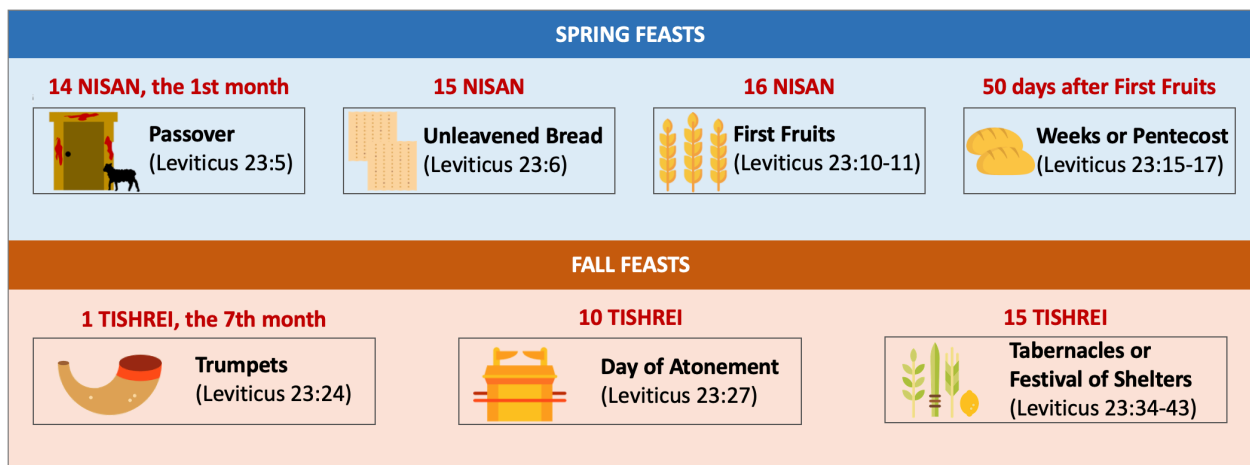
In order for the Israelites to remember God’s history and truth, God told them to continually teach their children. Notice that the Passover is celebrated in Jewish homes, not in a public setting. This is a family gathering conducted and led by the father and mother. Home teaching of the children in the Word of God was their job.



This was the pattern of education that God had set up in the divine institution of family. Parents were to train their own children in the way of Yahweh, so that their children would know the truth and the truth would be shared from generation to generation. The role of parents in teaching the children was part of God’s plan to “speak” and “reveal” Himself to all generations. Parents who don’t teach their children deprive their children of God’s revelation and His truth.



This is also why God gave the Israelites feasts to celebrate in remembrance of Him and what He has done for them.



But what about Gentiles? Do believing Gentiles today have ways to remember what God has done for us? Yes. God gave all believers the sacrament of Communion as a memorial to Jesus. This is to be celebrated regularly. This is what Jesus Himself said and did.



**1 Corinthians 11:25–26**

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it.” <sup>26</sup> For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.

**God’s Revelation Comes Through Prophets**

During the times of God’s revelation, how did He reveal Himself to the people? God did it through His prophets. The pagan nations communicated with their gods through dark magic, diviners, witches and spiritualists. However, Israel was to listen only to God’s prophets.



At Mount Sinai, Moses was God’s chosen prophet to speak to the people. And the Israelites themselves recognised Moses’ role. This is what they said to Moses.

**Deuteronomy 5:27**

Go yourself and listen to what the LORD our God says. Then come and tell us everything he tells you, and we will listen and obey.’

After Moses came a line of prophets whom God revealed Himself to. These were ordinary people that God chose, but after He revealed Himself to them, they would speak God’s words aloud and also record what God said.

Yahweh commanded the people to obey His prophets without question because they represented Him. But because of that, God also told the people how to recognise false prophets from real ones.

This is what God told Moses.

## Test 1: What a true prophet predicts must come true.

### Deuteronomy 18:19–22

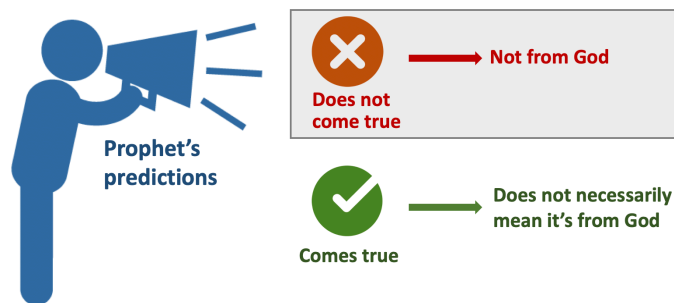
<sup>19</sup> I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. <sup>20</sup> But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.’

<sup>21</sup> “But you may wonder, ‘How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?’

<sup>22</sup> If the prophet speaks in the LORD’s name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.

The work of the prophets in recording the Word of God was so critical that God put in place a test for everyone to tell if a prophet was genuine or false. Everything that prophet says must come true. God said that if it did not come true, that prophet is false and must be put to death. This was how seriously God viewed the job of a person who was to represent Him to the people.

Note that God did not say that if a “prophet’s” prediction came true, it must immediately be from God. It is **when it does not happen**, that **proves it is not from God**. It is a negative test.



## Test 2: The teachings of true prophets must be consistent with the Word of God.

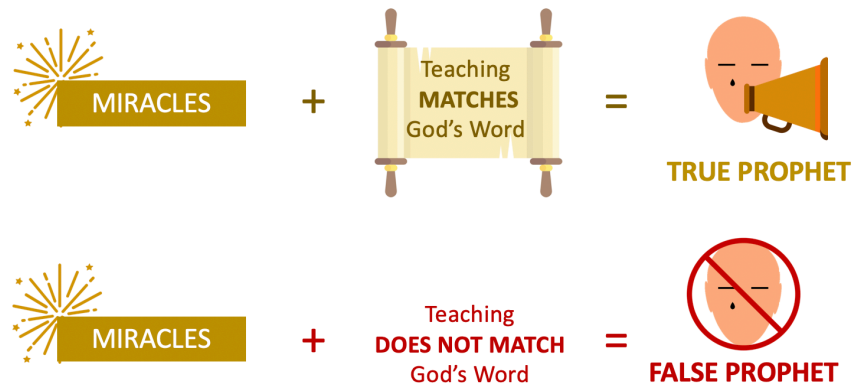
With every new prophet that God raised, what they wrote had to agree with what had already been recorded. No new prophet’s words could contradict the ones before.

### Deuteronomy 13:1–5

<sup>1</sup> “Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, <sup>2</sup> and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, ‘Come, let us worship other gods’—gods you have not known before— <sup>3</sup> do not listen to them. The LORD your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul. <sup>4</sup> Serve only the LORD your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him. <sup>5</sup> The false prophets or visionaries who try to lead you astray must be put to death, for they encourage rebellion against the LORD your God, who

redeemed you from slavery and brought you out of the land of Egypt. Since they try to lead you astray from the way the LORD your God commanded you to live, you must put them to death. In this way you will purge the evil from among you.

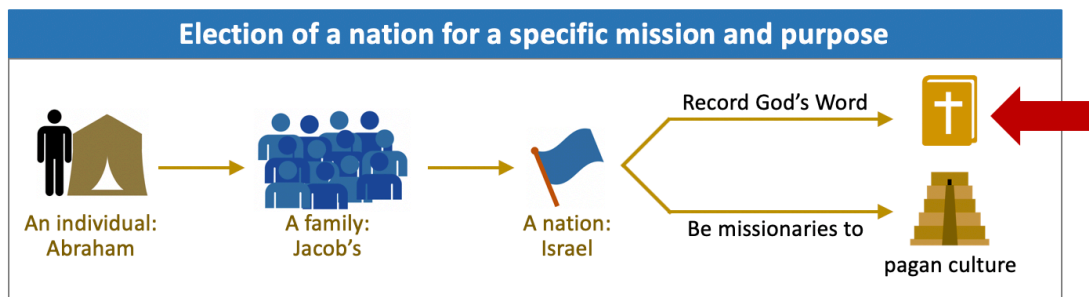
God told the Israelites that signs and miracles are not a test for true prophets. This is probably because the devil and demons can also perform “miracles”. Instead, God said the real test is what the prophet is teaching.



For over 1400 years, from the time of Moses to Jesus, God raised prophets who spoke His word to the people. This is entirely unique to the Israelites. No other people group or religion had prophets who spoke God’s words over such a long span of time.

## God Records His Word: the Inspiration and Canon of Scripture

When God first called Abraham out from the pagan culture, there was one very important work that He planned to have Abraham’s descendants do. They were to preserve His history and truth in the form of written Scriptures.



But how did this start? This recording of Scripture started with Moses on Mount Sinai. Throughout history, God revealed many things. But not everything that was recorded became Scripture. For example, in the Old Testament, prophets or “court recorders” wrote about the acts of the kings. Many of these were not preserved as Scripture. They were kept in other books.

**1 Chronicles 29:29**

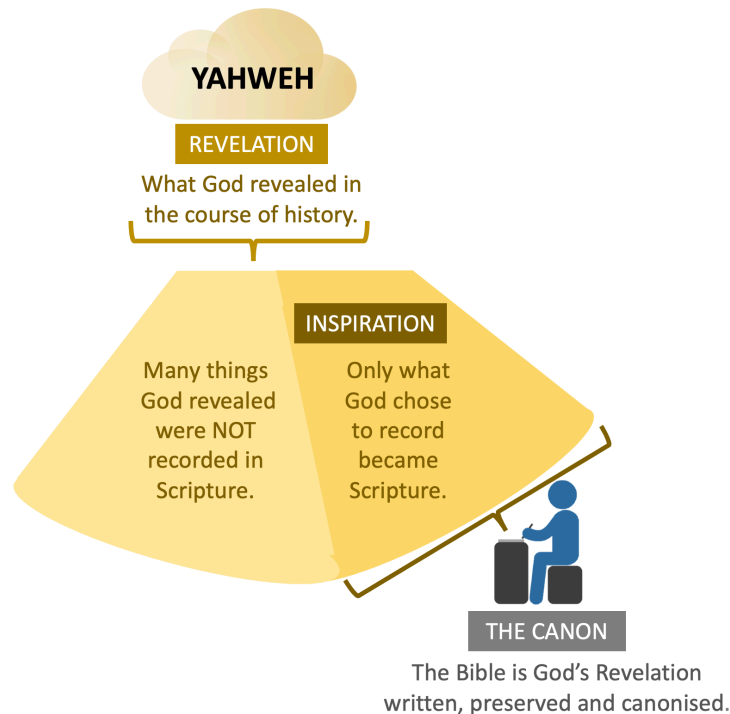
All the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, are written in The Record of Samuel the Seer, The Record of Nathan the Prophet, and The Record of Gad the Seer.

In the New Testament, the apostle John also said that only a portion of what Jesus said and did was recorded as Scripture.

**John 21:24–25**

<sup>24</sup> This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate. <sup>25</sup> Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

However, whatever God revealed that was to be recorded as Scripture became known as “inspired”.

**Inspiration**

The word “inspired” or literally “God-breathed” was a word created by the apostle Paul. It only refers to the preserved Scriptures, the Bible.

This is what he said:

**2 Timothy 3:16–17**

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

What God revealed was more than what was eventually captured in the Bible. However, the Bible itself says that whatever God chose to preserve of His revelation in the form of the written word is sufficient for us to get to know Him and to equip His people for every good work.

But why was the Bible necessary? Real revelation only happened in certain generations and God has not revealed anything new since the end of the New Testament. To preserve the contents of God's word, a written version would be important as a record that "remembers" history and truth for future generations. This is why the Bible is so important.



## Infallible

For Scriptures to fulfil its purpose, it is also critical that the Bible is totally accurate and reliable or "infallible". Why? This is because God made contracts with mankind and the Israelites. And the Bible is the historical record of God's relationship with the Israelites: it shows clearly what God said and shows whether the Israelites responded by keeping or breaking God's covenant.



If God intended the Bible to document His behaviour and that of the Israelites, then the Bible must be absolutely accurate in all its recorded details. A witness that lies or makes mistakes is not acceptable! So there must be no errors or lies in the Bible at all. Otherwise, the Bible cannot be trusted as a reliable record.

God is very serious about the accuracy of the Bible because it relates to His contract with man. This is what God told Moses to tell the people regarding the Law.

### Deuteronomy 4:2

Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you. Just obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you.

And even in the last pages of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, God gave stern warnings about keeping its accuracy.

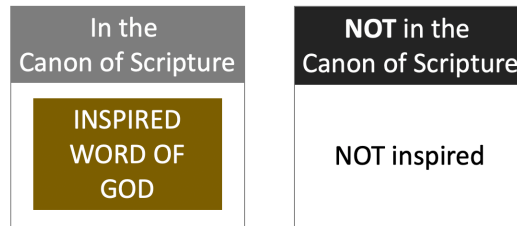
### Revelation 22:18–19

<sup>18</sup> And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: if anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

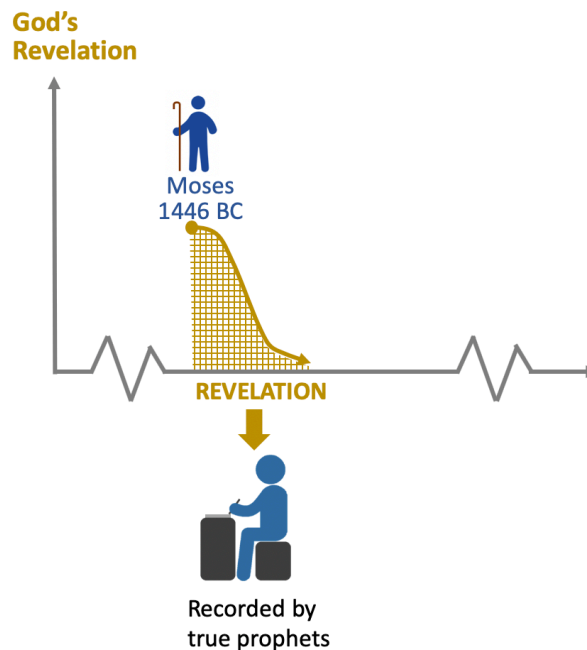


## The Canon of Scripture

The word “canon” refers to the writings that “passed the standards and test” to be included in the Bible.



The writings that became part of the Bible had to be written by true prophets during the generations when God was speaking and revealing Himself. The prophets were the guardians of Scripture. They wrote and they compiled them. When that era of revelation ended, the prophets stopped writing.

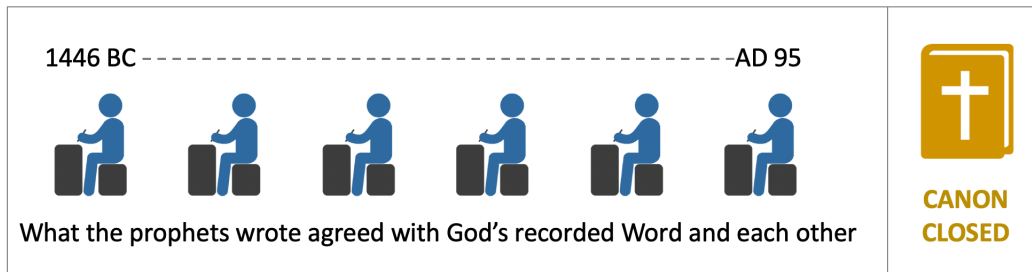


When another season started where God revealed His word again, everything these later prophets recorded had to agree with what God had revealed before.

During the time the New Testament was being written, the Holy Spirit guided the writers as they communicated God's truth to the church. As with the Old Testament, each new letter had to agree with God's already recorded word.

Most of what was recorded in the New Testament wasn't brand new revelation. It was a continuation or clarification of the Old Testament. God guided the writers to write and God guided the church to accept the writers' words.

After the whole season of revelation ended, the “canon” was fixed or “closed”, which meant nothing else could be added to the Scriptures. The canon of Scripture closed after the New Testament writings were completed.



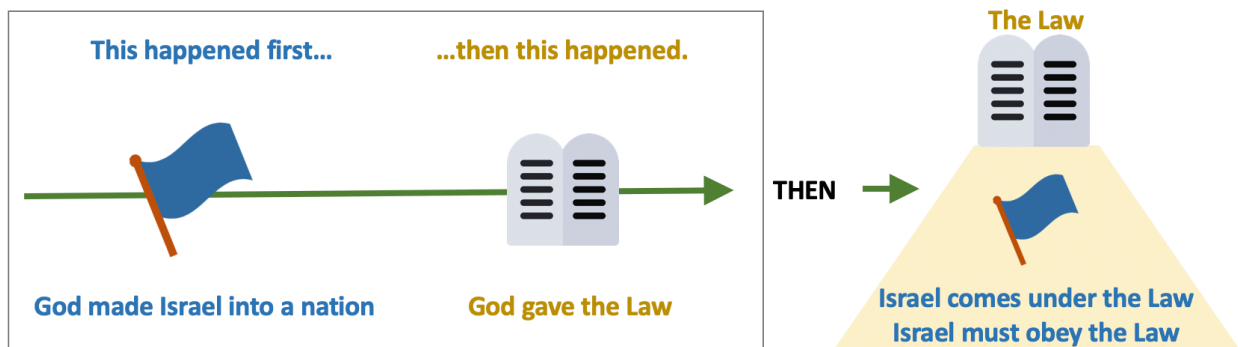
Some people feel that because the early church had been involved in “putting together” the canon of Scripture, the church is allowed to decide when other writings can be added. Others also feel that the church has the authority to define the “proper” interpretation of the Bible. But does the church really have authority over the Bible?

We get a better understanding of how to answer this from what happened at Mount Sinai.

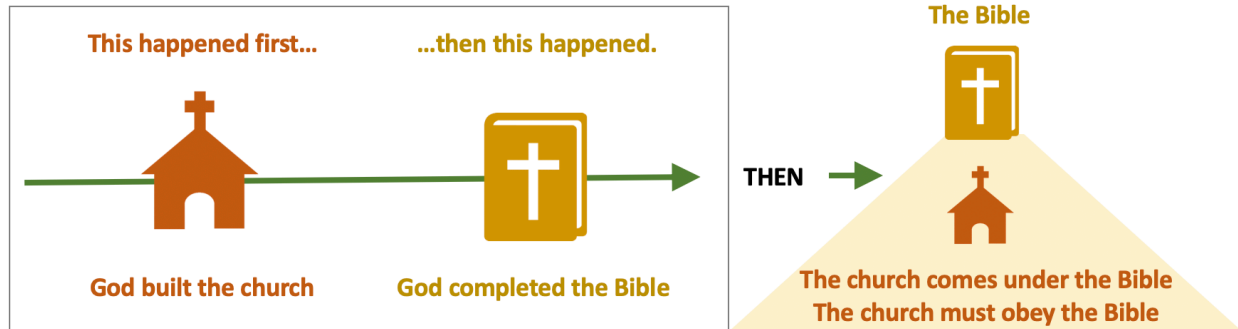
1. **Israel came into existence first:** God first created the nation of Israel at the Exodus.
2. **Then God gave the Israelites the Law.** God gave the Law to Moses, an Israelite, and He wrote it down. So in a sense, it can be said that God's Law came through the Israelites.

However, once the Law was given:

- all Israel must obey the Law.
- all Israel comes under the authority of the Law. Israel does not have authority over the Law, meaning they were not allowed to add to it, subtract from it or interpret it in any way they wanted.



Similarly, God built the church first. Then He used the early church to complete the writing of the New Testament. However, once the canon of Scripture closed, the church comes under the authority of the Bible. The church is not allowed to add to nor take away any Scripture.



## Biblical Faith is Related to God’s Revelation, Inspiration and the Canon of Scripture

Why did God bother to reveal Himself to Israel and have them record His words? This is because biblical faith in God requires content. Our faith in the Creator-God cannot rest on a foundation made of nothing. God never calls people to “blind faith”. God truly wants mankind to know Him and then put their trust in Him.

### Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

So, to give us the content necessary for faith:

- God revealed Himself through the verbal and written word.
- He inspired prophets to record His word and
- He set out the canon of Scripture, what words were to be included, and what were not.





At the first recording of God's Word at Mount Sinai, despite God's amazing amount of revelation to the Israelites, the people chose to reject God.

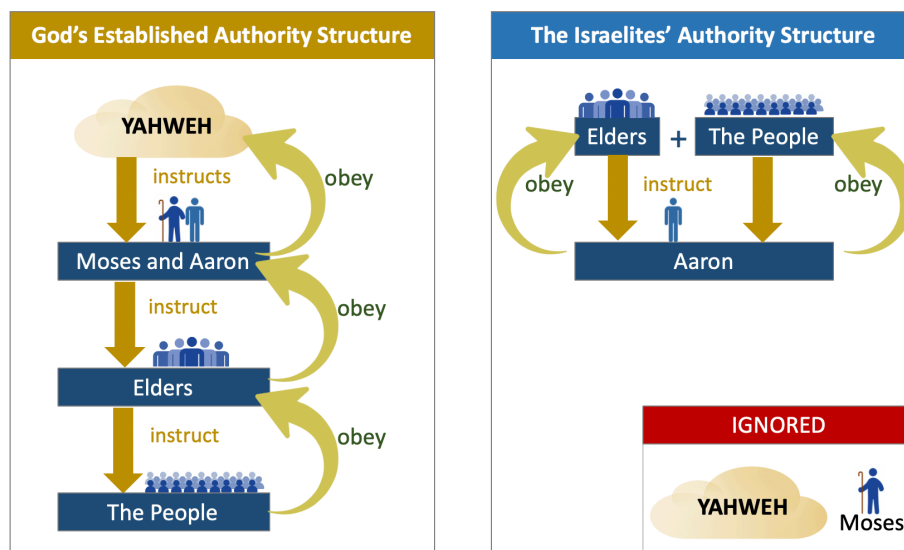
## Rebellion: The Israelites' Response at Sinai

**The people rejected God's leadership.** At first, the Israelites told Moses they would obey God's word. However, while Moses was still with God on Mount Sinai getting instructions on the Law, the people rebelled and created their own god to worship.

### Exodus 32:1

When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. "Come on," they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt."

God had set up a proper authority structure, but the people overturned it. Instead of listening to Aaron, the people **told** Aaron what they wanted and pressured him to listen to them instead. They wanted to do things their own way. They rejected God's way.



## Aaron gave in to the people

Aaron should have stood firm in his position as leader. He should have reminded the people that it was Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt and He was with them on the mountain. Instead, Aaron gave up his leadership authority. In wanting to please the people, Aaron himself went against God.

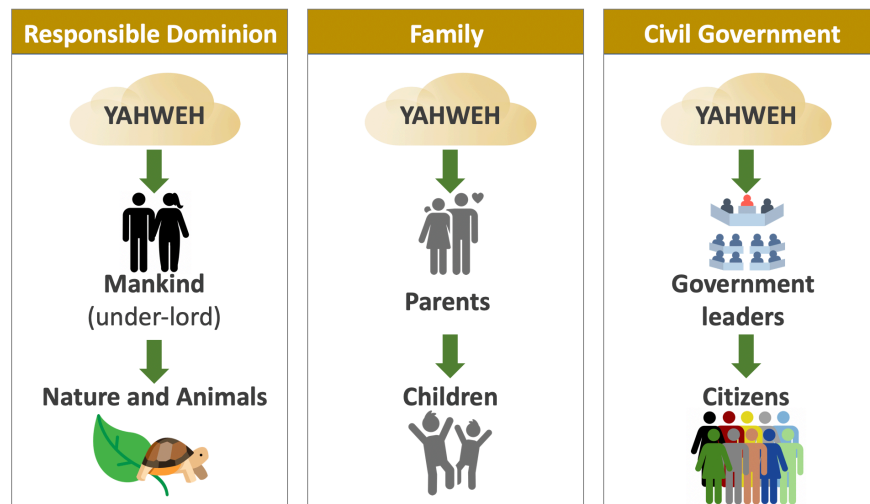
### Exodus 32:4–5

<sup>4</sup> Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, "O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" <sup>5</sup> Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!"



## Some people believe that authority structures don't matter. They feel everyone should be equal and have the right to do whatever they want. What does God think of this?

When God gave the divine institution of responsible dominion, mankind was to be the under-lord of the earth but under Yahweh's authority. In the divine institution of family, God gave the parents authority over their children. With the divine institution of civil government, God gave leaders authority over the people so they could limit evil in a sinful world.



Through all this, God was providing a way to limit chaos and have order and stability even in a sinful world.

### 1 Peter 2:13–14

<sup>13</sup> For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, <sup>14</sup> or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.

Yahweh is a God of order and stability. God had designed authority structures for good reasons. But people in their pride, always believe they know better. People always want to do things their own way:

- **Aaron failed as a leader.** He failed in his responsibility to lead the people properly.
- **The people failed as followers.** They decided not to obey the authority over them. This had disastrous results for all the Israelites.

Moses however, did not ignore the bad choices they made. He did not pretend it didn't matter. He took his God-given authority and leadership, confronted Aaron and the people and held them accountable for what they had done. All with God's approval.

**Exodus 32:20–21, 25–28**

<sup>20</sup> He took the calf they had made and burned it. Then he ground it into powder, threw it into the water, and forced the people to drink it. <sup>21</sup> Finally, he turned to Aaron and demanded, “What did these people do to you to make you bring such terrible sin upon them?”

<sup>25</sup> Moses saw that Aaron had let the people get completely out of control, much to the amusement of their enemies. <sup>26</sup> So he stood at the entrance to the camp and shouted, “All of you who are on the LORD's side, come here and join me.” And all the Levites gathered around him.

<sup>27</sup> Moses told them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Each of you, take your swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other. Kill everyone—even your brothers, friends, and neighbors.” <sup>28</sup> The Levites obeyed Moses' command, and about 3,000 people died that day.



Moses took his role and leadership authority seriously. He did not care about pleasing people or being “popular”. He cared about Yahweh and pleasing Him.

Today, we see some adults, parents, teachers and people with authority give up their rightful leadership.

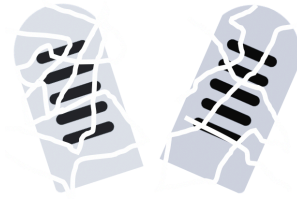
- Some believe that the personal choices of individuals outweigh everything else.
- Others believe any form of authority is bad.
- Still others have a perverted understanding of grace and leniency.

These unfortunately often result in serious and regretful consequences.

As believers, we need to understand that God gave authority structures because they are necessary and He will hold those in authority responsible for their roles to lead, guide and speak into the lives of the people under their care.

## Moses “tore up” the contract

Before Moses had even completed the writing of the Sinai contract, the Israelites broke the agreement! So Moses smashed the tablets in anger.



### Exodus 32:19

When they came near the camp, Moses saw the calf and the dancing, and he burned with anger. He threw the stone tablets to the ground, smashing them at the foot of the mountain.

This was not a good start to the father-son relationship between God and the Israelites!

What did God think about the whole incident? Yahweh wanted to destroy all the people and start a new nation with Moses!

### Exodus 32:7, 9–10

<sup>7</sup> The LORD told Moses, “Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. <sup>10</sup> Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation.”

This was really bad!

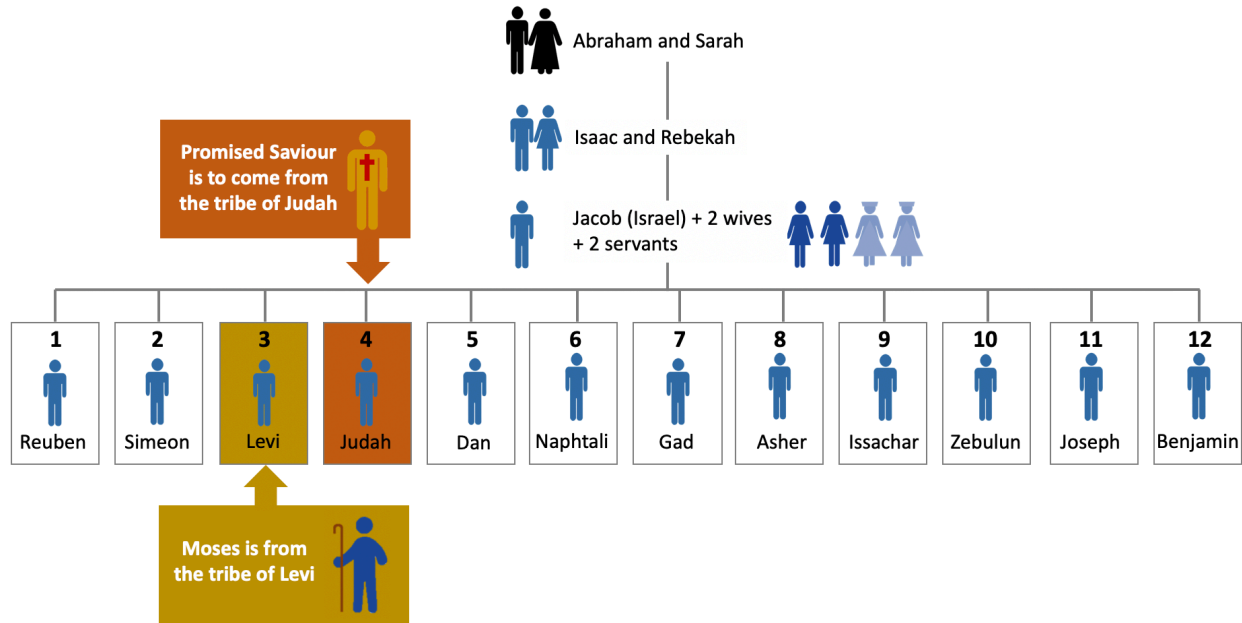
First, God said to Moses, “Your people whom you brought”. Israel was God’s son, but God seemed to be tossing them aside and not wanting to take responsibility for them!



Second, God proposed to make Moses into a great nation. God had earlier made a covenant with Abraham where Abraham’s great-grandsons would become the 12 tribes of Israel and the promised Saviour would come from the tribe of Judah.

Moses was **not** from the tribe of Judah. Moses was from the tribe of Levi, the tribe of priests.

Was God threatening to break His covenant with Abraham?



No, God was not going to break His covenant. He would not do that. He is a faithful promise-keeper. But it appears God was using this incident as a teaching and growing point.

## 1. God used this incident to teach Moses about leadership and to grow him spiritually into a strong leader.


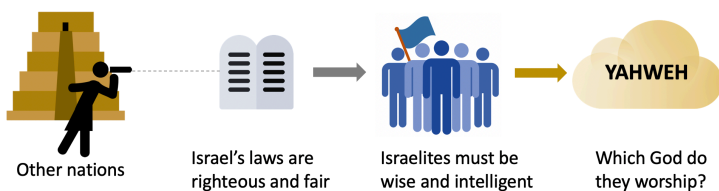
God knew Moses' heart. Moses started off as a very reluctant leader. Things had not been easy for him in Egypt and God knew it would only get more difficult in the desert. The people were sinful and rebellious and Moses would have a lot of trouble leading them.

Moses needed to be a strong, decisive and firm leader. He could not be weak and give in to the people like Aaron did.

So by posing the very shocking statement about breaking the Abrahamic Covenant, God was forcing Moses to take authority and leadership. God wanted Moses to be clear and very firm on what he believed to be right and true.

God pushed Moses to build him up as a spiritual leader.

Moses took up the challenge and replied to God in a very wise way.

Moses' Reply	Commentary
<p><b>Exodus 32:11–14</b>  <sup>11</sup> But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. “O LORD!” he said. “Why are you so angry with <u>your own people whom you brought</u> from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand?”</p>	<p><b>Moses affirmed the truth.</b> God tested Moses by pushing responsibility to him, saying that the people belonged to Moses (Exodus 32:7). But Moses pushed back. Moses told God no, they are not MY people, they are YOUR people. Moses focused on the truth. He reminded God that He was Israel’s Father and even though the people were rebellious, they were still His.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Yahweh's son</b></p> </div>
<p><sup>12</sup> <u>Why let the Egyptians say,</u> ‘Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth’? Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people!</p>	<p>Then <b>Moses used God’s revealed will to negotiate with Him.</b> Moses knew what God was concerned with and he argued on that basis. Moses knew that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God wanted the world to know Him and be saved.</li> <li>• God’s plan was for the Israelites to represent Him to the whole world.</li> <li>• The plan God had for drawing the world to Himself was to show people His own glory.</li> </ul> <p>So Moses basically said: “You will give the wrong impression of yourself to the Egyptians if you destroy your own people! Don’t do that! This will not help you achieve your goal!”</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>

Moses' Reply	Commentary
<p><sup>13</sup> <u>Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.</u> You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.'"</p>	<p><b>Moses showed confidence in God's character.</b> Moses reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was as if Moses were saying: "This is your promise that I know you will keep!"</p> <div data-bbox="948 478 1122 653" data-label="Image"> </div>
<p><sup>14</sup> <u>So the LORD changed his mind</u> about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.</p>	<p>Based on Moses' interaction with God, God decided not to totally eliminate the people.</p>

Through this exchange, Yahweh gave Moses confidence on how to approach Him. God was training Moses on how to have a relationship with Him. What Moses said to God would not be considered a polite religious prayer. There was nothing "nice", "sweet" or "gracious" about it. Moses argued with God! Is this "bad"? No. Moses trusted in God's character and he showed this trust by talking to God honestly.



How did God respond? He was not angry with Moses for doing that. God was not afraid of the difficult conversation. He didn't need everything to be "nice" and "fake". God wanted real engagement.

## 2. God used this incident to show that the way Moses interceded for the Israelites is a picture of how Jesus intercedes for all believers.

The Mosaic contract wasn't even completed and the people broke it. Mankind is incapable of keeping God's laws! Moses knew that the righteous Yahweh had every right to totally eliminate the people, but he interceded for them, begging God not to do that.

### Exodus 32:30

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a terrible sin, but I will go back up to the LORD on the mountain. Perhaps I will be able to obtain forgiveness for your sin."

**Deuteronomy 9:18–20**

<sup>18</sup> “Then, as before, I threw myself down before the LORD for forty days and nights. I ate no bread and drank no water because of the great sin you had committed by doing what the LORD hated, provoking him to anger. <sup>19</sup> I feared that the furious anger of the LORD, which turned him against you, would drive him to destroy you. But again he listened to me.

<sup>20</sup> The LORD was so angry with Aaron that he wanted to destroy him, too. But I prayed for Aaron, and the LORD spared him.

**Because Moses pleaded with God for the people, God didn’t destroy them.**

Throughout this incident, Moses was a picture or a foreshadow of Jesus. What Moses did helps us understand how Jesus also intercedes to God for all believers.



**Moses interceding  
for the people...**

**...is a picture of...**

**Our Real and  
Only Intercessor**



**...How Jesus intercedes  
for all believers**

**1 John 2:1**

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous.

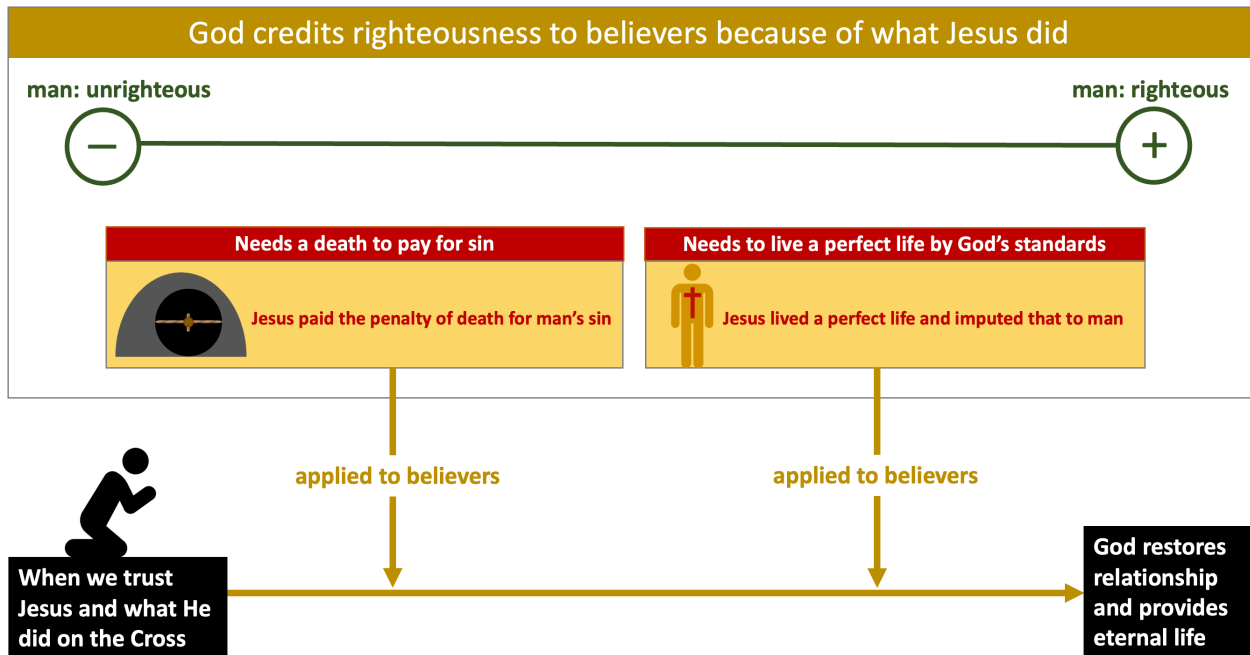
What does this mean when we say Jesus intercedes for us? It means that Jesus is our Defender. When Satan (whose name means accuser) stands in front of God and accuses us of sins and weaknesses, Jesus defends us.

Jesus basically tells Satan, “No, you have no right to accuse because:

- “My substitutionary death paid for their sins in full (bringing them from unrighteous “-” to innocent “0”).
- “I gave my righteous life to them, so that when God looks at them, all God sees is my righteous life (bringing them from innocent “0” to righteous “+”).”

Jesus gained God’s eternal favour for us based on what He did on the cross for us, so that we do not need to face eternal death.





Moses was a picture to help us understand how Jesus would be an intercessor for us. But **Jesus is our ONLY intercessor. He is the ONLY mediator between God and man.** No one else has the power to stand before God and defend us before the Father. No other human, no angel, no spirit, no one.

**1 Timothy 2:5**

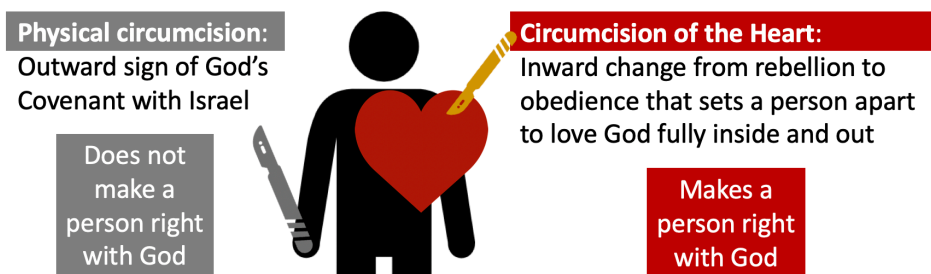
For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.

**3. God used this incident to tell the Israelites they needed to circumcise their hearts.**

The Israelites had proven incapable of obeying Yahweh on their own. So God told the Israelites the only way they can be acceptable to Him is for them to change their hearts.

**Deuteronomy 10:16 (ESV)**

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.



But what does God mean by “circumcise the heart”?

- ➔ It means that the heart is inwardly, spiritually changed and made loving towards God.

And how does God perform this “spiritual surgery” on the people’s hearts?

- ➔ Through the Holy Spirit. It happens when people put their trust in Him.

**Romans 2:29**

No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.



This is also the same for us today. We cannot make our hearts love and obey God. God has to do this for us. And God does. He does this when we put our trust in Jesus for salvation.

**Colossians 2:11**

When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

The circumcision of our hearts, the spiritual surgery to cut away our sinful thinking and have our hearts turned towards God, is a spiritual act that God performs for us when we put our trust in Christ.

The events at Mount Sinai showed that Israel had a lot to learn about their Father, Yahweh. And they had a whole lot to learn about how to be His son. After this season of early nation building, God was going to teach them more, with difficult life lessons during the period of the Conquest.



**Is God reliable? Or does He change His mind about things?**

After Moses spoke to Yahweh, God said He would not utterly destroy the people as He had threatened. Did God change his mind?

The Bible tells us very clearly that God does not change.

**Numbers 23:19**

God is not a man, so he does not lie.

He is not human, so he does not change his mind.

Has he ever spoken and failed to act?

Has he ever promised and not carried it through?

As humans, when we realise we have made a mistake, we would “change our minds” and make a different choice. God does not change in that way because He is all-knowing and

all-wise. He never makes a mistake and therefore, does not need to change His mind. Yet some passages in the Bible appear to give that impression.

Here are some thoughts:

1. It is important to understand that God often uses **conditional statements**. For example, in the Sinaitic Covenant, God said He would send blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience. God was telling the people the options they had and how He would respond to them. This passage explains how it works.



#### **Jeremiah 18:7–10**

<sup>7</sup> If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, <sup>10</sup> but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.

God does change the way He treats people based on their choices which He had already warned them about. This does not change His character.

2. There are other passages in the Bible which talk about God feeling regret or sorrow.

#### **Genesis 6:6**

So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.

The way to understand this is that it is a **figure of speech**. It was written in a way to help people understand what God felt or thought, but explained from a human perspective. It does not mean that God made a mistake and wished to undo it.

3. How then should we understand what happened between God and Moses when God said He changed His mind?

When Moses prayed for the Israelites, God showed mercy. He still punished the people with the plague, but He did not destroy them totally. **God responded to Moses' prayer.** The give-and-take conversation showed that Moses had a personal relationship with God. Moses was important to Him. In His sovereignty, God chooses to allow mankind to have a genuine relationship with Him where our prayers mean something to Him.

This should encourage us to know that the Creator-God of the universe truly wants a relationship with us. This should encourage us to pray to Him, talk with Him and genuinely engage with Him. He has shown us through His interaction with Moses that He is not afraid of hard conversations and raw emotions.

Let us determine to be real with our God. Let us determine to want a genuine, deep and honest relationship with Him.



## Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. Why is it important to think of Scripture as accurate and without any error? What impact does it have on our faith?
2. Looking at the authority structures in your life, how should you respond to those in authority over you, and how should you lead those whom God has placed in your authority?
3. Thinking back on your prayers, how do you think God has responded to you? Looking at Moses' example, how do you think you can pray the next time?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Exodus 23:20–33; Deuteronomy 20:1–20; Ruth 1–4

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### Endnote

Page 2: The illustration “Tabernacle” by Dylan Kwok.