

Lesson 10: The Desert Experience – Part 1

Reading Preparation:

- Exodus 16-20

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Lesson Notes:

1. The Beginning of the Desert Experience

Every trip requires preparation, but the Israelites due to the conditions surrounding their departure, and the lack of camping equipment could not survive on their own. They did not have enough water. They had no means to keep food from spoiling even if they had brought sufficient for themselves. There was little or no grazing land for their animals. How were they going to survive their Desert experience? The answer, as they were soon to learn, was they would not be able to survive on their own. They were going to have to rely completely upon the Lord. In fact that was the reason why God had brought them to the Desert: to learn to rely completely on Him for their daily and spiritual survival. God could have taken them somewhere else. Through their own industry, they with their animals would have been able to live off the land, but that was not heaven's plan. They were here....in the desert....dependent upon heaven's direction. If they were obedient, they would survive. If they were disobedient, they would die.

2. Continued Murmuring

Water was provided (see Exodus 15:24), as we had noted just three days out into the desert prior to the "murmuring" of the Hebrew children. On the fifteenth day of the second month, they murmur again.

Exodus 16:2-3

**2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:
3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.**

It is not that the need for food and water are not legitimate needs for the people in the barren wilderness. The Lord clearly understands their basic needs and has promised that He will provide for them. The problem is their lack of faith either in Moses or the Lord to meet their needs. They believe instead they have only been brought to the desert to die! The Lord's responds.

Exodus 16:12

**12 I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel:
speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and
in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye
shall know that I am the Lord your God.**

While it is essential the Israelites have food and water, it is even more important that they learn to be obedient. It is my belief that free agency is the first law of heaven, and the second is obedience. Note the preceding verse.

Exodus 16:4

**4 ...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.**

Obedience is as essential to the survival of the Israelites as is bread and water. If they do not learn to be obedient to the direction they receive from heaven, they will not be able to survive the physical harshness of their environment. Just as we will not be able to survive the harshness of the world in which we live, if we do not learn to heed the whispering of heavenly promptings.

Here comes the first lesson of obedience for inherent with the gathering of the Manna, is the keeping of the Sabbath day. They are to gather on each of the other days only enough manna for one day.

Exodus 16:20

**20 ...but some of them left of it until morning, and it
bred worms and stank:...**

On the day prior to the Sabbath, they are to gather enough for two days.

Exodus 16:23-24

**23 ...To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the
Lord: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that
you will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for
you to be kept until the morning.
24 And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade:
and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein.**

With obedience to the direction of Moses, their food did not rot or stink. If they were disobedient, they suffered the loss of food for a day or two. In this simple, but effective manner, the Lord is teaching Israel to follow the directions of their prophet. They are also learning the Lord keeps his promises to his children.

Exodus 16:35

**35 And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years,
until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna,
until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.**

The children of Israel continue their journey in the wilderness and now pitch their tents at Rephidim (Ex. 17:2). The murmuring of the children of Israel escalates.

Exodus 17:3-4

**3 And the people thirsted there for water; and the people
murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that
thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our
children and our cattle with thirst?
4 And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do
unto this people? they be almost to stone me.**

As one compares the complaint regarding the lack of food with this recent complaint for water, there are similarities. We see in their lack of faith that Moses has only brought them to the desert in order to die. They will also add the death of their cattle. Had they so quickly forgotten that previously, through Moses, the Lord had provided water and the daily provision of manna and quail? The escalation is that they now threaten physical harm to Moses!

Ellis T. Rasmussen observes,

"...again, the people's attitude was, 'Is the Lord among us, or not?' They knew there was a God and they knew He could help them, but they could not reach that quiet confidence, which is faith, that He would." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 170).

3. Two Important Leadership Lessons

3.1. Fortification By Looking to the Prophet

Their basic needs for food and water having been provided by the Lord, the children of Israel must now face another basic need, protection.

Exodus 17:8

8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

The LDS Bible dictionary states,

"Amalek. Amalekites. An Arab tribe that lived in the desert of Paran between the Arabah and the Mediterranean... The Amalekites were at constant war with the Hebrews from the time of Moses (Ex. 17:8, etc.), till their power was broken by Saul and David (1 Sam. 15; 27:8; 30; 2 Sam. 8:12)...." (LDS Bible Dictionary in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, 607).

Moses appoints Joshua to gather a group of men and go out and defend themselves against the Amalekites. He then takes an interesting, but important position.

Exodus 17:9-13

9 ...to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.

10 ...and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12 But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Once again we see the Lord teaching an important lesson to his children. He initially expects his children to do all they can to defend themselves and to protect their children from danger. He then places His leader, Moses, upon a prominent place so he can be seen by those who are fighting and they know of his support. When his arms tire, others are there to give him support. Moses is not expected to hold up his arms all day by himself! The simple lesson is if you will look to your leaders, I, the Lord, will give you protection from your enemies.

Harold B. Lee referenced Aaron and Hur holding up the arms of Moses as similar to his role as counselor to Joseph Fielding Smith,

"I think that is the role President Tanner and I have to fulfill. The hands of President Smith may grow weary. They may tend to droop at times because of his heavy responsibilities; but as we uphold his hands, and as we lead under his direction, by his side, the gates of hell will not prevail against you and against Israel (see D&C 21:4-7). Your safety and ours depends upon whether or not we follow the ones whom the Lord has placed to preside over his church. He knows whom he wants to preside over his church, and he will make no mistake... Let's keep our eyes on the President of the Church and uphold his hands as President Tanner and I will continue to do." ("Uphold the Hands of the President of the Church" in Conference Report, October, 1970, 153).

Just as the Israelites of the past looked to Moses to give them guidance and protection, those who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ, today look to their living prophet for guidance and protection. His counselors, like Aaron and Hur, now provide strength and support to him as he fulfills his many responsibilities in the church.

[3.2. Jethro Teaches Moses to Delegate Responsibility](#)

It appears that the Hebrew children have become sufficiently established that Moses is able to contact his father-in-law, Jethro, and ask him to bring his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to the base of Sinai so that he can reunite with them.

It is during Jethro's visit that he makes an observation regarding the challenges Moses faces as a leader.

Exodus 18:13

13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from morning unto the evening.

It appears that Moses is acting as the sole judge to the Israelites in all matters that concern them. Jethro is familiar enough with Moses having lived with him and his family for forty years that he feels comfortable in asking him what role he is providing to the people.

Exodus 18:14-16

14 And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?
15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God:
16 ...I judge between one and another, and do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.

Jethro learns Moses has taken upon himself the sole responsibility of making judgments and teaching God's statutes and laws to the people. Whether Jethro had gained insight regarding delegation through his own life experiences or he was directed by inspiration from the Lord himself, we do not know, but he expresses an important truth regarding the effects upon a leader when he attempts to bear the responsibility of leadership by himself.

Exodus 18:17-18

17 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.
18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

Jethro now offers his son-in-law a solution to his leadership burden.

Exodus 18: 21-22

21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:
22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is a similar program of organization, probably for the same reason. The Bishop is ordained and set apart by the Lord as a Judge in Israel of the Aaronic Priesthood and the woman in his ward. He serves hundreds; The Stake President serves as judge over the Melchizedek Priesthood in his stake and assists the Bishops of the wards in the stake as needed in all their decisions. He serves thousands; and all decisions may be appealed to the First Presidency for a final decision. The Bishop's counselors; the counselors of the Stake President and the High Council and the Quorum of the Twelve all serve their various leaders in these matters of importance. "and they [others, rather than just one individual] shall bear the burden with thee "[the Prophet of the Church] (Exodus 18:22).

One might inquire, why didn't the Lord himself instruct Moses regarding this important leadership principle instead of Jethro, his father-in-law or someone else? The following reasons occurred to me. Over the forty years Moses spent in Jethro's desert home, it was Jethro who taught Moses the principles of the gospel. Jethro had become someone to whom Moses looked upon with esteem and importance. Who better to teach Moses an important leadership principle than his former tutor and mentor?

Second, an important principle for a teacher, is to teach by example. If the Lord were to become the only one who taught Moses, how would Moses learn the concept that he did not have to do everything himself? By inspiring Jethro, the Lord was able to teach Moses the Lord himself also works through others to teach important concepts to his children.

Third, it has been my observation the Lord does not provide "ready-made prophets," but instead takes those whom He knows have the potential to become great leaders, and molds them, one step at a time, often through the challenges of life. Who better than Moses knew the burden of leadership! I sense that when an alternate solution was offered than the one Moses had practiced, he was willing to listen. Whether that direction came directly through the Lord or through his father-in-law or another whom he valued, he would have been willing to try another option. While it is true sometimes there is a "burning bush," or "the appearance of an angel," most often the Lord works though "less spectacular means" to give guidance and assistance to His children.

[4. Israel's Preparation To Be a Holy People](#)

[4.1. "A Kingdom of Priests and An Holy Nation"](#)

Exodus 19:5-6

**5 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:
6 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.**

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"Israel was called anew to the mission of Abraham's seed (Ex. 19:5 and fn.). Moses was to prepare his followers to be a 'peculiar treasure' (Heb., sgullab, the personal treasury whereby a king operates, defends, and extends his kingdom). As a 'kingdom of priests,' the Israelites would be servants of the Lord with divine authority, 'an holy nation' dedicated and committed to teach and serve." (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 103).

The Lord has chosen the children of Israel to become a holy people, even his covenant people. It is their responsibility to prepare the rest of the nations of the world to also "become the children of Abraham," of whom the Lord has given special blessings, including his divine authority. In order to qualify for this blessing, they must enter into sacred covenants which will set them apart from others. The Old Testament records the challenges the children of Israel faced as they strove to become God's covenant people. Today as we strive to become a covenant people, hopefully we can learn from their experiences and avoid their pitfalls.

Robert L. Millet states,

*"It was one thing to get Israel out of Egypt, and another thing to get Egypt out of Israel! Indeed, the compelling drama of the deliverance, exodus, and wanderings of Israel proved to be a tragedy, a story of lost opportunities—a saga of things as they might have been. It would be over a millennium before the fullness of gospel blessings and the fullness of priesthood ordinances would be available to the generality of the people. In the meantime, the Lord had commandments and spiritual structure for a people he still loved: the word from Sinai was about to be given" ("The Call of Moses and the Deliverance of Israel," in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 109).*

[4.2. Preparation For the Theophany \[The Appearance of God to the People\]](#)

God gives the following directions to Moses in preparation of their becoming his covenant people.

Exodus 19:9

9 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...

The Lord is reinforcing in the ears of the people a basic premise which is that He will speak to the people through His anointed prophet. In this manner they may know when His prophet speaks, he speaks as the Lord' representative and what he says is the will of the Lord. Prior to the Lord's visit in the cloud, the people are to prepare themselves externally and internally.

Exodus 19:10-11

**10 And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes;
11 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.**

In order for the people to be prepared to see the Lord himself meant they had to be clean internally as well as externally.

Ellis T. Rasmussen draws the following parallel,

"That they were to cleanse themselves outwardly as a symbol of their inner purification seems interestingly appropriate; it suggests a parallel to the nature of the rite of baptism, as an outward washing symbolic of an inner cleansing." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 175).

Today as we prepare ourselves to attend church each Sunday as baptized members, we also strive to be clean externally as well as internally. Each Sunday we partake of the sacrament in renewal of our baptismal covenants. We do not want the residue of the world in which we live to interfere with our being unable to fully feel the Spirit of the Lord.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“At the prearranged signal, the sounding of the trumpet ‘exceeding long,’ the people trembled in anticipation and awe, but apparently they were not fully ready to come up ‘into the sight’ of the Lord on the mount where Moses was, for the Lord told him to go down and warn them not to come up. Even though their hearts were not fully prepared to endure His presence, they did hear the voice and the words of God as the Ten Commandments were given...” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 124).

Unfortunately, the people were so frightened by the effects on the Mount their faith failed them and they were not able to see the Lord as they had anticipated.

Exodus 20:18-19

**18 And all the people saw the thunderings, 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.
19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.**

However, they did hear the voice of the Lord and the words of God as the Ten Commandments were given.

Exodus 20:22

22 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.

They had heard the voice of the Lord. They received confirmation Moses was the Lord's servant upon the earth and they were to give him obedience. Not long ago, they had been slaves to the Egyptians, now they were in the process of becoming servants of the Most High God. It was enough for them now.

5. The Decalogue

The time has now arrived for the Lord to speak to the children of Israel and also to us. He sets down the foundational commandments upon which we are to be governed worthy to be called his covenant children. As with all covenants which come from heaven, we may choose to accept the conditions or reject them. Each commandment brings a blessing to the recipient and a corresponding loss of blessing, if the commandment is ignored. The choice is ours.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“The first four commandments defines our relationship with God; The fifth commandment establishes the importance of family and proper family relationships. The last five commandments regulate man's relationships with his fellowmen. A man who has committed himself to the perfecting of his relationship with God, Family, and fellowman is well on his way to perfection in all things” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 127).

5.1. First and Second Commandments – Worship Only God

Exodus 20:3-4

**3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing...**

It is important to understand, as we will later learn, the children of Israel were not given the higher law that was originally recorded on the first set of tablets that Moses broke. The higher law was not widely known until the coming of Jesus Christ. It was known, however, to those living in the Americas as recorded in the Book of Mormon. For our purposes, the corresponding higher commandments as taught by the Lord will be noted along with the Ten commandments or carnal commandments. It is important to note these commandments along with the law of sacrifices were given in order to prepare the people for Christ. He will fulfill the lower law and teach the higher law to his disciples.

The higher law established by Christ for these two commandments may be:

Luke 10:27

27 ...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;...

B/M, Alma 5:19

19 ...can ye look up to God...with a pure heart and clean hands? ...can ye look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"The first two commandments are essentially one. The Lord declared his identity as the One who freed them and forbade worship or acknowledgment of any other force, entity, or idea as a 'god'....it permits no other deity whatsoever—neither in addition to, subordinate to, nor in contrast to the only true and living God." (The LDS Commentary of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 104).

When our loyalty to deity is divided with something else, regardless of what that may be, it then takes away from our total and complete devotion to God. The Lord of heaven requires of us all that we are willing to give all we have in expression of our love and commitment to He who is our creator. Anything else will not be accepted.

Spencer W. Kimball stated,

"It is not enough [however] to acknowledge the Lord as superior and refrain from worshiping idols; we should love the Lord with all our heart, might, mind, and strength, realizing the great joy he has in the righteousness of his children." ("Hold Fast to the Iron Rod" in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.2. Third Commandment – Name of the Lord

Exodus 20:7

7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;...

The Higher law:

B/M, Mosiah 18:9

9 ...to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death,...

In the world in which we live, what was not many years ago, uncommon speech, has now become common and acceptable to a large number of people. Profanity of deity has become increasingly more accepted as the nation's respect for deity has come under attack by those who find the worship of God to be offensive. As prayer in school or in the nation have been largely replaced by "a moment of silence," or omitted completely and the Pledge of allegiance to the flag which contains the phrase, One nation, under God," have come under attack, the use of vulgar language has increased. Is it just coincidence that when our respect for deity decreases so also does our sensitivity to others?

Spencer W. Kimball admonished,

"It is not enough to refrain from profanity or blasphemy. We need to make important in our lives the name of the Lord. While we do not use the Lord's name lightly, we should not leave our friends or our neighbors or our children in doubt as to where we stand. Let there be no doubt about our being followers of Jesus Christ." ("Hold Fast to the Iron Rod" in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.3. Fourth Commandment – Sabbath Day

Exodus 20:8

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

The Higher law:

Doctrine and Covenants 59:9

9 ...thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

Whereas this nation was once known as a nation that respected deity, and attendance at church was a common Sunday activity for a families or individuals; church attendance has now drastically declined. Spectator sports, shopping at the mall, and various other activities have become the religious substitute for many people who find church attendance boring and unfulfilling. Hero worship of sport or movie or music figures has seemingly become more important to many than their worship of God. As our values of what is really important decline, so will our nation. This lesson from the decline of former civilization has been repeated over and over again. Do we really think we will be exempt?

Spencer W. Kimball taught,

"The Lord's holy day is fast losing its sacred significance throughout the world,...More and more, man destroys the Sabbath's sacred purposes in pursuit of wealth, pleasure, recreation, and the worship of false and material gods...It is not enough to refrain from movie going, hunting, fishing, sports, and unnecessary labor on the Sabbath. Constructive use of the Sabbath day includes studying the scriptures, attending church meetings to learn and to

worship, writing letters to absent loved ones, comforting the sorrowing, visiting the sick, and, in general, doing what the Lord would have us do on this, his holy day.” (“Hold Fast to the Iron Rod” in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.4. Fifth Commandment – Father and Mother

Exodus 20:12

12 Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

The Higher law:

Colossians 3:20

20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

It is understood that “obey” includes inward reverence, as well as outward behavior. In every age, a distinguishing blessing to children for their obedience to their parents has included personal peace of mind.

In this day in which we live, many of us owe a great deal to our parents for the care and protection they provided for us. While there are many whose parents were so preoccupied with their own needs they often neglected those who were in most need of their attention, the gift of life which they gave is priceless. I believe that someday we will meet our parents and will have an opportunity to speak with them. I’m sure there will be both gratitude and expressions of disappointment from both parties. However, once we have the opportunity to hear from them, those who have carried the scars of anger and hurt may find them becoming less and their appreciation may even increase. Anyone who has had the opportunity and blessing to be a parent knows that in retrospect we all wish that we had made better choices. This is especially true for the neglectful but now aged parent, who seldom receives a visit from his son or daughter. Personal regret is often the preoccupation of the elderly.

Spencer W. Kimball states,

“If we truly honor our parents as we are commanded to do, we will seek to emulate their best characteristics and to fulfill their highest aspirations for us. Nothing we could give them materially would be more prized than our righteous living.” (“Hold Fast to the Iron Rod” in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.5. Sixth Commandment – Murder

Exodus 20:13

13 Thou shalt not kill.

The Higher law:

Matthew 5:44

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Spencer W. Kimball states,

“It is not enough to refrain from killing. We are rather under solemn obligation to respect life and to foster it. Far from taking a life, we must be generous in helping others to enjoy the necessities of life. And when this has been accomplished, we seek to improve the mind and the spirit. We refrain from taking harmful substances into our body. Through wisdom and moderation in all things, we seek good health and a sense of physical well-being.” (“Hold Fast to the Iron Rod” in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

While most individuals would find the taking of a life to be something they could not conceive of doing, the large number of abortions that occur in this country would suggest that in many ways our sense of life has been dulled by the passing of the years. Termination of a pregnancy, except due to rape or the life of the mother, is to take the life of an unborn fetus. As President Kimball notes, we must also use wisdom in what we take into our own bodies, avoiding any harmful substances that may serve to shorten our own lives. Life is to be valued and to be lived with joy and happiness and we will be held accountable if we do anything to shorten the life of another or our own.

5.6. Seventh Commandment – Adultery

Exodus 20:14

14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

The Higher law:

Doctrine and Covenants 42:22

22 Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.

Matthew 5:27-28

**27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,
Thou shalt not commit adultery:
28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman
to lust after her hath committed adultery with her
already in his heart.**

There is but one law given by heaven regarding sexual purity. It is abstinence before marriage and total and complete fidelity after marriage. Society once held that sexual purity was an important value. It would appear that like many of the other commandments given on Mount Sinai, sexual purity has been replaced with permissiveness and irresponsibility. It is “as if,” as long as it is between two consenting adults, “anything goes.” One may pretend there are no consequences for one’s actions, but that is as foolish as trying to deny that there are no consequences for violating the law of gravity. When we replace the ancient commandments for today’s morality, we are like the individual who jumps out of the three story building and says, “I can fly!” Sooner or later, the ground will say, “No you can’t!”

Spencer W. Kimball states,

“It is not enough to refrain from adultery. We need to make the marriage relationship sacred, to sacrifice and work to maintain the warmth and respect which we enjoyed during courtship. God intended marriage to be eternal, sealed by the power of the priesthood, to last beyond the grave. Daily acts of courtesy and kindness, conscientiously and lovingly carried out, are part of what the Lord expects. It is for us to keep our hearts and minds pure, as well as our actions.” (“Hold Fast to the Iron Rod” in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.7. Eighth Commandment – Stealing

Exodus 20:15

15 Thou shalt not steal.

The Higher law:

Luke 18:22

**22 ...sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the
poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven...**

It would appear this is one commandment that has stood the test of time. We still believe it is wrong to take something that doesn’t belong to you. Taking a pencil or paper from your employer often goes unnoticed, but taking a car or money or possessions of another, is a punishable crime. It is difficult to imagine what it would be like to live in a society where stealing was not a punishable crime.

Spencer W. Kimball notes,

“...it is for us to be honest in every way. We must be generous, the very opposite of selfishness. When money is needed, we give money. But often what is needed more is love and time and caring, which money cannot buy. When that is true, even being generous with our money is not enough.” (“Hold Fast to the Iron Rod” in Ensign, November, 1978, 6-8).

5.8. Ninth Commandment – False Witness

Exodus 20:16

**16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy
neighbor.**

The Higher law:

Matthew 22:39

39 ...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

“The ninth commandment specifically forbids false testimony, but it is expanded in other scriptures to include all forms of lying, misrepresentation, or falsehood.” (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 108).

Adam S. Bennion adds,

“To bear false witness is to testify to or to pass along reports, insinuations, speculations, or rumors as if they were true, to the hurt of a fellow human being...Whereas murder involves the taking of human life, bearing false witness centers in the destruction of character or its defamation. It reaches to the ruin of reputation.” (“The Ninth Commandment,” in The Ten Commandments Today. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965, 136).

Some years ago, I was watching a popular television show which took place at a high school titled, Mr. Novak.

Mr. Novak episode summary:

A young girl had been tried for killing her parents. A jury had concluded there was insufficient evidence and had acquitted her. She had come to another city to stay with her guardian and began attending the high school where Mr. Novak was her teacher. It seems the other students had learned of her previous experience with the law and they, along with some of the other teachers, had begun talking about her as well as judging her.

Mr. Novak, tried to stay neutral and to help the students as well as fellow teachers delay judgment. Any criteria for their judgment of her was not to be based on any previous action, but by her actions while at the school. He shared with them,

"The reason I am teaching school now is due to the influence of an earlier school teacher. But, I saw this teacher destroyed by some false accusations that were made that caused this teacher to stop teaching and later killed him. It was determined later that he was innocent of all complaints against him." Mr. Novak concluded, "He wasn't killed by a gun's bullet, but by verbal assassination!" (see TV series: Mr. Novak, Season 2, Episode 12, Beyond Reasonable Doubt. Aired on December 22, 1964).

I had written down this incident for it brought to my awareness the devastating effects that half-truths or untruths can have upon an individual. Repeating something I had heard, without knowing the facts, had previously seemed so innocent.

William Shakespeare states,

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash;
'tis something, nothing;

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
'But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed. ("Othello" Act 3, Scene 3).

5.9. Tenth Commandment – Covet

Exodus 20:17

17 Thou shalt not covet...

The Higher law:

Matthew 6:33

**33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto
you.**

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"The tenth commandment forbids taking illicit delight in, or feeling an improper desire for, another's wife, property, status, or position. This commandment warns against desiring that which cannot be legally and morally acquired..." (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 108).

It is possible some may feel the last of the "Ten commandments" is of least importance. The following insight may given one further pause for consideration.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual notes,

"The implication [of this commandment] is that when one sets his heart on things of this world to the point that allegiance to God and his principles no longer matters, then material things become as a god to that person; he follows after them or worships them, and this practice is the same as idolatry." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 135).

When seen in the brighter light of coveting being equated with idolatry, it would appear the first commandment and the last commandment are closely related and, therefore, most important. It is true when we view the "Ten Commandments" as heaven inspired, their importance increases and their application in our daily lives provides us great meaning. If one stands back and asks, "If a society were able to fully practice the "Ten Commandments" in their lives, would it make them a better people?" I believe most people would agree. I believe it is for this very reason the Lord gave to the children of Israel the "Ten Commandments" at this time in their journey. If they could live these ten simple truths, their trip to the promised land would have take a shorter time than if they did not.

6. Conclusion

Cecil B. DeMille stated,

“We cannot break the Ten Commandments. We can only break ourselves against them—or else, by keeping them, rise through them to the fullness of freedom under God. God means us to be free. With diving daring, He gave us the power of choice.” (Commencement Address in Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, Provo, 31 May, 1957).

The children of Israel and their prophet Moses have been brought to the desert to be taught in order to become God’s covenant people. What we now know as the Sinai Peninsula will be their classroom. They were brought out of Egypt, and now they begin the process of getting Egypt out of them!

The challenges they faced are similar to the challenges we also face. While we are not in a desert environment, we are also during our mortal existence in the process of being tried and tested in order for us to qualify to become one of God’s covenant children. It was their choice. It is now ours.