



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

## Exodus 19:16-25 New American Standard Bible October 8, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 8, 2017**, is from **Exodus 19:16-25**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Exodus 19:16) So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.**

On the first day of the third month after God freed His people from slavery in Egypt, Moses went up Mount Sinai in fulfillment of the LORD's promise and prophecy to him: "And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain'" (Exodus 3:12). After meeting with God, Moses went down the mountain to prepare the Israelites to meet the LORD so they could hear the LORD speak to Moses, and therefore, they would have no excuse not to honor, trust, and listen to Moses as the LORD's spokesman when God gave them the Ten Commandments and the Covenant Law through him (Exodus 19:9). On the third day, God manifested His presence on the mountain using a combination of thunder, lightning, a loud trumpet blast, and a thick cloud. God is Spirit, and the invisible God used these phenomena that terrified the people to manifest His presence to them. He had done so already through mighty miracles in Egypt, but this was a direct display of the LORD's almighty power for all the people to see and hear together at one time.

**(Exodus 19:17) And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.**

The people (people that the LORD called His treasured possession; people He would make into kingdom of priests and a holy nation — Exodus 19:5-6) had washed their clothing so they would be consecrated to meet the LORD. The LORD had forbidden them to touch the mountain on penalty of death. When Moses heard and saw the LORD's presence manifested on the mountain, he led the terrified people out to meet God, but they could not touch the mountain on penalty of death.

**(Exodus 19:18) Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.**

When Moses met the LORD for the first time, Moses heard the LORD speak from a burning bush that the fire did not consumed; at the LORD's command, he took off his shoes because the LORD told him that he was standing on holy ground (see Exodus 3). When God gave the Covenant and Law to the people through Moses, the LORD descended on the mountain in fire. The mountain shook more violently than a volcano erupting, but the people at the foot of the mountain were not harmed. When the Lord Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His followers on the Day of Pentecost, He did so with a manifestation of fire, tongues of flame appeared above the head of each disciple without burning them.

**(Exodus 19:19) When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.**

Combined with the violent trembling of the mountain, the trumpet sound grew louder in a way that the sound could not be mistaken for thunder. The LORD's personal presence on the mountain was not just a thunderstorm with lightening, and it could not be mistaken for such. As the trumpet sound grew louder, Moses spoke first to the LORD, and the people heard the LORD answer Moses. God gave the Israelites the opportunity to hear His voice speak real words in their language so they could understand the LORD in human speech. They did not need to see and were not permitted to see a form of the LORD with their eyes, for they would later be forbidden to make any graven image of God; and if they had seen a form of the LORD, they would have carved graven images sooner than they eventually did in disobedience to God. God manifests himself supremely through words to and through people; such as Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, through the written Scriptures (the Old and New Testaments), and most assuredly and most supremely through the Word made flesh that dwelt among us. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one

has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:1, 14, 17-18).

**(Exodus 19:20) The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.**

No matter how terrifying to the Israelites (and possibly to Moses) to hear the LORD’s command, Moses obeyed the voice of the LORD and proved himself an example for the people to follow when the LORD required a lifetime of consecration and obedience to Him. The LORD graciously descended to the top of Mount Sinai and graciously spoke to the people directly and also through Moses. The people needed to see that Moses could safely go up to see the LORD and come down safely again so they would have no excuse for turning from Moses or the LORD if Moses delayed coming down from the Mount at a later time (see Exodus 32:1-4).

**(Exodus 19:21) Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.**

Because God is love (see 1 John 4:8), God does not desire that any should perish (see 2 Peter 3:9); therefore, the LORD wanted Moses to be certain to warn the people a second time not to force their way up the mountain to see the LORD; for if they did so, many of them would perish. The people needed to learn that Moses had not given them and was not going to give them arbitrary manmade laws, but the very commands and laws of God. The LORD wanted the Israelites to trust in His words, and not see Him or an image of Him or create an image of Him in their minds to worship. Jesus declared: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

**(Exodus 19:22) “Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.”**

These “priests” may have been the elders that Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, encouraged Moses to appoint (see Exodus 18:19-27). The command indicates that no one, not even priests, can presume to come into the presence of the LORD without consecrating themselves; which means, setting themselves apart from sin for God’s holy service. Perhaps these priests offered the sacrifices on the altars that were built prior to the construction of the tabernacle (see Exodus 20:24-26).

**(Exodus 19:23) Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’”**

Moses told the LORD that he had done what He had told him to do. In Moses’ opinion, they had been sufficiently warned not to come forward and touch the mountain. But the LORD knew His people better than Moses, and the LORD knew how quickly they were prone to disobey. So, the LORD ordered Moses to go down the mountain once again to warn them. Over time, Moses would learn more about the character of those he led.

**(Exodus 19:24) Then the LORD said to him, “Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them.”**

God’s laws are always an expression of His love and God gives His laws for the benefit of His people. The ceremonial laws God gave Moses pointed toward the coming of God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah, and what He would do. God gave moral laws, the Ten Commandments, for all people everywhere, for the moral laws are designed according to our nature as created by God. To be a law and not just advice, there must be a penalty for disobeying. If an Israelite forced his or her way into the LORD’s holy presence contrary to His command, the penalty would be death. The LORD and His Law should be respected, and there would be consequences for disobeying the LORD. The Israelites needed to learn to obey God rather than use their newfound freedom for their own selfish purposes. They also needed to learn to respect Moses as their lawgiver and eventually trust Aaron as their high priest. They were no longer to live as slaves under an arbitrary Pharaoh or slave master. They were to learn how to govern themselves according to laws given by God; laws suited to their physical and spiritual nature and for their benefit.

**(Exodus 19:25) So Moses went down to the people and told them.**

Once again, we learn that Moses did not argue with God, but obeyed God. Moses gave the LORD a reason why he thought he did not need to go and talk to God’s people again: he had done what God had told him to do earlier. God patiently restated His command to Moses without giving Moses any reasons for why He wanted Moses to do what He commanded, and Moses obeyed the LORD. We know God has good reasons for all that He says and does, and sometimes we can discover God’s good reasons from subsequent Biblical history, even as Moses would soon learn more about the nature of those he was leading as they wandered in the wilderness forty years as punishment for their rebellion. We also learn from experience why we should not sin or live in disobedience to God.

## Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what ways did the LORD manifest His presence to Moses?
2. In what ways did the LORD manifest His presence to the Israelites?
3. Why do you think God refused to allow the Israelites to see His form?
4. In what ways did God reveal His covenant and laws to the Israelites?
5. What are some of the ways God showed His concern for the Israelites?

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Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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