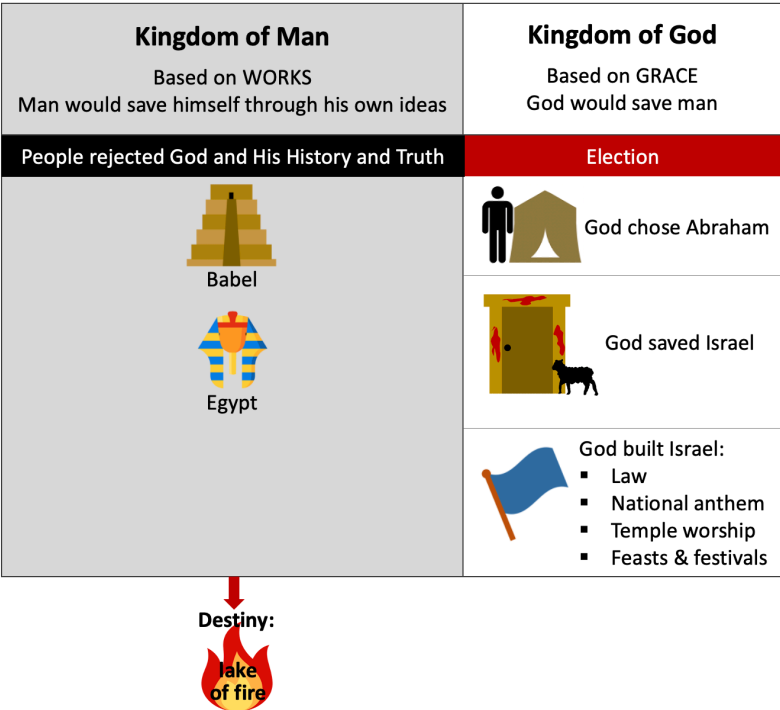


11. God Taught About Himself – Part 1

Previously...

Both before and after the Global Flood, while there were those who trusted in Yahweh and had a relationship with Him, most of mankind rejected Him. The consequence of this was serious. They would be eternally separated from the infinitely good God.

So Yahweh, in His mercy, chose to provide a way for mankind to come to know Him. He wanted them to have the opportunity to respond positively to His plan of salvation and escape from this gloomy eternal destiny. He called Abraham, who responded to Him in faith. God’s plan was to build an entire nation from Abraham’s descendants. This nation, Israel, would record God’s history and truth and make it available to the world.










Because God chose the nation of Israel to be His ambassadors to the world, He wanted them to live in a way that would reflect Him and His character. He wanted them to demonstrate how He, as the sovereign, all-powerful God relates with mankind.

To help the Israelites relate well with Him, each other and other people groups, Yahweh gave them their law. The law taught them His standards and how He expected them to behave. And to encourage them to take His law seriously, Yahweh promised blessings for obedience to the law, but also punishments for rebelling against it.

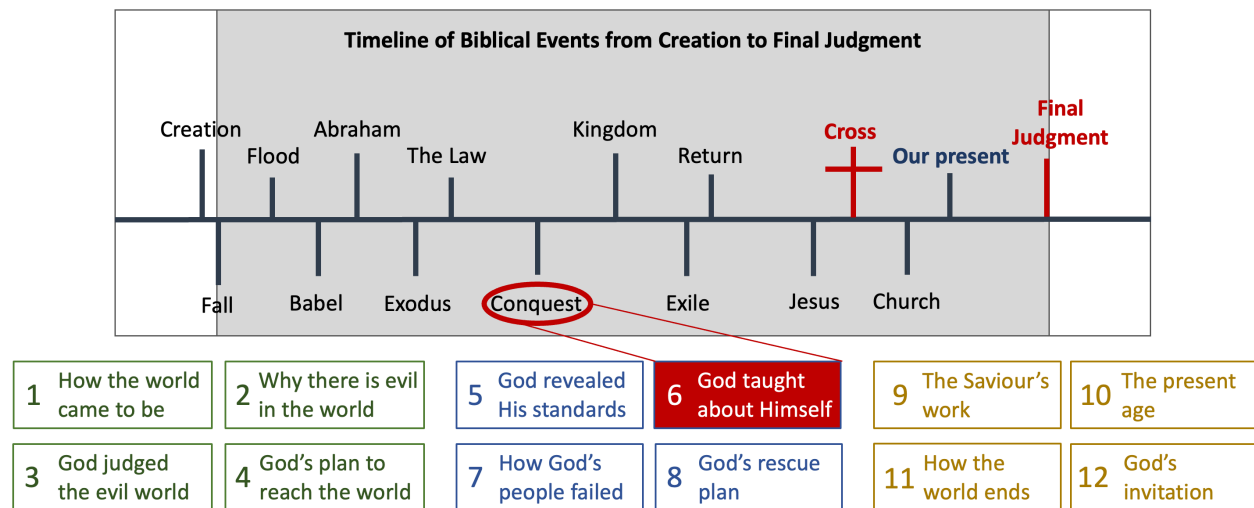
Yahweh was serious about this because His plan was to reach the world through the nation of Israel. He formalised the law into a contract—the Mosaic Covenant.

Previously, God had made unconditional contracts with Noah and Abraham. This meant that Noah and Abraham did not have to do anything good or avoid anything bad for God to keep the terms of those contracts. God alone would unconditionally fulfil the promises He had made.

However, the Mosaic Contract was conditional. This meant that Israel had obligations they needed to fulfil. They needed to obey the 613 laws in the contract.

	 Noahic Covenant	 Abrahamic Covenant	 Mosaic Covenant
 Parties	God, mankind, animals	God, Abraham and descendants	God and the 12 tribes of Israel (sons of Jacob)
 Promises	No future global floods	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessings for obeying all the laws • Cursings for disobeying the laws
 Signatories	God alone (with the rainbow)	God alone (with the animal halves)	God (with the sign of the Sabbath)
 Type	Unconditional	Unconditional	Conditional

How would anyone know if Israel had kept their side of the contract by being obedient to God? Or how would anyone know if God had kept His side of the contract to bless them for obedience and punish them for disobedience? In this lesson, we will see that Yahweh put in place “lawyers” or “prosecuting attorneys” for this contract. The way that God administered the law taught the people even more about Him. We will also learn how Israel chose to respond to Yahweh.





GOD ADMINISTERED THE LAW THROUGH “LAWYERS”

In any contract, there needs to be a way whereby observations can be made with regards to how each party is behaving. There needs to be a way to hold the parties to the terms of the contract.

This was why Yahweh put in place “lawyers” or “prosecuting attorneys”. They were to record both His and Israel’s behaviours.



If Israel kept the contract:

- The “lawyers” would record Israel’s obedience.
- Then they would announce the promised blessing.
- Thereafter, they would also record the blessings God sent.



If Israel broke the contract:

- These lawyers would act like prosecuting attorneys.
- They would announce Israel’s failure and God’s coming discipline.
- However, speaking on God’s behalf, they would also encourage the people to repent. If Israel repented, God would not send the curse.
- The lawyers would then record what each party did.



Blessings for keeping the covenant

Leviticus 26:1–13 (also Deuteronomy 28:1–14)

Blessings include:

- Economic prosperity, good weather and cooperative nature (v4–5)
- Military success and peace (v6–8)
- Population growth (v9)
- God’s continued presence with them (v11–12)



Cursings for breaking the covenant

Leviticus 26:14–46 (also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)

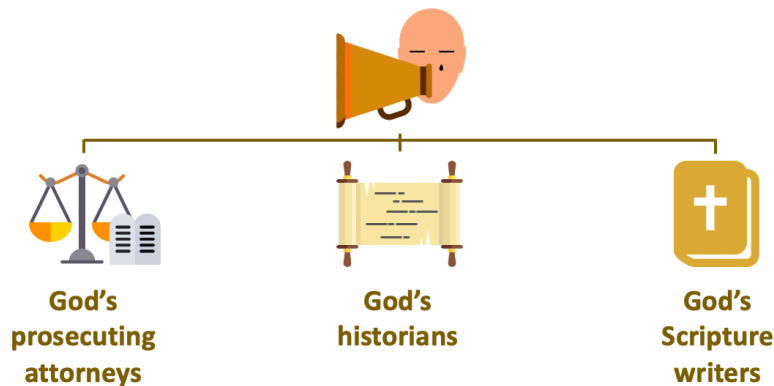
5 Stages of disciplines or cursings:

- Stage 1:** Disease and sickness (physical and psychological), military defeat, economic disaster (v14–17)
- Stage 2:** Famine (v18–20)
- Stage 3:** Death of children and livestock, population decrease (v21–22)
- Stage 4:** Starvation, epidemics, crushing military defeat (v23–26)
- Stage 5:** Cannibalism, death, enemy invasion, exile, terror and psychological problems, God’s presence removed from them (v27–39)

In the Bible, these “lawyers” were known as the prophets.

The prophets had three different jobs.

Job of the Old Testament Prophets



God's prosecuting attorneys

One of the jobs was to be Yahweh's prosecuting attorneys. The Old Testament of the Bible therefore, is a record of how Israel and God behaved with regards to the Mosaic Contract.



God's historians

But the prophets were also God's historians. Yahweh wanted people to know the true meaning and purpose of history. So God inspired the prophets to record historical events from His all-knowing perspective. The prophets explained what Yahweh was doing and why events were happening the way they were. God didn't want fallen mankind to freely speculate on why history was unfolding the way it did.

For example, if God sent an enemy to battle Israel because of their rebellion against Him, He didn't want people to look at that event and say that Israel was defeated because the enemy was stronger, their leader was smarter, or their god was more powerful. So the sovereign Yahweh made the prophets write down the "behind-the-scenes" explanation of how He was orchestrating events and why. This was what one of the prophets recorded.

Amos 3:7

Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything
until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

God was saying that the job of the prophets was to understand and record real history.



God's Scripture writers

The prophets were also God's Scripture writers. Aside from recording and writing down God's interpretation of history, He also gave the prophets additional information to record in Scripture. Importantly, nothing the prophets wrote contradicted with what God had given in the Law or in previous revelations.

The job of the prophet was a very important one.

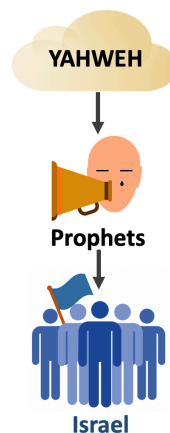
How people knew who God's chosen prophets were

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 to whom God revealed Himself. These were ordinary people that God chose, but after He revealed Himself to them, they would speak God's words aloud and also write down what He said so that the present and future generations would have a written record.



At that time, the pagan nations communicated with their gods through demonic magic, diviners, witches and spiritualists.

However, Israel was to listen only to God's prophets. Yahweh commanded the people to obey His prophets without question because they represented Him.

Because of this, Yahweh put in place very strict criteria for the people to be able to identify God's true prophets from those who were imposters or false prophets. This was what God told Moses.

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

Deuteronomy 18:19–22

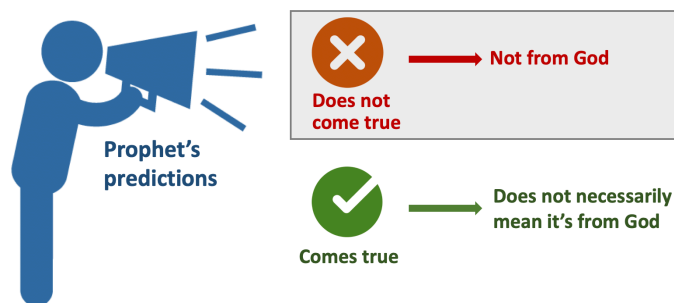
¹⁹ I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. ²⁰ But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.'

²¹ "But you may wonder, 'How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?'

²² 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 the prophet said must come true. God said that if it didn't come true, that prophet was 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 was **when it did not happen**, that **proved it was not from God**. It was a negative test.



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

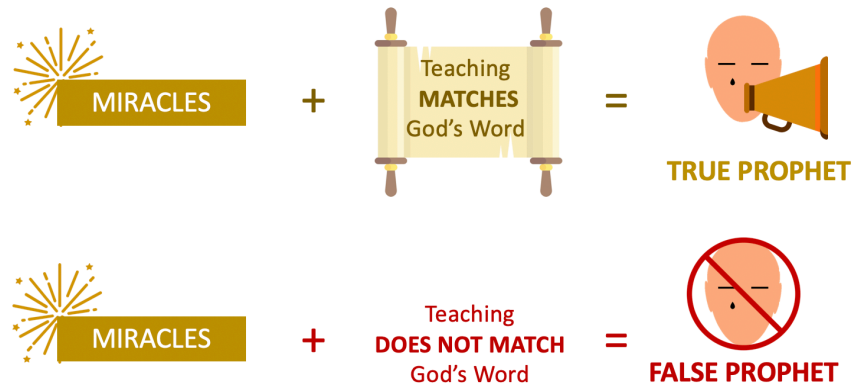
With every new prophet that God raised, what they wrote had to agree with what had already been recorded. No new prophet's words could contradict the words of earlier prophets.

Deuteronomy 13:1–5

¹ “Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, ² and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, ‘Come, let us worship other gods’—gods you have not known before— ³ 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. ⁴ Serve only the LORD your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him. ⁵ 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 were not the sole test for true prophets. This was probably because the devil and demons could also perform “miracles”.

Instead, God said the real test was what the prophet was teaching.



For over 1400 years, God raised prophets who spoke His word to the people. This was entirely unique to the Israelites. No other people group has had prophets who spoke God's words over such a long span of time.

What the administration of the Mosaic Law taught the people about Yahweh

Through the way Yahweh administered the Mosaic Law, we see that:

- God was **very serious about the contracts** that He made. He put in place prophets to monitor and report on the behaviour of the parties to the contract.
- God wanted people to be able to **see how He behaved** and then be able to draw conclusions about what He was like and **whether He could be trusted**.
- God is very strict about how His history and truth, as well as His words, are reported and recorded. **False prophets were put to death** because the role of prophets was very important to **ensure the world would have a true and accurate record** of Yahweh's words, and know how to be rescued from the Second Death.



DID ISRAEL KEEP THE MOSAIC LAW?

While Moses was up on Mount Sinai with Yahweh, recording down the laws that the people said they would obey, something happened where the Israelites were camped at the base of the mountain. We will read this account in our Bibles.



Let's turn to our Bibles and read Exodus 32:1–35.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

Exodus 32:1–35

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.”

² So Aaron said, “Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.”

³ All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ 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!”

⁵ 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!”

⁶ The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.

⁷ The LORD told Moses, “Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. ⁸ How quickly they have turned away from the way I commanded them to live! They have melted down gold and made a calf, and they have bowed down and sacrificed to it. They are saying, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”

⁹ Then the LORD said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. ¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. “O LORD!” he said. “Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand? ¹² Why let the Egyptians say, ‘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! ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 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.’”

¹⁴ So the LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.

¹⁵ Then Moses turned and went down the mountain. He held in his hands the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. ¹⁶ These tablets were God's work; the words on them were written by God himself.

¹⁷ When Joshua heard the boisterous noise of the people shouting below them, he exclaimed to Moses, "It sounds like war in the camp!"

¹⁸ But Moses replied, "No, it's not a shout of victory nor the wailing of defeat. I hear the sound of a celebration."

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. ²⁰ 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.

²¹ Finally, he turned to Aaron and demanded, "What did these people do to you to make you bring such terrible sin upon them?"

²² "Don't get so upset, my lord," Aaron replied. "You yourself know how evil these people are. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off.' When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!"

²⁵ Moses saw that Aaron had let the people get completely out of control, much to the amusement of their enemies. ²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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." ²⁸ The Levites obeyed Moses' command, and about 3,000 people died that day.

²⁹ Then Moses told the Levites, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD, for you obeyed him even though it meant killing your own sons and brothers. Today you have earned a blessing."

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."

³¹ So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a terrible sin these people have committed. They have made gods of gold for themselves. ³² But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, erase my name from the record you have written!"

³³ But the LORD replied to Moses, “No, I will erase the name of everyone who has sinned against me. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I told you about. Look! My angel will lead the way before you. And when I come to call the people to account, I will certainly hold them responsible for their sins.”

³⁵ Then the LORD sent a great plague upon the people because they had worshiped the calf Aaron had made.

People are rebellious at heart and also self-deceiving

Yahweh had just miraculously rescued the Israelites out of Egypt with ten supernatural plagues. He revealed Himself to them, led them, fed them, protected them and promised to bless them richly.



The people saw Yahweh’s glory on top of Mount Sinai, and heard His voice as He spoke to them. They even confirmed several times that they agreed to all the terms of the Mosaic Covenant that God had made with them. This was how they had responded to Moses after he read them the laws.



Exodus 24:7

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, “We will do everything the LORD has commanded. We will obey.”



But not too much later, as Moses was up on the mountain with God, the people told Aaron, Moses’ brother, to build them a handmade god to worship. The Israelites:

- contributed gold to the building of this idol;
- created a manmade calf-god out of the gold;
- gave credit to the calf-god for rescuing them out of Egypt;
- held a festival to celebrate this newly created “god”.



The Israelites knew the truth about Yahweh. But they rebelliously and stubbornly chose to “pretend” that the calf-god was the one who had rescued them. They created lies and preferred to deceive themselves with those lies.

They would rather worship a fake, handmade god that they could control, than worship the sovereign Creator-God of the universe.

Yahweh knows the heart of all mankind and all their secret thoughts. He knows that mankind is evil, rebellious and self-deceiving.

This is God’s commentary about mankind that He recorded in the Bible.

Romans 1:18–23

¹⁸ But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. ¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

²¹ Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. ²² Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.

²³ And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

This commentary accurately describes how the Israelites behaved as well.

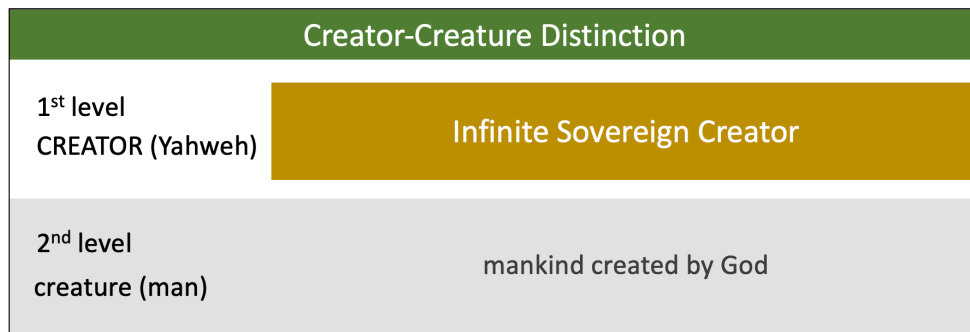
Yahweh held the Israelites accountable for breaking the Mosaic Contract

It was not long after the Israelites agreed to the Mosaic Covenant that they broke their side of the contract with God. So Moses went down from the mountain to confront them.

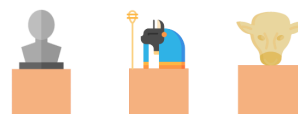
When Moses saw the golden calf and the people celebrating and worshipping it, he became so angry that he smashed the two stone tablets on which Yahweh had personally written the Ten Commandments. Moses was very visibly showing the people that they had already broken the law.



Then Moses destroyed the calf idol by burning it and grinding it up, and made the people drink the ashes mixed with water. Moses was proving that their handmade “god” was not a god at all. Their “god” couldn't even prevent itself from being burnt and crushed to bits.



NOT 1st level and NOT 2nd level
 Lifeless, breathless, dead idols of gold,
 silver and wood, made with human hands



Then Moses carried out Yahweh's instructions to punish the people. Moses made the people identify themselves: those who were loyal to Yahweh and those who were rebellious against Yahweh. So the people divided themselves into two groups.



Those who were loyal to Yahweh consisted of all the Levites. The Levites were the descendants of Levi, Jacob's third son.

Moses told the group who was loyal to Yahweh to kill the rebellious group. The Bible says that 3,000 people died that day.

What was Yahweh doing? He was doing nothing outside of the Mosaic Contract which the Israelites had agreed to.



For example, the first two commandments in the Ten Commandments stated that the Israelites would have no gods other than Yahweh and they would not make for themselves any idols. The Israelites broke both.



The legal terms of the contract stated that Yahweh would bless them if they kept the Mosaic Law and He would curse them if they broke the Mosaic Law. One of the curses would be death.

God used the loyal and obedient Levites to carry out His judgment against the 3,000 evil Israelites. The Levites acted in obedience and faith towards God.

In addition, Yahweh also sent a great plague upon the people for worshipping a lie: the idol they themselves had made.

God was showing the Israelites how serious He was about the job that He had given them. In order to be a blessing to the world, the Israelites could not be corrupted. God would not tolerate any rebellion. Being the Creator-God, He had every right to righteously judge the people.



Yahweh wants a genuine relationship with mankind

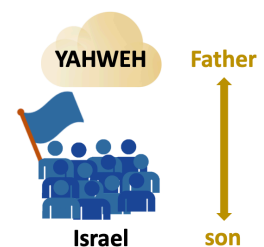
God was so angry with the Israelites that He was about to destroy them all. But He intentionally told Moses His plan so as to provide Moses a chance to respond.

Moses immediately took up the invitation and spoke frankly with God. Moses knew that Yahweh was a promise-making and promise-keeping God. He believed that Yahweh would keep His unconditional promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This meant that Yahweh had to keep alive the Israelites as a people group, and not destroy all of them.

By recording the conversation between Moses and Himself, Yahweh showed the kind of relationship He wanted to have with mankind: a genuine, authentic relationship with engagement, discussion and response. In this situation, God responded positively to Moses' plea to spare the life of national Israel.

Even though Yahweh, the Creator-God of the world, could choose to have any kind of relationship with Israel including master-slave, dictator-subject, etc., Yahweh chose to have a Father-son relationship with Israel.

And with Moses, who trusted in Him, He chose to have a friendship. This is how the Bible describes Moses' relationship with Yahweh.



Exodus 33:11a

Inside the Tent of Meeting, the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

In today's lesson, we learn that even though Yahweh had important plans for Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, He also expected them to live according to His righteous standards. He would not put up with their hard-heartedness and rebellion towards Him.

Yahweh held them accountable for the way they chose to live. We remember that when God created the world, He gave mankind free will, or responsible choice. They are free to decide how to live. However, consequences will always follow their choices.

What happened next?

When Yahweh took the Israelites out of Egypt, He planned to bring them to the land which He had given to Abraham, the land of Canaan. After giving the people their law at Mount Sinai, we will see that God told them to move into the Promised Land. In the next lesson, we will see what happened there.



Bible reading for review

Exodus 32:1–35; Deuteronomy 9:13–11:32