

OT LESSON 14

“YE SHALL BE A PECULIAR TREASURE UNTO ME”

by Ted L. Gibbons

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This lesson will not follow precisely the format of the lesson in the manual for Gospel Doctrine. I want to provide some insights and background to the excellent material contained in the Church’s publication. Please do not teach this lesson at the expense of that one. The manual provided by the Church is your main and most important non-scriptural resource. This lesson is clearly of lesser value and inspiration, but I hope it will help you in understanding what happened to Israel in the wilderness and at Mount Sinai.

INTRODUCTION: One of things the Children of Israel needed to learn was trust in the Lord. In Proverbs we read

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Prov. 3:5,6)

Over and over again as Israel traveled from Egypt to Sinai, the Lord seemed to be saying, “Trust me.” Actual *trust* is a precious commodity, one not to be given lightly. The older Alma taught,

And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments (Mosiah 23:14).

The story that follows, given by Elder McKay in 1944, illustrates how important it is to find those you know you know you can trust.

There is a story told that a company of botanists seeking some special flowers up in the Canadian Rockies, came one day to a very rare flower down on the side of a cliff. To reach it they would have to retrace their steps and go back ten miles to come up from the valley below. Someone suggested that if they had a

rope they could let a boy down to pick the specimens. That suggestion was prompted by the fact that a little boy had been following them for about an hour, watching them silently.

They got the rope and said:

Here, lad, we'll give you \$5 if you will put this rope around you and permit us to let you down to get those flowers.

Without saying a word the lad scampered off. They thought they had frightened him. He went to a house nearby and soon came back with a man by his side. Then the little fellow answered:

You may put that rope around me, and I'll get the flower, if you'll let my dad hold the rope. (Pres. David O. McKay, CR, Apr. 1944)

1. THE LORD TRIES TO TEACH ISRAEL TO TRUST HIM.

In these chapters, the Lord seems to be trying to teach Israel to trust him to “hold the rope.” We will discuss the episodes leading to Mount Sinai with that in mind.

ONE

1. The Problem: (Exodus 14) We discussed this event in lesson 13. The Egyptian Army trapped the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea.

2. Israel's Reaction:

And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:12,13)

3. The Lord's Solution: The sea was divided and the Egyptian Army destroyed.

4. The Lesson: Trust me to protect you.

TWO

1. The Problem: Bitter water

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah (Ex. 15:23)

2. Israel's Reaction:

And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? (Ex. 15:24)

3. The Lord's Solutions:

(A) And [Moses] cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them . . . (Ex. 15:25).

(B) And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters (Ex. 15:27).

4. The Lesson: I will help you meet your legitimate needs.

THREE

1. The Problem: Hunger

. . . ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex. 16:3)

2. Israel's Reaction:

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: 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 . . . (Ex. 16:2,3).

3. The Lord's Solution: Manna

Then said the LORD unto Moses, 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 (Ex. 16:4).

We ought to note that the purpose of the manna is not just to feed these people. but to "prove them, whether they [would] walk in [the] law, or no." The nature of the instructions about manna suggest other lessons that were to be learned as well. It had to be gathered every day. It could not be stored except for the Sabbath.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God

led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live (Deut. 8:2,3)

4.The Lesson: Trust me every day. Feast on my word every day.

FOUR

1. The Problem: No water to drink:

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink (Ex. 17:1)

2. Israel's Reaction:

Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? 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? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me (Ex. 17:2-4)/

3. The Lord's Solution: Instead of showing Israel a tree or an oases, the Lord commanded Moses to bring water from solid rock!

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex 17:5,6).

4. The Lesson: Trust my leaders.

FIVE

1,2 The Problem & Reaction: The Amalekites attack (Ex. 17:8). Israel

prevails when Moses holds up the rod and the falter when he does not.

And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed (Ex. 17:11).

3. The Lord's Solution:

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. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (Ex. 17:12,13).

4. The Lesson: Trust my leaders.

SIX

1. The Problem: “Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening . . . And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. 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” (Ex. 18:13,17,18)

2. Israel's Reaction: Israel must wait long periods for help and counsel and the people (and Moses) “wilt surely wear away.”

3. The Lord's Solution:

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: 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 (Ex. 18:21,22).

4. The Lesson: Trust my leaders.

The passages in Exodus 18 mentioned above, in which Jethro teaches Moses about delegation, contain an interesting description of what Prophets are supposed to do.

(18:15) “enquire of God”
(18:16) “judge between one and another”
(18:16) “make them know the statutes of God, and his laws”
(18:19) “Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God.”
(18:20) “Teach them ordinances and laws”
(18:20) “Shew them the way wherein they must walk”
(18:20) “Shew them . . . the work that they must do.”
(18:22) “Every great matter they shall bring to thee.”
(19:17) “And Moses brought . . . the people . . . to meet with God”

The Lord taught the Israelites the importance of following Moses one more time at Mount Sinai. He instructed Moses to prepare the people to meet with him, and then said:

Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD (Ex. 19:9)

2. THE LORD MEETS WITH MOSES ON MOUNT SINAI AND GIVES ISRAEL THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Some have supposed that the 10 Commandments were given to Moses, and that he then gave them to Israel. The scriptural account is pretty clear that it did not happen in just that way. Note the promise God made in Exodus 19:9: “That the people may hear with I speak with thee.”

In Exodus 20:1, we are told that God “spake all these words . . .” In Exodus 20:22, after declaring the 10 Commandments, the Lord says, “You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.”

In Deuteronomy 5:4 Moses reminds Israel that “The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire . . .” In Deuteronomy 5:23,24 we read

And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his

glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

Also please note that the 10 Commandments and the three chapters that follow (Exodus 21-23) are part of an eternal gospel covenant, and not part of the Law of Moses. Moses' desire was to prepare the people to see God.

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, *and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God*; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory. Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also . . . (D&C 84:23-25).

When the Lord had finished giving the instructions in these chapters, the people made a covenant:

And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do (Ex. 24:3)

A few verses later they said (again): "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

Some of the Israelites actually did see God.

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink (Ex. 24:9-11)

It was after all of this that Moses went into the mount and received the

tables of stone with these laws written on them (see Ex. 24:12).

There are still a great many who accept and attempt to abide by the Ten Commandments, but there are a great many who do not. We live in a day when *commandments* are not generally well-received.

In his book *The 2nd Ten Commandments*, Orion Moshe Kopelman says the original set of 10 is an outmoded, uncultural guide. The first of his new multi-cultural, world-wide commandments is "Maximize your time spent in flow and happiness." This rule may not make a lot of sense to people in southern Sudan or Kerala, unless they keep up with theories of personal growth or have spent some time in a California beach community" ("thou Shalt Not Command," *US News and World Report*, Nov. 18, 1996).

The *US News* article cited above suggests that people might be more receptive to these 10 (original) commandments if the negative and bossy language were removed and if a few creative loopholes were added. For example,

Thou shalt not steal, but creative work with your tax return is OK.
Thou shalt not kill, except during any of the trimesters or if the Pentagon says you must.
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods, except in the sense that our whole economic system depends on the power of envy and wanting more.

You get the idea. We as members of the Church of Jesus Christ have once again, almost by default, become the custodians of something sacred. We are the proponents and messengers of the Mt. Sinai covenant. We must declare by word and by example that these commandments are still in force and that there are divine, often eternal, penalties attached to the breaking of them.

Cecil B. DeMille stated, after exhaustive research for the epic motion picture *The Ten Commandments*: "We cannot break the Ten Commandments. We can only break ourselves against them." (From a Commencement Address, Brigham Young

University, 31 May 1957, p. 3. Cited by Thomas S. Monson, "In Quest of the Abundant Life," *Ensign*, Mar. 1988, 2)

I wish this part of lesson 14 were its own lesson. There are some wonderful insights for teaching to be found in these commandments, but, as I lack the time and the 10 are not a separate lesson, I will go on.

3. THE LORD INTRODUCES THE LAW OF MOSES.

As noted above in the passage from D&C 84, the Israelites refused the blessings of the eternal covenant. By their disobedience to the promises they themselves had made in Exodus 24:3,7, they forfeited their right to the blessings God wanted to give them.

The first cataclysmic revolution took place while Moses was on the Mount. Her had been called up in Ex. 24:12. According to 24:18 he stayed for 40 days, a time period recorded in Exodus 25-32. While he was there, terrible things happened in the camp below.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him (Ex. 32:1)

And Aaron did! (Ex. 32:2-6). What might he have been thinking. Clearly no one in our day would ever give up on a promise from God just because it came later than expected, would they? No one would marry out of the covenant because a worthy spouse did not show up soon enough, would they? No one would place personal integrity on the altar of profit because business success was too long in coming, would they? No one would postpone missionary opportunities because people willing to listen were too slow in appearing, would they? No one would misuse their procreative powers because waiting for the right time and place to marry would take too long, would they? No one would quit praying for a needed blessing because it did not come at the moment they wanted it, would they?

When the worshiping of the golden calf started, God told Moses to get down

to the camp (Ex. 32:7-10). Moses went.

And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables (Ex. 32:15,16).

Notice what Moses did when he saw his people worshiping a graven image.

And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount (Ex. 32:19).

It was under these circumstances that Israel received the Law of Moses. It was not designed to replace the gospel laws they had already received. Its purpose was to give Israel

. . . a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him (Mosiah 13:30).

Notice the language of the JST regarding the new tablets of stone given to Moses.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two other tables of stone, like unto the first, and I will write upon them also, the words of the law, according as they were written at the first on the tables which thou brakest; but it shall not be according to the first, for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them; for my presence shall not go up in their midst, lest I destroy them. But I will give unto them the law as at the first, but it shall be after the law of a carnal commandment; for I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage. Therefore do as I have commanded thee, and be ready in the morning, and come

up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me, in the top of the mount (Ex. 34:1,2, JST).

CONCLUSION: I wrote a book entitled *This Life is a Test*. In the book I discussed several rules for understanding, taking, and passing the Test of Life. One of those rules was “Harder Versions of the Test are Available.” The Law of Moses was a harder version of the Test. Thinking of it reminded me of a personal experience when I made things much harder than they needed to be.

I was hurrying. My wife and I had made plans to attend a movie and if I did not move quickly, we would certainly be late. I had barely enough time to wash the car and then pick up the baby sitter. The children were in the car with me: Chris who was three and Debbie, who was nearly two. Since the sitter was a young lady they did not know, I thought I might facilitate the getting-acquainted process by having the three of them in the car while I drove home.

I pulled in at the self-serve car wash, rolled the windows up tightly, and stepped out of my new, 1971 Dodge Charger. I swung the driver’s door shut and pushed the lock button as the door passed me. By the time the door thumped home, I knew I had made a mistake. *The keys were still in the ignition*. The children were still in the car.

I explained the problem to my son, and told him to pull up the lock button on the door. He tried. He really tried. But his little three-year-old fingers could not generate enough force to pull the knob up. The newness of the car and the smoothness of the plastic defeated him. Nor could he open the doors. They needed to be unlocked manually first.

I was frantic, now. I needed to get inside the vehicle and go get the baby sitter. But how? I knew that with a wire coat hanger, I might have some chance. But where would I find a coat hanger at a car wash? Without much hope I walked to a nearby garbage can and began to examine the contents. To my astonishment I found not one, but two hangers, discarded there, I was certain, by some *inspired* car-washer earlier in the day.

I unwound the hook from the rest of the hanger and forged a small loop to fit over the lock knob. Fashioning the hanger into a

useful tool took some time. Then, using all my creativity, I forced the wire around the plastic molding of the door and into the passenger compartment. Finding a spot around the door where this could be done consumed more time. Then I discovered that I could not get the loop over the knob without help. But finally I made Chris understand what I needed and he moved the wire to the correct spot. I pulled sharply and the knob popped up.

Filled with relief, I glanced at my watch and realized that we were not going to get to the movie on time. "Well," I thought, "since we are late anyway, I might as well wash the car while I am here." I secured the keys as a hedge against children now fascinated with door locks, and deposited my quarters. I had been washing the car for about three minutes when my son waved for my attention. I bent over near his window to hear what he had to say, but the noise of the water made it difficult to understand him. "What?" I shouted, whereupon *he rolled the window down* and said, "Dad, I need to go to the bathroom." (Ted L. Gibbons, *This Life is a Test*, pp.106,107)

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