



Faithful GOD

COVENANT People

a Good Soil series for small group study

#4: Moses: Law and Obedience

Bible Readings: Exodus 24:3-11

Deuteronomy 29:10-15

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People

This series takes us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**. We are exploring different covenants and perspectives as we think about our relationships with God, consider what God is calling us to be, and how we should live as Covenant people. It is best used in small groups, but can also be helpful for personal study.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

As you prepare to lead this session, pray for your group and reflect on the group's growing understanding of Covenant. *Are there any questions that may need further reflection?* Our focus this time is firstly on **Moses and the response of the people to the giving of the Law, as they become officially Covenant people** which gives them parameters to live by, and secondly **the renewal of the Covenant** after the people of Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Please read and reflect on the readings beforehand.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

Our journey through the Bible now takes a big leap! Hundreds of years have passed and the family of Israel are in Egypt. **The story of Moses** (starting in the book of Exodus) could not be more dramatic: being put in a basket as a baby, growing up as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, killing an Egyptian and fleeing to Midian, the encounter with God at the burning bush (as Moses is called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt), pleading with Pharaoh to let the people go, and then the resulting ten plagues when Pharaoh said "no". Then there's the exodus, being led by the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, the provision of manna in the wilderness and water from a rock. We then have the giving of the Law: not just the Ten Commandments (**Ex. 20:1-21**) but also **Exodus 20:22 – 23:33** which is known as '**the Book of the Covenant**', God's law code for Israel. You might like to read both of these passages beforehand to provide some helpful background.

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Covenant God,
as we gather to reflect on the relationship between the law given to Moses and your people,
remind us that you are a God of relationship who calls us to be in relationship with you.
Inspire us by your Holy Spirit and guide us in our thoughts and conversations
that we may see and understand that we are Covenant People. In Jesus' name. Amen.

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore

If you feel comfortable sharing, explore these questions in small groups: *How easy do you find following instructions? What rules have you broken? (deliberately or accidentally) Were there any consequences?*

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

Both of the readings that are being explored are the options provided in the Methodist Covenant Service for “the readings from the Law”, but they are not normally read together. However, they are really helpful in our exploration as they show a growing understanding of what it means to be a Covenant people, recalling the people of Israel’s response to the reading of the law at two different stages in their history.

Read together the first Bible passage: Exodus 24:3-11

Moses has just returned from Mount Sinai with the instructions needed to help the people in both religious and civic life. When he has gone through them all, the people respond: “*All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do*” (verse 3). This seems to be such a spontaneous unequivocal and demanding response of total obedience! There are no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’, no ‘what ifs’ or ‘maybes’. This commitment is sealed in worship as Moses builds an altar and sacrifices are made. He then re-reads the laws, the people reaffirm their commitment, and further sacrifices are made.

Now read the second passage: Deuteronomy 29:10-15

A lot has happened since the first giving of the law in Exodus 24: the people of Israel have shown that they have not always followed God’s law or been obedient. It feels like the Promised Land is in sight and once again people are reminded of the law. They are invited to renew this Covenant relationship which joins them with those who have gone before and those who will come after; a perpetual Covenant.

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

The words of our **Methodist Covenant Service** demand a lot from us. Some people might deliberately avoid the service because the Covenant Prayer is so challenging. *How do you respond to the total pledge of obedience that the people of Israel made following the reading of the law (Exodus 24:3)?*

The Old Testament recalls many instances when the people of Israel did not obey God’s laws. *How obedient to God are you? Are there times when it is easier or harder?*

The Law was given to set the standards for God’s community, both on the journey and for the Promised Land. *How does this connect with the previous stories about what it means to live as God’s people?*

*How important is it that the Covenant with Moses and the people is set in the context of **worship**? What **sacrifices** may we need to make after making or renewing our Covenant with God? And how important is it to emphasise God’s **loving grace and forgiveness** in our Covenant Service?*

The Covenant is a personal commitment in a corporate setting and is something that binds particularly the people called Methodist together. *What does it mean to you that the Covenant is not only made with those present but also with those who are not here today (Deut. 29:15)?*

The Covenant Prayer is written in the first person (“**I am no longer my own but yours...**”). *Would it have a different meaning or impact if it used the plural (“**We are...**”)? Which would you find more meaningful?*

How important is it that the Covenant is renewed every year? Is there an argument for it to be done more or less frequently? In what other ways are we reminded of God’s grace in our worshipping lives?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Spend time in prayer as a group (aloud or in silence) bringing to God those areas that have been highlighted during this session. You may like to use this prayer to conclude:

Gracious and loving God, we bring before you those times when we know we haven’t followed your ways;
Forgive us when we have deliberately or unintentionally broken your laws and been disobedient.

Help us by your Holy Spirit to live the whole of our lives as your Covenant people, in faith and obedience.

In Jesus name. Amen.

(And of course, you could say **the Lord’s Prayer** to finish.)

COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

As Covenant People, the people of Israel pledged obedience to God. *Is there an area of your life that you struggle to give to God? Where is God calling you to be obedient, or to trust God more?*

Junior Good Soil, issue #4

MOSES and the COMMANDMENTS:

Living by God's Standards

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches. It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas!



PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

We're going to move quite quickly through the Bible now (fasten your seatbelts!)... Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac. He got married to Rebekah, and they had Jacob and Esau. Jacob (also called Israel) had twelve sons including Joseph, who was taken to Egypt and helped them out during a famine. Jacob and his family (who became known as the Israelites) were reunited with Joseph in Egypt and they ended up staying there for hundreds of years, but they were treated very badly, as slaves. **Moses** was sent by God to help them, and God led them to freedom. (Their escape is known as the Exodus.) So, as God's free people, they needed some rules to live by – to help them reflect God to the world, and to each other. Today, we're looking at **God's Commandments**, and the people's promise to keep them. This was a **Covenant with God** – a very special relationship built on a two-way commitment, like a marriage.

QUIET TIME – a prayer

Dear God, today we're going to learn about the rules you gave to your people long ago, to help them to live as your holy people.
We can learn all about how you want us to live through the Bible, and especially through the words of Jesus, as we try to follow him.
Help us always to try to be faithful to you, to live as your people, and may you forgive us when we sometimes get things wrong, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... Genesis chapters 20 and 24

For older children, you can read the important verses from an appropriate Bible:

Exodus 20:1-21; **Exodus 24:1-10** (these links are from the **Contemporary English Version**)

Or for younger children, try the **Usborne Children's Bible** (2009, pages **40-41**, and previous pages).

You can also watch an animated version of Exodus 20: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Kb1_v98As0

WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

The Israelite people made a Covenant with God, but they didn't always live up to their side of the bargain. God still keeps his promises, even though he might be sad or even angry. God is faithful, even though sometimes we are not. In God's grace, he gives us what we don't always deserve, and he always loves us.

LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

What rules do you think are most important when it comes to being God's people? What rules do our world need to learn? How can we show people a better way to live? Try to write a **new Ten Commandments** for your church, home, or school. Make it as bright and positive as possible!

PRAISE AND WORSHIP – hymns and songs (can be used at the start or end, or whenever!)

That's Who I Praise (Brandon Lake) www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Q7cR8G4BaI

As for me (Rend Collective) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJzPHPRUM8I>

Take my life and let it be (Reawaken Worship, STF no.566) www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3gWwGDGgVA
or how about this for a fun 'old-school' classic, sung by a Primary school:

Moses, I know you're the man (Singing the Faith, no.473) www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HofToLxXMg