

The Speaking God: The Holy Mountain

*We love him, visit him, and covenant with him,
because he first loved us, visited us, and covenanted with us.
God is the First, and therefore must be the Last.¹*

And God spoke all these words:

"I am the JEHOVAH [the LORD] your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

1. "You shall have no other gods before me.
2. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them....
3. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God....
4. "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy....
5. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
6. "You shall not murder.
7. "You shall not commit adultery.
8. "You shall not steal.
9. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. "You shall not covet...."²

*"The wolf will live with the lamb,....
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,....
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,....,
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"³ says the Lord.*



Commenting on the excellent play of a fellow competitor, a professional golfer recently responded to an interviewer: "He is hitting the ball well. The man upstairs is with him." "The man upstairs" is a phrase we hear fairly often in our society when one wants to talk about God but not appear too pious. I hate to think that is all they know about God; "Oh man upstairs, hear our prayer." However, some of you just might remember Patsy Cline's song about praying to him.

¹ Matthew Henry, Exodus 19:1-8.

² See Exodus 20:1-17.

³ Isaiah 11:6a, 7c, 8a, 9ab.

Have you talked to the Man upstairs
'Cause he wants to hear from you
Have you talked to the Man upstairs
He will always see you through
And this trouble ever troubles you
Now don't you run and hide
'Cause if you ever need a friend
He'll be there by your side
Just turn your eyes to heaven
And say a simple prayer
Through the clouds of lace
You'll see His face
No matter when or where

Patsy's "Man Upstairs" is hardly the same as the appearance of Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai or of Jesus to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yet there appears to be an amazing number of people who seem to think so. We need to be perfectly clear in this series about "The Speaking God." Many years ago I heard a prominent Old Testament scholar say that the major difference between the God of Israel and the God of pagan nations around Israel was that God spoke. The Lord of Israel communicated with them; they were His people and He was looking out for them. This is where the *Ten Words* [Ten Commandments] come into the picture.

The Ten Commandments was an attempt by the Almighty to establish a formal relationship with His people. The Commandments are divided into two parts, the first four talk of God and the last six of God's people. The idea was that if the people followed these ten requirements, their lives would be full of meaning and happiness and their nation would live in security and peace. However, the sad story is that more often than not the people broke the Commandments and were punished rather than blessed. And why did it happen this way? Because the people made bad choices rather than good ones. Why they consistently did that is a mystery. It's the same story in our society today.

So the quest we will be on the next few months is to learn how to communicate with this God who loves to make connection with His people. We will learn all over again what Thomas Merton said. Do you remember my quote from one of his books in the first of this series? *God's life is a speaking; our life is a listening!* And what does that mean for you and me? It means that our *salvation is to hear and respond.*

If we listen we will hear the Lord Almighty, not just a man upstairs. We will hear the Creator, the Sustainer, the Beginning and the End, Yahweh of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the goal of the Church! A man upstairs did not send Moses out with the Ten Commandments. No, it was the God who made the Red Sea part; the God who calmed the Sea of Galilee during a terrific storm! He is the Holy God who judges, the loving God who cares about you. He is the God who walks with us through the valley and the God who thunders His will from the top of the holy mountain. But more than

this: He is the God who delivered His people from Egyptian bondage and the God who delivered us from the bondage of sin through Jesus Christ!

The Ten Commandments were given to us from the top of Mt. Sinai, as the newly freed Egyptian slaves were being led by Moses to the land of promise, what today is Palestine. What kind of God is it that gives these Commandments? It is a God of power, a God of love, a God of holy character, a God who does what is necessary to be sure that all who seek Him will live with Him forever in His kingdom. This God speaks—and we will see that all through this series—and we read of it all through the Bible.

Once in Rome I visited an old Jewish Museum. The lady who showed me around was very helpful in our discussion of Jews in Roman history. As we walked among the many displays she would mention the Lord, but she never called Him by name but said instead “Blessed be He.” Obviously it was a sign of respect but I knew it was much more. By “Blessed be He” instead of “God” or “Lord” she was saying something about the nature of God and the nature of human beings. Each time those three words were mentioned, she was affirming how magnificent and holy God is and how lowly and sinful humans are by comparison. It was as if we were at the bottom of Mount Sinai, hearing the voice of God roll down from its highest peak. And like the ancients, we trembled at His voice and the Ten Words He spoke. Again, like the ancients, it was our part to listen and obey. In that way we would, quite literally, be saved, as they were from slavery and sin.



If I am going on a quest for eternal reality, I had better know who my guide is. Frankly, I do not trust “the man upstairs.” It reminds me too much of the human-like gods and goddesses of ancient Babylon and Egypt. In addition to lying, wild sexual indulgence, and brutal killing on the heavenly battlefield, these gods could die. They routinely avoided contact with humans, which meant they did not communicate with them and offered them no salvation. “The man upstairs” sounds to me more like a dictator than a self-giving God who took no delight in the death of His followers and who eventually came to earth as a Son in order to try to “get through” to His human community. The ground of our study is that the LORD of the universe, the Almighty GOD and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ seeks us out so that He might say directly to you and me: “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

*For next week,
reread Exodus 19:1-20 and list features of the character of God that you find there.*

The next installment of our series is entitled
The Speaking God: Let there be light!
In preparation for that installment please read Genesis 1-2 and John 1:1-9.

--Jerry Mercer
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