

God appears to Moses

• *Thunder, lightning and thick cloud*

• *A trumpet-sound getting louder and louder signals the coming of God*

• *Moses – a unique mediator*

• *God descends from a great height to reach the top of the mountain*

• *Moses' fourth ascent to meet God at a higher level*

• *A further warning*

• *Moses himself was under the law, as was Jesus*

On the third morning God appears^{□1}. There is thunder, lightning, and thick cloud. It is the appearing of God's glory. Thunder was the loudest sound heard by the ancient world. Lightning was the most dramatic flash of light. The loudest sound and the most dramatic flash of light together represent the glory of God's burningly pure, sin-hating nature. The cloud obscures and covers the glory and lets us know that God cannot be totally and directly observed. His glory has to be partly concealed by the cloud; human nature is unable bear the totally displayed radiation of God's nature. This is a common theme in connection with the glory of God.

A trumpet-sound, like that of a ram's horn but louder, signals the coming of God. It sounds out so loudly that the people are afraid^{□1}. They are led to the lower slopes of Mount Sinai^{□2}. It is taken for granted that they do not go over the limits mentioned in verse 12. The way for God's coming has been prepared. Everyone knows what is to happen. The smoke now encircles the entire mountain; the whole mountain is a vibrating furnace^{□3}. The fire of the burning bush^{□4} which became a pillar of fire^{□5}, has now become a burning mountain. God comes down and thick smoke went up like smoke from a furnace. The smoke also speaks of God's power to destroy, as rubbish is burnt in a furnace. Abraham had seen something similar. When Sodom was exterminated by the fire of God, Abraham saw the 'dense smoke ... like the smoke from a furnace'^{□6}. The trumpet sound gets louder and louder^{□7}.

Verse 19b says 'Moses was speaking and God kept answering him in a loud voice'. We are not told what they were saying to each other; the uniqueness of Moses as a mediator between God and the people is being emphasised.

God comes from such a great height that He has to descend to reach the top of the mountain (compare Genesis 11:4, 5 where the top of the tower of Babel is in the sky, but God has to come down to see it!) The descent has already been mentioned^{□1}. The style of the description is detailed and repetitive; vital events are generally told in a very repetitive manner in Hebrew narrative. Moses is summoned to come to the top of the mountain. It is his fourth ascent recorded in the book of Exodus. The previous three occasions involved Moses going some distance up the lower slopes^{□2}. Now for the first time Moses is called to a higher level where God will speak to him^{□3} but as soon as he ascends to this point he is sent down again to warn the people not to break through the barrier that has been marked out^{□4}. Even the priests who can come partway up the mountain may not come as far as Moses comes and must specially consecrate themselves ready for the approach towards God^{□5}. No priests have been mentioned before! It is likely that already the tribe of Levi is beginning to do priestly duty. They must take special care. Moses seems to think that to warn the people again is unnecessary^{□6} but God insists. He tells Moses that, when he ascends the mountain again, he must return with Aaron^{□7}.

As the chapter closes (in our English Bibles) Moses is with the people; he is still with them at the end of the giving of the Ten Commandments^{□1}. Only after the giving of the ten commands does he ascend to God again^{□2}. Although Moses is God's mediator, he is as much under the law as anyone else. 'Moses was faithful as a servant'^{□3}. He was not exempt from the law himself. Nor was Jesus. Although He was faithful as a Son^{□4}, He still was born under the Mosaic law^{□5}.

□1 19:16a

□1 19:16b

□2 19:17

□3 19:18

□4 3:1 - 4:17

□5 13:21-22

□6 Gen 19:28

□7 19:19a

□1 19:18

□2 3:1-3

19:3

19:8b

□3 19:20

□4 19:21

19:12

□5 19:22

□6 19:23

□7 19:24-25

□1 20:18-20

□2 20:21

□3 Heb 3:5

□4 Heb 3:6

□5 Gal 4:4

The Law

1. Is truly from God

A number of points are specially worth noting.

1. **The law is truly from God.** This can scarcely be doubted but is worthy of special mention because the Bible comes to a negative conclusion concerning the law. Jeremiah will point out its failure. A new covenant will be needed, 'It will not be like the covenant that I made ... a covenant that they broke...' ¹. Yet the law 'came with glory'². However provisional and inadequate it may turn out to be, it nevertheless came from God, and came with a revelation of the glory of God's nature. Yet it was only temporary. Paul makes the point that the 'ministry of the Spirit' comes in even greater glory³. And when the ministry of the Spirit comes – says Paul – the glory of the law is set aside because the coming of the Spirit has displaced the law⁴. Yet the law was never evil, never demonic. It was always 'holy, righteous and good'⁵. It was the people who failed, not the law ('a covenant that **they** broke'⁶).

¹ Jer 31:32

² 2 Cor 3:7

³ 2 Cor 3:8

⁴ 2 Cor 3:9-11

⁵ Rom 7:12

⁶ Jer 31:32

2. Revealed God's sin-hating purity and majestic power

2. **The law revealed God's sin-hating purity and majestic power.** The law came with a revelation of God's glory that aroused fear and terror. God's nature was revealed as burningly holy, and full of bright illumination. The shaking of an entire mountain – and mountains were famous for being inflexibly stationary – showed the greatness of God's power. When holy hatred of sin is allied to majestic mountain-shaking power we have a revelation of God's nature that is stunning and fearful.

3. Arouses only fear

3. **The law arouses only fear.** There is nothing in this revelation of God that can arouse anything but deep fear in the people. 'All the people ... trembled'¹. The law would restrain sin out of fear, but it would never arouse affection or love of God. This eventually would turn out to be its greatest weakness. Fear never arouses love, and yet the heart of righteousness is love. The law did not draw people towards God; it drove them away from God. God knew what He was doing when He gave His people the law, but it was only a temporary measure. It would have the effect of preserving the nation of Israel, and by preserving the nation of Israel it would prepare for the coming of Jesus. The law is not against the promises of God already given to Abraham. Yet it will take something more than the revelation of God's holiness to bring men and women to true righteousness of heart. The law will prove to be a ministry of death. 'If there was glory in the ministry which imparts condemnation, much more does the ministry which gives us righteousness abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory'. The law was bad news for sinners. It came with the brightness of God's glory. The law was temporary; something permanent has come in Jesus. 'What was set aside came accompanied with glory' but now 'much more has the permanent come in glory!' (see 2 Corinthians 3:7–11). The law had fading glory; the good news of Jesus has permanent glory.

¹ 19:16

- Never love or affection

- A temporary preserving measure

- The good news of Jesus has permanent glory



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below

Slices for the Nations	Slices for Sponsors	Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable • In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge • Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation • The same material as Slices for the Nations • Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge • Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) • The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations

To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk

Details of the availability of *Preaching Through The Bible* books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk