



The Ten Commandments

Part 13 – He has hushed the law’s loud thunder

Exodus 20:18-21

Verses 18-21 of Exodus 20 function as a transition from the Ten Commandments to a book of judgments (21:1-23:19). So these verses are both an epilogue and part of the prologue for judgements announced in the following section. As an epilogue these verses describe the people’s response to the presence of God and the revelation of his law at Sinai.

From this point on God will mediate his revelation to the people through Moses. That is, Moses will speak to the people on behalf of God. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example, is Moses’ preaching of the moral law. In a similar way, preaching today has a mediatorial role in

that it is the chief means by which God proclaims and applies his Word to the lives of his people.

God’s warning and the people’s response of keeping their distance is not something that will remain in perpetuity for the people of God. Certainly God must be revered. He must be hallowed. God must never be approached casually as though he were ordinary. Nevertheless the mediator God supplies ensures that his people may “draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

Main Idea: Jesus Christ is the Divine Mediator between God and his people.

1. The Law’s Terror

Vs. 18 – “Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off...”

- After the announcement of God’s moral law the text transitions back to a narration of the events immediately following (vv. 18-21). The people’s first response is one of dread. This may be attributed to two realities. First, the supernatural phenomena that accompanied the giving of the law were fearsome. Moses describes how the mountain was consumed by smoke, clouds, and lightening. There was also the sound of thunder claps and the blast of trumpets. Interestingly, these same phenomena are used in Scripture to describe the Day of Judgment when the age to come is inaugurated by the returning Christ.
- Second, the people’s fear was due to the law itself. They had not yet become so accustomed to God’s law that they had learned to disregard it with little or no thought. In that moment before the quaking mountain of God’s presence the people heard for the first time the demands of God’s holy law. Those demands were in harmony with the awesome holiness of God. At that moment the people realized the terrible gulf which existed between their sinful selves and the purity of God. Surely they wondered how a God like that could possibly tolerate them.

2. The People’s Plea

Vs. 19 – “...and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.’”

- The response of the people was to place as much distance as they could between themselves and God. They also pled for Moses to speak to them on behalf of God (vs. 19). Hearing

directly from God was too great a burden for their hearts to bear. In essence they ask Moses to be their mediator; their go-between so that they would not have to deal directly with God. Of course God had already made this arrangement. God had previously prepared and appointed Moses as the mediator between himself and his people. Long before the people knew their need for a mediator God had appointed one.

3. The Lord's Response

Vv. 20-21 – “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.’ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.”

- God provides a mediator for his people. Moses is the chosen go-between; the one who would speak to the people on behalf of God and represent the people before God.
- In response to the people's dread the mediator says, “Do not fear.” It is interesting that after telling them not to fear he explains that God is testing them so that “the fear of him may be before you.” The distinction is between a phobic fear and a fear of reverence. The former scatters while the later gathers and is connected to love. The purpose of this holy reverence is “that you may not sin.”

Moses as Mediator:

a. He encouraged their obedience.

Vs. 20

- “...that you may not sin.” Moses is there in part to deter the people from sinning. We must never become so comfortable with our present struggle against sin that we easily excuse our lapses into sin.

b. We went to God on their behalf.

Vs. 21

- “Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” The mediator goes where the people may not.

c. He made atonement for sin.

Ex. 24:5, 6, 8

- Beginning as early as Genesis 3 God established the need for a substitutionary sacrifice for the atonement of sinners. Moses functions as a priest offering sacrifices for the people's sin.

d. He interceded for them.

Ex. 32:9-14

- The use of a mediator to intercede for the people does not indicate change within God. Rather it highlights that in his work of saving his people God must uphold his perfect justice as he pours out mercy.

e. He offered his life in their place.

Exodus 32:32

- Moses offered himself in their place, asking God to take his life if only to pass over their sin. But that was the one thing Moses could not do for the people. Though he was the God-appointed mediator Moses was also a fellow sinner along with the people. Ultimately the demands of God's justice could only be met by God himself. There would have to be a Mediator who would not only be able to identify with the people's frailty but must also be Divine; very God of very God.