

Session 4: Covenant

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea: Because Yahweh does not break his covenants, we can trust him, even when the future seems unsure.

Head Change: To know that God doesn't break his covenant or promises.

Heart Change: To feel safe and secure in our relationship with God despite our struggle with sin.

Life Change: To confidently trust God in every circumstance, especially when we don't know what tomorrow will bring.

OPEN

Has someone ever broken a promise to you? How did their fickleness make you feel? Did it impact your ability to trust others?

We expect people to keep promises, but many times they fail us—unintentionally or not. People can betray or disappoint us, which can make it tough to trust others. But it can be much more difficult to trust God since he holds our entire lives in his hands. Fortunately for us, we serve a God who never changes and cannot lie. His promises are surer than the sun rising in the morning.

In session 4, Dr. Pointer is going to show us how God plans to keep his covenant with Israel by exploring the Ten Commandments and covenant ceremony in Exodus 20–24.

READ

Read Exodus 20:1–21; 24:1–11.

Note: *This series touches on parts of Exodus. If you would like to read the whole story of Exodus and understand the context of this, check out our daily reading guide for the book of Exodus in the **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Pointer’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What were the five covenants Dr. Pointer mentioned in this session?

What were the Ten Commandments meant to do for the Israelites?

Show Session 4: *Covenant* (8 minutes).

DISCUSS

Before God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, he reminded them of who he is. He wanted his people to understand that they were entering into a binding relationship with the God who delivered them out of Egypt. This covenant was one of blessing, promising them new life in a new land. Read Exodus 20:1–17.

God's commandments constrained Israel to a specific lifestyle, but one that would cause them to flourish. Today, we tend to think of rules, guidelines, or ordinances and a hinderance to our faith because they constrain us. **Do you think the constraint of rules can cause flourishing? Why, or why not?**

When we read the Ten Commandments, we may think that they are simple rules to follow. Don't murder, don't steal, don't make idols—seems pretty easy to live by these rules, right? But these laws are not individual commands, they are communal. God's people were meant to build a community where murder, stealing, and idolatry never happen. **What would a community that followed all of these commands look like? Would you want to live in that kind of society?**

God's commandments set the Israelites apart from the nations around them. But that separation from their neighbors was not meant to isolate them from others. Instead, by living according to God's wisdom and laws as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), Israel was meant to reflect God's goodness to the world. **In what ways could a nation defined by the Ten Commandments be attractive to their neighbors? What would it teach them about the God of Israel?**

The Ten Commandments were a part of God's covenant with his people. A covenant is simply a binding agreement between two parties that defines their relationship, much like a marriage. **How would you describe or define our relationship with God? In what ways is God's relationship with his people like a marriage?**

Note: To learn more about covenants, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

In verses 4–6, God commanded that the Israelites should never make or fashion an idol for worship. For a people coming out of Egypt, a land full of idols and statues of gods, having no image of God was a radical change. God wanted his people to know that he, the only true God, was not like the false gods they had seen before. Today, we don't pray in front of statues of gods, but we do worship the idols like material wealth, acclaim, beauty, power, and comfort. **What do you think idolatry looks like today? How could we remind ourselves that God is not like our idols?**

Idolatry also distracts us from our relationship with God. It may sound strange, but God refers to idolatry as adultery. When we look for satisfaction from anything other than God, we are forgetting our covenant with Yahweh. **In what ways is idolatry like adultery? How might this association change your perspective of your relationship with God?**

Note: *To learn more about the dangers of idols and idolatry, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

The third commandment—“do not take the Lord’s name in vain”— is typically thought of as a law against swearing or cussing. The Hebrew word we translate as “take” (*nasa’*) can also be translated, “to carry, bear, or lift up.” As God’s kingdom of priests, Israel was God’s representatives to the world—they were to “carry” his name. But if they ignored God’s laws and lived how they pleased, they would cease to represent him to the world or, at worst, give people the wrong idea of who God is. God is commanding them to represent him well. **In what ways is this command deeper or more expansive than you imagined? In what ways can we carry God’s name in vain today?**

The first four commandments teach us how to relate correctly to God and the last six teach us how to treat one another. **Take a moment to read all the commandments and phrase the commandments in a positive sense. What behaviors is God encouraging us to do?**

Read Exodus 24:1–11. In these verses, Moses told the Israelites about the commands and ordinances that God gave him on the mountain. **How did the Israelites respond to Moses’s message?**

Moses and the Israelites built an altar made of twelve pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and sacrificed animals on the altar. Making a covenant with God was difficult, messy work. But, as Dr. Pointer explained, we don't need to build altars or be marked with blood to be consecrated anymore. Jesus's sacrifice on the cross has covered our sins and set us apart as God's people. **Do you ever feel like you need to earn God's approval through personal sacrifice or service? What would it look like to trust in Jesus's work on the cross than in your behavior?**

The Ten Commandments reflect God's love for us. They reveal his desire to protect, shape, and guide us on the journey to holiness. While we are not saved by following the law, we can know that a life of obedience to God is the path to a fulfilling and holy life. God, our good Father, has shown us how to live in his world in his way. Obeying him is an opportunity to find joy in his creation. **Do you think of obedience as the way to personal fulfillment? Why, or why not?**

What could it look like for you to be joyful in your obedience to God this week?

LAST WORD

Dr. Pointer ended our session with a gentle reminder—everything done by God is rooted in his character. We can trust him, not just because of what he has done, but who he is. If he has been faithful to keep his covenant in the past, then we know he can be trusted with our lives today.

The question we must wrestle with is if we will trust him. Are we willing to put our trust in God instead of the idols in our life? He is infinitely more able, trustworthy, and loving than anyone else in our lives. Trust him with tomorrow as you obey him today.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Exodus.

1. What is a covenant?

The custom of making covenants happens numerous times in the Bible. It was a formal process of creating legally binding agreements between two parties, ratified by swearing an oath to one another. There were no written contracts, just the word of two parties promising specific actions. Any two people could enter a covenant, and, in the Old Testament, we find that God made covenants with his people.

Covenants are still made between people today—marriages, ordinations, peace treaties, and various contracts are all examples of covenants. **How do we treat contracts and covenants in our society today?**

When sin distorted the world, God began to restore the world through covenants. After the flood in Genesis, God made a covenant with Noah, promising to never destroy the earth by water again (Genesis 9). God later made a covenant with Abraham, promising to make him and his family into a great nation and to bless the world through him (Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21). And, many generations later, God made a covenant with David, promising that the future Messiah would come through his lineage (2 Samuel 7).

The covenant God made with Israel in Exodus 19–24, known as the Mosaic covenant, centered on the law, meant to set God's people apart in their culture and behavior. God promised to bless and protect his people if they remained obedient, observing all the laws he

commanded. If they abandoned him, choosing to follow idols, he would not shield them from the effects of their sin or continue to bless them.

But the unique part of the Mosaic covenant is that it points to the coming of Jesus Christ. The laws of God showed Israel just how sinful they were and how they were in desperate need of a savior. In the same way, the Law shows us how sinful we are. **In what ways does the Law show that you need a savior?**

In Christ, we don't need to keep the Law for God to save us. We are declared righteous because Jesus fulfilled the Law in our place. We live under a covenant of grace, where Jesus has done the work, and we reap the benefits of his faithfulness. Our sins are wiped away, and we get to have eternal fellowship with Yahweh.

What can you do to remind yourself of the gift of grace we live under today? How can you be intentional about reflecting on the significance of the covenant of Jesus Christ?

2. What is an idol?

We might not create golden statues to worship instead of God, but any time we love anything else more than God, we have fallen into idolatry. An idol is any created thing that we put our hope in to deliver us from pain or to our ideal future. Money, sex, a remodeled house, high-achieving children, or streaming services can all be idols.

In the Old Testament, an idol is anything that human beings create, mold, or fashion into a physical object with the intent of it representing God. The problem is we can never truly grasp the image of God or represent all of his glory. Read Exodus 20:1–6. **What are the specific commands God gives in these verses? What are the consequences God gives for creating and worshipping idols?**

While Moses received God's warnings against idols, his people were creating a new object of worship. Read Exodus 32:1–6 and take note of everything the Israelites did, comparing their actions to God's commands in 20:1–6. **How many of the commandments did Israel break in this passage? What specific reasons did they give for their decision to create a golden calf?**

It can be easy to look at Israel and think about how foolish their actions were. But we are not so different from them. We rush to modern idols to deliver us from boredom, feelings of sadness, or insecurity. We want to be influential, comfortable, at peace, and in control. We may not build golden calves or pray to statues, but we are quick to run from God to new objects of worship. **What are some examples of idols we worship in our culture? Which of these idols is most appealing to you?**

How do our modern idols break God’s statutes of the law?

Modern idolatry is not always overt. Sometimes we don’t even realize that we are holding on to idols instead of God’s provision. Read Proverbs 4:23. **What is “flowing” from your heart? What things dominate your daydreams? What tends to make you the most anxious or frustrated? What, if you lost it, would make life not worth living?**

The answers to the previous questions can point you toward your potential idols. But don’t let your investigation stop here. Talk to some trusted friends, your pastor, or your spouse. What idols might be tempting you from God, and how might you reject them in favor of God’s perfect, unending love?

3. Weekly Reading Plan

Exodus is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: Exodus 20:1–21

Day 2: Exodus 20:22–21:36

Day 3: Exodus 22

Day 4: Exodus 23

Day 5: Exodus 24