

How many times did Moses ascend Mount Sinai?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Moses-on-Mount-Sinai.htm>

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Moses actually went up on Mount Sinai several times to meet God as recorded in Exodus 19 through the end of the book. Depending on the reckoning, Moses climbed Mt. Sinai about eight times to meet with the Lord.

The first ascent. After the exodus from Egypt, on the first day of the third month, the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai. Moses' first trip up Mt. Sinai is described in Exodus 19:2-7. He ascends the mountain in verse 3 and comes back down in verse 7. On the mountain God tells Moses that He is offering a covenant to the people of Israel: if they will keep the covenant, God will make them His own "treasured possession" and "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (verses 5-6). Moses reports this message to the people, and the people respond by saying, "We will do everything the Lord has said" (Exodus 19:8).

The second ascent. Moses returns to the top of Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:8 in order to relay the people's response to the offer of a covenant. God then tells Moses that He will speak audibly to Moses in a thick cloud so that all the people will put their trust in Moses as God's chosen leader. Moses descends the mountain in verse 9 in order to relay this information to the children of Israel.

The third ascent. In Exodus 19:10, God is speaking to Moses again, which implies that Moses may have again climbed Mt. Sinai. (Some scholars believe God's words in verse 10 were part of the discourse in verse 9.) In any case, Moses is said to descend the mountain again in verse 14. Moses consecrates the people in preparation for the Lord's

appearance on the mountain on the third day (verses 10-11).

On the third day, “there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast” (Exodus 19:16). The people of Israel were understandably frightened. Then “Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder” (verses 18-19).

The fourth ascent. Moses’ fourth trip up Mt. Sinai is described in Exodus 19:20-25. God summons Moses to the top of the mountain in order to have him warn the people not to draw near the mountain while His presence is on Sinai. He also tells Moses to bring his brother, Aaron, up the mountain with him. Moses descends the mountain in verse 25.

God then delivers the Ten Commandments audibly in Exodus 20:1-17. In fear, the people of Israel plead with Moses not to let God speak directly to them. Instead, they ask Moses to be their intercessor and they would listen to him (verses 18-19). Moses tells them to not be afraid but that God is testing them so that they would fear Him and not sin (verse 20).

The fifth ascent. Moses returns to Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20:21 as he “approached the thick darkness where God was.” At this time, God gives Moses various laws, recorded in chapters 21-23, along with a promise to give the land of Canaan to the children of Israel (Exodus 23:20-33).

The sixth ascent. In Exodus 24:1 Moses is summoned again to climb Mt. Sinai. This time he is to bring Aaron, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel

with him. The next morning, Moses “built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel” (verse 4). He offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and read the Book of the Covenant to the people, who responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey” (verse 7). To ratify the covenant, Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the sacrifice (verse 8).

After the ceremony, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders ascend the mountain, and there they “saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky” (Exodus 24:10). Amazingly, God allows these men to live, even though they had seen God; in fact, they “ate and drank” on the mountain (verse 11).

God then commands Moses to continue up Sinai in order to receive the stone tablets that God had prepared (Exodus 24:12). Moses takes Joshua with him and sends the others down to the foot of Sinai. While Joshua waits, Moses continues the ascent. For six days, a cloud covers the top of the mountain. On the seventh day, God calls Moses to enter the cloud and approach the top of the mountain. Moses stays there for 40 days and 40 nights (verse 18).

During this meeting on the mountain, God gives Moses much information. This included the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone by God Himself. Moses also receives complete instructions on how to build the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and the altar, specifications for the priestly garments, etc. (Exodus 24-31). Unfortunately, at the foot of the mountain, the Israelites had Aaron build the golden calf and were committing idolatry. When Moses and Joshua descend the mountain in Exodus 32:19 and see

what the people are doing, Moses breaks the stone tablets in anger. He then destroys the golden calf and disciplines the people.

The seventh ascent. Moses goes back to the Lord in Exodus 32:32 in order to intercede on behalf of the children of Israel. This implies another ascent of Sinai. In a show of great love and mercy that anticipates the love and mercy of Jesus Christ, Moses offers his own life in exchange for the life of Israel (verse 32).

The eighth ascent. In Exodus 34:1-2, the Lord says to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain." Moses is to come alone. On top of the mountain, the Lord reveals Himself to Moses and describes Himself this way: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (verse 6). Moses worships the Lord and receives a repetition of the covenant. Moses is on Sinai for another 40 days and 40 nights, miraculously "without eating bread or drinking water" (verse 28). When Moses comes back down to the people, "he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him" (verses 29-30).

The events at Mt. Sinai were monumental in the history of the world. God was creating for Himself a new nation with new laws and a new way of life. The Lord showed Himself to be a God who desires to communicate Himself and to forge a relationship with His people. In giving the Law, God revealed His holiness, clearly defined sin (Romans 7:7), and provided a guardian to eventually bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). The mediation

of Moses on Sinai is a wonderful picture of the intercession of Christ on behalf of sinners (Romans 8:34).