

What is the significance of Mount Sinai?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/mount-Sinai-significance.html>

Sometimes, Mt. Sinai is simply called Sinai. Additionally, many verses contain references to the wilderness of Sinai, which refers to the desert area around the mountain. Mt. Sinai is also sometimes called Mt. Horeb.

Mt. Horeb is the place where Moses saw the burning bush and where God spoke to him and sent him on a mission to Egypt to bring the Israelites out of slavery (Exodus 3:1-6).

Mt. Sinai was the mountain in the wilderness where, after the crossing of the Red Sea, God met with Moses and delivered the law. So Moses received the law and saw the presence of God in the same area as he originally encountered God in the burning bush (cf. Acts 7:30). The primary passage regarding the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai is Exodus chapters 19-34.

Early on in the Israelites' wilderness traveling, God told the people to get ready to meet with Him. God promised He would deliver His law to them from the mountaintop so that they would know how to conduct themselves. The people were warned to stay away from the mountain itself, for it would be holy ground. Any person or animal that touched Sinai during the time God was there would be put to death (Exodus 19:12-13).

God descended on Mt. Sinai with a terrible display of power: thunder and lightning, a dark cloud, fire and smoke, the blast of a trumpet and quaking of the earth (Exodus 19:18). God thundered out His commands to the people. They were so frightened that they asked that God speak to Moses and let Moses be the intermediary (Exodus 20:19)

God called Moses up the mountain to meet with Him several times. God gave Moses the law, which Moses then faithfully relayed to the people.

On one trip up Mt. Sinai, Moses stayed in the presence of the Lord for a long time (40 days), and the people grew restless and began to think that Moses had perished. Exodus 32 records that, after promising to do all the Lord had commanded (including not making any images for worship), the people demanded that Aaron make an idol for them to worship. This was the god they wanted to go before them as they continued their trek. Aaron made a golden calf, and the people began to celebrate and offer sacrifices to it.

From the top of the mountain, God told Moses what had happened, and Moses descended Sinai in a rage. He was carrying the stone tablets on which God Himself had engraved the law, and Moses smashed them in anger, perhaps as an illustration of how badly the Israelites had already broken God's law. Many of the idol worshippers were put to death (Exodus 32:28), and Moses ground up the golden calf and put it in water and made the Israelites drink it (verse 20). Then he ascended the mountain once again to receive a second copy of God's law.

Once again, Moses spent an extended time on Sinai, and God allowed Moses to witness some of His glory. When Moses came back down the mountain, his face was shining with the glory of God. The people were afraid of him, so he put a veil over his face so he would not frighten the Israelites (Exodus 34:29-35).

Sinai also features into the story of the prophet Elijah. When running from Queen Jezebel, Elijah stopped to rest in the desert. There, an angel of the Lord fed him, and "strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached

Horeb, the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:8). At Horeb, or Sinai, Elijah stayed in a cave where he met the Lord. God spoke to him with "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). The parallels between Elijah's experience and Moses' are significant: both prophets were sustained by God for 40 days and nights. Both met with God and heard His audible voice. Both were in the same location.

Throughout the rest of Scripture, Mt. Sinai is associated with the giving of the law. Hundreds of years later, Nehemiah publicly prays, "You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments" (Nehemiah 9:13). In Galatians 4:24-25, Paul uses Mt. Sinai metaphorically to represent the law and Old Covenant.

Paul also speaks of Moses' face that shone (an event inextricably linked to Sinai) in 2 Corinthians. He says that the law involved glory (as evidenced by Moses' face), but it was a fading glory. Paul calls the law the "ministry of death" because it condemned all who broke it (2 Corinthians 3:7). Paul notes how much more glory, and lasting glory, is present in the ministry of the Spirit and the gospel that brings life (verses 8 -18).

In Hebrews 12:18-24, the author contrasts the Old Covenant given at Mt. Sinai with the New Covenant:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Since the delivery of the New Covenant seems to be a “kinder, gentler” presentation, we might tend to believe that rejection of it is less serious than the rejection of the Old Covenant. However, Hebrews 12:25-29 warns Jewish believers who were being pressured to leave Christianity and return to Judaism not to do so:

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

Today, there is some debate over what mountain is the historical Mt. Sinai. However, if a person could actually climb Mt. Sinai, it would not bring him or her any closer to God. God is not confined to a specific location. If anything, such a climb should remind the spiritual pilgrim of how many times he has violated the laws that were delivered

there.

The only way to draw near to God is by faith in Christ. Climbing mountains will not do. Those who are in Christ have God's Spirit living within them. Even though they are imperfect, they are under no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Christ, who is "worthy of greater honor than Moses" (Hebrews 3:3), has fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17). We are free. "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:2-4, ESV).