

## **Moses and the Israelites** (taken from the Book of Exodus)

After Moses led the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they wandered in the desert for many years. They were glad they were free, but it was hard going at times. Sometimes they were hungry and thirsty, then they began to grumble. But God provided for them, in spite of their grumbles and they knew that God was with them leading and guiding them.

As they made their way through the desert they lived together as a community learning to care for each other's needs, but above all learning to know and worship the God who had saved them. When they reached a very high mountain called Mount Sinai, Moses ordered the people to camp at the foot of it and not to climb its slopes, because it is God's mountain. Moses himself began to climb and asked the people to pray that God would teach them the laws which would bring them together as a people. Moses stayed on the mountain for a very long time, praying and talking with God. Then he returned to God's people and gave them God's Laws: The Ten Commandments. These were to help the people to live in freedom and to be responsible for their actions.

- Q Why are rules necessary to enable people to co-exist successfully?
- Q Why was this particularly true for the Israelites wandering in the desert?
- Q In what way do rules and laws bring freedom to people who follow them?
- Q Why did Moses feel it was his duty to seek advice from God on rules to live by?
- Q Would all the rules necessarily be about religious belief and practice? Why?
- Q Why would the Israelites accept these rules from Moses?

## The Ten Commandments

God spoke, and these were his words:

*"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves."*

1. *Worship no god but me. Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God.*
2. *Do not use my name for evil purposes.*
3. *Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work – neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.*
4. *Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.*
5. *Do not kill.*
6. *Do not be unfaithful.*
7. *Do not steal.*
8. *Do not lie against your neighbour.*
9. *Do not be greedy and want what other people own.*
10. *Do not take another's husband or wife.*

Based on Exodus 20 1-17

- Q Which Law do you think is most important and why?
- Q How do you think these Laws helped the Israelites to live in harmony with one another?
- Q Which day do Jewish people observe as the Sabbath?
- Q How do they keep it holy and make it a day of rest?
- Q Which day of the week is the holy day for Christians?
- Q How should Christians observe this?
- Q Who are the first three Laws concerned with and why?
- Q Who are Laws 4 - 10 concerned with?
- Q Which of these beliefs and values are most important to us today and why?