

Through the Bible

Exodus 19-27

Chapter 19

The Arrival at Sinai

- Is a pivotal chapter in the Exodus narrative
- After the miraculous signs of God (plagues) and the miraculous exodus from Egypt
- After the escape through the Sea of Reeds
- After the miracle of bitter water being “healed”
- After the miraculous provision of manna, quail and water from a rock
- and after the reuniting of Moses with his family and his father in law helping him to organize the people of Israel into smaller groups forming a leadership structure,
- we now come to Sinai
- ***Go back and look at Exodus 3**...when Moses meets God at the Burning Bush
- notice he is tending the flock of his father-in-law in the wilderness and he comes to Sinai, “the mountain of God” (also called *Horeb* in Hebrew)
 - a Hebrew commentary by Robert Alter notes the name Horeb is derived from a root signifying dryness and so it translates to something like “the parched mountain”
 - it is worth noting that this area is a full 3 days’ journey from the Nile (the great source of water)
 - there is an antithesis point to make here: Moses, the name associated with water from infancy on, now encounters the God of all creation in the dry desert in a flame.
- and jump down **to v. 12** and notice that God says “*you will worship God at this very mountain*”
- Moses knew precisely how to lead the people of Israel HERE
- so when we find him HERE in Genesis 12, he knew how to get here
- he met God here and now he will meet Him here again
- *Psalm 18 is an example of a place in Scripture that God is described as a rock
 - even though written by David, God is described as strength, rock, fortress and savior, the rock in whom we find protection...the only solid rock
 - when you put those next to each other, it jumps out to us:

-On a rock Moses meets God, later on that rock Moses will meet God and receive the law and will understand that God is the rock that defends, protects and gives us strength

-It is exactly 2 months after the Israelites left Egypt that they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai. (19:1)

-the original language uses the lunar calendar to indicate how much time had passed, but even the way that that is worded in Torah suggests an important change in the narrative...or rather BEGINNING of a new narrative portion

-As Sean mentioned last week, as far as a broad timeline for Exodus, (following bondage, discipline and deliverance) we are now entering the Period of Legislation and Organization

-Also interesting that Scripture mentions that they break camp at Rephidim. This only stood out to me because it was in Sunday's sermon from chapter 17 where Israel defeats the Amalekites because Aaron and Hur help hold up Moses' arms...this happened at Rephidim

-So Israel leaves Rephidim, arrives at Sinai approx. 6 days later (back to the mountain where Moses met God earlier in Exodus 3)

-and Israel sets up camp at the base of Sinai

-and Moses climbs the mountain to appear before God...in the Hebrew, the way this verse is written suggests that even as the Israelites were setting up camp, Moses was already on his way up the mountain to meet God

The appearance of the Lord on the mountain

-next we have the Lord calling to Moses from the mountain with instructions for the people

-God reminds Moses of what he did to the Egyptians and that he carried his people on eagles' wings

-the eagle's supremacy among birds is meant to suggest the majestic divine power that miraculously swept up the Hebrews and rescued them from the house of slavery

-next God reveals his plan /destiny for Israel

READ: EX 19:4-5

-**"If you will obey me and keep my covenant"** God would soon make a formal covenant with Israel and Mt Sinai, but first He revealed what He

wanted to do for an obedient Israel..the covenant was greater than the law itself

-The covenant would involve law, sacrifice and the choice to obey and be blessed or disobey and be cursed.

-“you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth”

-these are people that God wanted to be in a unique place in God’s great plan...these are people of great value and concern to God..not that God ignores the rest of the earth, but that He was determined to use Israel to reach the earth

-“and you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.”

-this promise is dependent on Israel upholding the terms of the covenant

-in the first covenantal promise it was stipulated that Abraham’s seed must be just and righteous (blessing to the earth)

-but a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is well beyond just a blessing

-this is something the biblical writers/prophets will continue to wrestle with

-later we will get a clearer picture of what a priest is and does

-but from what we already know a priest intercedes on behalf of the people to God and represents God to the people

-This is Israel’s job to the rest of the world!

-Moses reports all of this to the elders of the people

-and **all the people** responded together that they would do everything the Lord commanded

-and Moses reported this answer back to God

-presumably God can hear their answer himself, but this establishes the importance of Moses as the intermediary...a priest for the people

*the Rabbis describe this as an example or type of marriage: God is entering into a marriage covenant with His bride: Israel. And His bride is willingly entering into this marriage

-a marriage included pledges of faithfulness and loyalty and love...all present here

-God tells Moses he will show up in a thick cloud so the people can hear him speak to Moses, so they will therefore always trust Moses

-what follows can be illustrated as preparation for marriage:

-tell them to consecrate themselves (wash clothing, bathe, get ready)

-the mountain itself...the place of the covenant is also sacred and a boundary is set around it so that when the Lord comes down no hand may even touch the mountain

-until a ram's horn blows, then the people can go up on the mountain

-So Moses and the people consecrated themselves for 3 days.

READ Ex 19:16-19 (trumpet/ram's horn) and then God shows up in:

-thunder and lightning and a cloud – These signs of power and glory signaled the presence of God...the whole environment spoke of God's presence in a terrifying sense, striking fear and reverence into the heart of the people

-sound of a loud trumpet – What Israel saw and felt in the thunder, lightning, cloud, smoke and earthquake was terrifying, but though terrifying these were all "natural" phenomenon. The Trumpet was not natural, it did not come from camp, but from heaven...no wonder all of the people trembled

-one commentary says it this way: *and the voice of the trumpet waxed louder and louder: Moses kept speaking, and God kept answering him with a voice* i.e. with thunder. Moses is of course below with the people. The tense of the two last verbs implies reiteration: the repeated thunderings were interpreted as God's part in a dialogue with Moses

-Moses led them to the **foot of the mountain**...the covenant making place
At the sound of the trumpet, Moses led the people up to the barrier at the base of the mountain where they could see, smell, hear and virtually taste the fire which covered the mtn. as well as feel the earth shake under their feet

-And **"All of Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord had descended on it in the form of fire."** And smoke billowed and the whole mountain shook violently

-Moses spoke and God thundered: as the sound of the trumpet blast became longer and louder until Moses finally spoke to God and God answered him by voice

-Moses again climbs the mountain to speak with God and then God instructs him to descend and tell the people again not to break the boundaries (moses says 'you already told us this') but God wants Moses to communicate the necessity for the people to respect the holiness of God's presence

-and Moses goes down to report what God has commanded to the people

-the assumption here is that the people could hear God speaking to Moses, but must not have been able to understand

Chapter 20 The giving of the 10 commandments for Covenant Community

Let's start with some big picture things to understand about these commandments

- Chapter 20 starts by stating that God spoke/or God gave all the people these instructions
- these were expectations for all, not just the leaders/religious leaders
- this was a God-based moral code...not a Moses based one and different than any codes followed by surrounding pagan cultures
- a God based moral code is unique...it has to mean that God sees our obedience/disobedience, he must measure it and in some way, He must also reward obedience and punish disobedience

***It's interesting to note:** The *Code of Hammurabi* is another well-known set of laws and principles from this same approximate period. There are some similarities between the Ten Commandments/Mosaic Law and the Code of Hammurabi, but the differences are even more profound. While Hammurabi mentions the gods of Babylon, the emphasis is clearly on *him* as the king and lawgiver (with divine authority, of course). The *Code of Hammurabi* begins with page after page of how wonderful Hammurabi is and how much he has accomplished. Hammurabi is clearly above his own law since *he* was the embodiment of the law. Not so with Moses; the emphasis is clear: **God spoke all these words**, and *no man is above the law*.

***The Ten Commandments are also GOOD.** They are good because:

- They show the wise moral guidance and government of God.
- They answer the need of mankind for moral guidance and government.
- They give us a way to teach morality.
- They would make the world so much better if obeyed.
- They are good for all humanity; some of the Law of Moses is specific unto Israel, but the Ten Commandments are universal.
- They are good when they are promoted and held as ideals, even when they are not perfectly obeyed.

*It is important for us to know, understand, receive, and obey **all** of these commandments in a fully Biblical perspective, also taking into account what the rest of the Book of Exodus the New Testament also tells us about the law of God.

- these commandments were never given with the thought that one might *earn* heaven by obeying them all perfectly or even adequately
- The covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was much bigger than the law (as dramatic as the covenant making event was)
- God had already made an everlasting covenant with Israel through their father Abraham (Gen 15)
 - This is known as the “Abrahamic covenant”
 - in this covenant God is promising blessing and giving Israel ownership of the law
 - this Mosaic law was “added” to the Abrahamic covenant, but it did not annul it
 - the law entered alongside God’s previous covenant (Rom 5:20) and was a temporary measure (Gal 3:19)
 - The Mosaic Covenant is especially significant because in it God promises to make Israel “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19)
 - Israel was to be God’s light to the dark world around them/a separate and called-out nation so that everyone around them would know that they worshiped Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God
 - The Mosaic Law would reveal to people their sinfulness and their need for a Savior, and it is the Mosaic Law that Christ Himself said that He did not come to abolish but to fulfill
 - the Law was not given to save...**it could not**
 - God and Israel knew it was impossible for them to keep this law perfectly, so the need for sacrifice was introduced...Israel must depend on the sacrifice of an innocent victim as a substitute for the guilty law-breaker
 - In this sense, the Ten Commandments were like a **mirror** that showed Israel their need for sacrifice
 - Jesus summarized the 10 commandments in Matthew 22:35-40 with “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*”
 - This simplification doesn’t eliminate the Ten Commandments; it fulfills them, showing us the heart and desire of God for His people
 - The problem is that we haven’t kept the two commandments either, much less the ten

-We know that Jesus Himself was the only one to ever keep the law perfectly – either in the ten or the two. He never needed to sacrifice for His own sin, so could be the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Wonderfully, *His obedience is credited to those who put their love and trust in Him.* [Romans 8:2-3](#) (This is God’s amazing promise to those who repent and believe on Jesus)

-**The law is a “schoolmaster”** to us ([Galatians 3:22-25](#)). Before God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ was fully evident, we were *kept under guard by the law* – both in the sense of being bound by the law, but also held in protective custody. The law, through its revelation of God’s character and its exposure of our sin, prepares us to come to Jesus – but after we have come, we no longer have to live under our tutor (though we remember the behavior he has taught us). (Enduring Word Commentary)

- “The great message of the Christian faith is, therefore, that we are free from the Law’s condemnation in order that we may be able to fulfill its obligation by the power of [Jesus] within us.” (Redpath)

-“My obedience therefore is not legal, but inspired by love and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit. Does New Testament grace allow a lower standard than Old Testament law? The standard under grace is higher.” (Redpath)

-the NT Christian is actually under a more demanding way of life than the OT believer was because the OT law dealt with outward acts and the NT law of love deals with inward attitudes.

-Being free from the Law (NT) does not mean being free to sin, liberty is not license

-we have been called to liberty, but we must use that liberty for the good of others and the glory of God (Gal 5:13-26)

-We are under a **Higher law of Love**, the law of Christ

-we don’t try to obey God in the flesh (or in the ability or energy of our flesh) because this is not possible...the flesh is weak and sinful and cannot submit to the law

-But as we *die* to sin and *yield* to the Spirit the SPIRIT FULFILLS THE LAW IN US AND THROUGH US

-To go back to the law is to exchange grace for works

-God gave the law to Israel to

-reveal his holiness

- reveal man's sinfulness
- to mark Israel as God's chosen people and to separate them from other nations
- to give Israel a standard for godly living that they might inherit the land and enjoy its blessings
 - It is a guardrail, keeping humanity on a moral path
 - It is a mirror, showing us our moral failure and need for a savior
 - It is a guide, showing us the heart and desire of God for His people

-It is not meant to make anything perfect, justify from sin, give righteousness or peace, or give life
-it cannot do those things

The Ten Commandments

Often organized into two groups. 1-4 focus on our conduct toward God and 5-10 focus on our conduct toward one another

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| 1. <i>Have no other gods before Me</i> | 5. <i>Honor father and mother</i> |
| 2. <i>Make no idols or images</i> | 6. <i>Do not murder</i> |
| 3. <i>Do not take My Name in vain</i> | 7. <i>Do not commit adultery</i> |
| 4. <i>Remember the Sabbath Day</i> | 8. <i>Do not steal</i> |
| | 9. <i>Do not bear false witness</i> |
| | 10. <i>Do not covet</i> |

*The only commandment not repeated in the NT is the Sabbath

After God gives the 10 commandments

Ex 20:8 tells us that the people heard the thunder and the ram's horn/they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain...and they trembled with fear

-they asked Moses to speak to them because if God did they would die
 -Moses tells them not to be afraid...their fear of God will keep them from sinning (20:20)

-this makes me think that lack of fear of God is the freeway for sin in our lives/Our reverent fear of God (respect and honor) keeps us obedient.

-God doesn't use this as a weapon (as in terrify us into obedience) instead it is a natural sequence...I stop fearing the Lord (and start disobeying) and I stop fearing the results of my disobedience

-And then *as the people stood in the distance, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was*

Following are instructions for:

- Proper use of altars
- Fair treatment of slaves (note: this is condoning of slavery)
- How to handle assaults, murder, kidnapping (!), and all sorts of mistreatment and disagreements over property
- It also addresses social responsibility (again in treatment of people) and justice issues (treatment of people)

Promise of the Lord's Presence

- Following these instructions is a promise by God to protect Israel on their journey and lead them safely
 - God even shares his strategy for entering the land....not driving out the people who live there all at once (or the wild animals would multiply and be a threat) but driving them out a little at a time in order for Israel's population to increase so they can take possession and manage the land
 - but they are reminded what is required of them: **SERVE ONLY THE LORD**
 - this is a call for **complete consecration to God...an offering of self and property to Him and Him alone/a reminder to serve only the Lord God**
- READ EX 23:20-26 and then summarize 27-33**

Chapter 24 Israel accepts the Lord's Covenant

- many rabbis say that Israel then "married" the Lord
- Israel repeatedly promises to do EVERYTHING the Lord has commanded
- and blood was spattered to confirm this covenant promise
- next Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders climbed up the mtn and they saw the God of Israel
- God then instructs Moses to come up to Him...where He will give him the commandments on tablets of stone
- the elders stay behind and Moses climbs the mtn where a cloud covered it/glory of the Lord settles on it for 6 days
- to everyone else, the glory of the Lord appeared at the summit like a consuming fire
- and moses stayed up there another 40 days

-receiving the tablets as well as instructions for offerings, the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle and its furnishings

Unfortunately, as we will see next time, Moses being on top of a mountain in the midst of the fiery presence of God, the people are going to turn their hearts away from their brand new covenant

It's the equivalent of cheating on your spouse....on your honeymoon