

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 19 – Speaker Notes

Last time we were together, we looked at Exodus chapter 17 where we saw the travels of the children of Israel from the Wilderness of Sin to Rephidim. After the three days of uphill travel, the people were very thirsty and complained to Moses saying, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” They had totally overlooked the fact that Yahweh was providing them with food every day, even giving them twice as much on the sixth day so that they would not have to go out and gather the manna on the seventh day.

It was while they were at Rephidim (probably while they were arguing with Moses) that the Amalekites attacked them, picking-off the stragglers who were the weakest and most tired. Moses told Joshua to take the men and do battle against Amalek. As they fought, Moses went up a hill and held up his staff. As long as he was holding the staff up where the Israelites could see it, they prevailed against Amalek. But, when his arms got tired and he lowered the staff, the Amalekites prevailed against Israel. Therefore, Aaron and Hur had Moses sit on a rock and they held up his hands and the Israelites defeated the Amalekites. As we pointed out last time, this is a beautiful picture of the importance of behind the scenes ministries in the church.

After this victory, in chapter 18 of Exodus, we learn that Moses’ brother-in-law, Jethro, brought Moses his wife and two sons, whom he had been caring for. It’s possible that Moses sent them to Jethro during the plagues. While Jethro was there at Rephidim, he observed Moses judging the disputes between individuals. This judging took all day long and the people, and Moses, grew weary. Jethro recommended that Moses assign some of the leaders of the people to assist him in this judgment process, relieving the weariness of the people and Moses alike. Moses did so and then led them on to the Wilderness of Sinai.

Now, in chapter 19 we see the Israelites encamping before Mt. Sinai while Moses goes up the mountain to talk with God. In this chapter we will see Moses ascend to the top of the mountain three different times.

Exodus 19:1-2

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain,

According to the text, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai on the third new moon. The Israelites left Egypt the day after the Passover (14th of Abib, or Nisan) and now it is the third new moon of the year. Since the new moon always marks the first day of the month for the Israelites, this is the first day of the third month. Therefore, the Israelites have been journeying for a month and a half or 45 days.

As we are about to learn, the giving of the Ten Commandments occurred on the fiftieth day of the journey. This day has historically been celebrated by the Jews as the Day of Pentecost (meaning the 50th day). Notice that the era of the Law began on the Day of Pentecost and Christianity also began on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room and received the Holy Spirit.

Once the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai, they camped there before the mountain. It is believed that the Israelites encamped on the southeast side of the mountain. From this location there is a clear view of the mountain as it rises directly above the plain. Reaching its summit by foot is easily accomplished in about three hours.

Exodus 19:3-4

while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.

Moses’ 1st trek up Mt. Sinai – Although it does not specifically say that Moses went up the mountain, the expression “Moses went up to God” implies that he climbed the mountain.

Why does the Bible call the Israelites both, the house of Jacob, and the people of Israel. Both of these expressions refer to the Israelites. The first (Jacob – meaning “he grasps the heel”) was the name given to him by his parents. The second (Israel – meaning “prince of God”) is the name given to him by God after his encounter with Him as Jacob was returning from Paddan-Aram with his wives and children. The significance of referring to them by both names may be an indication that some of them were still living according to the flesh while others of them had already developed a saving faith in the words of *Yahweh*. Another interpretation for the use of the two names is that Jacob refers to the Israelites in their poor and lowly position whereas Israel refers to them in their rich and exalted position.

The first message that *Yahweh* told Moses to give to the house of Jacob and the children of Israel is that *Yahweh* had already demonstrated His power and His care for them. They had been witnesses to what He had done to the Egyptians and how He had brought the Israelites out of Egypt.

Exodus 19:5-6

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Moses is up on the mountain receiving the message that he is to proclaim to the Israelites. In this message, Moses is to remind the Israelites how *Yahweh* has already protected them, proving that He cares for them. He now places a condition on the blessing that He promises to bestow on them. Notice that obedience has nothing to do with them having been chosen by God, or with God’s protection of them. For the children of Israel, obedience to the Law is the condition for their blessing as a people. But, keep in mind what the Apostle Paul tells us about keeping the Law:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Galatians 3:11)

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. (Romans 4:13-15)

If the Israelites had obeyed God and kept His commandments, they would have had an exalted position; they would have served as a kingdom of priests and as a nation separated from the world and separated to God. As a kingdom of priests, separated from the world system, the Israelites were supposed to be the global witnesses of *Yahweh* and in doing so, they would be supremely blessed by *Yahweh*. These same promises are made to the Church, not based on keeping unkeepable laws, but based on faith alone:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Peter 2:9)

Like the Israelites, we are supposed to be the witnesses to the world system, and we are supposed to "... proclaim the excellencies of him who called you ..." And remember we are told to: *be in the world but not of the world.*

Exodus 19:7-8a

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." ...

Moses has now descended the mountain for the first time. He assembled the elders of the people and delivered God's message to them. As representatives of the people, the elders committed themselves to keeping the laws of God, not knowing that they were incapable of keeping these laws.

Exodus 19:8b-13

... And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

Moses' 2nd trek up Mt. Sinai – Here again, we are not specifically told that Moses climbed the mountain the second time. However, from verse 14 we know that he was up on the mountain.

We see Moses once again as a type of Christ. Moses acted as the mediator between the people and God and yet we know from the New Testament that there is only one mediator between God and men:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5)

However, because of the holiness of *Yahweh* and the sinfulness of man, *Yahweh* veiled himself from the people with a thick cloud. The Israelites were able to hear the voice of God as he talked to Moses but they were not able to see Him. This is like the pillar of cloud that has been leading the children of Israel since they left Egypt. Other references to God's presence in clouds include:

And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 8:10-11)

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water. (Psalms 18:11)

As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (Luke 9:34-35)

and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished. (Revelation 15:8)

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21:27)

Moses was then told to go to the people and consecrate them. The word translated "consecrate" is the Hebrew word *qadash*, meaning "to set apart from common use to sacred use." By using this word and

stipulating the cleansing of the people, *Yahweh* taught the Israelites that He is separate and Holy and is to be treated as such.

Yahweh also proclaimed to the people that He is set-apart and that anything that He touches is also set-apart. Because of His presence on it, Mt. Sinai became holy. Anyone who touched the holy mountain was to be put to death by stoning or by an arrow.

Exodus 19:14-19

After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations." On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 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, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Moses returned from the mountain for the second time and delivered God's message to the people. God's people responded by sanctifying themselves and washing their clothes. Jewish tradition requires a person to bathe whenever they put on clean clothes. Moses also informed the people to abstain from sexual relations for three days.

Let's do a little calculating here. The Passover was the fourteenth of the first month and it was on the first day (the new moon) of the third month that they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai. If we assume that Moses' two trips up and down Mt. Sinai occupied one day each that would total forty-seven days since the Passover. Three days later would have been the fiftieth day. Therefore, "... the morning of the third day" would have been the 50th day, that is to say, the day of Pentecost.

The thunder and lightning from the thick cloud sitting over the mountain would serve as a dramatic reminder of how powerful and majestic *Yahweh* is and how weak and insignificant the children of Israel were. The thunder and lightning coming from the cloud was immediately followed by a loud trumpet blast. We are not told who sounded the trumpet, but we know from the book of Revelation that there are angels who will sound trumpets of judgment over the inhabitants of the earth.

Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. (*Revelation 8:6*)

Then, after Moses led the people to the foot of the mountain, the Israelites saw smoke billowing up from the mountain. Although this could describe a volcanic smoke and ash eruption like that of Mt. St. Helens, there is no reason why we need to ascribe a natural phenomenon to this event. Also, Mt. Sinai is not volcanic in origin. This was, rather, another demonstration of the power and majesty of our God.

The next thing we are told is that Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him. Once again, there are many who would ascribe this to natural phenomena but the Scripture is clear that it was an audible representation of the voice of God that the people heard. When confronted by the awesome power and majesty of Almighty God, any person would be reminded of his or her sinfulness in the presence of a holy God. Even the mighty prophet Isaiah was humbled at the vision of God's holiness:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the

midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
(Isaiah 6:1-5)

Exodus 19:20-25

The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Moses’ 3rd trek up Mt. Sinai – After Moses spoke to God and was answered by the Almighty, *Yahweh* called him up to the top of the mountain a third time.

Even though Moses had already warned the people not to come near the mountain, God made him return down the mountain once again to deliver the warning to the people.

Yahweh then said a curious thing. He said, “let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” Who are the priests that are referred to here? Since the Levites had not yet been set-aside as priests, this is probably a reference to the heads of the households, or perhaps the first-born who had been consecrated to God. Finally, *Yahweh* instructed Moses to go down to the people a third time. *Yahweh* gave Moses instructions to go warn the Israelites a second time regarding the sacredness of the mountain. He also instructed him to bring Aaron with him the next time he came up the mountain.

So What?

Holy is the LORD

The thing which is most obvious throughout this chapter is God’s holiness and His majesty. Both the Hebrew word *qadash* and the Greek word *hagios*, which are translated “holy” or “sanctify,” carry the notion of being set-apart for divine use. God is completely set-apart from sin and is so holy that any sin in His presence must immediately be judged. Furthermore, the Apostle John tells us that no man (not even Moses) has seen God:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:17-18)

That is to say, no one has seen God in His natural shekinah glory, for God’s holiness would destroy any who would come near. A small part of this glory was displayed for three of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration when Christ was transfigured before them. This glory emanates from God’s holiness.

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (Matthew 17:1-2)

When we begin to get a grasp of the holiness of God, we simultaneously begin to recognize our own lack of holiness. That is to say, as we see His holiness we recognize our own sinfulness. God is incapable of sin because He is complete holiness. We, on the other hand, have a sin nature and we cannot keep from sinning. Even the Apostle Paul, who wanted to be sinless, lamented over this problem:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
(Romans 7:15)

Those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have had our sins paid for and we have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. That is, God has granted to us the righteousness of Christ in place of our own unrighteousness. Because of this, God can look upon us as being without sin. One of the great failures of the Christian Church today, however, is a lack of understanding of God's holiness. Because we take for granted our imputed righteousness, we assume that God is like us. We know that we can boldly approach God's throne through prayer:

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

We can have a close personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. We are declared His children and even have the privilege of calling Him Abba or "papa."

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (Romans 8:15-16)

But we are still sinful people in the presence of a Holy God. We need to revere God for His holiness and majesty and for His power and might. We do so by humbling ourselves before Him.

Approaching God

Additionally, we see that no one can approach God of his or her own accord. We must be called by God in order to approach Him. For even Paul said:

no one understands; no one seeks for God. (Romans 3:11)

who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, (2Timothy 1:9)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are *the* called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Moses was called by God to climb the mountain and to approach the glory of Almighty God. The Israelites were called to hear God speak to Moses. All who are saved today are called by God. We do not approach God because we want to. We approach God because He wants us to.

Our Source of Blessing

And remember we are not saved by works! Rather, our works are the evidence of our salvation. But that's not all! Just as God told the Israelites that they would be blessed *IF* they kept the words of His covenant, so we will be blessed by our obedience to Him. Am I trying to say that if we want material blessings from God, all we have to do is be obedient to Him? That sounds a lot like the "Health and Welfare Gospel" that many false teachers proclaim.

No, that's not it at all. Let's look at the difference between the rewards promised to the Israelites versus the rewards promised to the church. The Israelites were looking for material blessings, while they were waiting for an earthly kingdom. We, on the other hand, are looking for spiritual blessings, while we are waiting for a heavenly kingdom. Our rewards will not be health and wealth on this earth. Our rewards will be crowns which we will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The rewards for the Israelites are temporal. Ours are eternal! Are you working for eternal rewards right now? Are you laying up treasures in heaven? Think about that!

Let's pray.