

**Weekend of May 11/12, 2013**  
***Called to Holiness***

**Passage Outline:**

1. Who Should We Be? - Exodus 19:1-6
2. How Should We Prepare? - Exodus 19:10-14
3. What Should We Expect? - Exodus 19:16-19

**What's Our Study About?**

It's about our responsibility to be holy as God's covenant people.

**How Can Our Study Impact Your Life?**

It can lead you to value holiness in your daily life, and by God's power strive to attain it.

**1. Who Should We Be? - Exodus 19:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai. <sup>2</sup> After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

The nation of Israel had just been freed from the Egyptians slavery. After a long march through the Sinai, the people prepared to meet Yahweh at the holy mountain. They were going to learn what a means to become a holy nation—consecrated unto Yahweh.

**Read the articles “God’s Self-Revelation at Sinai,” “Rephidim and the Plain of Encampment,” “The Geographical Challenges of the Sinai,” and “God’s Revelation in the Sinaitic Covenant” contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.**

Israel was brought to Sinai in the fulfillment of a promise made to Moses by Yahweh (Ex. 3:12). The trip from the Red Sea to Sinai had been an arduous one at best. Lack of water made it difficult on not only the livestock but also the people as well. While encamped at Sinai the people most likely obtained water at the foot of the mountain.

Once the people had settled in, Moses went up the mountain of God in order to hear from God. The picture painted by Moses is that Yahweh is as eager to see his children coming to Mount Sinai as the father was at the home-coming of a child.

In verses 4-6 Yahweh spells out Israel's call to holiness by which He and His people were to live. This section is a summary of the complete account which would be given in the rest of Exodus and parts of Leviticus. God began this portion by helping the Israelites remember His saving acts. As a means of reviewing His history with the Hebrew people Yahweh enumerated what had happened since the recent deliverance from Egypt.

Three points are pivotal here: First, Yahweh reminded the Israelites of what He did to the Egyptians and Israel's powerful rescue at the Red Sea. Second, He noted that He carried you on eagles' wings. The idea of

being carried ... on eagles' wings looks back to God's supernatural provision in the wilderness. Third, we see how the people had been brought all this way by the grace of God. God noted that He had brought Israel to Himself, in other words being brought into the spiritual presence of Yahweh at Sinai.

In verse 5, note the "if ... then" form of the statement which sets up the stipulations for behavior of those involved in the covenant process. The Israelites were solemnly urged to listen to God intently and carefully keep His covenant. If the nation kept the commandments and spirit of the covenant, then out of all the peoples Israel would become Yahweh's treasured possession. Peter made clear that this was not just specific instruction to the Israelites in the wilderness, but applies to Christians as well (1 Peter 2:9-10).

There are two theological points that need to be made here: First, while God made all the peoples of the world, yet He chooses the least of all the nations of the world to be His special possession. This fact reveals quite a bit about Yahweh and His relationship with Israel. We can't help but think back to Genesis where God promised Abraham that He would make Abraham into a great nation more numerous than the stars of the heavens (15:5). Second, we see a strong notion of monotheism. God is not only the God of the entire world; He holds all people accountable before Him.

The next phrase, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation, is foundational to the character and function of the nation itself. To unpack this verse we need to examine three points: First, if the nation were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, that would mean they are to become a personal visual to a watching world.

**Please read the article "The Jewish Priesthood" contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.**

Second, within Israelite society the priest was the model for how the nation was to conduct itself. But just as the priest was to be set apart for his devotion to God so also was the nation Israel to be consecrated to God (Ps. 114:1-2). Striving to live lives of holiness was not limited to the priests in Israel but also a characteristic of the people of the nation.

Third, as a light to the rest of the world, Israel would intercede for the Gentiles and thus help bridge the distance between God and man.

These words from Exodus have direct parallel to how you and I live out our lives. As a Pastor of a Church, and specifically this Church, I am to model before you how one is to live before God. My life, conduct and attitudes are to be such that people see in me the Holy God whom I serve. But that kind of life style does not stop with me. As with Israel of old, all members of this congregation are consecrated to God and are to live as a holy nation under God.

## **2. How Should We Prepare? - Exodus 19:10-14**

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes <sup>11</sup> and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. <sup>12</sup> Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death... Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain.'" <sup>14</sup> After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes.

If you had the opportunity to meet the Queen of England or some other royalty, how would you dress for that occasion? Most likely we will never meet Prince William or Princess Kate. But, if we were to meet them, there would certainly be protocols we would have to follow. If we were to meet our senator, representative, or even the President of the United States, there is most certainly a physical decorum that must be met. Verse 10 records the instructions given the people to consecrate themselves before coming into the presence of the Holy

God.

The idea behind consecrating or purifying oneself is the concept of being “singled out for a purpose.” Preparing to meet God would certainly mean reverence but also to make certain that everything was pure and right before coming into God’s presence. The people were to make ready not only by spiritual purification but also were to wash their clothes and cleanse themselves. These acts of preparation were to be combined with a boundary which would set off Mount Sinai, creating a zone that the people could not cross due to the holiness of God—for to do so would result in immediate death.

Once the people had consecrated themselves, on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. The people were to expect something that was unique! They were going to be granted a theophany - a physical manifestation of God upon the earth.

God is a holy and awesome, slow to anger and abounds in love and kindness. In His kindness He did not want the Israelites to inadvertently stumble into the zone or sphere of His holiness and bring destruction upon them. We see many examples in Scripture where the Holiness of God can be a deadly thing to sinful man. God would give an exemption to His people by allowing them to go up the mountain at the appropriate time, but they had to stay within the zone He prescribed until then.

A blast of the shofar or ram’s horn by God from atop Sinai would call forth the people to hear the words of God. The spectacle that was Sinai was to awaken the people to the fact that we approach God with deep reverence and we do so on His terms, not our own.

Coming to God today must also be on His terms. God is holy and we are sinful. Trying to enter His presence without first dealing with that which sets us apart would be disaster. We know full well, we can approach this Holy God only through the Blood of Jesus Christ. He is the only way to this Holy God.

### 3. What Should We Expect? - Exodus 19:16-19

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

How terrible and awesome this theophany of Yahweh as He visited Sinai that third day. Some have argued that the phenomena described in these verses are those of a volcano; however we do not have any compelling reasons to make this case. We have other examples in Scripture, where Yahweh’s appearance upon the earth brought such wild activity. When God appeared to Elijah, we read: **1 Kings 19:11-13** <sup>11</sup> The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face... To Isaiah, God appeared **Isaiah 29:6** <sup>6</sup> the LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire. To Nahum, God appeared **Nahum 1:3** <sup>3</sup> The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

The thunder and lightning, a thick cloud simply served to get the people’s attention and to demonstrate to them that they were not entering into a covenant with a weakling God. Unlike the other gods of the ancient Near East, this God did not need to be coddled, kissed, or paraded around in order to be fearsome. The people were

entering a covenant with an all-powerful God—Yahweh—the living God! His holiness demands our respect and reverence as we encounter His presence.

“Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.” At that point in history Israel was a covenant people! No longer were they a simple Bedouin group wandering through the wilderness to flee from Egypt. No longer were they merely the offspring of Jacob, they now stood as a people to be consecrated unto Yahweh. Now they were a people standing before Holy God pledging to keep laws that would bind them to God and God to them in a covenant relationship.

The text in Exodus 19 gives us a progression of “Because...Therefore.” We sometimes think that “because the people obeyed God, therefore God made them His people.” But that would make the people earning God’s blessings through works-righteousness. But God rescued His people from Egypt, protected them from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea and led them to Mt. Sinai even before He gave them the Ten Commandments. So instead the progression of “Because...Therefore” needs to read, “because God Rescued His people, therefore they will obey God.”

The same progression of “Because...Therefore” exists in the New Testament. It is “because God sent His Son Jesus to die for our sin therefore we want to obey God.” It is our response to this loving God that we obey His commands. We want to give our lives to Jesus in thanksgiving for all He has done for us. Reversing that progression would mean we are trying to earn our way to heaven by being good. This is why Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will obey My commandments.”

## **Biblical Truths**

1. God declared that people who faithfully kept His covenant would be His special possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation.
2. Remember that God’s grace in Jesus Christ does not excuse us from holy obedience; rather in Jesus the stage is set for our obedience. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”
3. Understand that we always must approach God on His terms, not our own.
4. Understand where God puts boundaries, and mark those boundaries in your own life to avoid the unholy and to embrace the holy.
5. Before coming to worship, practice the discipline of confession and repentance, preparing to meet this Holy God.
6. Come to church with the expectation that you will meet the holy God. God’s character has not changed.
7. But remember, we come to Church as our loving response to all God has done for us in Jesus Christ.