

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Israel at Sinai; God's Covenant Offer

Exodus 19:1-25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, Exodus 19 stands at the hinge of the whole Old Testament: here God formally offers Israel the covenant that will shape the rest of their history. The teacher must present this covenant rightly. The Law given at Sinai was God-given, holy, righteous, and good for its time (Romans 7:12), a gracious arrangement framed by redemption, for God reminds Israel of the rescue before He asks for obedience. Yet the New Testament is equally clear that this covenant has been fulfilled in Christ and is not bound on Christians. Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17); the legal demands were nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14-17); and the first covenant has been made obsolete by the better covenant in His blood (Hebrews 8-10). Hold both truths: the Old Covenant was good and from God, and it has now given way to its fulfillment in Christ. Do not bind its ceremonial details on the church, and do not despise it as if it were evil.

Two further threads run through the chapter and should be drawn out. First, Israel's calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (19:6) is taken up by Peter and applied to the church, which is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). What Israel foreshadowed, the church now is in Christ. Second, the terrifying holiness of God at Sinai, the boundaries, the fire, the trumpet, the warning that to touch the mountain is to die, teaches the holiness of God and the sinner's need of a mediator. Israel could not approach; they needed Moses to stand between. This aches for the greater Mediator, and Hebrews 12:18-24 gives the heaviest weight of the lesson its fulfillment: we have not come to Sinai's fire and darkness but to Mount Zion and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. Give Q9 the fullest treatment, holding together God's holiness, the goodness of the Old Covenant, its fulfillment in Christ, and our access through our Mediator.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims at hearts that have grown casual about God. Many believers want God's blessings while caring little for God Himself, and many have lost any real sense of His holiness. Exodus 19 confronts both. It reminds us that redemption is for relationship, that God rescued us to bring us to Himself, and it restores a trembling reverence by showing the consuming holiness of the God who loves us. Yet it does not leave us at the foot of a terrifying mountain; it points us to Christ, through whom we are brought near with confidence. Help your students leave treasuring their nearness to God, recovering a holy fear of Him, and resting in Jesus their Mediator, who has done what the Law could never do and brought them all the way home to God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 19:3–6. God reminds Israel how He bore them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself, then offers to make them His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, if they will keep His covenant. What does this reveal about why God redeems a people, and about the gracious purpose behind the covenant He was offering (compare Deuteronomy 7:6–8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene at the great turning point. Three months out of Egypt (19:1), Israel arrives at the very mountain where God met Moses at the bush and promised, you shall serve God on this mountain (3:12). The whole exodus has been moving toward this meeting between the holy God and His redeemed people.

Notice the order, which is everything. Before God asks for a single act of obedience, He recounts grace: you have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself (19:4). The covenant is framed by redemption. Obedience is the response to deliverance already given, not the price of earning it. This same gospel order, grace then obedience, runs through all of Scripture.

Unpack the eagles' wings image. The eagle is fierce and strong yet carries its young tenderly; God both crushed Egypt and bore Israel gently. And the destination of that carrying is stunning: He brought them to myself. The goal of redemption was never merely freedom from Egypt but nearness to God.

Open the offer. If they keep His covenant they will be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (19:5–6). A nation of former slaves is invited to belong to God as no people ever had. Deuteronomy 7:6–8 makes clear this was sheer love and faithfulness to His promise, not because Israel was great. Teach the class that God redeems a people in order to draw them to Himself and make them His own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant framed by grace: redemption recounted before obedience is asked (Exodus 19:4–5).
- The goal of redemption as nearness to God, brought to myself (Exodus 19:4).
- Israel chosen by God's love and faithfulness, not by their own greatness (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).
- The gracious purpose behind the covenant: to make a redeemed people God's own treasured possession.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God recount His rescue before He asks for obedience?

- What does it mean that God brought Israel to Himself, not just out of Egypt?
- How does this opening shape the way we should understand the covenant He offered?

Question 2

Student Question:

God says the rescue from Egypt was so that He might bring you to myself (19:4). It is easy to want what God gives while caring little for God Himself. Is your relationship with God mostly about His blessings, or about Him, and how would you know the difference?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on the phrase brought you to myself (19:4). The aim of redemption was relationship with God, not merely the gifts He gives. It exposes a subtle idolatry: wanting what God provides while caring little for God Himself.

Help students test their own hearts honestly. We can pray diligently for health, provision, and relief, and rarely long for God Himself. We treat Him as a means to the blessings we actually want. The cross of this is that God offers us Himself as the greatest gift, and we keep reaching past Him for the lesser ones.

Lead toward a deeper desire. The Psalms model a heart that wants God above His gifts: whom have I in heaven but you, and there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you (Psalm 73:25). Invite the class to notice whether their relationship with God is mostly transactional and to ask Him to make them hungry for Him, not merely for what He can do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wanting God's blessings while caring little for God Himself.
- Redemption aimed at relationship, not merely at gifts received (Exodus 19:4).
- The subtle idolatry of treating God as a means to lesser ends.
- Learning to desire God above all He gives (Psalm 73:25).

Discussion Prompts

- Is your relationship with God mostly about His blessings or about Him?
- How could you tell the difference in your own life?
- What would it look like to desire God Himself more than what He gives?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 19:5–6. Israel was offered the calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Peter takes those very words and applies them to the church, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy

nation (1 Peter 2:9–10). How does Israel's calling foreshadow the privilege and purpose of the church under Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question develops the calling of 19:5–6: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. As a kingdom of priests, Israel was to represent God to the nations and the nations to God, a people set apart to mediate His presence and reflect His character to the watching world.

Show how Peter takes this up for the church. In 1 Peter 2:9–10 he lays Sinai's very words over God's people in Christ: 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. What Israel foreshadowed, the church now is. Every Christian shares in this priesthood, with access to God and a calling to declare His praises.

Teach this without anachronism or dispensational error. We do not read New Testament specifics back into Israel's life, nor do we look for a future earthly political Israel; rather, Israel's calling pointed forward and finds its fulfillment in the church, the people of God in Christ. The privilege is staggering: redeemed people made priests to God, and the purpose is clear: to be holy and to proclaim His excellencies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).
- The church as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9–10).
- Israel's calling foreshadowing the privilege and purpose of God's people in Christ.
- The purpose of the priestly calling: holiness and proclaiming God's excellencies.

Discussion Prompts

- What did it mean for Israel to be a kingdom of priests among the nations?
- How does Peter apply this calling to the church?
- What is the purpose behind being made a royal priesthood in Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

When Israel heard God's offer, the whole people answered together, all that the Lord has spoken we will do (19:8). Where have you said an easy yes to God with your lips that your daily life has not actually kept, and what does honest obedience require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on Israel's quick answer: all the people answered together and said, all that the Lord has spoken we will do (19:8). The yes was sincere in the moment, yet the rest of Exodus and Numbers shows how far their daily lives fell short of it.

Help students see themselves in this. We say easy yeses to God in worship, in resolutions, in moments of conviction, and then live as though we had never spoken. The gap between our professed commitment and our practiced obedience is one of the most honest things to face.

Press toward sincere, costly obedience. The point is not to make people afraid to commit, but to make their commitments real. Jesus warned about those who say Lord, Lord, but do not do what He says (Luke 6:46). Invite the class to name one easy yes that their lives have not kept, and to consider what honest obedience would actually require this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel's quick verbal commitment, all that the Lord has spoken we will do (Exodus 19:8).
- The gap between professed commitment and practiced obedience.
- The danger of saying Lord, Lord, without doing His will (Luke 6:46).
- Moving from easy words to honest, costly obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you said an easy yes to God that your life has not kept?
- Why is the gap between profession and practice so common in us?
- What would honest obedience require of you this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 19:10–15. God commands Israel to consecrate themselves, wash their garments, and be ready, because on the third day the Lord will come down on the mountain. What does this careful preparation teach us about the holiness of God and what it means to draw near to Him (compare Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15–16)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move into the preparation for meeting God. He commands Israel to consecrate themselves, to wash their garments, and to be ready by the third day (19:10–11, 14–15). Nothing about approaching God is casual. The washing and consecrating dramatize that one cannot come carelessly into the presence of the Holy One.

Teach the holiness of God behind these commands. God is not merely greater than us; He is holy, set apart in purity and majesty. To draw near to Him requires that His people be set apart too. This is the heartbeat of His call: you shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15–16, citing

Leviticus). Holiness is not optional decoration; without it no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Apply it with care. We do not bind the ceremonial washings of Sinai on Christians; those belonged to the Old Covenant. But the timeless truth stands: the God we approach is holy, and He calls His people to consecration, to lives set apart for Him. The outward washing pointed to the inward reality of clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3–4) that God still desires in those who would draw near.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Careful consecration required to approach a holy God (Exodus 19:10–11).
- The holiness of God as the reason no one may come to Him carelessly.
- God's abiding call to holiness: be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15–16).
- Drawing timeless truth about consecration without binding ceremonial washings on Christians.

Discussion Prompts

- What do the commands to consecrate and wash teach about the holiness of God?
- What does it mean to draw near to a holy God?
- How does God still call His people to consecration and holiness today?

Question 6

Student Question:

God told the people to be ready by the third day, with no casual or last-minute approach to His presence. How seriously do you prepare your heart to meet God in worship and prayer, and what does your preparation, or lack of it, reveal about how you view Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the lack of preparation in our own approach to God. Israel had two days to ready themselves; God refused to be met casually or last-minute (19:11, 15). Our own habits of worship and prayer often show how lightly we take coming before Him.

Help students examine their hearts honestly. Do we stumble into worship distracted and unprepared, or do we ready our hearts to meet the living God? Do we rush into prayer with no reverence, treating the Holy One as an afterthought? Our preparation, or lack of it, quietly reveals how high or low our view of God really is.

Encourage concrete change. This is not about ritual for its own sake but about the heart's posture. Suggest practical ways to prepare: quieting the heart before assembly, confessing sin, coming with expectancy and reverence. How we prepare to meet God shapes whether we actually meet Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God refusing to be approached casually or unprepared (Exodus 19:11, 15).
- How our habits of worship and prayer reveal our view of God.
- Preparing the heart to meet the living God rather than stumbling in distracted.
- Reverence and expectancy as the proper posture for approaching God (Ecclesiastes 5:1–2).

Discussion Prompts

- How seriously do you prepare your heart to meet God in worship and prayer?
- What does your preparation, or lack of it, reveal about how you view Him?
- What is one concrete way you could come before God with more reverence this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 19:12–13, 21–24. God sets strict boundaries around the mountain, warning that whoever touches it will die, and even the priests must consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out against them. Why does a holy God place such limits on sinful people's approach, and what does this teach about our deep need for a mediator (compare Hebrews 9:7–8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the boundaries. God commands that limits be set around the mountain, and whoever touches it shall surely be put to death (19:12–13). Even later, when the Lord descends, He warns Moses again that the people must not break through to gaze, and that even the priests must consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out against them (19:21–24).

Teach why a holy God limits sinful people's approach. It is not that God is unwilling to be near; He came down on the mountain precisely to meet them. But His holiness is consuming, and sinful people cannot rush into it and live. The boundaries protect the people and proclaim the truth that access to God is not casual or self-determined; it is on His terms.

Draw out the need for a mediator. Israel could not approach; they needed Moses to go up and come down between them and God. Hebrews 9:7–8 reflects on this same reality in the tabernacle: the way into the holy places was not yet opened while the first covenant stood. Sinai aches for a mediator who can bring sinful people safely near to a holy God, a longing answered fully in Christ. The barrier at the mountain is, in the end, a signpost to our need of Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Strict boundaries set around the holy mountain on pain of death (Exodus 19:12–13, 21–24).
- A holy God's presence as consuming, so that sinners cannot rush in and live.
- Access to God on His terms, not by our own self-determined approach.
- The deep need for a mediator to bring sinful people safely near (Hebrews 9:7–8).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does a holy God place such strict limits on the people's approach?
- What does the barrier at the mountain teach about coming to God on His terms?
- How does this scene point to our need for a mediator?

Question 8

Student Question:

The same God who carried Israel on eagles' wings also wrapped the mountain in fire, smoke, and a trembling trumpet blast. Have you let yourself remember that the God who loves you is also holy and to be feared? How might a recovered reverence for God change the way you live this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question holds together the two truths of Sinai that we are prone to split apart. The same God who bore Israel on eagles' wings (19:4) wrapped the mountain in fire, smoke, and a trembling trumpet blast (19:16–18). His love and His holiness are not in tension; they are both fully true.

Confront the lopsided pictures we carry. Some hold a God so loving He is no longer holy, a comfortable grandfather who overlooks everything. Others hold a God so severe they never feel His tender care. Sinai refuses both distortions: He is the God who carries His people and the God before whom a mountain quakes.

Press toward recovered reverence. A holy fear of God is not opposed to love for Him; it is the soil love grows in. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), and those who walk in the fear of the Lord also walk in His comfort (Acts 9:31). Invite the class to consider how a recovered reverence, taking God's holiness seriously again, would reshape how they speak, worship, and live this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding together the love and the holiness of God (Exodus 19:4, 16–18).
- Correcting lopsided pictures of God as only tender or only severe.
- The fear of the Lord as the soil in which love and wisdom grow (Proverbs 9:10).
- How recovered reverence reshapes daily life and worship.

Discussion Prompts

- Have you let yourself remember that the God who loves you is also holy and to be feared?
- Which lopsided picture of God are you more prone to hold?
- How might a recovered reverence for God change the way you live this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 19:16–25. The mountain blazes with fire, thunder, thick cloud, and a trumpet so loud the people tremble, and Israel cannot approach; only Moses may go up as mediator. This terrifying holiness, and the covenant offered here, were God-given and good for their time, yet now fulfilled in Christ and not bound on Christians (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). How does Sinai display the holiness of God and our need of a mediator, and how does Hebrews 12:18–24 show that fulfillment as it contrasts the mountain of fire with Mount Zion and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, so give it the fullest treatment, holding several truths together. First, the scene itself: on the third morning the mountain blazes with fire, thunder, lightning, thick cloud, smoke as from a furnace, and a trumpet so loud the whole camp trembles, and the mountain quakes greatly (19:16–18). This is the holiness of God made visible. Israel cannot approach; only Moses may go up as mediator (19:20–24). Let the class feel the terror and the majesty of it.

Second, teach the covenant rightly. The covenant offered here, and the Law that follows, were God-given, holy, righteous, and good for their time (Romans 7:12). This is not an evil or merely primitive arrangement; it came from God and was framed by His grace. We must never speak of the Old Covenant with contempt.

Third, teach its fulfillment plainly. This covenant has now been fulfilled in Christ and is not bound on Christians. Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Paul says the record of legal demands against us was set aside, nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14–17). Hebrews declares the first covenant obsolete, replaced by the better covenant established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6–13; 9–10). So we hold both truths: the Old Covenant was good and from God, and it has given way to its fulfillment in Christ. Do not bind its ceremonial details on the church, and do not despise it.

Fourth, show the great contrast in Hebrews 12:18–24, which is the doctrinal heart of this question. The writer says you have not come to a mountain that may be touched, to fire and darkness and gloom and tempest and a trumpet blast and a voice so terrifying the people begged it to stop. That was Sinai. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to innumerable angels in festal gathering, to God the judge of all, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word. Sinai displayed God's holiness and our need of a mediator and kept the people at a distance; Zion brings us near through Christ. The mediator Israel needed at the foot of the mountain is given to us fully in Jesus, who has opened the way into God's presence.

Land the whole block on Christ. Sinai teaches us that God is holy and that sinners need a mediator to come near. Both truths are gloriously answered in Jesus, our great High Priest, through whom we draw near with confidence (Hebrews 4:14–16). The terrifying mountain was never the end of the story; it was pointing us home to God through His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sinai's fire, smoke, and trumpet as the visible holiness of God (Exodus 19:16–18).
- The Old Covenant as God-given, holy, righteous, and good for its time (Romans 7:12).
- That covenant now fulfilled in Christ and not bound on Christians (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10).
- Israel kept at a distance, needing Moses as mediator, pointing to our greater Mediator.
- The contrast of Sinai and Mount Zion: from a mountain of terror to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 12:18–24).
- Drawing near to God with confidence through Christ our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16).
- Neither despising the Old Covenant nor binding its ceremonial details on the church.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the scene at Sinai display both the holiness of God and our need of a mediator?
- In what sense was the Old Covenant good and from God, yet now fulfilled in Christ and not bound on us?
- How does Hebrews 12:18–24 move us from the terror of Sinai to the joy of coming to Jesus?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole chapter, from eagles' wings, to the covenant offer, to the trembling holiness of Sinai. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through it, whether to treasure being brought near to God, to recover a holy reverence for Him, or to rest in Christ your mediator who has brought you all the way to the living God.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole chapter into one personal response. The arc has run from eagles' wings, to the covenant offer of belonging to God, to the trembling holiness of Sinai and the need of a mediator, and each scene presses toward Christ and toward formation.

Help students name something specific rather than a vague resolve. For one it may be treasuring anew that God brought them to Himself; for another, recovering a holy reverence that worship and life have lost; for another, resting with confidence in Christ their Mediator, who has brought them all the way to the living God.

Point them finally to Jesus. Israel stood trembling at the foot of a mountain they could not climb; we have come to Mount Zion and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. Close by inviting students to let Christ form them through this passage, drawing near to God with both reverence and confidence, because the One who is holy has made a way for them through His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Treasuring that God redeems us to bring us to Himself (Exodus 19:4).
- Recovering a holy reverence for God in worship and daily life.
- Resting in Christ our Mediator, who brings us near to God (Hebrews 12:24).
- Moving from knowing the Sinai account to being formed by Christ through it (James 1:22).

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter speaks most directly to where you are right now?
- What is one specific way you will let Jesus form you through this lesson this week?
- How does coming to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, change the way you approach God?