

# The Book of Exodus

## Lesson 13: Israel at Sinai; God's Covenant Offer -- Exodus 19:1-25

Three months out of Egypt, the dust of slavery still on their sandals, Israel comes at last to the foot of a mountain. They have followed the cloud and the fire across a sea and through a desert, and now the journey pauses at Sinai, where everything is about to change. This is not just another campsite. This is the place God has been bringing them to since the burning bush, when He told Moses, you shall serve God on this mountain. The whole exodus has been leading here, to a meeting between a holy God and the people He has redeemed. And before a single law is spoken, God says something that ought to take our breath away.

Listen to how He begins. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Brought you to myself. The rescue was never only about getting out of Egypt; it was about getting to God. He carried them, He says, the way an eagle carries its young, fierce and tender at once. And then comes the offer: if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. A nation of slaves is being invited to belong to God in a way no other people ever had. It is a stunning grace, and Peter will one day take those very words and lay them over the church.

But grace at Sinai comes wrapped in trembling holiness. God tells the people to consecrate themselves, to wash their garments, to be ready, and above all to set boundaries around the mountain, because anyone who touches it will die. On the third morning, the mountain is wrapped in thick cloud, there is thunder and lightning, a trumpet blast so loud the people in the camp tremble, smoke billowing up as from a furnace, and the whole mountain quakes. The God who carried them on eagles' wings is not safe in the way we like to imagine. He is holy, utterly holy, and Israel learns at Sinai that you do not stroll casually into the presence of God. You come consecrated, and you come through a mediator.

And that is where this chapter quietly points us. Israel could not climb the mountain; they needed Moses to go up and come down, to stand between them and the consuming holiness of God. The whole scene aches for a mediator who can bring sinful people safely near to a holy God. The writer of Hebrews looks back at this terrifying mountain and then lifts our eyes: you have not come to a mountain of fire and darkness and trumpet blasts, but to Mount Zion, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. The covenant offered at Sinai was God-given and good for its time, holy and righteous, yet it was always pointing past itself to the One who would do what the law could never do, and bring us all the way to God.

**Group Discussion:** Before God gave a single command, He reminded Israel that He had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself, then offered to make them His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. What does this opening reveal about the

heart of God toward the people He redeems, and how does it shape the way we should understand the covenant He was offering?

**Personal Reflection:** God called Israel to consecrate themselves and be ready to meet Him, because He is holy and not to be approached carelessly. Where in your own life have you grown casual about the holiness of God, and what would it look like this week to come before Him with the reverence and consecration He deserves?

*Read Exodus 19:1-25*

## **Study Questions**

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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)?
6. 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?
7. 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)?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

## **Digging Deeper**

**Reflect on these passages:** 1 Peter 2:9–10, where Peter calls the church a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, applying Sinai's language to God's people in Christ; Hebrews 12:18–24, which contrasts the terrifying mountain of Sinai with Mount Zion and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant; Colossians 2:14–17, where Paul says the legal demands against us were set aside and nailed to the cross; Hebrews 8:6–13, which shows the first covenant fulfilled and made obsolete by the better covenant in Christ; Exodus 24:3–8, where the covenant offered at Sinai is formally ratified with blood, pointing to the blood of the new covenant.

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