

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO REDEEMS

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 19:1-15

To understand more about Mount Sinai and the holiness of God.

Exodus: Part Two

If we were to think about the book of Exodus as being a two-part miniseries, we have just finished *Part One*, and are about to embark on *Part Two*. Chapters 1 through 18 have explored a number of important events in biblical history: the slavery of Israel within the kingdom of Egypt (Ex. 1-2), the covenant name of God (Ex. 3), the call of Moses and Aaron (Ex. 4), the plagues of the LORD on Pharaoh and Egypt (Ex. 7-12), the institution of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12-13), the parting of the Red Sea (Ex. 14), and the grumbling of Israel in the wilderness as they are led by God from encampment to encampment (Ex. 15-18). *Part One* really highlights God as the One who *rescues*. *Part Two* highlights God as the One who *redeems*. Chapters 19 through 40 will chronicle another series of equally important historical events: Sinai (Ex. 19), the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), the law (Ex. 20-23), the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 24), the architectural blueprint of the sacred tabernacle which contains the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25-31), the false worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32), the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 35-39), and the outright rebellion of Israel in the wilderness which creates real damage to the relationship between Israel and God (Ex. 40:35). Having redeemed His people, protected them, and provided for them, the LORD will now lead them to “the mountain” (Ex. 19:2), where the beginnings of a covenant will unfold.

Read the Text:

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. 2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3 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: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 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; 6 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.” 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. 9 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, 10 the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments 11 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. 12 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. 13 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.” 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” (Exodus 19:1-15, ESV)

Study the Text:

Sinai, Pt. 1

Chapter 19 begins with the Israelites entering “the wilderness of “Sinai” (Ex. 19:1). Verse 2 recalls their journey through “Rephidim,” the same place where “Amalek came and fought with Israel (Ex. 17:8). After journeying for some months, they arrived and “encamped before the mountain” (Ex. 19:2). Below is a breakdown of some of the keywords and phrases in this passage.

THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD

Verse 2 indicates that the people of God encamped in the wilderness of “Sinai.” This is only the second time the name “Sinai” has been given in the book of Exodus, the first occurring in Exodus 16:1 as a place marker in relation to “the wilderness of Sin.” This time, however, it is the central focus, and will become a prominent place in the second half of Exodus. While the word “Sinai” was only used one time in chapters 1 through 18, it will be used a total of twelve times in chapters 19 through 40. Verse 2 also indicates that Israel “encamped before the mountain,” although the name of the mountain is not given. Given that they are in the wilderness of Sinai, however, it is reasonable to assume this is Mount Sinai, and that is a correct assumption. However, the ambiguity of the term “mountain” is not intended to be ambiguous at all, as it’s a term that has already been repeatedly used in the book of Exodus in conjunction with Mount Horeb. Moses connects Horeb and Sinai together by the singular term “mountain” or “mountain of God.” Sinai and Horeb are the same.

This makes sense in light of Exodus chapter 3. In that chapter, when God first reveals Himself to Moses in the burning bush, Moses is hesitant to follow, saying in verse 11: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” God then answers: “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, ***you shall serve God on this mountain***” (Ex. 3:12). The mountain referenced is the mountain on which Moses and God are speaking: Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1). While on Mount Horeb, God tells Moses that he will return to this mountain and serve Him. Now, in chapter 19, having returned to “the mountain,” Moses is about to go before the Lord to receive the Ten Commandments and the law.

COVENANTAL LANGUAGE

Notice that while the people of Israel “encamped before the mountain,” Moses “went up to God” (Ex. 19:2-3). It is there, on the mountain, that the LORD tells Moses to prepare Israel for the coming covenant into which they will enter with God. Further, the LORD reveals the covenant blessings of obedience in verses 5 and 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.” God will treasure the Israelites over and above all of the people of the earth. It’s interesting that God is not solely in possession of Israel, but “all the earth.” However, it is to the earth that Israel will serve as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” set apart for the purposes of calling people to repentance, into covenant with the LORD, and to prepare the way for the Messiah (Gen. 49:10; Jer. 23:5). Moses then came and reported to Israel “all these words that the LORD had commanded him,” and “all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do’ (Ex. 19:7-8). Moses then “reported the words of the people to the LORD” (Ex. 19:8).

This passage highlights two important details. One, Moses is the intermediary between God and man in this covenant. The people do not approach God of their own accord, but relay to Moses what they want to communicate so that He can relay the message to God, and vice versa. Moses acts as the bridge between the LORD and Israel. Moreover, the language being used in this passage is distinctly covenantal. This kind of

covenant language appears again more formally in chapter 24, when the “Book of the Covenant” is opened and read (Ex. 24:7). This is required to follow the LORD. When an individual decides to follow Jesus, they are in effect saying: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” It was true then, and it is still true today.

PREPARING FOR THE ENCOUNTER

To go before the LORD is no small act. Verses 9 through 15 should challenge our view of God and His holiness to some degree. Though we live in the covenant of grace and are not merely followers of God but children of adoption (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5), we would do well to take note of how serious the holiness of God is. Before coming to the mountain of God, the people are told to consecrate themselves and wash their garments (Ex. 19:10), to be careful not to touch the mountain lest they die (Ex. 19:12-13), and to not engage in any sexual activity. This is not to say that sexual activity makes someone “unholy” or “unclean.” Rather, these restrictions highlight the importance of keeping a singular focus in preparation for such a monumental encounter. Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart summarizes this well: “Does this verse, when coupled with verse 15, imply that getting dirty is evil or that having sex is evil? Not at all. Rather, it asserts that there are special occasions of prayerful preparation and worshipful activity that call for avoidance of the usual, non-sinful personal indulgences and demand special, focused, self-denying attention to God.”¹ Encountering God is a terrifying and wonderful thing. To come into His presence should never be taken flippantly.

What About Now?

I think, perhaps, the most significant takeaway in this passage is the holiness of God. God is holy, and He demands us to be holy as well (1 Pet. 1:16). He not only demands it, but He transforms us by renewing our minds (Rom. 12:2) and makes us a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). However, because we live in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we sometimes forget to approach the LORD in worship with reverence. The modern Christian posture towards worship is very “me-centered.” We are often more concerned with styles of worship and song selections than offering our praises to the LORD of hosts. We must be careful to never make worship or ministry about us; it’s always about “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible” (1 Tim. 1:17).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 19:1-2. When did Israel come into the wilderness of Sinai? From where did they set out? Where did they encamp in the wilderness of Sinai?

2. Read Exodus 19:3. To where did Moses go? What did the LORD say to Moses?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 19:4-6. In your own words, summarize what the LORD said to Moses.

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 426.

2. Read Exodus 19:7-8. Who did Moses call together? What did he say to them? How did the people respond? What kind of language is this indicative of? (Hint: See above notes)
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Day Three

1. Read Exodus 19:9a. What did the LORD tell Moses He was going to do? What was the purpose of this?
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2. Read Exodus 19:9b-11. Did Moses convey the words of the people back to the LORD? What did the LORD say in response to this? What were the people to do in order to prepare for their encounter?
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 19:12-13. What were the people not to do? What would happen if they disobeyed?
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2. Read Exodus 19:14-15. Where did Moses go next? What did he say to the people? What did they do in response to message from the LORD?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 45 Discussion: Refocus Your Worship

So much of Exodus 19:1-15 conveys the holiness of God and the seriousness with which we should take Him. That isn't to say that we aren't "friends of God" (Ja. 2:23; Jn. 15:15; Ja. 4:4). We have a unique relationship with God in light of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ than the Israelites had through Moses. However, this does not negate the holiness of God and the command to "be holy" or "set apart" as He is holy. Talk as a group about how the holiness of God ought to motivate your worship of Him.

1. Icebreaker: What does "holy" mean? What do most people assume it means?
2. How does the holiness of God change the importance of song selections and worship style?
3. Evaluate your worship habits. Are they more "me-centered" or "God-centered?" How so?
4. Does the theology of worship music or the style of worship music matter more to you?
5. Can you worship to songs you aren't familiar with? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. Israel comes out of Egypt, through Rephidim, and into the wilderness of Sinai.
2. God tells Moses to tell the people to consecrate themselves in preparation of an encounter with Him.