

## Exodus 19

- Tonight we study chapter 19 and an introduction to the giving of the Law, which begins in chapter 20
  - Technically, we've been in the third part of the book for the past three chapters
    - The third part chronicles the giving of the Law to Israel
    - We count it from chapter 16 and not chapter 20 because God has already begun to instruct Israel
    - He's already begun to demand their obedience to His commands and statutes
  - But those early mentions of statutes and regulations were simply the warm up for the main act, when Moses receives the entire Law of God
    - That main event begins in chapter 20
      - The giving of the Law is more properly understood as the giving of a covenant, which obligates Israel to keep the Law
      - Before we get there, we study the nation's arrival at the mountain
    - So the nation's arrival at the mountain includes preparations for entering into a covenant with the Lord
    - And those preparations include rules and regulations for how the nation is to regard the mountain itself

**Ex. 19:1** In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

**Ex. 19:2** When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.

- As Moses tells us, it's been three months since the nation left Egypt
  - Once again the date of their arrival is precise in a way that reminds us that God is guiding their every step

- Exactly three months after the nation exited Egypt, they arrive at the mountain in Midian, sometime in May or June
- They had been camped in Rephidim, which we know is a part of the mountain range of Horeb and near Sinai
  - But now they move directly to the base of the mountain Sinai
- We've seen the names Horeb and Sinai used interchangeably throughout the story
  - To be more specific, Horeb refers to the mountain range in Midian
  - The name Sinai is the name of the mountain peak in the Horeb range
  - Like Pikes Peak is a mountain in the Rocky Mountain Range
    - Israel has been moving alongside the Horeb range almost since they came up out of the Red Sea
    - But now they have reach the base of Sinai
  - And here the nation comes to a rest

**[Ex. 19:3](#) Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:**

**[Ex. 19:4](#) 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.**

**[Ex. 19:5](#) 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;**

**[Ex. 19:6](#) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."**

- As the nation camps, Moses receives his first instructions from God
  - Moses we're told goes "up to God" but God called to Moses "from the mountain"
    - Moses walked some distance away from the people to approach the glory of God
    - But he didn't climb the mountain, not at this point

- Then the Lord begins to speak to Moses concerning what He was going to deliver to the people
  - In vs. 3-6 we find the heart and purpose of Law
    - Some has called these verses the most theologically significant text in all Exodus
    - It has been called a linchpin between the covenant to Abraham and the covenant to all Israel
  - And we learn several important points about the Law
- First, the law was given to the house of Jacob and the sons of Israel
  - Obviously, the house of Jacob and the sons of Israel are one and the same
    - This covenant and the law it contains is an agreement between the Lord and the people of Israel
    - The terms of this agreement are only binding to that group of people
    - This is a common misperception among Christians
      - Especially if we've been mis-taught that the Law is a binding set of rules upon believers
      - The reality is very different
  - Only the Jewish people are bound by the terms of the Law given through Moses
    - Gentiles are not party to this covenant
    - Paul teaches us in Romans 2:14 that Gentiles "do not have the law"
    - And again in Rom 2:17 Paul identifies the Jew as the one who has the Law
      - Nevertheless, all men, both those with the law and those without the law, will be judged by the Law of God

**[Rom. 2:12](#) For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;**

- Through this covenant, God gave Israel a preview of the standard that all men face at their judgment day
      - And it bound them to following it in this life or else face certain penalties
      - But the covenant did not establish God's right to judge Israel
    - On the contrary, all men were already under the penalty of God's Law even before He revealed to Israel
      - Though Gentiles are not parties to this covenant, they are still judged according to the Law
  - But once we come to faith in Messiah, whether Jew or Gentile, we are no longer under the penalty of the Law
    - Jesus take our place in that judgment, and He fulfilled the Law's requirements perfectly
    - So at our judgment, we are found vindicated because Christ's perfect life is credited to us through faith
    - For those who have not received that propitiation before they die will stand for judgment on the basis of their own works
      - And they will not survive that judgment
- Secondly, God enacted this covenant having delivered Israel out of Egypt
  - This statement is a direct reference to the covenant to Abraham
    - Remember I said that these verses are a linchpin between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai covenant
    - By linchpin, we mean that the covenant of Abraham foretold certain events in the lives of Abraham's descendants
      - Specifically, the Lord told Abraham that his descendants would be numerous
      - But that they would wander and be enslaved for 400 years
      - And then they would be delivered out of Egypt
    - At this moment, the Lord has now done as He promised

- So He first reminds the people that He is trustworthy and covenant-keeping
- This gives rise to what comes next in Israel's relationship with the Lord
  - And the answer is found in the Sinai covenant
  - This covenant will begin a new dispensation in God's plan of redemption
    - Rather than work through a patriarch and his family, now the Lord commits Himself to a people and nation
    - The covenant He is establishing in chapters 20 and beyond is the next chapter in His plan to bring the Seed, Christ
- So these verses are the linchpin to connect God's fulfillment of one covenant and the inauguration of a new covenant
  - But this transition between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant is not a matter of succession but rather of elaboration
  - God is not signaling that the Abrahamic Covenant is coming to an end and a new covenant is taking its place
    - On the contrary, the Abrahamic Covenant continues on perpetually
    - While the Mosaic covenant will merely come along side for a time

**[Gal. 3:17](#)** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

**[Gal. 3:18](#)** For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

**[Gal. 3:19](#)** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

- God has good reason for pairing these two covenants together for a time

- Abraham's inheritance - and by extension our share in that inheritance by the New Covenant - did not come by Law but by a promise
  - So the arrival of the Law didn't change or improve upon that earlier promise
  - Instead, the Law came to reveal our sin
- Third, God tells Moses that this covenant is about taking possession of Israel in a unique and special way
  - The Lord says all the earth is His, but He is prepared to designate Israel in a special way
    - Through His covenant, Israel will assume an unique identity
    - They will be set apart from all the other nations of the earth
    - Among all the people of Earth, Israel will forever have a special place
  - This distinction will serve a purposes in the current age and in the next
    - In this age, the nation will be entrusted with the oracles of God
    - It will be the place of the Lord's dwelling on Earth
    - And it will bring the Seed of Messiah into the world
    - In the Kingdom to come, Israel will serve the Lord in His temple and rule over all nations on earth
- Finally, God says that the opportunity to have this special relationship with the Lord is contingent upon Israel keeping the covenant
  - They are obey His voice and keep the covenant
    - This is a parity covenant, which is different than the suzerainty covenant God established with Abraham
      - The Abrahamic Covenant was a suzerainty covenant between a superior, the Lord, and a lessor, Abraham
      - The Lord set the terms and granted the covenant to Abraham without any agreement on Abraham's part
      - Abraham neither accepted nor refused it

- Nor did it come with any condition or obligations for Abraham
- He did nothing to receive it and he does nothing to keep it, since it was dependent on God's promise alone
- The Sinai Covenant is a parity covenant between two parties
  - The two parties in this case are not equal of course
  - But both must agree to the terms of the covenant
  - And both assume obligations under the covenant
  - Both Israel and the Lord are committing to keep the terms
- I hope it doesn't ruin the ending of our story if I tell you that Israel doesn't succeed at this requirement
  - They often disobey, sometimes merely hours after having been given a command
  - So how does covenant manage to stand?
- In later books of the Law, we get our answer
  - The Lord constructs this covenant in such a way that the agreement will survive Israel's disobedience
  - In fact, the Lord places provisions in the Law for what would come upon the nation when they disobey the terms of the covenant
  - Though Israel violates the agreement, the covenant remains in force through a series of penalties and curses
  - Ultimately, those penalties take the form of the Tribulation judgments
    - As we studied in our Revelation class, this covenant becomes the basis for the Lord justly rejecting Israel at the Lord's first coming
    - In their place, the Lord sent the gospel to the Gentiles

- This covenant, and more specifically the nation's disobedience to the covenant, gave the Lord a just basis for sending the Gospel to Gentiles in place of Jews for a time
  - But after those penalties are enforced, as the covenant requires, the nation of Israel is brought into glory and faithfulness
    - Then as a result of the nation's compliance with the Law, they begin to receive the blessings
    - Notice in v.6 the Lord says that they will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation
      - The reference to kingdom is the first use of the term in the Bible and is a reference to the THE Kingdom where Christ rules
    - This will be a time when the nation serves the Lord as a nation of priests
      - A priest is responsible for mediating between God and men
      - The nation will play this role in the Millennial Kingdom
      - This will also be the time when the nation as a whole becomes holy and without sin, glorified in the Kingdom
- So to summarize, these verses teach:
  - God is making a covenant with the nation of Israel
    - Never with Gentiles
    - And it no longer binds a believer once he has come under the New Covenant
  - Secondly, the covenant bridges the giving of the Abrahamic Covenant with the coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant
    - It does not replace the Abrahamic Covenant or even enhance it
    - Instead, the covenant serves as a contrast, revealing sin rather producing righteousness
  - Thirdly, it establishes a chief nation on earth, Israel

- The nation is a unique possession of the Lord
- And He establishes it for His glory and purposes
- Finally, the covenant comes with terms for Israel
  - It's a parity covenant, so Israel must keep up their end of the agreement
  - Or else they suffer the penalties of the covenant
  - And by their failure to keep the covenant, the Lord creates an opening for Gentiles to be brought into the New Covenant
- That's a lot of theology to open our study tonight, so let's move through the rest of the chapter

[Ex. 19:7](#) So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him.

[Ex. 19:8](#) All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

[Ex. 19:9](#) The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

[Ex. 19:10](#) The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments;

[Ex. 19:11](#) and let them 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.

[Ex. 19:12](#) "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.

[Ex. 19:13](#) 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

[Ex. 19:14](#) So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.

[Ex. 19:15](#) He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

- Moses comes down and announces these terms to the elders of Israel
  - As they hear that what the Lord is granting to Israel, they are understandably excited and eager to receive this blessing
    - So they immediately agree to the terms

- They agree without truly knowing the details of the covenant
- This is a rash decision, since they don't know what they're signing up for
- Notice it says in v.8 that "all" the people answered in agreement
  - But the "all" in this case does not mean every single member of the 2+ million Jews in the encampment
  - There was no such need for every single person to agree
  - Because Moses had instituted Jethro's suggestion to appoint leaders, the nation was represented by their elders
  - If the elders agreed to the covenant, they were binding the entire nation
    - Much in the same way that our elected representatives in the United States can bind all citizens of the nation by their decisions
- This same principle was at work in Jesus' day when the nation of Israel rejected Him and suffered the judgment of AD 70
  - Not every person in Israel personally rejected Jesus
  - But the elders of Israel rejected Him, and they spoke for the nation
- Moses delivers the report to the Lord, thus establishing agreement in the covenant
  - Next the Lord begins to teach Moses and Israel on how they may approach the Lord
    - First, the Lord tells Moses how the nation will experience the Lord on the mountain
      - He will descend on the mountain in a thick cloud
      - Then the people will hear His voice as He speaks with Moses
      - The Lord Himself will not be visible, since the cloud will conceal Him from the Moses and the people
      - But they will hear Him

- The writer of Hebrews says this experience was a terrifying one for the nation gathered at the base of the mountain

[Heb. 12:18](#) For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

[Heb. 12:19](#) and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

[Heb. 12:20](#) For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."

[Heb. 12:21](#) And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

- The Lord wants to make this impression upon the people so that they will believe in Moses forever
  - That's a puzzling statement until we recognize what the Lord means by the people believing in Moses
  - The Lord doesn't mean He wants people to believe in Moses, the man
  - He means He wants all Israel and all people forever to believe in the word Moses delivered, that is the word of God delivered through Moses
    - In this case, we're talking about the Law and the rest of the Torah
    - Moses' writings were to last forever, since God's word will never pass away
- In preparation for the Lord's descent to the mountain in the cloud in three days, He tells the nation they must perform a ritual cleansing
  - The people must wash their clothes and remain consecrated for the arrival of the Lord
    - Consecration means to be holy and set apart from sin
    - Obviously, the nation could not separate themselves from sin
      - The people were sinful by nature and nothing short of the resurrection was going to correct for that issue
      - So holiness is to be understood in a lessor form
    - The people were to perform a ritual consecration

- Ritual cleansing or consecration means performing symbolic actions that picture spiritual cleansing
- Like any picture, the ritual cleansing can't substitute for the greater reality
- It merely provides a substitute that serves as a reminder of the need for the reality in its greater form
- In this case, they were to wash themselves and refrain from sexual activity to avoid bodily fluids
  - This greater reality pictured here is the spiritual cleansing that comes only from faith in the Messiah and His blood which cleanses us from all unrighteousness
  - And washing the body and clothing pictures the greater cleansing we receive by faith
- But the ritual doesn't take the place of the real thing
  - Even if the ritual was followed perfectly, the people were still sinful
    - Human works simply can't erase sin
    - We can see this clearly in v.12
      - Even after the nation had followed the Lord's commands regarding the ritual cleansing, they would still be subject to death if they so much as touched the mountain
      - The mountain was to be a temporary dwelling place for the Holy God
      - And if our sinfulness comes into contact with the just and holy God, death will immediately result
  - This is why the Lord is determined to appear in a dark cloud
    - This was to protect the people from God's wrath and holiness
    - This is the same reason why God gave Adam and Woman advance warning of His approach in the Garden after they sinned
    - He knew that if they came into His presence, they would die, so He gave them time to hide

- And they hid because they instinctively sensed jeopardy at the Lord's approach
  - So in v.13 the Lord states that anyone or any animal that even touches the mountain or crosses the border of the mountain will die
    - Only when a ram's horn is blown may they approach the mountain
      - The blowing of the horn is the sign that the Lord has arrived to meet His people
      - This feature also forms a picture on it's own
        - The Lord will use a horn to announce His arrival for His Church at the onset of the Rapture
- These setting offers us a useful understanding of how man approaches God
  - Since the Garden, men have tried to define their own path to finding God
    - The very existence of many religions is evidence that men love to design their own path to God
    - But God can only be approached according to His rules
      - The Lord defines who and how and when we will come near to Him
    - It must be this way, because man have no capacity to reach God much less survive the encounter
  - The reason the unbelieving world continues to delude itself into thinking it can discover it's own way to God is two fold
    - First, they create a god that is far less than the True God
      - He is less holy, less knowing, less just and less powerful
      - Only by defining god in lessor terms can we feel comfortable with our discovery
    - Secondly, they imagine themselves as without reason to fear God
      - They assume themselves to be far less sinful, far less in debt and under far less of a penalty than they really are

- If they could only appreciate how much wrath they have stored up for themselves, they would hope to never see God
- The truth is that God is perfect, holy, and just and He will judge all sin completely
  - Nevertheless, in His love and mercy, He has made a way available for us to approach Him
  - He calls us, just as He called the nation of Israel
    - We don't find Him
    - He finds us
  - And then He sets the terms for our encounter
    - He defines the standard of holiness - His perfection is the standard
    - He provides the means for canceling our debt - His Son Jesus' death on the cross
    - He set the terms for our reconciliation - our faith in Christ's death on the cross in our place and His resurrection to make possible eternal life
    - He sets the timing for our encounter- upon our death and entrance into His presence
- The Lord drives the entire process, makes all the rules, and accomplishes all the work
  - We receive His grace and praise Him for it
  - But if we think we can rest on our own merits, define our own terms, or decide the timing of our encounter, we will find ourselves exposed for the fool we were

**[Ex. 19:16](#)** So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

**[Ex. 19:17](#)** And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

[Ex. 19:18](#) Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

[Ex. 19:19](#) When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

[Ex. 19:20](#) 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.

[Ex. 19:21](#) Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

[Ex. 19:22](#) "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them."

[Ex. 19:23](#) Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'"

[Ex. 19:24](#) Then the LORD said to him, "Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them."

[Ex. 19:25](#) So Moses went down to the people and told them.

- As the writer of Hebrews explained, the arrival of the Lord on the third day to the top of the mountain brings great terror to the people
  - All the people stood at the base of the mountain and watches the Lord's glory arrive
    - Atop the mountain, the Lord descends in a fire that burns continuously atop the mountain
    - The cloud is produced by the smoke of the burning
    - And from the cloud also comes lightening, with all the sound of thunder when lightening flashes nearby
    - And if that weren't enough, the mountain quaked violently
      - The earthquakes weren't destructive in the sense that people lost their lives
      - But they brought terror to the people nonetheless
    - Furthermore, the trumpet sound grew louder and louder, indicating that the Lord was near
      - Then Moses spoke to the Lord and the Lord answered with a voice like thunder

- The fire and burning and smoke and other signs inducing terror produced a display of God's refining and purifying judgment
  - The scene instilled great fear of the Lord in the people
  - If the approach of the Lord instills this kind of fear into God's own people, including Moses, what kind of fear will the world as a whole experience in future days of judgment?
  - For that matter, what will we individually experience when we face the Lord in our judgment day, especially if we have not lived a life that pleases the Lord?
  - The writer of Hebrews gives us that answer as well

[Heb. 10:26](#) For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,  
[Heb. 10:27](#) but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

- The fear of the Lord is a common term in Scripture, and the writer is explaining its full meaning
  - Too often I've heard it said that the fear of the Lord simply means respect for God
    - There is no biblical basis for such an interpretation
  - The word for fear in Hebrew is yare, which means to be afraid, to become frightened, to be dismayed, and occasionally to show reverence
  - Here's an example of how the word is used, as Jacob prays to God

[Gen. 32:11](#) "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I **fear** him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

- Jacob feared Esau, because he thought he and his family would die
  - That's the meaning of fear, and it's used to describe our attitude toward the Creator

- To the extent that we diminish the true meaning of fearing the Lord, we run the risk of making it easier for ourselves to sin
      - We remove any concerns that God may respond to our provocations
      - We forget how much God hates sin
- And we have good reason to fear the Lord, even as believers
  - Our sin is so great and He is so holy and powerful that fear is the natural and right response when we approach the Lord
    - Making it all the more remarkable and necessary that the Son of God take the form of man in order to live among us, Emmanuel, God with us
    - He took a form that allowed Him to live and eat with men without generating fear or dread among those He visited
    - He lowered Himself for that purpose, and so that He might take our place on the cross
  - Notice in v.21 that after Moses ascended to meet with God in the cloud for the first time on the mountain, the Lord warns Moses not to allow the people to cross past the barriers
    - God knew that in time, the people would lose their fear
    - Should they lose that fear, they might wander up the mountain and die
    - If they break through those barriers, the Lord says He will break out against them
      - There is a play on Hebrew in these statements
      - The Lord uses two Hebrew terms for break out
      - The first use of the Hebrew word means to cross or pass through a barrier, while the second means to destroy or break apart
  - Therefore, the Lord tells us Moses that from this point forward, only Aaron, the priests and he can approach the Lord
    - The holiness of God places a necessary barrier between Himself and His people

- Only the Lord's chosen representatives may approach Him
- These chosen representatives will intercede on behalf of the people
  - First Moses, who pictures Christ, the one who talks with God on behalf of the people
  - Also Aaron, the companion of Moses who speaks for Moses to the people
  - And finally the priests, who have yet to even be named, will have opportunity to serve God in the tabernacle which will be built
- These barriers to direct contact and fellowship with God are made necessary by the grace of God in response to the sin of men
  - Our sin is THE problem driving our relationship with God
  - The Lord is holy and perfect in all ways
    - The word holy means "set apart"
    - The Lord is utterly set apart from sin
      - In the way that light and dark cannot exist at the same moment and in the same place, neither can the Lord be in the presence of sin
      - He is set apart from it as light is from dark
    - Moreover, He is perfect in justice
      - He must be righteous in all things
      - If sin were to enter into His presence, He must bring immediate justice against it
      - And the penalty for sin must be death, absence from the presence of God
  - Following the fall in the Garden, man entered into a state of sin
    - Our spiritual nature was contaminated by sin, leaving us in jeopardy of God's judgment and the death that always follows

- So as grace to men, God has remained outside our presence since the Garden
- Men cannot enter into His presence in a full way
- Men can only enter His presence through a mediator, like Moses
- And if that mediator is another sinful man, like Moses, then he is also in jeopardy for his own sin
  - But God will permit His chosen representative of the people to enter while still concealing Himself sufficiently to protect the person from death in God's presence
    - In the Law, the one who entered the holy of holies did so only after the room is filled with smoke
    - And God has also brought a cloud upon the mountain to obscure Himself from Moses
- What the Lord is teaching Israel is that men approach the Lord only on His terms and through mediation
  - We cannot define our own road to Heaven or to finding God
    - The Lord defines the way
    - The Lord sets the rules
    - The Lord brings penalty if we ignore the rules
  - And we must approach through a mediator who represents us
    - You don't get to pick that person
    - God assigns His representatives
    - In each age, they have taken different forms
      - The patriarchs, later the priesthood of the law
      - Later the prophets
      - Today, God's representatives on earth is the church, the holy priesthood of all believers
- Ultimately, the representative for all men is the Lord Himself
  - He is the High Priest that bridges us to the Father