

You Shall Know I Am: God's Great Call to Commitment

Exodus 19:1-25

2/13/19 Theme: God has made a covenant with His people calling them to obey His Laws and to fear Him so that they can be a treasured possession, kingdom of priests and holy nation. Through His people, they can bless the nations.

Introduction

The **National Urban League** is an organization comprised of minority entrepreneurs providing economic empowerment, educational opportunity for the underserved in America. Their annual conference some 20 years ago took place in Houston. I was totally surprised when I was **selected** to give the **invocation** at this conference. I was overwhelmed by this special privilege. I got to **hang out** with city council men as well as state senators. I thought I was only a little potato, but they chose me. I felt **really significant** to be chosen to pray for such a recognized organization. In Genesis 12, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His Chosen people for a very special task. He probably felt overwhelm also. God, the creator of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords have selected the Israelites to be His people. Wow, what a privilege.

God has established a covenant with Abraham, where God has promised three things: 1) Their **seed** or descendants will be like the stars in the sky as recorded in Genesis 15:5. 2) **God** Promised them **Land** 3) They will **be blessed and will be a blessing to the world**. While they were in Egypt, the Jews multiplied like crazy and they were very fruitful as God fulfilled the first and third promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Since they were so fruitful, it **threatened Pharaoh**. As a result, they were placed into **slavery**. Now God wants to fulfill the 2nd part of the Abrahamic Covenant by bringing them to the Promised Land. Here in our Scripture reading from Exodus 19, God wants to **establish a covenant with Moses and His people**.

We have arrived at a **new section** of Exodus. Exodus 19-24 describes the **giving of the law**. Exodus 19, which we will study today, is the **introduction to this climatic part of the book**. Thanks to the discoveries of ancient Near Eastern texts, we have found many literary compositions of covenants and treaties. The covenant that God made with His people is similar to the **ancient Near Eastern treaties**. As we look at the first two verses of Exodus 19, this is the setting for the covenant. "In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt- on the very day- they came to the Desert of Sinai." In v.2, it says that they camped out in front of the mountain, which is Mt. **Sinai**.

A. The Setting for the Covenant (19:1-2)

Mt Sinai is a very significant place. Let me take you back to where **God called Moses** from the **burning bush** to lead the people out of Egypt. It was located at **Mt. Horeb**, which is another name for Mt. Sinai. **Exodus 3:12**, "And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will **worship God on this mountain**.'" God **predicted** that Moses will deliver His people out of Egypt and bring them back to where He has called Him at Mt. Sinai. Moses' journey has come full circle. Now in Exodus 19, that prophecy in Exodus 3 was fulfilled. They **camped there** in the desert in front of the mountain. The term "**desert**" does **not** always mean a dry wasteland, but it can be interpreted as an uninhabited grazing country.

They **stayed in Mt. Sinai for almost a year**. For the **next 59 chapters**, which include the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, and up to the Book of Numbers chapter 10, they were in Mt. Sinai. God is **preparing** them to enter the Promised Land by **giving them the Law**, which provides them instruction as to how they can have a meaningful relationship with a holy God as well as a meaningful relationship with those that are around them. Since they have **been away** from God's Promised Land for **over 400 years**, it is important for them to **learn how to worship God**. In the following weeks, we will examine the Law more closely.

[From Exodus 1-18, we see God has **redeemed His people**. Now God wants to **claim them as His** own and enter into a **covenant relationship** with them, which is recorded in Exodus 19-24. Here in Exodus 19, God is calling His people to a covenant relationship. Let us read Exod. 19:3-4, “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: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ”]

B. God is Calling His People to a Covenant Relationship (19:3-8)

Here records the first **conversation between God and Moses**. Actually, God has several conversations with Moses, where he went up and down Mt. Sinai several times communicating God’s instruction to His people. God is introducing a covenant that He would ratify with the people of Jacob. God is **calling His people to a covenant relationship**. First God reminds them of how He has delivered His people out of Egypt by using a word picture. He said in verse 4, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on **eagles’ wings** and brought you to myself.”

ILLUSTRATION The mother eagle needs to teach the young eagles to fly. The young ones prefer to stay in their **comfortable secure nest**. But if they do not get out of the nest, they will **not fulfill their purposes in life**. Therefore, the mother eagle forces the young ones out the nest so that they will learn to fly. The mother eagle stay near to the youngsters and flies **under them with her wings spread out** to catch them if they fall.

The Israelites were comfortable in Egypt because they have food, shelter and security. It has become their “nest.” We remember when the Israelites were standing before the **Red Sea** as they saw the Egyptian army coming that they **complained** to Moses wishing that they we back in Egypt. George Morrison, one commentator said, “It took one night to take Israel out of Egypt, but forty years to take Egypt out of Israel.” We will see that the Israelites keep yearning to go back to Egypt, their comfortable “nest.” But that is not their home. God has delivered them out of Egypt with a special purpose that is **much better** for them than to stay in their nest. In order for them to experience it, they must trust God and allow Him to guide and care for them like being carried on eagle’s wings.

APPLICATION: Are we **comfortable** where we are? We are **in the world, but not of the world**. God has a purpose for each one of us. It is when we understand and obey God’s purpose and **calling for our life**, then we will experience all that God has created us for. If we choose to stay in our secured place, we **will miss out** on God’s best for our life. Life is not about us, life is all about God. It is when we serve Him with our **God-given gifts** that we will be most fulfilled. Are you staying in your comfortable nest or are you willing to **step out and fly** and experience great adventures with God?

The Israelites need to see that they have a **new identity as Children of God** instead of citizens of Egypt. That is why God wants to make a **covenant** with His people. This covenant is **conditional**. It requires **obedience**. Not only are the Israelites to remember what God has done, but being redeemed should **motivate them to obey**. God gives three wonderful promises if they obey God. Let us read vv.5-6, “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, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

When the Jews were in Egypt, they were slaves, but God has a **better plan** for them. God shares that His people have **three new identities**, namely, treasured possession, kingdom of priests and holy nation. Going back to the Abrahamic Covenant, God wants to use His people to be a **blessing to the whole world** as recorded in Genesis 12:3. When they

obey the covenant or the Law that will be revealed to them, these three identities **show how** they can **be a blessing to others**. This is the crust of this whole passage.

1. Treasured possession

The whole earth belongs to God. However, the Lord has **chosen** the Israelites to be His **treasured possession**. It means that Israel is a **royal property**. Israel is not chosen because of anything that they have done, but because of God grace. Not that they are better than others, but they were **set apart** by God for His special work. As they **obey God, God will bless them**. It will **create a curiosity** from others to want to know the God of Israel. They are to **be a blessing to the world**, who in turn will recognize the true God and worship Him.

ILLUSTRATION: What is your **treasured possession**? It is something that you cherish. You would not exchange it for anything else. It gives you joy and pleasure. You would do anything to keep it safe and not have it harmed.

APPLICATION: **We are God's treasured possession**. He values us and cherishes us and would guard and protect us. We should be so thankful for being chosen by God. As God's treasure possession, we are to **make Him known and to live for His glory** so that we can be a **blessing to the world**.

[Another new identity is that we are kingdom of priests. What does that mean?]

2. Kingdom of Priests

Priests are God's servants that bring people into God's presence to worship Him. **Aaron and his sons** will have the **privilege to be God's priest**, but it was God's desire for **all** of the Israelites to live as priests. Israelites are to bring people into God's presence to worship Him. They are to **make God known** to the world by being **God's showcase to the Gentiles**. God's people are to **represent God** and to point people to the Lord, our king. The Jews had the responsibility to **make God known to all nations**. Unfortunately, they did not do a very good job. **Instead of influencing** the nations to worship God, the nations have influenced Israel to worship their **idols**.

APPLICATION: One application to be kingdom of priest is to take the good news and bring it to others. Last week, there is a list of **short-term mission trips** that the church is sponsoring. I strongly encourage you to **step out in faith** to consider joining one of them. May you be kingdom priests as you bring people into God's presence.

[Three new identities that the Israelites can be. 1) Treasured possession. 2) Kingdom of priests. 3) The third identity is a holy nation.]

3. Holy Nation

The word "holy" means to **set apart**. They are to be a set apart nation. God says, "You are to be My holy people" in Exod. 22:31. Six times in Leviticus and twice in I Peter, it says, "**Be holy, for I am holy**." Since Israel is God's chosen people, they should **reflect** God's character, one of which is holiness. This does not mean that they are to be **isolated from the other nations**. They should **not be like the rest of the world**. In Romans 12:2, it says that we are **not to conform to the pattern of this world**, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The Jews are to **stand out** from the rest of the nations. They have different values because they are committed to the Lord. Through their **set apart** behavior, it will bring nations to have knowledge of God. Just like Queen of Sheba, who came to see King Solomon. She recognized that it was His God that had favor on him.

APPLICATION: Do our classmates, coworkers, and neighbors know that we are Christians? Do we stand out with positive behaviors? One non-Christian asked one of our church members, "What **percentage** of your small group have **good marriages**?" He replied, "A high percentage has good marriages." The non-Christian said, "Most of my friends do not have good marriages. **What is your secret**?"

APPLICATION: The Apostle Peter **borrow this imagery** from Exodus 19:6 and called the **Church** today “But you are a **chosen people**, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” as it is recorded in **1 Peter 2:9**, Like **Israelites**, who is God’s people in the O.T., the **Church**, who is God’s people in the N.T. is to be set apart for God’s purpose, which is to point people to the Lord. Through our **words and deeds**, we can be a **living advertisement for the Lord**. How the world **gets a glimpse of God** is through the behaviors of His people.

When Moses went back down to the people to let them know what God has said, they quickly responded in v.8 saying, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” Then Moses went back up the mountain for the **2nd conversation with God**. He let God know of the people’s positive answer. God communicates **another message** to Moses to bring to his people. Moses was to inform the people that the **Lord himself will visit** them in the form of a thick cloud at the end of three days. Before He comes, the people are to **consecrate** themselves. God is calling His people to **be sanctified**. Vv. 10-11 say, “And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes 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.”

4. God is Calling His People to be Sanctified (19:9-11,14-15)

Before God came to meet with His people, they were instructed to **be consecrated**, which means to be set apart for special service to God. The word “holy” and “consecrate” comes from the same root work that means “set apart.” The word **holy** speaks to the purpose of setting apart. The word **consecrate** speaks to the means to set apart. **Everyone** is to be consecrated including the priests as recorded in v.22. **Before we can set apart** ourselves for God’s use, we need to put aside certain negative behaviors or sin. We need to **be cleansed before meeting up with God**.

They were instructed to **wash their clothes**. We need to understand that common folks do not have many clothes. The poor normally has two sets of clothes. They do not wash up daily. That is why bathing and changing clothes often marks a **new beginning** or another word- setting apart for God’s use. We not only need to be cleansed **outwardly, but more importantly inwardly**. In 1 John 1:5,6,9, “This the message we have heard from him and declare to you; God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Light and darkness cannot coexist. Too often, we do **not realize how much God hates sin**. If your significant other hates to be notified of last minute event, if you love her, you would make sure that you would not notify her of last minute event. We do **not want** to make that special individual **mad** and upset. If we do what someone hates, then before you know it, the relationship will be strained.

Before meeting God, we also need to be consecrated or sanctified. May we **confess our sins** so that we can restore our relationship with God. Too often, we take sin for granted. God promises to **forgive** us if we truly confess our sins. **True repentance** involves change of behavior. At this time, I like for us to **stand and read our public confession**. Please be seated.

APPLICATION: As an application, I am going to give you two minutes to **confess your sins** right now. I want you to **take your hands covering your face** and bow your head as you confess before the Lord and tell Him how you feel and ask him to forgive you and to turn from your bad behavior.

[God is **calling** his people to a covenant relationship. God is **calling** his people to be **sanctified**. Lastly, God is **calling** his people to **fear** His holy presence.]

5. God is Calling His People to Fear God's Holy Presence (19:12-13,16-25)

From vv. 12-13, the people were **warned to stay at a distance** from the mountain, where God is dwelling. "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.'" They were to **keep their distance** because God is a holy God and the Israelites are **sinful people**.

On the third day, God descended in a great **display of power and majesty**. Let's read v.16, "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**." In v.18, we see more of God's authority, "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." That is a **scary** scene. In verse 21, **God warned** the people not to get close to see the Lord or else they will perish. In v.23, God **warned** them again. It says, "Moses said to the Lord, 'The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'"

The lesson here is that God is **calling His people to fear God's holy presence**. There is a **gap** between God's holiness and Man's sinfulness. We need to have a **clear picture of who we are and who God is**. We are filthy, wicked, selfish, and evil. We need to consecrate ourselves by **confessing** our sin in order for us to be used by God. In addition, we need to **fear** God because He is a **holy God**, who will judge sin. He can **pour his wrath** upon us and we should fear Him. With a **healthy fear of God**, it will keep us from sinning against Him. Too often we only see God is a **God of love**, which He is, but He is also a **just and holy** God that will **judge our sins**. Sin hinders us from being useful for God.

God has made a covenant with His people calling them to obey His Laws and to fear Him so that they can be a treasured possession, kingdom of priests and holy nation. Through His people, they can bless the nations.