

## **“A Kingdom of Priests, A Holy Nation”**

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 19 **Devotional Reading:** Leviticus 19:1-10

### **Exodus 19:1–14 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. <sup>2</sup> After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> 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 descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” <sup>7</sup> So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. <sup>8</sup> The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.” Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. <sup>10</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. <sup>13</sup> They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.’ Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain.” <sup>14</sup> After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes.

### **LESSON AIMS**

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize God’s expectations for Israel as expressed through Moses.
- **Biblical Principle:** To obey God and keep His covenant.
- **Daily Application:** To declare God’s praises as one of His treasured people.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Mediating Peace**

When the nation of Israel defeated its neighbors in the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), hostilities still persisted between the two sides. But something remarkable happened in 1978: two staunch enemies, Israel and Egypt, signed a peace treaty known as the Camp David Accords. Those talks didn’t resolve every issue or change the fact that the nations had fought bitterly. But Egypt formally recognized Israel’s right to exist, and in exchange, Israel returned all captured territory in the Sinai Peninsula.

Like all peace treaties between nations, it took both sides—represented by Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel—to find common ground and shared goals. The peace talks also required a patient mediator—the United States and President Jimmy Carter—to bring them together.

The key role of a mediator is related to the current lesson in three ways. First, Moses played the role of communicator and mediator at Mount Sinai. Second, God communicated a plan through His mediator to form Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Third, those functions took on new meaning at the coming of the ultimate mediator, Christ, who brings lasting peace to all who turn to Him with faith (Romans 5:1).

### **LESSON CONTEXT**

Four hundred thirty years from the time of Joseph, God delivered Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12:40; 18:10). Through miraculous plagues, which showed Egypt’s deities to be powerless (7:8–11:10; 12:29–42), God brought the people out into the wilderness, where He continued to protect and provide for them (Exodus 13–18). In spite of dangers

and trials, the people arrived at their destination: Sinai, the mountain where God had first revealed himself to Moses (Exodus 3). Exodus 19 begins the climactic meeting of God with His redeemed people.

### **Coming to Sinai: Exodus 19:1–2**

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3), He gave him an encouraging promise: “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (3:12). That promise had now been fulfilled. At least eight times, Moses had asked Pharaoh’s permission to lead the people into the wilderness where they could worship Jehovah, and each time, Pharaoh had refused. But now the Israelites were at Mount Sinai through God’s provisions...and would remain camped there for the next eleven months (Numbers 10:11–12). God had redeemed His people (Ex. 1-18) and was now going to claim them as His own and enter into a covenant relationship with them (Ex. 19-24), just as He promised (6:6-7).

### **1. What was the significance of the children of Israel traveling from Egypt to Mount Sinai? (Exodus 19:1-2)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

What insights can you share about experiencing God’s provision during a relocation?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How might those insights differ between voluntary and involuntary relocations?

### **God’s Chosen People: Exodus 19:3–6**

This is the first message carried by Moses—a direct speech of God (v. 3). God is declaring what He has done by choosing the descendants of Jacob and rescuing them from slavery (v. 4). The words here supply the principle for making an agreement with the Lord: He is the God who delivers. The Hebrew people didn’t just escape from *Egypt*; they were led out by the glorious power of God— “flown away” so to speak, as if carried by a majestic eagle. The deliverance from Egypt was unprecedented and a clear indication of the benevolent power of their rescuer-God.

### **2. On what principle was Moses to give the people for making an agreement with the Lord? (Exodus 19:3-4)**

The speech continues with a conditional statement. The keywords of the new covenant were “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant.” Only then will God fulfill the promise of favor, they would then be *my treasured possession ... above all nations*. Israel’s obedience would set them apart from all the world.

God’s claim of ownership of *the whole earth* (v. 5b) justifies His particular election of Jacob’s children (Israel). If God lacked rights to the whole, He would not have the ability to choose. But the creator God breathed into humans the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). He is the redeeming God whose covenant people shall be a blessing to all the earth, in continuation of His promise to Abraham (12:3).

Furthermore, Israel was to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” for God (see v. 6 of today’s lesson). As the priestly order was set apart from the common mass, so the Israelites, compared with other people, were to sustain the same near relation to God; a community of spiritual sovereigns, a holy nation—set apart to preserve the knowledge and worship of God. This is what Moses was to communicate to the people for God.

Ultimately, the *holy* status that the Israelites received was not intended just for their personal benefit but eventually for the benefit of the world as *a kingdom of priests*. The description a royal priesthood, a holy nation is valid for God’s people of the new covenant in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9-11). Unlike the Sinai covenant, which would be repeatedly broken, the redemptive work of Jesus offers His followers a “new covenant” (see Jeremiah 31:31–34).

### **3. What condition was placed upon this new covenant (agreement) with God? (Exodus 19:5-6)**

## What Do You Think?

How would you explain to someone what being part of the new covenant priesthood means?

## Digging Deeper

How would your explanation to a person agnostic to faith differ from your explanation to a new Christian?

### God Shall Come: Exodus 19:7–14

Moses was a faithful servant because he relayed *all* that God had told him. The people quickly affirmed, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” Moses again climbed the mountain to relate to God the people’s acceptance of the compact.

#### 4. How did the people respond to what Moses relayed from God? (Exodus 19:7-8)

## What Do You Think?

What is one thing you can improve on to ensure that your actions match the Word that God has called you to proclaim?

## Digging Deeper

What are some indicators that a situation calls for silence rather than speaking?

Once Moses had returned to speak with God, he was informed about a pending divine appearance. The technical name for this is *theophany*, which means an appearance or visible manifestation of God. Earlier in Exodus, God had used a cloud to reveal His presence and to give a sign of His protection (Exodus 13:21). In the New Testament, the Father speaks from a cloud at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:5–6; Mark 9:7–8; Luke 9:34–35). Later, Jesus ascends from a mountaintop and is taken up in a cloud, which shows God’s heavenly presence (Acts 1:9). Here, the function of God’s appearance in *a dense* (thick) *cloud* is so that *the people will hear* when God speaks to Moses. This will show Moses’ authority as God’s messenger. Now and into the future (*always*), God wants the people to *trust in* Moses.

#### 5. What did God say He would do to show Moses’ authority as His messenger? (Exodus 19:9)

Verse 10 begins direct instructions from God that Moses was to convey to the Israelites. They must be correctly prepared to receive God’s presence. These instructions are for the sanctification, or setting apart, of the people prior to the giving of the covenant.

The command to *consecrate* (sanctify) is of the same root as “holy” in 19:6. The verb means “to transform someone into the state of holiness” or “to dedicate.” Moses will direct the people to avoid ceremonially unclean things, while at the same time they will wash and prepare themselves in body and spirit. The washing of clothing is associated with holiness in dozens of places in the Old Testament, and often marked a new beginning (see examples Genesis 35:2; Lev. 14:8-9). Two days will be the length of this preparation.

#### 6. How was Moses instructed to prepare the people for God’s presence? (Exodus 19:10)

## What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can better reflect your consecrated status to the world?

## Digging Deeper

What guardrails are available to keep that reflecting from becoming legalistic or “holier than thou”?

The people were to “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.” However, staying away from Mount Sinai was a matter of life or death, for the presence of God sanctified the mountain. So, Moses put up barriers to keep the people at a distance.

In a dramatic way, God was teaching the people the distance between a holy God and sinful men and women, as well as the danger of presumptuously rushing into the presence of the Lord. God’s holiness was not something to haphazardly approach. Here, the warning is heightened: even a single *hand*—perhaps laid upon the mountain in curiosity—or the mindless trampling of an animal would be enough to warrant death through stoning or arrows. Both forms of execution would allow others to remain at a distance from the one who had violated God’s space. The people were not to permit anything defiling to remain in their midst as they prepared to meet God.

A horn’s long blast was to be the signal to approach the mountain. By implication, the Israelites were being treated as the “nation of priests” that God had named them in Exodus 19:6, since proper clothing and preparation would come to be required of priests (example: Exodus 40:12–16).

### 7. What precautions were needed regarding approaching the mountain and entering God’s presence? (Exodus 19:11-14)

## CONCLUSION

### Holy God, Holy People

In its context, Exodus 19 shows the responsibilities that fall upon people whom God chooses and redeems. They are required to prepare themselves for God’s presence. In the new covenant context, it is not church buildings that house God’s presence; rather, it is the bodies of Christians themselves, those who become a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Followers of Jesus also serve as mediators who introduce others to the ultimate mediator, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

By making Israel His “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), God was laying the groundwork to bless the world through the children of Jacob. Israel would break the Sinai covenant and fall victim to sin, but God had a plan to make a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–32; compare Matthew 26:28). For Christians, the promise that “all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) has come true, in and through Jesus. He is the seed of Abraham, the inheritor of God’s promise (Galatians 3:16). Christ alone, because He is God’s Son, is fit to be *king* of God’s kingdom; the permanent *high priest* to a group of priests, He is the perfect *mediator* between God and humans.

## PRAYER

Dear God, our heavenly Father, we may sometimes feel inadequate as representatives of Your holiness. May we be emboldened and guided by Your Word and Holy Spirit to be found as Your faithful servants and a royal priesthood. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

The holy God is the redeeming God.

## ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week’s lesson is “**A Space for God**” and summarizes God’s instructions for offerings and construction of the Tabernacle. Study Exodus 25:1-9; 26:1, 31–37.