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**C0628 – August 2, 2006 – Ex 19:1-25 – The Purpose & Preparation Of The  
Mosaic Covenant**

**THE COVENANT AT MT SINAI (19:1-24:18)**

The key idea of Exod 19 is the holiness of God and the necessity of approaching Him on His terms. In our relativistic and tolerant culture the reigning theory is that man is free to approach God however he wants as long as he is sincere and on this basis God will accept him. The problem with this lie is that God is holy and thus His character, by necessity, limits how sinful humans can approach Him. Graciously, He has told us how we can approach Him with full acceptance. The consequence for not following His gracious way is not to be taken lightly, because it is “certain death”.

**Arrival at Mt Sinai (19:1-2)**

**Exodus 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.**

**<sup>2</sup> 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.**

The **third month**... in the Hebrew means the ‘third new moon’ (*chodesh*). What this indicates is that we are in the seventh week since the Exodus, probably on the 48<sup>th</sup> day (cf Sailhammer, p 281 and Cassuto, p 224). **on that very day**, the day of the ‘third new moon’ **they came into the wilderness of Sinai** having previously been at **Rephidim. the wilderness of Sinai** is a desert wasteland as signified by the name Mt Horeb which means ‘waste’. This **wilderness** is where Mt Sinai is located. Scholars have struggled over the exact location of Mt Sinai. To date there are actually 14 different suggestions. The traditional site is Jebel Musa near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula although this tradition is late (~350AD). Today there is a monastery located there called St Catherine’s where a very important manuscript called Sinaiticus was discovered by

Tischendorff in the 1850's. Another suggestion is that it is Jebel al Lawz in the Arabian Peninsula. Whatever mountain this is verse 2 says they actually came and **camped in front of the mountain**. So, the plain in front of the mountain had to be large enough to accommodate ~2 million people. The mountain was the same one where Moses saw the burning bush. God prophesied that Moses would return to this mountain after the Exodus and now this prophecy is being fulfilled (cf Exod 3:12 with 19:2). There are far and near prophecies in the Bible. Far prophecies are fulfilled beyond the prophet's lifetime. Near prophecies are fulfilled within the prophets lifetime. This is a near prophecy. There are ~ 600 prophecies in the Bible. ~ half of these have been fulfilled and each was fulfilled literally. ~ half of the prophecies remain to be fulfilled and it is logical to assume that each will be fulfilled literally as well.

### **God Announces the Terms of the Covenant (19:3-6)**

All biblical covenants have terms and here God lays out the terms of the covenant to Moses who then mediates them to the people. The terms are laid out in an "if...then" format indicating that it is a conditional covenant.

**<sup>3</sup> 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:**

**<sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.**

**<sup>5</sup> '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;**

**<sup>6</sup> 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."**

While the people rested from their journey **Moses went up to God**, remembering that God had told him he would worship Him at this mountain (Exod 3:12). And immediately **YHWH called to him from the mountain**. The introductory formula "**say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel**" are the words of a divine commission. As the 'servant of YHWH' Moses is to serve these words to the people. Many have erred greatly because they have failed to observe who God spoke these words to. He did not speak them to the Christian, He spoke them to Moses who was to give them to Jacob and Israel. In essence this means the Ten Commandments are not the law for Christians to follow.

I want to make several observations on verses 4-6. Without doubt these verses are the most theologically significant in the entire book of Exodus. They show how God

sovereignly chose Israel to be His servant nation. **'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.**

*First*, note that YHWH did this to the Egyptians and not Moses and YHWH bore them on eagles' wings to Himself and not Moses. So, God gets all the credit for these miraculous acts and therefore He gets all the glory! *Second*, notice that they did not just hear about what YHWH had done for them from afar but they actually saw what YHWH had done with their own eyes. They saw the expressions of God's attributes of power and love. First they saw His power topple the Egyptians and second they saw His love gently bring them to Himself on eagle's wings.

“The image of the eagle [v. 4] is based on the fact that the eagle, when its offspring learns [*sic*] to fly, will catch them on its wings when they fall.”

The image sums up Israel's experience thus far in the wilderness. Each time they failed to have faith in YHWH (for lack of water, food, war, wisdom) He swept underneath them with His broad wings and delivered them (cf Dt 32:11).<sup>1</sup> *Third* observation, God never asks the people to do anything for Him before He has first done for them. I delivered you now you obey My commandments.

Principle: God never asks us to do for Him before He has first done for us. God is the initiator. Example, we should forgive others because He first forgave us (Eph 4:32-5:2). When I see people refusing to forgive others it always aches my soul. It's very common and very prideful not to forgive. I see pastors who've failed and then people who refuse to accept them any longer. When we don't forgive others what are we saying? We're saying that we are better than them, that we are not as sinful as them. Let me ask you a question? What sins did Jesus Christ not pay for on the cross? Why then do you refuse to forgive others for certain sins, usually overt sins? Are you not also a transgressor? What about the covert sins? How would you like it if we could all see one another's hearts? It might cause some of us to shut up about other people's overt sins. The principle is that we should always forgive others no matter the offense because Christ first forgave us. How many times should we forgive others? An infinite number of times. Why? Because Christ paid for all sin on the cross. What is forgiveness? Forgiveness means “to send away”, to send away the offense from our minds. Now, that is a difficult thing to do for humans because it involves the concept of forgetting and we have a memory. How then do I forgive someone? *First*, you make a conscious decision not to bring it up again. You're going to refuse to talk about it. The more you bring it up the more it will be seared on your mind and the more difficult to blot from your memory. So, first, you're going to make a conscious decision not to bring it up again—ever. *Second*, this sets in

motion the process of forgetting. It may take years to forget but when you forgive someone you're saying, "I'm not going to bring this up again. I'm going to move forward. I'm not going to hold this against you because Christ doesn't hold it against you." And over time, human memory will fade and you will eventually forget. So, that's an example of God doing first. God forgave us in Christ and so we should forgive others.

Now, in verse 4 we have an example of this pattern. God toppled the Egyptians and bore them on eagles' wings. It's only logical that they should now respond with positive volition. Verse 5, '**Now then, see, in light of what I have done for you, 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; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' Three promises are made here that are very important.

1. If you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be My own possession.
2. If you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests.
3. If you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be to Me a holy nation.

Let's explore these three promises because they are very important. *First*, if you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be My own possession or "treasure". This means that out of all the nations, Israel would have a unique relationship with God, if she obeyed. *Second*, if you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests. The nation of Israel would be a kingdom of priests. This is not just the tribe of Levi but the entire nation would function as priests. So, this means Israel would be the intermediary of the knowledge and salvation of God to all the nations, if she obeyed. Further, if Israel obeyed she would become a kingdom and this opens the door for God to be her King? So, *if* they obeyed *then* the Theocratic Kingdom would come, God's kingdom on earth. *Third*, if you obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be to Me a holy nation. To be holy means to be separate, distinct. So, if Israel obeyed God they would be a distinct nation among all the nations. So, the ultimate purpose of the Mosaic Law (apart from it serving as a tutor to lead people to Christ) was to separate Israel from the nations so she would be a distinct people. Such distinctiveness would provide for their being a kingdom of priests and carrying out missionary activity.



Fig. 1. Missions in the Bible

See, if you read the laws you realize Israel would do things differently than the other nations, they would be following a different set of wisdom principles (DVP vs HVP) and so this would open the door for them to evangelize the world. Both Israel and the Church are distinct entities in the world designed by God to be separate from the world in order to carry out missionary activity! If we are not a distinct people, if we look like the world, if we clothe the church in the garb of the culture then we lose our witness in the world!

So, the ultimate purpose of the Mosaic Law was to make the nation of Israel distinct among the nations so they could maximize missionary effectiveness. So, the laws may have practical or scientific benefits but these are only secondary. In short, if Israel obeyed the law she would demonstrate how wonderful it is to live in a Theocracy.

### Israel Agreed to the Terms of the Covenant (19:7-8)

**<sup>7</sup> So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him.<sup>ii</sup> (prophet)**

**<sup>8</sup> 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. (priest)**

Importantly, in verse 8 **the people** agreed to the terms of the covenant. I'm not sure the people knew what they were getting into. Though their desire was good they overestimated their sinful hearts and underestimated God's holy standards. God later

said, "Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!" (Dt 5:29). The Israelites failed to perceive the sinfulness of their hearts and God's holiness. This is a trap we are all too prone to fall into. Unger said, "...they meant well and no doubt spoke sincerely from the heart, but they were ignorant of the weakness of the flesh and of the fact that even redeemed man can only keep the word of God and enjoy the power of God in his life by faith and not by human effort. They were leaving the sure ground of faith alone in God's grace and looking to themselves and what they were in themselves instead of looking entirely to God and what they were in Him" (Unger, p. 123).

**PRINCIPLE:** The Israelites perceived their hearts as good but God knows the heart is sinful and unable to meet His righteous requirements. To meet these righteous requirements they needed a new heart which would come by faith alone. God promised to give them a new heart under the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Thus, the dispensation of the Mosaic Law demonstrates that even though law is good it is not able to bring about the righteousness that God desires. We all fail to obey the law at some point and this shows us that what we really need is a new heart.

### **Preparations for the Mosaic Covenant (19:9-15)**

**<sup>9</sup> 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." (cf 14:31) Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.**

**<sup>10</sup> The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments;**

**<sup>11</sup> 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.**

**<sup>12</sup> "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.**

**<sup>13</sup> '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."**

**<sup>14</sup> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.**

**<sup>15</sup> He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."**

In verse 9, **YHWH said to Moses, “Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud.** Now Moses only hears God’s voice but later he will see Him **in a thick cloud.** The **thick cloud** is a visible manifestation of God. All visible manifestations of God are referred to as the Shechinah Glory.

*First*, what does Shechinah do? Shechinah is a word that comes from the Hebrew *shachan* and means “dwelling. The Greek equivalent is *skene* which means “to tabernacle”. So, the Shechinah “dwells” or “tabernacles” among men.

*Second*, what is the Shechinah? The Shechinah is “the glory of the Lord” (Heb = *Kvod Adonai*; Gk = *Doxa Kurios*). What is the glory of the Lord? It is His divine essence. So, Shechinah Glory is the visible manifestation of the essence of God.

*Third*, what form(s) does the Shechinah Glory take? The Shechinah Glory usually appears in the form of a cloud, fire, light or some combination of these such as a storm. At Mt Sinai it was a combination of all three, a mighty storm.

*Fourth*, why does the Shechinah Glory appear in forms? To filter His divine essence. No one can see God in the fullness of His divine essence. For humans to see God’s essence it must be reduced in its fullness. For example, have you ever tried to look at the sun with the naked eye? You can’t do it. But you can look at the sun through certain lenses or filters. Now, that’s a finite illustration of seeing God. It is impossible for the frailty of humanity to see God directly but we can see Him indirectly through filters. And that’s why He comes in a thick cloud here.

*In conclusion*, the Doctrine of the Shechinah Glory states that at key points in history God makes His divine essence visible to man through a filter which impresses upon man His awesome essence. This is what happened on Mt Sinai when God came in the form of a thick cloud with all the thunders and lightnings and smoke of a storm. Why did the God choose to manifest Himself here at Mt Sinai?

1. To authenticate Moses as a prophet of God (Exod 19:9). God will speak the Ten Commandments to Moses so that all the **people may hear** (Exod 20:18-19; Dt 5:22-27) and this will cause them to believe in Moses forever.
2. To instill in them the fear of God so they would not sin (Exod 20:20)

**Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD**, that is, he repeated verse 8, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” Now, the Doctrine of the Shechinah Glory is

tremendously important at this point. God is coming near to the people and so there must be rules laid down and followed lest people see Him or touch His mountain and perish (Exod 19:21). So, in vv 10-15 God lays down the rules to emphasize His holiness. God is holy. Now, most people think that holiness only means “set apart” “separate” but this is only its secondary meaning. The primary meaning is to be splendid, beautiful, pure, and uncontaminated. God is holy—as the Absolutely Pure, Resplendent, and Glorious One.<sup>iii</sup> Hence, none can touch Him. *Secondarily*, God is set apart from His creation. God is the Creator and man is a creature. So, here we are seeing the Creator-creature distinction. The holy Creator is on the mountain and the sinful creatures at the foot of the mountain. These two cannot get together. Therefore, the sinful people must be very careful to follow God’s rules lest they approach God wrongly and perish.

So, now let’s go through the rules of preparation in verses 10-15. *First* they are to be purified. This involves being **consecrated**, set apart **today and tomorrow** and this involves doing the laundry, **washing their garments**. These external ritual purifications were symbolic of inward cleansing.<sup>11</sup> **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.** *Second*, Moses **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.** The boundaries were set so that none might break through and touch the mountain. This external boundary signifies the Creator-creature distinction. The Creator is absolutely holy and the creature is utterly sinful, a doctrine distinct to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. All other religions, philosophies and worldviews consider God to be a part of the chain of being. Transgression of this boundary results in the harshest penalty; the death penalty. Notice, if one even touches the mountain the death penalty is applied, “the least contact is forbidden”. And the way in which he should be put to death?<sup>13</sup> **'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.'** For reasons of ritual purity the person must not be touched by others lest his uncleanness be transferred to them. Thus man or beast must be stoned or shot through from a distance. **When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.**" Apparently Moses gives the signal to blow the ram’s horn which tells the people they can come up to the border of **the mountain**. And they did all this in verse 14 and then in verse 15 **He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."** So, for three days they must abstain from sexual relations. This does not infer that sex within marriage is unclean. Merely that abstention from sex during this time was for ritual purity.



Principle: God does not accept anyone who approaches Him any other way. God explicitly defines how we must approach Him. If we violate this there is certain death. God is holy and as such He determines how man can approach Him safely.

Principle: The world claims that we can each approach God and worship God in our own way and that God will accept us as we are and will accept our worship as long as it is sincere. This is a lie from the pit of hell. God will not accept men as they are and God does not accept all worship. One interesting application of this lie is the modern Contemporary Christian Music Movement. The argument is that God wants each of us to express our own individuality in worship and that worship is only true worship when it is not limited to a definite form. This is a lie from the pit of hell. The Bible is very plain, God is holy and He does not accept all worship. He places very strict requirements on worshipping Him. This is a key text for understanding this principle. First, God is holy. He is separate from all. Second, man is sinful. Third, a holy God can only be approached His way.

#### **Israel Meets God (19:16-25)**

**<sup>16</sup> 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.**

**<sup>17</sup> And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.**

**<sup>18</sup> 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.**

**<sup>19</sup> When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.**

**<sup>20</sup> 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.**

**<sup>21</sup> 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.**

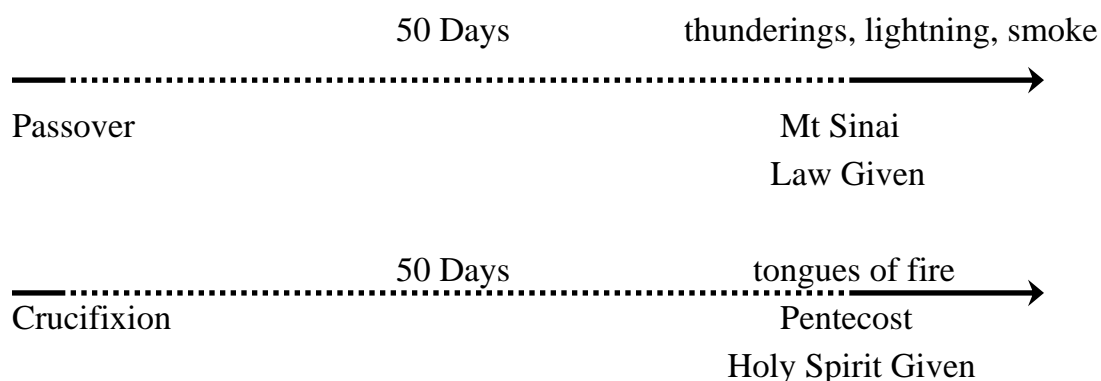
**<sup>22</sup> "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them."**

**<sup>23</sup> 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.'"**

**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."**

**25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.**

Verse 16 records what apparently took place on the 50<sup>th</sup> day since Passover. This day would correspond to the day after the Feast of Weeks which is the day of Pentecost. 50 days passed between the Passover and the giving of the Law and 50 days passed between the Crucifixion and the giving of the Holy Spirit.



Shechinah Glory was present on the day the Law was given as well as on the day the Holy Spirit was given (tongues of fire).<sup>iv</sup> The visible manifestation of God caused the people to tremble. **17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.** These ~2 million people **met God** (*elohim*- a plural of majesty) in all His majesty though shielded by the thick smoke. **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.** YHWH is **in the fire** and the fire produces smoke to shield the people from the fullness of His divine essence and the result of His presence within causes the **whole mountain to quake violently** **19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.** And this tumult grew in strength as a crescendo of power. **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.** **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.** This may seem repetitive but it is placed here for emphasis. Men are often driven by curiosity to take a peak at some wonder but to **break through** the border **to gaze** at the **Lord** will surely result in their perishing. The emphasis is again on God's otherness and holiness. **22 "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD**

**will break out against them."** This is the principle of measure for measure (lex talionis)—eye for eye—tooth for tooth. The only question here is who are the priests? The Levitical priesthood has not been established (Num 3:6ff). Evidently, at this time the “firstborn sons of Israel” were the priests. They were set aside in accordance with Exod 13:1-2. Later this practice was abolished by God when He set aside the entire tribe of Levi to serve as priests (Num 3:6ff). <sup>23</sup> **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.'"** In essence Moses says, “You already **warned us** so it is unnecessary for me to go down the mountain and tell them again.” But God, knowing their curiosity and weakness of flesh disregards Moses statement and says "**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.**" The repetition can't hurt and indeed the Lord knows that without this additional warning the people would probably break through and perish. So, God is cognizant of their weakness and graciously looking out for their well-being. <sup>25</sup> **So Moses went down to the people and told them.** At this point in the narrative the thunderings and lightnings have ceased, all is perfectly calm and still. The next thing that will be heard is the voice of the YHWH giving His teaching, His *torah* in what we know as the Ten Commandments but in the Hebrew is known as the “Ten Words” or in the Greek as the “Decalogue”. So, we have entered upon one of the most sacred portions of Scripture as demonstrated by the context. A moment where God comes to dwell with man and instruct Him personally through divine revelation in Ten Words which serve as the basis for the entire Mosaic Legal System, the express will of God for the nation of Israel. Thus, God will be Suzerain and Israel His vassal.

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<sup>i</sup> Edersheim says, “For as “on eagle’s wings” had Jehovah borne them, God’s dealings being compared to the eagle, who spreads his strong pinions under the young birds when they take their first flight, lest, weary or faint, they be dashed on the rocks.” (p. 128)

<sup>ii</sup> Here you see Moses clearly acting as mediator between YHWH and Israel. Moses was a prophet and priest of Israel, but he was not a king. The Lord Jesus Christ was prophet, priest, *and* king. As prophet and priest of Israel Moses had to be an excellent communicator, a skill he claimed to lack just a year earlier (Exod 4:10ff) but which God promised to remedy.

<sup>iii</sup> Edersheim, *Old Testament Bible History*, 129.

<sup>iv</sup> This manifestation of the Shechinah Glory is very similar to the storm theophany’s in the book of Revelation (Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

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