

Exodus 19  
Psalm 81  
Hebrews 12

“The Holy Mountain”

April 30, 2017

Israel is preparing to do what God had called them to do:  
worship God at his holy mountain.

They had left Egypt to offer sacrifices to the LORD in the wilderness.

Now it is time.

So the first thing that they must do is consecrate themselves – prepare themselves –  
to come into the presence of God himself.

In the days of Moses, they really didn't have much of a tradition of doing this.  
After all, this is the *first time* that Israel has ever worshiped God together.  
(At least, this is the first time that scripture records such a worship service).

But over time, Israel develops patterns and traditions of how to prepare for worship.  
One of those traditions is the way in which the Psalms would train Israel  
how to prepare for worship.,

One of those Psalms is Psalm 81.

Psalm 81 calls Israel to sing to God – to blow trumpets at the new moon –  
and at the full moon (at the feast day – the worship days of Israel).

When the trumpet blows – when you hear the sound of the trumpet –  
you are to come and gather to worship the Lord.

That trumpet blast should remind you of the Exodus –  
that trumpet blast should remind you of that first gathering at Mt. Sinai –  
when the trumpet blast of heaven called Israel to worship.

Psalm 81 calls Israel to worship the God who delivered them from bondage to slavery.  
And then Psalm 81 calls Israel to listen – to hear God's commands –  
and obey the word of the LORD.

Sing Psalm 81  
Read Hebrews 12:18-29

How do you prepare to come to worship?  
Prepare?

I know – sometimes you're upset with everyone and everything –  
you've just had a big fight on the way to church –  
and so the only preparation you have is in the parking lot:  
“Okay, everyone, *smile* – let's pretend we have it all together!”

But think about what we are doing.  
We are coming together as the people of God to *worship the living and true God*.  
We have gathered in the heavenly Holy of Holies.

We're not just here for our friends.  
We're not just here to listen to the preacher.

We have come to Mount Zion – to the city of the living God –  
the heavenly Jerusalem.  
This is where we are!

That's why it is important to prepare.  
If you think about it, the Israelites didn't dress up all fancy.  
They just *washed their clothes* –  
in those days, most people would have had very limited wardrobes!  
It's not about wearing something fancy.  
It's not even about wearing something *clean*.

It's about *being clean* in the presence of God!  
If you smell good and look good – but you are steaming mad on the inside?  
That's *not* what God requires!

The reason why we try to get the house cleaned and ready on Saturday night,  
the reason why we try to get everything done early –  
is so that we can be *ready* to meet with God.

Here in Exodus 19, God has brought Israel out of Egypt – out of slavery –  
so that they might come and worship him at his Holy Mountain.

### **1. The Third New Moon: From Passover to Pentecost (v1-15)**

*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.*

Notice what time it is!

The new moon is always the first day of the lunar month.  
If this is the third new moon,  
how many days has it been since they left Egypt?  
Passover was on the fourteenth day of the first month.

So there are sixteen days left in that month.  
Then there are thirty days in the second month.  
So if we are at the new moon of the third month,  
it is the 47<sup>th</sup> day since they left Egypt.

Verse 16 tells us that the LORD appeared to them on the mountain on the third day.  
Which would be the 49<sup>th</sup> day since Passover.

And then in chapter 24, verse 4, we are told that on the *next morning* – the 50<sup>th</sup> day –  
Moses built an altar and all Israel gathered to worship the LORD.

The LORD has not yet instituted the feast of Pentecost.

But Pentecost is the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover

(or more precisely, you count 7 Sabbaths from the Sabbath of Passover week,  
and then the day after the 7<sup>th</sup> Sabbath is Pentecost -  
so Pentecost is always on a Sunday – the first day of the week).

Pentecost is the fulfillment of Passover.

God had said to Moses that when he brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt,  
they should worship him “at this mountain.”

God had said repeatedly to Pharaoh,

“Let my people go that they may worship/serve me.”

But Passover ends with Israel in Egypt.

Passover is not complete – Passover is not fulfilled –  
until you come to the holy mountain and worship God.

And that requires the fiftieth day – seven times seven plus one.

The first part of the book of Exodus ends with the tenth plague  
and the celebration of the Passover.

The second part of the book of Exodus will end with the ten commandments  
and the first Pentecost (the name is not used – but the date is exact).

Every Jew in all of history knows that the giving of the Law  
is connected to Pentecost.

Indeed, Exodus 19-24 must all be understood together,  
as the fulfillment of the Exodus from Egypt.

The giving of the Law and the beginning of corporate Worship

is all bound together as God shows us what it means to be his new community.

And that’s why I’ve outlined the sermon as you have it in the bulletin:

You first need to understand the relationship between the Gospel and the Law –  
and then you need to respond to the Gospel – the good news of salvation –  
with faith, repentance, and a commitment to new obedience.

Only then can you be brought near to God by his covenant mediator.

#### **a. Understanding Gospel and Law (v1-6)**

##### **1) “I Bore You on Eagles' Wings” - The Primacy of the Gospel (v3-4)**

*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.’*

Notice the first thing that God highlights:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians,  
and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

What is the *gospel*?

The good news is *not* “you can be a better person”!

The good news is *not* “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

In other words, the gospel is *not* a subjective experience.

The good news is *This is what God has done.*

The gospel is a message about what God has done in history.

The gospel is a message about an event.

What has God done?

He has defeated your enemies and brought you to himself.

I want you to think about this for a moment.

Is it true?

Did God really save Israel from Egypt?

Did the Exodus really happen?

If not, then all that follows is meaningless.

Likewise, if Jesus did not come in the flesh and offer himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin,  
and if Jesus was not raised from the dead,  
then our faith is pointless and vain.

But if it is true,

if *God* came in the flesh and took upon himself the wrath and curse that we deserved,  
then that should reorient our lives entirely.

The gospel is a message about what God has done in history.

And the *law* contains how we ought to *respond* to what God has done in history:

## 2) “If You Will Obey My Voice” - The Conditions of the Law (v5-6)

*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.”*

Because I have saved you,

therefore obey my voice – keep my covenant.

God does not save you so that you can do whatever you want.

He saved you for something *better* than what you want.

Even here in verses 5-6, as God is commanding them to obey him,  
the focus is *still* on what God will do.

In verse 4, God saved Israel from Egypt – without any help from Israel.

“I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

Only God can save.

But once God has brought you to himself,  
he calls you to walk before him and be blameless.

You see this two-fold movement in God's covenant with Abraham.

In Genesis 15, God swears by himself that he will do three things:

He will give Abraham the Promised Land,  
He will give Abraham the Promised Seed,  
And he will make Abraham's Seed a blessing to the nations.

What was Abraham supposed to do?

In Genesis 15, Abraham does nothing.  
God alone passes between the pieces of the animals –  
as if to say, I alone will do what I have promised.  
Abraham cannot make God's covenant come to pass.  
Only God can save.

But in Genesis 17, God says, "I am God Almighty, walk before me and blameless."

In Genesis 17, God gives to Abraham the covenant sign of circumcision,  
and calls Abraham to keep his covenant and obey his voice.

But as God makes clear here in Exodus 19:5-6,  
it's not that God does the first part, and then we do the second part.

All of salvation is from God.

The distinction is that in the first part (in our justification)

God alone acts to justify us.  
The first part of the covenant is unconditional.  
We contribute nothing to our justification.  
All we can do is *receive* justification *by faith*  
(like Israel received their deliverance from Egypt by faith).

And then in the second part of the covenant (in our sanctification)

God alone sanctifies us.  
But we are required to cooperate with God in our sanctification.  
We were slaves to sin and death.  
We were dead in our sins.  
But now God has made us alive in Christ.  
He has brought us to himself on eagles' wings.  
Therefore, because you are now *alive* in Christ –  
because you are *free*,  
do not use your freedom to pursue your selfish pleasures –  
but rather, put to death the deeds of the flesh.

Or to use God's language to Moses,  
"obey my voice and keep my covenant."

And this is where the "conditional" side of the covenant comes in.

"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant..."

And there are three things that will happen “if you keep my covenant”:

First,

“you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine”  
This highlights the central theme of the blessing of Abraham.  
What is the point and purpose of the blessing of Abraham?  
The Land, the Seed, and the Blessing to the Nations.  
That through Abraham’s Seed, the blessing of God would come to all the earth.  
Here the primary purpose of the covenant at Sinai is to highlight the Seed of Abraham  
as God’s treasured possession in the midst of the nations –  
“for all the earth is mine.”  
Israel’s unique status as the people of God is *not for themselves* –  
*but for the nations.*

And you see this fleshed out even more clearly in what follows:

The second and third things are that, “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

At this point, Israel has no priests.

The tribe of Levi has not yet been selected as the priestly tribe.  
So even before there are priests in Israel,  
Israel is called by God “a kingdom of priests.”

God has just said that “all the earth is mine.”

All the peoples of the earth belong to God.  
And he has chosen Israel to be the “kingdom of priests” –  
to mediate the blessings of God to the nations.

Don’t just think about this in terms of what it would have meant to Israel at Mt. Sinai.  
This was written down for Israel in every generation.  
It was written down *for us* as well.

If you want to understand what a kingdom of priests is – just look at the next phrase:  
“a holy nation.”

Israel is set apart – consecrated to God.

But set apart *for what?*  
Whenever you see the *holiness* of God emphasized in scripture,  
the point is not merely that God is separate and exalted and distant.  
God’s holiness is *not* what keeps him far from us!  
His holiness is what drives him to bring us *near* to him.

After all, what is a “holy nation.”

The word for nation is the Hebrew word “goy.”  
The word “goy” is ordinarily translated “Gentile.”  
“The nations” are the “Gentiles.”

Israel is a *holy goy*.

God’s purpose in calling Israel to himself is to have a *holy goy*  
in order that *all the nations* – all the *goyim* – might become holy.

You have been called by the God of all the earth to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God has brought you to himself – *not* simply for *your* sake –  
not simply to make *you* happy, or healthy, or whatever –  
but to make you *holy*, to *set you apart*  
so that you might be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

So that you might mediate the blessings of God to the nations.

The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 2:9, reflects on how this applies to the church today:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for his own possession,  
that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you  
out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

This is almost a direct quote from Exodus 19.

It’s not that the church “replaces” Israel.  
Rather, the Gentiles are grafted *into* Israel,  
so that the blessing to Abraham might truly come to pass,  
that Abraham’s Seed would become a blessing to all nations.

At the cross, Abraham’s Seed will be narrowed down to *one man*.

Jesus becomes the true Israel – a royal priesthood of one – a holy nation of one –  
so that through his suffering and death  
he might destroy the power of death.

And thus all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – whether Jew or Gentile –  
are the Seed of Abraham by faith.

So what should you do in response to the message of the gospel?

We see this in verses 7-8:

**b. Responding to the Gospel (v7-9a)**

**1) “All That the LORD Has Spoken We Will Do” (v7-8)**

*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.*

There is a delightful simplicity in the response of the people.

“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

This is the proper response of faith.

We have already seen before we reached Sinai that Israel grumbles in the wilderness.

In a few chapters it will reach outright rebellion.

And when they leave Sinai, they will continue to grumble and rebel.

But it is important for us to see that Israel accepts the terms of the covenant.

The people profess their faith and obedience.

This is important because if you have made profession of faith –

if you have confessed Jesus as Lord –  
then you have made the same commitment:  
“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”  
You have accepted the responsibility of living as a royal priesthood – a holy nation –  
that you might proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness  
into his marvelous light.

And so Moses goes back up the mountain and tells the LORD that the people have accepted his terms:

## **2) The Coming of the LORD (v9a)**

*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.”*

The coming of the LORD will be in a thick cloud.  
The glory of the LORD will be veiled in thick darkness.  
This glory-cloud is the presence of God with his people –  
“an awe-inspiring, frightening presence.” (Enns, 389)

Why does God do this?

So that the people might hear the voice of the LORD as well.  
After all, if God only ever speaks to Moses,  
it would be easy for people to say,  
“Sure, Moses, you just made all this up.  
You *said* that God spoke to you –  
but how do we know that it really came from God?!”  
So here the LORD will speak to Moses in the presence of all the people –  
so that the people “may also believe you forever.”

### **c. “Be Ready for the Third Day” (v9b-15)**

You cannot help but notice the emphasis on the third day.  
Three times in verses 11-15, the LORD highlights the importance of the third day.

If the people are going to be ready to hear the voice of the LORD,  
then they must consecrate themselves.

## **1) The Holiness of the Mountain (v9b-13)**

*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; [a] whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.”*

On the third day, the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.  
This is God’s holy mountain.

The mountain is holy because it is the place where God’s presence dwells.  
At the end of the book of Exodus,



the presence of God will leave Mt. Sinai and fill the Tabernacle.

The glory of the LORD will “tabernacle” with Israel in the wilderness.

And in the days of Solomon the glory of the LORD will fill the temple,  
so that Psalm 68 can say that “Sinai is now in the sanctuary.”

The Tabernacle – and later the Temple –  
are a picture of Sinai – like a mountain tipped over on its side!

As you walk into the Temple toward the Holy of Holies  
it is as though you were climbing God’s holy mountain.

When we get to chapter 24,  
we will see the 70 elders of Israel come partway up the mountain,  
just like the priests would serve in the holy place.

Then we will see only Moses go all the way to the top of the mountain –  
just like the high priest alone could go into the Holy of Holies.

And the people must stay in the courtyard – the area outside the edge of the mountain.

God has said that his people will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.  
But they are not yet a holy nation.

“Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.”

Why?

Why must the one who touches the mountain be put to death?

Verse 13 is key:

“No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot;  
whether beast or man, he shall not live.”

God is teaching Israel what *holiness* means.

The one who has touched the Holy Mountain is now “contaminated” by God’s holiness.  
Why is this a bad thing?!

Because Israel is *not yet* a holy people.

For unholy people to come in contact with a holy God can only mean death.

God’s purpose is to bring a people *near* to himself.

But the problem is that sin has erected a barrier between man and God.

And there is no way for us to leap the barrier!

Only God can do something about the problem.

(And this will happen when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us)

Until God becomes flesh,

our flesh cannot touch the holiness of God.

There must be a *holy* flesh and blood.

That’s why there is such an emphasis on consecrating the people in verses 14-15:

## 2) The Holiness of the People (v14-15)

*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."*

What was involved in "consecrating the people"?

In Exodus 13, we heard about the consecration of the firstborn.

The firstborn were consecrated by offering a sacrifice to the LORD.

So it is possible that sacrifices were offered.

(Certainly in Exodus 24, we will hear about burnt offerings and peace offerings).

But there are two things particularly described here:

First, they washed their garments.

This may not sound like a big deal,

but you are in the middle of the desert –

and you are going to use your precious water to wash your clothes.

To consecrate yourselves – to set yourselves apart for God's service –

means that you will sacrifice your most precious resources for him.

And secondly, for the next two days, don't have sex.

"Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

In other words, your ordinary drives and desires need to be reoriented.

Sexual relations between husband and wife are a good thing.

But because of sin, the "ordinary" has been disordered.

So consecration to God requires them to set aside ordinary sexual relations.

(Think about how Paul encourages married couples in 1 Corinthians 7:5,

"Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time,

that you may devote yourselves to prayer;

but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you

because of your lack of self-control.")

Here at Mount Sinai, God commands all Israel to take two days to devote themselves to prayer in preparation for hearing God's voice.

## 2. The Morning of the Third Day: Coming Down and Going Up (v16-25)

### a. Bringing the People to Meet God: The LORD Descended in Fire (v16-20)

*16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.*

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain.

Thunders, lightnings, thick clouds – these are often seen when the LORD appears.

There was also a very loud trumpet blast –

clearly *not* a human trumpet blast –

but 'the trumpet of the LORD' – the blast of the archangel.

Here in Exodus, the appearance of the LORD sets the pattern that we will see throughout the scriptures.

Later, in the prophets, the picture will gain more and more detail –

sometimes the details will seem rather different –  
but it seems clear that the biblical authors are all describing the same thing;  
it's just that they are using different ways of trying to explain in words  
the marvelous things that they saw or heard.

And when the LORD announces his coming with the thunder and lightning and cloud and trumpet,  
Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.

But notice how far he brought them:  
“they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.”

That's as far as Moses can bring you.  
Moses can bring you to God at the foot of the mountain.  
But Moses cannot bring you up the mountain.  
Only Jesus can bring you to God through his death and resurrection (1 Peter 3:18).

*18 Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 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.*

And then in verse 18, we see the mountain wrapped in smoke –  
“because the LORD had descended on it in fire.”

The burning bush was but a small, localized appearing of the LORD.  
Now the fire of the LORD descends upon the Mountain,  
and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln,  
and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke,  
and God answered him in thunder.

And then – marvel of all marvels –  
“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.”

God had said, if even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be put to death.  
How does Moses survive?

In one sense, the holiness laws of the OT were artificial.  
They are not *natural*.  
In other words, there is nothing *inherently holy* about Mt. Sinai.  
The true Holy of Holies has always been the *heavenly* Holy of Holies.  
What God is doing in the OT is preparing the people  
for entrance into his *heavenly* Holy of Holies –  
through the flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus.

And so God creates an “artificial” system  
in order to depict and portray the heavenly holy places.

Moses and Aaron function as types and pictures of Christ,  
and so they are able to enter the earthly holy places  
in order to show Israel what Jesus will do.

**b. Breaking Through and Breaking Out: The Second Warning (v21-25)**

*21 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.” 23 And Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” 24 And the Lord said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them.” 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.*

But the artifice of the OT system is precisely what makes it so important.

And that’s why the LORD says to Moses – go down and warn them again.

In verse 23, Moses seems to think that this is redundant –

I already told them not to come up –

and so we placed limits around the mountain, like you told us.

But the LORD says,

Do it again.

And particularly, God says, “do not let the *priests* and the people break through.”

Who are these “priests?”

We have not heard of priests in Israel prior to these verses.

In chapter 24, we will hear of the “young men” offering burnt offerings and peace offerings,

But who are the priests?

At this point, we do not yet have Levitical priests,

so the priests would be whoever had been designated to offer sacrifices.

But God says that even the priests are not to come up the mountain!

Why not?

Coming into the presence of a Holy God is no small matter.

Hebrews 7-10 explains that the whole of the OT sacrificial system  
was designed to show us what Jesus needed to do.

We needed someone who would offer himself as a sacrifice in our place.

But no mere man could be a sufficient sacrifice.

Indeed, no mere man could be a sufficient priest!

Only one who is the exact imprint of God’s own nature

could become the priest – and the sacrifice – who could remove sin,  
and bring us into the presence of a holy God.

But that is how much the Father loved you.

He wanted to bring you to himself!

So, back to our opening question!

How do you prepare for worship?

In 1 Peter 2, immediately after quoting from Exodus 19, Peter comments on how to apply this.

Let's start with the quote (1 Peter 2:9-12):

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for his own possession,

that you may proclaim the excellencies of him

who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people;

once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh,  
which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable,

so that when they speak against you as evildoers,

they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

The best way to prepare for worship

is to be holy.

Remember what God has done in Jesus Christ to save you from sin and death.

Remember how he has made you a people – *his* people.

His *holy* people – his *holy* nation.

And thus abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

And we need each other in order to do this.

We need to live life together in order to do this.

We need to be a *holy people* together in order to do this.

And when we do this –

when we keep our conduct honorable among the nations –

that is what God uses to draw the nations to himself.

Think of our Egyptian brothers –

telling those who bombed their churches, “thank you for sending us to Jesus –

thank you for reminding us that life is short and we need to be right with God –

and what's more, we love you – and we want you to come to know the same love of God.”