

# EXODUS

## Chapter 19

### *Israel at Mount Sinai*

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

**19:2** *Rephidim ... wilderness of Sinai.* Southeastern Sinai Peninsula. Modern surveys of the area have suggested the Er-Raha plain as a potential place for a large Israelite encampment. The peak Gebel Musa stands close by. The traditional site is marked today by St Catherine’s Monastery. This remains the best possible site, though the absolute location where Moses received the covenant cannot be determined. (TLSB)

*wilderness of Sinai*. Located in the southeast region of the peninsula (see note on 3:1). The narrator locates there the events recorded in the rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and Nu 1:1–10:10. (CSB)

**19:3** *went up to God*. Ascended the mountain to talk with God. (TLSB)

**19:4** *I bore you on eagles' wings*. The description best fits the female golden eagle. (CSB)

Metaphor for their speedy salvation and rescue from Egypt. (TLSB)

**19:5** *if*. The covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai is the outgrowth and extension of the Lord's covenant with Abraham and his descendants 600 years earlier (see chart on "Major Covenants in the OT"). Participation in the divine blessings requires the obedience of faith. (CSB)

*my covenant*. As a response to His covenant promise (cf 6:5), the people were to obey God. (TLSB)

*treasured possession among all people*. The equivalent phrases used of Christians in 1Pe 2:9 are "chosen people" and "people belonging to God" (see Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). (CSB)

They would enjoy a relationship of grace and forgiveness (cf Eph 2:8–10). (TLSB)

*all the earth is mine*. God is the Creator and Possessor of the earth and everything in it (see Ge 14:19, 22; Ps 24:1–2). (CSB)

**19:6** *kingdom of priests*. Israel was to constitute the Lord's kingdom (the people who acknowledged him as their King) and, like priests, was to be wholly consecrated to his service (see Isa 61:6; cf. 1Pe 2:5; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). (CSB)

As the consecrated priests would stand between God and His people, so the people of Israel would act as priests to the world, set aside by God for service, witness, and prayer. Israel would be a priest to all the nations of the world. Today, Jesus perfectly mediates between sinners and God; the Church also intercedes (1Pt 2:9). Luther: "Do not despair after sin, but lift your eyes on high to where Christ intercedes for us. He is our Advocate. He intercedes for us and says: 'Father, I have suffered for this person; I am looking after him.' This prayer cannot be in vain" (AE 30:236). (TLSB)

*holy nations*. See 1Pe 2:9. God's people, both individually and collectively, are to be "set apart" to do his will (see Dt 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; Isa 62:12). (CSB)

**19:7** *elder*. Hbr *zaqen*; term related to "beard." Used for various levels of tribal leadership. A body of 70 elders led Israel, representing the tribes (e.g., Ex 24:9; c six elders per tribe). Elders were often associated with religious leadership and acted as counselors to rulers. Each city typically had elders who acted as judges. (TLSB p. 228)

**19:8** *all the Lord has spoken we will do*. The people promised to accept the terms of the covenant (see 24:3, 7; Dt 5:27). (CSB)

The people are confident they can fulfill the Law. Chem: "God restrains this arrogance by manifesting their sin and His wrath by the voice of the Law" (*LTh* 2:458). (TLSB)

**19:9** *the people will hear when I speak*. See Dt 4:33. (CSB)

God publicly authenticated Moses as His spokesman so the people would have no doubt about the source of the Law that Moses would give them. (TLSB)

**19:10–11** Outward preparation to meet God symbolizes the inward consecration to act as God’s holy people. (CSB)

**19:11** *in the sight*. The people would be able to see the cloud and lightning and hear the thunder (visible manifestation of God’s presence). (TLSB)

**19:12–13** The whole mountain becomes holy because of God’s presence. Israel must keep herself from the mountain even as she is to keep herself from the tabernacle (see Nu 3:10). (CSB)

The people were to come close to the mountain but not touch it. God is holy, and the people are sinners. Sinners could not approach God without being destroyed. (TLSB)

**19:15** *do not go near a woman*. Not because sex is sinful but because it may leave the participants ceremonially unclean (see Lev 15:18; see also 1Sa 21:4–5). (CSB)

Refers to sexual intercourse, which rendered men ceremonially unclean for a short time (cf Lv 15:16–18). (TLSB)

**19:16–19** God’s power and majesty were overwhelming, striking fear into the hearts of all who were there. (TLSB)

**19:16** *thunder ... lightning ... trumpet blast*. God’s appearance is often accompanied by an impressive display of meteorological sights and sounds (see, e.g., 1Sa 7:10; 12:18; Job 38:1; 40:6; Ps 18:13–14). (CSB)

**19:18** *fire ... smoke from a furnace*. Physical manifestation of the living God. Fire and smoke often signaled God’s presence, esp in the context of covenant and promise (cf Gn 15:17). (TLSB)

**19:22–23** *consecrate*. Even the priests who drew near to God in their duties were not exempt from this requirement. No one was to set foot on the mountain. The repetition underscored the seriousness of the command and also helped people commit the rules to memory. (At this time, most people were illiterate. (TLSB)

**19:22** *priests*. See also v. 24. Before the Aaronic priesthood was established (see 28:1), priestly functions were performed either by the elders or by designated younger men (see 24:5). But perhaps the verse anticipates the regulations for the Aaronic priests who will be appointed. (CSB)

*who come near to the LORD*. To officiate at sacrifices (see 40:32; Lev 21:23). (CSB)

**19:24** *bringing Aaron*. Aaron served as Moses’ “mouthpiece” and also helped lead God’s people (4:14–16). (CSB)

**Ch 19** God’s people, rescued from slavery in Egypt by His grace, go to Mount Sinai, where God establishes His covenant with them. Sinfulness prevents the people from approaching God personally. Yet God graciously appoints an intermediary, Moses, through whom He makes His covenant with His people. Thanks be to God, we can approach Him with confidence through our mediator, Jesus. • O Lord, deliver and consecrate us this day in the renewal of our Baptism, that we may lead lives that honor You. Amen. (TLSB)