

Exodus 19-20 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Ch. 19 marks a crucial moment in the history of Israel, for it records their arrival at Mt. Sinai.

This will be the scene of God formally extending an invitation to the tribes of Israel to be His covenant people.

It's at Sinai that God will give an extensive legal code to Moses; a code which contains moral, civic, and ceremonial regulations.

It's at Sinai that the Ten Commandments are given and Moses receives the blueprints for a special building that will mark the literal *center* of the nation.

Sinai also becomes the scene of some of one of the worst failures of the children of Israel in their trip to Canaan, as we'll see.

Outline For Exodus

- I. The Exodus • Chs. 1-13:16
- II. The Journey to Sinai • Chs. 13:17-40:38
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 - F. From Rephidim to Sinai • 19
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CHAPTER 19

F. From Rephidim to Sinai • 19

1. 1-6 • God's invitation to Israel to be His people

¹ In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. ² For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

Israel's calendar is based on their Exodus from Egypt.

The first month is the month they left, on the 14th, which is the Passover.

So it has taken them 2 months to travel to Sinai. [map]

A handful of critics of the scriptures say that there is no way between

2 & 3 million people could have gone this far in this period of time.

But historians have more than amply shown such criticism is *totally* ill-founded.

Keep in mind that virtually all transportation at this time was done on foot and people were accustomed to going great distances in this way.

Also, the Israelites had just been liberated from a harsh and oppressive lifestyle which had *toughened* them physically. It would not have been difficult at all for the people to travel the distance from Egypt to Sinai in this period of time.

Another factor to consider was that while they were nearly 3 million in number, they were used to being ordered into work projects and would have followed Moses' lead – at least at first, which is precisely what we see in these first chapters of Exodus.

It isn't till a bit later that a few begin to question his leadership and balk at following.

So now, in the 3rd month, they arrive at the destination God had told Moses they would come to, as a sign that He was indeed with them, guiding them, and would bring them into the Land of Promise.

Exodus 3:12 - So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

This was spoken by God to Moses as he stood before the burning bush when he first received his calling.

So the nation finally arrives at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and Moses remembers that promise.

So he re-ascends the mount to that place where he had first encountered the Lord.

3 And 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 children of Israel: ⁴ 'You 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, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; 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 which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Okay – there is a lot here and we need to work through it carefully.
First of all – v. 4

‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,

The plagues were a dramatic demonstration of God’s superiority to the gods the Egyptians worshiped.

And since the Egyptians were the dominant nation in that region at that time, this meant Yahweh was the supreme deity, the all-powerful God.

He hadn’t just opened the door to freedom, He’d blown it right off it’s hinges!

and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.

This idiom, of being born up on eagle’s wings, becomes a repeated theme and image God uses to refer to how He had carried them in the early days of their Exodus.

It was an image that the children of Israel would have well understood as they passed through the wilderness and passed by the hills and mountains that rise from the desert floor.

You see, eagles build their nests high in the rock cliffs.

They make them of twigs, the sharp ends of which face *into* the nest.

But the mother eagle puts lots of down and padding in the nest to cover the sharp twig ends.

As the eaglet matures and gains weight, it begins to press down on the padding, which doesn’t provide the same protection it did when the eaglet was younger and lighter.

Pretty soon, that nice comfortable nest has become uncomfortable, and the eaglet will hop out of the nest to get away.

But it’s not really ready for flight yet because the muscles for it’s wings aren’t conditioned.

So it falls through the air – which is why eagles always position their nests on cliffs.

As the eaglet falls, it flaps its wings, trying desperately to fly, but it can't.

And at just the right moment, the mother eagle swoops under it and catches it on its back, right between its wings.

It then bears it back up and places it into the nest, which while still uncomfortable, is still better to the eaglet than the uncomfortable condition of falling through the air.

And there the eaglet stays, until as it gets a bit older, the mother removes some of the down, exposing more and more of the twig ends.

Soon, it's too uncomfortable to stay in the nest, and the eaglet, will once again hop out and free fall.

And once again the mother will swoop down and catch up her young.

This process will go on a few times until eventually, the eaglet's wings are functioning as they're supposed to and instead of falling, it's *flying*.

This is precisely the process God has been taking the nation of Israel through.

He took them out of their nest in Egypt.

Their time in Egypt had begun as a comfortable stay in a land of plenty when it was a time of drought for the rest of the region.

But over time, the nest became uncomfortable; the sharp twigs of slavery poked them and they longed to be let out.

God opened the door and they took their first journey outside the nest of Egypt.

Then God bore them up by leading them with the pillar of smoke and fire.

He bore them up through the Red Sea and their deliverance from the threat of the Egyptian army.

He bore them up in the battle with the Amalekites, with the provision of manna, and water at Rephidim.

In all of these trails, God was giving them another opportunity to exercise the muscles of their faith and to learn how to soar, rather than fall.

What God did with Israel, He does with us.

It seems to be the universal experience of Christians that their first few weeks or months of the Christian life are awesome times of

sensing the Lord's presence and love.
Everything is new and fresh and cool – even the trials seem to be fun in a way!
But then, there comes a time of severe challenge and testing, and the Lord's presence seems less real, less tangible.
The mother eagle is no longer there dropping choice worms into our mouth.
We look around and we wonder where God is, and it's getting so uncomfortable, and so we step out, and find ourselves free-falling through discouragement, fear, panic!
But it never fails, right at the last moment, right before we crash, the Lord moves in and lifts us up, and carries us back to a place of safety.
This happens again and again, until we learn to fly; until we learn that being a mature Christian isn't a life of sitting in a comfortable place where God drops blessing into our lives.
It means being like Him, living His life His way, soaring above the things of this world.
As Israel was now at Sinai, they had been born up by the Lord time and again.
But God had a mission for them, and that was to take possession of Canaan, a land inhabited by giant adversaries who lived behind heavily fortified walls.
God had a land of great blessing and promise for them but it would need to be conquered.
Israel would need to learn to fly – to fight – to be victorious as they walked by faith in Him.
And so, as they traveled from Egypt to Sinai, God kept pulling them down out of their nest and facing them with the trials they had endured.
And at each step, right before they crashed, He always came through and bore them up by providing for them.
His goal was to teach them, not how to fall, but how to fly, to look to Him right at the outset of some trial and need.
God desires for each of us to enter in to the fullness of his promise and blessing.
There is a spiritual Canaan, a Promised land that awaits us – it's the spirit filled life.

But we have an adversary who wants to keep us from entering in and taking possession of what the Lord intends for us.

The trials we endure are part of the Lord process of maturing us, and teaching us of His faithfulness.

They are part of His turning us from slaves to warriors.

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine.

God had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would be His special covenant people.

And though this was a promise made in and by grace, by God's unmerited, unearned favor, He extends an invitation now to those descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – it's an invitation to be a people, a nation that would be the special focus of His attention.

We need to understand what God says here against the historical backdrop of that time.

You see, the ancient world believed in *many gods*, and every nation, every tribe and group of people had their own deities.

Specifically, each had their own *chief god* to whom they were attached and had a special covenant with.

The Egyptians worshiped *Ra* as their supreme deity.

The Babylonians worshiped *Marduk*.

Most of the Canaanites worshiped *Baal*.

The Philistines worshipped *Dagon*.

In the religions of these people, the god they served placed specific demands on them, and if the people met them, then the deity promised certain benefits.

God is using that form here with the people of Israel.

He has given them ample evidence of His reality, power, and love.

And now, He extends to them the invitation to enter into a national covenant with Him: He will be their God and they shall be His people.

The conditions are this – they must obey Him, and if they do, then they will be His treasure!

Then God adds this most crucial remark that was meant to make them realize He wasn't like the other deities worshipped by the other nations.

He may indeed be using a form similar to what was in place around them, but that's as far as the similarity goes.

He says, "**All the earth is Mine.**"

He wasn't to be confused with the idols and petty deities worshipped by others.

He wasn't a god limited to just one geographical region, or to just one aspect of creation.

No! The whole earth is His. He is Creator and Sustainer of CREATION itself.

I love what God says here in v. 5, how he identifies Israel – as His special treasure!

What does God consider of value? Where does He invest His wealth? What's His treasure? HIS PEOPLE!!!! Those who are in covenant with Him.

Gold and silver mean nothing to Him – they are but minerals, destined to dissolve when the heavens and the earth are changed.

The ONLY THING that lasts when this Creation is complete, when it has served it's purpose and passes away, the only thing that remains, that lasts, is people!!!

Listen to these words of Moses 40 years later as he looked back on the early days of the Exodus when God first forged the covenant with the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:9-12

9 For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.

10 "He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.

11 As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings,

12 So the LORD alone led him, And *there was no foreign god with him.*

Did you catch that – the Lord's portion what He gets out of all this, is what? His people!

You & me! We are His portion!

We are the apple, the pupil, of His eye!

How careful are you about your eye? That's how tender and careful the Lord is about you!

In Ephesians 1: 16-18, Paul says this -

16 [I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Did you catch that? Paul prays they might know how God treasures them as HIS INHERITANCE!

Listen – WE ARE WHAT GOD GETS OUT OF ALL THIS!

AND WE ARE WHAT HE WANTS.

Deep in the heart of every human being is the longing *to be desired, to be wanted.*

It was placed there by God, because we were made for Him.

We find our purpose, our meaning in being pursued and found by Him.

Our greatest potential is realized in giving ourselves to He Who wants us.

God's greatest glory is in us becoming Who He created us to be – the object of His treasured affection.

6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

As Israel obeyed the Lord, and became God's treasure, then she would become a nation set apart from all others to be a kingdom of priests.

A priest's task is simple & 2-fold:

- 1) The priest stands before God on behalf of people.
- 2) And stands before the people on behalf of God.

Yahweh here says that Israel would become a sacred nation, whose mission would be, not to hoard the revelation of God, but to mediate it to the other nations of the world.

They would bring the needs of the world to God and would bring

God's message to the world.

That was God's original plan for Israel – but she badly neglected her duty, her sacred calling, and instead of being a *light to the nations*, she hoarded the revelation of God and grew proud of her status as His choice treasure.

It got so bad that Israel worked *against* her mission – and began to treat outsiders, the Gentiles, as a people to hate and disdain.

Gentiles were said to have been created by God as nothing more than fuel for the fires of hell.

The loathing of Jews for Gentiles became so intense that if a Jew so much as brushed a Gentile, he was supposed to change his clothes!

Jews and Gentiles could not share a meal & Jews were not allowed to enter a Gentile's home.

When we consider God's original plan for Israel and how He intended them to be a *missionary* nation, we wonder how very different the history of the world might have been if instead of hoarding the revelation of God, she had been faithful to her mission of being a kingdom of priests.

And then we're reminded of Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:9 & 10.

9But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people,

These words sound amazingly a lot like what God said to Israel at Mt. Sinai!

They are, and Peter intends us to understand them that way.

. . . that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Just as the children of Israel were a bunch of nobodies, a despised race of slaves no one could give a rip about, so we were nobodies, with nothing whatsoever to comment us to God.

But God, in His mercy and grace, chose us, saved us, and made us into a kingdom of priests, a covenant-community with a sacred mission of sharing His message with this lost world.

How tragic it would be if we followed in Israel's footsteps and failed to share that message, but instead isolated ourselves and hoarded

the goodness and blessing of God.

2. 7-8 • The people accept

7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. ⁸ Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

Moses repeated the Lord’s invitation to the leaders of the people to enter into this national covenant with Him as their God and they as His people.

Their response was positive – they agree to the terms.

Now that the covenant has been agreed to, God needs to give Moses the *specifics* of what it means to obey Him.

Now we get the regulations and rules that will govern the relationship of the people with Yahweh.

3. 9-15 • Getting ready for God’s revelation

9 And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.”

God is going to give the law, the specifics of the covenant to Moses, and Moses will then relate them to the people.

But God wants to make sure the people accept what Moses tells them as indeed from God, and not just made up by Moses.

So when God comes, He will appear in manifest majesty and speak to Moses in such a way that the people will accept what Moses says as from the Lord.

How that will be worked out we’ll see in just a moment.

So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. ¹⁰ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. ¹¹ And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take

heed to yourselves *that* you do *not* go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³ Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot *with an arrow*; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”

Okay, get the scene here. Moses had originally gone up to meet with the Lord and God had given him the *initial* invitation to the national covenant to give to the elders.

Moses had then gone back down to those elders and shared it with them.

They had responded and Moses had carried that word back to God. God now tells Moses that he must go back to the people and get them ready for a special revelation of His glory and will.

He will descend upon the Mount, which will become a kind of pulpit form which He will speak.

A boundary must be set up around the base of the mount so that no one breaks through and tries to ascend the mount while God is speaking.

The reason why is because the attention of the people would be drawn off what God was speaking onto those who were going up the mount.

What God has to say to the people is so important, there can be no distractions, so if anyone does break through, they are to be immediately executed by the rest of the people, either by stoning or by arrow-shot.

You know, during our services here, we need to do our best to keep distractions to a minimum.

People coming in late, getting up and moving around during service, cell phones, pagers, wristwatch alarms, fidgety kids, and chit chat – all these things can be distractions – and not one of them is necessary.

God warned the people to recognize the sanctity of the mount of His revelation, and if anyone violated it, the consequences were severe and immediate.

Now, this doesn’t mean we’re going to implement a policy of stoning or shooting people when they make a distraction!

But it does mean we all need to look at our times here as serious business!

We are worshiping God! And we are listening to His Word, waiting on His Spirit to speak to us and teach us His truth. Look, God even told the people that there would be two full days of preparation before He spoke, and they were to get ready by washing their clothes.

This was a simple way of impressing upon the people that this was going to be a *special* event and they needed to prepare for it.

And there is a direct correlation to what we do here.

This doesn't mean we're to put on our Sunday best and dress up for church.

What it does mean is that when we come to church, when we come into the Lord's presence to worship and hear His Word, we come with *prepared* hearts.

It isn't outward, but inner preparation we need to attend to.

It's clean *hearts* the Lord is looking for; hearts made clean by the washing of the water of the word. [Ephesians 5:26]

14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵ And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near *your* wives."

Moses went back to the people to implement the preparation the Lord had commanded.

He told them that in 3 days the Lord would come with a special word for them and they needed to get ready.

They washed and prepared, and then Moses added the command that they were to avoid marital relations for a couple days, until the Lord had come and spoken to them.

Now why would he say this? Some have concluded that this is a sign that there's something *unclean* or *unholy* about sex, even *marital* sex.

Well, that doesn't jive with the rest of what the Bible teaches about sex, and it doesn't fit with the context here either!

Is it *morally wrong* to wear *dirty* clothes? No!

But would you wear them when meeting a dignitary? No way!

It's appropriate to affect your cleanest and best appearance when meeting a dignitary.

This is the way we ought to understand Moses' command that the people abstain from marital relations for a couple days. He wanted them to realize that as *important* as the husband–wife relationship is, as *intimate* as it is, there is in fact a relationship that is even *more* crucial, *more* intimate – our relationship with God.

And just as abstinence would create a tension that would look for release in being re-united with one's spouse, Moses wanted to create a *healthy spiritual tension* in the people that would find release in their union with God.

4. 16-25 • The Lord appears in glory on Mt. Sinai

16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

When the dawn of the third day came, the Lord descended in glory on the mount.

There was a thick cloud representing His presence and glory. Flashes of lightning crackled and thunder boomed, but above it all there was heard the sound of a trumpet, summoning the people to the edge of the mount, that they might hear the words which God would command them.

17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. ¹⁹ And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. ²⁰ Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on 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 gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.

22 Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” 23 But Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.’ ” 24 Then the LORD said to him, “Away! Get down and then come up, you and 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 spoke to them.

God called Moses up yet again, to tell Him once more how crucial it was that the people realize the importance of not trespassing onto the mount.

Moses told the Lord that he'd already done that and that the boundary markers had been set.

But God urged Moses to return and tell the people to be *extra-cautious* about straying onto the mount.

So Moses went and reminded the people just how serious this issue of touching the mount was.

They needed to be impressed with the reality of just how holy God is.

But there was another reason why God told Moses to go back and talk to the people.

He wanted Moses to be *with* the people when the *first words* of the covenant were spoken.

These words would be spoken for all 3 million of the people to hear, not just to Moses.

CHAPTER 20

G. At Mt. Sinai • 20-40

1. 20:1-17 • The Ten Commandments are given

1 And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

And now we get the 10 Commandments, which we're covering in

depth on Sunday mornings over the next so many weeks.

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; ⁵ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. ¹¹ For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

According to Jewish tradition, the first 4 commandments were written on the first of the two stone tablets.

The 10 Commandment can be divided into two sections:

- 1) Those which relate to our duty toward God, on the first tablet.
- 2) Those which relate to our duty toward man, on the second tablet.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He said it was to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and strength, and to love our neighbor as our self.

He said on this hangs *all* the Law.

Loving the Lord is the fulfillment of the first tablet's commands

while loving our neighbor is the fulfillment of the second.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor’s.”

[We’ll look at all of these in depth in our series on Saturdays & Sundays]

2. 20:18-21 • The people’s terrified reaction

18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. ¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

After witnessing the awesome display of God’s power and majesty, and hearing His voice announcing the terms of the covenant, the people can bear no more.

The sights and sounds have overwhelmed them and they are on the verge of sensory overload.

It’s a common desire for people to want to see God.

We think what a huge faith-boost it would be if we could just see Him & hear Him speak audibly.

What we read here should put that idea to rest! The people plead with Moses to make it stop!

Later, when Moses asked to see God, the Lord told Him that was *impossible* because the revelation would *kill* him!

When the prophet Isaiah was given a glimpse of heaven, all he saw was the hem of God’s robe and the glory was so great it

wiped him out.

When John was given the revelations he had, he too was wiped out and fell as though dead.

Daniel was made so physically weak by the glory he saw it took him days to recover.

The point is this – seeing God in His glory is not something this frail human flesh can endure.

That’s why these bodies have to be traded in for that which is immortal and spiritual.

We are made and destined for eternal, face to face fellowship with God.

But these things [bodies] could never endure it, not even for a second.

Here the children of Israel are coming to grips with the reality that Yahweh is not at all like the deities worshiped by the heathen nations. He is the *true* God and all others are fakes and pretenders.

20 And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”

What a great word!

You see, as the people had just now heard the terms of the covenant they had agreed to, they realized they’d already broken every one of the commandments!

So sure, judgment would come and they were fearful that the lightening would blast forth and fry them where they stood.

But Moses calms them by saying that they need not fear God – rather, fear sin!

God doesn’t want the people to walk in a terrified kind of way before Him but rather to walk with utmost care as it came to their observance of the commandments.

All the lightening, and thunder, and earthquakes were evidences of God’s power and that He’s not One to be trifled with.

21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

3. 20:22-26 • Building an altar

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to

the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. ²³ You shall not make *anything to be with Me*—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.

This is a reiteration of the 2nd Commandment—not to make an image that represents God.

God repeated this command because He knew how prone the people were to the making of idols as instruments of religious devotion.

It’s what *every other* nation and religion did, but they were to break away from other religions.

They were to realize and implement their radical difference from the ways of the world.

It’s the nature of worship to become *incarnational*; that is, to find expression!

That which we truly worship, will find expression in our lives.

The problem is, if we’re not careful, we can start equating the form of our worship with the thing we’re worshipping.

In the ancient world, they took a log or stone and fashioned it into the shape of a goddess.

The idol was merely meant to be a representation of a spiritual entity, but it wasn’t long before the image itself was thought to *be* the deity.

God told the people never to make an image of Him because there would be a confusion about Him that would take place.

By its nature, an image would always be less than who and what He is.

An image would distort their view of Him and so their relationship with Him.

You know, an *image* is the product of our *imagination*.

The *factory* of images is the imagination – and long before we fashion an image with our hands, we’ve fashioned it in our minds.

There’s a danger in trying to *imagine* what Jesus looked like – and this is why the Word of God never even hints at His physical appearance.

The HS does not want us conjuring imaginary portraits of the Lord because it would inevitably fall short of who and what

He is.

Yet still, our worship strives for incarnation – for expression.

And this is why Jesus said that true worship, pure worship is that which is offered up to the Lord in spirit and in truth, that is, the communion of our spirits with the Lord's through the revelation of His Word.

There is an indispensable link between the Word of God and true worship.

And it's one of the reasons why I think the worship we enjoy here at CC is some of the best and sweetest worship that pleases God.

Not because it's excited and loud and rambunctious, but because it's sincere, and joyously reverent, respectful of God's holiness and receptive to His grace.

Our worship finds expression in prepared hearts, uplifted hands, and surrendered lives.

24 An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. ²⁵ And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. ²⁶ Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

Note this – it's crucial! As God has just given the core and heart of the law, He immediately speaks of the altar – why?

Because where there is law, there is sin because man is fallen! God gave the law, not to *make* man righteous, but to show him he's *not*!

As Paul says to the Galatians, the Law is a schoolmaster, a tutor, which drives us to Christ.

So God gives immediate instruction about the altar because where there is law, there's the need for sacrifice, for substitution.

The altar they are to build is to be a plain affair.

If made of earth, they are just to scrap some dirt together.

If made of stone, they are not to shape the stones.

The reason why is because God wants the attention to be on the sacrifice itself, not on the altar it's laid on.

The attention is to be on the substitution the animal offered up *is* for them, and not on the work of some artisan.

The plain altar speaks of grace, not works!

And this is why the altar wasn't to be some lofty affair either, in which the priest would ascend many steps and so his backside exposed to those below.

All attention was to be where? On the *offering*, the *sacrifice*.

This points to the Final Sacrifice all previous sacrifices *anticipated* – the sacrifice Jesus would offer up on the plain wooden Roman cross on an earthen hill outside the walls of Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

Now that Israel has come to Mt. Sinai, they will spend the next year there.

All throughout that year they would be given the Law of God and would see it put into effect in the governing of their nation and lives.

The word *Sinai* means “*thorny*.” The area is also called *Horeb* which means “*desolate*.”

Interesting that God would bring them to *Mt. Thorny in Desolation* to give them the Law.

But that is precisely the lesson we're to learn from this, and why, hard on the heels of giving the heart of the law, God gives the command for the altar.

The Law is holy, right and good.

But because we're not, because we're fallen, the law provokes the sin within us to rise up & rebel.

Then our conscience is *pricked*, poked by the thorns of the law, and we're stricken with guilt.

The longer we live with the Law, the more *desolate* we become, realizing there's no way, in our own strength, we can commend ourselves to God.

Thank God He's erected an altar at the foot of Mt. Thorny and at the edge of the Wilderness of Desolation.

For on that altar a sacrifice is made which is the substitution for our guilt and which covers our failure and shame.

Let's take careful note here that before God had them build the altar, he gave the Law.

You see, what need is there of sacrifice if there is no *consciousness* of sin?

The only one's who need a Savior are those who realize they are lost!

We do people a major disservice today by failing to speak of sin, and by downplaying the Law of God.

All too often, the gospel is presented as little more than an offer to join a church and put a bumper sticker on your car, or wear a T-shirt with a clever religious slogan on it.

The true message of Christ is that He is our substitute, that He was offered up in our place and that by faith in Him the righteous requirements of the law are met and satisfied.

Those seeker-sensitive churches who refuse to mention the reality of sin for fear it might turn some people off, are in effect saying what Jesus did on the cross wasn't really all that important.

One has to ask – are we interested in making *genuine born-again converts* or just *church members*?

Are we preparing people for *heaven* – or just giving them a false sense of security as they make their way into hell?

Listen, Jesus died on the cross – FOR YOU AND ME!

He died to pay the debt for our sin!

We've all blown it; we've broken God's law – every one of us!

Now, you might say, "Well not me. I've never murdered anyone or committed adultery."

Have you ever said something false about another person? Have you ever lied? You've broken the 9th Commandment.

Have you ever coveted what belongs to another, been envious of their success?

You've broken the 10th Commandment.

Have you, for every moment of your life, had only God as your God?

You've broken the very first Commandment.

Even if you have kept all the commandments, except one, and even then broke *it* only once, you're guilty of having broken them all!

James 2:10 • For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

[Use the tablets to show how]

Evangelism is not telling people if they come to Jesus it will enrich their marriage, enhance their income, and give them a pearly white smile.

Evangelism begins with the bad news that we are all sinners – but the good news is Jesus died for sinners!

Ray Comfort uses this analogy which I think is great and will end with this.

There's a plane on the runway at LAX.

The flight attendant hands one passenger a parachute and says, "Here - put this on. It will make your flight more enjoyable."

In the back of the plane is another flight attendant who hands another passenger a chute and says, "Here – put this on. At some point this plane is going down and this chute will save your life."

The plane takes off and about 10 minutes later the first passenger is really struggling.

The chute isn't making the trip more enjoyable – it's a pain!

So he takes it off and throws it to the floor in disgust.

When the flight attendant walks by and encourages him to put it on, he says, "It tried it and it doesn't work for me."

The passenger in the back has his chute on, and though he's hunched over in his seat, he's thinking about only one thing – the plane is going down! But he's ready.

The message of Christ in many ways makes living in this world more difficult, because this world is opposed to God.

But one day our plane is going down. We will leave this world and stand before God in judgment.

The only way to survive that judgment will be to have on Christ!

I apologize to you if you were told that Christianity is fun and that it will make you more sexy and hip.

That's not the message Jesus wants His people to share.

The fact is, apart from Christ, you and I are sinners destined for an eternity in hell.

We have broken God's law and bear the guilt of our sin.

The remedy is Christ who died to pay for our debt of sin and remove our guilt.

Now, the fact is – once we put our faith in Him, He does change us

and make our lives better.

But that life He makes better is not just a new and improved version of this world's idea of what it means to live.

It's a whole new way to be human!

A new person among a new people; a holy nation – God's special, choice treasure.