***Lessons from the Mountain***

While I was sitting waiting for my flight back home in the Tucson airport I looked across the runway from the window I was sitting by. Far off in the distance was a very large mountain protruding up from the flat ground. My mind began to wonder as I was bored and still had an hour to waste before my flight. I drifted to Mount Sinai picturing myself among the multitude in that day when Moses went up on the mountain.

**Introduction:**

When we come to the nineteenth chapter of Exodus the Israelites have been through much and seen great wonders. The plagues of Egypt **(Exodus 7-12),** the first passover. They had witness God in His awesome power. Then after they have came out of Egypt they arrive at Mount Sinai. This period of Israel's history is an incredibly crucial time. They spend almost an entire year in the wilderness at Sinai. From the third month of the first year of the Exodus **(Exodus 19:1)** to the second month of the second year **(Numbers 10:11-12).** Where they had previously witness about a year of plagues in Egypt they will not witness a year of God’s power on display.[[1]](#footnote-0) And the nineteenth chapter is the beginning to this awesome period of Israel's history and it is a time of preparation for the covenant and the dwelling of God.

There are three major themes of points that I think are crucial to get from this chapter of Scripture. They are 1.) God has Spoken, are we listening? 2.) God desires you, and 3.) God demands holiness.

**God Has Spoken, Are We listening?**

When we begin the nineteenth chapter the nation of Israel has arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. They had traveled far under threat from Pharaoh for part of the journey. They had witnessed the parting of the Red Sea and the deliverance of God. They had seen all of the mighty works of God and now that they were at Sinai they were about to witness the greatest work of all; they were to hear the voice of God. The only question left was were they going to listen? During this period God would speak to Israel through Moses as a type of mediator in preparation for God Himself speaking to the people. It says here in the text ***“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.’”* (Exodus 19:3)** God is about to given unto Moses the conditions of the covenant in which Israel was going to enter into with God.

The questions posed earlier is the same for us today. God has spoken to us today is just as a miraculous way. And no God has not come down on another mountain to speak, the way He speaks today is still just as powerful. Consider for a moment that the Bible that you hold in your hands contains the words and thoughts of God, His righteousness! “***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;”* (Romans 1:16-17a)** Think about it! God’s holiness is revealed unto man in those pages but not the mere fact that He is holy, because that has been long known, but that God’s holiness is what cleanses us from our sins! But also, the Hebrew writer reminds us the God has spoken to us just as He spoke unto Israel. **Hebrews 1:1ff “*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”*** We are also told that Scripture is all sufficient and contains everything we need in life **(2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3).** Despite these amazing facts there are some who still do no hear, do not listen. This was the case with Israel in **Exodus 32:1, 6, 1-8.** We are warned repeatedly to pay attention to the Word (**Hebrews 2:1)** and to be a doer not a forgetter **James 1:22-25.**

**God Desires You:**

The second major theme we find in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus is that God desires you! God spoke to Moses and all of Israel that ***“You shall be My own possession among all the peoples...”*** He had chosen Israel from the patriarchs to be His own possession and the people by which the world would be blessed (**Genesis 12:3**). Think of own possession here as a “special treasure” as something kept in a private collection. Something that is beyond value to you. This is how God viewed Israel. God valued Israel dearly. He reminds them in this section how He ***“bore [them] on eagles’ wings, and brought [them] to [Himself].”*** Using the analogy of a mother eagle and her offspring God reminds them that it was Him who was always there and how it was Him who guided them to deliverance. Going back only a few short chapters to **Exodus 15** we see all that God had done for Israel as recorded in the Song of Moses. He had brought vengeance down upon their enemies, spared them in the Passover, guided them through the Red Sea, and led them in the wilderness. Israel was a newborn eaglet who without Jehovah would have been easily destroyed.

But do not think that God’s lovingkindness and desire for a people stopped with Israel. God today desires each and everyone of us for a holy nation. Just as God carried Israel out of bondage as on eagles wings so to today has God done great and mighty works for you and I.

* He gave us His son as the perfect sacrifice **Hebrews 10:12-17**
* He has given us an all sufficient or perfect word of faith **2 Timothy 3:16**
* Christ stands ready as a perfect high priest and mediator **Hebrews 5:9-10 “ *And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”***
* Remember that God desires you! ***“who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*(1 Tim, 2:4)**

However, this relationship with God is conditional. Going back to **Exodus 19:5 *“If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples...”*** God’s promise to Israel was conditional. They were to be His own people, a ***“kingdom of priest and a holy nation”*** if they obeyed all that God would command them to do. God has never wanted forced servitude. Because if it is forces it is not from love. This expectation from God or part of His nature did not simply go away when Christ came. Christ Himself said that ***“if you love me, you will keep My commandments”*** (**John 14:15)** and again in another place He has said ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven will enter.”* (Matthew 7:21)** Based on that condition Israel cried out ***“All that the Lord has spoken we will do!”*(Exodus 19:8)** based upon their acceptance of the term God tells them what He would do **verse 9.**

**God Demands Holiness:**

This is the biggest emphasis we see stressed in the chapter. That God demands holiness. Once Israel has said that they will do all that God will command them God spoke unto Moses saying ***“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments;”*(Exodus 19:10)** Before they were to come into the presence of God they had to make themselves ready. One cannot be defiled and come into the presence of a all holy God. It is what the Prophet said in **Habakkuk 1:13 *“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor.”***

Part of holiness is respecting the boundaries that God has established. God spoke unto Moses that ***“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. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’”*(Exodus 19:12-13)** The literal and immediate application is that they were not to touch or go near the mountain but, there is a great principle to be learned and applied here in this text. And that is we cannot do as we please or play with the boundary of what is acceptable and expect to be in good standing with God. Going back to the listening point, it would not take long before those standing there in that assembly would no longerdo all that the Lord had commanded them. We can look at Aaron's sons in **Leviticus 10:1ff.** They had just gotten done with offering up the sacrifices and no sooner than Moses and Aaron had blessed the people did Aaron's sons disobey God. We are no different, Peter tells us that ***“like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all of your behavior; because it is written “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”* (1 Peter 1:15-16).** We are called to a higher standard, to be done with the world, what fellowship do we have the things that are against God if we have become part of His family?

**Exodus 19:18-25:**

Here the Lord God descends upon the mountain with fire, smoke, and lightning. And the command is given again to ***“set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.”*** This shows just how important holiness is to God. He cannot stress it enough here in this section. Just as Israel received the call to be holy nation and priesthood then we receive the same call now, “***But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*(1 Peter 2:9-10)**

**A final point:**

God coming down in power on the mountain signaled Israel that something big and important was about to happen. The covenant was about to be given unto them. This was an amazing event but as the Hebrew writer reminds us that greater things have come in Christ Jesus. **Hebrews 12:18-24.**

Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant. One by which all may be saved. He inaugurated it with His cleansing blood. The only way to come in contact with that blood is in the waters of baptism **Mark 16:16 cf. 1 Peter 3:21**

1. Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary.* P. 299 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)