

Exodus Chapter 19

Before we come to chapter 19 itself, I would like to make a quick summary of what has gone before in this book. This is not a digression but is just what God did with Moses in verse 4.

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

Before we move on in the christian pathway, it is often wise to first look back. This is what Paul did to Timothy in his second epistle. He is reminding Timothy of things that had happened in the past, and if the young man could only grasp these, he would be in no danger of being ashamed of Paul or the testimony of the Lord.

If Israel had kept in mind how God had dealt with their enemies, they would not have been so afraid of their enemies. God also reminds Moses how He had borne them on eagles' wings. In Exodus 14:13, Moses said to the fearful people, "Fear ye not: stand still and see the salvation of the Lord". They won the battle without even having to draw a sword. They rose like eagles above the scene at the Red Sea.

Chapter 19 also marks a distinct change in the book of exodus. We are going to pass from grace to law. The book begins with Jacob entering the land of Egypt with 70 souls. Four hundred years later the descendants of Jacob have multiplied to such an extent that the scripture says, "The land was filled with them". It is reckoned by some that they could have reached two million souls by the time of the exodus. A family had become a nation and it was prospering in Egypt. But then came the drastic change of chapter 1:8:

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

Israel became a nation of slaves under the bondage of Egypt. The first 18 chapters are a record of how God brought them out of Egypt. Love was God's motivating force as we read in Hosea chapter 11:

1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

God's first step in grace was to preserve for Israel a deliverer. Moses was spared the fate of the male children who had otherwise to be put to death. Moses was God's chosen man, but at the beginning of the book, Moses was not yet in a proper condition. He supposed that God by his hand would have redeemed Israel. He was right in his assumption but he first had to learn in the school of God how to lead. He had to get Egypt out of his system before he could bring a nation out of Egypt – and that took 40 years in the wilderness to accomplish. This covers chapters 1 to 4.

In chapters 5 to 12, God then had to deal in judgement with Egypt. God was going to judge them for what they had done to His people and the Lord brought upon them a series of plagues. This was in fulfilment of the promise made by God to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

He made an even more specific promise in Genesis chapter 15:

13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

God not only foreknew the bondage of Egypt, He also knew how long the period of bondage would last – 400 years. But at the end of the 400 years, Egypt itself would be

judged, and God would bring them out with great substance.

Many centuries later, Israel found itself again in bondage – this time in Babylon. But once again, the oppressor found himself under the judgement of God.

Chapters 13 to 15a describe the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea.

Finally in this part of the book, chapters 15b to 18 describe the first steps taken by the nation in the wilderness. It is not an encouraging start, for after only three days in the wilderness, they begin to murmur against the Lord and against Moses. Towards the end of chapter 15, they come to the waters of Marah, and they were bitter. The people murmur against Moses. "What shall we drink?" Moses is instructed by God to cast a tree into the waters, and the water becomes sweet. In the goodness of God, verse 27 describes how the Lord brought them to Elim where they found 70 palm trees and 12 wells of water. Chapter 16 records their next murmuring., this time it is because of food. "Ye have brought us into this wilderness to kill us with hunger". God responds by sending the quails and the manna. In chapter 17, the people are thirsty again and they murmur once more. "Give us water that we may drink". Despite their murmurings, God responds again in grace and gives them water from the smitten rock in Horeb. In chapter 18, Moses takes the advice of Jethro his father-in-law by appointing rulers and judges to pass judgement on the affairs of the people.

God has therefore been acting in grace to bring His people out of the bondage of slavery, and He has even blessed them these three times that they murmured against Moses.

But chapter 19 sees the change. He is no longer going to deal with them under grace but under the Law. Chapter 19 sets the scene at Mount Sinai for the giving of the Law in chapter 20. They have been delivered from the bondage of Egypt but now they are about to come under the bondage of the Law. Paul speaks of this bondage in Galatians chapter 4:

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

The Christian today who is in the church of God, has been delivered from the bondage of the Law. But while we do not strive to be justified by keeping the Law, we do not have license to behave in any way that we like. Grace still puts constraints upon us. In many ways, grace is even more demanding for the Christian, for we are asked to control not only our deeds but also our thoughts and our feelings. We are the bondservants of Jesus Christ and we seek to please our new master by keeping His commandments.

Chapter 19 of Exodus begins with, "in the third month". Israel had a new calendar. When the Passover night was fulfilled, God said to the people. "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months". Now nearly two months have passed since the Passover, and the people have come to Sinai. Verse 3 tells us:

3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

Moses was a man who spoke face to face with God. As God instructed him, so he passed on the mind of the Lord to the people. He was the mediator between God and the nation. We too have a mediator in I Timothy 2:

1. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Our mediator has acted to bring us to God in salvation. But presently, He is also our Great High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession for us". He prays for us in our weakness and intercedes on our behalf as an Advocate, should we fall into sin.

Moses is reminded of their immediate past – but then comes the transformation, "Now therefore". God was going to make three promises to them – they would be "a peculiar treasure", "a kingdom of priests", "a holy nation". But these promises would be made with a condition attached:

1. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant,

The promises were based on the little word "if". "If ye will obey my voice". All through the remainder of the Old Testament, God's blessings have to do with the land, and they are temporal and sometimes temporary. If they kept His commandments, God would send the former and the latter rain and the harvest would be abundant. If they feared the Lord, He would protect them from their enemies. But if they failed to obey Him, then famine would come, their enemies would overcome them, and eventually of course, they would lose possession of the land itself and go into captivity. There never has been a more favoured nation than Israel but equally few nations have suffered so much – and all because of their disobedience towards God.

The church has also been blessed by God - according to Ephesians chapter 1:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

Our blessings are spiritual, and they are in heavenly places, unlike those of Israel. Our blessings too are unconditional. Verse 4 goes on to say:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

God's interest in us did not begin on the day that we were saved – not even on the day that we were born. We were chosen "before the foundation of the world" – before sin even entered the universe of God. We had nothing to do with God's choice – It was His sovereign will. We can do nothing to keep His blessings or indeed to lose them – they have been given to us by God. We are redeemed, we are forgiven, we are His sons, and we are His heirs. We owe it all to God – all our blessings are unconditional.

It is beautiful to see in Ephesians chapter 1, that while we read of the many blessings of the church today, there is not one mention in the chapter of the little word "if". Every blessing comes without conditions.

Now what about these three promises in Exodus chapter 19? The first promise is that they would be "a peculiar treasure". The idea is of a treasure which has been shut up for Himself – a treasure which is His unique possession. The Lord Jesus surely had this in mind when He spoke about the treasure hid in the field in Matthew 13:

44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

By His death on Calvary, the Lord has purchased the field, which is the world. Israel is an earthly people, so to get the treasure, the Lord had to buy the field. Today, because of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, the treasure remains hidden in the field, but one day, He will come again to claim His "peculiar treasure".

There is an interesting conclusion to this promise at the end of verse 5:

Above all people: for all the earth is mine:

When the Lord comes again in glory for Israel, He will already have received the title deeds of earth as per the account of Revelation chapter 5. The earth is His, and He share His government of the nations with the nation of Israel. Ten men shall lay hold upon the skirt of him who is a Jew saying, "We will go with thee, for the Lord is with thee".

If Israel is typified in Matthew 13 as a treasure, then surely we can see the church represented by the "one pearl of great price". It was so precious to the Lord Jesus that he

went and sold all that He had, that He might purchase it.

The second blessing for Israel is that they would become a "kingdom of priests". We would normally make a distinction between the idea of royalty and priesthood, but here we have a kingdom and we have priests. God's purpose was to reign through the priests. Israel should have been a theocracy ie a nation over which God reigns. But because of the failures of Israel, this idea in which all were priests becomes confined to the tribe of Levi, then restricted even further to Aaron and his sons. We know that Aaron himself was restricted in his access to the most holy place – he was allowed in only once per year on the day of atonement.

We, on the other hand, have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. The way into the holiest is now made manifest after the rending of the veil. What Israel knew in a restricted physical way, we now enjoy in a much fuller way through the Spirit. According to I Peter chapter 2, we are a holy priesthood:

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

In the same chapter, we are also described as a royal priesthood:

1. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

This one verse in fact encapsulates all three promises to Israel in Exodus 19, for it includes all three ideas – priesthood, nation, and a peculiar people.

The idea of being a holy nation is that the nation of Israel should be a sanctified nation – a nation set apart from the idolatry and wickedness that marked so many of the nations round about them. The same is true of us today – we need to be separate – to be a holy nation.

If we as Christians enjoy in spirit the promises of God to the nation under the old covenant, we also enjoy the blessings of God under the New Covenant. Both Jeremiah chapter 31 and Hebrews chapter 8 tell us that God will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; **I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:**

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for **all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.**

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and **their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.**

It is not hard to see how the Christian is enjoying these blessings today. We hold the word of God dearly, in our hearts. We have an intimate relationship with God as our Father. Because of eternal life, we come to know both the Father and the Son. And our sins have been forgiven us.

In verse 7 of Exodus 19, Moses called for all the elders of the people and laid before them all the words which the Lord had spoken. The people's response is immediate in verse 8:

1. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.

They said this even before the Law had been given to them – the 10 commandments are not given them until the next chapter. They signed up for something that had not yet been given. This was foolhardy to say the least, and it also revealed their supreme self-confidence, for we subsequently know that they were totally unable to keep the word of the Lord – in fact, they failed miserably. Chapter 32 tells us how they made the golden calf and thus broke the first two commandments even before they had received them.

Both Andrew and Philip in John chapter 1 made bold statements regarding the Lord Jesus. Firstly we read about Andrew as he goes to find his brother Peter

1. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

Then Philip finds Nathaniel and makes a bold statement also:

1. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

The Lord was going to put both these men and their words to the test in John chapter 6. There is a problem. They are in the desert where five thousand people have come to hear Him. There is nothing there for the people to eat. The Lord asks Philip first of all, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" The bible adds the comment, "This He said to prove him, for He Himself knew what He was about to do". It is the Lord really saying, "Philip, you told Nathaniel that I was the one in the scriptures that Moses and all the prophets wrote about. So how do you think we can solve this problem?" Philip should have answered, "Well Lord, all things are possible for Thee". Instead, Philip looks at the size of the crowd and says, "Two hundred pennyworth is not sufficient that each one might eat a little". In other words, "The problem is too big for us". Andrew then speaks up, "There is a lad here that hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they amongst so many?" Andrew is saying, "Our resources are too small". It proves the point that if we make bold statements, the Lord might just ask us one day to prove our own words.

That was true of Peter in the upper room.

Mt 26:33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

Peter's proud boast is, "Lord, others might let you down, but you know that you can depend on me". We know only too well what happened to Peter that night.

We make just one comment before leaving verse 8. In verse 7, Moses had passed on the words of the Lord to the people. In verse 8, he passes on the words of the people to the Lord. He was a true mediator between God and men, just like the Lord who said to the Father in John 17, "I have given unto them the words which Thou hast given Me". The Lord speaks again to Moses in verse 9, and for the second time, Moses reported the word of the Lord to the people.

So what more did the Lord say to Moses in verse 9?

2. **And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.**

No matter how close Moses was to God, he could not look upon His face. In chapter 34, Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock and he was able only to see God's back parts, as God passed before him. In Exodus 19, the Lord spoke to Moses in a thick cloud. The people could hear the Lord speaking to Moses and in so doing would believe the words of Moses.

One is reminded of the cloud upon the mount of transfiguration. The three disciples heard the Father's voice speaking to them from the cloud, but they could not see God.

One might assume from the above that we too shall never see God. John chapter 1:18 would seem to support this view.

18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

But does this verse mean, as some have suggested, that we will never see God at all, not even in heaven, but that God will only be seen in the person of His Son? We might perhaps digress slightly by looking again at our phrase, "No man hath seen God at any time", and ask ourselves the question, "Does this mean that we shall never see God?"

Some would quote, "We shall never see God in essence, but only in the Person of His Son". John 1:18 would of course be cited as proof of this statement.

"No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". This may indeed suggest at first sight that we shall never see God, but surely there is a qualifying statement in the verse – "at any time". No man in the flesh could ever hope to see God and live. But what if we were no longer in the flesh – beyond the limitation of time. Let us look at various facts on both sides of the argument.

1. God is spirit (John chapter 4)

Does this mean therefore that God is invisible. Well, in Heb 1, we read there of angels who are ministering spirits, and the Bible is full of angelic appearances, when they were seen by men.

2. The invisible God (Colossians ch 1)

Col 1 says that Christ is the "image of the invisible God". So is this not conclusive ? God is invisible. Well we look at the Greek word for invisible and discover that it is simply the opposite of the word "seen" ie the unseen God. Christ is the image, not of a God who cannot be seen, but of a God who is unseen.

3. The form of God

Does God have a body that we can see? In Matt 18, we learn of the angels that they do always behold the face of the Father who is in heaven ". In Rev 5, John sees a book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne. Moses saw His back in the cleft of the rock. So, God has a body just like us, and this shouldn't surprise us for we are made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1)

4. Sightings of God

There are a number of times when man were able to look upon God, though it was not in the flesh but in visions ie not in the realm of time.

In Rev 4 and 5, John looks and sees Him who sat upon the throne and speaks of Him in both chapters. In Daniel Ch 7, the prophet sees the Ancient of Days sitting upon His throne as the Lord, the Son of Man, approaches Him.

Job also, no less than 3 times over speaks of his great hope that one day he would see God – "yet in my flesh shall I see God". "Whom I shall see for myself....mine eyes shall behold Him and not another".

5. Our nearness to God

In Luke Ch 1, Gabriel says of himself "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God". Gabriel is one of the very few angels named in the Bible. He appears on 4 special occasions. Twice in Daniel chapters 8 and 9. In chapter 9 he comes to announce to Daniel the great prophecy of the 70 weeks: In Luke chapter 1, he comes to announce to Zacharias the birth of John the Baptist, then to announce to Mary the birth of the Lord Jesus. Gabriel uses a Greek word ENOPION to describe his position - in the presence of God.

But in Eph 1:4, Paul says of us Christians that we are before Him in love. Before is KATENOPION which means "hard up against" or "in His immediate presence." We are nearer to God today than even the highest angels in heaven. What we are as far as our position is concerned today, we shall be in reality in a day to come. This particular Greek preposition is used on only three occasions in the New Testament. Apart from Ephesians 1, it is found only in Colossians chapter 1 and in Jude. In Colossians we read that God is going to present us "holy and unblameable and unreprougeable in his sight". "In his sight" uses katenopion. Then in Jude 24, we read of "in the presence of His glory". Thus the Christian today enjoys a unique position before God.

Back to Exodus 19, from verse 10 to the end of the chapter, we have preparations made for the giving of the law in chapter number 20. There were to be two days of sanctification

beginning in verse 10:

10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,

11 And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

All this activity was to impress upon the people the holiness of God and the holiness of the law that was about to be given to them. They were to be cleansed externally - even to the extent of washing their clothes. There was to be no defilement as they stood at the foot of the mountain.

The word "holy" occurs about 50 times in Exodus alone. We also have the word "holiness" mentioned 6 times, and the verb to sanctify occurs 16 times. Thus the idea of being holy runs continuously throughout the book. The life of the Jew was to be marked as a life of holiness. The word "holy" occurs far less frequently in the New Testament. Most references are to the Holy Ghost and quite a few of the remaining references are to the Holy place in the temple. But holiness is also something that is expected of us. Peter writes in his first epistle:

1Pe 1:15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

1Pe 1:16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

We are to be imitators of God in this respect. The Lord prayed about our sanctification in John 17.

Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth

He also was about to set Himself apart, that they might have an object to view which was above and beyond this world.

1. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

To achieve this purpose of sanctification, the Lord is now in the presence of God as an Advocate. We have an advocate towards the Father in I John 2:1. He is busy on our behalf to keep us in fellowship with the Father.

In Exodus 19, the people were to present themselves before the Lord at Sinai, but they were not to come near the mount. Bounds had to be set, beyond which they could not go. They were not even to touch the mount with a hand on penalty of death. Even if a beast were to stray onto the mount it was to be stoned or thrust through with a dart. The holiness of God is being forcefully impressed upon the people.

It would appear that Moses ascended and descended on the mountain no less than three times in this chapter and seven times in all in Exodus. God appears to be anxious that not a word He has spoken should be lost on the people. No one could ever say that he did not know the mind of God. No Christian can have that excuse either. We have the complete word of God in our hand. We have the Spirit of truth within us and teachers standing before us so that no one can claim exemption through ignorance.

The third day was accompanied by fearful sights and sounds. There were thunderings and lightnings, there was a thick cloud, and there was the sound of the trumpet. The people trembled at these things. We even read of Moses in Hebrews chapter 12:

20 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:

How different at times is the God of the Old Testament from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, as He is revealed to us in the New. The only exceptions to this are found in the book of Revelation where we are dealing with the judgement of God upon this world. In chapter 8, the seventh seal has been opened and the seven trumpets are about to sound:

5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the

earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

In chapter 16:18, the seventh vial has been poured out with equally dramatic results:

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

In verse 20 of Exodus 19, the Lord calls Moses up into the mountain, only to be told that he was to go back down the mountain and warn the people not to cross over the bounds that had been set.

Moses replies, "The people cannot come", for God had set bounds and the people were obedient. But God insists, "Away, get thee down". Although God would indeed destroy those who dared to transgress, He is anxious for Moses to warn them yet again not to exceed the bounds that had been set. God is a God of judgement when necessary, but judgement is His peculiar work. The Lord delights in mercy.

God provides ample opportunities for us to avoid the pitfalls that would lead to our downfall as Christians. Peter was told that the cock would crow twice before he would deny thrice. In Mark we read that Peter denied and the cock crew. Peter denied again and the cock crew a second time. He should have paid attention to the first crowing and stopped what he was doing in denying his master. He could not say that he had not been warned.

Paul has the same spirit in Philippians chapter 3:

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

Paul was repeating himself but he had in mind the safety of the believers in so doing.

In Exodus, the people were to sanctify themselves and then draw near unto the mountain – but they were not allowed to touch the mountain itself. They had to keep themselves at a distance from God.

In the New Testament, the Christian likewise has to sanctify himself but then he is brought near into the very presence of God. In Ephesians chapter 1, we are been chosen in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before Him. "Before Him" means literally "in His **immediate** presence". We are nearer to God than even Gabriel whose boast in Luke chapter 1 was that he was standing in the presence of God.