

Scripture Lesson Text

EXOD. 19:16 And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

17 And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

18 And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

19 And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.

20 And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses *up* to the

top of the mount; and Moses went up.

21 And the LORD said unto Moses, **Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.**

22 And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them.

23 And Moses said unto the LORD, **The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.**

24 And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them.

25 **So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.**

NOTES

Obedience and Respect

Lesson Text: Exodus 19:16-25

Related Scriptures: *Job 40:1-14; Psalm 96:1-13; Hebrews 12:18-29; Revelation 19:4-10*

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—“Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount” (Exodus 19:17).

Lesson Exposition

ASSEMBLY—Exod. 19:16-19

Awesome visitation (Exod. 19:16-17). It had taken the Israelites three months to travel from Egypt into the wilderness, where they camped at the foot of Mount Sinai (vs. 1).

Since this was the very area where Moses had led his sheep, it was not unfamiliar territory. Now leading a different kind of flock, Moses at least knew his way around this desolate region. Sinai was also the place where God had earlier called him to return to the land of his birth (Exod. 3).

When Moses ascended the mountain for the first time, God reminded him of both the plagues upon Egypt and Israel’s miraculous rescue from slavery (19:4). The Lord promised that if Israel would obey Him and keep His covenant, they would be God’s “peculiar treasure” (vs. 5) and a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (vs. 6), language later applied to Christians (I Pet. 2:9).

When Moses presented the possibility of Israel being in a covenant relationship with the Lord, the people affirmed their willingness to serve Him (Exod. 19:8). For the people to enter

into this covenant, they needed to be sanctified, that is, set apart. This would be accomplished by washing both their bodies and their clothing (vs. 10) and refraining from certain activities (vs. 15).

Once the people were sanctified, the Lord would “come down in the sight of all the people” (vs. 11). Although there would be some manifestation of the Lord in their presence, they would not experience God’s full glory. Even Moses was not permitted this privilege (Exod. 33:20; cf. John 1:18).

Moses made sure the people made the necessary preparations for their encounter with God. When the third day arrived, “there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud” (Exod. 19:16). As we might expect, “all the people that was in the camp trembled.”

Making their way from the camp to “the nether part of the mount” (vs. 17), that is, the foot of the mountain, the people prepared “to meet with God.” While the people were to assemble at the mountain, restrictions had already been imposed concerning how close

they were to get (vs. 12). Breaching these restrictions would result in instant death (vs. 13), reinforcing the solemnity of the occasion.

Authoritative voice (Exod. 19:18-19). Far from the flippant attitude many modern people have concerning approaching God, the physical manifestations present at their meeting at Mount Sinai stressed the sacredness of the occasion. The visible manifestations of fire and smoke, along with the earth literally shaking beneath their feet, should have been enough for the Israelites to realize that they were in the presence of the living God.

As the description of what occurred at Mount Sinai continues, we learn that “the voice [sound] of the trumpet” (vs. 16) got “louder and louder” (vs. 19).

ADMONITION—Exod. 19:20-22

Solemn charge (Exod. 19:20-21). The description of the Lord’s visitation to earth seems to indicate that He came only as far as the top of Mount Sinai. Moses therefore was called “up to the top of the mount.” Although Moses was not always quick to obey the Lord (cf. chaps. 3—4), this time he immediately did what God commanded.

Once on top of the mountain, Moses was told to return and “charge the people” (Exod. 19:21). The word “charge” also can be rendered “warn” or “admonish.” The warning in mind had to do with anyone going beyond the aforementioned boundaries that had been established (vss. 12-13) in order to “gaze” (vs. 21) upon the Lord. Such actions would bring death.

Sacred trust (Exod. 19:22). The mention of priests raises the question of the identity of these individuals. Since the Aaronic priesthood had not yet been officially established, we cannot be certain who they were.

One suggestion is that they were “the elders of Israel” (Exod. 3:18), men

who by virtue of their age and experience were the recognized leaders of the descendants of Jacob. Another possibility is that they were the “young men of the children of Israel” (24:5), who “offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord.” Another suggestion is that the firstborn of Israel (13:2), who were spared during the final plague, functioned as the first priests. Whoever they were, these men had been designated priests, even if it was a temporary arrangement.

The point of the priests being singled out, however, was to show that although in a privileged position, they were not to be presumptuous in approaching the Lord. The rules concerning sanctification applied to them as well. Both people and priests had to be careful about keeping their distance from the holy mountain.

Some time later, Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, were struck dead because they disregarded the regulations concerning the fire to be used in worship (Lev. 10:1-7). God says what He means and means what He says!

This is a warning to all people who find themselves in positions of power and authority. It is sad to hear of judges going to jail for breaking the law, physicians addicted to the drugs they were supposed to prescribe to others, or church leaders stealing from the offerings that were to be used for benevolence. People in certain positions may think the rules that apply to others do not apply to them, but this is not true. No one is above God’s law. In Israel’s case, God’s law was about to be given to them in the form of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17).

ASCENT—Exod. 19:23-25

Mountain approached (Exod. 19:23-24). Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to be in the presence of God. This would not be the last time he did so.

Considering the many regulations, rituals, and rules given Israel concerning their worship and other aspects of being God's chosen people, Moses would have to make many trips to the mountain to receive divine instructions.

In response to the Lord's commands in verses 21-22, Moses reminded the Lord, "The people cannot come up to mount Sinai" (vs. 23). As we all know, the natural curiosity of humans to see or do things we have never seen or done is always with us. Even if the people had good intentions concerning being in the presence of the Lord, their propensity to evil would have disqualified them from coming into the awesome presence of the Almighty.

Moses recalled the Lord's instruction to make sure there was a boundary between the people and the holy mountain. Exactly how this was done is not specifically mentioned. As we know, boundaries of various kinds are necessary. Since we are sinners, we are often tempted to test the moral boundaries God has established. If we will admit it, all of us can recall times we got too close to an alluring temptation and succumbed!

On his next trip up the mountain, Moses was told to bring his brother Aaron with him. Aaron had already functioned as Moses' spokesman (Exod. 4:14-16), and now he was about to become the nation's first high priest. As such, it was important for him to be in the presence of the Lord with Moses. Just because Aaron was invited to the mountain did not mean others were free to come as well (19:24). Otherwise, God would be forced to destroy them.

Mediator appointed (Exod. 19:25). While we do not usually think of Moses as a priest, he was, in fact, from the priestly tribe of Levi.

Functioning as Israel's intermediary, Moses delivered God's message

to the people. Later he interceded on behalf of the people (cf. Exod. 32:30-32), along with being their teacher and lawgiver. Bringing to the people God's laws, statutes, ordinances, and decrees was his primary role at this early point in Israel's history.

Since the New Testament declares Christians to be a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, [and] a peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9), we are to be intermediaries between a holy God and a lost world. As "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and "the light of the world" (vs. 14), we are to let our lights shine for Christ (vs. 16).

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. How long did it take the Hebrews to travel from Egypt to Sinai?
2. What important event had occurred earlier at Mount Sinai?
3. What was involved in the sanctification of the people before they met with God?
4. What physical manifestations accompanied the Lord's presence?
5. What would be the fate of those who disregarded the restrictions God placed upon them?
6. What warning was Moses told to go back and give the people?
7. Who might the priests serving the nation at this time?
8. What lesson do we—especially those in authority—still need to heed today?
9. In what role did Aaron serve, and why was he to come into the Lord's presence?
10. In what way did Moses serve as a mediator between God and Israel?

—John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Christians must prepare themselves every day to meet an all-powerful and holy God (Exod. 19:16-17).
2. God chose to display His glory and power in various ways and at various times (vs. 18).
3. God is holy and powerful beyond our understanding; yet He longs to draw near to His people (vss. 19-20).
4. Our sin separates us from God, but through Christ, God has made a way to approach Him (vs. 21).
5. We must remember that our leaders are merely human, so we must resist the tendency to idolize them (vs. 22).
6. Obedience to God is critical for those who lead His people (vss. 23-25).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the way that God communicates with His people today differ from the way He communicated with His people at Sinai?
2. In what ways did God provide for His people after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt?
3. How had Sinai been significant in the life of Moses before the Exodus (Exod. 3:12)?
4. How does remembering what God has done in the past help us?
5. What does this passage teach us about the character that God intends His people to possess?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount” (Exodus 19:17).

This meeting of the people with God took place on the third day after they had arrived at Mount Sinai.

On the morning of the third day, the Lord indeed made His presence on the mountain known through thunder, lightning, thick smoke, and the shattering blast of a trumpet.

In response to the Lord’s appearing, Moses brought the people as far as the foot of the mountain. But they were not to touch the mountain itself.

The overarching picture here is one of God’s extreme holiness. The Lord’s presence was not to be trifled with. It was not to be treated merely as a chance to see something odd or extraordinary. His visitation on the mountain was not for the idly curious to gawk at.

The New Testament contrasts this fearful encounter between the Lord and the Israelites in Exodus 12 with the experience of Christians under the new covenant (Heb. 12:18-29). There, the writer differentiates between the loud, terrifying storm of thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, and trumpet blasts and our coming to the true city of the living God.

Rather than come upon us in terrifying judgment through the giving of His law, which convicts every human heart of its hopeless state of sinfulness, deserving only His just wrath, God Himself has delivered us from judgment. He accomplished this through the atoning death and triumphant resurrection of His only beloved Son.

—John Lody.