



LESSON 23

God prepares Israel for the covenant

EXODUS 19:1-25



The holy LORD chooses a people for Himself.



“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:4–6).

Supporting Truths

1. God is holy.
2. God rescues a people to be His own.
3. God calls a people to be His own.
4. God calls His people for a purpose.
5. God’s people are to respect God’s holiness.

Objectives

1. Describe what happened on the mountain that showed God’s holiness.
2. Describe how God rescued and cared for Israel.
3. Explain what God expected Israel to do in order to enjoy His covenant.
4. Explain what the two descriptions of Israel meant for them and for all believers.
5. List the ways Israel prepared to meet God.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God prepares Israel for the covenant • Exodus 19:1-25



Lesson Summary

Having proved His power to deliver and to provide, God brought the Israelites to Sinai in order to make His covenant with them. By delivering and providing for them, He had already made them His own special people, and now He called them to obey Him and keep His covenant, so that they would be a royal priesthood and a holy nation. The Israelites answered God's call, and after preparing for three days, they met God as He appeared in thunder and fire and smoke upon the mountain.

Spotlight on the Gospel

At Mt Sinai God once again announced His intention to have a people who would represent Him and be His own people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This remains God's plan today: every person He calls, whether Jew or Gentile, is called to dwell in a relationship with a holy God and to proclaim Him to the world. The law given at Sinai shows God's holiness, and Christ's death on Calvary satisfies His holiness. And now, Christ's risen life is able to turn sinners into a holy nation.



God preserves Israel
Exodus 15:22-17:7



God prepares Israel for the covenant
Exodus 19:1-25



God gives the Ten Commandments
Exodus 20:1-21

DELIVERANCE

Lesson Commentary

The holy LORD chooses a people for Himself.

As Israel gathered at Mt Sinai, they knew their LORD was worthy to be their God. He had proven His might over all other so-called gods and over all the power of Egypt. He had also proven His care by providing food, water, and guidance to Israel as they traveled through the wilderness. Now, the LORD brought Israel to Mt Sinai (19:1-2), fulfilling His promise to Moses that the Israelites would serve Him at this place (3:12). From the beginning His purpose in redeeming Israel was so that they would worship Him as His special people. Having prepared Israel for this moment, the LORD now made a covenant with them to be His own people, a holy people called to have a special relationship with Him and a special mission for His glory.



THINK ABOUT IT

God redeems people so that they might enjoy an eternal relationship with

Him marked by joyful worship and fulfilling service to Him.

The LORD chose Israel to be His holy people (19:1-8)

First, the LORD reminded Israel of what He had done for them. He addressed them as the “house of Jacob,” reminding them of their humble beginnings as just one family (19:3). But He

also called them the “people of Israel,” pointing out the great nation they had become under His care. God’s care for them was powerful: He rescued Israel from Egypt as if He were a mighty eagle carrying His people to safety (19:4). The word for eagle in this verse describes a variety of eagles and vultures found in that area and likely brought to mind a bird like the griffon vulture, a soaring, majestic bird with a wingspan over nine feet long. It is as if God had swooped down, plucked them out of slavery, and soared away with them beyond the reach of their enemies.

But God rescued them for a purpose: to bring them to Himself (19:4). Because He had redeemed them, it was fitting that they should now serve Him. So He called them to obey His voice and keep His covenant (19:5). Although God’s **covenant** is a promise that cannot be broken (Rom 11:29), only those individuals who respond obediently to His covenant will enjoy a part in the covenant (Deut 28:15; Heb 3:7-12). This is because God’s promises must always be received by faith, by believing Him (Gen 15:6). It is not possible to enjoy the blessing of being God’s own possession if a person refuses to obey God. So the Mosaic covenant that begins in this chapter is not a plan of salvation by works, but instruction on just how holy God demands His people to be (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). This holiness is finally achieved only through the righteousness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21) and through a new heart given by the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:26).

If the people would obey, they would be God’s own special possession (19:5). Even though all people belong to God, Israel would be His unique treasure. Later, believing Gentiles are also called God’s own possession (Titus 2:14), because they share in the faith of Abraham (Rom 4:16). All those chosen by God are treasured by Him.

What makes Israel, and all believers, so prized by God? First, He has called them to be a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9). They were to communicate God’s word to the world (Gen 12:3), since **priests** are those who serve in God’s presence, worshiping God, praying and sacrificing for the people, and teaching God’s way of salvation. Through Israel all nations would be blessed (12:3). Specifically, the blessing that came through Israel was God’s Word (Rom 3:2) and the Messiah (9:5). Similarly, believers today are called to proclaim Christ as revealed through God’s Word (10:14-15).

Second, Israel was also to be a **holy** nation, called by God to be pure and set apart from the world in order to carry out God’s special purpose (Deut 14:21). By their holy living they were to worship God and draw

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THINK ABOUT IT

All believers are called to be a light that points to the glory of God by living holy lives in an unholy world (Matt 5:16).

the nations to God (Isa 2:3). So also believers today are to adorn the gospel by their holy living (Titus 2:10). Because they had seen God's power to rescue and care for them, the Israelites agreed to do all that God had spoken (19:8). The true

test would be whether they would continue to have this heart of obedience (Deut 5:28–29).

Israel prepared to meet with their holy LORD (19:9–15)

After agreeing to listen to the LORD, the people prepared to meet Him. The LORD planned to appear to all the people, instead of just to Moses, so that the people would trust Moses' leadership (19:9). But since the LORD is holy, the Israelites needed to prepare for meeting with Him. They prepared by washing their clothes (19:10, 14), keeping their bodies clean (19:15), and making a boundary around the mountain (19:12–13).



THINK ABOUT IT

God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (John 1:5).

Although such external actions do not make a person holy (Isa 1:16–17), they do show two things. First, they show the seriousness of being in God's presence. When Moses had first met with God on this mountain,

he had removed his sandals and had not approached too near to God's presence in the bush (Exod 3:5). So no one should dare to come into God's presence without first carefully thinking about who God is (Eccl 5:1–2). Second, they show that holiness involves purity (2 Cor 7:1). God is pure and does not tolerate even the smallest amount of sin in His presence.

The holy God met with Israel (19:16–25)

God's holiness is pure, but it is also awesome and terrifying. When He appeared, He came with thunder and lightning and with a dark cloud (19:16).

There was a trumpet blast that grew louder and louder, as well as smoke and a violent earthquake (19:18–19). When Moses went up the mountain, he was trembling to be in the presence of such a holy God (Heb 12:21). Anyone who understands God's holiness trembles in His presence and feels overwhelmed by his own sinfulness (Isa 6:3–5).

This passage emphasizes the terrifying power of God's holiness by repeating warnings about coming too close to God. Three times the people were warned not to cross the boundary around the mountain (9:12, 21, 23–24). Not even the priests were allowed to cross since they had not been purified yet (9:22). God's holiness is so fierce that anyone who crossed would be killed; executed with stones or arrows so that no one else would become guilty by touching the sinner (19:13). Even animals were to be killed if they crossed. God's holiness is a matter of life and death (Lev 10:1–3).

Unfortunately, no human is able to live up to God's standard of holiness. All have fallen short of His glory (Rom 3:23). No one is righteous (Ps 14:3). The only way to escape being destroyed by God's awesome holiness is to be saved by the Messiah. Jesus bore God's holy wrath for sinners. He also rose from the dead in order to give new life to all who believe. He is the one who rescued Israel from Egypt, but even more importantly, He is the one who rescues sinners from the kingdom of sin and makes them holy (1 Pet 2:9–10).

THINK ABOUT IT

Believer's are called to offer acceptable worship to God, with reverence and awe, because God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28–29).



Lesson Outline

The holy LORD chooses a people for Himself.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. The LORD chose Israel to be His special treasure (19:1–8).
2. The LORD called Israel to be His holy people (19:5–6, 9–15).
3. The LORD showed Israel His great holiness (19:16–25).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. The LORD chose Israel to be His holy people (19:1–8).

- Israel came to Mt Sinai, just as God had promised Moses (19:1–2).
- The LORD reminded them of the proof of His power and love (19:3–4).
- The LORD required obedience according to His covenant (19:5).
- The LORD promised that they would be His special people (19:5).

- The LORD promised that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (19:6).
- Israel agreed to do all that the LORD spoke (19:7–8).

2. Israel prepared to meet with their holy LORD (19:9–15).

- They washed their clothes (19:10, 14).
- They kept their bodies clean (19:15).
- They made a boundary around the mountain (19:12–13).

3. The holy God met with Israel (19:16–25).

- God came with thunder, lightning, a dark cloud, a loud trumpet blast, fire, smoke, and an earthquake (19:16–19).
- The people met God at the foot of the mountain (19:17).
- The LORD warned Moses to keep the people back or they would die (19:20–25).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What animal did God use to show how He rescued Israel?**
An eagle.
- 2. Why did God rescue Israel?**
Because He chose them as His special treasure.
- 3. What did Israel do to prepare to meet with God?**
They kept their clothes and bodies clean, and they made sure not to come too close to God.
- 4. When God appeared, what was it like?**
Thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, an earthquake, and a trumpet that got louder and louder.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Where did God choose to appear to Israel?**
He appeared at Mt Sinai, just as He had promised to Moses.
- 2. Why did God deserve their obedience and worship?**
He had rescued them with power like that of a huge, soaring eagle.
- 3. Why did God rescue Israel?**
He had chosen them to be His own special treasure.
- 4. What does it mean to be a kingdom of priests?**
It means every individual among all Israel was supposed to know God, worship Him, and display Him to the rest of the world.
- 5. What does it mean to be a holy nation? It means Israel was supposed to be pure, devoted to God, and different from all the nations.**
- 6. What did Israel do to prepare to meet with God?**
They kept their clothes and bodies clean, and they made sure not to come too close to God.
- 7. What would happen if someone crossed the boundary?**
They were to be killed by being stoned or shot with arrows.
- 8. How did God display His holiness?**
He appeared with thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, an earthquake, and a trumpet that got louder and louder.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



MEETING GOD AT SINAI

Use rope or string to rope off the part of the classroom. As children enter the classroom, tell them not to cross the rope. Use this activity to talk about God's holiness and why the children of Israel had to cleanse themselves before coming to meet God. Hand out wet wipes and have the children wipe their hands clean before sitting down for the lesson.

LINE LEADER

God redeemed Israel for a special purpose. He selected Israel to be a nation to lead others to God. When you take the children out of the classroom, select one child to be the line leader. Tell the children that the line leader has a special job. That special job is to lead the children where the teacher wants them to go. Israel was a different kind of leader. They were to be good examples for the nations to follow. They were supposed to love God so much that other nations would want to know about this God they served. As a way to emphasize Israel's special job, select a few children to serve in a special way this morning.



A SPECIAL TREASURE

Bring in a decorative box that contains costume jewelry, plastic gold coins, and pretend money. Tell the children that you have a box with "treasure" inside. Pull out the items one at a time and tell the children why they are valuable. Explain that some people think treasure like this is the most important thing in the world. However, God had made the nation of Israel His special treasure out of all the different nations of the world.

"THIS IS THE WAY WE...ON A SUNDAY MORNING"

Together with the children, sing and act out this song as if getting ready for Sunday School, going through the motions of washing their faces, combing their hair, putting on their clothes, praying for their food, eating their breakfast, brushing their teeth, picking up their Bibles, closing the door, and driving to church. Talk about the Israelites listening to Moses and obeying him while getting ready for something special. They washed their clothes and waited for a special day.

Mt. Sinai Scene
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.



MT. SINAI SCENE

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Cotton balls, grey construction paper, blue cardstock, white and orange paper, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Pre-cut white lightning bolts, orange flames, and the verse from the craft sheet. Have children tear pieces of grey construction paper and use them to glue into a mountain shape on blue cardstock. Glue on the orange flames to the top of the mountain and cover with cotton balls. Glue on white lightning bolts and the verse as shown below.



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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

HOLY BOUNDARY (EXODUS 19:12)

Take the class to a large play area. Use sidewalk chalk or tape to make a large circle around a triangle to represent the boundary around Mount Sinai. Place cones on four corners to establish a square boundary outside the circle inside of which to conduct the game of tag. Explain the regular rules for the game and then add one important rule: Children may not cross the line surrounding Mount Sinai for any reason! If children accidentally cross the boundary, or even touch the circular line, they are permanently out of the game.

HOLY AND POWERFUL

Bring in pictures of lightning storms or of the aftermath of an earthquake. Show them to the children. Ask the children if they have ever felt an earthquake or seen lightning. Have them take turns telling you about it. If you have experienced an earthquake or a terrible thunderstorm, tell the children about it. In today's Bible lesson, we will learn about God causing both earthquakes and thunderstorms on Mount Sinai. That is where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel were told to stay back from the mountain because God's presence would destroy them.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL

In Exodus 19:6 God's people are called "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Utilize the following items to illustrate how Israel was supposed to function among the nations of the world.

Object 1: Mirror—God's children are to reflect His glory.

Object 2: Flashlight—God's children are to be lights in the world shining God's good news.

Object 3: White cloth—God's children are called to be holy.

Object 4: Pencil—Israel wrote down God's Word.

PREPARING THE YOUNG FOR MATURITY

Bring in pictures, books, videos, or articles that show different ways in which parents (animals and humans) prepare their young to go off on their own. Parents, whether they are eagles, grizzly bears, opossums, or humans, all have ways to teach their young how to survive and live on their own. Discuss and show examples of the various ways this is accomplished. In today's Bible lesson, we see how God prepares His people to live as He designed them. They are to be holy and reflect His glory. They are to be set apart as special for all the people of the world to recognize.



APPLY

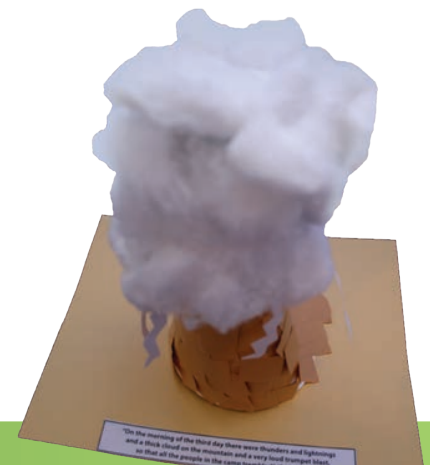
BUILDING MT. SINAI

See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*.

Materials: Craft sheet, Styrofoam cup, cotton balls, tan and white cardstock, brown construction paper, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Have children form a cone shape from white cardstock. Tape it together and tape it to the tan cardstock. Tear pieces of brown construction paper and glue it to the cone. Glue cotton to a Styrofoam cup. Cut out white lightening bolts and glue them around the rim of the cup. Put tape on the inside of the cup and place on the top of the cone. Glue the verse to the tan cardstock.

Building Mt. Sinai
See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*.



AGES 9–11



THE FEAR OF GOD

The fear of God is more than reverence. It is being more afraid of Him than of anything else. Bring pictures of (or simply discuss) various things people are afraid of (spiders, sharks, tigers, fierce dogs, bad people, the dark, etc.). Talk about the things we do to be less afraid (put dogs on leashes, put tigers in cages, have lights to replace darkness, prisons to contain criminals, etc.). We should fear God more than anyone or anything else in the world because He is stronger than any of these things. Fearing God should not make us want to avoid Him but should make us want to obey Him (Ex. 20:20).

A SPECIAL POSSESSION

Ask the children if they have a special possession. Have them share what these are. Bring in some of your own favorite things to show the children. Ask them to imagine that their special possession was lost or stolen or broken or ran away. What would they do? God had a special possession. It was the nation of Israel. We will learn more about this in today's lesson.



TOILET WATER

God told Israel that they were to be a “holy nation”. Bring in two water bottles filled with water and an eye dropper filled with toilet water. In front of the children, drop a few drops of toilet water in one of the bottles. Then ask the children which bottle they would want to drink. Explain that in order to be holy we must be completely separate from sin. Even just a few “drops” of sin makes us unacceptable.

SYMBOLS OF THE COVENANT

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Pass out a copy of the work sheet to each child (located in craft book). As you teach through the passage, write the following phrases by each symbol and encourage the children to do the same:

Treasure Box—God’s Possession (Exod 19:5–6) — 1. Kingdom of priests,
2. Holy nation

Scroll—Two conditions to the covenant (19:5) — 1. Obey His voice, 2. Keep His covenant

Mouth—Israel’s Response (19:8) “All that the LORD has spoken we will do”

To-Do List—Three-Day Preparation (19:11–15) — 1. Wash clothes, 2. Keep body clean, 3. Prepare hearts

Cloud—Signs of God’s presence and awesome power (16:10) — 1. Thunder and lightning (19:16), 2. Thick cloud (19:16), 3. Loud trumpets (19:16), 4. Fire (13:21; 14:24), 5. Smoke (19:18), 6. Quaking (19:16)



MOUNT SINAI MAJESTY

Reread the most descriptive part of God’s presence being displayed at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16–20). Work together as a class to list different words on the board that describe the awesome power of the LORD. Discuss how various words vividly picture the mighty power and presence of God. Here are some examples:

Verbs

Heeding, thundering, trembling, descending, warning, fearing, consecrating, obeying, keeping, blasting, sounding, quaking, washing, preparing.

Nouns

Cloud, smoke, fire, trumpet, third day, voice, boundary, Moses, Israel, Aaron, priest, lightning.

Adjectives

Loud, thick, complete, long, fearful, furnace-like, whole.