

# Exodus 19: Covenant with God

## Leader Guide



**Small Group Study** – Each week our small groups team works alongside Pastor J.D. to create a small group study which corresponds to his sermon that week. The study examines a related passage of scripture to the text he preaches through with the goal of challenging small groups to grow both in their confidence in studying the bible and in their application of the truths brought out in the sermon.

**Context:** Exodus was a foundational book in Israel's faith and history. In Exodus, the people meet God, receive his laws, enter into a covenant relationship with Him, and experience His Presence among them. Throughout this narrative, God reveals the fundamental aspects of His character- love, glory, justice, holiness, and compassion- some for the first time in history. In Exodus, the Israelites learn the name "I AM" (similar to the name "Yahweh") hear His voice, and begin to worship Him as the one true God. The rest of the Old Testament either refers to or builds off the theology of Exodus and the other books of the Pentateuch.

Throughout Genesis, God has proven Himself faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even when His covenant with these individuals seems most in doubt, God brings His promises to fruition. Abraham's descendants have become a great nation, saved from famine by Joseph. But because of the famine, they are not living in the Promised Land. Exodus begins with the Israelites, now great in number, crying out to God. God hears them and begins to prepare a leader and an exit strategy for His people. By the hand of God, the Israelites are freed from Egypt and led into the wilderness where they will meet God in Exodus 19, just as He promised in 3:12.

**Theme:** Up to this point in history, God had made covenants with individuals. These covenants featured God's unconditional promises to make these individuals into a nation, bless them, and give them the Promised Land. In Exodus 19, God now makes his covenant with *all* the people. In this covenant, the people would now be making an agreement with God (as opposed to simply receiving God's promises) that they would live according to His laws. God's end of the bargain was that His Presence would remain with the Israelites (tabernacle) as He leads them into the Promised Land.

In reading this chapter, you will see that this covenant is more than just a business contract. The chapter opens with a summary of Exodus 1-18 in which God "bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself (19:4)." God then calls his people, "my treasured possession." The people were to wash their garments and wait for the Lord to come down to them. These observations lead some commentators to describe this scene as a wedding ceremony. While that may not be for certain, what is clear is the love that God communicates to the Israelites in this chapter. But, this will not be a covenant between equal partners. The Israelites are not allowed to touch the mountain when God descends, and they are to cleanse themselves in preparation. If they were to rush up the mountain to try to see God, the thundering Presence on the mountain would be too much for them to survive. Thus, in this covenant ceremony, the people are confronted with both the love *and* the holiness of God.

From this moment in history, Israel would come to understand their role in the world as a kingdom of priests to a Holy God. Undeservingly, the Almighty God saved them from slavery and destruction. Now He was revealing His character to them and telling them how He desires to be worshipped. Their role was to keep and spread the law that they were about to receive, and explain to others how to worship the true God. In the next study, we will examine the serious nature of this responsibility.

**Aim:** The goal of this study is to discuss the meaning of being in a covenant relationship with the Holy God. He is amazing and powerful, and yet he loves us enough to bind Himself to us in an agreement. Part of the people's role in this covenant is to be a kingdom of priests, who are to make God known and help others to worship Him. The New Testament reiterates this role for believers as part of the New Covenant (1 Peter 2).

## Study Questions:

What aspect of God's character most impacted you in your reflection on this week's sermon?

[19:1-6]

What does God want the Israelites to understand based on His saving them from Egypt?

God displayed His power, but He used His power specifically to free them. He wants them to understand that He has chosen them among all nations to be His people.

What do you think the average Israelite reaction was to being chosen as both God's treasured possession and a kingdom of priests?

After participating in the Exodus and witnessing God's greatness, the people must have responded with awe and shock at being chosen by Him and called His treasure! This new status also came with a tremendous responsibility- that everyone was to be a priest for Him. They now had the responsibility to make Him known to the nations and lead them in proper worship of this Holy, Powerful, Awesome God. They may have overwhelmed by God's love and by the importance of their new role.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-12. What does Peter add to the understanding of being a Kingdom of Priests and Treasured Possession?

Peter provides some helpful commentary in 1 Peter and says that the same roles apply to Christians. As Christians in the New Covenant: our sacrifices are spiritual (no need for a physical sacrifice after the cross), we are to proclaim His "excellencies," we are to tell about our own Exodus out of darkness into light.

[19:7-24]

How do verses 7-24 add to your understanding of what it means to be a priest of God?

God is Holy, which means that He is separate, other, and deserving of honor. We should worship God on His terms and make sure to cleanse ourselves according to His standards. God is powerful and strikes fear in the people, and so the people must take great care to honor Him the right way, because His holiness is more important than even their lives.

How would you describe the role of Moses in this scene? Why does he become one of the most important figures in Israelite History?

In verse 9, Moses is established by God as His spokesman. Moses is given the task and authority to speak to the people and write Scripture on God's behalf (later called a prophet). Israel trusted Moses' words implicitly as their delegate before God

Why do you think that God commanded the people to wash their garments and "consecrate" themselves for this occasion?

How does someone make sure they are clean before they approach God in prayer and in worship?

The cleansing was a sign to show that this was an important event and that God was deserving of their honor. The New Testament says that we are clean because Christ has washed us spiritually and thus we can approach God *boldly* (Heb. 10:19ff). God's glory and holiness have not diminished and our sin is no less awful, but the cross is powerful enough to cleanse us forever.

If you had the opportunity to encounter God in a thundering cloud, how would it affect your faith in God?

Opinion question. It would probably be helpful to have some sort of encounter with a physical manifestation of God's presence.

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21. Peter got to witness the Glory of God in a cloud on a mountain when he saw Christ transfigured (Christ's heavenly glory became evident). What does Peter say is helpful for faith?

Peter says Scripture is a more sure word than a physical encounter with God's presence. In the Word, you have certainty, clear divine interpretation of events such as Exodus 19, and the work of the Holy Spirit in creating the Word.

Why is it important that God makes a covenant with Israel?

This event provides the foundation for the rest of Israelite History. Will God keep His promises? Will the people be faithful to God? The answers to these questions and the nature of the relationship between God and Israel in the covenant constitute the rest of the Old Testament. It is astounding that the Holy God would bind Himself and His honor to a sinful, small nation.

How has reading Exodus 19 enhanced your understanding of covenant with God? What does being part of the New Covenant, instituted by Christ, mean for you?

Make Christ's excellencies known, tell others about your salvation from sin, and help others understand how to worship Him!