

"The Mount that Burned with Fire"

Exodus 19

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One night, early in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, a ruler of the Jews came to visit Christ. He probably came at night because he wanted to have a private conversation. The account of this famous visit with Nicodemus is recorded in John 3. I paraphrase it as follows:

Nicodemus: "We know you are a man sent from God; nobody could do these miracles if he were not from God." Jesus [A very strange answer]: "It is the truth: If a man is not born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Note: Jesus treated this learned and dignified man with respect, and engaged on the highest level of spiritual truth. The wheels of the mind of Nicodemus would have to turn very rapidly indeed to understand. He didn't understand, but it was not because Jesus talked down to him—Jesus talked up to him. Later on, Nicodemus would understand and became one the great heroes of the earliest church.

Nicodemus [showing that he did not understand]: "How can an adult enter into his mother's body and be born again."

Jesus [Maintaining a very high level of conversation—talking up to Nicodemus, not disparaging him or speaking down to him]: "It is the truth: If a man is not born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. The flesh brings forth flesh; the spirit brings forth spirit. Don't be amazed that I say that you must be born again."

It is very certain to me that Nicodemus would ponder these words over and over in the months to come, and the words and deeds of the Lord Jesus set the nation of Israel ablaze. It would be given to him to know the things of the kingdom of God and he would believe and trust in Christ as I said before.

But this conversation illustrates a very important biblical principle: the things of the natural world such as a child being conceived and born are used as illustrations of things that cannot be seen with the physical senses. This is why the Scriptures are of such great importance, for they make the connection between that which is seen and that which is not seen. The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal.

That this is true is everywhere set forth in Scripture. 1Cor. 10 says that the events of the history of the Israelites are recorded for our benefit and warnings to us unto whom the

ends of the world are come Psalm 49 says essentially the same thing. There is a caution here:

Pr 26:7 “The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.”

1. Just like Nicodemus, you must bring something to the conversation; you must meditate and combine the words of Christ with the Scripture you have learned; you must pray for wisdom and understanding. The Holy Spirit works through your consciousness and your reason and your will and your affections; you are not just a wax tablet or an empty pot that He writes on or pours stuff into you. You must receive and embrace and love and feel; for this is also the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. If you are a fool, a parable will do you no good. So the Old Testament, if not seen in the spirit and knowledge and wisdom of Jesus, the eternal wisdom of God, will hurt you and not do you good. As Solomon continues in the passage about the legs of a lame man:

Pr. 26:8 As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honor to a fool.

Pr. 26:9 As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

3. So you must listen up very carefully this morning. I am not going to speak down to you, but I am going to speak up to you. I hope that you will meditate on these things, and like Nicodemus go away and ponder them and understanding will come.

I am going to speak of three mountains that are in Scripture. Two mountains are included in one mountain and the coming of Christ brought about a separation in the one mountain which became the two mountains. One of the two mountains would come to ruin; the other would become very great and fill the earth. They are not the only mountains in Scripture, but they are very important for our study today. We have read two passages today, Exodus 19 and Hebrews 12, that describe these mountains, and we will look at a passage that will give us additional insight into these things. But we must remember that part about the stone binding in the sling and must be careful that we don't whack ourselves in the head or drive the thorn into our hands. These things must be treated with sobriety and wisdom. The image of the mounts is not my image, it is the image of Scripture and we will try to speak carefully, but will only be able to give a brief outline of these things.

I. The mount that burned with fire: Exodus 19. What an impressive series of events arrest our attention as we read these words. These are important things and we must pay attention to them.

A. Here God took Israel to Himself; from henceforth they would be His people and they would be their God. Vs. 5. It was contingent upon them hearing His voice and keeping His commandments.

B. They would be established as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. “Mountain” would be used throughout the scriptures to symbolize a kingdom—something organized and rising above mankind.

C. Moses was the Mediator and spoke to the people for God and to God for the people; he was both a prophet and a priest.

D. All the details magnified the majesty and holiness of God.

1. Cleansing of the people; No touching the Mount; abstaining from conjugal relations.

2. The great spectacular signs: thunders, lightening, trumpet sounds, earthquake, smoke as a furnace. Forbidden to touch the mountain.

E. In the years to come the form and the substance of the kingdom of Israel would become more clear as the law was given and explained. It was many years before the Temple was built and the full obedience to the laws and ordinances could be achieved. The prophets would teach, but Israel did not heed the words of the law and the prophets. Most of their kings were corrupt and wicked, and their prophets spoke lies, and the priests corrupted the worship of God.

F. But even so, there were godly men and women among them. The kingdom of Israel, represented by this first Mount, contained chiefly two things: Precepts and Promises. The Precepts strictly enjoined upon the people what they were to do, and the Promises chiefly spoke of the coming of the Anointed One, the seed of the woman, the seed the Abraham, and the Seed of David.

G. The center of the Kingdom of Israel was the city of Jerusalem where the Temple was and the center of the government of the House of David and His descendants.

H. As a result, we had really two kingdoms develop out of the Nation of Israel and the Precepts and the Promises: An early kingdom centered in Jerusalem ruled by the descendants of David, and the priests and rulers connected with the Temple at Jerusalem; and a heavenly kingdom whose temple was in Heaven and whose king was the Lord.

1. Hebrews says that the earthly things were patterns of the heavenly things. The Old Testament speaks of the Kingdom of God that rules over all; The kingdom of David and Solomon but a pale figure of that, but it

was a figure. The Temple with its worship and ceremonies was likewise a pale figure of the Temple in Heaven. "God is in His holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him, the Scripture says.

2. So the kingdom of David, or Zion, became a symbol of the heavenly throne of God and represented His rule over all things, and the Temple of Jerusalem where sacrifices of animals and all the rituals were performed became a symbol for God in heaven to whom men pray and give thanks.

II. Now let us look at Galatians 4:

A. The Scripture:

19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

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.

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

B. Comments:

1. As I said there were two Jerusalems: one above, and one below.

a) The one above was free and pertains to the promises:

b) The one below was in bondage to sin and hardness of hearts, thinking they could serve God by precepts, rather than by faith.

2. What was the difference:

a) Christ had come; Messiah had come. The kingdom of God, hidden behind the promises and the ceremonies has been made manifest.

b) The two Jerusalems have been rent asunder;

(1) That which is of the flesh passes away: the earthly Jerusalem; the temple; the ceremonies, the rituals, the discipline, etc.

(2) That which is of the promise and the spirit remains.

3. The precept was never designed to be a way of salvation, for that would negate the faith of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and represent a denial of the sin of Adam and the curse that had come upon all the seed of Adam. It was not a mulligan, a do over, but a covenant with a two-fold purpose: to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin—by the precept, and the promise of the coming of the Savior who would put away sin.

4. The church is the kingdom of promise; for when Messiah came, the promises are now seen to be directed from Heaven and our worship is directed toward Heaven:

a) We are not to think in terms of earthly kingdoms and earthly worship.

b) This is the reason why Jesus must go away and return to Heaven, so our worship and work might be directed by the Holy Spirit: by the Holy Scriptures taught by the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of the people and supplies pastors and teachers as helpers to their faith, confirmed by the sacraments. True worship will never be localized in holy shrines, buildings, objects, places since Christ is in heaven and we are to seek him there.

III. This is made dramatically clear in Heb. 12:18-29

A. Everything comes from the same True and Living God who is a burning fire, and the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the judge of all men, and He is the one who spoke from Sinai and is the Creator of all things including the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace neither of which can ever pass away. If you reject the Covenant of Grace, your default position is under the wrath and judgment of the other covenant into which you were born as a child of Adam, a child of the flesh. The Covenant of Works was established at the creation of man and renewed at Sinai to show the exceeding sinfulness of men without the Spirit.;

B. But our Holy Mount—our kingdom is not of the world—it cannot be touched or seen.

C. Our kingdom is an innumerable company of Angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, the church of the firstborn whose name are written in heaven—a particular people who have been designated from eternity

D. The word of the Heavenly Jerusalem shook, is shaking, and will shake until all that cannot be shaken remains and the rest is burned in the fire of the wrath of God.

E. We are going to read of the fate of those who despised the word from that earthly Mount that Burned with fire; How much more horrible will be the fate of those who refuse to hear Him who speaks from heaven.

F. Our Kingdom cannot be shaken:

1. We must serve God acceptably: in spirit and in truth.

2. We must serve God with reverence; do not be double minded about it. Do not ride the fence; do not hold back your love and loyalty to the truth and the people of God. We are not to be like Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, because of the bitterness of his soul. Heb. 12:15-17

3. We must serve God with godly fear. Keep your heart in the kingdom and temple of the Lord. Now is now; then was then. God will hold you for your faith now, not for the life you think you would have lived in some better time. This is the time for you, and your life now is the reflection of your faith now.

May God bless you. Amen and Amen God bless you.