

## *Sacred Space In Promise – Preparation for the Covenant at Sinai*

### **I. Israel's Arrival at Sinai (19:1-25)**

#### **A. God's Preparatory Charges to Israel (19:1-15)**

Israel's journey from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai had tested Israel and proven the nation's unfaithfulness, even while demonstrating God's unfailing commitment to His covenant.

In spite of their unbelief, ingratitude, and rebellion, Yahweh carried Abraham's descendents "on eagles' wings" to His holy mountain to ratify His covenant relationship with them. *Toward that end, He issued two preliminary charges to prepare them to meet their covenant Redeemer-God.*

#### **1. The First Charge – The Purpose for the Covenant (19:1-8)**

Yahweh's first charge identified His **intent** in this union: As His elect son, Israel was His "**unique possession**" for the purpose of being a "**kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**"

- a. These two phrases interpret each other. *Israel's identity as Yahweh's uniquely elect "son" pointed to its obligation of consecration, devotion, testimony and mediation.*
- b. As a "holy nation," then, Israel would fulfill its Abrahamic vocation as a "priestly kingdom," manifesting and testifying to its God in order to bless the wider world.

*"The entire nation was to live in the midst of God's presence, and were all to become like priests standing in the presence of God in his temple and reflecting his glorious light, being intermediaries for the nations living in darkness and apart from God." (Beale)*

- c. This charge also provides insight into how the covenant should be perceived as **law**.

*The Law of Moses was the covenant binding God and Israel, which formally ratified the relationship of covenant Father and son that the Abrahamic Covenant established (Exo. 4:22-23). Thus all of its particulars addressed the core obligation of love – love for God manifested in love for one another (Deut. 6:1-9; Mat. 22:35-40; Rom. 13:8-10), and that for the sake of God's ultimate restorative purpose underlying the Abrahamic Covenant.*

***Thus righteousness under the Mosaic Law was relational faithfulness as defined by the covenant, not moral/ethical compliance as such.*** \* ref. Hosea 11:1ff; Ezekiel 16, 23

- d. God's first charge, then, identified Israel's identity and calling under the covenant, which provided the framework for their understanding of their obligation of obedience. *Israel responded by committing themselves to be faithful in all God required of them.* \* 19:7-8

#### **2. The Second Charge – Preparation for the Covenant (19:9-15)**

After the people openly affirmed their commitment to His word and covenant will, Yahweh proceeded to set the **terms for their encounter** with Him on the holy mountain.

- a. Reflecting their status as a holy nation, God charged the sons of Israel to consecrate themselves for three days by washing their clothing and abstaining from sexual contact.

- b. And yet, even in their ritual purity, God sternly warned the Israelites to keep their distance from Him. No person or animal was to touch even the base of Mount Sinai while Yahweh was present upon it. *Yahweh's beloved elect "son" – whom He had redeemed and taken to Himself – was forbidden from approaching the place where His glory descended, let alone entering into His very presence.* \* 19:12-13, note also vv. 20-21

## **B. God's Meeting with Israel – Sinai as Yahweh's Sanctuary (19:16-25)**

This scenario and God's warnings to Israel underscore the fact that *sacred space* and divine-human encounter remained a matter of mediated distance. Though God had consecrated Israel to Himself as His elect, beloved *son*, the son couldn't commune with the Father apart from some intermediary – in this case, Moses, Aaron, and Israel's elders. \* 19:19-25, 20:18-21, 24:9-11

*The true recovery of sacred space – intimated in the protoevangelium and promised in the Abrahamic Covenant – awaited a future fulfillment; it awaited the end of divine/human estrangement. **True divine-human intimacy would not be recovered until man was restored as image-son, which restoration would find its essential fulfillment in the Incarnation.***

## **II. The Making of the Covenant (20:1-23:33)**

### **A. The Preamble to the Covenant (20:1-2)**

Consistent with covenant structures in general and near-eastern suzerain treaties in particular – treaties that would have been familiar to the ancient Israelites – Yahweh introduced His covenant with a preamble identifying the parties to the covenant.

#### **1. God's Self-Identification – Israel's Redeemer-Father**

Israel wasn't simply entering into covenant relation with the Creator-God: *God wanted Israel to know Him as their Redeemer, Deliverer, and covenant Father who had liberated them and gathered them to Himself as He had pledged to Abraham.* \* Gen. 15:12ff; Exo. 3:1ff, 6:1ff

The Creator-God thus revealed Himself to Israel as **Yahweh**: *the God who will ever be who He is. That is to say, He is the God whose purposes, will, and commitment never change or relent; He is the God whose intent for His creation, bound up in Abraham by covenant grant, would be fully realized exactly as determined.*

#### **2. Israel's Identification – Redeemed Son**

Thus Israel was more than just a chosen and redeemed people; they were *sons of God* as Abraham's offspring and heirs of the covenant promises and obligations.

- a. But they were and remained covenant sons because God is *Yahweh*: the God who is faithful irrespective of men and circumstance. *Even Israel's name itself was a perpetual reminder that their triumph with God was the result of Him causing them to prevail out of a condition of complete incapacity and chronic failure.*
- b. And Israel would indeed prevail because of its high calling on behalf of the world. *Yahweh was consecrating the sons of Israel to Himself as committing them to the vocation He'd determined for them; His "holy nation" was to be a "priestly kingdom."*