

A Kingdom of Priests

Exodus 19:1-9

Israel comes to Mt. Sinai three months after leaving Egypt. They arrive in the third month and will leave almost a year later (v1; Num. 10:11). God unfolds His covenant with Israel in a spectacular way, calling them His special treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

NOTES:

On Eagles' Wings

Back at the burning bush, before Moses confronted Pharaoh, God told him, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" (Ex. 3:12). This sign is fulfilled as Israel camps at the base of Sinai and God speaks to Moses from the mountain: "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself'" (vv3-4). In the ancient world suzerainty treaties occurred when a stronger tribe or state would covenant with a weaker one. These consisted of five parts: 1) Preamble indicating who is charge; 2) Historical summary describing the suzerain's rule; 3) Stipulations and rules of the covenant; 4) Blessings and curses for keeping and breaking the agreement; 5) Statement of what will happen in the future. Covenants are everywhere in the Bible from the garden forward, and so we expect people made in the image of God to act this way (cf. Hos. 6:7; Gen. 15). God briefly establishes all the parts: 1) & 2) God defeated Egypt, redeemed Israel, and bore them eagles' wings to Himself (v4); 3) They are to obey His voice and keep covenant; 4) By doing so they are a special treasure, and, implied, a drossy treasure if not; 5) They endure as a priestly kingdom and holy nation among the nations. The Ten Commandments and all the ordinances to come describe the terms of covenant. Blessings and curses are found at the end of Leviticus (26) and Deuteronomy (28). God is the King. He says to the house of Jacob: "You have seen." We know God because we have seen what He has done, believing in our heart and confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, that He brought us to Himself (v4). Just like Israel, "now therefore", we follow Him.

Covenant Keepers

God says Israel if they obey His voice and keep His covenant they will be a special treasure above all people (v5). Does this mean that Israel earns righteousness by works, or that they have to be perfect in order to be blessed? No, but it means they have to trust the Lord: "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off " (Dt. 30:11ff.). A covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered with attendant blessings and chastisements. Israel did nothing to be saved from the Egyptian army. Now that God has saved them, they must walk in His ways if they are to enjoy His blessings. Covenant-keeping is promise-believing and sin-confessing. So all you have to do to keep covenant is love and follow God, confessing your sins honestly and regularly, believing He will complete the good work He began in you. This not raw "works", but living out the

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identity God bestowed when He brought us to Himself: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (Mk. 3:14). If you leave the Lord and deny your need for the Savior, then judgment awaits (Dt. 30:17-18). This is the same in New Testament/Covenant, where we have more covenant blessings to enjoy or reject (Heb. 10:26-31). Apostasy, falling away from the Lord, really does happen, and it happens in one of two ways. In Luke 15, the prodigal son takes his inheritance and squanders it on riotous living. The older brother never openly rebels against his father, maintaining “I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends” (Lk. 15:29). He falsely believes his father is a miser toward him and hates the grace shown to the prodigal. The prodigal came back to his father, but we don’t know if the older brother was ever really with him. You can be estranged from God by licentious living or by legalistic, self-righteous living. Both of these have hatred of God’s law in common. They are covenant-breaking companions. God warns covenant people against both ditches.

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Israel is to be God’s special treasure above all people, He says, “for all the earth is Mine” (v5). The Lord does not choose Israel because He is rejecting everyone else who is also His, but because He wants to bless the nations through Israel. Aaronic priests mediate between God and Israel, but He calls them to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation to intercede on behalf of the nations (v6). Israel would be a shining light to draw the nations to Yahweh (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:57-60; Ps. 87:4-5). They must keep covenant and be holy in order for this to happen. Worship performed in the beauty of holiness attracts people: “Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth” (Ps. 96:9). When we worship the Lord who is holy, praying for and loving the nations, they see the beauty of the Lord and come to Him. In the new covenant, the new Israel is made up of people from every nation, and we are spread throughout the earth: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10). We keep covenant with God, confess our sins, believe His promises, and intercede for the world. We do this here and everywhere—right down to the person we live next to. This is how God is sending His good news and declaring His love for the world through Jesus Christ.