

suppose that Zipporah and the two sons stayed with Moses, though we read nothing more about their being with Moses. In the land of Canaan years later, we read of Moses' grandson (Gershom's son) Jonathan becoming an idolatrous priest. See Judges 18:30.

When Israel left Mt. Sinai, Moses requested Hobab, the son of Reuel (Jethro), to accompany them. See Num. 10: 29-32. The family of Hobab grew into the Kenite tribe dwelling among the Israelites. See Judges 1:16; 4:11, 17; I Sam. 15:6.

THE TEXT OF EXODUS
TRANSLATION

19 In the third month after the children of Is-ra-el were gone forth out of the land of E-gypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Si-nai. (2) And when they were departed from Reph-i-dim, and were come to the wilderness of Si-nai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Is-ra-el encamped before the mount. (3) And Mo-ses went up unto God, and Je-ho-vah called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Is-ra-el: (4) Ye have seen what I did unto the E-gyp-tians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. (5) Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: (6) and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Is-ra-el.

(7) And Mo-ses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which Je-ho-vah commanded him. (8) And all the people answered together, and said, All that Je-ho-vah hath spoken we will do. And Mo-ses reported the words of the people unto Je-ho-vah. (9) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people

may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee for ever. And Mo-ses told the words of the people unto Je-ho-vah. (10) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their garments, (11) and be ready against the third day; for the third day Je-ho-vah will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Si-nai. (12) And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: (13) no hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, he shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. (14) And Mo-ses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their garments. (15) And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not near a woman.

(16) And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. (17) And Mo-ses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. (18) And mount Si-nai, the whole of it, smoked, because Je-ho-vah descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. (19) And when the voice of the trumpet waxed louder and louder, Mo-ses spake, and God answered him by a voice. (20) And Je-ho-vah came down upon mount Si-nai, to the top of the mount: and Je-ho-vah called Mo-ses to the top of the mount; and Mo-ses went up. (21) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto Je-ho-vah to gaze, and many of them perish. (22) And let the priests also, that come near to Je-ho-vah, sanctify themselves, lest Je-ho-vah break forth upon them. (23) And Mo-ses said unto Je-ho-vah, The people cannot come up to mount Si-nai: for thou didst charge us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. (24) And Je-ho-vah said unto him, Go, get thee down; and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aar-on

with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto Je-ho-vah, lest he break forth upon them. (25) So Mo-ses went down unto the people, and told them.

**EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER NINETEEN
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE**

1. After careful reading propose a short topic or theme for the chapter.
2. In what month did Israel come into the Wilderness of Sinai? (19:1)
3. On what day of the month did they arrive? (19:1)
4. Where did Israel make its camp? (19:2)
5. Where did Moses go from the camp? (19:3)
6. Why was Israel called the "house of Jacob"? (19:3; 1:1-7; Gen. 46:1-4)
7. How had Israel been borne along on their journey? (19:4; Deut. 32:11)
8. To whom had Israel been brought? (19:4)
9. What conditions did Israel have to fulfill to become God's people? (19:5)
10. What would Israel be unto God? (19:5-6)
11. What is a "kingdom of priests"? (19:6; Compare I Peter 2:9)
12. To whom did Moses first report God's words? (19:7)
13. What was the response of the people? (19:8)
14. Where did Moses go after hearing the people's acceptance? (19:8)
15. In what manner would God come to Moses and Israel? (19:9)
16. How would God's coming affect the status of Moses? (19:9)
17. What preparations were the people to make before God's revelation of Himself? (19:10, 14)
18. When was God coming down? Who would see God come down? (19:11)
19. What was to be built around the mount? (19:12)

20. What was to be the punishment for touching the mount? (19:12-13)
 21. How were mountain-touchers to be handled? (19:13)
 22. What was to be the signal for them to draw near the mountain? (19:13)
 23. What restriction was imposed upon the people before God came down? (19:15)
 24. What was the appearance and the sound on Mt. Sinai as God came down? (19:16, 18)
 25. What was the reaction of the people as God came down? (19:16)
 26. What did Moses do when the cloud came down? (19:17)
 27. What voice came from the mount? (19:19)
 28. What warning was given to Moses? (19:21) Why the repetition of the command? (See 19:12)
 29. What *priests* are referred to in 19:22?
 30. What protest did Moses make about God's warning concerning the people's breaking through? (19:23)
 31. Was the warning really needed? (19:24-25)
-

EXODUS NINETEEN: ISRAEL READY FOR GOD'S COVENANT
(ISRAEL AT THE DOOR OF NATIONHOOD)

1. The journey completed; 19:1-2.
 2. The divine offers; 19:3-6.
 3. The personal pledges; 19:7-8.
 4. The sanctifying preparations; 19:9-16.
 5. The descent of God; 19:16-25.
-

THE LORD'S OFFER TO HIS PEOPLE (19:3-6)

I. BACKED UP BY GOD'S PAST ACTS: (19:3-4)

1. What I did to the Egyptians.
2. How I bore you on Eagles' wings.
3. How I brought you to myself.

II. CONDITIONED UPON OBEDIENCE: (19:5a)

1. Obey my voice.
2. Keep my covenant.

III. BRINGS RICH HONORS: (19:5b-6)

1. You will be my own possession.
 2. You will be a kingdom of priests.
 3. You will be a holy nation.
-

SANCTIFIED TO MEET GOD (19:10-15)

1. Wash garments; (19:10; Rev. 7:14)
 2. Set bounds about the mount; (19:12)
 3. Abstinence; (19:15)
-

WHEN GOD COMES DOWN!! (19:16-25; John 6:38; 3:13)

1. Nature demonstrates; (19:16-18; Matt. 8:27)
 2. God's men are summoned; (19:19-20; Mark 3:13-14)
 3. Men must keep their distance; (19:21-24; Acts 5:13)
-

EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. *What is in Exodus nineteen?*

The chapter tells of the things that occurred just before God gave the covenant of the ten commandments. We call the chapter **READY FOR GOD'S COVENANT**. The people were made ready by (1) their arrival at the destination, Mt. Sinai (19:1-2); (2) God's promise to take them as His own (19:3-6); (3) Their public promise to obey God (19:7-8); (4) The Lord's last-minute instructions (19:9-15); (5) The Lord's descent upon the mount (19:16-25).

The Greek version of Ex. 19:1 contains the word *exodos*, from which we get the name *Exodus*, meaning "going out."

2. *When did Israel arrive at Sinai?* (19:1)

They arrived in the third month after going forth from Egypt. Moses had kept a log book. See Num. 33:2. They had left Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month (See 12:6, 51), and arrived in the third month. On the "same day" they came to the wilderness of Sinai. If this expression means "the first day of the month," their trip had taken about forty-five days. But the Hebrew simply says "in this day." It is by no means certain that this means Israel arrived at the desert of Sinai on the *first* day of the month. Later traditions affirmed that the giving of the law was fifty days after the Passover. We feel that this is about correct, but it cannot be proved from the text. Ex. 19:11 indicates that the Lord came upon Mt. Sinai on the third day after their arrival. These three days, plus about forty-five days for the journey, give a total of approximately fifty days.

God's promise to Moses about Israel's serving Him "in this mountain" (3:12) was fulfilled upon their arrival there.

3. *What place is the Wilderness of Sinai?* (19:1)

We think that the name refers here to the plain of Er-Rahah at the north edge of Mt. Sinai, at the foot of the peak Ras Safsafah. Ras Safsafah is 6540 feet high, and is part of an oval-shaped ridge with a second (and higher) peak - Jebel Musa, or the Mt. of Moses - at its south end. Jebel Musa is

7647 feet high.

The name Wilderness of Sinai is sometimes applied to the entire southern area of the Sinai peninsula covered by granite mountains. But here the term seems to be restricted to the area just beside Mt. Sinai.

There is a small plain at the south side of Jebel Musa called Wady es-Sebaiyeh. This has been often said to be the plain of Israel's encampment. But travellers in the area report it is only about 7000 feet long and four to six hundred feet broad; and its whole surface is covered with sharp rough stones. There is scarcely a good place for three tents to be pitched together; and its whole area is about 145 acres.¹ Furthermore, a small hill lies between es-Sebaiyeh and Jebel Musa, so that there was no possibility of the people coming up to the Mount without a previous process of hard climbing or a long walk around. See Ex. 19:12, 21. Es-Sebaiyeh is in no wise fitted for a major camping ground.

On the other hand the plain er-Rahah on the north of Ras Safsafah comes up to the very foot of the mountain. It is two miles long and one-half broad, and slopes gradually down from the plateau to the north. The slopes of the enclosing mountains afford further space and seating for an almost unlimited multitude. The Wady (valley) Leja, which opens into er-Rahah on the west, is an extensive recess about a mile and a half long and three-fourths broad. This would add substantially to the camping ground.²

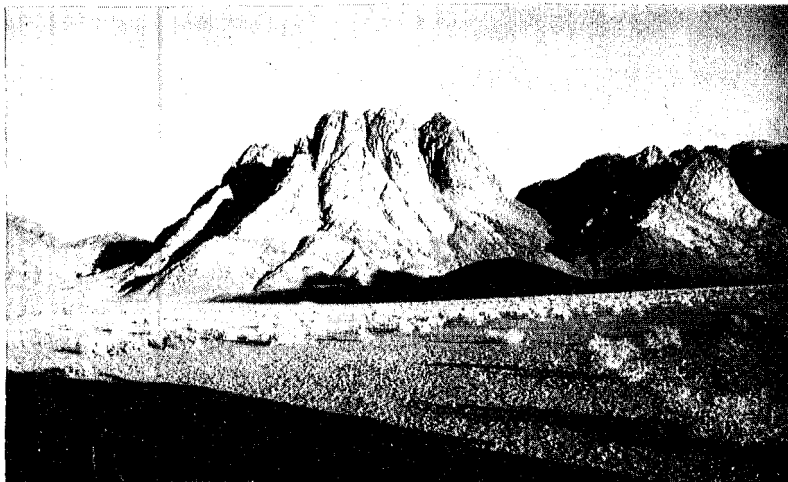
No other district in the premises affords such excellent pasturage as the immediate neighborhood of Mt. Sinai. There are four streams of running water there and several springs and cisterns.

4. *What place had Israel left just before reaching Sinai? (19:2)*

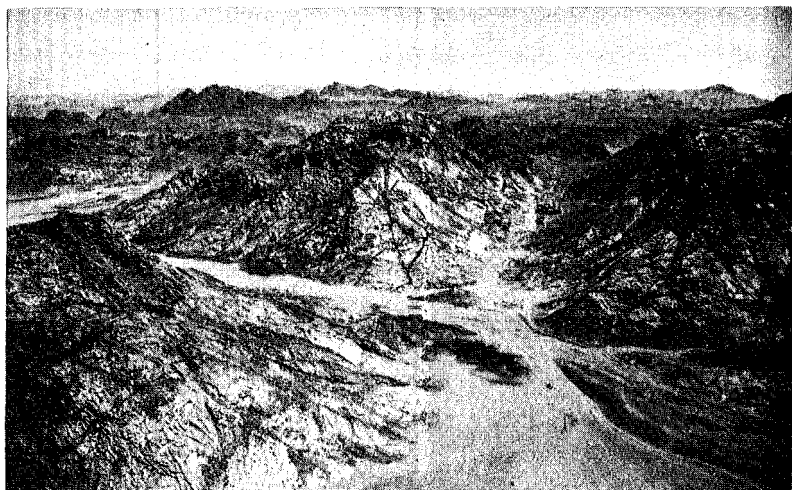
They had left Rephidim. Rephidim had been a place of several events—water from the rock, war with Amalek, Jethro's visit, a system of judges set up. Now they leave

¹S. C. Bartlett, *From Egypt to Palestine* (New York: Harper, 1879), pp. 270-271.

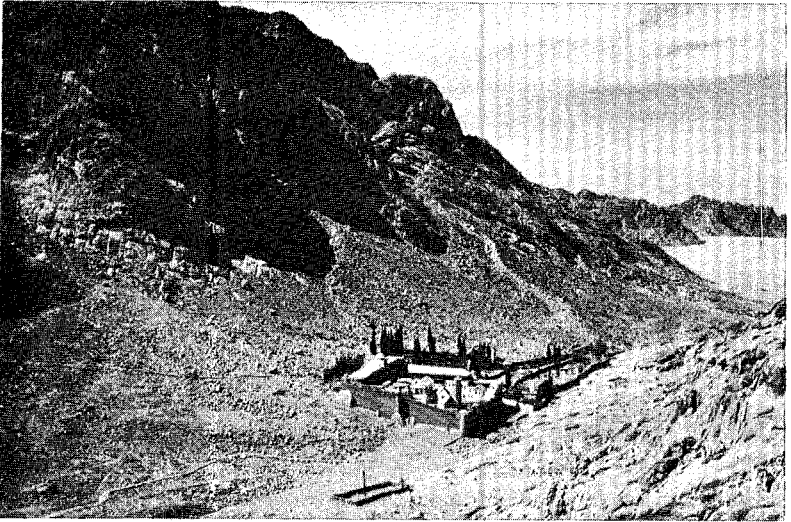
²Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 272.



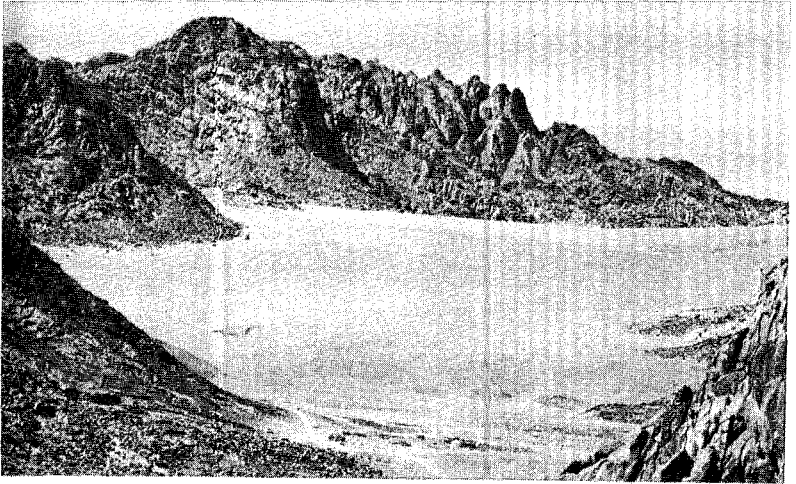
Mt. Sinai. This view is SE across the plain of Er-Rahah. Mt. Sinai has two peaks (or summits). The peak in the foreground is Ras Safsafah. The other peak, Jebel Musa, lies behind Ras Safsafah, barely protruding at left of mount. Monastery of St. Catherine lies to left of mount. (Courtesy Pictorial Archive: R.L.W. Cleave)



The Mt. Sinai ridge. View NW. Jebel Musa is in center of picture, and St. Catherine's monastery in the valley. Note rugged terrain of the wilderness of Sinai. (Courtesy Pictorial Archive: R.L.W. Cleave)



Monastery of St. Catherine in the valley east of Jebel Musa (mount of Moses). View NW. (Courtesy Pictorial Archive: R.L.W. Cleave)



Plain before Ras Safsafeh (Mt. Sinai). Probably this flat area was part of the area where the Israelites gathered before Mt. Sinai when the ten commandments were given. The peak of Ras Safsafeh lies to the left. This view is just to the right of the picture above. View NW. (Courtesy Pictorial Archive: R.L.W. Cleave)

Rephidim. It was not far from there to the "mount of God" (Sinai), probably only one day's journey of about ten miles. See 17:6; 18:5.

5. *From where did the LORD call Moses?* (19:3)

Jehovah called Moses from the mount. The text implies that Moses heard the voice of the LORD (Jehovah) as he was ascending the mount unto God. We are not told why Moses went up into the mountain. It probably seemed to be the obvious thing to do inasmuch as God had said, "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain." (3:12)

The expression "house of Jacob" is not found elsewhere in the Pentateuch, but it is very appropriate in the light of God's promises to Jacob (Gen. 46:4).

Note that Moses went up unto *God* (the general term for God as creator and ruler), but the *LORD* (Jehovah, or Yahweh) called unto him. *Jehovah* is God's covenant name, used when dealing with His people. We can almost always detect reasons for the use of the one name or the other.

6. *What had the Israelites seen God do?* (19:4)

Three things: (1) What He had done to the Egyptians; (2) How He bore them on eagles' wings; (3) How He brought them unto Himself!

The expression "upon the wings of eagles" is a figurative but vivid description of the strong and loving care of God. The mother eagle will fly beneath her newly feathered eaglet as it makes its first attempt to fly. The *eagle* may refer to the Palestinian vulture.

Deut. 32:11: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad his wings, he took them, and bare them on his pinions." The mother eagle will tear up her nest and thus force the eaglets to fly. In a similar way God had impelled Israel to leave Egypt. Then He protected them in their spiritual immaturity as they journeyed.

The reference in Ex. 19:4-5 to eagles' wings and the conditional nature of God's covenant reminds us of Deuteronomy, which stresses the same points. How consistent is

God's revelation through it all!

Note God's purpose in delivering Israel: He brought them unto Himself!

Ex. 19:3 begins a great block of divine teaching that stretches clear into Numbers ten.

7. *What did God want Israel to keep?* (19:5)

He wanted Israel to keep his COVENANT, and to become His own covenant people.

This word *covenant* refers to a formal arrangement of relationship between two parties. Covenants can be made between individuals or groups. A national constitution is a covenant. So also is a peace treaty, and a will (or testament).

The principle of *covenant* has always been the basis of God's dealings with his people. God made a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:9), and with Abraham (Gen. 15:18), and others. Unless we grasp the idea of *covenant*, we simply will not understand Exodus.

The law which God gave through Moses to Israel is presented as a *covenant* (Ex. 24:7-8; 34:27). Exodus chapters nineteen through twenty-four tell of the giving of the covenant and its ordinances. Ex. 32-34 tell how the covenant was broken by making the golden calf and then how the covenant relationship was restored.

There are two main types of covenants:

(1) Parity covenants (or treaties), between parties of equal importance.

(2) Suzerainty treaties (covenants), by rulers for the subjects beneath them.

In the first type of covenant the contracting parties each agree to do certain things, and the covenant is in effect only if both parties keep their bargains. Abraham and Abimelech made such a covenant together (Gen. 21:27).

God's covenants are more like the second type of covenant. God as a ruler makes certain promises and then demands particular acts of obedience. The covenant is imposed by the superior upon the inferiors. Such covenants may be basically offers of grace to an undeserving people; God's covenants are

always such. A will, or testament, is a covenant of the second type because the blessings promised to the heirs after the death of the testator are offered solely upon the basis of the wishes of the testator.

Archaeologists have observed that the suzerainty treaties (covenants) made by ancient Hittite and other kings with their vassals follow the same general format and literary pattern as God's covenant with Israel.³ These generally contain a preamble (like Ex. 19:3), a historical introduction (19:4), general principles for future conduct (19:5), specific stipulations (Ex. 20-23), divine witnesses (24:9-11), and curses and blessings (23:22-31).

The similarities between the treaties of men and the covenant of God prove very little, except that God has chosen to express His proposals in terms familiar to men; or that the essential features in any complete and logical covenant are similar.

The ancient covenants of human kings which have been preserved show a slight difference in form between those made in the second millenium B.C. (the time of Moses), and those made in the first millenium B.C. (after 1000 B.C.). The fact that the form of the Mosaic covenant more closely corresponds to the form of the covenants of the second millenium than to those of the first millenium supports our belief that the Exodus covenant was indeed written in the time of Moses, rather than by several unknown "sources" (J, E, D, P) living centuries later, as many critics allege.

K. A. Kitchen lists several differences between covenant forms of the first and second milleniums. (1) In late second millenium forms, as far as preserved, the divine witnesses *almost always* come between the stipulations and the curses, whereas in first millenium covenants, so far as known, they never do. (2) A historical prologue is typical of late second millenium covenants, but is unknown in our first millenium

³Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 193. K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1966), pp. 90-96.

examples.

8. *What did God propose to make of Israel? (19:5-6)*

Three things: (1) Mine own possession; (2) A kingdom of priests; (3) A holy nation. All of these titles are now applied to the people of Christ's church (I Peter 2:9).

"Mine own possession" means my own special (or peculiar) treasure, one belonging privately to a king. The same expression is found in I Chron. 29:3; Deut. 7:6; Eccl. 2:8. How we guard and protect our treasures! Israel was very precious to God. The expression "mine own possession" sounds more partial than it really is. There was no thought of favoritism in God's choice of Israel (Deut. 7:6-8). Israel had not been called to privilege and rulership, but to being an example and rendering service.

God owns all the earth (Ex. 9:29). God could exalt any people by choosing them, but no people could exalt and elevate God. God is by nature supreme and ultimate. What man says or does cannot change God's power, glory, or authority. Man can neither cause God to be glorious nor diminish His glory. Thus for God to choose one people as HIS people was a great favor, one demanding a grateful response.

God's ownership of Israel has an exact parallel in the church. We are now a people for God's own possession (I Peter 2:9; Acts 20:28; I Cor. 6:20).

"A kingdom of priests" means more than merely a nation of priests governed by Jehovah. It implies that the people had kingly qualities as well as priestly qualities. This is evident by the fact that the Greek O.T. translates the phrase as a "royal priesthood," and the inspired apostle Peter adopted the Greek translation as the true meaning of the verse. See I Pet. 2:9. The Israelites were a *royal* people, who would devour the nations that were their adversaries and crush their bones in pieces (Num. 24:8; Deut. 33:29). Similarly, Christians have a *royal* as well as a priestly character. Christians shall have authority over the nations and rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27). They shall sit

down with Jesus upon His throne.

The fact that Israel was a kingdom of *priests* suggests that their individual and collective purpose was to function as a go-between between God and men of all nations. They were to be living examples of what God would do with and for obedient mankind, and were to teach the ways of God to men, and otherwise help men come to God.

The "fly in the ointment" (Eccl. 10:1) in this glorious honor for Israel was that Israel was as sinful and as far from God as the nations to whom they were to be priests and light! (Rom. 2:19)

The same self-contradictory situation exists in the cases of worldly, covetous, lustful, disobedient, lukewarm "Christians" (?). While they may consider themselves as being the light of the world, the light that is in them is darkness.

Israel was to be a *holy* nation. The primary meaning of *holy* is not *separated*, but "to be pure, splendid, untarnished."⁴ The meaning of *holy* is not to be weakened by saying that a thing is *holy* only insofar as it is the exclusive property of God. Sin opposes holiness, and the sinner resists sanctification. God intends that holiness shall prevail and the unholy be destroyed if they will not repent. Holiness means being like God! (Lev. 19:2; I John 3:3). That means more than belonging to an exclusive clique labelled *Holy* (or *Private Property*).

The concept of Israel's becoming a NATION looms large in Exodus. God had promised Abraham that He would make him to become a great NATION (Gen. 12:2). But when Israel left Egypt, they were hardly a nation! They were a band of escaped slaves without homeland, national constitution, an established system of government, judges, or priests. The story of how Israel became a NATION is really the grand theme of the book of Exodus. The events at Mt. Sinai brought Israel into nationhood.

⁴C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. II in *The Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 99-100.

9. *How did Israel respond to God's covenant offer? (19:7-8)*

ALL the people answered TOGETHER, "All which Jehovah hath commanded we shall do." Their spontaneity and unity rejoice us, until we recall how quickly they forget their promises.

Israel's religion was openly presented by God. There were no secret doctrines to a favored class, no books of mysteries, but a divine offer to rich and poor, young and old, learned and unlearned. Though it could never be earned, it had to be personally accepted. It was not an imposed religion.

Note that the statement is made twice that Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD (19:8, 9). Probably there is a hint in this that Moses rejoiced to report their good words to the Lord. Maybe he felt that the people had finally been converted.

Regarding the *elders*, see 4:29-30.

The Hebrew *Jehovah* (Yahweh, LORD) in 19:7 is translated God (*theos*) in the Greek, instead of *Lord* (*kurios*) as usual. See footnote on p. 378.

10. *In what manner would God come unto Moses? (19:9)*

He would come in a thick cloud.

This verse makes quite plain the fact that God spoke primarily with Moses rather than with Israel. God said, "I come unto *thee* . . . that the people may hear when I speak with *thee*." God, of course, foreknew that the people could not long endure hearing His voice (20:19). Their sin was such that they were both incapable and unwilling to hear God's voice.

One major purpose of the miraculous display of cloud, smoke, etc. was to certify Moses unto the people as God's mediator, "that they may hear when I speak with thee and believe thee for ever." We still must accept Moses as God's spokesman of that time.

God's appearances are often associated with clouds and smoke. See Isaiah 6:1-4; 19:1; Num. 11:25; I Kings 8:10; Psalm 97:2; Rev. 1:7.

There is no way that anyone can *prove* that God came

down upon Mt. Sinai in a cloud and lightning and thunder and earthquake. This is a matter of faith. We accept this record because we have faith in Jesus, who said that the Old Testament was all true (John 10:35; Luke 16:17). We accept it because the fulfilled prophecies of the O.T. give us faith. We rejoice that we can live by faith in what God's word says.

11. *What preparations were to be made for Jehovah's coming down?* (19:10-11, 15)

The people were (1) to wash their garments, and (2) to abstain from sex relations, and (3) to set bounds, that is, a fence or barrier, around the foot of the mountain.

The washing of clothes before holy ceremonies was a fairly common practice in Bible times. Levites washed their clothes as part of their consecration (Num. 8:7). Those who touched the dead washed their garments (Num. 19:19). The reasons for washing of garments seem obvious: all nations have sensed the outward joys of cleanliness, and its symbolic resemblance to the cleansing of mind and heart. See Rev. 7:14.

"Sanctify" (or consecrate) means to separate, make holy, pure, and set apart for God's use.

"The third day" in 19:11 obviously meant two days after the day God spoke. This expression can illustrate the Jewish way of speaking of time, and is helpful in understanding the time meant when our Lord said He would rise on the "third day" (Matt. 16:21).

"Against the third day" means "for the third day" or "on the third day."

Abstinence from sex relations prior to God's descent upon Mt. Sinai does not indicate that this is evil or even questionable. Both the O.T. and the N.T. approve of sex relations of married people as good, necessary, protective, and enjoyable. See Prov. 5:18-20; I Cor. 7:2-5.

Nonetheless, as we sometimes fast from eating lawful food as a means of devoting our total energies and mind to God, so on some occasions sex relations are to be left off. See I Cor. 7:5. Thus it was at Mt. Sinai. In the same way David

was permitted to eat the showbread reserved for the priests "if the young men have kept themselves from women" (I Sam. 21:4-5). According to Lev. 15:18 a man was regarded as ceremonially unclean "until evening" after lying with a woman. Certainly no such uncleanness was to be present at the grand forthcoming appearance of God.

Note that Jehovah was to "come *down*" upon the mount in the sight of all the people. When a covenant is made, the parties must meet. Man cannot ascend to heaven.⁵ This is the heart of the Biblical concept of revelation. God comes down to man. "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven," Jesus said of Himself in John 3:13.

Certainly it was a condescension on the part of God to localize His appearance at Mt. Sinai, seeing that He fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:23-24). But God has done this often for man's sake, even sending His own son into the world in human form.

12. *How were the people to be kept away from the mountain?* (19:12-13)

By two means: (1) A bound, or fence, was placed about the foot of the mountain; (2) Quick execution was threatened if they even touched the mount.

It was possible to set a boundary about the north end of Mt. Sinai because the rock mass of the mountain rises rather abruptly from the plain beside it.

The people were neither to go up into the mount or even to touch the edge of it while God was appearing upon it. Death by stoning or shooting with arrows was the penalty for this.

This command was quite terrifying to the people. "They could not endure that which was commanded, that if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart" (Heb. 12:20).

The reason for this stern restriction was very basic: Sinful

⁵Ramm, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

mankind cannot approach near God's presence, and God's presence was upon Mt. Sinai. Moses did not even dare come too close to God's presence at the burning bush (3:5). Flesh and blood, such as we are now, cannot inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 15:50). We should not seek explanations in some ancient concepts of taboo. It seems unfounded to offer explanations such as that because the mountain had become "holy," then anything that touched it became "holy" also; and that for living creatures this meant sacrifice and death.⁶ If that were true, then carrying "holy" flesh (or meat) would endanger the bearer (Haggai 2:12), but it did not.

"Touch it" in King James version is better translated "touch him."

13. *What would the trumpet sound signal? (19:13)*

"When the trumpet (Heb. *yovel*, or ram's horn trumpet) sounds a long blast, they shall ascend to the mount." This is a difficult verse. We suppose that the "they" spoken of are the people, but that is not without question. Only Moses and Aaron went up (19:24). The close connection of this statement to the command about not coming onto or touching the mount makes it a surprising switch of thought.

Probably the verse merely refers to what is related in 19:17: At the blowing of the trumpet Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the lower part of the mountain.

The Greek O.T. reads, "When the voices and trumpets and the cloud departs from the mountain, they shall come up on the mount."⁷ This meaning is very clear, maybe so clear as to be trite. However, there were probably numerous people who would feel that even after God's revelation of himself at the mount was completed, the mount was still too "holy" to climb up into. We could question whether that

⁶Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁷We are always reluctant to adopt the Greek reading in preference to the Hebrew when they differ. However, in some cases the Greek reading is preferable. Thus in Romans 10:18 Paul quoted the Greek ("sound") of Psalm 19:5 rather than the Hebrew "line."

was a relevant issue at that particular point of time.

Regarding 19:14-15, see notes on 19:10-11.

14. *What happened when God descended upon the mount?* (19:16, 18)

There were thunders, and lightnings, and a thick cloud, and the voice of a trumpet (Heb., *shofar*, a horn or cornet), and an earthquake.⁸ The whole mountain smoked, for Jehovah descended upon it in fire (probably lightning; see II Kings 1:12). The smoke rose like smoke from a furnace (that is, a kiln or melting furnace). Compare Gen. 19:28 where Sodom and Gomorrah appeared burning with the same appearance. Deut. 5:4: "The Lord spake to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire."

Observe that it was morning when God descended on the mount.

The people trembled at this spectacle. What Israelite could doubt that God was there when he saw this display! God intended that His fear should be before their eyes (20:20). That surely took place.

This was no ordinary thunderstorm on Sinai. Thunderstorms are not uncommon there in winter; but the Israelites arrived in early June, when the season for these was past. Besides that, no thunderstorm was ever like the appearance of God's coming.

The awesome events at the giving of the law are referred to in Hebrews 12:18-19 as a contrast to the less spectacular and gentler giving of the gospel. The contrasting modes of giving the law and the gospel illustrate the contrasting characters of the law and the gospel. "Ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no more word should be spoken unto them."

15. *Where did Moses assemble the people?* (19:17)

⁸Ex. 19:8 says "The whole mount quaked greatly." The Greek and several Hebrew manuscripts read this "The people quaked greatly" (or "were exceedingly amazed").

Moses brought them to the lower (nether) part of the mount, but not where they could touch it. Their encampments surely extended out quite some distance (several miles) in front of the mount and in the adjoining valleys. But Moses directed them into a compact group.

16. *What signal called Moses to the top of the mount? (19:19-20)*

The voice, or sound, of a trumpet continued and waxed (grew) very strong. Then Moses spoke. We do not know what he said. Perhaps he asked the Lord what he should do. The Lord answered him with a voice. The Hebrew word for *voice* may also be translated *thunder*, as in Ex. 9:23 and I Sam. 12:17. But the voice (or thunder) was intelligible; and Jehovah called Moses to the top of the mount and Moses went up. Compare John 12:28-29.

The trumpet definitely appears to have been a supernatural trumpet of God rather than a trumpet of man. This trumpet will sound again at our Lord's second coming (I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:52). The Hebrew word for trumpet here (as in 19:16) is *shofar*, not *yovel*, as in 19:13. However, *shofar* and *yovel* are used synonymously in Joshua 6:5, and probably are so used here also.

Neh. 9:13: "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right ordinances, and true laws, good statutes, and commandments."

17. *Why is the command about keeping the people from the mountain repeated in 19:21-24?*

We think it was necessitated by man's perverse desire to look upon forbidden things and by God's determination to keep the people off the mountain. The command to keep off the mountain had indeed already been once given, and the barricade had been set up about the mountain (19:12). But just as Eve longed for the forbidden fruit, and the men of Beth-Shemesh looked into the ark of the covenant when they certainly knew better (I Sam. 6:19), so some Israelites on this occasion were thinking about taking a little peek beyond the fence.

Moses thought that everything was secure (19:23). But God had a deeper knowledge of what was in man than Moses did. Some were tempted with the plan to “break through” and “gaze” (19:21).

Unbelieving critics have taken aim at 19:21-25, declaring it to be a “secondary passage” from a different source, and unnecessary and repetitious. This attitude arises not from any concrete evidence that such sources ever existed, but from a lack of spiritual comprehension and meekness toward God’s word.

18. *Who are the priests referred to in 19:22?*

Certainly they were not the sons of Aaron (Ex. 28:1), nor were they the firstborn of every family (Num. 3:12-13). The exact identity of these priests is not made clear. We can only say that they were the ones who had been discharging the duties of the priestly office according to rights and customs previously employed.

Ex. 24:5 tells of the *young men* of the sons of Israel offering burnt offerings and sacrificing young bulls and peace-offerings to the LORD. Perhaps they were the “priests” referred to in 19:22. Others suggest that the *elders* were the priests; or that the heads of families served in that function. See 19:7; 6:14.

The repetition of the command for all the people, priests included, to stay off the mountain shows their unholiness. Like the people the priests were to “sanctify themselves.” Compare 19:10. They were NOT exempt from the commands of God to all the other people. Nor were they too holy to yield to the temptations that attracted other people.

19. *Who was to accompany Moses back up on the mount? (19:24-25)*

Aaron was to go with him. Aaron did not go up the mount until after Moses himself had received the laws of Ex. 21-23. See 20:21. Then God called Moses to come up with Aaron, and Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy

⁹Noth, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

elders (24:1). But even then these were to worship afar off, and only Moses came near to Jehovah (24:2).

Exodus 19:25 ends rather abruptly. The words of Moses to the people are not recorded, but they surely consisted of God's repeated warning in 19:21.

As we come to the end of chapter nineteen, we should be in eager expectancy. All things are ready for the declaration of the covenant of the law. The awesome appearance at the mount shows the greatness of the occasion. The miracles of the deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness journey all point toward this great moment. We shall not be disappointed as we proceed into chapter twenty!

THE TEXT OF EXODUS
TRANSLATION

20 And God spake all these words, saying,
(2) I am Je-ho-vah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of E-gypt, out of the house of bondage.

(3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

(4) Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (5) thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I Je-ho-vah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me, (6) and showing lovingkindness unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

(7) Thou shalt not take the name of Je-ho-vah thy God in vain; for Je-ho-vah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

(8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; (10) but the seventh day is