

# CHAPTER 19

This chapter introduces the solemnity of the giving of the law upon mount Sinai, which was one of the most striking appearances of the divine glory that ever was in this lower world. We have here,

- I.** The circumstances of time and place (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The covenant between God and Israel settled in general. The gracious proposal God made to them (v. 3-6), and their consent to the proposal (v. 7, 8).
- III.** Notice given three days before of God's design to give the law out of a thick cloud (v. 9). Orders given to prepare the people to receive the law (v. 10-13), and care taken to execute those orders (v. 14, 15).
- IV.** A terrible appearance of God's glory upon mount Sinai (v. 16-20).
- V.** Silence proclaimed, and strict charges given to the people to observe decorum while God spoke to them (v. 21, etc.).

## ~~EXODUS~~ EXODUS 19:1-8

### THE COVENANT OF SINAI

Here is,

- I.** The date of that great charter by which Israel was incorporated.
  - 1.** The time when it bears date (v. 1) — *in the third month* after they came out of Egypt. It is computed that the law was given just fifty days after their coming out of Egypt, in remembrance of which the feast of Pentecost was observed the fiftieth day after the passover, and in compliance with which the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles at the feast of pentecost, fifty days after the death of Christ. In Egypt they had spoken of a three days' journey into the wilderness to the place of their sacrifice (~~EXODUS~~ Exodus 5:3), but it proved to be almost a two months' journey; so often are we out

in the calculation of times, and things prove longer in the doing than we expected.

2. The place whence it bears date — from *mount Sinai*, a place which nature, not art, had made eminent and conspicuous, for it was the highest in all that range of mountains. Thus God put contempt upon cities, and palaces, and magnificent structures, setting up his pavilion on the top of a high mountain, in a waste and barren desert, there to carry on this treaty. It is called *Sinai*, from the multitude of thorny bushes that overspread it.

II. The charter itself. Moses was called up the mountain (on the top of which God had pitched his tent, and at the foot of which Israel had pitched theirs), and was employed as the mediator, or rather no more than the messenger of the covenant: *Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel*, v. 3. Here the learned bishop Patrick observes that the people are called by the names both of *Jacob* and *Israel*, to remind them that those who had lately been as low as Jacob when he went to Padan-aram had now grown as great as God made him when he came thence (justly enriched with the spoils of him that had oppressed him) and was called *Israel*. Now observe,

1. That the maker, and first mover, of the covenant, is God himself. Nothing was said nor done by this stupid unthinking people themselves towards this settlement; no motion made, no petition put up for God's favour, but this blessed charter was granted *ex mero motu* — *purely out of God's own good-will*. Note, In all our dealings with God, free grace anticipates us with the blessings of goodness, and all our comfort is owing, not to our knowing God, but rather to our being *known of him*, ~~ROM~~ Galatians 4:9. *We love him*, visit him, and covenant with him, *because he first loved us*, visited us, and covenanted with us. God is the Alpha, and therefore must be the Omega.

2. That the matter of the covenant is not only just and unexceptionable, and such as puts no hardship upon them, but kind and gracious, and such as gives them the greatest privileges and advantages imaginable.

(1.) He reminds them of what he had done for them, v. 4. He had righted them, and avenged them upon their persecutors and oppressors: "*You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians*, how many lives were sacrificed to Israel's honour and interests:" He had given them unparalleled instances of his favour to them, and his care of them: *I bore you on eagles' wings*, a

high expression of the wonderful tenderness God had shown for them. It is explained, <sup>(4521)</sup>Deuteronomy 32:11, 12. It denotes great speed. God not only came upon the wing for their deliverance (when the set time was come, he rode on a cherub, and did fly), but he hastened them out, as it were, upon the wing. He did it also with great ease, with the strength as well as with the swiftness of an eagle: those that faint not, nor are weary, are said to *mount up with wings as eagles*, <sup>(4341)</sup>Isaiah 40:31. Especially, it denotes God's particular care of them and affection to them. Even Egypt, that iron furnace, was the nest in which these young ones were hatched, where they were first formed as the embryo of a nation; when, by the increase of their numbers, they grew to some maturity, they were carried out of that nest. Other birds carry their young in their talons, but the eagle (they say) upon her wings, so that even those archers who shoot flying cannot hurt the young ones, unless they first shoot through the old one. Thus, in the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud and fire, the token of God's presence, interposed itself between the Israelites and their pursuers (lines of defence which could not be forced, a wall which could not be penetrated): yet this was not all; their way so paved, so guarded, was glorious, but their end much more so: *I brought you unto myself*. They were brought not only into a state of liberty and honour, but into covenant and communion with God. This, this was the glory of their deliverance, as it is of ours by Christ, that he died, *the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God*. This God aims at in all the gracious methods of his providence and grace, to bring us back to himself, from whom we have revolted, and to bring us home to himself, in whom alone we can be happy. He appeals to themselves, and their own observation and experience, for the truth of what is here insisted on: *You have seen what I did*; so that they could not disbelieve God, unless they would first disbelieve their own eyes. They saw how all that was done was purely the Lord's doing. It was not they that reached towards God, but it was he that brought them to himself. Some have well observed that the *Old-Testament church* is said to be borne upon eagles' wings, denoting the power of that dispensation, which was carried on with *a high hand an out-stretched arm*; but the *New-Testament church* is said to be gathered by the Lord Jesus, *as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings* (<sup>(4123)</sup>Matthew 23:37), denoting the grace and compassion of that dispensation, and the admirable condescension and humiliation of the Redeemer.

(2.) He tells them plainly what he expected and required from them in one word, obedience (v. 5), that they should *obey his voice indeed and keep his covenant*. Being thus saved by him, that which he insisted upon was that they should be ruled by him. The reasonableness of this demand is, long after, pleaded with them, that *in the day he brought them out of the land of Egypt* this was the condition of the covenant, *Obey my voice* (<sup>2473</sup>Jeremiah 7:23); and this he is said to protest earnestly to them, <sup>2410</sup>Jeremiah 11:4, 7. Only obey *indeed*, not in profession and promise only, not in pretence, but in sincerity. God had shown them real favours, and therefore required real obedience.

(3.) He assures them of the honour he would put upon them, and the kindness he would show them, in case they did thus keep his covenant (v. 5, 6): *Then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me*. He does not specify any one particular favour, as giving them the land of Canaan, or the like, but expresses it in that which was inclusive of all happiness, that he would be to them a God in covenant, and they should be to him a people.

[1.] God here asserts his sovereignty over, and propriety in, the whole visible creation: *All the earth is mine*. Therefore he needed them not; he that had so vast a dominion was great enough, and happy enough, without concerning himself for so small a demesne as Israel was. All nations on the earth being his, he might choose which he pleased for his peculiar, and act in a way of sovereignty.

[2.] He appropriates Israel to himself, *First*, As a people dear unto him. *You shall be a peculiar treasure*; not that God was enriched by them, as a man is by his treasure, but he was pleased to value and esteem them as a man does his treasure; they were *precious in his sight and honourable* (<sup>2394</sup>Isaiah 43:4); he *set his love upon them* (<sup>4802</sup>Deuteronomy 7:7), took them under his special care and protection, as a treasure that is kept under lock and key. He looked upon the rest of the world but as trash and lumber in comparison with them. By giving them divine revelation, instituted ordinances, and promises inclusive of eternal life, by sending his prophets among them, and pouring out his Spirit upon them, he distinguished them from, and dignified them above, all people. And this honour have all the saints; they are unto God a *peculiar people* (<sup>3014</sup>Titus 2:14), his when he *makes up his jewels*. *Secondly*, As a people devoted to him, to his honour and service (v. 6), a *kingdom of priests, a holy nation*. All the Israelites, if compared with other people, were priests unto God, so near were they to

him (~~484~~Psalm 148:14), so much employed in his immediate service, and such intimate communion they had with him. When they were first made a free people it was that they might *sacrifice to the Lord their God*, as *priests*; they were under God's immediate government, and the tendency of the laws given them was to distinguish them from others, and engage them for God as a holy nation. Thus all believers are, through Christ, made to our God kings and priests (~~616~~Revelation 1:6), *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood*, ~~619~~1 Peter 2:9.

**III.** Israel's acceptance of this charter, and consent to the conditions of it.

**1.** Moses faithfully delivered God's message to them (v. 7): *He laid before their faces all those words*; he not only explained to them what God had given him in charge, but he put it to their choice whether they would accept these promises upon these terms or no. His laying it to their faces denotes his laying it to their consciences.

**2.** They readily agreed to the covenant proposed. They would oblige themselves to obey the voice of God, and take it as a great favour to be made a kingdom of priests to him. They answered together as one man, *nemine contradicente* — *without a dissentient voice* (v. 8): *All that the Lord hath spoken we will do*. Thus they strike the bargain, accepting the Lord to be to them a God, and giving up themselves to be to him a people. O that there had been such a heart in them!

**3.** Moses, as a mediator, returned the words of the people to God, v. 8. Thus Christ, the Mediator between us and God, as a prophet reveals God's will to us, his precepts and promises, and then as a priest offers up to God our spiritual sacrifices, not only of prayer and praise, but of devout affections and pious resolutions, the work of his own Spirit in us. Thus he is that blessed *days-man who lays his hand upon us both*.

## ~~1249~~ EXODUS 19:9-15

### THE APPROACH OF GOD ANNOUNCED

Here,

**I.** God intimates to Moses his purpose of coming down upon mount Sinai, in some visible appearance of his glory, in *a thick cloud* (v. 9); for he said

that he would  *dwell in the thick darkness* (<sup><40E></sup>2 Chronicles 6:1), and make this his pavilion (<sup><40E></sup>Psalm 18:11),  *holding back the face of his throne* when he set it upon  *mount Sinai, and spreading a cloud upon it,* <sup><40E></sup>Job 26:9. This thick cloud was to prohibit curious enquiries into things secret, and to command an awful adoration of that which was revealed. God would come down  *in the sight of all the people* (v. 11); though they should see no manner of similitude, yet they should see so much as would convince them that God was among them of a truth. And so high was the top of mount Sinai that it is supposed that not only the camp of Israel, but even the countries about, might discern some extraordinary appearance of glory upon it, which would strike a terror upon them. It seems also to have been particularly intended to put an honour upon Moses:  *That they may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever,* v. 9. Thus the correspondence was to be first settled by a sensible appearance of the divine glory, which was afterwards to be carried on more silently by the ministry of Moses. In like manner, the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon Christ at his baptism, and all that were present heard God speak to him (<sup><40E></sup>Matthew 3:17), that afterwards, without the repetition of such visible tokens, they might believe him. So likewise the Spirit descended in cloven tongues upon the apostles (<sup><40E></sup>Acts 2:3), that they might be believed. Observe, When the people had declared themselves willing to obey the voice of God, then God promised they should hear his voice; for, if any man be resolved to  *do his will, he shall know it,* <sup><40E></sup>John 7:17.

**II.** He orders Moses to make preparation for this great solemnity, giving him two days' time for it.

**1.** He must  *sanctify the people* (v. 10), as Job, before this, sent and  *sanctified his sons,* <sup><40E></sup>Job 1:5. He must raise their expectation by giving them notice what God would do, and assist their preparation by directing them what they must do. " *Sanctify them,*" that is, " *Call them off from their worldly business, and call them to religious exercises, meditation and prayer, that they may receive the law from God's mouth with reverence and devotion. Let them be ready,*" v. 11. Note, When we are to attend upon God in solemn ordinances it concerns us to sanctify ourselves, and to get ready beforehand. Wandering thoughts must be gathered in, impure affections abandoned, disquieting passions suppressed, nay, and all cares about secular business, for the present, dismissed and laid by, that our hearts may be  *engaged to approach unto God.* Two things particularly prescribed as signs and instances of their preparation: —

(1.) In token of their cleansing themselves from all sinful pollutions, that they might be holy to God, they must *wash their clothes* (v. 10), and they did so (v. 14); not that God regards our clothes; but while they were washing their clothes he would have them think of washing their souls by repentance from the sins they had contracted in Egypt and since their deliverance. It becomes us to appear in clean clothes when we wait upon great men; so clean hearts are required in our attendance on the great God, who sees them as plainly as men see our clothes. This is absolutely necessary to our acceptably worshipping God. See <sup><1816></sup>Psalm 26:6; <sup><2016></sup>Isaiah 1:16-18; <sup><302></sup>Hebrews 10:22.

(2.) In token of their devoting themselves entirely to religious exercises, upon this occasion, they must abstain even from lawful enjoyments during these three days, and not *come at their wives*, v. 15. See <sup><405></sup>1 Corinthians 7:5.

2. He must *set bounds about the mountain*, v. 12, 13. Probably he drew a line, or ditch, round at the foot of the hill, which none were to pass upon pain of death. This was to intimate,

(1.) That humble awful reverence which ought to possess the minds of all those that worship God. We are mean creatures before a great Creator, vile sinners before a holy righteous Judge; and therefore a godly fear and shame well become us, <sup><323></sup>Hebrews 12:28; <sup><421></sup>Psalm 2:11.

(2.) The distance at which worshippers were kept, under that dispensation, which we ought to take notice of, that we may the more value our privilege under the gospel, having *boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*, <sup><309></sup>Hebrews 10:19.

3. He must order the people to attend upon the summons that should be given (v. 13): “*When the trumpet soundeth long then let them take their places at the foot of the mount, and so sit down at God's feet,*” as it is explained, <sup><333></sup>Deuteronomy 33:3. Never was so great a congregation called together, and preached to, at once, as this was here. No one man's voice could have reached so many, but the voice of God did.

## ~~(236)~~ EXODUS 19:16-25

### THE DIVINE PRESENCE ON MOUNT SINAI

Now, at length, comes that memorable day, that terrible day of the Lord, that day of judgment, in which *Israel heard the voice of the Lord God speaking to them out of the midst of the fire, and lived*, ~~(848)~~ Deuteronomy 4:33. Never was there such a sermon preached, before nor since, as this which was here preached to the church in the wilderness. For,

**I.** The preacher was God himself (v. 18): *The Lord descended in fire*, and (v. 20), *The Lord came down upon mount Sinai*. The *shechinah*, or glory of the Lord, appeared in the sight of all the people; he *shone forth from mount Paran with ten thousands of his saints* (~~(832)~~ Deuteronomy 33:2), that is, attended, as the divine Majesty always is, by a multitude of the holy angels, who were both to grace the solemnity and to assist at it. Hence the law is said to be given *by the disposition of angels*, ~~(405)~~ Acts 7:53.

**II.** The pulpit (or throne rather) was mount Sinai, hung with a *thick cloud* (v. 16), covered with *smoke* (v. 18), and made to *quake* greatly. Now it was that the earth *trembled at the presence of the Lord*, and the *mountains skipped like rams* (~~(834)~~ Psalm 114:4, 7), that Sinai itself, though rough and rocky, *melted from before the Lord God of Israel*, ~~(476)~~ Judges 5:5. Now it was that the *mountains saw him, and trembled* (~~(380)~~ Habakkuk 3:10), and were witnesses against a hard-hearted unmoved people, whom nothing would influence.

**III.** The congregation was called together by the *sound of a trumpet, exceedingly loud* (v. 16), and *waxing louder and louder*, v. 19. This was done by the ministry of the angels, and we read of trumpets sounded by angels, ~~(486)~~ Revelation 8:6. It was the *sound of the trumpet that made all the people tremble*, as those who knew their own guilt, and who had reason to expect that the sound of this trumpet was to them the *alarm of war*.

**IV.** Moses brought the hearers to the place of meeting, v. 17. He that had led them out of the bondage of Egypt now led them to receive the law from God's mouth. Public persons are indeed public blessings when they lay out themselves in their places to promote the public worship of God.



Moses, at the head of an assembly worshipping God, was as truly great as Moses at the head of an army in the field.

**V.** The introductions to the service were *thunders and lightnings*, v. 16. These were designed to strike an awe upon the people, and to raise and engage their attention. Were they asleep? The thunders would awaken them. Were they looking another way? The lightnings would engage them to turn their faces towards him that spoke to them. Thunder and lightning have natural causes, but the scripture directs us in a particular manner to take notice of the power of God, and his terror, in them. Thunder is the voice of God, and lightning the fire of God, proper to engage the senses of sight and hearing, those senses by which we receive so much of our information.

**VI.** Moses is God's minister, who is spoken to, to command silence, and keep the congregation in order: *Moses spoke*, v. 19. Some think it was now that he said, *I exceedingly fear and quake* (<sup><827></sup>Hebrews 12:21); but God stilled his fear by his distinguishing favour to him, in calling him up to the top of the mount (v. 20), by which also he tried his faith and courage. No sooner had Moses got up a little way towards the top of the mount than he was sent down again to keep the people from *breaking through to gaze*, v. 21. Even the priests or princes, the heads of the houses of their fathers, who officiated for their respective families, and therefore are said to *come near to the Lord* at other times, must now keep their distance, and conduct themselves with a great deal of caution. Moses pleads that they needed not to have any further orders given them, effectual care being taken already to prevent any intrusions, v. 23. But God, who knew their wilfulness and presumption, and what was now in the hearts of some of them, hastens him down with this in charge, that neither the priests nor the people should offer to force the lines that were set, to *come up unto the Lord*, but Moses and Aaron on, the men whom God delighted to honour. Observe,

**1.** What it was that God forbade them — breaking through to gaze; enough was provided to awaken their consciences, but they were not allowed to gratify their vain curiosity. They might see, but not gaze. Some of them, probably, were desirous to see some similitude, that they might know how to make an image of God, which he took care to prevent, for they *saw no manner of similitude*, <sup><825></sup>Deuteronomy 4:5. Note, In divine things we must not covet to know more than God would have us know; and he has allowed us as much as is good for us. A desire of forbidden knowledge

was the ruin of our first parents. Those that would be wise above what is written, and intrude into those things which they have not seen, need this admonition, that they *break not through to gaze*.

**2.** Under what penalty it was forbidden: *Lest the Lord break forth upon them* (v. 22-24), and *many of them perish*. Note,

**(1.)** The restraints and warnings of the divine law are all intended for our good, and to keep us out of that danger into which we should otherwise, by our own folly, run ourselves.

**(2.)** It is at our peril if we break the bounds that God has set us, and intrude upon that which he has not allowed us; the Bethshemites and Uzzah paid dearly for their presumption. And, even when we are called to approach God, we must remember that he is in heaven and we upon earth, and therefore it behoves us to exercise reverence and godly fear.