

Moses, Sinai & Covenant

In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter speaks of Christians, both Jewish and Gentile:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The equation of the people at Sinai with the New Testament Christians is very, very interesting. From a certain point of view, the material we will cover today will have a tremendous impact on your eschatological position. I do not know how much you are aware of this, but in a sense a person's eschatology will be greatly determined by what he believes that God was doing with Israel in Exodus 19 when He covenanted with them—when the theocracy was formally established and when God stated what the relationship was to be, the law that follows that, the confirmation. Sometimes we speak of 'eschatology embedded in creation.' William Dumbrell wrote a book in which he takes themes from Revelation, finds those same themes in Genesis and traces them through the entire Scriptures. Dr. Anthony Hoekema, in his book, *The Bible and the Future*, also points out that our understanding of creation will determine our eschatology because the end is embedded in the beginning. God carries out what He intended. I hope we can return to the passage in 1 Peter 2 at the end of the course, but for now let us turn to Exodus 19 and see if we can get the basic theological prospectus from Exodus 19 to Numbers 10. Let us pray.

*Lord, our God, You have given us a tremendous revelation. You have done great things. You have said great things and then You have done them also. You have carried them out and we are the recipients of many blessings today. God, Your grace is wonderful. Your love is steadfast and immeasurable. You never fail us. God, You uphold us and we thank You for that. Continue to sustain us. Give us what we need during this hour. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

We begin in Exodus 19. It would not be difficult to remain in Exodus 19 for the entire lecture, but we also have to move on. The first three verses of Exodus 19 read as follows:

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the desert of Sinai. After they had set out from Rephidim, they entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel..."

There, Moses is commanded to be God's mouthpiece. Moses has to function as a prophet. There we have direct communication, God speaking to Moses. We do not know how that interaction takes place, but here again we have an aspect of the supernaturalism that we come across again and again in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. God spoke to Moses, "And tell the house of Jacob, the people of Israel." Notice that He says Jacob and Israel. Jacob is the personal name. Israel is the official name that God gave Jacob when He struggled with him at Peniel. "Go tell these people, these descendants of the man who struggled with God, God has not let them go. Tell them."

I often get a little tingle in my spine when I think of how Moses, quoting God, could just sum up in two little phrases all that had happened. Have you ever watched eagles? They are amazing birds. They carry sticks that look like logs up to the top of a tree and they build a nest. Then when the young are ready to

fly, the mother eagle has a way of nudging them out over the edge and then the mother jumps and swoops underneath and picks them up and carries them back to the nest. Eagles are known to do that even when they have their nest way up on the cliffs. They nudge the little fledglings out and let them fall and learn to fly. Then they will swoop underneath and pick them up and carry them back to the nest. God says in Exodus 19, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt.” He sums up in those few words all the plagues and all the destruction, and the death of the firstborn. He does not say “like a mother carries her baby,” but “like an eagle carries its young.” Evidently in the desert area, they were able to see the eagles there, too, and God said, “Yes, I nudged you out of the nest. I nudged you of Egypt; you saw what I did to Egypt. I got you out of there and I have been teaching you to walk and I have been teaching you to fly. I had to come and scoop you up a few times when the sea was in front of you and when the water got pretty salty, when you thought you couldn’t drink it, when you were tired already of meat and I gave you all those quail. I picked you up and carried you like a mother eagle.”

In Ezekiel 16, God uses another metaphor to speak of how He took care of Israel. He says that He found Israel as a newborn baby who had not been washed or cleansed or softened with oil. God found that little baby. We have different pictures in the Bible of how God took care of these people—an unorganized mass of slaves turned free. God carried them, but He did more than just carry them. The next thing He says is, “and I brought you to Myself.” This entire passage is the story of Emmanuel, God with His people. God didn’t ever forsake them. He brought them to Himself. What does a bridegroom do when he goes to the marriage ceremony and he takes his bride to his new home? The man leaves his mother and father. He takes his wife and clings to her. That is what God did. God took His bride out of Egypt. He nurtured her. He wooed her, according to Ezekiel 16. He brought her up into His embrace and brought her to Himself so that they could be brought together in a beautiful bond. The covenant bond was there, but the people who had been in Egypt for all those years had not had much instruction. They may not have been aware, but at the same time—as we saw last time—God remembered and God knew they were His people.

What assurances does God give Israel as He brings them to Himself and to His embrace? First, “The whole earth is Mine.” There you have the cosmic kingdom, which some may want to refer to as the creation covenant, put before them again. “I am the king. I am the Lord of it all—the whole earth, every nation, every aspect. This big Mount Sinai is Mine, too. Everything, the whole earth is Mine.” Then He says, “If you obey Me fully and keep My commandments.” Again, we have the word *im*, “if.” Is this strict conditionality? There is a lot of argument among scholars about this. They speak about the covenant with Abraham being the covenant of promise and this covenant with Moses as being the covenant of works and law, but we do indeed see the word *im* in this passage. Is that to be interpreted strictly in a legal sense, implying causality? Remember what has been stated before: “I broke Egypt; I carried you as a mother eagle carries her eaglets. I brought You to Myself, here you are.” Then the question becomes, “Now what are you going to do?” God does not treat His people like a block of wood or a bunch of sticks. He addresses them as responsible people and says, “If we are going to be married and have a happy marriage, there is a certain ‘condition.’ There are certain things that will definitely have to take place. I will expect something from you—not for the creation of the covenant, not for the creation of the theocracy, not for the creation of your future. That is already established, but you need to stay in this relationship, you need to stay married to Me, you need to be a faithful bride. He speaks of Israel as His bride. The Hebrew word *segulah* is best translated, “my treasured possession.” God says to Israel, “You will be My darling; you will always be My darling, the apple of My eye. I will love you with My whole heart. You will have that love, but the only way you have that love is in you stay in My arms, if you stay within My embrace. The only way you will have that love is by staying in covenant with Me, maintaining the relationship that I have established.” God does place a responsibility on His people. God demands a response. God has stated the situation: “You are my *segulah*. You are Mine. I

brought you to Myself. You will always be My treasured possession—obeying, following, living as a bride. If you refuse to live as a bride, you will not be a bride.” God does not give Israel an option: “Choose you now what you want to be.” Rather, He says, “I brought you to Myself. This is the situation: now be a bride. Be a bride, and you will be My blessed treasure all the way.” Please understand that the situation is, in a way, an accomplished fact. Israel is with God. God has done it all there at Sinai.

God goes on to give them the assurance that they are to be a kingdom of priests. Peter uses this phrase as well—the priestly kingdom or a kingdom of priests. You can find commentators arguing as to which way is best to say it: are they to be seen as a priestly kingdom with the emphasis on “priestly,” or is the emphasis on kingdom of priests? I don’t think that makes much of a difference, but one thing is sure: the idea of kingdom tells them that they are to see themselves as under the rule of God. They are God’s domain, and if you want to stress the great sovereignty of God, you will say “a kingdom of priests,” but if you want to emphasize what God wants them to be on earth, then you say “a priestly kingdom.”

What was God saying when He said, “And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests?” He was saying not only that He is their ruler, but, “You must function as a priestly people. You must stand between Me and the whole earth, which is Mine. You are to represent the earth.” At the time of creation, when God told Adam and Eve to cultivate the earth and have dominion over the earth, Adam not only had to represent God to the whole of creation in a royal way. He had to represent the creation to God. He had to bring a beautified, cultivated, dominated and named creation before the presence of God to the glory of God. Now God is saying to Israel, “I am only giving you the Adamic command that I gave in creation. I want you to be a kingdom of priests. I want you to bring all the nations and the earth before Me as My kingdom.” So Israel becomes the central kingdom, God’s agency through which He will bring His blessing to the nations. Do you remember Genesis 12? This relates directly to Genesis 12—“And I will bless you and you will be a blessing to all the nations”—but the priestly aspect points out now that all the nations are to come into the presence of God through Israel. Israel is to pray for the nations. Israel is to work for the world. That is their function. God says, “I did not bring Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldeans for the fun of it, and neither is that why I brought you here in the midst of all the nations. I did that because I claimed those people. They are Mine—Mine by creation, and Mine by the reconfirmation of the creation covenant with Noah and Noah’s sons. Through Noah’s sons, those people are Mine and I want you to bring them to Me.”

There is a repetition in that phrase of the great Old Testament missionary mandate. This certainly tells us what we must do if, as Peter tells us, we are the kingdom of priests today—“Go to the nations, bring in the nations.” We know that the prophets talked about that, and Jesus talked about that, but do not forget that phrase “the whole earth is Mine.” The earth is not limited just to nations. The earth included the whole ecological and environmental situation. We, as God’s kingdom of priests, ought to be right in the forefront of preserving God’s earth. I am not saying that you should go along with what some of the radical environmentalists say, but we had better become a little more ecologically concerned also. We are often accused of taking the cultural mandate seriously and thinking, therefore, that God says, “Go and exploit the world.” No, no, no, no! We are to beautify this world, too. The priests were the representatives of beauty. The priests were the representatives of cleanliness. The priests were the representatives of wholeness and integrity. Everything that functioned to bring peace in creation as a whole, but also between people and the rest of creation, was the task of the priests. The priests were to see to it that the threefold cultural mandate was properly carried out: the relationship to the cosmos, the relationship to one another, and the relationship to God. The priests stood right in the middle of that and today, you are priests by God’s appointment. Peter reminds us of that.

The final assurance I want to look at is that Israel is a holy nation. God has told them, “The whole earth is Mine. You are My blessed treasure. You are My kingdom of priests,” and now He tells them, “You are my holy nation”—*goy kadosh*. The word *goy* indicates a political unit, by contrast with *ami*—“my people”—the word that indicates the covenantal relationship. There is a difference between a state and a government. Government is how a state is administered—how it is run and governed. God said to these people, “You are to see yourself as a political unit.” The emphasis is not so much on territory, but on people. God does not mean that the all-important thing is Israel’s new status as a state. Israel always wanted to put a lot of emphasis on the state—their property, their land—and I think some Christians still get carried away with that to a certain extent. God’s emphasis, however, is “I want you to be a people that are organized, that can serve as a kingdom of priests.” The word *goy* puts emphasis on the political, organized, governed dimension. God wants them to be a governed people, an organized people, a united people, but as they are that, they must also be holy, completely sanctified unto God.

As I said, it would be easy to spend the entire lecture in this passage. We need to move on, but I hope that you have clearly in mind now what God said to these people. He had laid the historical foundation and the theological foundation. Everything was there—“Now Israel, what is your response?” In this passage, Exodus 19 to 24, three times the people are asked to respond, and each time they say, “All that the LORD has said we will do.”

When I married my wife, they only asked her to say, “I do,” one time, and that was enough. I do not know of many marriage ceremonies that call for more than one “I do,” from the woman (or from the man, for that matter). Maybe they ought to have three of them in this age of widespread divorce! But the people said, “All that the LORD has said we will do.” There was their response, and in a way, the marriage knot was tied. There are two little phrases that we need to see there in the passages when the people respond, “All that the LORD has said we will do.” The people responded together, Exodus 19:8, and they did it as one voice, Exodus 24:3. God had brought them together. He had placed them there before Him, and there was not a dissenting voice. From then on, the responsibility could truly be on the people. God had done His part and all the people had to do was say, “God, You are great. God, You are wonderful. Here we are.”

We jump ahead for a moment to Exodus 24:5-7. Here, the covenant was consolidated after the law was given. We will talk about the giving of the law in a minute. But after the giving of the law, Moses had to bring the people before God again. He built an altar and this is where we have the ceremony where the animal is killed. Half of the blood is taken in a bowl and poured on the altar. The other half of the blood is taken and the people are not dipped in it. They are not immersed in it, but the people are sprinkled. The blood is sprinkled on the people and they are sealed by the blood of the covenant. The covenant has now been confirmed by ceremony, by blood, by the death of a substitute animal. (That points forward to when Christ later says that He is the Mediator of the covenant, because He shed His blood for the remission of sins.) These people could stand there and know that they were a forgiven people. They were a cleansed people. God had made them a holy people. They had been sealed by the blood of the covenant, but that did not happen until the people said, for the third time, “All that the LORD has said we will do.” The covenant was consolidated by oath and by ceremony.

In chapters 20 to 23, we have the law. What was the purpose of that law? Let me put it simply: these are housekeeping rules for a good marriage. Do you understand that? Some of you may not be married, but for those who are: when you got married, didn’t you and your husband come up with some type of living arrangements? Of course, God did not say to His people, “Be a holy people and now go do as you please.” The first thing He said was, “Only Me. No other gods. I am your only God.” Jeremiah talks about God being a husband to Israel and God says, “No other husbands, no other lovers, and I don’t

want you to go around taking pictures or making any type of resemblance of another lover.” That is the second commandment. The third commandment is, “I have given you My name and from now on, you will be called *ami*, My people. If you mistreat My name, you mistreat Me, because you cannot separate Me from My name. I have given you My name, the ‘I am that I am.’ Don’t start making fun of My name. Honor it and use it as a means of drawing the nations.”

The fourth commandment is, “I want you to take time to love Me. Because when you really love Me, I know that we will stay together, but love takes time. Love takes time. So I give you six days a week to be doing your work out there in creation, all that interaction, but I want one-seventh of your time for Me. Remember that day of rest. That goal that I have set before you, that I have achieved Myself in creation, that I’ve set before you, remember that. We need time now and for the future.” If there is one commandment today that people flaunt by saying that they live in the New Testament age, it is this. In our culture at least, a football game seems to take precedence over time with family, with God’s family, and time with the Lord Himself. The way this commandment is kept is a good gauge for how well the first three rules for God’s housekeeping with His bride are honored.

In the next six commandments, God talks about relationships between people. The fifth commandment: “You shall not have your children dishonor their father and mother. Keep the family intact.” The sixth commandment: “Do not be attacking each other and killing one another.” The seventh commandment: “Preserve the marriage bond.” These three commandments relate to the covenantal social mandate and the eighth and tenth commandments are very important too. They deal particularly with the way we look on the cultural and material dimension of life. The ninth commandment—“take care of your neighbor’s name in the midst of the whole cultural situation”—is a combination of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth. So these six commandments address how we deal with our fellow people in the cultural and in the social situation. As long as we remember their honor, their claims in society, and their relationships, all will be well. The law is basically ten guidelines for a good marriage. It was for the people personally. It was for their relationship with God. It was for their relationships with each other and with the world. What a beautiful guideline! God shows us how to love Him. The law is a set of guidelines for love. People who turn the law into legalism forget the heart of the law. Jesus Himself said that the heart of the law is “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love is the heart of the law. When Jesus said, “I know if you love Me, you will show it by keeping My commandments,” that came right out of Exodus 20:19-24. Israel was given this in detail and these laws covered the whole of life.

Let us move on to the concept of theocracy. When God married His people in that formal way there at Sinai, He established what we call the theocracy. You will not find that word in the Bible. It comes from the words *theos*, “God,” and *kratos*, “power.” Theocracy is God’s power, God’s sovereignty, God’s rule on earth. God is now formalizing how He is going to exercise His reign over His domain, over His people and through His people. Theocracy puts emphasis on the reign and the power of God. How is God going to reign over His people? He has just pointed this out: “You will be My *segulah*, My treasured possession. You will be My kingdom of priests and My holy well-organized, regulated, governed people. That is the way I will reign over you and through you. I will reign Myself. I will have My representatives. First of all, Moses will represent Me and he will do that in a threefold office. He is the one who will tell you the law—the prophetic dimension. He will administer the law—the royal dimension. He is the one who brought sacrifice when the blood was sprinkled on the people—the priestly dimension. Moses functions in the threefold capacity as prophet, priest and king. Now I reign through My threefold office, which is now represented in Moses. Moses, therefore, is My great mediator, but I want you to trust Moses, because he speaks for Me. He rules for Me. He sacrifices on My behalf. He prays on your behalf.” The theocracy is God’s reign over His people. God does not tell

Moses to be king, because God is the king. (By the way, Vos mentions that a theocracy must not be seen as equivalent to a missions agency.)

There are four points I want to emphasize: kingdom on earth, symbol, type, and tabernacle. First, the theocracy is God's kingdom on earth. He has said, "You are My kingdom, My organized people." Secondly, the people are to serve as a symbol. What is a symbol? A symbol is a representation of a fuller, greater reality. So the theocracy, as God put His reign over His people, symbolized God the creator, the king over the whole of creation. Israel symbolizes to the world how God is the great king. If a symbol is truly a symbol, it is also a type, and a type is never a type unless it is first of all a symbol.

I want to refer now for a moment to the tabernacle, the tent. The tabernacle is the symbol of Emmanuel, God with us. It indicates that God, the spiritual, infinite, invisible, everywhere-present one has made His home with us. He is truly with the people, just as He said: "I will be with you. I will dwell in your midst. Look at the tabernacle. That is the symbol of My presence." But the tabernacle also functions as a type. What does it really refer to? Who is the real Emmanuel? Look at John 1: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." Who is it who came and tabernacled among us? Who is the true Emmanuel? Jesus Christ. When the type is fully realized, when Christ has come, the symbol need no longer function because the reality has come. That is what the Book of Hebrews emphasizes so emphatically and specifically and persistently: "The sacrifices and the priesthood all pointed to Christ. When the reality is here, you do not return to the types and the shadows and the symbols. They are finished. They have performed their duty. You can read about them to better understand the anti-type." The tabernacle is the first thing that God tells Moses to establish because the tabernacle represents the heart of the theocracy. God is reigning over them. God is there with them. Do not see the tabernacle only as a place of worship, but see it as a place from which God reigns. The tabernacle is a place from which God directs, controls, speaks, shows His love, and ministers to the people so that they can, indeed, be priestly.

I do not really agree with people who want to see the theocracy re-established on earth. I find it terribly difficult to accept a pre-millennial eschatological position because that calls for a re-establishment of the symbol, but the symbol has done its duty. There is no purpose for it anymore. The reality has come in Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said, the kingdom is among us. The reign of God through Christ has come. Before Jesus Christ became flesh on earth, the people had to know that God was reigning. How could the people know that God was truly reigning, that God was Emmanuel, that the theocracy was a reality? The tabernacle. That was the palace. Remember that the palace garden in Eden had to be vacated? However, God keeps the palace one way or another. For a while this was hardly possible with the patriarchs, but there was the altar that Abram built. Now the palace was the tabernacle. When we get to Joshua, we will see that at the heart of the tabernacle was the ark of God's presence.

Did Israel remain faithful to God? Did Israel understand what they had said, "All that the LORD has said we will do"? When Moses was up on the mountain getting the instructions concerning the tabernacle and the priests, the people created and worshipped the golden calf under Aaron's guidance and direction. The first two commandments are tragically disobeyed and God says, "I am going to wipe out these people." God tells Moses to go down, and when Moses sees what is happening, he breaks the tablet of Ten Commandments and he says that the covenant is shattered. They are not keeping God's will. God says to Moses that He will destroy the people and make a great nation out of Moses. Then Moses becomes the mediator par excellence. He prays fervently for his fallen people. He prays for God's wandering bride, calling on God to preserve His name. Then God applies the curse of the covenant, and quite a number of people die right then. Not only did Moses function as a mediator, but notice how God makes Himself known in Exodus 34:6-7 (you will find this passage repeated in the Psalms and Jonah). In Exodus 34:6, the Lord, Yahweh, the 'I am that I am,' the compassionate one. Compassion means "to

suffer with.” The gracious God, who has love for the guilty, who is slow to anger. The term there is “of a long nose, of a long breath.” God knows how to take a deep breath. He abounds in love, in faithfulness. He maintains His *chesed*, His loving-kindness. He forgives the wicked. He forgives rebellion. He forgives sin, but He will never leave the guilty unpunished. The justice and righteousness of God comes through, but there are more terms used to describe the wonderful character of God as compassionate and loving, gracious and patient. God shows His righteousness and justice in the face of rebellion and sin. God is a forgiving God and Israel, the bride, was forgiven, even though she had committed a tragic act of spiritual adultery by bowing before that golden calf and calling it the god who delivered her from Egypt. God forgave, but also applied the curse so that the people might know the consequences. For the people as a whole, however, the theocracy remained. God’s reign on earth remained.

The reign of God is a reign of compassion. It is a reign of grace, a reign of patience, a reign of love, a reign of faithfulness. It is a reign of upholding love through all generations. It is a reign of forgiveness, but it is a reign of justice and righteousness too. What a God, what a gracious God! Had He expressed the curse of the covenant to a full degree, there would never have been Jesus Christ—Emmanuel—but God maintained His people so that later on, through His people, the Christ would come who would bring all virtues to even fuller and greater expression.