

## Exodus Chapters 19-20 (Part 1) - John Karmelich

We're essentially at the Bible location where God gives the 10 Commandments. I'm writing a separate lesson on the "10" next time. This lesson's the text that surrounds "10". What I kept thinking about as I studied this text is, "How do we prepare to listen to God?" I thought about how do most of us get ready for church. Obviously, we pick something to wear, maybe help our kids get ready, grab stuff including funds for the church. In these two chapters, again we're going around the "10" as they teach us how the Israelites prepared to meet God. I'm just saying if we are prepared to hear from God (like every time we study His Word and attend church) we should understand how God wants us to prepare. I like most of the things I do in life to be meaningful. Hopefully learning how to prepare to hear from God will be an extremely beneficial thing for each of us.

I can hear many of you thinking, "I've been going to church all my life. I read my bible regularly. You are going to lecture me on how to prepare for God?" First I'm not lecturing anyone! I just want to show how God told the Israelites to prepare to receive the 10 Commandments. Remember we're coming to a pivotal moment in human history, the giving of the "10". As most of you know, I believe the bible isn't just to teach us history, but a guide on how God wants us to live. Therefore if there's over a chapter on how to prepare to listen to God, I'd argue that's worth our time to see what the Bible says on this!

With that said, let's begin with where we left off. We last left the Israelites working their way out from Egypt towards Mt. Sinai (in the wilderness northeast of Egypt). The last thing we read in Chapter 18 is a lecture from Moses' father-in-law on leadership skills and delegation of duty. His father-in-law lived not far from where Moses saw the burning bush (Mt. Sinai). That leads to Chapter 19. It begins with a "time stamp" in effect. The night the Israelites put the lamb's blood on their doors in Egypt, as to avoid death was on a full moon of the first month of their calendar year (in the spring). Yes, it's the same day Jesus was sacrificed for our sins roughly 1,500 years later. The Jewish calendar is on a lunar cycle (that is about 28 days). The first thing Chapter 9 says is they arrived at this place on the "no moon" night of the 3rd month. You can do the math, but it's about 45 days. BTW, to this day on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost the Jews celebrate the giving of the law which is about the same time period. So on the same day the church was born, was the date the 10 Commandments were given. The point is the church was born to use our lives to make a difference for God. Since God made us to glorify Him, it helps to keep that in mind as we prepare to "meet Him".

After that we get a few notes on where the Israelites traveled to on the way to Mt. Sinai. The location's a classic debate. To me, the most important thing is two million people made it there as God told them to. At this point Moses went up the mountain and I suspect to the exact spot where the burning bush is (ok was) located. By the way I don't believe we have to travel to a specific location or pray in any sort of specific way to hear God speak. My view is "God is God" so He can speak to us when He wants, as well as how He desires to. Still the Israelites were "spiritual babies" at this point, so up Moses went by Himself to talk to God. In effect Moses got a short speech from God. To me the key word God said in this little talk is "if". Let me explain it this way: God's promise to give the land to Israel wasn't tied to any specific conditions, but was an unconditional promise. The "if" is the idea that we must remember what God has done for us, and we will be blessed if we keep our thoughts on what He's done for us. It is the fact that they (and us Christians) are separated by God to be His witnesses to the world. Some of what God told Moses here is applied in the New Testament to the church. Israel as an entity still can be a witness for God if and when they put their trust in Him. This is a separate issue from salvation. This is about using our lives to make a difference for Him and lead other people closer to Him.

After that little speech, Moses came down off the mountain to share what God said with the Israelites. I suspect he told the leaders and it spread from there. We then get told the Israelites must "prepare for the third day". A clue if ever there was one! They were to prepare by washing their clothes (clean up) as well as refrain from sex for three days. I don't think that means we must refrain from sex before we go to church on Sunday for three days! The issue is that we are called to be a witness for God and that requires to get our focus on Him. Refraining for a bit from things we enjoy doing is a way to focus on Him (similar to what fasting is by the way). As far as cleaning up before seeking Him is a good idea if for no other reason then for the sake of those sitting around us. It's not about trying to earn God's favor but using our lives as a witness for Him!

The Israelites were also told not to go up the mountain themselves as it would be a death sentence. I'm reminded of what Paul said how Mt. Sinai is associated with death (the law kills!) while Jerusalem that city on a mountain represents new life in Jesus. It's the idea that failure to obey every aspect of the law leads to death as that's God's standard for perfection and He expects perfection to be with Him forever! That's why God Himself is the perfect sacrifice on our behalf. (See Romans Chapter 7 on this!)

When the third day came it was "show time"! There was thunder, lighting and a loud trumpet blast! It obviously got everyone nervous! Moses went up there and the main thing God told him was to go back down and say once again that no one else is go up there! It teaches how important it is to let God be in control of things we can't do (trying to please Him based on our works)! Chapter 19 ends on that note. Obviously, the 10 Commandments is important as is the key laws for all believers. We're get into all of that in the next lesson on the "Big 10" themselves!

I want to talk about the first thing God said after He gave the law to all the Israelites in Chapter 20. His first topic after that was about how to build an altar for sacrifices to Him. In essence, it was to be built out of basic stones and nothing fancy! When the Israelites built the tabernacle later in Exodus, as well as the permanent temple (centuries later) was a "fancy thing" to put it mildly. So what's the deal here? Why would God want the first thing after the big 10 Commandments speech to talk about how to build a "cheap altar" for sacrifice?

I believe what God wants to get across is the idea that we can't impress God with what we build. Yes I know building a church takes hard work and sacrifice, but it misses the point. When we use our lives to glorify Him, we can't impress Him with our efforts! We sacrifice just to say that we're grateful for what He's does for us and a sacrifice (be it a check, time or effort) is showing God we're desiring to put Him first above anything else! Of course there are issues to deal with, but God's saying in effect, "All of that isn't necessary to impress Me! For an altar, we can keep it simple. What I care about is My people use their lives to make a difference for Me." We don't do it because God's got a big ego! We do it because it's the best way to live out our lives in service to Him. That's why we were separated in the first place! If you get that, you get why we're separated for Him and hopefully that helps us to understand how it is that God wants us to prepare to meet Him!

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John