

Session 4

June 23, 2024

## GOD'S PROMISE TO MAKE A HOLY NATION

Exodus 19:1-8

The connection of God's people Israel with God's people the church is a bit confusing. Certainly, there are shared characteristics and shared principles between the two, but I believe to simply replace Old Testament Israel with the New Testament church is a violation of both good hermeneutics (Bible interpretation) and of God's sovereign character. Therefore, to apply the promises God made to Israel directly to the church is an error. I recall a Jewish friend of mine asking why the church wanted to claim all the blessings promised to Israel while ignoring all the curses sent their way! My favorite example is when a church evangelist claims 2 Chronicles 7:14 as a prescription for New Testament revival. While there are indeed some transferable principles, the context of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is centered squarely on Israel. The church is not even hinted at! But there are some exceptions to the rule, and Exodus 19 is one of those exceptions; not because it is convenient, but rather because the apostle Peter was inspired by God to apply it that way (see 1 Peter 2:9). Here, our application is safe. God will have a holy nation. It was ushered in by Israel and will be established in eternity by His church.

**A new covenant (vv. 1-4).** God's promise to Abraham was to establish a people for Himself and to give them a land in which to build His kingdom. The covenant with Moses is more defined. Notice the *markers* delineating it. There is a specific date attached (v. 1). There are specific locations mentioned as well (v. 1-2). There is an exact landmark recorded (v. 2). All of these details are included to make this event remarkable in Israel's history. Notice as well the *memories* evoked. First, there was the destruction of the Egyptians. The Lord not only punished them, He did so in miraculous and remarkable ways. Second, God reminded them of their deliverance. They were "carried on eagles wings" from their hopeless oppression in Egypt to their glorious savior. God said, "I brought you to Myself." What had begun with Abraham was being continued some 600 years later. The land Abraham had claimed, Israel would conquer. This was a turning point in Israel's history, and the Mosaic covenant would guide the people into a deeper relationship with the One True God. For reflection: *In what ways are the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant alike? How do they differ? Do see a progression in the level of commitment required?*

**A conditional covenant (vv. 5-6).** Whereas the covenant God made with Noah and Abraham were *unconditional* (that is, essentially one-sided as decreed by God), the covenant that God made with Moses—and the newly freed nation of Israel—was a *conditional* covenant. This is signaled by the classical conditional formula: "If...then..." (v. 5). The "if" portion sets the conditional requirement. In this case, it's *obedience*. The covenant aspect was the Law of God, which was yet to come. Yet before God laid it out, He wanted them to know what to expect. They would be required to *listen* to God, and *carefully keep* His word. The "then" part was the result. God would give them three great blessings. First, they would be a *treasured possession* (v. 5). The language carries the idea of something valuable, but also something *worked for*. It's important to understand that Israel did not work for this honor. Rather, it was God who would toil with them to make them His people. Second, they would be a *kingdom of priests* (v. 6). In any religion, priests act as mediators between the natural and the divine. In this case, the entire

nation would act as that mediator between lost mankind and their redeeming God. Third, they would be a *holy nation*, that is, a nation set apart for God's purpose. Indeed, in that day, only Israel served the One True God. For reflection: *1 Peter 2:9 applies those three results to the New Testament church. How does today's church carry out those functions? How effective do you think we are?*

**An accepted covenant (vv. 7-8).** With the conditions of the covenant clearly laid out, all that was left was to "shake on it." But since the covenant applied to the nation, the nation had to understand the conditions and agree to them. As was the custom (see Ex. 3:16, 4:29, 12:21 et al), Moses spoke to the elders of the people, who then conveyed the message down the line. The people responded with enthusiasm and unity, "We will do all that the Lord has spoken" (v. 8). Thus, they agreed to the covenant even before they knew the exact provisions of it. No doubt, the blessed results were appealing, and their intentions were pure. Unfortunately, the best of intentions are no match for the worst of circumstances! And we know how things went from there. For reflection: *If God already knew how poorly Israel would act in regard to their obedience, why do you think He made a covenant He knew they would not (or could not) keep?*