

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 286

Exodus 19

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Episode Summary

Exodus 19 begins with the short move of the Israelite community from Rephidim to Sinai. The chapter not only sets the stage for the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, but the covenant ceremony of Exodus 24. This episode focuses on the preparations for receiving the law and entering into the covenant. Toward that end, we focus on the nature of the Sinai covenant, its relation to the earlier Abrahamic covenant, and the ultimate goal of the covenant, expressed in Exod 19:5-6.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 286: Exodus 19. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Well, Mike, we have some interesting news. Not only do we have a special, special guest on to talk about it, but we have something else to announce. Something exciting that is going to be super-fun.

MH: Yeah! I'm going to turn it over to her. Drenna, my wife, is with us, and she's been very busy planning something real special. So Drenna, why don't you tell the audience what it is?

DH: Hey everybody, this is Drenna. And I just wanted to take a few minutes to tell you about something really fun that we've been planning. But first off, I just want to thank each and every one of you for listening. You've been such a blessing and encouragement to us through all the emails and Instagram messages and Facebook messages. And I just wanted to let you know that we do read them, even though we don't have time to comment on all of them. But we just really appreciate you. You're such an encouragement and blessing to our lives. And honestly, we desire to meet you guys and hang out with you guys and put a face behind the names that we see through the internet. So we just want to give you an opportunity to do that. So I just wanted to invite you guys to this special thing that we are planning, and it is the first ever Naked Bible Cruise. And it is on a brand new Princess ship, just built this year (2019)!

MH: Just for us, right? [laughs]

DH: Yeah, just for us. [laughs] And this is going to be a really special cruise because Mike is going to be doing a lecture series. It's going to be brand new material that no one's ever heard before. So you guys are going to be the first.

MH: Yeah. I thought for this a good idea would be to start drilling down on the kinds of things that would go into an *Unseen Realm 2* (an *Unseen Realm* follow-up book). So that's about all I'm going to say right now. You could go to MoreUnseenRealm.com and there are like fifty things up there. So I'm going to pick at least one or two of those. We're going to focus on things that we haven't done on the podcast and elsewhere (as I'm out speaking). That'll be the cruise content. So hopefully we'll get people interested and you'll come out and you'll hear something new for sure.

DH: Okay, Mike. Do you remember what we're calling the cruise? We came up with a name.

MH: Moderately teasing here. [laughter] "Unseen Realm: A Deeper Dive."

DH: I like it. I think it sounds catchy. Okay, just let me tell you a little bit about the cruise. When is this cruise? Well, you have a year to plan, because it's October 10-17, 2020. So it is going to be leaving from New York and it is a New England up into Eastern Canada coast cruise during the height of the fall foliage. So if you have never seen the fall foliage in the Northeast part of the United States, it is a treat. It is beautiful. Now we grew up in Pennsylvania, so we were used to seeing that every year. And it is absolutely breathtakingly beautiful. So it's going to be going up the coastline and we're going to be porting in Rhode Island, Boston, New Brunswick. Just to see those towns in the fall.

MH: Yeah, it's pretty spectacular. My brother actually just took a road trip up there into the New England states and just raved about it. So yeah, it's no exaggeration, it's one of the more beautiful parts of the country at that time of year. So that went into the planning.

DH: Okay, so the cruise has a price point package for every budget. So there are three levels. And every cabin is a win-win. So it doesn't matter what your budget is. You're still going to be pampered and you're still going to have a beautiful place to sleep at night. So since it is a year away, it's a great way to budget and plan and save money for this. Let's just talk about the sessions. So the first night, we're going to be doing a meet-and-greet. We're going to have a special room just for our people. There will be beverages, cocktails, and food, so that we can just meet each other and know people's names and faces. And it'll be a time for Mike and Trey to just mingle with...

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MH: Yeah, our wives and such. So it'll be a good way to break in. And then the rest of the cruise is either stopping points (getting off, spending a day at different points) and then either in the evening or in the morning before we hit a docking point, having some Naked Bible content.

DH: Yeah. So there are going to be five lectures. And they are basically an hour and a half each session. The first hour (give or take a few minutes) is going to be a lecture and then the last 30 minutes will be a Q&A.

MH: Yeah, so it's five content sessions and then basically five Q&As.

DH: And also my friend Cheryl who is the travel agent helping me plan all this is going to try to do at least one excursion that's just for our group so that we can go out to a port and just enjoy the day together. But that's to be announced. So you can just go to NakedBibleTours.com and that will give you all the information. Right now we don't have the whole itinerary done, but that will be done in the next few days and you'll be able to see that on the site as well and sign up for the cruise. So I hope that you are all as excited about it as Trey and Melissa and Mike and I are, because we really want to meet you and make friends.

MH: Yeah, it'll be fun. It'll be fun. Even if I'm along, it'll be fun. [laughter]

TS: We might have to push Mike in the water and see what he does, because we know how much he loves the water. [MH laughs]

DH: Well, if he has his flippers on, he's fine. [laughs] If he doesn't, he's going to sink like a lead balloon.

MH: And my goggles. Don't forget those.

DH: I know we're going to get this question because we always do. Are these sessions going to be recorded or livestreamed or available to anyone else that isn't on the cruise?

MH: Yeah, we do get that question all the time. What we're going to do is, we are going to record everything, but the lecture content is not going to be for anyone other than people who are on the cruise. You may see it a year later (something like that). The Q&A sessions we will likely record for the purpose of the podcast. Something like that, like when we're at ETS or SBL. But the lecture content, if you want to get that in any sort of timely form, you have to come to the cruise.

DH: Well thanks for letting me hop on here and tell you about this project that we're trying to work out for you guys. I appreciate it so much and thank you.

MH: Alright, thanks for being on, Drenna.

TS: Yeah, first time after almost five years! [laughter] It only took a cruise to get you on. Do you have anything...

DH: Well, I'm excited about that, so...

TS: Well here's your chance to get back at Mike. Do you have anything you want to... Here's your chance to blackmail him on the air.

MH: Yeah, we'll capture that in an hour-long episode. [laughs]

TS: Its own episode. Alright, will do. Well, again, you go to NakedBibleTours.com. Get all of the information on there. It may not all be up there right now, but keep checking back. You have a whole year to make that happen. So we hope to see you all. It'll be a lot of fun. And I promise you, if you're going to come, we're going to have lots of fun. I guarantee it.

MH: Yeah. Lots to eat, too.

DH: Lots to eat.

TS: Alright...

DH: Thank you!

TS: Thanks, Drenna! Well, Mike, I can't wait till that cruise. It's going to be fun. I hope everybody is looking forward to that and will come out and join us. That's a first. That's going to be super-exciting.

MH: Yeah. And all-new content. If you want to hear what potentially would be like we talked about (*Unseen Realm* 2 sorts of discussions), that's the place that you're going to hear it first.

TS: Awesome. Well, this week, we're back into Exodus. Exodus 19. And we're marching ever closer to Exodus 20, the big...

MH: Yeah, we are. I should say something, too. We brought up the Ten Commandments a few times, prepping people for that. And we're going to break that up into at least a couple of episodes because there's some real controversial stuff in there. And there's actually a big academic discussion about how the Ten Commandments aren't really the Ten Commandments. So how's that for a teaser? [laughs] So we're almost there, but we have to hit Exodus 19, naturally. And Exodus 19 is (not just chronologically) a precursor to the Ten Commandments. But there's covenantal stuff in here that prepares us for Exodus 20 because it's the covenant of Sinai. That's really what their context is. So we're going to cover Exodus 19 (the whole chapter) in our discussion now. But again, when we finally hit Exodus 20, that's going to be a few episodes. You could sort

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of look at Exodus 19 as a covenant prelude to giving the law at Sinai. Because the law is itself a covenant, but there's going to be a covenant ceremony that follows Exodus 20. And the idea of creating a covenant between God and his people at Mount Sinai is actually introduced in this chapter. So we're going to work our way through most of the chapter. In fact, I might as well just start off by reading at least a portion of it. It's not that long of a chapter. But as is our typical method, there are a few things I want to dive into in the chapter. We're not going to go verse by verse. So Exodus 19 begins this way:

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." ⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

Notice "the elders" there? We talked about them in Exodus 18. So they're witnesses, part of this process of transmitting the information to the people.

⁸ All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, ¹⁰ the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments..."

And so on and so forth. So we'll hold off on the purification process. I want to focus on verses 4-6 in that beginning section. That was essentially the first 10 verses of Exodus 19. So this is the reference about being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For those who have read *Unseen Realm*, this is part of the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview about how Israel is supposed to be mediator (a collective mediator or in the people individually) to the rest of the nations. This is part of the logic of why Israel is supposed to be unique: to attract them back into

relationship with the true God. So there are some things to notice here that are worth pointing out. The language of verse 4 is actually echoed in Deuteronomy 32, specifically verse 11. So we have a reference here (or at least a connection point) to the Deuteronomy 32 worldview through verse 11. I'm going to read Deuteronomy 32:11:

**¹¹ Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions...**

This is a description of how God dealt with (cared for) Israel, and that language in verse 4 "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"... So when you read Exodus 19:4, as someone who has the whole Torah, your mind should be taken to Deuteronomy 32:11. It establishes this connection. So you have a textual connection and its coherence is made clear by the conceptual connections between this chapter of Exodus and just generally the Deuteronomy 32 worldview.

15:00 For those to whom this concept might be new (if you haven't read *Unseen Realm*), Deuteronomy 32:8-9 talks about God divorcing the nations, assigning them (*allotting them* is language used in Deuteronomy and elsewhere, Deuteronomy 4:19-20, Deuteronomy 17:3, Deuteronomy 29:23-26, passages like that)... where God allots the other nations to members of the heavenly host (the sons of God) and vice versa. And they're supposed to be caretakers (placeholders) in God's place over the nations. Because God is punishing the nations at the Tower of Babel incident. That's Deuteronomy 32:8.

**⁸ When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.**

So this worldview is that God is no longer in relationship with the nations of the world. What nations are those? It's the ones listed right before the Genesis 11 Babel story, in Genesis 10. And then in verse 9 of Deuteronomy 32, after God assigns the nations to the sons of God and the sons of God to the nations, the next verse says Israel is Yahweh's portion, his allotted inheritance. So that has to do with God's election of Israel. But Israel doesn't exist at the time of the Tower of Babel, so in the biblical story that's why right after Babel we get the call of Abram and the origin of Israel there. So this is the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. The rest of the Old Testament is framed by this Tower of Babel event. It's Israel against the nations and Yahweh (the God of Israel) against the other gods. Because we find out from other passages, including later in Deuteronomy 32 but

especially in Psalm 82, that the sons of God (the *elohim*) allotted to the nations become corrupt. They enslave their populations. They turn their hearts toward idolatry instead of ruling the nations according to God's good justice, according to God's nature. And we know that's what they were supposed to do, because that's what they're condemned for *not* doing in Psalm 82. And, of course, in Deuteronomy 32 we also get the mention that the gods of the other nations seduced the Israelites (Yahweh's own people) to worship *them* instead. So this is the worldview of the Old Testament. It ties into something called "cosmic geography," that Israel is sacred space and every other nation around Israel is under the dominion of hostile divine beings who are corrupt in their administration. So you look at that and then you go back to Exodus 19:4. Those verses are essentially saying (in verses 5 and 6), "Hey, you're my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, but you're my treasured possession. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (a nation set apart). These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." So Exodus 19:4-6 really has a lot to contribute, or essentially is part of the matrix of ideas that really comprise the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview. That's the term I like to give it and that I gave it in *Unseen Realm*.

So this whole complex—when Abram is called and Abraham and Sarah have a child, when she's past child-bearing age—that's intentional on God's part because he's going to supernaturally raise up a population to be his own people. That people now has been delivered from Egypt, showing that "you're still my treasured possession." Calling them out of Egypt, judging the gods of Egypt (as we've talked about repeatedly in this series of the podcast on the book of Exodus—all of this is part of the same worldview, the same matrix of ideas.

I want to say a few things about the "possession" and "inheritance" language. The Hebrew term that's translated treasured possession is *segullah*. And Sarna has a few comments on that. He writes:

My treasured possession Hebrew *segullah*, like its Akkadian cognate *sikiltum*, originally denoted valued property to which one has an exclusive right of possession...A letter from the Hittite sovereign to the king of Ugarit characterizes his vassal as his "servant" and *sglt*, "treasured possession." The biblical description of Israel as God's *segullah* or as his '*am segullah*, "treasured people," as in Deuteronomy (7:6; 14:2; 26:18–19), thus expresses God's special covenantal relationship with Israel and His love for His people. At the same time, those biblical texts, as well as Exodus 19:6, all uniquely emphasize the inextricable association between being God's *segullah* [MH: his treasured possession] and the pursuit of holiness. (More on 19:6 later).

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Because it says, "You're my treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and a holy nation"... All of these things are tied together conceptually. Another observation is that the covenants between God and Abraham and God and Israel

at Sinai (which we're approaching here in the book of Exodus) are, of course, related. They're not like separate, random things. God had made a covenant with Abraham that he would give him the land and multiply his offspring. Through him the rest of the nations would ultimately be blessed—all those circumstances in Genesis 12:3. Those promises are linked in some way to the covenant that's going to come up here, which is going to be made at Mount Sinai. And broadly, we can see because of what Sarna just pointed out that “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation” are all ways of describing the same thing. So “treasured possession”—that's the Abrahamic component. And then “kingdom of priests” is also the Abrahamic component. “Holy nation” feels like it's more law, but we actually get some of that linked back into the Abrahamic covenant.

Now many presume (many listeners out there in our audience I'm quite sure of this) have been taught, and therefore presume, that the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional due to its unilateral nature. In other words, when that covenant was formed in Genesis 15, it's God (the fiery theophany that passes through the animal parts). So lots of Bible teachers out there say, “See, only God passed through, and so only God has obligations in this covenant. This is an unconditional covenant. There are no conditions put on Abraham or his offspring to keep this covenant.” It actually isn't true. So we can't really set the Abrahamic covenant against the Sinai covenant, which is *filled* with obligations. It's the law. This perception that Sinai covenant is conditional because it has laws attached to it and the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional because it doesn't have laws... the reality is that the Abrahamic covenant is actually *both* unconditional and conditional. God for sure in Genesis 15 does act unilaterally in making the covenant (Genesis 15), but that didn't mean Abraham could live any way he wanted to after that ceremony. Abraham couldn't initially believe in Yahweh and then go off and follow some other god, for instance. He couldn't rebel intentionally against Yahweh. This is actually made explicit by Genesis 17, and I'm going to read that here—verses 1-14 and then verses 22-27. Now this is the chapter about circumcision.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [MH: why?] ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³

See, that's language from Genesis 12—“multiply you greatly.” And there's a condition attached here: “Walk before me and be blameless”—blameless in terms of his relationship with Yahweh, his loyalty. Here we are back to a theme in *Unseen Realm*: believing loyalty. So Abraham had to believe that Yahweh was the God of gods. There's the belief component. And his loyalty component is that he's not going to worship any other. So Abraham couldn't just do what he wanted

here. And right here, the Abrahamic language from Genesis 12 and Genesis 15 is linked to being blameless—obedience in some way. The passage continues:

⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

There's Genesis 12 language right in Genesis 17, where he just told Abraham to walk before him and be blameless. Then he changes his name and so on and so forth. And you get down to verses 22-27 (still Genesis 17):

²² When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. ²³ Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵ And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶ That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

So in other words, Abraham could not have just said, "You know, I don't feel like doing that. Yeah, I know that's the sign of the covenant here in Genesis 17. God and I just had that conversation about it. But you know that's going to hurt. I'm just not going to do that." No! That's an expression of his belief. It's a way to show loyalty to Yahweh whom he has professed to believe in. Abraham can't just do whatever he wants. This idea of conditionality within the Abrahamic covenant is also made explicit, I think, even more dramatically in Genesis 22. This is the offering of Isaac. And we know the story. Right when the Angel of the Lord intervenes (I'm going to pick it up at verse 15):

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, [MH: Abraham was willing to offer Isaac.] ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

Now where does that language come from? Genesis 12. It's the Abrahamic covenant. And God says, "Because you obeyed here, I'm surely going to do these things."

¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

So it is simply not true that the Abrahamic covenant had no conditions. The condition was believing loyalty. You can't just go off and worship some other god now. So that is important. It has ramifications in certain respects for eschatology about the fulfillment of these promises and what they mean, how they play out in the future, so on and so forth, applied to Abraham's offspring and the Promised Land. If you're thinking that there are no conditions attached, then you're going to go off in a certain trajectory when it comes to end times questions about the land of Israel, whether the land promises were met or sinned away through the exile—all that kind of stuff. It has ramifications for your view of end times. And I'm not going to get into those here. If you want to think about that, you could just go to Google and type the name of my homepage "drmsb.com" and type in the word "eschatology" and "obsession." I did a long series years ago on why an obsession with eschatology is a waste of time. There are about 10 of these things that you basically have to make hermeneutical decisions on. They're not self-evident in the text. Depending on what decision you make, that takes you down a certain road in terms of end times beliefs. And the Abrahamic covenant and its nature is one of those.

Now secondly, I want to say something else about the covenant here. The covenants between God and Abraham and God and Israel really both get into this concept as we discussed a few minutes ago about being mediators to the nations, of the means of blessing. And that really brings us back to this "kingdom of priests" language that you find here in Exodus 19:4-6. Again, in the context of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, it suggests a mediatorial role. And just so that you know that this isn't just Mike (just his perspective on it), let's go back to Sarna. Actually, I have three sources here: Sarna, Carpenter (his commentary on Exodus that we've referenced before), and Pete Enns' commentary on Exodus (the *NIV Application Commentary*). I don't know if we've utilized Pete's commentary yet in this series, but he has a nice section on this. So to Sarna, Sarna says this about this "kingdom of priests" language:

National sovereignty, here expressed by "kingdom," is indispensable for the proper fulfillment of Israel's mission. Without it, the nation becomes the passive tool of historical forces beyond its control. At the same time, the priest's place and function within society must serve as the ideal model for Israel's self-understanding of its role among the nations.

They were supposed to be mediators between the other nations and God, the true God. Carpenter in his translation notes that the phrase here that's translated kingdom of priests is **מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים**.

The translation of **מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים** is challenging. Cf. Houtman, 444–45, for a discussion. Is Israel "a royal priesthood" or "a priestly kingdom"? [MH: You could

translate it either way.] Various translators both ancient and modern prefer one or the other, so that reasonable grammatical arguments can be given for both. In the end, the biblical text probably intends the reader to hear *both* points of view.

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So royal priesthood... The Israelites have a certain status. And isn't it interesting? If you take the royal priesthood translation, that's imaging. That's representing God. It's a status in respect to the rest of the nations. "We're God's priesthood, not somebody else's. And you're not." "A priestly kingdom" gets into this mediatorial role. Pete Enns has a nice section here. I might do this a bit more extensively than the others. Pete writes:

Israel is a "kingdom of priests." This title appears nowhere else in the Old Testament and is therefore a bit difficult to pin down. What is also somewhat strange is that the priesthood in Israel has not been established yet [MH: that's going to come later in the book of Exodus], so what does God mean by designating his people in this way? To refer to Israel as a kingdom of priests does not imply that we should think of priesthood in the developed, cultic sense we see later (e.g., chs. 28–29). Yet we must remember that even though the Israelite priesthood proper was not inaugurated until after chapter 19, this is not to say that priesthood was a new idea for them. There is no record of Israel's having performed a priestly role before 19:5, but they have had plenty of contact with other peoples with priests (e.g., Gen. 14:18; 41:45, 50; 46:20; 47:22, 26; Ex. 2:16; 3:1; 18:1). [MH: They know what priests are, is Pete's point.]

Moreover, the patriarchs performed "priestly" duties when they sacrificed (e.g., Gen. 15:10–11). Israel, simply by living in the ancient world, knew very well what priests were and how they functioned... "Kingdom of priests," therefore, is not an anachronism. Rather, it is a statement of the manner in which God will use Israel with respect to the rest of the nations.

This is where the... phrase, "holy nation," comes in. Both "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" are to be taken together, if not as identical then at least as clearly supporting each other. As a kingdom of priests, Israel is set apart (which is what "holy" means) from the other nations. Israel is different, since she is a "treasured possession." This is God's peculiar people, and so they will be separate. But Israel is not separate in the sense of living in isolation from the other nations. As holy and priestly, Israel is the means by which God will, as his plan unfolds more and more, *bring the nations to have knowledge of him*.

I think that's really well-put as far as this mediatorial idea. Sarna adds,

The priest is set apart by a distinctive way of life consecrated to the service of God and dedicated to ministering to the needs of the people.

And that brings the concepts of holiness (being set apart) and therefore behavior (obedience to God's laws) into focus. Now this deserves some commentary. The people (Israelites) didn't earn (I hope this is clear) the status of being God's covenant people by obeying laws. Rather it's because they were already God's people that he gave them laws to show loyalty to him exclusively. And (to repurpose Sarna's thought) to define Israel's self-understanding so that they can play their role with respect to the nations. So this is believing loyalty. Abrahamic covenant is about believing loyalty and so is the Sinai covenant. They're not getting laws so that they can *become* God's people, so that they can earn the right to be called God's people, that they can merit the title, "We're God's people and his treasured possession." No, they already are.

I think this is good for Christians to remember when we think about works. We don't do works to earn our membership in the family of God. There are rules, if you will. You should live a certain way because you're already in the family of God. It's not a merit/brownie-point system. I know we beat this drum a lot, but honestly I think it deserves to be beaten because I just encounter Christians all the time, whether online or in person, that struggle with this concept, that, "Well, you know, because I sinned..." or "Because I don't do this or that thing enough, then God doesn't really like me as much as he did way back when, when I came to the Lord." That's bogus. That's just bad theology. It forgets Romans 5:8 and it actually changes the gospel to some sort of merit-based thing.

35:00 And you can't even say that about the Torah. They're getting God's laws because they're already his people. The laws are going to help them not only maximize life... Honestly, much of the Torah is about how God gives us laws because he knows what will make life most enjoyable for people. So there are laws about human relationships. There are laws about sexuality. There are laws about children. There are laws... You have all that stuff because that's how we avoid living self-destructive lives, where we destroy ourselves and the people around us. And then there are lots of laws about sacred space to teach us that God is other than we are—all that stuff.

But the laws (the moral law, especially) are about character formation or being a certain kind of people. Why? So that you can earn your spot at God's table? No, it's so that you can be a witness. You can attract the nations back to the true God. If you have a happy people who live in harmony with each other and you have a stable society, yeah, that's going to be attractive. People are going to wonder why you do what you do. So it's the same concept in the New Testament as in the Old here. There's a lot of continuity here that just gets glossed over in this whole faith-and-works discussion.

Now we hit verses 10-15 and this is where we get these instructions for purification. They're supposed to wash their garments. I'm not going to read all the verses. "Wash your garments" in verse 10. God says in verse 11 he's going

to come down in a thick cloud. In verse 12, Moses is supposed to set limits for the people around the mountain.

‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.

It’s a lesson in sanctity. It’s a lesson in sacred space. Now God will exempt a group later in Exodus 24 that he allows to come up into the mountain. But here, nope, you have to put a boundary around it.

¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot;

With an arrow, not a gun, obviously.

Whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.

So on and so forth. Verse 15:

¹⁵ And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day [MH: when this is going to happen]; do not go near a woman.”

These are all rules (if you actually look at Leviticus, and we actually did a whole podcast series on this) for ritual purity—not moral purity, but ritual purity, avoiding the defilement of sacred space to reinforce the fact that God is *other* through various rules and restrictions. And if you want more detail on that, you have to go listen to the Leviticus series. Now Durham writes this of this section:

Moses then reminded them of the need to be completely ready by the third day, with the additional instruction that they were not to “come near נגשׁ to a woman,” a euphemism for sexual intercourse. This prohibition is parallel to the prohibition against touching the isolated area of Mount Sinai: a man’s semen rendered both the man and the woman with whom he was having intercourse unclean [MH: ritually unclean] and therefore cultically unacceptable for a specified period (Lev 15:16–18). The reason for this has to do with the holiness of what may be called a life-immanence connected with the Presence of Yahweh.

If you remember back when we talked about this in Leviticus, blood and semen were life forces. That’s how they were perceived. And so when you lose blood or semen, it’s like you die a little bit (in this worldview). You lose some of the life force. And you can’t occupy sacred space because that’s God’s space, and God is the source of life, not death. This is a conceptual world that’s very foreign to us. And if you want more details, go back to Leviticus and there’s a whole bunch

of this kind of stuff in Leviticus and you can get the rationale for some of these purity prohibitions.

Durham continues with some interesting observations about Sinai as sacred space here. I want to take a little time to read what he says here, because this is in the sweet spot for some of the content we talked about in *Unseen Realm*. So if you haven't read the book yet, this might encourage you to do that, because we do this kind of stuff in the book. So Durham writes:

40:00

Mount Sinai assumes the character of a sanctuary for the duration of the theophany [MH: when God comes down to meet the people]. A close similarity to the wilderness Tabernacle is suggested by several shared characteristics. Both Sinai and the Tabernacle evidence a tripartite [MH: a three-fold] division. The summit corresponds to the inner sanctum, or Holy of Holies. The second zone, partway up the mountain, is the equivalent of the Tabernacle's outer sanctum, or Holy Place. The third zone, at the foot of the mountain, is analogous to the outer court. As with the Tabernacle, the three distinct zones of Sinai feature three gradations of holiness in descending order. Just as Moses alone may ascend to the peak of the mountain, so all but one are barred from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Just as the Holy Place is the exclusive preserve of the priesthood, so only the priests and elders are allowed to ascend to a specific point on the mountain. [MH: We're going to see that in Exodus 24.] The confinement of the laity to the outer court of the Tabernacle, where the altar of burnt offering was located, evokes the parallel with Sinai in the restriction of the laity to the foot of the mountain, where the altar was built. The graduated restrictions on access, touch, and sight are the counterparts of the repeated regulations about the unlawful invasion of sacred domain in the same three ways. God is said to "descend" upon the mountain as upon the Tabernacle, and He communicates with Moses on the summit as He does in the Holy of Holies. Finally, the vivid descriptions of smoke, dense cloud, and fire that issued from and enveloped Sinai are paralleled by the cloud and fire that become associated with the Tabernacle.

I thought that was interesting because he brings out a lot of this parallel language between the mountain and the Tabernacle. This is the cosmic mountain, the abode of Yahweh. The gods (or God, in the case of biblical thought) have their home, where? In gardens or mountains. And sometimes those things are combined. Eden is called both a mountain and a garden in the Bible. It shouldn't be surprising then that you have Sinai, the mountain. And then when you get to the Tabernacle, it's decorated like Eden. It's supposed to remind you of Eden—the menorah, the tree of life, the light, all this kind of stuff. And the same thing with the temple and the way that's decorated. It's decorated specifically with garden and Edenic imagery.

And here we have Tabernacle parallels to the mountain, to Mount Sinai. This is all intentional. It's all a conceptual way of thinking. If you're the Israelite or if you have the Israelite in your head as you read the Old Testament, these are some of the things that ought to just stick out to you, a deliberate associating of these things: sacred space, God's abode. And where God is, his council is. And we're going to see that. There are going to be references... When we get to the giving of the law, we'll go back to Deuteronomy 33:1-2 where we have the heavenly host present with God at the giving of the law. Where God is, his council is, his entourage is, the heavenly host with him, his partners there, and meeting with his people who are his partners on earth. This is a whole matrix of ideas that we try to bring out in *Unseen Realm*, but here we have it in Exodus. And Durham does a nice job of summarizing that.

A few other items in the chapter. In verse 16, the language is interesting. It says:

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain...

I would suggest that kind of description is why later in various parts of the Old Testament, the Lord's appearance takes on that character—the so-called storm theophany, or the storm imagery associated with Yahweh showing up somewhere. It's supposed to make you think back to Sinai, to this scene. This is the first use of thunder and lightning in the biblical story for God's appearance. So when we see the terms or elements in later passages, they're designed to take the mind of the reader back to the God of Sinai. This is intentional on the writer's part. It's not random.

Verses 21 and 22 are kind of interesting. There's a note here on third-person language used by Yahweh of Yahweh. [laughs] This is part of the Two Powers in Heaven complex—the two Yahweh figures that I talk about in *Unseen Realm*. But you actually get another one of these third person hints here. Exodus 19:9 says this:

⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I [MH: first person language] am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever."

You go down to verses 21-22 and we read this (the wording changes a little bit):

²¹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. ²² Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

45:00

So you have the Lord talking about the Lord. You have Yahweh talking about Yahweh. When we get to the giving of the law scene... If you've read *Unseen Realm*, you know that I think there's some anthropomorphic language there associated with the giving of the law. I do think we have the visible Yahweh there along with the invisible Yahweh—the two Yahweh figures. So I don't know necessarily that this language in Exodus 19:21-22 is a way to (if you'll pardon the pun) flesh that out. I'm not committed to that, as far as those two verses go. But there are other things that suggest, "Well, maybe we *can* consider these verses in that way." But we'll get to that when we hit the scene at Sinai and the giving of the law.

Now verse 22 (you may have caught this, and from the Pete Enns quote, Pete sort of alludes to it as well)... In verse 22 we have the phrase "let the priests who come near to the Lord do this and that and watch out and so on and so forth." We don't have a priesthood yet. That's Exodus 28 and 29. But as Pete said, "Hey, they know what a priest is." There's priestly stuff going on within the Israelite community prior to the establishment of a formal cultic priesthood in Exodus 28 and 29. Scholars have noticed this and noticed the chronological issue. And some of them just say, "Yeah, this is totally anachronistic." Sarna writes this:

According to Exodus 28 and 29, the priesthood was not established in Israel until after the Sinaitic revelation, which would make the present reference to priests, like that in verse 24, an anachronism. Many modern scholars regard these verses as reflecting a different strand of tradition about the origins of the priestly institution...

This is the kind of thing... We've commented on this before in the book of Exodus. This is the kind of thing that scholars will look at (some scholars) and say, "Ah, we have two sources here." It's part of the documentary hypothesis—JEDP. And you have a blending of the sources at this point and you get this little anachronistic phrase that the editor just didn't catch, or something like that. Well, you know, okay. You could look at it that way. But a number of scholars don't. Enns writes this:

This is the first reference to Israelite priests in the Old Testament [MH: specifically Israelite priests]. Officially, the priesthood is not established until chapter 28. So, where do they come from? Do the Israelites have "priests" in a looser sense of the word before they are officially established? Some commentators reconcile this difficulty by suggesting that the elders or young men function as priests at this stage. We should not dismiss this too quickly, especially in light of 24:5 (which has young men sacrificing).

Exodus 24:5 reads,

⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.

Now that offering... You have people doing offerings before you get to Exodus 28 and 29. And in Exodus 24:5, they're not called priests; they're just young men. So maybe they had some other system or people playing this role before you get to the formal inauguration of the priesthood in Exodus 28 and 29. Now Enns continues. He says:

Still, nowhere are these men called *priests*, the term used here [MH: in Exodus 19]. Perhaps this passage assumes the official priesthood of chapter 28 and following, but that would throw the entire scene at Mount Sinai into chronological disarray...

Enns confesses:

I am as confused by this chapter as by any other in Exodus. I see only two possible solutions. Either priests of some sort exist before the official establishment of the priesthood, or portions of this chapter are chronologically displaced.

It's very apparent that you have "young men"—you have *somebody*—offering sacrifices prior to Exodus 28 and 29. So for my money, I think that's kind of what we need to go with. And this reference to priests here... I would think it's coherent to say, "Well, that refers to these young men, whoever they were. It refers to the somebodies who are doing priestly things before we actually ever get to the priesthood." In other words, I don't think that this kind of statement, which looks anachronistic, compels either the idea of sources at this point or some kind of blunder. We've seen in other parts of Exodus that you have anachronistic things happen that are brought in either by the writer or by the editor to make specific points and to create associations that will make sense in terms of what *does* come later. So there might be a literary reason as well.

50:00 Let me quote Wenham here to wrap up our episode. Those are the things I wanted to cover. You have the kingdom of priests. You get the believing loyalty thing. You get the Deuteronomy 32-mediating worldview. You have the covenantal language here: believing loyalty. And I do think it was an important point that we pointed out that the Abrahamic covenant does have conditions. It's not so foreign to the Sinai covenant. And the Sinai covenant is not divorced from belief, from faith. We associate... "Abraham believed God and he counted it to him for righteousness." (That's Genesis 15.) Well, that's true. That's the belief component. But to say that it has no loyalty component is wrong. And when you go to Sinai and say, "Look, it's all about rules and laws. There's no faith here." No. That's not true either. Because they're already... They have to believe in

what God promised them earlier in their history and what God has done for them in the exodus. They have to decide that, “We believe that this is the God of gods. We are going to therefore remain loyal to him. He has chosen us. He has delivered us. We believe that. And now we are going to live in a certain way to attract the other nations back to him, to show where our loyalty lies.” It’s not about *earning* or *meriting* a place in God’s family. They’re already his family. So both of these covenants have both elements.

Now Wenham (to wrap up the chapter, to set up Exodus 20) says, “This whole scene...”

That material, however, disrupts a dramatic sequence in which Yahweh comes to his people, then speaks to them. As exciting as is his Advent onto the mountain, more amazing still is his address to all the people waiting, an address in which he gives himself to them more fully still by trusting them to enter into covenant with him. Exod 19 holds but half the theophany; the other half, the completing half, is in Exod 20.

What he means by this is that we have a situation where God’s talking about their status. “You’re going to be a kingdom of priests.” There’s instruction. There’s theology done here. And that is interspersed. It interrupts the drama of the situation, that God is actually going to show up on this mountain. And the purpose that he’s showing up for is to make a covenant with his people. And his people are going to be a kingdom of priests, because they are a treasured possession. And they need to be holy because they’re a kingdom of priests, with this mediatorial idea in mind. This is part-and-parcel a working out of the promises in the Abrahamic covenant. That ultimately it’s through Abraham’s seed—his offspring—that all the other nations will be blessed. That’s the way it’s supposed to work. And we get part of it. It starts rolling here in Exodus 19, but the rest of it is going to come next time, when we hit Exodus 20 finally. We get into the scene of the giving of the law.

TS: Alright, Mike. I’m looking forward to the next several chapters. We’re not quite to the point when I need to watch *Raiders of the Lost Ark* yet [MH laughs] to get it. I think that’s, what, chapter 25?

MH: 25, yeah.

TS: We still have several chapters to get to it.

MH: Till we get to the face-melting? Is that what you’re talking about?

TS: Right. Exactly. So everybody’s homework is to watch that video.

MH: [laughs] The passage on face-melting... [laughs]

TS: That's exactly right. I want to know where that passage is.

MH: That's right out of the Bible. [laughter]

TS: Right. I want to know what verse that is, or which ancient Near Eastern text somewhere says...

MH: What's the Hebrew word for face-melting? Is that what you want to know?

TS: Exactly. "Don't look at it. Shut your eyes. No matter what happens, when it opens." Alright, well hey Mike. I don't know if people already know out there that we have our T-shirts and we have some swag for people to buy. If you want that link, go to NakedBiblePodcast.com and you can get that link up there in the menu. What's funny is that me and Mike were talking about how we have pillows. It scares my wife seeing half a face of us on the couch. But it's hilarious.

MH: Yeah. Maybe there's your face melting.

TS: There you go.

Alright, Mike. Well, we'll be looking forward to Exodus 20 next week. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.