

The Covenant at Sinai

If God did not seek us we would not find him. The initiative of grace is God's. In Eden it was God who came to visit our original ancestors and taught them the way of life, which they quickly abandoned. After years of mankind's selfish immoral living God came to Noah with a plan to cleanse the earth and begin again. God sought out Abram at Haran, calling him and his descendants to a more intimate relationship with God and a future when all the earth could know God. Through the curious twists of this world, now God approaches Moses and a people called Israel. With the covenant on Mt. Sinai, God calls Israel not only to tell his name to the world but to be God's "most precious possession" (v. 5) ... "a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation" (v. 6).



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It has been three months since the plagues of Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. On their wilderness trek God has provided manna for bread, quail for meat and water from a rock. God's love for this battered people is obvious. Now at the foot of Mt. Sinai (also known as Mt. Horeb or God's Mountain), Moses meets God once again to receive directions and that significant code of law we call the Ten Commandments.

Being called God's people and seeing yourself as chosen means very little if your thoughts and actions are not shaped by God's love and grace. Do not overlook the truth that God chose Israel "out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me" (v. 5). There is no "because you deserve it" or "you are a guaranteed success." As with Israel, so it is for us: God's grace makes a new life possible, but how we respond and live results in blessing or disaster.

The record of God's patience and love has been remarkable to this point. Now Israel faces decision time. To assist them in their choices, now and into future generations, God commands them to remember what God "did to the Egyptians" and how he "lifted [you] up on eagle's wings and brought you to [God]"

(v. 4). Later, in Deuteronomy 6:5-9, Israel is again told to remember and given specific actions to aid their memory. They must tell the stories of God's faithfulness and delivery to their children. They must continually write the stories of God's deliverance on their wrists, foreheads and door posts. In other words, the stories of God's love and faithfulness must become part of their daily lives. When God's people forget we get caught up in this world's selfishness, become snared in the tangles of disappointment and fear and are mired in hopelessness. Remember Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and all who have gone before us. Remember God's faithfulness even in their mistakes and how they found renewed hope. God describes his faithfulness: "how I lifted you up on eagle's wings and brought you to me" (v. 4).

God clarifies his expectations for those who profess to be his children: "So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession" (v. 5). Our common thinking is that if we do good God will reward us with blessings. That concept demolishes the meaning of love and the idea of living out God's grace. A believer in God, a follower of Christ, desires to live as a child of God. How else can God's people truly be a "kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation"? (v. 6). Jesus said it clearly: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16 NASV).

There is an additional beautiful promise connected to the idea that we must live as God's people. "So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples" (v. 5). The Hebrew word translated "my most precious possession" is *segullah* and is used only eight times in the Old Testament. This word means that out of all the magnificent treasures a king possesses, this one *segullah* surpasses them all. That is how much God loves us when we are faithful in loving and sharing God with our world. We may respond to a friend's question about our children, "I have no favorite ... they are all special." God is saying, every time

Formations

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Scripture: Exodus 19:1-8

we live faithfully and share his grace with our world, "You are my favorite, my most precious possession." Living a Christian life is not checking a box beside every rule you keep or adding up points for a reward. We are to embody the good news in a world darkened by bad news.

We are to be "a kingdom of priests" (v. 6). The Apostle Peter repeated this same truth for the early church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become his people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his everlasting light" (1 Peter 2:9). Moses could have spoken these same words at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

There is no supporting scripture for God's people to be boastful, uncaring toward the world or comfortable with an image of multitudes burning in hell. We should be shaped in our thinking and living by the ultimate gift of Christ. Sin and judgment are real, but so is the gift of life in Christ. As we read the stories of Israel there is a sad comparison to the modern church. We fail to live out the gospel. We act as though we are privileged. We think that our large buildings, entertainment style worship broadcasts and political connections are evidence of spiritual success. We seem to have forgotten that speaking the truth, maintaining moral standards and humbly serving God embody every covenant, including the covenant of God's grace.

What would happen if Christians in this year of 2017 seriously examined the foundation of our faith? Facing moral failures, persistent poverty, racial prejudice, violence and abuse, will we chose to be the presence of Christ, or just maintain religious structures? Are we willing to be God's holy people – that is, different and seeking to live by the example of Jesus? What is God calling you to be and do in our time?

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