

Exodus 19:1 – 24:18

^{19:1} In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. ³ Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons 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 then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the 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 sons of Israel.’ ⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.’ Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. ¹⁰ The LORD also said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹ and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to [on] the mountain.’ ¹⁴ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵ He said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.’ ¹⁶ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹ When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. ²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. ²¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. ²² Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.’ ²³ Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’’ ²⁴ Then the LORD said to him, ‘Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them.’ ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

^{20:1} Then God spoke all these words... ¹⁸ All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.’ ²⁰ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.’ ²¹ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was...

^{24:1} Then He said to Moses, ‘Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. ² Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.’ ³ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’ ⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ ⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’ ⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank. ¹² Now the LORD

said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.' ¹³ So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ¹⁴ But to the elders he said, 'Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them.' ¹⁵ Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. ¹⁸ Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *God and His People on a Mountain*: Eden seems to have been a mountain, as Ezekiel says explicitly (Ezk.28:13 – 14) and suggested by the fact that the four rivers diverged and flowed from Eden (Gen.2:10). Adam and Eve were presumably supposed to meet God there. Abraham and Sarah also seem to have built an altar on a mountain and worshiped God there (Gen.12:8). God had appeared as fire in a burning bush at this mountain to meet with Moses, promising that He will bring Israel back here to worship Him (Ex.3:1 – 12). However, Israel did not go up the mountain because of fear. Later, Moses would reflect on this episode and say, 'The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain' (Dt.5:4 – 5; cf. Ex.19:13, 19).
- *Forty Days, Forty Nights*: The first occurrence of this time period is in Noah's flood. The rains came for forty days and nights to flood the earth (Gen.7:17; 8:6). The number 40 seems to be associated from that point on with purification. Jesus was in the wilderness purifying his humanity for 40 days (Mt.4:1 – 11; Lk.4:1 – 13). Jonah preached, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown' (Jon.3:4), which was a time of purification leading up to the metaphorical overthrow of Nineveh by God by their repentance (and Jonah seemed to anticipate this).

Questions

1. Why do you think God speaks to Moses, and tells him to speak to Israel?
 - a. God seems to like working through human representatives as much as possible. He spoke directly to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3, and then henceforth speaks through Moses and also Aaron.
 - b. God identifies a pattern. He says that when Moses speaks to Aaron and then Aaron speaks on behalf of Moses, that Moses is 'as God to Aaron' (Ex.4:15 – 16). I think God is enacting a typology, a pattern, a structure. The Father speaks in and through His Word, who is His Son. The fact that God speaks through Moses is preparation for the disclosure of the Trinity. Jesus will say that the Father speaks through him.
2. Why a mountain? Why not a valley? Because God works in patterns. He is reminding Israel that originally, He met with Adam and Eve on a mountain.
3. How come Israel didn't want to go up and meet with God?
 - a. God had just rescued Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt... was He now going to eat them alive? That's absurd. Yet it's easy to forget God's goodness in the past, and distrust what He is saying.
 - b. Fire and cloud? God seems to want to purify Israel like a refiner's fire. Moses will go up the mountain into the fire and cloud, and emerge with face shining.
 - c. Illus: It happened to a guy I look up to, a guy named Blaise. When Blaise was 16, he wrote a paper about math that astounded the intellectual establishment. He would have made MIT proud. He invented the first digital calculating machine by the time he was 21. He made great strides in mathematics, physics, geometry, probability, and astronomy, and was hailed a genius in his own time. But what intellectual discovery did he value the most? Discovering Jesus. When he was 29 years old, on the night of November 23, 1654, Blaise Pascal had a fiery vision. He saw a vision of God cleansing him of his sin through Jesus [which is great!] and giving him joy, peace and love [even better!!]. What an awesome thing. That night he wrote a poem about his commitment on a piece of parchment that he always wore with him, sewn into his clothing:

... From about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight.

Fire.

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,' not of philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

God of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

'Thy God shall be my God.'

The world forgotten, and everything except God...

From that night onward, Blaise Pascal found that Jesus Christ was ultimately valuable. He found that Jesus was his life's goal and his life's love. He found that his mind was called to plumb the depths of the knowledge of Jesus, the one he loved. His ability to write found its consummation in comparing other worldviews and religions to Jesus, the one he loved. He felt that the achievements of his former life paled in comparison. Even his research afterwards reflected this. He kept on researching mathematics, but he also began compiling notes on what he regarded as his most significant work: a full-scale defense of the Christian faith. He died before finishing it, but his notes remain. They are called the *Pensees* of Blaise Pascal. In it, he says, 'Everything that is not God is unable to fulfill my desires. It is you alone I seek, that I may have you... Jesus Christ, my Savior, the... image and character of your essence is that image and likeness I desire.'

4. What does God do in response to them not going up the mountain?
5. Why did Moses sprinkle animal blood on the people?
 - a. Blood represents life (Lev.17:11).
 - b. Animals are not corrupted by sin. So their blood is uncorrupted. This continues the motif from the fall when God clothed Adam and Eve in animals skins. The uncorrupted blood gives life, covers Israel whose blood is corrupted.

- c. Ultimately, the blood of animals represents the blood of Jesus, because Jesus purified his 'blood' or rather his human nature. He gives it back to us. If you want to stay within the motif of blood, it's like Jesus acts like a blood donor, or organ donor. Really he is a life donor.