

## LESSON 3

# Covenant at Sinai

Exodus 19:1–8

*Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation. These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites”*

Exodus 19:5–6

**Class Overview:** Redemption and provision prepare the way for covenant. At Mount Sinai, God brings His redeemed people into a formal relationship with Himself: not to earn His favor, but to live as those who already belong to Him. The covenant given at Sinai reveals God’s holy character, His expectations for His people, and His desire to dwell among them as their God. This moment marks a unmistakable shift: Israel is no longer just a rescued people wandering in the wilderness; they are now a covenant people called to reflect God’s holiness in how they live together.

This lesson reminds us that grace does not eliminate responsibility; it gives it meaning. God did not give Israel His law to save them; He gave it to them because He had saved them. In the same way, believers today are called to live out their relationship with God in faithful obedience, shaped by gratitude rather than fear. As we study the covenant at Sinai, we are challenged to consider what it means to belong to God, to listen to His voice, and to live as a unified people shaped by His holiness and love.

**Class Objectives:** By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of the covenant at Sinai, recognizing that God established it with a people He had already redeemed.
2. Identify Israel’s covenant identity as God’s treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation.

3. Understand the relationship between grace and obedience, seeing obedience as a response to God's saving work rather than a means of earning it.
4. Recognize God's desire to dwell with and shape His people, calling them to reflect His holiness in their communal life.
5. Apply the covenant principles to Christian life today, embracing the call to live faithfully and obediently as God's people in the world.

## Introduction

THERE ARE MOMENTS IN SCRIPTURE WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE INVITED TO STOP AND LISTEN CAREFULLY. Mount Sinai is one of those moments. After delivering Israel from slavery and sustaining them through the wilderness, God brings His people to the mountain, not to threaten them, but to draw them into a deeper relationship. This is not the scene of a harsh taskmaster, but of a holy God speaking to a people He has already redeemed.

At Sinai, God reminds Israel of what He has done before telling them what He desires. He does not begin with commands, but with grace. The covenant reveals God's heart: He wants a people who belong to Him, reflect His holiness, and represent Him to the world. As we study this moment, we are reminded that obedience is not about earning God's favor, but about living faithfully as those who already belong to Him.

## God Grounds the Covenant in Redemption (Exodus 19:3–4)

Before God speaks a single command, He reminds His people of a single truth: *what He has already done for them*. Sinai does not begin with law; it begins with memory. God anchors everything that follows in His saving action.

In Exodus 19:4, God says, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." This

is a theological foundation. God deliberately recalls Israel's redemption before introducing covenant responsibility. *The relationship is rooted in grace, not performance.*

Notice the movement in God's words. He did not merely bring Israel out of Egypt; He brought them *to Himself*. Redemption was personal and purposeful. God saved His people to be in a relationship with them. The covenant is not about control; it is about belonging.

In Scripture, God always acts first. He rescues before He instructs. He delivers before He directs. Israel's obedience would never be the cause of their salvation, but the response to it. The New Testament makes this same point unmistakably clear. Paul reminds believers that while we were still powerless, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Salvation begins with God's initiative, not human effort. In the same way Israel stood at Sinai as a redeemed people, Christians stand before God already reconciled through Christ.

Paul urged us to live transformed lives *because* of God's mercy, not to earn it (Romans 12:1). Obedience flows from gratitude, not fear. The covenant at Sinai teaches that God's commands are given *within the safety of an established relationship*. God does not call His people to obey to secure His love. He calls them to obey because they already have it. When obedience is separated from grace, it becomes legalism. When obedience grows out of grace, it becomes worship. For Israel, and for us, remembering redemption is essential. Forgetting what God has done always leads to misunderstanding what God asks. Sinai begins with grace so that everything that follows can be lived in faith.

## **A Covenant People (Exodus 19:5–6)**

After reminding Israel of His saving work, God immediately tells them who they are called to be. The covenant is about identity, not just behavior. Before Israel ever hears a command, God speaks a calling.

In Exodus 19:5–6, God declares that Israel is His “own possession,” a “kingdom of priests,” and a “holy nation.” These words are not

accidental. They reveal how God sees His people and what He intends them to become. Israel's identity was no longer shaped by slavery or survival; it was shaped by belonging to God. To be God's treasured possession meant that Israel belonged to Him in a special and purposeful way. Though the whole earth belonged to the Lord, He chose Israel to be a people through whom His character and purposes would be made known. This identity was not earned; it was granted by grace.

Calling Israel a kingdom of priests revealed their mission. Priests stood between God and others, representing God to the people and the people before God. Israel was not chosen for privilege alone, but for service. God intended His people to reflect His holiness and make His presence known among the nations. The description of Israel as a holy nation emphasized distinction. Holiness did not mean isolation, but dedication. Israel was called to live differently because they belonged to a holy God. Their way of life was meant to display God's character in the world.

Peter tells us that we are a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). Just as Israel's identity shaped how they lived, so our identity in Christ shapes our conduct, our unity, and our mission. God's people live differently because they *are* different. Identity precedes obedience. When we forget who we are, obedience becomes burdensome. When we remember who we are, obedience becomes a natural expression of gratitude and purpose.

The covenant begins with belonging. God defines His people before He directs their steps. Understanding who we are in Him changes how we live together and how we represent Him to the world.

## **Obedient Faith (Exodus 19:7–8)**

After reminding Israel of His saving work and defining who they are as His people, God now invites a response. Covenant is never imposed by force. God speaks, and His people are called to listen, consider, and respond together. In Exodus 19:7–8, Moses relays God's words to the

people, and Israel responds with one voice: “We will do everything the Lord has spoken.” This moment is very important. The people respond quickly, confidently, and collectively. The covenant is entered not by a few leaders, but by the whole nation.

This response demonstrates that covenant faithfulness starts with willingness. God does not force obedience; He invites it. Israel’s agreement shows trust, at least at this moment, in the God who redeemed them and claimed them as His own. Their unity in response emphasizes that covenant life is meant to be lived together, not individually.

Yet Scripture also invites us to read this moment honestly. Israel’s words are sincere, but their future failures remind us that good intentions alone are not enough. Covenant obedience requires continued trust, humility, and dependence on God. This sets the stage for much of what follows in the wilderness journey, both successes and failures.

Jesus taught that true discipleship involves hearing His words and putting them into practice (Matthew 7:24). Likewise, James reminds believers that faith expresses itself through obedient action (James 1:22). Obedience is not perfection, but an attitude of readiness to listen and respond. Importantly, Israel’s response was unified. No tribe stood apart. No group negotiated separate terms. God was forming a people who would walk together under His covenant. Are we willing to listen to God’s voice together and respond faithfully, even when obedience requires trust and perseverance? Covenant life calls us not only to personal faith, but to shared commitment. God still desires a people who say, not just with words but with lives, “We will do what the Lord has spoken.”

## For Application

**Never Separate Obedience from Redemption.** God did not call Israel to obey to be saved; He called them to obey because they were saved. Remembering what God has done guards us from legalism on one side and apathy on the other. Gratitude fuels faithful living.

**Live Out the Identity God Has Given You.** Israel was called God's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Our actions stem from who we believe we are. When we forget our identity, obedience feels like a burden. When we remember it, obedience becomes full of purpose.

**Let God's Holiness Shape Daily Living.** Holiness is not about withdrawal from the world, but faithful distinction within it. God calls His people to reflect His character in how they speak, love, forgive, and live together. Covenant faith always reshapes everyday life.

## Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

### Memory Verse:

*Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation. — Exodus 19:5 (CSB)*

### Weekly Challenge:

This week, choose one area of daily life, your words, your schedule, your relationships, or your reactions, and ask: *What would it look like to live as someone who belongs to God here?* Act on that answer in a concrete way. At the end of the week, reflect on how remembering your identity as God's covenant people shaped your choices and attitudes.

## For Discussion

1. Why do you think God reminded Israel of their deliverance from Egypt before giving them the covenant? How does that order shape the way we understand obedience today?

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2. What stands out to you about God calling Israel His “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests,” and “holy nation”? Which of those descriptions is most challenging for you personally, and why?

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3. Israel responded together, saying, “We will do everything the Lord has spoken.” What does this teach us about the shared nature of faith and obedience?

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4. How can remembering our identity as God’s people help us avoid both legalism and spiritual apathy?

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5. In what practical ways can our congregation live out its covenant identity in unity, holiness, and service to others this week?

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