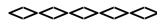


THE THIRD DAY

*Adapted from a discourse, God's Holy Mountain,
delivered in Poland by J.F. Scale, 2015*



Part One

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The account of the Passover is well known to students of the Old Testament. We begin with an overview of Exodus 19 and the how and the why the Israelites found themselves ‘on the first day of the third month’ in Sinai.



They had been delivered by Jehovah from their long bondage in Egypt. Led by Moses, a vast number of people – men, women and children, accompanied by as many as 20,000 thousand ‘strangers’ (‘foreigners’, Ex. 12: 48, 49) who had attached themselves to Israel, left the ‘fleshpots of Egypt’ behind. Following the destruction of Pharaoh’s army that had pursued them (Ex. 14), the multitude came to the Desert of Shur.

Wandering for three days, they found no potable water there, until they came to Elim, ‘where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water’ (Ex. 15: 27). The subsequent chapter (16) recounts the miracle of the manna and the quail. It is recorded that at Rephidim (v. 8-15) they were attacked by the Amalekites, whom they repelled (17). At length the mass body, upwards of about 3,000,000[**note1**], came to the Sinai desert, the account of which forms the basis of this article.

Exodus 19: 1-15 (with commentary)

1. On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt — on that very day — they came to the Desert of Sinai.
2. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front [at the base] of the mountain.[**note2**]

The Desert of Sinai, identified by tradition where the children of Israel camped is most probably an erroneous ascription. ‘It may be used loosely as a synonym for the Sinaitic Peninsula but probably does not embrace as much territory.’ (*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 797.) Mount Sinai – Horeb – is referred to in v. 20; there is much debate over its exact location, a question not pursued here. Regardless, the LORD had provided ample room for the pilgrims to set up sprawling camps to accommodate the many thousands of families.

Fifty days after they quit Egypt we encounter Israel at the foot of the mountain with deliverance and miracles fresh in their minds. Though they had witnessed a wonderful liberation, the reader is left with the impression that the people were not yet fully persuaded that Jehovah had done all these things. The date would come to be known as the ‘. . . feast of weeks’, ‘. . . of the first fruits’ and otherwise as the Feast of Pentecost (50th day), the name reminiscent of the distant future event when the holy spirit was

poured out upon the Apostles, *fifty* days after the death of Christ – the antitype of the sacrificial lamb, the literal blood of which was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of their dwellings by the Israelites to keep at bay the avenging angel (Ex. 12).

Having been slaves for so long, at the beck and call of their taskmasters, the Israelites had perhaps stopped thinking for themselves. Such behaviour is not unusual: British soldiers, demobilised after having served in the Second World War (1939-45), acted the same way; many felt at a loss without their mates, and had difficulty adapting to civilian life.

3. Then Moses went up [presented himself] to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel [. . . of *Jacob* and *people of Israel* – an idiomatic term, meaning one and the same –]’:

4. “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”



Through Moses, Jehovah reminds the people that they had already witnessed His power, leading them forth from captivity, destroying Pharaoh’s army. He had righted the wrongs done to them, bearing them up on eagle wings:

like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him [Israel]; no foreign [dumb] god was with him. – Deut. 32: 11, 12.

The figure is apt. The mother eagle stirs up the nest, knocking the fledglings out topsy-turvy down to the rocks below, forcing them to flap their wings. Just when it seems that they would be dashed upon the rocks, she swoops underneath, spreads her wings and catches them, soaring up and depositing them into the nest. This training goes on day after day until the fledglings learn to coordinate their wings and fly, albeit erratically, by themselves, employing their tail feathers to steer them and soar. (From a typical/antitypical point of view, the two wings represent the Old and New Testaments. [Hear Prof. R.G. Jolly’s discourse on this subject, [Stirring Up the Nest](#)].)

5. “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

6. you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.’

7. So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak.

8. The people all responded together [on Moses’ rehearsing what the LORD had said to him], ‘We will do everything the LORD has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

9. The LORD said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.’ Then

Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

‘Sinai was wrapped in smoke because Yahweh descended upon it.’ (*Peake’s Commentary*, p. 226b.) Take note that their ‘hearing’ the LORD speak to Moses does not mean *they* understood what was said. When addressing the Jewish leaders, Jesus said: ‘. . . you have never heard his voice nor seen his form.’ (John 5: 37; comp. v. 11, below; *see also*, Acts 9: 1-7, as to Saul’s companions hearing a ‘sound’ but not seeing anyone).

10. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate [sanctify] them today and tomorrow. Make them wash their clothes

11. and be ready by *the third day*, because on that day the LORD will come down on mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.’

The people could not ‘see’ Yahweh, for this is impossible for the human eye. His presence was made known – testified to – by the smoke.

12. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, “Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death.

13. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to [touch or] be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.”[**note3**] Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they approach the [base of the] mountain.’

14. After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them [made them holy], and they washed their clothes. [*see v. 10*]

15. Then he [Moses] said to the people, ‘Prepare yourselves for *the third day*. Abstain from sexual relations.’ (comp. Lev. 15: 16; 1 Sam. 21: 4.)

To Be Continued

ENDNOTES

[1] ‘*Six hundred thousand* – That is, There was this number of effective men, twenty years old and upwards, who were able to go out to war. But this was not the whole number, and therefore the sacred writer says they were *about* 600,000; for when the numbers were taken about thirteen months after this they were found to be *six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty*, without reckoning those under *twenty* years of age, or any of the tribe of Levi; see Numbers 1: 45-46. But besides those *on foot*, or footmen, there were no doubt many *old* and comparatively *infirm persons*, who rode on camels, horses, or asses, besides the immense number of women and children, which must have been at least three to one of the others; and the mixed multitude, Exodus 12: 38, probably of refugees in Egypt, who came to sojourn there, because of the dearth which had obliged them to emigrate from their own countries; and who now, seeing that the hand of Jehovah was *against* the Egyptians and *with* the Israelites, availed themselves of the general consternation, and took their leave of Egypt, choosing Israel’s God for their portion, and his people for their companions. Such a company moving at once, and emigrating from their own country, the world never before nor since witnessed; no doubt upwards of two millions of souls, besides their *flocks and herds*, even *very much cattle*; and what but the mere providence of

God could support such a multitude, and in the wilderness, too, where to this day the necessities of life are not to be found?' [*Adam Clarke's Commentary* on v. 37.]

[2] The geographic location of Mount Sinai has for many years been disputed by scholars. Most probably it was in present-day Saudi Arabia. This place would have been well known to Moses after his stay in Midian to which he fled, at age of 40, as a fugitive, from Egypt, having murdered an Egyptian who was attacking a Hebrew slave (Ex. 2: 11-15). Moses met Jethro [*yithro*, 'excellency'] and in due course married his daughter, Zipporah. (Jethro, a priest in Midian, was a descendant of Abraham, through Keturah – Abraham's concubine). Some translations have it that Zipporah was an Ethiopian, but this is not quite correct. She was a Cushite. The people of Cush came from two distinct areas: Midian and Ethiopia, in Africa. Zipporah's father was priest of Midian; his daughter was of light complexion; the Ethiopians were dark, and under Egyptian culture were viewed as brutish. Moses and Zipporah had two sons, Gershon ('stranger in the land', referring to Moses' expatriation) and Eliezer ('God is my help', again with reference to Moses). In Ex. 4: 13 we read that Moses had neglected to circumcise the lad (24-26), thus breaking the covenant God had imposed on Abraham, putting the boy's life at risk. Zipporah performed the deed (Gen. 17: 14).

[3]'Since the man who has touched the mountain has acquired "holiness", he is dangerous, and it would be fraught with peril to touch him.' (*Peakes*, p. 226d.)