

# Exodus 19:3-6

- A Kingdom of Priests, a Holy Nation, a light for the nations -

**Author: Evert Jan Hempenius**

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## Introduction

- ❖ What is the position of the church in today's world? What was/is the position of the people of God in this world?
- ❖ One of the most foundational texts for the self-understanding of the people of God is found in Exodus 19:3-6 and referred to by Peter (1 Pet 2:9) and the Book of Revelation (1:6).
  - The people of God have a covenantal relationship with the LORD and are called a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.
- ❖ Exodus 19:3-6 is a poetic text and can serve as a text in the context of worship.
  - When the people of God worship the LORD and Savior, they have a mediatory task for all people.
    - In thanksgiving.
    - In intercession.
    - In proclaiming the word of God of salvation.
    - In setting an example of holiness.
  - Because the whole world belongs to the LORD. He is the creator.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Letter of James. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone". You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## Context

- ❖ Genesis 12:1 – Exodus 40. Some texts are highlighted because of their relevance with regard to Exodus 19:3-6.

<i>Historical background</i> (Gn 12-50)	The history Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (The history of the covenant): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gn 12:2, 3; 18:18).</li> </ul>
<i>Introduction</i> (Exodus 1)	Ex 1:1-22 The Israelites in Egypt.
Moses and the Exodus	
<i>The life of Moses</i> (Exodus 2:1-22)	Ex 2:1-22 – Birth of Moses; His defence of a fellow-Hebrew; Midian.
<i>The call of Moses and his return to Egypt</i> (Exodus 2:23-6:27)	Ex 2:23-25 – The suffering of Israel in Egypt. Ex 3:1-4:17 – The Call of Moses, the revelation of the NAME of the LORD. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ “Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex 3:13, 14).</li> </ul> Ex 4:18-6:27 – The return of Moses to Egypt and the suffering of Israel. Ex 6:28-10:28 – The first nine plagues. Ex 11:1-12:30 – The tenth plague and the institution of the Passover. Ex 12:31-15:22 – The EXODUS, the Sea of Reeds
From the Sea of Reeds to the Sinai	
<i>The desert</i> (Exodus 15:22-18:27)	Ex 15:22-27 – The waters of Marah and Elim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ “There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, ‘If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you’” (Ex 15:25, 26).</li> </ul>

Worship and the Covenant at the Sinai	
<i>The Sinai</i> (Exodus 19-40)	Ex 19-24 – The covenant. Ex 25-40 – The worship, the tabernacle <> the golden calf.

- ❖ A more elaborated outline of Exodus 19-24, the Book of the Covenant.

Ex 19:1-2	The historical setting at the Sinai
Ex 19:3-6	<b>The Declaration of the Covenant</b>
Ex 19:7, 8	The people's response to the stipulations of the Covenant "We will do everything the LORD has said."
Ex 19:9-15	After this response, Israel is prepared to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation
Ex 19:16-25	The LORD descends on the Sinai, a holy place (See also Ex 3:5)
Ex 20:1-17	The Ten Commandments – The Constitution of the Holy Nation
Ex 20:18-21	The fear of the LORD in response to the descent of the LORD (Ex 19:16-19)
Ex 20:22-25	True Worship
Ex 21:1-23:19	Different Laws
Ex 23:20-33	The Promised Land "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared" (Ex 23:20). The LORD will continue what he has begun to do: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Ex 19:4)
Ex 24:1-18	<b>The confirmation of the Covenant</b>

## Form and structure

- ❖ The table below shows and highlights the following aspects of the structure:
  - The first column summarizes the purpose of the text.
  - The second and the third column (*remember, promise*) show the past (second) and the present and future (third).

- The structure of the text:
  - The text has an ABCB'A'-structure:
    - A: command to address the people.
      - B: from the past to the present and future.
        - C: condition or stipulation: if..., then.
      - B': from the past to the present and future.
    - A': command to address the people.
  - C: the condition is the central and most important part:
    - past + present – COVENANT – present + future

<i>Historical setting</i>	Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said,	
<i>Command to address the people</i>	“This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:	
<i>Remember C<sup>1</sup></i>	‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings	and brought you to myself.
<i>Stipulation C<sup>2</sup></i>	Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,	
<i>Promise C<sup>3</sup></i>	then out of all nations	you will be my treasured possession.
	Although the whole earth is mine,	you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’
<i>Command to address the people</i>	These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”	
	<i>From the past</i>	<i>To the present and future</i>

- ❖ Within this text, three cases of ‘parallelismus membrorum’ are found. A parallelismus membrorum consists in most cases of two similar sentences which convey, in this case, the same thought. “Repeating the same idea in different words adds a poetic effect to verses 3–6, which scholars believe reflect a special style used in worship.”<sup>1</sup>
  - This figure of speech is very often found in the Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs and the poetical parts of Isaiah.

<sup>1</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 449-450).

- ❖ Motyer comments: “The sequence of the three central C sections is extremely important for our understanding of the Old Testament and, indeed, of the whole Bible and of our place as the covenant people within it. The sequence is the saving acts of the Lord (C<sup>1</sup>), our response of obedience (C<sup>2</sup>) and the blessings which obedience brings (C<sup>3</sup>). Nothing must ever be allowed to upset this order. Notice, therefore, the past tenses of verse 4 and the contrasting future tenses of verses 5 and 6. The Lord’s great act of deliverance and salvation has already been done (4), and this is why verse 5 can speak of the Lord’s covenant as an existing reality and something to be ‘kept’, that is, preserved and guarded.”<sup>2</sup>

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ The COVENANT with Abraham is foundational (Gn 17:1-14):
  - “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.’
  - Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,
    - **‘As for me,** this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.’
  - Then God said to Abraham,
    - **‘As for you,** you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

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<sup>2</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, p. 196).

Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'

- **COVENANT.** A 'covenant' is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance. As indicated by the designation of the two sections of the Christian Bible—Old Testament (= covenant) and New Testament—"covenant" in the Bible is the major metaphor used to describe the relation between God and Israel (the people of God). As such, covenant is the instrument constituting the rule (or kingdom) of God, and therefore it is a valuable lens through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical ideal of religious community.<sup>3</sup>

## Exposition

### Chapter 19

- ❖ "This is the most dramatic chapter of the book, and it is important that every translation should convey this excitement and drama to today's readers."<sup>4</sup>

### Verse 3

- ❖ "Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said."
  - This refers to the moment that God appeared to Moses at the burning bush. "And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'"
    - This is a sign to Moses.
    - **It is a place of worship.** This is especially important, because God, the LORD, calls the Israelites a **kingdom of priests.**
  - The abrupt shift from God to the LORD is found elsewhere. In Exodus 3 we find the following designates within the same periscope:
    - The **angel of the LORD** (Ex 3:2).
    - The **LORD** saw that he had gone over to look, **God** called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" (Ex 3:4).
    - Because these shifts in designations, which occur more often, it is questionable to state that: "this is probably due to a literary seam."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mendenhall, G. E., & Herion, G. A. (1992, Vol. 1, p. 1179).

<sup>4</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 447).

<sup>5</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 449).

❖ **“This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:**

- This is a parallelismus membrorum. See notes above.
- “The verse appears to be poetical, displaying both metrical balance and parallelism throughout.”<sup>6</sup>

Verse 4

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

- **“You yourselves.”** Emphatic.
- The figure of speech is a parallelismus membrorum. See notes above.
- This is an emphatic call **to remember** the great deeds of deliverance, the ten plagues and judgment of Egypt, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the victory of the LORD over the Egyptian army.
- **“on eagles’ wings”**
  - Osborn and Hatton comment: “The word for **eagle** includes several varieties of large birds of prey, known for their powerful wings and swift flight. This figure of speech is based on a poetic picture of how the **eagle** teaches its offspring to fly, namely, that it will catch them on its wings when they fall. Such an activity has never been seen in real life, and so it is best to deal with this as a poetic figure created in order to picture God’s care for his people. (See Deut 32:11 for a more complete description of this metaphor.)”<sup>7</sup>
  - Garrett remarks: “It was a hard journey through a harsh land, and they experienced severe thirst, hunger, and warfare along the way. From this perspective, the claim that they made it to Sinai on eagle’s wings sounds propagandistic and might well have been met with bitter scoffs from the tired people. But the claim is entirely true: God broke the power of Egypt and delivered the people from troubles all along the way. **The very claim to carrying Israel on eagle’s wings is itself a test of faith.**”<sup>8</sup>
- **“brought you to myself”** In the presence of the LORD. This is the main theme of the Bible. The children of God are called to live in the presence of the LORD (See also Revelation 1:4-8) and to enter “into covenant relationship (which is ultimately a family relationship) with the only true God.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stuart, D. K. (2006, Vol. 2, p. 421).

<sup>7</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 450).

<sup>8</sup> Garrett, D. A. (2014, p. 459).

<sup>9</sup> Stuart, D. K. (2006, Vol. 2, p. 422).

## Verse 5-6

### ❖ “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant.”

#### ○ “Now if you obey me fully.”

- “you” is used emphatically.
- “obey me fully” = “listen attentively to my voice.” The LORD is the God who speaks.
  - The New Jewish Version reads “if you will obey me faithfully,” and the New Jerusalem Bible reads “if you are really prepared to obey me.”<sup>10</sup>

These two translations translate these words intentionally, which does more justice to the meaning. If the NIV is taken literally, “fully” sets a high standard, which could not be met by the Israelites.

- Motyer comments: “The law of God is essentially his instructions on how to live a life pleasing to him, and it has this meaning not only in the Old Testament but throughout the Bible. God’s law is not a ‘ladder of merit’ by which we try to climb, by grim obedience, into his ‘good books’; it is a way of life revealed to those who are already by redemption in his good books. He brings us to himself and then requires us to live so as to please him.”<sup>11</sup>
- And: “The significant *if* with which verse 5 opens relates not to covenant status but to covenant enjoyment. Status comes by the acts of God; enjoyment by the responsive commitment of obedience. Obedience is not our part in a two-sided bargain, but our grateful response to what the Lord has unilaterally decided and done.”<sup>12</sup>
- This is elaborated in Exodus 20-24 and all the other commandments, the LORD has given. It is necessary to study Old Testament Law.
  - Within the context of Exodus 20-24, there is a distinction between:
    1. The Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17). These laws are foundational.
    2. Exodus 21:2-23:19 contains different collections of laws pertaining to Hebrew servants (Ex 21:2-11), personal injuries (Ex 21:12-36), personal property (Ex 22:1-15), social responsibility (Ex 22:16-27). Some small

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<sup>10</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 451).

<sup>11</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, p. 191).

<sup>12</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, p. 200).



collections of laws address different kinds of situations (Ex 22:28-31). There are small collections addressing 'Mercy and Justice' (Ex 23:1-9) and 'the Sabbath and the Festivals' (Ex 23:10-19). These collections are elaborated in the Book of Leviticus.

This second category has often a conditional character. These laws have an open character. They don't cover all different situations found in daily life. They are a guide for judges to apply these laws to new situations. Psalm 1:2 says: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night."

○ **"And keep my covenant"**

- Moses said about this covenant: "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands" (Dt 7:9; Ex 20:6).
- This will be confirmed by the Israelites in Exodus 24:7: "Then he (Moses) took the **Book of the Covenant** and read it to the people. They responded, '**We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.**'"
- "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth" (Dt 28:1).
  - Motyer: "This all amounted to a distinctive personal, social and national life—the lifestyle of the covenant people."<sup>13</sup>

❖ **"then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."**

- **"Treasured possession."** Israel is the personal property of the LORD.
  - "For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance." (Dt 32:9; Ps 135:4).
  - "But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'"  
"For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead" (Isa 43:1-3).
  - This means that the LORD will be:
    - "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children

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<sup>13</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, p. 201).

for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Ex 34:6,7;  
Ps 103:8)

❖ **“Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”**

- The Lord God is Creator of heaven and earth and of all nations (Eph 3:14, 15; Gn 11:1-9).
- **“A kingdom.”** The LORD is King.
- See for the overall structure and the notes on parallellismus membrorum above. This figure of speech is helpful to understand the thoughts expressed:
  - then out of all nations = Although the whole earth is mine
  - and:  
you will be my treasured possession = you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’
  - **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you** (Gen 18:8)
    - Psalm 67:1-4: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.”
    - Kaiser remarks: **“The whole nation is to act as a mediator of God’s grace to the nations of the earth,** even as Abraham was promised that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed”<sup>14</sup>
- **“A holy nation”** s a nation set apart to serve the LORD God.

❖ Motyer summarizes and comments: “Unilateral divine decision and action had made the Israelites the Lord’s elect, the objects of his providential care and the people of his intimate presence. Before them, by promise, he set the enjoyment of those very things that he had done: to know themselves as his treasure, to have access to his presence as his priests and to show forth his holy glory to the world. But this can be so only if they *obey ... and keep.*”<sup>15</sup>

Verse 6b

❖ “These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

- This command emphasizes the importance of the preceding words.

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<sup>14</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr. (2008, Vol. 1, p. 473).

<sup>15</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, p. 200).

## Application

### General

- ❖ Start with the question about the relevance of the Christian Church in today's world.
- ❖ Explain the historical background and give a short summary in which are important:
  - The covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
  - The burning bush and the revelation of the NAME to Moses.
  - The Exodus and the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds,... the saving acts of God and relate these to the saving work of Jesus Christ our Lord.
- ❖ Pay attention to the setting of the scene itself: “this is the most dramatic chapter of the book, and it is important that every translation should convey this excitement and drama to today’s readers.”<sup>16</sup> It is really impressive.
- ❖ Explain the following
  - “The grace of God precedes the law of God. His grace reaches out to save, and it is to those whom he has saved that he reveals his law. The first characteristic of the saved is that they possess, know and live by the word of their saving God. In the case of our ancestors in the faith, the Israel of old, that word came through Moses; in our case, inheritors of the new covenant in Jesus’ blood, it is the whole, completed Bible.”<sup>17</sup>

### Study also

- ❖ 1 Peter 2:3-10:

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

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<sup>16</sup> Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. A. (1999, p. 447).

<sup>17</sup> Motyer, A. (2005, 191, 192).

❖ Revelation 1:4-6:

“Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, **and has made us be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

- There is more than one more important connection to be discovered between the Book of Revelation and Exodus 19.

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled” (Ex 19:16). See Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18.

- The following thematic connections can be noticed:

- Exodus 19: the LORD descends on the Mount Sinai.  
Revelation: the LORD descends on this earth.
- Exodus 19: the Israelites are called to serve the LORD, the Almighty as a holy priesthood and to worship him.  
Revelation: the Christians are called to serve the LORD, the Almighty as a holy priesthood and to worship him (1:5, 6).

❖ The priesthood of all believers and the New Testament:

- “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rm 12:1, 2)
- “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1, 2).

❖ Stuart writes: **“Priests stand between God and humans to help bring the humans closer to God and to help dispense God’s truth, justice, favor, discipline, and holiness to humans.**

- Israel was called to such a function. How? The answer is not spelled out in the present context, but it surely was to take place in four ways:

- (1) Israel would be an example to the people of other nations, who would see its holy beliefs and actions and be impressed enough to want to know personally the same God the Israelites knew.
  - (2) Israel would proclaim the truth of God and invite people from other nations to accept him in faith as shown by confession of belief in him and acceptance of his covenant, as Jethro had already done.
  - (3) Israel would intercede for the rest of the world by offering acceptable offerings to God (both sacrifices and right behavior) and thus ameliorate the general distance between God and humankind.
  - (4) Israel would keep the promises of God, preserving his word already spoken and recording his word as it was revealed to them so that once the fullness of time had come, anyone in the whole world could promptly benefit from that great body of divinely revealed truth, that is, the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>
- This is applicable to the church and the Christian community of today:
    - (1) Set an example for other people (1 Pt 2:12).
    - (2) Proclaim the truth (1 Pt 2:9)
    - (3) Intercede for the world (1 Tim 2:1-5; Gn 18:23-32).
      - “Israel’s (church’s) the assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.”<sup>19</sup>
    - (4) Keep the promises of God in preserving the Word of God.

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<sup>18</sup> Stuart, D. K. (2006, Vol. 2, p. 423).

<sup>19</sup> Stuart, D. K. (2006, Vol. 2, p. 423).

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