

Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (13)
Saved ... For What Purpose?
Exodus 19:1-6 (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-12)

Introduction:-

In connection with an earlier sign made known to Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:12), finally Israel arrive at the Mountain of God, where not only would they worship God, but would also hear from Him about the future He has for them. One scholar notes that when Moses first ascended the Mountain to receive the covenant at verse 3, this happened to be the fiftieth day after Passover, soon to be known as Harvest or Weeks, and later Pentecost (Exodus 23:16; Acts 2:1). This may also give us the first clue about the ultimate meaning of our passage before us, as this relates to the calling and vocation of Israel and the Church. Up to this point, the first phase of Moses' assignment has been completed. With the help of God's mighty hand, he had brought God's people up out of Egypt. But is that all that Israel should experience and know? The song of victory sung at Exodus 15:1-18 declaring God's power over Egypt and His sovereign kingship and rule was still ringing in their ears. The people of Israel were truly aware that they were a "saved" people. But now Israel are brought to the foot of the Mountain, where new things will be revealed, and where the second stage of their deliverance begins. This invites the question, "Is there something more to know and learn about Israel's salvation and deliverance?" Now they are about to learn what their deliverance means in terms of God's wider covenant purposes and plan for the nations. And so we can rightly call this passage: "Saved ... for what purpose?" Let us now examine the threefold presentation of this passage.

1. First Remember - You were carried on Eagles' Wings (verses 3-4)

To begin with, Moses' "going up to God" in verse 3 is the first of seven ascents that Moses makes at Sinai, indicating both the holiness of God, and the need to keep in constant fellowship with him. Likewise, we too must learn to keep in constant contact with God, if we want His blessings to flow down to us!! And the very first word directed to Israel from the top of Sinai is the need for the Israelites to think back to what God has done for them in defeating Egypt and bringing them to himself. In this way, Israel has been "carried on eagles' wings", all the way from Egypt to Sinai. What a journey through a barren and howling desert and waste! This is a beautiful figure of speech, as the eagle is noted both for its power and also its meticulous care and protection of its young, possibly comparing God's bringing of Israel out of Egypt with eagles carrying their young on their backs, as with the Song of Moses at Deuteronomy 32:10-12. Further, this is something that Israel must learn and sing forever! Also, the repeated use of the word "I" in verse 4 indicates that only the Lord Himself was responsible for such a great act of mercy and grace, when no other god was present or able to help (Deut. 32:12). Perhaps we too have a constant need to count our blessings, and name them one by one, and be surprised at what the Lord has done for us, when we are tempted to think that the Lord has not been with us, or has forgotten us, or is powerless to save.

2. Secondly Obey - Now if you obey me fully and keep my Covenant (verse 5)

Not only are the Israelites called to remember what God has done for them, but that memory now has an important purpose. It should motivate them to obey and keep God's covenant with them (verse 5). Does the extraordinary dimensions of our personal salvation in Christ do the same thing for us? Does it lead us to love and obey our Saviour more? Note here that the Israelites are not to keep the law in order

for God to save them. They have already been saved. God has brought them out of Egypt. But now the people are called to act in a manner worthy of their high calling, as Paul puts this at Ephesians 4:1, and at 2 Thessalonians 1:11. What then is the covenant that God has in mind here in verse 5? On the one hand, a good argument could be made for the covenant already made with Abraham at Genesis 12:1-3, where Israel has been chosen and blessed to be a blessing to the nations. And this promise was the reason for God acting at Exodus 2:24-25, and is hinted at in verse 5 in terms of Israel remaining as God's treasured possession, from all the nations of the earth. But on the other hand, the Sinai covenant about to be made with Israel, and framed in the covenant ratification ceremony at Exodus 24, will be an important outworking of this blessing to the nations, especially in the keeping of the first two commandments, which will supremely identify Israel as God's treasured possession and holy people.

3. Four important consequences of Obedience (verses 5-6)

Finally, verses 5-6 really addresses the issue of Israel's vocation before God and the world. First, the key term is Israel as God's "treasured possession" (Hebrew = *Segullah*) - This relates to valued personal property. In 1 Chronicles 29:3 and Ecclesiastes 2:8 it refers to a king's private treasure, a metaphor for how God values Israel, but also emphasizing Israel's election by God. In the Ancient Near East a king (but never a whole people as here) is a treasured possession of his own god, and he is personally chosen, blessed, and protected by that deity. And we too are the royal property of the king! To be used as the king chooses. Secondly, T.E.Fretheim sees a missionary emphasis in verse 5b, by translating "Because" the whole earth is mine. Whilst this may be so, the translation of NIV, "Although" the whole earth is mine, probably better captures the idea of the wonder of Israel's election from all the other nations of the earth that could have been chosen (See Deut 7:7-8). Thirdly, the following two expressions of "kingdom of priests" and "holy" nation spell out further dimensions of what it means to be Yahweh's "special treasure", as those who belong to Him as His exclusive possession. The expression "kingdom of priests" speaks of a "grant of royal priesthood" (J.Davies), enabling Israel to stand in the presence of God. Here it is therefore a case of relationship, and not one of function, as it will later become with the Levitical priesthood. But the point is well made and taken - We must first stand before God before we can stand before men, in order that people can see the attractiveness and glory of our God, and be drawn to Him. Fourthly, Peter in the New Testament will combine "royal priesthood" with "holy nation" in order to stress the evangelistic implications of "godly" living (1 Peter 2:9-12). In other words, in living "holy" lives, in the sense of being separate from the world (which is precisely the point at which the Israelites failed), the church fulfils its divinely appointed duty of being a "light" to the nations. Therefore as a royal priesthood and as a holy nation, we are called through a life of holy living and good works to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His most wonderful light.

Conclusion:-

The passage before us today tells us that we have been saved, not for privilege, but for service. Also, each of these three defining marks of Israel are telling us that we are first called to "be" the people of God, before we can effectively "do" the Will of God, as a light to the nations. Is there something in our lives today that will attract and draw people to our Wonderful Saviour? Will others take note that we have been with Jesus? As his holy priests, and treasured possession, may we too learn to stand in His presence, in order that we might stand before men, and commend the Cross of Christ to a perishing world. May God help us in this task. **Amen.**