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Under the Chuppah

19: 16-25

Under the Chuppah DIG: In what sense are the Israelites standing under the chupah? As this covenant was with all the people, why do you think God wants only Moses on the mountain with Him (19:9, 19-20)? What role do the elders and Aaron play in this (19:7-8, 24)? Why did God allow only Moshe to speak for Him?

REFLECT: After all was said and done, who met with YHVH that day? Only Moses? Aaron and the priests? The people as well? Explain how each may have met God in his or her own way. The Bible teaches that the fear of ADONAI is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10). In what ways do you fear God? Is this helpful or hurtful to you? Why? How?



The wedding itself: the chuppah. After **the engagement (6:7a)**, **the separation of the bride (5:1)**, and **the segulah (19:5)**, we now come to the actual **wedding ceremony** of ADONAI and **the nation of Isra'el**. First, we saw **the people purify themselves in the mikveh (19:10 and 14)**, now we see **them** standing under **the chuppah**, or a **canopy** under which the wedding takes place. The word **chuppah** is also used in the Bible, both in **Joel 2:16** where we read: **Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride from her chuppah**, and in **Psalm 19:6**, where it talks about **the bridegroom coming out of his chuppah**. **In Jewish thinking, the chuppah is a symbolic house. It is a single domain into which the groom welcomes his bride.** Indeed, **the chuppah** even looks like a little house with open sides. But where was **the chuppah** on Mount Sinai? **On the morning of**

the third day there was thunder and lightening, with a thick cloud (the chuppah, so to speak) covering the Groom (God) and the bride (Isra'el) on the mountain (19:16a). It was there that **ADONAI** welcomed **Isra'el**, as represented by **Moshe**. **Their** new "home" or place of dwelling was to be eternally with **Him**.³⁵⁵

And then the promised sign was given **(19:13)**, a **very loud trumpet blast** announced the presence of **God** in the midst of **His people**. **Everyone in the camp trembled (19:16b)**. In fact, as the writer to the **Hebrews** thought back on it (**Hebrews 12:18-21**) he said, that **Mount Sinai** became a place of utter terror. **Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain (19:17)**. Never was there such a sermon preached before or since.

The Sh'khinah glory became visible again when **Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because ADONAI descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently** but no life was lost **(19:18)**. Amazing cosmic displays of this kind often accompanied **God's** arrival (**Second Thessalonians; Hebrews 12:18-19; Revelation 1, 5 and 11:19**). A **smoking fire pot with a blazing torch** symbolized the presence of **God** at the institution of the Abrahamic Covenant (**Genesis 15:17**), and in a similar way **fire** along with **smoke like from a furnace** accompanied the appearance of **God** on **Mount Sinai** at the time of the institution of the Mosaic Covenant.³⁵⁶

And the sound of the *sophar*, or trumpet, grew louder and louder. Yet despite the chaos, there was an element of peace when **Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him** in front of **the people** of **Isra'el**. **The Israelites** heard **God's** voice **speaking to Moshe (19:19)** out of the **fire**, but they did not see **Him (Deuteronomy 4:15)** because **God is spirit (Isaiah 31:4; John 4:24)**.³⁵⁷ **ADONAI** descended to the top of **Mount Sinai** and called **Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moshe went up (19:19-20)**. A contrast is underscored in this passage by a pair of antonyms. Whereas **the people** were standing at the bottom of **the mountain (19:17)**, **God** stood on **top of the mountain**. In addition, **Moses went up Mount Sinai**, but **ADONAI descended** upon it. The antithesis being represented by these word-contrasts is the separation that exists between a holy and pure **God** and an unholy **people**. Once again, **Moshe** was summoned to mediate between the two.³⁵⁸

And once **Moses** reached **the top of Mount Sinai**, **ADONAI** said to **His** servant: **Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see YHVH** because **many of them would perish (19:21)**. Even the priests, who approach **Him**, must

consecrate themselves, or they would die a sudden violent death **(19:22)**. We must understand that the term **priests** here refers to the firstborn that **God** had set apart for **Himself, they** functioned as **priests (13:2 and 24:5)** before the tribe of Levi was set apart for that purpose and took **their** place **(Exodus 28, 29; Numbers 8:14)**.³⁵⁹

Moshe responded to **God's** repeated message by saying: **The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because You Yourself warned us** not to **(19:23)**. Maybe **Moses** did not fully understand **God's** reason for repeating what **He** had said earlier in **19:12-13**, but **God** did not underestimate **the people's** tendency to grumble and forget **His** decrees. Thus, because the penalty would be so severe, **He** had repeated it for emphasis lest they forget! So **ADONAI** commanded **Moses** His servant: **Go! Go down and tell them** anyway. And the next time you come to **the top of the mountain bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up, or they will die. So Moshe went down to the people and told them** all that **God** had said **(19:24-25)**.

Like these **people of Isra'el** of old, **we know what it is to fear the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:11)**. In this section we have read of the people's **fear** in approaching **God**, and we also know that **the fear of ADONAI is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10a)**. However, at the same time every believer has been given the grace of **God**. We know that **God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Messiah died for us (Romans 5:8)**. Therefore, both of these positions are true; we are to **fear** Him and we are to **love Him**. Are these two mutually exclusive? No! But then how does it work?

First, for believers and unbelievers alike, we must have a healthy regard for **God's** judgment. **ADONAI** is the **God** of power and justice. **He** is the sovereign **God** of righteousness, of creation and destruction. **Jesus** said it best **Himself: I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:4-5)**. However, if you believe, trust, and have faith in **Christ** you have been saved from this fate.

Secondly, as believers, our right standing before with **God** has been dealt with on the cross and empty tomb. In that sense, there is no **fear** on our part. The life of a believer is not about living in **fear**. For us, **the fear of ADONAI** means that we ought to have a reverence, awe and respect for **Him** resulting in worship, adoration and service **(Job 28:28; Psalms 19:9, 22-23, 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 8:13, 9:10)**.³⁶⁰ **Yeshua** is the **Lord** of redemption and mercy. This sense of awe should keep us from thinking that **God is my pal**. If we fall into

that trap, we develop confidence without a sense of reverence.

Exodus 19 is a clear reminder that the **God** we meet with regularly is **the Creator** of everything. **He** is fearful, threatening, unsettling, all-powerful and all-knowing. **He** is, to use the well-known expression of the beaver in C. S. Lewis' classic children's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, not safe - but good. **Ha'Shem** is both someone to be feared and **the One** who has traveled the universe to meet us where we are. **He** came in the form of a human being, born of a woman, who bore our sin in **His** own body and who desperately loves us. It is perhaps, in the end, a paradox well worth remembering: We **fear Him** because **He** is good, and we see **His** goodness because we **fear Him**.³⁶¹