

A sense of what is sacred

Exodus 19

BEFORE GOD GAVE Moses the Ten Commandments, he taught the Israelites to develop a sense of awe in his presence. "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.' 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" (Exodus 19:9, 16).

Before the people came into the presence of God, they were given instructions about reverent conduct. These instructions still reflect a sense of what is sacred today.

Preparation and consecration were emphasized. "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow'" (Exodus 19:10). This was not to be a hurried event. It was not a brief "drive through" encounter with God. Something of extreme importance was about to happen so there needed to be some advance preparation. In fact, the people spent two days consecrating themselves to God.

When I was growing up, every Saturday night about 7 P.M., the atmosphere of our home changed. That's when shoes were polished, clothes were pressed, hair was washed, lessons were finalized, and preparations were

made for the church service the next day. Something special was happening on Sunday!

Attention was given to cleanliness and appearance. "Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:10, 11). Even though God looks at the heart and not the outward appearance, they were to wash and dress in clean garments. Appropriate appearance helped prepare the heart and show proper respect.

I recently attended a banquet where the President of the United States was to be the featured speaker. As I looked around the room, I noticed every man wore a suit and every woman wore a dress. No one mandated the proper attire—people instinctively dressed in formal clothing because they were coming into the presence of an important figure.

Physical expectations and restrictions were provided. There was such a sense of reverence about God's presence that the people were to abstain from sexual relations the night before. When daylight came they were not to attempt to climb Mount Sinai, or even to touch it. Moses said, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy'" (Exodus 19:23).

We can be thankful that we are no

longer under rigid rules about consecration or appearance or physical restraints when we worship God today. The book of Hebrews reminds us we don't come to a terrifying mountain that can't be touched, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" (Hebrews 12:22).

The sacrifice of Christ frees us from fear and from Old Testament restrictions. Still we must show wonder and respect for the holiness of God. When we bolt into his presence without advance preparation, a complete disregard for appearance, and a cavalier attitude toward the place of worship, we exploit his grace and insult his holiness.

God is a God of love and mercy. Even so, he is worthy of our utmost respect and our best worship. The apostle Paul wrote to Christians, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). ■

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Day by Day With the Bible

Use this guide to read through the Bible in 12 months. Follow Bob Russell's comments on the highlighted text in every issue of THE LOOKOUT.

Day 1 ○ Matthew 12:22-37
○ Acts 17:16-34
○ Psalm 28
○ Exodus 13-15

Day 3 ○ Matthew 13:1-23
○ Acts 18:18-28
○ Psalm 30
○ Exodus 19, 20

Day 5 ○ Matthew 13:44-58
○ Acts 19:23-41
○ Psalm 32
○ Exodus 24-26

Day 2 ○ Matthew 12:38-50
○ Acts 18:1-17
○ Psalm 29
○ Exodus 16-18

Day 4 ○ Matthew 13:24-43
○ Acts 19:1-22
○ Psalm 31
○ Exodus 21-23

Day 6 ○ Matthew 14:1-21
○ Acts 20:1-12
○ Psalm 33
○ Exodus 27-29

What Do You Think?

1. What does God expect from those who worship him?
2. How will you meet God's expectations in your worship?