

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Worship This Week July 20, 2025

SCRIPTURE INTRO – We've been spending several months working our way through the book of Exodus. It's the second book of the Old Testament and it describes the journey of God's people from captivity in Egypt to the Promised Land and everything along the way. It has been an uphill climb and a winding road, in every sense of those words. The people of Israel, under the human leadership of Moses and under the direction and empowerment of God, are being transformed from a collection of 12 tribes into a nation. And not just any nation but a chosen people. At this point in their journey they have arrived at a significant stop: Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. We do not know exactly where this mountain is. For hundreds of years now, a mountain peak some 7,647 feet high in the southern Sinai Peninsula called Jabal Mousa (Mountain of Moses) has found the greatest number of supporters. The arrival of the people of Israel at this place is the highlight of the entire Book of Exodus. There's a saying we use when people experience something moving. We call it a "mountaintop experience." Have you ever had one? For people of faith, who know the Lord, it might be a time in which we feel God's presence. It might happen during prayer, during worship, during a small group gathering. It could also take place in nature, while driving down the highway. The location does not matter. What's important is that the Spirit of God has touched you. You are inspired. You experience peace. Perhaps your life has been changed.

Over the next few Sundays, we will see God's presence, the granting of the covenant, the 10 Commandments and then very specific instructions of how to deal with one another and how to worship. Among the words from God would be an incredible promise: "I will perform miracles that have never been performed anywhere in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people around you will see the power of the LORD—the awesome power I will display for you." All they would have to do is listen and obey. These are chosen people. Not because of their accomplishments and achievements – in human terms, they are a collection of sheep herders, hardly a great civilization like Egypt. They were chosen not as a reward for their faith or good works. They were chosen to fulfill God's purpose for humankind. With that, let's pick up the story.

SCRIPTURE – Exodus 19:1-8

MESSAGE – Let’s look at some key words. God said to Moses: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” The **eagle** is used as the symbol for God and for deity throughout Scripture. In the Book of Ezekiel, deity is represented by the face of an eagle. In the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation, deity is pictured by a flying eagle. The eagle is seen and admired for its strength and its ability to soar to the heights. It is the king of birds. Someone has called the eagle the “jet plane of the bird family.” So, there is great beauty in the metaphor of Israel’s being born on eagle’s wings, held aloft by God’s grace, carried by Him safely out of the bony hands of death back in Egypt.

God then said to Moses: “Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant. . .” **Covenant** is a mutual agreement between two or more parties. So far in the Old Testament we have seen the Covenant with Noah in which God promises to never flood the earth again (Genesis 9) and the covenant with Abraham, in which God promises Abraham’s descendants a land, and blessing for all nations. Later, we will see the Davidic Covenant, where God promises King David a lasting dynasty (2 Samuel 7). Today, we live under the New Covenant in which Christ offers forgiveness of sins and a renewed relationship with God.

If the people keep the Covenant God is about to hand down through Moses, Israel “will be my own **special treasure** from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me.” Special treasure means Israel has been set apart. We can say they have been chosen for a purpose. On the one hand, the claim that one nation has been chosen out of all of God’s people can be offensive. Doesn’t it fly in the face of the words in the very first chapter of Genesis: “So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them” (Gen. 1:27). It states “human beings” in general, not just one nation.

Let’s be very clear about this. God does not say Israel is His special possession like a favourite child. It’s not about Israel. It’s about God. As “a special treasure,” God’s chosen one, Israel was to express herself in two ways.

First, **Israel was to be a kingdom of priests**. This promise is repeated by the Prophet Isaiah: “But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, / They shall call you the servants of our God . . .” (Is. 61: 6). Israel is to be a people who live entirely to serve God. As priests they are to be mediators for Him, each one enjoying the right of individual access to Him, not for themselves but for others. The “priesthood of believers” begins here, and not in the New Testament.

The second way God's chosen ones were to express themselves as God's special treasure was that **they were to be "a holy nation."** To be holy meant that they were to be separated, set apart from all other nations, to live lives that would reflect the very nature of God. The essence of holiness as we find it in the Bible is "conforming to the character of God." This is the essence of the covenant and is a central theme running throughout Scripture. It is the recurring call of Paul "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). The word "holy" has the notion of difference and separation.

We may not be Jewish, but as followers of Christ submitted to God we carry that New Covenant. We are to be set apart by God for God's purpose. Not separated from the world, but to be like Christ in this world. So, as God's special treasure, Israel had been chosen, **chosen to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** Both mean that Israel was chosen for others. It's interesting that Peter uses this same passage to set forth the vocation of the Christian church: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers, we are – individually and collectively – priests, acting as bridge between people and God and to be witnesses. As priests, we are to speak to the people for God, and we are to speak to God for the people. Our dual vocation is the vocation of witness and prayer. Note how the people responded when Moses came down from the mountain and gave them this amazing news: "We will do everything the Lord has commanded." They were ready to listen and obey. Interesting that they were not given a choice. God had already chosen them. Why is a mystery. As noted, they were not a powerful nation or known for their cultural achievement. God often chooses the most unlikely people. It was an awesome proposal: to work with God. We look around at churches and we often see a collection of ordinary people. The rich and powerful and famous are not typically known for their faith walk. Of course, there are exceptions. But by and large, God chooses people who are willing to submit their entire lives to Him. Not because of what we bring to the table, not because of what we have done. But because of our willingness to bow down and serve. As we will see with the ongoing story of Israel and as we see today with God's people, those who choose to live in humble submission to the Creator of Heaven and Earth experience personal peace. More important, we are positioned to be God's hands and feet, taking God's word and promise into the world, to be light in dark places. This is the hope that I have in Christ. And it is the hope for the world. Amen.