

SPECIAL DEVOTIONAL

SINAI'S EXPERIENCE IN THE NEW BEGINNINGS

When we enter the year of new beginnings, we do not just enter into a year which has a theme of 'new beginnings'. We are actually entering into a period of time where we will face the God of new beginnings. The story of how God dealt with Israel, His chosen people, is a story of how God worked on a series of new beginnings.

In the last chapter of the story of how God set the Israelites free from Egypt, just before the Lord sent the tenth plague, the Lord gave a time marker to the Israelites:

*"This month shall be your **beginning of months**; it shall be the first month of the year to you."* (Exodus 12:2)

The liberation from slavery in Egypt is a new beginning/chapter for the chosen people of God.

God didn't liberate Israel from Egypt without a purpose. God liberated Israel so they could worship the Lord, beginning at Mount Sinai. The arrival of the people of Israel at Sinai also marked a new beginning for the chosen people.

"So He said, 'I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'" (Exodus 3:12)

What kind of experience that the Israelite had in the new beginning at Sinai?

1. Israel arrived in Sinai: God Revealed the Purpose

What did the Lord first reveal in Mount Sinai? Was it God's blessing in the Promised Land? Or the battle plan to defeat the enemies? At this point, the Lord hadn't reveal those things. The first things that the Lord said to the people of Israel were:

1. God asked the chosen people to remember what He had done to deliver them out of Egypt. (Exodus 19:4)

2. God revealed the purpose of everything He did for Israel, which is to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They were set apart ("*sanctified*") from the other nations to be a nation that serves the Lord ("*kingdom of priests*"). (Exodus 19:6)

The same thing also applies to us, the Lord's covenant people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We need to meditate on God's purpose to call us out of the darkness into His marvelous light. Is it so that we can live a successful life, enjoying the blessings of God? That's not the primary reason. This is the purpose of God's calling upon us:

"But you are a chosen people, 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, NKJV)

The purpose that He had revealed to the Israelites is now revealed to us as well, so that we are set apart from others ("*chosen*", "*holy*") to be the people who serve the Lord ("*a royal priesthood*"). Therefore, we must ponder:

1. Is our life purposes the same or align with the purpose that the Lord has set for our lives?
2. Have we been using the resources that we have in this life – time, treasure and talent- to serve His divine purpose?

“When you realize God’s purpose for your life isn’t just about you, He will use you in a mighty way.”

Tony Evans

2. Israel Arrived in Sinai: God Came Down

Israel’s experience with God **before** Sinai, though amazing, was still limited: God spoke to Israel through Moses; God expressed His presence to the Israelites through pillars of cloud and fire. In the new beginning at Mount Sinai, the Lord had a new plan for Israel, which is to reveal His presence in a personal way.

*“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day **the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.**” (Exodus 19:10-11, NIV)*

God’s ‘direct’ presence was intended by God so that Israel would fear the Lord and did not sin. **(Exodus 20:20)**

What was the manifestation of His presence like?

The Bible recorded that there were *“thunder, lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking”* and *“the whole mountain quaked greatly.”* **(Exodus 19:18)**

This personal presence of God made Israel trembled. They became afraid; they trembled and stood afar off. **(Exodus 20:18)**

God’s chosen people were not ready to meet with God in the new chapter/ beginning. Because they were too afraid, they said:

“You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”
(Exodus 20:19, NKJV).

Their unpreparedness to meet with God in the new beginning caused them to choose ‘the old way’, which was to listen to God only through Moses. While Moses drew near the presence of God, the people *“stood afar off”* **(Exodus 20:21, compare it with Exodus 20:18b).**

New beginning takes all of us to encounter the Lord in a new dimension.

1. We cannot limit the presence of God by our stagnant knowledge of God.
2. We must not know the “God” who causes us to be not afraid of sinning.
3. It is impossible to be in the presence of God and not be transformed more and more into Jesus’ likeness.

God is far beyond what we can think of or imagine; we will fellowship with Him in the new heaven and earth for eternity. Therefore, expect God to take us deeper in the knowledge of Him in this Year of New Beginnings. (HT)

“There’s a difference between knowing God and knowing about God. When you truly know God, you have energy to serve Him, boldness to share Him, and contentment in Him.”

(J.I. Parker)