

Exodus 19:10-15

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In verses 10-15, the LORD tells Moses to “consecrate” the people in order to prepare them for the making of the covenant. This process includes washing their clothes and respecting the restrictions concerning Mount Sinai. Moses did as the LORD commanded. On the third day, the LORD was going to come down on Mount Sinai to fellowship with His people who are before the mountain.

The foundation of the covenant is now established. The Lord has proposed that He would bless Israel if they would follow His precepts and the people have agreed to His proposal. Now the people needed to be prepared to enter the presence of their God, their Suzerain Ruler in the covenant. To do this, *the Lord also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.”* In other words, they were to refrain from the common activities of life for two days. Their minds were to be consumed with the seriousness of what is about to happen, to be set apart (*consecrated*) for this special event.

The word for “consecrate” is the same word translated “holy” in other verses. To be *consecrated* or “holy” was to be set apart from the corrupting influences of the world for a special purpose. The people were to *wash their garments* as a symbol of purity, for God’s instruction will lead them to purify their lives.

The word for “garments” (Heb. “semalot”) is not the normal Hebrew word for clothing (Heb. “begadim”). The word used here is the same one used for “clothing” in [Exodus 3:22](#), which could indicate that the garments that needed washing were clothes that the Egyptians gave to the Israelites when they left Egypt. These could be their special event clothes, considering that slaves likely did not have any “fancy” clothes. This could also be symbolic of God’s redemption of Israel out of Egypt.

The consecration was to go on for two days because they needed *to be ready for the third day*. Why? Because *on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people*. Their holy LORD was going to descend from heaven and meet His covenant people in the wilderness. And everyone will see the evidence of His presence. This could foreshadow the

three days of waiting until Jesus was seen in His glory after being resurrected on the *third day*.

But there was a restriction stated in v. 12. The LORD instructed Moses to *set bounds for the people all around*. There was a limit to how close the people could come to the holy LORD. He was to tell the people to *beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it*. They were to avoid climbing the mountain or even touching its border. They were to come into God's presence, but on God's terms, maintaining their distance. As we shall see, this prohibition might have been given in part to protect the people from being overwhelmed, as they will soon ask Moses to move them even further away from God's presence.

To show the seriousness of keeping the *bounds*, the penalty is grim, for *whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death*. The penalty did not involve apprehending the individual because *no hand shall touch him*. Instead, the violator *shall surely be stoned or shot through*, and the rule applied *whether beast or man, he shall not live*.

New Testament believers can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” ([Heb. 4:16](#)), that is, enter into His presence, because Jesus Christ is our high priest ([Heb. 4:14](#)). Has God become more approachable? Likely not. In the case of the Israelites, they were drawing “near” as well. But God was going to manifest His presence in a physical manner that they would not forget. His goal is to implant the message in their minds, that they might fear God. If they got too close, they might just faint or die and miss the message. New Testament believers are invited to approach God's throne while living in this life, but not to occupy it. Amazingly however, Jesus offers as a reward for “overcomers” to actually sit down with Him on His throne in the coming Kingdom ([Revelation 3:21](#)).

The last instruction concerned when the Israelites could draw near to the mountain. They needed to listen for *when the ram's horn sounds a long blast*, then at that time *they shall come up to the mountain*. There is nothing in the text that states who was to blow the ram's horn. Perhaps it was the LORD Himself.

In vv. 14–15, the message was relayed from the LORD to the people. After the LORD finished His discourse, *Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people*. The people did what they were told and *washed their garments*. In addition, *he said to the people, Be ready for the third day*. This newly *consecrated* kingdom or nation that was to function

as a priest to other nations needed to take extreme care to prepare itself for being in the LORD's presence.

Moses then adds a requirement not mentioned by the LORD in the previous verses. He tells the people (men in particular) *do not go near a woman*. It could be connected to what would be included in the Law later that a husband and wife who have sexual relations were unclean until evening ([Leviticus 15:18](#)). No one who was unclean could approach the LORD in ceremonial worship.

These restrictions are likely issued in light of the pagan practices around them. In general, the pagan worship in the Ancient Near East involved sexual activity. The basic idea of idolatry was "I can manipulate this power to do my bidding." The illusion that "I control things" is a powerful draw for humans. Another powerful draw is illicit sexual activity. Pagan sexual activity often involved prostitutes, deviant sexual practices, and live pornography. This is also an allure, particularly for males. So pagan worship offered both "you can control" and a moral justification for pursuing unrestricted sexual appetites. Both factors help explain paganism's popularity—it was self-oriented. God's covenant is others-oriented and community-centric. In order to make a clear distinction, God creates another boundary, and tells the men to *not go near a woman* during the three days of consecration.

What cannot be concluded from this command is that sexual relations between a husband and his wife are sinful. The Bible is clear throughout that marital sexual relations were created by God, and are good. Marital sex is intended to bless humans. Adam's statement in [Genesis 2:24](#) that the "two shall become one flesh" is interpreted by the New Testament as including sexual intercourse ([1 Corinthians 6:15-17](#)). The Song of Solomon can be viewed on one level as an instruction guide for effective sexual relationship between husband and wife. The New Testament encourages married couples to take care to engage regularly in sexual relationships, except when fasting/abstaining to consecrate themselves, similar to this prohibition ([1 Corinthians 7:1-5](#)). It also asserts that there be nothing but good that comes from proper marital sexual relationship, commanding that the "marriage bed be undefiled" with sexual immorality ([Hebrews 13:4](#)).

The concept of purity before the LORD can be seen throughout Scripture. [Psalm 24:3-4](#) says, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully." In the New Testament, Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they shall see God” ([Matthew 5:8](#)). This is also mentioned by the writer of Hebrews when he says, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” ([Heb. 12:14](#)).

Biblical Text:

¹⁰The Lord also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” ¹⁴So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵He said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”