

## INTRODUCTION

What comes to your mind when you hear the title “king?” Whether it is in real life or in the movies a king usually has his palace. He also has a kingdom and its people whom he rules over. A king enjoys a lot of benefits like fine clothing, good food and wealth. Then a king may do whatever he wants because he has unlimited power. A king is no ordinary citizen. There were kings in the ancient western or Chinese history. We now live in the U.S. A figure closest to the king we have is the President. He may live like a king in certain ways. He lives in a palace called the “White House,” which also serves as his office. He has his chauffeur, cook and many other personal assistants. He flies on his own airplane. But according to the law, the President is just an elected public servant. He may sit up high, but he is there to serve the country and its people. Whenever citizens have something they do not like about the President they can openly express it because they are granted the freedom of speech. People criticize the President and ridicule him through the media. To many, the U.S. President is an ordinary person holding an extraordinary position. Our God is a completely different kind of King. He is the King above all kings. In the book of Exodus, this King chose Israel to be His people. But God is holy and humans are sinful. We cannot come before Him to shake His hand or ask for an autograph. There needs to be a separation between God and His people. In this passage we see three types of separation. Such barriers remind us that we have to treat God’s holiness seriously.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 神從萬國中分別祂的子民 God Separates His People from All Nations

First, God separates His people from all nations. Look at **verses 5-6**: 5 “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” God saw His people as a precious property. In order for them to receive God’s continual blessings there was an important condition – keep His covenant. God’s requirements in the covenant were spelled out in the Law in the subsequent chapters. The Law did not make Israel God’s people, but the Law maintained a close relationship between God and His people. The Law is similar to the house rules in your family. Rules do not create a parents-and-kids relationship. Rules ensure a harmonious relationship. Your neighbors’ kids may listen to you and are well-behaved. They may even do certain chores that your own kids do not want to do. But obeying your rules do not make them your kids. That is the part the Israelites were confused about from the Old to the New Testaments. They thought they had to keep practicing the Law perfectly to earn their relationship with God. God chose the Israelites not because they were good. He made that clear all along. For example, God said in **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** – “7 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” It was entirely because of God’s grace that He chose Israel. God also extends His

grace to us today. God saves us not because we are good. It is because we are bad. If you are being honest to yourself you know what kind of person you really are. Yes, you may be well-educated, do well in school or at work and have never been in jail. But deep down inside our hearts are filled with greed, selfishness, jealousy, impure thoughts, etc. If God were to grade us no one could pass His perfect standard. God saves us by His grace. All we can do is to react with praise and thankfulness. We love Him back, not because we want to earn His grace. It is because we want to show our appreciation to Him. Going back to the Exodus passage. I would like to draw your attention to two descriptions in **19:6**. God said that Israel would become “a kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation.” A priest is a mediator between God and His people. He presents offerings on behalf of his people to God, and in turn, he communicates the messages from God to His people. The nation of Israel as a whole played the roles of a priest to stand between God and other nations. Here lies an interesting truth. God separated Israel from all other nations to preserve its purity. But at the same time God also sent Israel out to attract other nations to Him. In that regard, the Jewish people got it all wrong. They thought that God’s people were like a VIP club that was restricted to Israel only. If Israel was to represent how God’s people should be like then they had to be “a holy nation.” By walking with God, Israel separates itself from the sins of the world. Even today, the church continues to be “a kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation.” It is sad but true that there are many sins going on in the church. The leaders do not follow God’s Word and neither do the members. It is true that the secular world sets a high expectation for the church. Our non-believing friends may criticize us: “If those people say they are Christians then perhaps I am an angel!” But don’t we forget, God sets the highest standard for His church. God is perfect and He requires us to be perfect. Yes, we will continue to stumble and fall. But by the grace of God we should pursue holiness. How? There is no short-cut. Everything goes back to the Bible. Love it, read it, and follow it. A church can be like a magnet. There are two poles on a magnet. One end attracts and the other end repels. We as a church can either attract people to God, or repel people from God.

## 2. 神從被造物中分別祂自己 God Separates Himself from All Creation

God separates His People from all nations. There is a second form of separation mentioned in this passage. God separates Himself from all creation. God told Moses that He was about to descend onto Mount Sinai. The Israelites had to prepare to meet with God. First, they had to clean themselves. **Verse 10** reads: And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes.” Here we see the word “consecrate,” which carries the meaning of setting apart for a special purpose. You may have a set of fine china at home that is not for daily use. Those dishes are set aside for holidays or for treating important guests. God told the Israelites to consecrate themselves by washing their clothes. It has a symbolic meaning of outward cleansing. Besides, God also told them to establish a restricted area to separate Himself from them. Look at **verse 12**: “Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.’” The Israelites might use rocks or some other objects to outline the area that no one, even animals, should cross over. Any person or animal crossing the boundary would face death penalty. Such serious judgment warned the Israelites that God’s holiness was not something to mess with. Jehovah was unlike the idols they saw in Egypt which the worshippers could touch, manipulate and approach casually. After all the preparations were done, God descended onto Mount Sinai. Let me just summarize the scene.

There were thunder and lightning, a thick cloud and blasting of trumpet (v. 16). There were also smoke and fire, and the ground trembled violently (v. 18). Imagine yourself standing at the foot of a live volcano in Hawaii. The lava is oozing out. Now there is a mega hurricane bigger than Florence hitting the islands head on. On the top of the volcanic eruption and crazy thunderstorm there is also a 9.0 magnitude earthquake happening at the same time. How would you feel under such circumstance? You must be scared to death. That was how the Israelites felt when God appeared on the mountain. The earth shook and so did they. Why did God reveal Himself in such a magnificent way? It was to show His holiness. On that day they saw, heard, smelled and felt the effects of God's presence. No one dared to get closer. Today God does not appear to us in a similar dramatic fashion. We know that God is gentle, merciful and loving. However, we often treat God like our buddies. We reason that: "Yeah, sometimes I can be rude, and offend my friends with my words and behavior. But they know me and accept me. I don't even need to apologize when I do something wrong." Do we hold the same attitude when we approach God? We do it all the time and we justify our sins. Cheating on tax return. Spreading rumors and slandering people behind their back. Exaggerating our accomplishment to our boss. What is the big deal? Everyone does it! After all, God has forgiven me. Even when we come to worship we are being too casual as if we were meeting our friends for coffee. We are worshipping the King of kings! If God greets you at the entrance, will you arrive late? If God is sitting next to you, will you check your phone every now and then, doze off, walk in and out of the sanctuary or day-dream? Don't you know that God is here even when you cannot see Him? Brothers and sisters: we often violate God's holiness! We need to confess our sins. God is with us 24/7. Clean up your acts – at home, in school and at work! Consecrate yourself before you come here on Sunday. That is more than taking a shower and putting on some clean clothes. Consecrate your hearts too! Get up earlier, and spend some time in prayer before you leave home. After you come in here, quiet yourself before the Lord. Let me say a word to our worship personnel too. That includes everyone serving in the hallway, upstairs in the sound booth and on the podium. People can tell if you are well-prepared or not. I am not talking about perfection. I make mistakes every Sunday. We serve a holy God. He deserves the best from us.

### 3. 神從眾人中分別祂的僕人 God Separates His Servants from All Others

God separates His people from all nations. God also separates Himself from all creation. There is a third kind of separation in this passage. God separates His servants from all others. Obviously, one such servant was Moses. God called Moses to be a mediator for the Israelites. See **verse 3**: Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said... After Moses got the message from God, he then passed it to the people. **Verse 7** reads: So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. Another example was when God ordered the Israelites to consecrate themselves and to set a boundary at the foot of the mountain. God gave His commands through Moses. When God finally descended onto Mount Sinai to meet with His people, He only allowed selected persons to come close to Him. Moses was one of them. We need to ask why there was such a separation. **Verse 9** gives us an answer - 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."... All the Israelites could hear audible voice from God. But God was not talking to them. He was speaking to Moses. Imagine a CEO was making his speech at the company's townhall meeting. Suddenly, he called you up to the podium and spoke to you. He acknowledged

your diligence, and he gave you some instructions on how to run the company. Everyone was looking at you. The microphone was on the whole time. How would that make you and other employees feel? At that moment the boss made you an important person for the company. In this verse, God told Moses the purpose for such communication channel – that the people “will always put their trust in you.” God wanted to reiterate that Moses was the spokesperson He had chosen. God also gave the same privilege to Aaron to approach Him. Look at **verse 24**: The Lord replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them.” Through Aaron, a system of priesthood would be set up. Only the descendants of Aaron could become priests. God chose Moses and Aaron as leaders not because they were more intelligent than others. It was God’s sovereignty. There should not be any pride in them, thinking: “God picked me because I am special!” Unfortunately, some Israelites were envious of their leaders. In Numbers chapter 12, even Moses’ older sister Miriam showed jealousy. **Verse 2** reads: “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the Lord heard this. What else can you say when even your own sibling stood up against you? God showed His anger toward Miriam and disciplined her with leprosy. Then later in **Numbers 16:3**, Korah and a few Levites attacked Moses and Aaron and said: ...“You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?” Once again, God stood up to protect His servants and punished the slanderers. Those people thought it was unfair that only Moses and Aaron were above the rest. They failed to recognize that God’s servants carried a lot of responsibilities. For example, Moses took all the heat when people grumbled. Moses and Aaron were accountable to God and to the people they led. The same is true for today’s churches. God calls pastors and lay-leaders to manage a church. Are they the most capable people in the church? Perhaps not. Many of you are better educated and know the Bible more thoroughly than me. How come I am standing up here while you are sitting in the pew every Sunday? It is God who puts me here to serve Him and serve all of you. I am not the boss. I am only God’s servant. Right now, we are looking for an English pastor. We say that we are calling a pastor, instead of hiring one. Though this future staff member will receive compensation he is not an employee of our church. We trust that ultimately it is God who calls His servants to serve among us. It is the same for all the lay-leaders too. When we need new coworkers, we should not only look for the most popular people. Rather, we should pray that God will put a desire to serve Him and His people in the hearts of the potential candidates.

## CONCLUSION

From this passage we learn that God is holy and we have to treat His holiness seriously. No one can come to God because we are sinful. The Israelites had to consecrate themselves before they could get slightly closer to God. Among all the people only a few selected servants could come into the presence of God. Compared to the Israelites, Christians are more blessed. It is because God took the initiative to send Jesus to come into the world. Jesus consecrated us by shedding His blood on the cross. All who put their trust in Jesus become God’s people. There is no more separation for those who are in Christ. Jesus has become the bridge to connect us to God the Father. God also sent the Holy Spirit to live in the believers. As Christians, do we enjoy the presence of God in our lives? Or do we find it extremely uncomfortable and inconvenient for God to stick with us, and is aware of all the things we see, do or say? God is holy, and He expect us to be holy too. We have to obey Him, and please Him by living a holy life.