

Encounters with God - Mount Sinai

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy chapter 12 is the chapter that I'd like us to go to this morning, this afternoon. Verse 5, Deuteronomy 12 verse 5, But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.

There you shall go and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings and the firstborn of your herd and your flock.

And there you shall eat before the Lord your God and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake in which the Lord your God has blessed you.

It seems as if this whole weekend will be focused on the Old Testament and that's not deliberate. I'm led to believe that up until now you have focused on the Old Testament and my intention today and tomorrow was to focus on the Old Testament. Now from one point of view there is nothing wrong with that.

[1 : 20] The Old Testament is the word of God. We have God's word in its entirety in both Testaments, Old and New. And the Old is as enriching.

It gives us the information, the narrative of what God did in the centuries before Jesus that led up to the coming of Jesus and that resulted in his death and in his resurrection.

Indeed, I would say that you can never understand the death of Jesus properly unless you understand something of the Old Testament. I'm not saying you can't be a Christian, of course. You can be a Christian without reading the Old Testament at all, but you cannot be an informed Christian without the information that the Old Testament gives.

And, of course, the key to that is always that we must, like Mark McLeod was telling us last night, that we must see the Old Testament as a lens through which we see the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 29] Remember that Jesus' death was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. It was the culmination of everything that the Old Testament looked forward to.

Remember what Paul says, Christ died according to the Scriptures. The Scriptures being the Old Testament.

I remember hearing one very famous Old Testament professor, Walter Kaiser, and he was telling us his students, he said, My students, he says, they ask me, have you ever read the New Testament? And he said, I have, and I like it. He said, it reminds me of the Old. And here is a man with a rich knowledge of the Bible in its entirety.

The way in which the Old Testament looks forward to the New and in which the New is the fulfillment of the Old. So there's nothing wrong with what we are doing this weekend as long as Christ is at the center of everything that we say.

[3 : 34] And I can assure you that he will. So what I intended to do this weekend was to focus on this period of Israel going through the wilderness.

And I wanted to focus particularly on three select encounters that Moses had with God. Three select encounters.

First of all, there is the encounter Moses had with God at Mount Sinai. And that's reflected upon here in chapter 12 and chapter 5 of Deuteronomy. And then tomorrow morning, God willing, I want us to look at Exodus chapter 33, where Moses encounters God once again in the wake of the idolatry of the people of Israel.

Now again, I believe that you had this the other night. That's not deliberate. But it ties up together. I'm not going to talk about their idolatry as such, but I am going to speak about Moses' request to God that he show him his glory.

And I want us to look at how in that revelation, something of Jesus is revealed to us. And then tomorrow evening, God willing, I want us to look at the final encounter that Moses had with God in his death, Deuteronomy chapter 34, that describes the death of Moses.

[5 : 00] And I want us to remind ourselves of the certainty of death that will come to all of us, but death that means something so very different for those who live and die in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So three encounters with God then. First of all, as Moses reflects in Deuteronomy chapter 12 over that encounter that happened 40 years ago.

Now, I don't know if you can remember 40 years ago. I suppose many of us can. I certainly, I can remember some things that happened to me 40 years ago. I can remember one particular.

We tend to remember the significant events that take place in our lives, don't we? We don't remember everything. Very few of us have that kind of memory.

But we remember the significance, the things that made their mark, the red letter days. And these events can make their mark for a variety of reasons.

[6 : 00] They can be good events or they can be bad events. The one thing that we all remember are the frightening events. I remember one particular, and it's almost as if it's yesterday.

45 years ago I was in high school. And the teachers decided to crack down on the high school because a group of boys in my year had destroyed the boys' toilets.

They did it just as an act of vandalism. And in those days there wasn't the psychologizing of events as there is today. There was a crackdown.

And that was as much physical crackdown as anything else. And the teachers decided that this was going to be vengeance on the pupils. And so they gathered the whole school together and the head teacher read the riot act and demanded that everyone responsible make themselves known.

And I remember how utterly terrified, I had nothing to do with it, but I remember how utterly terrified I was of that moment. I remember sitting at the back of the assembly hall, quaking in fear, just imagining what was going to happen to the guys who were responsible for this destruction.

[7 : 14] It's as fresh in my memory today as it was 45 years ago. Well, there was something that was equally fresh in the memory of the people of Israel then as it was 40 years ago.

And that was when God appeared to them on the top of Mount Zinai, just shortly after they had been delivered out of Egypt and after they had crossed the Red Sea.

It was always God's intention that one of the first things he would do would be to gather them together so that he could meet with them and so that he could give them his law.

And he did that in a particularly spectacular and a particularly horrific way. It wasn't as if God had some kind of pleasure in scaring his people.

He simply appeared as he was. And his appearance was simply naturally frightening. It struck terror when they saw the flames, the lightning, the sound, the thunder, the darkness, the gloom.

[8 : 17] That was simply God as he is appearing before his people. And when he spoke, that was the last straw. The people said, we simply can't cope with this.

We are too frightened to listen to any more. They said to Moses, Moses, will you please go up the mountain and speak to God for us? Listen to what he says, then come and tell us and we will listen to all.

You be our mediator. Now that was an important thing in itself. That was the first sign of the mediatorship that was necessary for God to speak to his people and for his people to listen to God. And that in itself was a pointer to none less than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our mediator, the one who stands between us and the one who was willing to take our guilt upon himself and suffer the wrath of God for us.

But on this occasion, the people, it was obvious that the people felt they simply could not cope with the sight, the sound, the spectacle, the majesty, the glory, if you like.

[9 : 34] It was. It was the glory of God. The problem was not with God. The problem was with the people. The people went and prepared to witness this God who had chosen them to be his own people and had called them to himself.

So there was fear and there was dread. There was terror at the display of God. And this is something that Moses was eager that they should remember.

Forty years later, as they made their final preparations to cross over into the promised land. Don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget the fear that you experienced because it was a healthy fear.

It was a fear that God honored. In fact, as a result of that fear, look at what God says. He says, you were right to fear me.

Oh, he said that they had such a heart as this always to fear me and to keep my commandments that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever. Now, I don't know about you, but no matter how fearful I'd feel, I would be quite happy if God said to me, you are right to feel that.

[10:50] And I sometimes wonder if their great mistake was, it wasn't their fear and it wasn't their dread of God. It was that they didn't continue to listen to the voice of God. The voice of God which spoke comfort to them and reminded them that they were precious to him.

The reason he had brought them out of Egypt was because he loved them with an everlasting love and he had great plans for them that he would one day take them into Egypt where he would take them into the promised land rather and where he would fulfill his promise to Abraham to be their God.

Their descendants would be like the stars of the sky, that he would be their God and they would be his people forever and in their seed all nations would be blessed. So that's what Moses is eager for them never to forget, the moment when they feared God at Mount Zinai.

But Deuteronomy chapter 12 is not just where Israel reminisce to things which have gone by in the past. It's a moment in which they look forward to something else.

And Moses is just as eager for them to anticipate what God is going to do for them and give them in the land of promise. They're just about to cross over.

[12:13] And this was a land that flowed with milk and honey. A land where they would enjoy peace and prosperity once they had destroyed in the name of God their enemies. It's the land where God was going to richly bless them and he was going to prepare them.

But their great fear ought to have been themselves because they were the biggest threat to their own well-being. But nonetheless Moses is anticipating and he's saying this is what's going to happen once you go there.

And he's looking forward not just to a couple of days after they crossed the Jordan River. Not even a couple of years. He's actually looking forward to hundreds of years later into their future.

Well beyond their life expectancy and the expectancy of their children or their grandchildren after them. This was to take place well beyond. And this promise is exactly the same as what they remember 40 years ago.

Because once again there will be a spectacular meeting with God. That's what it says in chapter 12.

[13:30] This is one of the great neglected chapters of the Bible. It's a chapter that's full of promise. Where God is saying to his people you remember those days 40 years ago when I met with you and when you dreaded me and when you wanted me to speak only through Moses.

Well I'm going to do the same again. I'm going to meet with you. Except this time it's going to be different. It's the same God.

The same glory. The same majesty. The same purpose. The same relationship. Covenant. The covenant relationship. That he had with his people. Except this time your response is no longer going to be one of dread and terror and fear.

Your response is going to be the opposite. It will be one of joy and gladness before me. And he goes on to describe in chapter 12.

What that meeting is going to be like. And what their worship is going to be like. And how their relationship is going to play out.

[14:40] In the future. He tells them first of all that there is going to be a prohibition. You shall not worship the Lord God in any way you choose.

Or most precisely in the way that the nations around you choose to worship their gods. Don't take your cue from them. Worship God in any way that he has revealed to you.

That's his command. So there was a specific directive towards their worship. But there was also to be a prohibition.

But there was to be a mediation in the way that they were to worship. They were to worship through the priesthood that God had established in the tribe of Judah.

And particularly in the sons of Aaron. They had been established as God's priests. In order to stand between God and his people.

[15:43] In order to represent God before them. And in order to represent them before God. That's what a priest is. It's a go-between. He's a go-between.

He's a mediator. He's someone who represents both parties. God and Israel. Now this had already started. It started when Moses was appointed to be the mediator.

When he had to go up the mountain way back 40 years ago in Zina. He was the one who met God face to face. And he received the law from God. And brought it down to the people.

And his duty then was to bring it to the people. And to set it before them. And to command them in the name of God. That they had to obey all of his law.

But the priesthood also extended to the sons of Aaron. And it extended to the tabernacle. The establishment of that location.

[16:46] That was to be set up every time the children of Israel were camped. Anywhere in the wilderness. They were to set up the tabernacle. Which was the place where God.

God's glory dwelt in the middle of his people. It was a very ornate structure. That was composed of the most holy place.

That contained the ark of the covenant. Upon which was the cherubim. Fashioned in gold. Forming the mercy seat.

Or the atonement cover. And on the atonement cover. Where it was to dwell. The Shekinah glory of God. And this was to be the place where sacrifice was to be made.

Which brings me on to the third feature of their worship in Canaan. Which was to be substitution.

There you will bring your gifts. And your sacrifices. And your offerings.

[17:43] God could not be worshipped. Unless there was sacrifice. Sacrifice. Because it was only by sacrifice.

That sin could be atoned for. Without the shedding of blood. There was no remission. There was no forgiveness. Sacrifice was the essential component. The central foundational component.

In their relationship with God. And that of course went all the way beginning. To the beginning.

When Adam and Eve fell. In the garden of Eden. In the garden. But then fourthly.

There was to be location. Location. The children of Israel were encouraged to think back 40 years to Mount Sinai.

Where God had met with his people at a particular defined place. Mount Sinai. But now. As they anticipate their worship in the promised land.

[18:49] Hundreds of years from now. There is another location. But this time. God is keeping it secret from them. For the moment. He's not telling them where he's going.

But nonetheless. There is a particular location. A geographical point. On the map. Where God says. I am going to choose.

To place. My name. Do you know how many times. References made to that. In the book of Deuteronomy. The place where. I will choose. To put my name.

Do you know how many times. 21 times. In the book of Deuteronomy. God makes reference to. The place where. I will choose. To make. My name.

To put my. To place my name. But he doesn't tell them. Where it's going to be. Because that hasn't been revealed yet. See. The Old Testament. Is a development. Of what God.

[19:43] Is doing. And what God. Is going to do. And only at the right time. Does God. Make each development. Clear. To the people. So that they. Can see.

How he is fulfilling. His promises. Keeping his. Every word. But for the moment. It's too early. He's not going to tell them. So they have to. Content themselves.

With not knowing. Where this place. Is going to be. There's a certain. Mystery. At this stage. And the people. Are going to have to live. In faith. Believing.

That that day. Will come. Believing. That everything. That God. Had promised. On this occasion. Would. Come. To pass. God.

God. That. God. That. But what's going to happen. At that place. Is exactly. The same. As what happened. In Zinai. God. Will meet. With. His. People.

[20:37] Just as he did. On the top. Of Mount Zinai. But this time. There will be. Jubilation. And there.

He says. You. Will. Rejoice. You. Will. Rejoice. Now.

How was all this. Fulfilled. Where was the place. That God. Chose. To put his name. And I'm hoping. That. By now. Everyone is.

Is trying to work it out. Some of you. I'm sure most of you. Have worked it out. By now. You should have. If you know your Old Testament. You should know. How all of this. Played out. In the history.

Of Israel.

The place. Turned out. To be. Jerusalem. And particularly. The temple. That David. Planned. To build. But wasn't allowed to.

[21 : 32] Get all the plans ready. But when he came to God. And he brought these plans to God. God said. You are not the man. To build the temple. Your son. Solomon. He is the one. Who's going to build the temple. Sure enough.

When Solomon came to the throne. He built the temple. It took seven years. To build. It was the single. Most expensive. Building. In the world. God. And. But it wasn't. It wasn't.

The significance of the temple. Was not because it was expensive. Or because it was ornate. Or because it was elaborate. Or because of the architecture. Or anything like that. The significance of the temple. Was.

When it was completed. Remember what happened. Solomon dedicated it to the Lord. He prayed to God. Dedicating this temple to the Lord. And Chronicles tells us.

That the glory. Of the Lord. Filled. The house. It's exactly the same. As what happened on Zinai.

[22 : 27] So much so. That the priests had to leave. They had to go. They couldn't remain there. At last. God. Was keeping.

This promise. In Deuteronomy chapter 12. That the place. Where God chose to put his name. It was now identified. This was a place. Where the people of Israel.

Were to come from. All parts of Israel. They were to worship. Through the priesthood. And from then on. In all the feasts. And the festivals. And the sacrifices.

The day of atonement. The Passover. And so on. And so forth. God was to be worshipped. By his people. At this place. And only. Only.

This place. No other place. Because that. Location. Was the place. Where God chose. To dwell.

[23 : 22] And to locate himself. To place. His name. Which meant. In effect. That was the place. To which God. Condescended. To dwell.

That was the Shekinah. Glory. Of. God. But even. That promise. Was temporary.

That promise. Looked forward to. Another. Moment. In history. That was to take place. Even further. Into. The future.

The temple. As a place. Of worship. And as a place. Where God. Located himself. Amongst his people. Looked forward to.

An even. Greater. Condescension. An even. Greater. Moment. When God. When God. Would once again. Come. Into this world.

[24 : 23] In the person. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. And his coming. Into the world. Was just. As glorious.

Except. That glory. Was revealed. In a different manner. You remember. What John. One says. The word. Became. Flesh. And dwelt. Among us.

The language. He's using. Is the same. Language. As God. Coming. To dwell. In the temple. Of Jerusalem. The word. Became. Flesh. And dwelt. Among us.

And. We. Beheld. His. Glory. The glory. As of the only. Begotten son. Of the father. Full. Of grace. And truth. This was. The final. Temple. Moment. The ultimate. Temple. Moment.

[25 : 19] I shouldn't have said. Actually. The final. Temple. Moment. Because there's another. Final. Temple. Moment. Still. Into the future. But this was. The fulfillment. Of God's promise. That one day.

Messiah. Would come. And the glory. Of the Lord. Descended. Into this world. And God. Became. A baby.

In the arms. Of his mother. Mary. And he grew up. In weakness. In humanity.

Two natures. God. And man. Man. Man. The temple. Was. There.

Once again. It had been created. As never before. Where God. His dwelling. Was now.

[26 : 20] In the person. Of Jesus Christ. With. His. People. People. And that's. Because. The temple. In the Old Testament. And you remember.

How. The temple. Of the Old Testament. Unfortunately. Instead of. Being. A place. Of worship. It had become. A place. Sadly. That. The people. All too often.

Worshipped. For its own sake. Rather than. For what it signified. But when you go back. To what it signified. You discover. That it signified. In the light of the gospel. It signified.

The presence of God. Among his people. And the. Gathering. Of his people. Around. The God. Who's had presence. Amongst them.

So what that means. In the New Testament. Was that God. Had fulfilled. His promise. In Jesus. To come down. And to dwell. Amongst his people. And create. For himself.

[27 : 16] A worshipping. Believing. People. Who would trust. In him. Because. Of what he. Had done. For them. On the cross.

He came. In his glory. Albeit. A veiled. Glory. Albeit. A glory. That was. Hidden. In many respects. And yet. For those. With the eyes. Of faith. They could say. Like John. We saw. His glory. The glory.

As of the only. Be gotten. Of the father. But he came. As. The mediator. The high priest. A high priest.

Who not only. Brought. The sacrifice. To God. But as we heard. Last night. Who. Was. The sacrifice. That satisfied.

[28 : 15] Once. And for all. The justice. The perfect justice. Of God. And the sacrifice. That brought. Justification. And peace. And forgiveness.

And reconciliation. And atonement. For us. So that today. There is no one.

Geographical location. Where God. Has placed his name. It no longer refers to. A particular place. In the world. God. But in so far.

As I pointed to. The coming of the Lord. Jesus Christ. That place. Is wherever. The church is. Because God. Is in the midst of them.

Dwelling amongst them. Receiving their worship. Guiding them. Enlightening their minds. Drawing close to them. Meeting with them. At their point.

[29 : 15] Of need. Confirming. His promises. And. And. Reminding them. Of his. Everlasting. Never ending.

Love. For his people. That was demonstrated. In. His death. On. The cross. And so. Now we. Are the temple. We. Are God's workmanship. We are. The body of Jesus. The body of Christ. Christ. We have come together today.

As. The body of Christ. In order to respond. To what he has done. In thankfulness. And in adoration.

In repentance. And in praise. And it is as. That. That. The body of Christ. That we will gather again. If it's God's will.

[30 : 17] Tomorrow. Again. In worship. And adoration. And praise. As a rejoicing people. Celebrating his death.

Not in some flippant way. Not in some superficial way. Not in the way that other people rejoice. That's not the kind of joy we have at all. The joy that God has given to us. Is a deep seated. Never ending joy. That rests. In Jesus. And that wants to remember. And never forget. What he has done for us. As our great high priest.

And as. Our sacrifice. And in gathering a people to himself. He has gathered.

He hasn't. Chosen those who deserve it. He hasn't chosen those who have. Earned his affection. Or earned his favor.

[31 : 14] By the way in which they have lived exemplary lives. He's chosen. Sinners. Wretches. People who.

Have come from all kinds. Of different backgrounds. People who are saved. By grace. People who have come to see.

That there is only one way. To be right with God. And that is. Through the Lord. Jesus Christ. And a people who. Will look forward one day.

To that. Final temple. Because the Lord's Supper. Is not only. A remembrance. Of what Jesus. Has done. In the past. But we are told.

That we are to. Continue to remember. Until. He comes. Again. And when he comes again. He will raise the dead. Once again.

[32 : 14] God will come down. As we saw. As we've been seeing all. For the whole of the last. For the last 30 minutes. God is coming down.

To meet with his people. There will be one final moment. When God. Will come down. When the Lord Jesus. Will come again. And the trumpet of the Lord. Will sound. And the voice. Will of command. Will raise the dead.

And the graves will open. And you and I. Will. In with. Renewed. Resurrected. Bodies. Will meet. The Lord. And we will go forever.

To be with the Lord. Soul and body. Reunited. In perfection. And where the dwelling. Of God. Will be. Amongst.

Men. We don't know. When that will be. We don't know. The details. But we. Have something. Glorious.

[33 : 11] To look forward to. Just like. The people of Israel. In Deuteronomy 12. They had something. Glorious. To look forward to. And none of them. Ever saw it. Until that moment.

It was some. It was something. That was going to happen. Way into the future. Well we don't know. How far into the future. The second coming. Will be. But we know. It's going to happen. And we know.

That we will. Have. Our own part. By faith. In the Lord. Jesus Christ. In that great moment. When he was dwelling. Will be.

Amongst. Men. And women. All of his. Redeemed. People. So. My brothers and sisters. Let us rejoice. Today. In the Lord.

We have. Everything. To rejoice. In. Everything. Because we have. A great saviour. One who has given us. His promise. That nothing.

[34 : 08] Can pluck us out of his hand. Let's pray. Our father.