

ENCOUNTERING GOD

Part 10 of Foundations 260 - OT. Exodus 19 & Hebrews 12.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. March 29, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

ENCOUNTERING GOD

Last week, during a break in my Philosophy of Religion class, I overheard a couple of students talking about what it takes to know God. They believe it is impossible because we cannot live up to his standards.

I suspect many people are in the same situation. They won't explore the Christian faith because they misunderstand it; they believe that encountering God depends on our performance. They get it all wrong.

Today, I want us to talk about what it takes to encounter God, to draw near to him, to find him, to know him, to be in his holy presence.

- **This will be a revelation** for some of us who have been on the religious treadmill and getting nowhere. It's going to set you free to know, love, and enjoy God.
- **It will be a reminder** for the rest of us who might have forgotten God's amazing gift of access and what happens when we pray or praise him.

So, let's talk about how to encounter God, and let's begin by exploring how **NOT** to do it.

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN EXODUS 19

Last week, we continued our Foundations 260 reading plan and came to Exodus 19. The chapter records what happened three months after God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Led by Moses, they marched into the desert and arrived at the mountain called Sinai.

Exodus 19 describes what happened next.

Exodus 19:3-6 (CSB) Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: “This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: 4 ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, 6 and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”

So, this was the pivotal moment when a ragtag band of refugees became God’s covenant nation, a *holy* priesthood saved by God. As God’s *kingdom of priests*, the entire nation would have access to God, represent God to the world, and stand in the gap, inviting people into a relationship with God.

Then, the Lord instructed Moses to prepare the people for something extraordinary: He would “*come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people*” (verse 11).

Then, the Lord appeared:

Exodus 19:16-19 (CSB) 16 On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud blast from a ram’s horn, so that all the people in the camp shuddered. 17 Then Moses brought

the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the LORD came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. 19 As the sound of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in the thunder.

Chapter 20 describes what God's manifest presence did to the people:

Exodus 20:18-19 (CSB) All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the ram's horn, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

God chose to manifest himself in fearful ways: in thunder, lightning, smoke, ground-shaking, and trumpet blast. His holy presence created such great fear that they begged Moses to mediate God's words: *"Don't let God speak to us"* (verse 19).

The Lord came near - sort of. BUT ... the people were kept back from the mountain, and they were OK with that because they wanted God to keep his distance too.

That's how NOT to encounter God. There is a better way.

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN HEBREWS 12

Christianity is not an Exodus 19, Mount Sinai, religion. We encounter God on a different mountain, Mount Zion.

We read about Mount Zion in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:18-24 (CSB) For you have not come to what could be touched (Mount Sinai), to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, 19 to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, 20 for they could not bear what was commanded: If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned. 21 The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. 22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

Mount Zion, and the city of the living God, and the heavenly Jerusalem are the same place: the place where God's Presence dwells. It's not a physical, earthly mountain; it is an eternal, spiritual realm.

It is so different from Sinai (turn the page):

Think about the contrast between the two mountain experiences:

- Mount Zion is a realm of *festive, joyful gathering*, not trembling fear.
- It is a realm where spiritual reality is accessible, not obscured by *darkness, gloom, and storm*.
- We come boldly into *God's city, to angels, perfected believers who have gone ahead of us, to God the Judge, and Jesus, the Savior*. We don't shrink back in fear. There is no one like Moses telling us to "Stop, don't come close."
- We have total access to the holy God, not because of the Passover lamb and the Exodus rescue. We encounter God through the sprinkled blood of the crucified Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. His atoning blood cleanses us from all our sin and makes us acceptable to God.

This heavenly Mount Zion is a glorious place, and we belong there NOW!

We participate in heavenly worship every day.

We truly encounter God. Think of that, when we pray and praise at home or in the car or here in the church building, we sort of leave the planet and enter a new realm, the heavenly city of God.

MOUNTAINOUS ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD

Fearing God is good.¹ It's important to approach him with awe, reverence, honor, and worship. We should not be casual; he's not our buddy, or the "guy in the sky." He is "holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty" (Revelation 4:8).

But it's equally important to approach God without paralyzing fear that keeps us distant from him. Jesus has opened the way into the city of God by his precious blood.

A passage in Hebrews 10 makes it plain:

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NLT) And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

That's amazing. That's why I'm a Christian.

Even on days you're not feeling it, believe it. Remind yourself of where your prayers and praises take you: straight into the city of God, the heavenly dwelling place. Picture the joyful gathering: the angels, the believers, the living God, and the risen, exalted Savior, Jesus

Let that soak in. It will be a mountainous encounter with the living God.

¹ See Appendix

APPENDIX

THE FEAR OF GOD

The late Scottish theologian, John Murray, writes that the fear of God is...

"The fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honor, and worship."

Fear isn't often considered a positive experience, but it can be very helpful.

Fear of God is ...

1. The foundation of wisdom and knowledge — Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 make this the programmatic claim of all Wisdom Literature
2. A deterrent against sin — God explicitly produced the Sinai terror so Israel's fear *"may remain with you, so that you may not sin"* (Ex. 20:20)
3. The motivation for covenant obedience — Deuteronomy 10:12 binds fearing, loving, and serving God into a single response
4. The fuel of worship — Hebrews 12:28–29 makes reverent awe essential to acceptable worship
5. The pursuit of holiness — Paul's "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1) links sanctification to ongoing reverence
6. An incentive to remain faithful — Jeremiah 32:39–40 shows God promises to implant fear in his people's hearts so they will not turn from him
7. A motive for evangelism — Paul's "knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11)

8. The antidote to the fear of man — Proverbs 29:25 and 1 Peter 3:14–15
9. A source of practical blessing, life, and security — Proverbs 14:26–27 and Psalm 112

Psalms 112:1 (CSB) Happy is the person who fears the LORD, taking great delight in his commands.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Review

- Review Peter's March 29th teaching and study guide.
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

Discuss

1. Have you ever experienced a season when you felt distant from God? What contributed to that sense of distance? What helped you get out of it?
2. Why do you think God revealed himself at Mount Sinai in such a fearsome, dramatic way? What did that communicate about his nature? What positive effects do you think it had? For insights, visit FamousGod.com/groups. Click on the "sermon manuscript" for March 29 and turn to the Appendix on page 7 for a list of practical benefits of fearing God.
3. How does Jesus' role as mediator change our experience of God's presence?
4. What are some barriers (ignorance, guilt, doubt, pride, busyness) that keep us from enjoying access to God's city described in Hebrews 10 and 12? How can we overcome those barriers? What role does "sanctified imagination" play?

Prayer Focus

- 247: "Lord, please add daily to the Cornerstone those who are being saved."
- Pray for more grace to enjoy our Mount Zion access to God through the blood of Jesus, and to worship him with reverence AND freedom.