

On Eagles' Wing

An Exegetical Study of Exodus 19:2-8

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John W Kleinig

God's purpose in settling on Israel as his people is stated more clearly in the story sketched out in Exodus 19:2-8 than anywhere else in the Old Testament. The divine declaration of intent found in 19:4-6^a is unique. The centre of this pericope is the Old Testament Reading for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost in Series A of the Three Year Lectionary. The choice is indeed apt. God's recollection of his efforts for the people of Israel and the declaration of his intent for them counter balance Paul's discussion in the Epistle (Romans 5:6-11) of the justification of the ungodly, and Christ's commission of the apostles as outlined in the Gospel (Matthew 9:35-10:8). Just as Israel was sanctified to join with God in his rule on earth, so the Church has been called to work with her Lord in his royal mission to the harassed and helpless.

Modern scholars have, I believe, failed to do justice to this passage, and that for two reasons. On the one hand, they have been unable to agree on its literary source, which has in turn hampered them in its interpretation.¹ On the other hand, in their obsession with historical origins and parallels, they have overlooked its significance within the present arrangement of Exodus. The passage has generally been treated in relative isolation, together with the rest of its hypothetical source. Otherwise, it has been considered within a covenantal framework,² ever since the discovery by Mendenhall of possible parallels between Exodus 19-24 and ancient Hittite treaties.³ While this interpretation was partially warranted by the mention of the covenant in 19:5, it failed to notice that in 19:5-6 God did not announce his intention to make a covenant with Israel, but to sanctify Israel for her liturgical mission in the world. Moreover, it tended to treat chapters 19-24 apart from 25-40, to the detriment of the latter part. This article

¹Most critical scholars assign 3^b-6 rather tenuously to D, by virtue of its supposed Deuteronomistic language. Others, such as W. Beyerlin, *Origins and History of Oldest Sinaitic Traditions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 10, 11, opt for E. More recently, D. Patrick, 'The Covenant Code Source', *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1977), 144-159, postulates a discrete source which consists of Exodus 19:3b-8; 20:22-23:19 and 24:3-8. It seems to me that M. Cross is correct in his contention that a slightly-reworked ancient epic poem lies behind the present text. See F.M. Cross, 'The Epic Traditions of Early Israel', *The Poet and the Historian*, ed. R.E. Friedman (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 21, 22.

² G.E. Mendenhall, 'Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition', *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954), 50-76.

³ See, for example, the commentary by B.S. Childs, *Exodus* (London: SCM, 1974), 364-367, and the specialized monograph by J.H. Elliot, *The Elect and the Holy* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 50-63.

attempts to interpret this momentous passage as a whole in its present literary context.⁴

A. CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

Exodus 19:2-8 comes at a pivotal point in the narrative of the book. The book falls quite naturally into two distinct parts: the story of the deliverance from Egypt with the subsequent journey to Mt Sinai in Exodus 1-18, and the story of God's appearance there in chapters 19-40. The second half of the book in turn consists of two main sections. The theophany with the inauguration of the covenant in 19:1- 24:11 is followed by the institution and construction of the tabernacle as Israel's place of worship in 24:12-40:23. This arrangement of material expresses the theology of the book. God delivered his people from Egypt so that he might dwell with them in their tabernacle, and act as their God through their worship of him there (see Exod. 29:45-46, cf. 15:13-18). The contents of our text naturally enough reflect its pivotal position. In Exodus 19:4, God summarizes what he has done for Israel as portrayed in chapters 1-18. Then in 19:5-6 he foreshadows what is about to happen, with verse 5 stating the purpose of chapters 20-24, and verse 6 stating the purpose of chapters 25-40. Our text then elucidates the theological structure of Exodus.

More immediately, the pericope is part of the instructions which God gave to Moses in Exodus 19:3-15 to prepare for his theophany in Exodus 19:16-24:11. These instructions emphasize the status of Israel as God's holy nation (5-6), the role of Moses as mediator (9), and the holiness of God (10-13). The contents of this section seem at first sight to be rather disjointed, since the divine instructions are interrupted by the recurrent ascent and descent of Moses. This has led scholars to postulate that we have here a rather rough and ready collation of sources.⁵ It seems more likely that our text makes the point that the giving of the Decalogue occurred on the same date as the Feast of Weeks, the Jewish Pentecost, which falls on the seventh day of the third month. Before this great event, there were then six days of preparation, with the arrival at Sinai on the first (19:1-2), the first ascent of Moses on the second (19:3-8^a), two further ascents on the third (8^b-9^a) and fourth days (9^b-13), and the purification of the people on the fifth and sixth days (14-15).⁶ Thus, the account connects the Sinai theophany with Israel's worship.

The text is itself a carefully-crafted unit of narrative.⁷ After record of Israel's encampment, the location of activity in Exodus 19:3-8 moves in three scenes: from the mountain to the plain and back to the mountain again. There is likewise a twofold interaction from the Lord through Moses to the people, and then from

⁴ In this I follow the new literary approach expounded so eloquently by R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981).

⁵ See, for example, M. Noth, *Exodus* (London: SCM, 1962), 153, 154.

⁶ See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 224-229, for an elaboration of this point.

⁷ See the analysis of L. Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1961), 169.

the people through Moses back to God. The events in 19:3-6 counterbalance the events in 19:7-8, so that the words of the people in 19:8 correspond with God's words in 19:4-6a. The structure and thematic development of the passage is therefore roughly as follows:

1. The Arrival of Israel at Mt Sinai: 19:2
2. The Meeting of Moses with God on the Mountain: 19:3—6
 - a. The appointment of Moses as God's representative (3)
 - b. God's proposal for Israel (4-6^a)
 - (1) a reminder of his guidance (4)
 - (2) a call for obedience to him (5^a)
 - (3) his purpose for his people (5^b-6^a)
 - c. God's command to report his proposal to Israel (6^b)
3. The Meeting of Moses with the people of Israel: 19:7-8
 - a. The report of God's proposal to Israel's leaders (7)
 - b. The unanimous acceptance of God's proposal (8^a)
 - c. The report to God of their acceptance (8^b)

B. INTERPRETATION

The pericope begins with the report of Israel's arrival at Mt Sinai in Exodus 19:2.⁸ It employs the three stock verbs for each stage of travel by speaking of 'setting out', 'arriving', and 'camping'. While the latter part of the verse may seem rather repetitious to us,⁹ it most probably refers to two separate encampments, the first somewhere in the wilderness of Sinai and the second more precisely before Mt Sinai. The name of the mountain is not given, as it is the same 'mountain of God' where Moses had received his call (3:1), been united with Aaron (4:27), and visited by Jethro (18:5). The eighth stage of Israel's journey from Egypt¹⁰ is mentioned to stress that it was God himself who had brought his people there to fulfill the promise made in 3:12. The goal of the exodus therefore becomes evident at Sinai.

⁸ The narrative is not chronologically sequential, since the events of chapter 18 are also said to occur at 'the mountain of God' (18:5). Thematically, chapter 18 belongs to the preceding chapters, while chapter 19 introduces 20-40.

⁹ The translators of the GNB were obviously worried about the apparent repetitiousness of 19:1-2, and so rearranged the material rather freely by running together the heading of 19:1 with the narrative of 19:2, and by mentioning only the final encampment at Mt Sinai.

¹⁰ The other stages are mentioned in 12:37; 13:20; 14:2; 15:22; 15:27; 16:1; 17:1.

Verse 3 begins with a disjunctive clause in Hebrew to mark the beginning of a new section of narrative.¹¹ And immediately we come across a surprising turn of phrase. From the context we would have expected Moses to go up 'the mountain', or even 'the mountain of God'.¹² That is indeed what is meant. But, instead, Moses is said to ascend 'to God'. That kind of language was used in antiquity for the journey of heroes and sages into the heavenly world, and so was generally avoided in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 30:12; Prov. 30:4). But here we have it used of the ascent of Moses on Mt Sinai. Now, mountains in the ancient world were often considered the meeting- point between heaven and earth, and so were chosen as sites by God for his appearance to his people.¹³ The notion of ascent to God was used only of Moses at Mt Sinai here and in a few other places. After the Lord's descent in a cloud upon the mountain (Exod. 19:8; 34:5), he called Moses to 'come up' to himself (Exod. 24:12; cf. Deut. 10:11), and Moses is said to have 'come up to the Lord' in Exodus 19:24, 24:1, and 32:30. It is as if Moses had thereby entered the heavenly realm, but only because heaven had come down to earth on the mountain.

The result of the ascent was that Moses heard the voice of God which commissioned him to announce God's intention for the people of Israel, just as he had previously (3:1-22) been commissioned to rescue them from slavery.¹⁴ Moses therefore became God's messenger and spokesman who reported the words of God to his people (19:3-7), as well as the words of the people back to God (19:8-15). He mediated God's revelation to the people who heard only the decalogue spoken directly to them by God (20:1-20).

Before God put his proposal to the people, he reminded them in 19:4 of what he had done for them. First, they themselves had experienced how he had defeated the Egyptians, and miraculously delivered the Israelites from their power. Secondly, he had not left them helpless and abandoned in a hostile world, but had 'carried' them along and 'brought' them to himself. Both these verbs describe God's care for his people. He had not only tolerated and led them like a shepherd with his sheep (cf. Isa. 40:11; 46:3; 63:9), but had also supported and sustained them like a father with his children (cf. Deut. 1:31).

Even more than that! He had 'brought' them to 'himself'. This expression is without parallel in the whole Old Testament, which usually speaks of God 'bringing' his people to the Promised Land (e.g. Deut. 8:7-10). The closest parallel to this is Psalm 43:3, where the psalmist implores God to let his light and truth 'bring' him to his temple. Just as God would later on bring his people into his

¹¹ It is also possible that the disjunctive clause suggests simultaneous activity. We would then translate 19:2^b-3^a: 'Israel encamped there before the mountain, while Moses went up to God.'

¹² The translators of the Septuagint may have been unhappy with this expression, as they translated it as 'the mountain of God.'

¹³ See the article on *har* by S. Talmon in *the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* Vol. III, eds G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 427-447, for the symbolic significance of mountains in Israel and the Ancient World.

¹⁴ The parallelism in the repetition of the command in 3^b is evidence of the poetic character of this passage. The Kethib of *wētaggēd* with its *yod* may stem from the transformation of this poem into continuous prose.

presence in the temple at Jerusalem for them to receive his blessings there, so he had brought them from Egypt to his presence at Mt Sinai.¹⁵ God's deliverance of the Israelites then reached its goal in the manifestation of himself to them in their worship which began at Sinai.

God's guidance of his people is described in a striking metaphor. He had carried them 'on the wings of eagles' or, more correctly, of 'vultures'.¹⁶ At first sight, the picture seems clear enough: As in Deuteronomy 32:11, the Lord is compared with a vulture which teaches its young one to fly by throwing it out of its nest, swooping down under it, if it proves unequal to the task, and allowing it to alight on its back. The image would then be of the Lord's protective care for his people. But two points argue against this realistic interpretation. First, the text mentions more than one vulture; the plural form is used. Secondly, this picture does not quite fit here. This passage does not describe the process of Israel learning to 'fly' by itself, but God's conveyance of Israel from Egypt to the holy mountain. The metaphor can perhaps be best understood more abstractly in the light of ancient oriental wisdom and iconography. In the wisdom tradition, the vulture was proverbial for its seemingly- supernatural ability to soar effortlessly from earth to heaven (Prov. 23:5; 30:19), and to live loftily in the highest places (Job 39:27-30; cf. Obad. 4; Jer. 49:16). As the largest bird in that part of the world, it was the ruler of the sky. In the iconography of the Ancient World from that period, wings of eagles or vultures were often attached as emblems to pictures of deities and persons, entities and powers. While this symbolized divine tutelage and supernatural protection in Egypt, it was a sign of transcendence and supra-mundane dominion in the Middle Eastern cultures, given to those deities and powers which ruled the heavens.¹⁷ Seen in this light, the point of the image in Exodus 19:3 seems to be that God gave the Israelites supernatural ability and power to reach Mt Sinai.¹⁸ He conducted them miraculously to his heavenly presence there.

After this summary of his performance for the Israelites, God then defined Israel's future relationship with him and announced his purpose for them in 19:5-6^a. These words were both promise and demand, for the people were to act in a way which is consistent with their God-given status and role. But before he did that, he outlined the means for the fulfillment of their mission as those whom he had brought to himself and so given access to his presence.

¹⁵ In the article on *bō* in the *TDOT* Vol. II (op. cit., 1975), H.D. Preuss maintains on verse 25 that this singular expression, which was probably cultic in origin, described the admission of Israel to God's presence in worship rather than their travel to the mountain.

¹⁶ See the informative article on *nāešaēr* by T. Kronholm in the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament (TWAT)* Vol. V (eds G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren and H.J. Fabry (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), 680-689.

¹⁷ O. Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 84-85, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977) examines the use and sense of this iconographical motif, in 194-216. See especially his summary of the evidence in 215,216.

¹⁸ The point of the image is similar to the point of the corresponding simile in Isa. 40:31, where the promise is given that God will give his crippled people in exile supernatural strength to 'fly' home to him on Zion.

The sense of the conditional clause here has often been mistaken. Since it presupposes the existence of the covenant, it can hardly give the conditions for the covenant, as is usually maintained,¹⁹ but rather for the operation of Israel as a kingdom of priests. Nor is it to be taken as if God makes Israel's election, or even future existence, dependent on her obedience. It does not so much warn against disobedience as present Israel's mission as a matter of choice for her. Even though Israel did not choose to become God's people, she could choose whether to carry out his mission or not.²⁰ The covenant with the Decalogue in 20:1-17, the subsequent ordinances in 21:1-23:19, and the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle in 25:1-31:19, regulated the life and mission of Israel as God's holy nation. By listening to the voice of God and keeping his covenant with its liturgical and ethical requirements, she would fulfill her vocation as a nation. More exactly, God would be able to use her to fulfill his purposes for her. The success of Israel's ministry, then, depended on her attitude to God's word and her obedience to his covenant.

Israel's mission in the world is defined in two ways. In the first place, she is God's 'own possession', and she must act accordingly. The Hebrew word for this denotes the private property or personal savings of an individual.²¹ To appreciate the force of this expression, we need to imagine an ancestral estate in Ancient Israel where the whole extended family owned the land collectively, together with its assets and produce. In that case, this word is used for the personal property of a wife or child or servant, which that person owned exclusively and could dispose of unilaterally. The picture, however, does not exactly fit God's possession of Israel, since God is the owner of everything. But the point of it seems to be that, even though he owned the whole world with all its nations as his hereditary estate by right of creation, he has gained Israel for himself by his personal initiative and effort.²² He purchased her at great cost to himself from the Egyptians and their gods. He therefore not only treasured her greatly as his most prized possession, but also reserved her for his exclusive use. Like a king with his royal estates, he could use it for his own pleasure rather than for public purposes. His association with Israel was governed by grace rather than by legality.

¹⁹ See, for example, the interpretation of Childs, 366,367.

²⁰ R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God* (JSOT Suppl. 22, Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), gives this explanation (227):

'In Ex. 19:5, however, the relationship between obeying God's voice and being his possession is not that between an action and its subsequent result. The protasis is a *definition* of the requirements of the position or vocation designated by the titles of the apodosis; it explains what being God's people means. To break the requirements of the protasis ... would not mean subsequently ceasing to be God's people. Rather, the act of unfaithfulness itself would be a denial of their position as God's people. But such a denial of their status need not entail the abrogation of that status.'

²¹ For what follows, see the article on *segullāh* by E. Lipinski *TWAT* Vol. V, op. cit., 749-752. The word is used similarly in Deut. 7:6; 14:2 and 26:18 to describe Israel's relationship with God. In each of these cases it occurs in a cultic context where Israel's holiness is mentioned as well.

²² God usually describes Israel as his inheritance or, more correctly, his hereditary estate. *Segullāh* is used here to emphasize God's direct initiative in creating Israel, as well as her 'sentimental' value to him.

Since Israel belonged to God, he had the right to honour or use her as he pleased. He therefore bestowed a unique privilege and responsibility on her as a nation, one which distinguished her from all other nations: He appointed her as his priestly kingdom and holy nation.²³ Since this comes in a passage of poetry, these two terms complement each other. The Hebrew word for 'kingdom' normally denotes the institution of the monarchy. This includes the royal court with all its personnel and administrative apparatus, controlled by the king and used by him in ruling his people. But the word can also denote the area and people ruled by a king. Israel was God's kingdom in these two senses of the word. Not only was she ruled by God as her divine monarch, but she worked with him in his royal administration on earth.

However, as his administration, the people of Israel differed from normal courtiers and administrators in the Ancient World. They acted as priests rather than as political functionaries. In Ancient Israel, priests were custodians of God's presence first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. They served as mediators between God and his people. On the one hand, they brought the needs of the people to God in sacrifice and prayer. On the other hand, they administered the judgment and grace of God to his people in word and ritual gesture. Israel's mission in the world was something like that. Since she had access to God's gracious presence in the tabernacle after its dedication at Mt Sinai, she could not only obtain God's blessing for herself, but also mediate it to other nations.²⁴

Israel's mission then was liturgical rather than political. Her worship of the living God determined not only her status and identity, but also her vocation and task. As a priestly nation she was holy. God himself sanctified her by the blood sprinkled on her after her acceptance of God's proposal in Exodus 24:3-8, just as the priests were sanctified by the blood sprinkled on them at their ordination (Exod. 29:19-21). After that, they were kept holy and shared God's own holiness by virtue of their participation in the worship at the tabernacle (29:38-46). God's promise to make Israel a holy nation was fulfilled by his gift of worship to her. She

²³ Since 'priests' stands in the absolute case, it must qualify 'kingdom', which is the main idea. 'Priests' is probably to be understood as an abstract plural with a similar grammatical function to 'holy'. It does not refer to a kingdom which consists of many priests, but rather to a 'priestly kingdom'. The interpretation of this singular phrase, whose nearest parallel expression is in Isa. 61:6, has been a matter of some controversy. The various possibilities are given rather succinctly by G.J. Botterweck in the article on *gôy* on page 430 of the *TDOT* Vol. II. It is now generally agreed that 'kingdom' and 'nation' are complementary institutional terms for Israel as a political entity. Only here is Israel called a 'holy nation'. She is, however, termed a 'holy people' in Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9 and Isa. 62:12. The stress here, as in 1 Pet. 2:5,9, is on the corporate rather than the individual holiness and priestliness of God's people. Whatever its precise sense may be, this passage does assert the primacy of worship over politics in God's purpose for his people.

²⁴ I cannot agree with the exegesis given by Elliot (op. cit., 50-63) on this passage. He maintains that the governing idea is that of Israel as a holy nation with access to God. He therefore takes 'kingdom' in a passive sense as the people ruled by the heavenly King. Israel is therefore priestly in that, like the priests, it enjoyed the status of holiness. He concludes: 'An emphasis not upon priestly function but rather upon a priestly relationship to JHWH is the concern.' It seems to me that one cannot so deftly separate status and function, privilege and responsibility. How could a person be a priest without functioning as a priest?

served the divine King and administered his royal business by her liturgical involvement and mediation. That was her unique privilege and responsibility. And she fulfilled this liturgical mission as long as she listened to the voice of her God.

Moses did as the Lord commanded in Exodus 19:3-6. He went down and set God's offer before the elders of the people (19:7), their natural leaders. The elders consisted of the heads of all the households and clans in the tribes of Israel. As the legal representatives of their families, they considered the matter and gave their consent to it.²⁵ God's mission was therefore not imposed on Israel. Moses reported the proposal to them exactly as he was told. Then all the people willingly accepted it, and they did so unanimously. After that, Moses finally returned to the mountain to report Israel's acceptance of her vocation.

C. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS IN PREPARATION FOR PREACHING

1. This text clearly expresses the priority of God's grace in his dealings with Israel. Her existence as God's people was entirely God's doing. He rescued her from slavery and extermination in Egypt; after that, he guided and sustained her miraculously. She owed everything to him. This, then, was the basis for God's demand that she hear his voice and keep his covenant. Yet even this demand was not meant to make her future existence dependent on her obedience. Rather, only by her willing cooperation and active involvement would she enjoy still greater privileges and blessings from God. She would be drawn into intimacy with him and share his holiness. The same is true for us. As St Paul reminds us in Romans 5:6-11, we have been saved by grace. What's more, the subsequent demands of God on us are the demands of grace. They have to do with our sanctification rather than justification. As God's people, we have been redeemed like Israel for the privilege of serving him (Titus 2:14).
2. Moses played the key role in God's dealings with his people in this story. He acted as mediator between God and them. He moved, as it were, between heaven and earth by ascending and descending the mountain of God. His activity as mediator was verbal. He spoke God's word to his people and brought their response back to God. This role of his was unique in the Old Testament. But we have a far greater mediator in Christ (Heb. 3:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:5). He descended from heaven to earth and then ascended from earth to heaven to bring the Father to us and us to the Father. As our mediator, he did not merely speak the word of God to us, but was himself the Word of God (John 1:1). Moreover, as our mediator, he instituted the new covenant and worship of God for us on the night before his death. In our worship he now mediates between the Father and

²⁵ Their consent is reaffirmed in 24:3, and then again even more strongly in 24:7, after the declaration of the Decalogue in 20:1-17 and the communication of the ordinances in the book of the covenant in 21:1-19.

us as our great High Priest (Heb. 7:25). As with Moses, a particular mountain played an important part in his ministry. There he not only met with his heavenly Father in prayer (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; John 6:15), was transfigured before the chosen three (Luke 9:28, cf. 2 Peter 1:18), and appeared to his disciples after his resurrection (Matt. 28:16), but he also called the twelve (Mark 3:13; Luke 6:12), taught his disciples (Matt. 5:1; 8:1), healed the sick, fed the crowd (Matt. 15:29-38; John 6:3), and commissioned the twelve (Matt. 28:16—20). Our holy mountain which we ascend with Jesus is the celebration of the liturgy in the Church (Heb. 12:22-24).

3. The purpose of God's deliverance was achieved by the gift of his presence with his people in the tabernacle (Exod. 29:42-46). God retrieved his people from the concentration camps in Egypt in order to bring them to himself in their worship of him. Israel's worship was, therefore, never a matter of her performance; it was divine benefaction. In it, God gave his presence and blessings to his people, like a king who holds an open audience at his palace for all his subjects, and grants them their requests.

God's dealings with his people reached their goal in Israel's worship. Even the covenant which God made with his people at Mt Sinai was not an end in itself but was meant to promote the orthodoxy of Israel's worship. Like Israel we have been redeemed to worship the Triune God. The goal of Christ's death for us is given in the institution of Holy Communion. The new covenant then centres on the Lord's Supper where our heavenly Father carries us on the wings of Christ our eagle, and brings us to his heavenly presence (Heb. 10:19-22). Through divine worship we who are holy in Christ share in God's own holiness here on earth.

4. God proclaimed the nature and mission of his people in Exodus 19:3-6. On the one hand, he conferred great privileges on them. By giving them access to himself in their worship, he showed how greatly he esteemed them, and how much he wished them to enjoy intimacy with him. Like priests they could receive many blessings from his holy presence. Like courtiers who ate and drank at the King's table, they could enjoy life at the court of their heavenly King. They were therefore most important people. On the other hand, God gave them far-reaching responsibilities. They were responsible for his worship on earth. As a holy nation, they were to act as his royal administration; as his priests they were to serve him and only him. This required attention to his word and obedience to his directives, for they were to worship him as he commanded, and represent him to the nations of the world. Even though they were happy to accept God's proposal, the Bible shows how they failed in their liturgical mission which was ultimately fulfilled by Christ himself.

Like Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ is a liturgical community, constituted by and for the worship of the Triune God. It derives its identity and receives its mission from its glorified Lord who is present with it in its worship. In him we are holy. By him we enter the kingdom of his Father, so

that, like the apostles in Matthew 10:1-16, we too share in his royal ministry and work with him in the administration of his Father's gracious rule.

Through him we corporately are members of God's royal priesthood, with the privilege of access to his presence and the responsibility for mediation between God and the people around us (Rev. 1:5). By our prayers we bring them and their needs to our Father (1 Tim. 2:1-6). By our proclamation and presence, we bring the Father and his grace to them (1 Peter 2:9; Matt. 10:40). In this way we serve God and reign with him on earth (Rev. 5:10). That is our liturgical mission.

5. In a sermon on this text, I would concentrate on the privilege and responsibility of divine worship. Here is a suggested outline:
 - a. Introduction: What is the purpose of our existence?
 - (1) Our own goals
 - (2) Worship as God's purpose for us
 - b. The Privilege of Worship
 - (1) The Father's initiative in bringing us to himself through his Son
 - 2) Membership in his royal family through his Son
 - (3) Sharing in God's presence and holiness through his Son
 - c. Our Responsibility in Worship.
 - (1) The need for obedience in our vocation
 - (2) Bringing others and needs to God in worship
 - (3) Bringing God and his grace to others in our daily life