

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 10

Chapters 17-19

In the wilderness of Sin, which contains within its boundaries Mount Sinai, the Israelites were treated to their first meal of quail in the afternoon and manna for bread in the morning. Soon after that occurred, the LORD began allowing the Israelites to move in groups and in stages to Rephidim.

Wilderness to Rephidim

Exodus 17:1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink.

When Moses records that the “**sons of Israel journeyed by stages ... and camped at Rephidim,**” we need to look at the record in Numbers 33:12-14 to understand what is meant by “stages.” There we find the following.

Numbers 33:12-14 And they journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and camped at Dophkah. And they journeyed from Dophkah, and camped at Alush. And they journeyed from Alush, and camped at Rephidim; now it was there that the people had no water to drink.

Therefore, the Israelites made two stops on the way from where the LORD began giving them manna to eat and where they grumbled about having no water at Rephidim. We do not know where these two settlements are but we do know where Rephidim is located. It is in the wilderness/desert of Horeb, the place where Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro just four months before when he saw the burning bush on the mountain of God which is also called Mount Sinai. In the large clearing in the wilderness of Horeb is the split rock that clearly shows where a stream of water has eroded the terrain into a streambed. The issue at hand is that no source of water exists at the rock. It is a solid rock. For many years the stream flowed to



Picture 32: Split Rock at the location called Rephidim. Mount Sinai (top left) Blue line Mount Sinai. White line split rock at Horeb, Yellow line, distance from split rock to Mt Sinai.

provide water for the Israelites. Water was never there before and it has not been there since! That clearing in the wilderness is just eight miles from Mount Sinai. In the top left corner of picture 32, Mount Sinai can be seen in the distance behind the split rock. That is the location of Rephidim. No settlement existed there before the Israelites and none has existed since their time there.

Quarrel With Moses

Exodus 17:2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

The translation says, "Why do you quarrel with me?" The King James Version uses the word *quibble* and it is a better word in this case. The people were thirsty and they were nitpicking Moses at every turn about their needs with the same complaint, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us ... ?"

The Rock at Horeb

Exodus 17:4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." ⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

The miracle of the water from the stone was not to be a secret occurrence. "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go" the LORD said to Moses. "You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." It was to be another miracle for the rebellious and faithless people! The place was called "Massah and Meribah" Massah means *trial* and Meribah means *litigation*. The people had put the LORD on trial in Rephidim. In the litigation, the LORD prevailed with an undeniable miracle that would provide for the people's thirst. The names of the place belonged to the Israelites; they were not Midianite names that would remain with the land after they left.

The event at this rock became a major point in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6 ¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-

pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.

Attack by Amalek

Exodus 17:8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.

It would have seemed that the masses of humanity in the clearing at Horeb would have been safe 10 miles or so off the major trade route, but they were not! The nation of Amalek attacked them. The Amalekites were the descendants of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, which meant that they were cousins of the Israelites. Their homeland was several miles to the north of Rephidim. The Amalekites came prepared.

Moses to Joshua

Exodus 17:9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." ¹⁰ And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ¹³ So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

For the first time in the Scripture we meet Joshua. In Numbers, his name is first mentioned as Hoshea but Moses addresses him as Joshua in almost every instance. In Greek, his name is translated as Jesus. Why? Because under his leadership, he will be the savior who leads the people in many ways. He is not to be confused with the ultimate Jesus, our LORD and Savior, but he is to be used by the LORD to lead the Israelites through many victories in the future. From this point on, as long as Joshua lives, he will be the general of the army of Israel.

We also meet Hur in this passage. He was the son of Caleb, who was the son of Ezron, who was the son of Pharez, who was the son of Judah. He was not of the lineage of Levi as Moses and Aaron were. We must remember that the priestly line was not set up at this time in the story.

Although we would like to create some significant interpretation as to why the lifting and lowering of the hands of Moses determined the fate of the battle, we cannot. It was simply the instruction of the LORD for the victory in this battle. If it showed anything, it was that even Moses had to be faithful to the LORD in his leadership as was expected of the nation as a whole.

Write in a Book

Exodus 17:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

Herein is the first mention of the LORD's instruction to Moses to make a record of all the events. But Moses was not to do it in private; he was to **"recite it to Joshua."** Even at this early time in the journey in the wilderness, Joshua was to be fully aware of everything Moses was doing and

thinking. Moses may have been the leader, Aaron may have been the spokesman, but Joshua would one day take on the authority of both their duties when the LORD put him in charge 40 years later. He was a general in training to be the ultimate earthly leader of the clans of the Israelites.

War Against Amalek

Exodus 17:15 And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner;¹⁶ and he said, " The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."

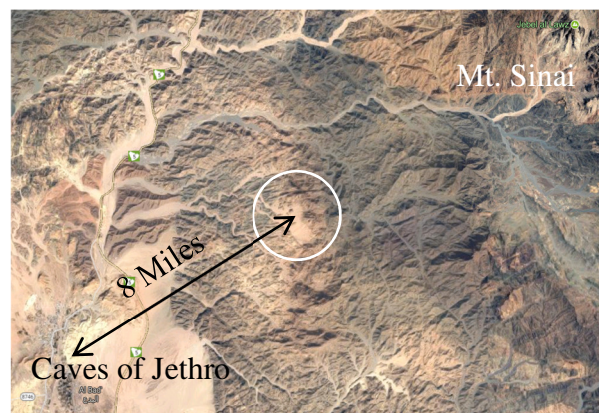
Most have heard the preachers speak about *Jehovah Nissi*; that name is found in Hebrew in this passage translated **"The LORD is My Banner."** This name simply means that *the LORD is Moses' sign*. The LORD performs the miracles and He is the One Who directs the life and leadership of Moses as we should all allow Him to do in our lives. We should look to the LORD for our sign, our direction, our instruction, our hope, our desire, our lives.

In this passage, Moses was to write that the Amalekites would be a thorn in the side of the Israelites for many generations. As the Bible attests, it is a true statement.

Jethro, Zipporah and Sons Join Moses

Exodus 18:1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.² And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away,³ and her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."⁴ And the other was named Eliezer, for he said, " The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."⁵ Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God.⁶ And he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."

We do not know when Zipporah returned to her father's house. Perhaps it was on the way to Egypt after she circumcised her son in Exodus 4. Perhaps Moses had sent her to visit with her father when the whole nation of Israel passed by the caves of Jethro just a few days before. We simply do not know the answer. Nevertheless, somehow and in some way, the message of all the events that had transpired since Jethro gave permission for Moses to go to Egypt about four months before it was told to him. Jethro's home was not far away from Rephidim. As the text said, Jethro sent word to Moses that he was coming to bring Moses' family to him. It also states that Jethro met Moses at **"the mount of God."** This reference means *Mount Sinai*. We must not be so nitpicky in our evaluation of this



Picture 33: Caves of Jethro to Rephidem

passage. Clearly, Rephidim was eight miles from Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. Yet, from the split rock at Rephidim in the wilderness of Horeb, Mount Sinai was clearly visible in the background. When the passage states that Jethro met Moses at the mountain of God, it is true that he met Moses in the foothills below and west of the mount.

Moses Greets Family

Exodus 18:7 Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare, and went into the tent. ⁸ And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the LORD had delivered them. ⁹ And Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians.

Moses was a respectful man; here, he shows the common respect due a father-in-law. This same respectful greeting of bowing and kissing was seen with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was a common tradition. In Moses' tent, the two, and perhaps all of Moses' immediate family joined in the retelling of all that Jethro had already heard but was now hearing from the leader himself. The Midianites did not think kindly of the Egyptians and the story this Midianite priest was hearing for the second time was great news to his ears.

Blessing of Jethro

Exodus 18:10 So Jethro said, " Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people."

Jethro was a priest of gods unknown to us. Nevertheless, he had recognized that the God of the mountain of Sinai was the God of gods. His gods could not have accomplished what Moses' God did in the past four months. Jethro had never had a personal encounter with his gods because they were figments of man's imagination, but Moses' God was real!

Family Meal

Exodus 18:12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God. ¹³ And it came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening.

Priests did what priests did, they made sacrificial meals to gods. In this case, Jethro made a sacrificial meal to the God of gods, Moses' God and most likely Jethro's new God. Aaron and the elders joined in the meal. But the next day, Jethro was disturbed by what he saw occurring with his son-in-law from morning until afternoon. Moses was overrun with complaints and arguments among the people in the tribes.

Jethro's Suggestion

Exodus 18:14 Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵ And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor, and make known the statutes of God and His laws." ¹⁷ And Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ " You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹ "Now listen to me: I shall give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, ²⁰ then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do. ²¹ "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² "And let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. ²³ "If you do this thing and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."

This whole passage was just a suggestion from a concerned father-in-law to his over-worked son-in-law. The most important part of this passage is that Jethro recognized that Moses would need God's approval before delegating authority to others.

Moses Selects Men to Help

Exodus 18:24 So Moses listened to his father-in-law, and did all that he had said. ²⁵ And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²⁶ And they judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge.

We do not know here whether or not Moses sought authority from the LORD to organize the people in this manner, but Moses did as Jethro suggested. Later the LORD will take credit for the organization. As such, Moses became the ultimate judge when all the other levels of judges could not handle a situation. In this action, the seed of the Sanhedrin was established in the Scripture.

Jethro Returned to His Home

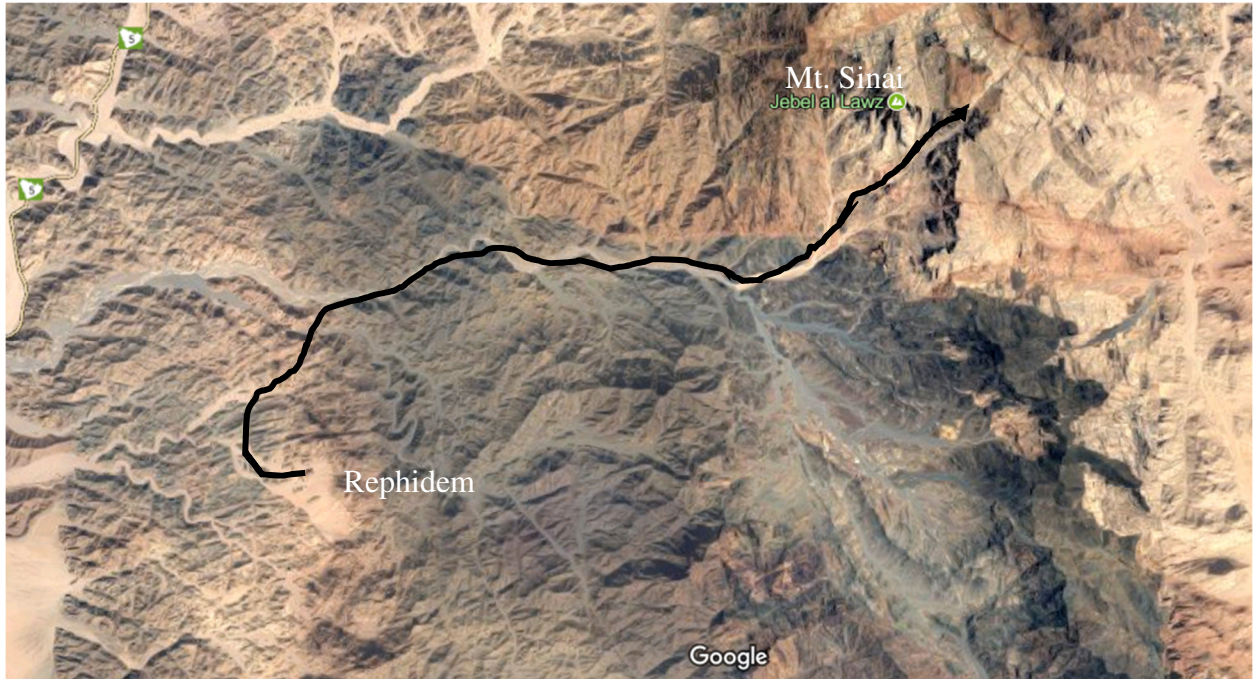
Exodus 18:27 Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

Jethro did not stay with the Israelites in the wilderness; his home was just eight miles away in the carved caves on the major trade route through the land of Midian. Jethro was a priest of Midian and the rest of his family and followers needed him in their village.

Third Month at Sinai

Exodus 19:1 In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.

On the 15th day of the third month, 90 days after leaving Egypt, the Israelites left Rephidim and camped nearer the mountain of Sinai, “**in front of the mountain.**” This meant that they camped on the east side of Mount Sinai.



Picture 33: Likely route from Rephidim to Mt Sinai

Moses and God on the Mountain

Exodus 19:3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴ ' You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵ 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

No doubt, Moses was back on the mountain where he had met the LORD for the first time about six months before. The people were in the clearing on the east side of the foot of the mountain and Moses was high above with the LORD. For the first time in the Scripture we see that the LORD promised to establish Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Surely, we knew from the LORD's encounters with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He had a special plan for this assembly but no one ever expected Israel to be established as a holy nation and a royal

priesthood to this extent, a promise not made to any other people. Peter, in his letter to the Jewish nations after the formation of the church states,

1 Peter 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Nevertheless, the nation of Israel has continued to fail the LORD in fulfilling this gift to them. They have disappointed the LORD, rejected Him, trusted in God but not in His plan and spurned the same LORD Who took them out of Egypt when He came in the flesh to be their Savior.

Moses Returns to Elders

Exodus 19:7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ And all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

Finally, the people are in one accord and willing to meet the LORD who delivered them from Egypt. It is interesting that Moses recorded in this passage that he delivered the message of the people's decision to the LORD on the mountain, as if the LORD did not already know their choice!

LORD to Speak from Thick Cloud

Exodus 19:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

For the first time, the Israelites who left Egypt would hear the voice of the LORD from the thick cloud, the same cloud that had been leading and protecting them for more than 90 days, as He did for 430 years while they and their ancestors were in Egypt.

How to Approach Mountain of God

Exodus 19:10 The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹ and 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. ¹² "And you 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. ¹³ 'No 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." ¹⁴ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵ And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

Moses was told to "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments." The people were about to meet their LORD and they were to do so as a consecrated and clean nation. To "consecrate" means to be devoted to the worship and service

of God; it also means to be set apart from anything that could cause sin to enter one's heart and life. The people were to be clean when they stood before the LORD from head to toe with garments unstained by filth of any kind. The process was to take two days.

The LORD also instructed Moses to **“set bounds for the people all around”** Mount Sinai. We do not know how he did this; nevertheless, it was his task. The boundary could not be crossed and there was a grave penalty for touching the mountain beyond the boundary; it was death. The LORD instructed Moses that **“whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.”** Neither man nor beast was ever to cross the boundary. Only Moses and Aaron could cross that line and live. The penalty was to be stoned or shot through with an arrow or spear.

The LORD also gave the following instruction, **“Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”** During the time of purification, sexual relations were off limits. Why? We do not know exactly. A great difference lies between a woman and a wife within the Scripture. Solomon speaks of it in his Song and the book of Ecclesiastes. By the time he penned the words to the Song of Solomon he had married 60 women as queens and partook of 80 concubines but when he found the woman to be his wife, she turned him down cold. A wife was part of a man after the marriage, the half that made the man a whole. Surely this passage does not refer to the relations between a husband and wife, but we simply do not know. We can say for sure that it refers to a relationship between a man and woman who are not married!

The Third Day at the Foot of the Mountain

Exodus 19:16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

On the third day, a storm gathered on the mountain and there was **“a very loud trumpet sound.”** We can assume that the trumpet was not man-made nor was it blown by a human. It was a sound from the LORD's realm announcing His arrival on the mountain. The storm and the blast of the trump was enough to strike great fear in the hearts of the people in the camp. Moses led the people to the boundary line at the mountain and there they waited for the voice of the LORD to speak.

The LORD Descended Upon the Mountain

Exodus 19:18 Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹ When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. ²⁰ And the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

The statement that the “**whole mountain quaked violently,**” does not mean that Mount Sinai was a volcano as many theologians and Bible students have assumed in the past. Supposing that the mount was a volcano actually led ancient archeologist to look only at volcanos when trying to discover the location of Mount Sinai. Therefore, they looked at the area between the two forks of the Red Sea and even named the land mass the Sinai Peninsula because of the incorrect assumption. Had they used the Scripture in their search, they would have known that Mount Sinai was in Arabia according to Paul in Galatians 4:25.

The trumpet did not blast just once but it “**grew louder and louder.**” Such a sound out of heaven had never been heard before. When Moses called out to God, He answered him in the hearing of the entire camp stationed outside the boundary lines. When the LORD called Moses, he crossed the line and went up into the cloud that covered the mountain where the people could not see him. There, the two spoke.

Instructions About the Mountain

Exodus 19:21 **Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. ²² "And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." ²³ And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for Thou didst warn us, saying, ' Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" ²⁴ Then the LORD said to him, " Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break forth upon them." ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.**

When the LORD says, “**And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves ... but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD,**” He is not contradicting Himself. The LORD wanted the priests to be at the front of the people at the boundary line. This is a curious instruction because the priests have not been designated yet as far as the priestly line descending from Aaron. However, there were surely priests among the people and they were most likely the elders or patriarchs of each family whom Moses and Aaron met in Egypt at the beginning before the plagues.