

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 19

EXODUS

CHAPTERS 23B-24

INTRODUCTION

Having given the laws and judgements concerning the Israelites' relationship with God, the next step was to ratify the covenant God made with His people. God's promises to protect His people from their enemies and to guide their journey to the Promised Land is conditioned on their total obedience to Him. Their worship of the LORD God must be true. True worship requires complete separation from idolatry as well as doing that which God desires and wills. God promised to provide for them and to protect them against their enemies in their journey to the land, which God had prepared for them.

The laws and judgements, which God gave them, were permanently inscribed in "the book of covenant". This is significant in that the people could read and know God's desires and will for His people at any time. In so doing, their fellowship with God would not be broken and would ensure God's provision and protection. Knowledge of and obedience to the will of God results in His blessings

and intervention on their behalf. Another significant point is that of the sealing of the covenant with the blood of the sacrifices. A special worship involving Aaron and his sons (Aaron and his descendants would be appointed as priests to the people), and seventy elders who represented the people.

Paul said that *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope* (Romans 15:4). This moment of history of God's dealing with His people, Israel, affords many precious spiritual lessons that are relevant and applicable to Christians today.

OUTLINE

A. LAWS RELATING TO SETTLING IN THE PROMISED LAND (EXODUS 23:20-33)

1. God would send an angel to lead and guide them (23:20)
2. God instructed them to obey the leadership of the angel (23: 21-23)
 - a. The declaration of the need to obey (v.21)
 - b. The promise of divine support (v.22)
 - c. The assurance of victory over the enemies (v.23)
3. God warned them not to worship the Canaanite gods but worship

only the LORD their God (23:24-26)

a. The Israelites were commanded not to worship the native gods but to utterly destroy them (v.24)

b. If the Israelites worship only the LORD God, they and their land would be abundantly blessed (v.25-26)

4. God would ensure the Israelites' victory in their battles in the land of Canaan (23:27-31)

a. God would send His "fear" before the Israelites so that they would be victorious (vv.27, 28)

b. God revealed that they would progressively possessed the land (vv.29-30)

c. God indicated to them the boundaries of the land (v.31)

5. God warned the Israelites not to make any covenant with the Canaanites (23:32-33)

a. The Israelites must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land (v.32)

b. The Israelites must drive out the Canaanites out of the land completely (v.33)

B. THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE COVENANT (24:1-8)

1. The LORD'S appointed leaders and witnesses to His covenant He made with Israel (24:1-2)

a. Moses, the spokesman of the LORD (v.1a)

b. Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu, who were later were appointed priests (v.1b)

c. The seventy elders of Israel were witnesses to the making of the covenant (v.1c)

d. Moses only might approach nearer to the LORD (v.2)

2. The book of the covenant (24:3-4)

a. Moses read all the words of the LORD and the people promised to obey (24:3)

b. Moses wrote all the words of the LORD in a book (24:4a)

3. The offering of sacrifices (24:5-6)

a. Moses and the people offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to the LORD (v.5)

b. Moses sprinkled the blood on the altar (v.6)

4. The covenant reaffirmed (24:7, 8)

a. Moses read again the all the words of the LORD from the book to the people (v.7)

b. Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the people (v.8)

C. THE GLORY OF THE LORD COVERED MOUNT SINAI (24:9-18)

1. Moses and Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders were called up to the mountain (24:9)
2. They “saw God” (24:10-11)
3. Moses went further up the mountain to receive the tables of stone wherein the law and the commandments were written by God (24:12-14)
4. The glory of the LORD rested on mount Sinai (24:15-18)
 - a. Moses ascended onto the top of the mountain (v.15)
 - b. The glory of the LORD covered the mountain for six days (vv.16, 17)
 - c. Moses was in the midst of the cloud for forty days and nights (v.18)

COMMENTARY

The Angel of the LORD

Having given them good laws and judgements relating to their communal life and how they ought to worship God, God declared to them that He would send “an angel” who would proceed before them to protect them in the way, and to lead them to the Promised Land (23:20). The identity of the angel can be discerned by careful examination of the text. Although the original word in Hebrew means “a messenger”, he was

no ordinary personality¹. First, the injunction to the Israelites to obey and not to provoke him. Second, the fact that he had the power to forgive and not to forgive sins. No one can forgive or remit sins except God². Third, the Name of Yahweh was in him. The text states that “my name is in him” (23:21b). Observe first the personal pronoun “my” used here. This indicates an inter-personal relationship between the LORD God and the angel. In addition, to have the name of the LORD in him means that he represents all the authority, power, and presence of the LORD God³. Fourth, the angel’s authority was unquestionable. The LORD’S blessings upon the Israelites were dependent on their complete obedience to him. There is no recourse for appeal. There was finality in the action of the “angel”. In view of these facts, was he *an* angel of the LORD or the second person of the trinity, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ? All the indications point to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether the Israelites visibly saw the angel in person or how He communicated with them is not mentioned, but that is beside the point. The presence of the angel was always with them and went ahead of them, and that he communicated with them. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ

¹ It is said that this angel could be ascribed to Moses or Joshua (Alan Cole, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Exodus*, 181).

² Mark 2:7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

³Psalm 118:10 All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.

promised that He would be with us always⁴. Although the Lord Jesus Christ is not visibly and physically with His people, His presence is always with them. Have we not heard of how the Lord shows to us that He is with us in times of our need — deliverance from a near fatal accident, providing for the next meal, punishing the enemy who threatens to hurt the Christian, opening doors of opportunity and advancement, and many more. If only we would be diligent to see in faith and not be unbelieving and taking a lot of things for granted that we may know that the Lord our God has always been with us. How our faith, love and service to Him can be strengthened.

God made it crystal clear that only obedience to Him would ensure His protection, provision and guidance. If they obeyed the LORD, He would deliver them from their enemies and adversaries. Moreover, God specifically warned them that they should not bow to or serve the gods of the inhabitants of the land, instead they should destroy their idols and images (23:24). They must not in any way compromise and make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for these people would surely be “a snare” unto them. What is a snare? In a metaphorical sense, making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and their gods would lure the Israelites from worshipping and serving

⁴ Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

the LORD their God, and this apostasy would destroy them. A snare lures, traps and destroys. How many Christians today have been snared by the false attractions and promises of the world today, and their faith destroyed!⁵ Indeed, Israel’s greatest danger in their journey to the Promised Land was not physical but moral. It was their moral faithfulness and submission to God alone and nothing else that was as vital.

God’s Promises Are Sure

It is amazing when we read of the extent to which God was prepared to protect, provide and preserve His people. Look at the list of “I wills”:

I will be an enemy unto thine enemies (23:22),

I will cut them off (23:23),

He (the LORD God) shall bless thy bread and thy water (23:25a),

I will take sickness away from the midst of thee (23:25b),

The number of your days will I fulfil (23:26),

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come (23:27a),

I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee (23:27b),

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivites (23:28),

I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river (23:31a),

I will deliver the inhabitants of the land unto your hand (23:31b).

What a comprehensive list: guidance in their journey so that they would reach the Promised Land; provision of food and water; preservation from illnesses and diseases; protection from their enemies and adversaries; and the destruction of all those who opposed them! God stopped at nothing to bless His people for He loves and cares for His own. We learn a precious lesson here. We are reminded of the inspired word of Paul, *If God be for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31b). We need to heed the commandment of God: to love and serve Him only, and none else; and do His will.

Ratification of the Covenant

God called Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, two oldest sons of Aaron, and the seventy elders of Israel, to go up to the mountain. God had given the covenant laws to Moses who had been commanded to write them in a book, called the “book of covenant” (24:7). The worship of God was an essential part of the covenant. This part involved Aaron, and his two sons Nadab and Abihu.⁶

⁶ It is appropriate at this juncture to mention that Nadab and Abihu would have succeeded his father Aaron in the priestly service unto the LORD. But their sin of offering “a strange fire” disqualified them

The seventy elders who were representatives of the people were involved, for they had the responsibility of administration and government. We see a broad three-level leadership. Moses who was called by God to be His spokesman. The priesthood, which is headed by Aaron and his descendants serving as mediators between God and the people and assisted the people in the proper worship of the LORD. The seventy elders, representing the people, served as judges of the people who brought to them their problems. This three-tier leadership serves as a good pattern for the administration and government of churches today. Their counterparts would probably be the pastor, responsible for the ministry of the Word and prayer, and the general oversight of the church; the elders, responsible for the spiritual growth and order of the church; and the deacons responsible for the various works of the church. This is akin to the New Testament pattern, though it may not be so clearly defined, but has developed through the history of church. The ratification of the covenant involved two steps. Moses told the people of the judgements and laws of the LORD and the people made an unconditional commitment to obey. Then Moses wrote the laws and judgements in the book of

from the privilege of serving as priests (Leviticus 10:1, 2--*And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. 2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*

covenant. Once again, Moses read the laws and judgement to the people and they repeated their previous commitment to obey. This is the first step. Then the people offered burnt sacrifices upon the altar built by Moses unto the LORD. Moses took the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkled on the people and pronounced: *Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words* (24:8b). This sprinkling of the blood upon the people became an official sign of sealing the covenant treaty. The sealing of the covenant climaxed in a covenant meal participated by the representatives of the people, they “ate and drank” (24:11). We see a parallel in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed for all those who will come to Him and confess Him as their Lord and Saviour. They are sealed with His precious blood, a sign of the covenant promise God made with all believers. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper to commemorate His atoning death, resurrection, and second coming⁷.

They Saw God

The exact nature of the appearance of God on this mountain top is not described to us, except the reference to “his feet” (24:10) and “his hand” (24:11). It can be said that it was an actual sight of God, not the full picture though. Although some have

⁷1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this ^{cup}, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

attempted to surmise that God could have appeared a king sitting on His throne, it is best not to go beyond the limits given in Exodus 33:20-23:

And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

The closest correct understanding of this appearance of God would be the suggestion that they saw the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The presence of God as experienced by Moses and the others served as a very important boost to those who were up there. They received the assurance that God would be present with them all the time in their journeying.

The Glory of God

The LORD called Moses up the mountain. This time it was Moses alone. Aaron, his sons and the elders were to remain with the people. If they had any matter to resolve, they could approach Aaron and Hur. One person was allowed to accompany Moses to the top of the mountain, and he was Joshua, who was later to be God’s appointed successor to

Moses⁸. A cloud covered the mountain top. Moses waited and beheld the cloud. Then on the seventh day, God called Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the *glory of the LORD* was “like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain” before the eyes of the people of Israel down below. Moses alone moved up and stepped into the midst of the cloud. Apparently Joshua remained where he was, near the top, but not in the midst of the cloud.

It defies the human mind to even try to describe the glory of God. At best, we know of the brilliance of the appearance, just like the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mount, “his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 17:2). God appeared here as a consuming fire, indicating His holiness and hatred of sin. The inspired composer of Psalm 97, describes to us the majesty, brilliance, awesomeness and holiness of the glory of God.

SUMMARY

This section ends the second major part of the book of Exodus. The laws and judgements God gave to His

people were for their own progress and prosperity. By keeping them they would maintain a right and proper relationship with God who would bless them, and they would be able to live together in peace and harmony, thus strengthening the whole community. Although some of the specifics of these civil and ceremonial laws and judgements may not be literally applicable today, yet the principles underlying them as have been discussed are still relevant and sound. As the blood bought people of God, we must take heed of these laws and judgements for our own good, individually as well as corporately. The troubles and squabbles in a church can be avoided and resolved if God’s laws and judgements are heeded.

The next section is God’s blue print of the Tabernacle.

⁸ Deuteronomy 1:38 But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Deuteronomy 31:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Exodus 23:20-26; Psalm 121:1-8; Matthew 28:19-20

TUESDAY: Exodus 23:27-31; Joshua 2:1-13; Romans 8:15

WEDNESDAY: Exodus 23:32-33; 2 Kings 17:1-23; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

THURSDAY: Exodus 24:1-8; 1 John 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

FRIDAY: Exodus 24:9-18; Matthew 17:1-5; Psalm 97:1-12

Discussion Questions

1. What did the LORD say that the angel would do?

2. On the other hand, how must the Israelites respond so that the angel would fulfil his mission?

3. In what ways did the LORD express the extent of His commitment to the future of the Israelites?

4. What task did the LORD require of the Israelites to do when they entered Canaan?

5. What benefits would the Israelites experience because they obeyed the LORD?

6. Why could not the Israelites make a covenant with the Canaanites?

7. Was the Israelites' greatest danger physical or moral?

8. How can we apply this principle in our Christian life today? Are any human relationships in your life right now menacing your faithfulness to God? If so, what should you do about this?

9. What three degrees of leadership are indicated in verses 1 and 2?

10. How did Moses act as a mediator between God and the Israelites?

11. Describe how the covenant was ratified or confirmed?

12. What spiritual insight from 23:20-24:18 would you like to take to heart this week?
