

March 9

Scriptures: Read Exodus 23 & 24

Key Verse: “Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.

Overview

Now that the Israelites were given many good civil laws, care must be taken that they be carried out honestly and justly. Justice and judgment must not be perverted by falsehood, mob pressure, or any form of bias. A principle that Jesus taught was also taught here in the Old Covenant (23:4, 4): “do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:44; cf. Proverbs 25:21, 22; Romans 12:20), and there is the idea of the golden rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12). These are contrary to the attitude of the world and express a godliness and separation which is pleasing to God. If the Israelites followed these rules, they would be different from the surrounding heathen nations. Our actions and attitudes are in themselves a witness to others of the love of God in our hearts.

The celebrations of the Sabbaths and feasts were not only duties of the covenant people, but were privileges for their enjoyment. They were the focal points of the Israelite social life. The sabbatical year served to provide for the poor, and, in the wisdom of God, it provided a time to the soil to be replenished.

The observance of the Sabbath day, along with being a religious observance, is here presented as humanitarian as it provided a time for all to be refreshed. As God doubled the manna on the sixth day, so they were to trust Him to provide an abundance in the sixth year so that in the seventh year of unworked soil they would not go hungry. The feasts were to serve as a remembrance of their redemption (by eating only unleavened bread) and of God’s continual blessings and provision. He is the giver and source of all good things and the feasts gave the Israelites opportunity to show their appreciation by bringing Him gifts (23:15, 17). The Canaanites had the superstitious religious rite of boiling a young goat in its mother’s milk to bring a good harvest. The Israelites were to learn that harvest came as a blessing from the Lord and He was to receive the glory for it. God constantly reminded them not to become involved in heathen practices (23:24, 32, 33). We must take care not to be influenced by the superstitions of the world and to remain separate from things which displease God.

The covenant concluded with promises and warnings. The angel that God set before Israel was surely a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ. God said of Him, “My name is in Him”, meaning God revealed Himself through Him. He dwelt among God’s people, and now He who became flesh dwells among us (John 1:14). He never leaves, but rather leads His redeemed believers through difficulties in wilderness places and through enemy territory to the promised inheritance where He has prepared a place for His spiritual Israel (John 14:2). In God’s wisdom and timing, He would gradually cause the inhabitants of the land to leave (23:28, could be a plague of literal hornets, or the sting of heat) so the Israelites could grow in number and fully occupy the Promised Land.

God called Moses, all the elders, Aaron and his two oldest sons to come before Him on Mount Sinai, but Moses alone went up closer to hear from Him further instructions and to write them down (attests to the Mosaic authorship, 24:4). All the people agreed to obey the rulings of the covenant. Sacrifice was necessary before the close relationship with God was possible, since mankind’s sinful condition forfeits the favor of God. The blood that was sprinkled upon the altar signified that their Lord as a living sacrifice in a close most likely, on the 12 pillars (representing the 12 tribes) was done as a sign of God’s acceptance and favor. Thus the covenant was ratified through blood.

In the same manner, Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, offered up Himself as a sacrifice on the cross and His shed blood was sprinkled on the altar in intercession on our behalf (Hebrews 9:12) and sprinkled on His Church, the body of believers, to be made acceptable before

God. Jesus seemed to allude to this portion of scripture (24:8) in words at the Last Supper: “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you (Luke 22:20; cf. Hebrews 9:19, 20).

In the ceremony that followed, God allowed Aaron, his sons and the elders to have a glimpse of His glory which must have been a tremendous faith-building experience. Then, for the fifth time, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to spend a longer time with God. Now that the covenant had been sealed they needed something concrete to aid them in their worship, so this time on the Mount, God instructed Moses about the Tabernacle and He Himself wrote down the ten commandments on the tablets of stone. Like Moses, we need to spend quality time with God so we may know His will, do as He instructs us and have our faith strengthened, He has given us His Holy Word and His Holy Spirit to aid us in worshipping Him.

Prayer

Father God, we are spending time in Your Presence. Show us Your will and strengthen our faith.