

July 9

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 23 & 24

Key Verse: “For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp,... therefore your camp shall be holy...” (Deuteronomy 23:14)

Overview

All the various laws in Israel were for the purpose of keeping Israel holy in the sight of the Lord, for only then would His presence be among them. The sacredness of the Lord’s congregation of Israel was signified by certain laws that excluded some people from participation in worship. Among these were eunuchs, since they could not have any heirs and, therefore, could not share in the inheritance of Israel. Similarly, we read in 23:2, “one of illegitimate birth shall not enter the congregation of the Lord” (23:2). This likely refers only to those born out of an incestuous relationship and not just out of fornication (e.g. Judges 11). This exclusion was because of the awful sin that surrounded the circumstances of conception and also to ensure that the line of Israel remained godly and pure.

The Ammonites and Moabites were also excluded to the tenth generation because of their wickedness in attempting to curse Israel through Balaam, as well as planning their seduction to bring ruin to their souls (Num.22:6; 25:1-2). The Edomites and Egyptians, however, were excluded only until the third generation, for although they were both adversaries of Israel, the Edomites were their brethren, and the Egyptians had welcomed their forefathers in times of famine and had given them many gifts at the time of the exodus.

We do find in the Scriptures, however, that the grace and forgiveness of God were extended to those who were excluded if they obeyed and pleased Him. Their missing privileges within the covenant community would be made up for with spiritual blessings and salvation (Isa.56:3-5). Ruth, the Moabite, was received as a daughter of Israel and even came into the line of the Messiah. In the new Covenant, no one is excluded from the privileges of the covenant relationship with God (Acts 8:27, 36-37).

Moses knew that Israel had yet to fight many battles and so he gave them some regulations concerning the military camp. The camp was to have the same sanctity as an Israelite community, for the presence of God was also among them at the time of war. The Israelite soldiers were to be sure their camp was free from moral, ceremonial, and natural uncleanness. Physical cleanliness was necessary since Israel represented the Holy God and their covenant relationship with Him.

Moses continued to stress purity when he spoke against the sin of Israelite female and male prostitution (which included the perversion of homosexuality, Rom.1:26-28). The heathen practiced these abominations in their temples in connection with idolatrous fertility rites, but Israel was never to do so, and money from such harlotry was never to be accepted in God’s house. Later, however these very sins were found in Judah (1 Kings 14:24).

When Israel inhabited the new land, it was to become a place of justice and mercy, just as God is just and merciful. Escaped slaves from other nations were to be given refuge (23:15-16). By this we are reminded that anyone who runs to the Lord will find refuge and comfort. God demanded

that the poor Israelites be treated kindly and never oppressed. He gave laws to protect and help provide for them. They were not to be charged interest on loans (23:19-20), and things necessary for their well-being were not to be taken in pledge (24:6; 24:12-13). A hired servant's pay was not to be withheld (24:14-15). The gleanings of all fields were to be left for the poor to gather (24:19-21). If they did not care for the needs of the poor, God would count it as a sin, but to fulfill faithfully these humanitarian laws meant blessings from God.

Once again, Moses discussed the sacredness of the marriage relationship. As Jesus later taught, it was God's original plan for there to be one man and one woman and no one was to separate them. Jesus explained that Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of the people's hearts (Matt. 19:6-9), but this was not God's intention, for the prophet Malachi proclaimed: "the Lord God of Israel says that He hated divorce" (Mal.2:16). The certificate of divorce put limitations on the husband; it implied that a valid reason was necessary. The sacredness of the marriage union is also evident in the provision for a husband to remain at home with his new wife for one year, allowing time together to build a healthy relationship and to start a family.

Prayer

Your laws, O God, are for our good. You care about every detail of our lives, but You give us our heads. We can go our own way if we choose. Of course, there are serious consequences for breaking Your laws. Therefore, Lord, keep us following Your way faithfully. We've decided that Your way is for us.