

Sent: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 3:17 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Exodus 20:22 – 21:36

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you!" (Deuteronomy 4:1)

Remember last week, when we dealt with Exodus 20--the "climax" of the Book of Exodus--when God appeared before the people at Mt. Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments, the "moral laws" which were to be the "framework to govern the life of the nation Israel, as well as the behavior of the Israelites individually! But, before giving them, He first reminded them of who was (and is)--the LORD your God--and what He had done for them (the children of Israel), "in bringing them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaver"! Then He gave them two sets of commands, the first four dealing with their relationship with God, and then the final six, dealing with their relationships with others! First and foremost, they were to "have no other gods before Him"! Stressing the "exclusivity" of God. And that was not all! Moses, speaking for God, in Deuteronomy 6:4-15, would later take it further: "They were to love the LORD their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might! And this, along with the rest of the commandments (and the "ordinances," yet to be given), "should be on their heart...and they were to teach them diligently to their sons and talk about them when they sat in their houses and when they walked by the way...and they were to fear and only worship the LORD their God who bought them out of the land of Egypt"!

And, in last nite's lesson, we learned that there were more--many more--related "ordinances" that God would give them--"amplifying" the Ten Commandments! In fact, 613 of them! Which would be eventually included in what would become known as "The Book of Covenant" (according to Exodus 24:7). Things God wanted them to know about how to worship Him and what it meant to live as "His people"! Our lesson last nite only included a sample of them--dealing with the treatment of slaves, and wives of slaves, and children's treatment of parents, and cases of "kidnapping," and (would you believe) about oxen (getting "gored" by ox, or ox falling into open pits)! Amazing how God is concerned about every aspect of the lives of His people! Even (seeming) little things! And with that...

Exodus 20:22-26 says that the LORD (after giving the Ten Commandments) wanted Moses, first of all, to remind the people that He "had spoken to them from heaven, and that they were not to have any other gods besides Him alone"! And that they were to "make an altar of earth (or 'uncut stones') and offer sacrifices on them of sheep and oxen" not only there (on the mountain), but "in every place where He would cause His name to be remembered"! Wow! (He obviously delights in our worship!)

The altar was basically to be kept simple and, if stones were used, they were not to be "wielded with tools" (which would "profane" their worship)! And there should be no "nakedness" exposed! Constable noted that the Canaanites apparently "dressed" stones for their altars as part of their pagan worship, and that Sumerian priests used to perform their ritual ceremonies in a state of nakedness! And God's concern with "nakedness" may also have gone back to the beginning, in the garden of Eden (in Genesis 3)--with the Fall--when Adam and Eve "saw," for the first time, their "nakedness" and were "ashamed," and then "hid themselves" from God, after which God made them

"garments of skin" (obviously "shedding their blood") to "cover their nakedness"! And so, the nakedness symbolized their "sin" and required a temporary "covering"--and the eventual "taking away" of their sin (which could only be accomplished one day through His "redemptive plan")!

And so, this was not the first time altars were used in worship! Cain and Abel (in Genesis 4:3) "in the course of time brought offerings to the LORD," apparently voluntarily, and perhaps "instinctively"? Noah, after exiting the ark, "built an altar to the LORD and took of every animal, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." And Genesis 8:21, says "the Lord smelled the soothing aroma..." and apparently "accepted" Noah's sacrifice, and was pleased, and "blessed him and his sons"!

Abram built an altar to the LORD (in Genesis 12) when first entering the land of Canaan, after God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and promised to "make him a great nation," and to "bless all the families of the earth" through him and his descendants; then again at Bethel, "where he called on the name of the LORD"! And later, on Mt. Moriah (in Genesis 22), where God tested the renamed Abraham, telling him to offer his son, his "only son," on an altar, as a "sacrifice." And Abraham obeyed, and God provided a "lamb" as a "substitute"! (Romans 4:3 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness!")

Isaac and Jacob followed suit! Isaac at Beersheba (in Genesis 26:23-25) after God renewed the promises made to his father, Abraham; and Jacob (in Genesis 35:13) at Bethel in response to how God "had answered his prayer in the day of his distress and had been with him wherever he had gone" (and where he changed his name to "Israel")!

And the rest is history! The history of how Jacob (or Israel) would end up in Egypt with Joseph and all the sons of Israel--for 400 years!--after God caused a famine in the land of Canaan and, all along, was working out His sovereign plan! In the fulness of time! The Exodus! The crossing of Red Sea, and the arrival of the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai! And we are back on story line!

The point is that God desires our worship! For us, a time and place to call upon the name of the Lord! A place of consecration! A place to remember and commemorate! Of surrender! Of "laying it all on the altar"! (I think of the words to that old hymn: "Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control? You can only be blessed, and have peace and sweet rest, when you yield Him your body and soul!")

Well, after the worship, the LORD said to Moses (in Exodus 21:1): "Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them (the children of Israel)! Not "laws" in the usual sense of that word, but "rights" (a "bill of rights"!) for those living within Israel, according to Constable. But only a sample of the divine ordinances of statutes which God gave to the people through Moses (a total of 42 through Exodus 23:13). And so, while the Ten Commandments provided basic principles of justice God demanded of His people, the example ordinances (or statutes) selected here demonstrated how those principles were to be applied in real life situations!

The first grouping (in verses 2-11) focused on the treatment of slaves. Slavery was widely practiced in the Near East (constituting, we are told, up to a third of the population on the Roman Empire at that time)!

Verses 2-6 say, "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years, but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man...and if he has a wife, his wife shall go out with him!" Free! But "if his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons and daughters, the wife and her children belong to her master, and he shall go out alone"! Unless, he (the slave) says he "loves his master and his wife and children" and chooses to remain, in which case the master "brings him to the door or the doorpost and pierces his ear with an awl--and he serves him permanently! Becoming a "bond servant" (which we too are called, as believers and followers of Christ, in Acts 16:17 and elsewhere)!

Constable notes that slavery became "indentured servitude" in Israel, meaning that they were not paid wages, but were provided housing, clothing, and food--and viewed as persons created in the image of God!

We are reminded of the beautiful story of Philemon and Onesimus, in the New Testament. Philemon was a prominent member of the church of Colossae, who owned a slave named Onesimus, who stole money from Philemon and ran away to Rome. At Rome he, providentially, ran into the apostle Paul who was imprisoned there, and Onesimus became a believer! Paul would write a letter (an "epistle") to Philemon urging him to forgive Onesimus and welcome him back "as a brother in Christ," charging anything he owed to his account! Philemon 15-16 puts it this way: "For perhaps he (Onesimus) was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother...!"

Interestingly, the apostle Paul did not urge Philemon to set his slave Onesimus free, but to treat him as a "brother"! And this is the context of the Mosaic law as well! God was more concerned about the treatment of others and not so much their station in life!

Colossians 3:22-24 says, "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth! Not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord! Whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve!"

Colossians 4:1 says, "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a master in heaven!"

And Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all in Christ Jesus!" Wow!

As for the rights of woman! Constable notes that females did not enjoy as much freedom as males in the ancient New East! Nor in Israel--but were subject to their fathers, or husbands, in authority over them, as well as to God!

Verses 7-11 describe the example of a girl whom her father sells as a slave to the father of her husband-to-be, who would then give her to his son as his wife. She would remain in the prospective father-in-law's household, unless, or until, someone "redeemed" her before the consummation of the marriage! If for some reason her father-in-law was displeased with her, he was to allow someone to "redeem" her. She was not to be sold as a slave! Interesting!

Meredith Kline wrote, in the "Simon Greenleaf Law Review" (35 or so years ago, granted) that "the most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is that there is none! It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code"! But Scripture is replete with teaching about the "sanctity of life"--with Psalm 139:13-16 perhaps the most cited text! Jeremiah adds: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born consecrated you...!"

Exodus 21:12-17 deals with crimes "worthy of death" and obviously serious in God's eyes! Including "premeditated murder" but also for "kidnapping" and, shockingly, for someone (in verse 15) "who strikes his father and mother," or (in verse 17) who "curses his father or his mother"! We think of the sixth amendment, "Thou shalt not commit murder"--but might be surprised that "capital punishment" was sanctioned by God prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments! God told Noah, in Genesis 9:6--"Whoever shed men's blood, by man his blood shall be shed!"

Then there is the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" provision which follows up on the "life for life" principle, and the basic concept that the punishment should always fit the crime, and that there should be a just penalty for evil actions and personal injuries! John Durham, in his commentary on Exodus, note that the provision is given to "limit punishment and retaliation"! Harshness and excessive leniency should both be avoided! And enforcement of justice should be the magistrate's job! And "forgiveness" ours!

Jesus would give it a more noteworthy interpretation, in Matthew 5:38-42--"You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, 'do not resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also! Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you!" Wow!

Well, interestingly (and surprisingly), God had a lot to say about oxen, of all things! (Remember these are examples to illustrate a greater principle!) But if you want to take it personally, if you have an ox who "gores" habitually, get rid of it! And do not leave "an open pit"! Believe it or not, it was Martin Luther who came up with the cliché, "Whose ox is being gored?" In his defense in the 1521 Diet of Worms, in Germany, Luther said "most human affairs come down to depending on whose ox is being gored!" How true! Politics notwithstanding! (By coincidence, to close on a light note, I learned while I was preparing for this lesson that, for the Chinese calendar, 2012 is "the year of the ox"! Ha!)

David wrote in Psalm 19--"The Law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes!"

Have a great week, men, and "listen" to the words of the LORD as we continue next week in our study of Exodus 22 and 23!

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