

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 11

EXODUS

Chapters 21- 40

CONTEXT: We are seeing here the establishment of God's kingdom in its Old Testament form. The Israelites are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who was later renamed "Israel"). As the children of the Patriarchs, they are the recipients of God's promise to populate the geographic region now known as Israel and of God's promise to bring mankind's victory over Satan through their descendants.

Moses and the people have heard God declare his "Ten Commandments." The people are encamped around Sinai, and here we pick up the story.

THE STORY: In Exodus 21 — 40 we find a number of different passages. Some recount narrative story. Other passages recount various laws given by Yhwh.

A. CHAPTERS 21 — 31 : Here God hands down a number of Laws to Moses for the people. The laws cover treatment of servants/slaves (21); personal injuries (21); property (22); social responsibility (22); justice and mercy (23); Sabbath (23); festivals (23). Moses tells these laws to the people. The people respond "with one voice, `Everything Yhwh has said we will do" (24:3). How wrong they were!

Moses takes a night to write down all the laws Yhwh laid out and then Moses ascends the mountain for more solo time with Yhwh. This time stretches into 40 days and nights.

God uses this time to explain a number of things to Moses. God covers the Tabernacle with its table, lamp stand, altar and the offerings (25 — 27). God also explains the Priestly garments, consecration, and altar/atonement/worship issues (28 — 30). God specifies which folks have been gifted with the necessary talents to build the Tabernacle and its parts (31). God then delivers to Moses the Ten Commandments engraved by the hand of God on two stone tablets (31:18).

Meanwhile, the "Everything he has said, we will do" people are mighty restless with Moses gone for so long. The Israelites tell Aaron (Moses' brother) that Moses is most likely gone for good and Aaron needs to make a God suitable for worship. Aaron fashions a golden calf out of earrings and other booty of the Israelites. He then sets up an altar before the calf for worshipping Yhwh.

God alerts Moses to the people's unfaithfulness and sends Moses down to deal with it.

Moses goes ballistic, smashing the tablets engraved by the finger of God. The people had already smashed the laws, Moses merely followed through with action giving a realistic face to the choices of sin by the people. Moses then demands an explanation from Aaron, and Aaron lays out a preposterous lie. Moses' intervention ultimately proves to be the reason God spares Aaron and countless others. Still, many perish out of their choice not to follow Yhwh (32).

Moses spends time with Yhwh in a "Tent of Meeting." Moses then goes back up the mountain where he gets a new set of the Ten Commandments written by God upon the stone tablets. While Moses does not see God face to face, God causes his glory to pass before Moses and the effect of that alone causes a nuclear-esque glow about the face of Moses (33 – 34).

With reiterated instructions, Moses sets about having the Tabernacle and accoutrements made as per God's instructions. After proper inspection, the tabernacle is set up and the presence of the Lord descends upon it (35 – 40).

B. THE PURPOSE OF LAWS. God gives the laws to Moses. The laws fulfill a multitude of purposes. We see at least the following:

1. The laws serve to regulate the society of the Hebrew nation.
2. The laws set up a moral code that is beneficial to the people that follow it.
3. The laws point us to God and Christ. This is done in a number of ways. Most notably the laws show our imperfections and need for salvation. Additionally, the laws reflect the nature and character of God within the confines of the time and place where the laws are given. (In other words, as a human at that time, and place, in that civilization, here was how Almighty God would function.)

These laws also serve as the basis for Western Civilization's legal system. It is from the Judaic code handed out by God in the Pentateuch that we have developed a number of our basic legal rights (property rights, tort law, criminal law, etc.)

NEXT WEEK: We hope to cover the book of Leviticus. Some detail will be given to the story of Nadab and Abihu (Ch. 10) as well as the Day of Atonement (Ch. 16). Both chapters would be useful reads before class.