

DHW

## LESSON 21

### The Book of Exodus

### Chapters 23B & 24

#### *INTRODUCTION*

Having given the laws and judgments relating to the Israelites' relationship with Him, God's next step was to ratify the covenant He had made with His people. Before they entered the Promised Land God prepared His people. He promised to protect them from their enemies and to guide them in their journey to the Promised Land but it was conditional upon their total obedience to Him. Their profession of loyalty and worship of the LORD their God must be true. True worship requires complete separation from idolatry as well as doing that which God would desire and according to His will.

The laws and judgments which God gave them were permanently inscribed in *the book of covenant* (24:7). This was 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 would result in His blessings and intervention on their behalf. Another significant point is that of the sealing of the covenant with the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices. A special worship would involve Aaron and his sons, who would be appointed as priests to the people, and seventy elders who would represent 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 us as Christians today.

The following is an outline to facilitate the study of these two chapters:

- 1) The promise of the Angel of the LORD to protect and lead the Israelites (23:20-25);
- 2) The promise of success and victory in the land if they obeyed the LORD (23:26-33);
- 3) Moses reaffirmed the covenant which God had made with them (24:1-8);
- 4) The Israelites saw God (24:9-11); and
- 5) God ratified the covenant He had made with them on Mount Sinai (24:12-18).

### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### **The LORD Sends His Angel**

Having given those good laws and judgments relating to their communal life and how they

ought to worship God, God declared to the Israelites that He would send *an Angel* who would proceed before them to protect them in their journey, and to lead them to the Promised Land, which God had prepared (23:20). The identity of the *Angel* can be discerned by a careful examination of the text. Although the original word in Hebrew means “a messenger,” He was not an ordinary Being. Firstly, we observe about the injunction given to the Israelites to obey and not to provoke Him. Secondly, the fact that He had the power to forgive or not to forgive sins was not in the power of any angel. No one can forgive or remit sins except God.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, the Name of Yahweh was in Him. The text states that *my name is in him* (23:21b). Observe 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*

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 2:7 *Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?*

means that He represents all the authority, power, and presence of the LORD God.<sup>2</sup> Fourthly, the Angel's authority was unquestionable. The LORD'S blessings upon the Israelites were dependent on their complete obedience to Him. There was no recourse for appeal. There was finality in the action of the *Angel*. In view of these facts, it is correct to identify the *Angel* as the Second Person of the Trinity. He was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. All the indications point to Him. Whether the Israelites visibly saw the *Angel* in person or how He communicated with them is not mentioned. However, that is beside the point. The presence of the *Angel* was always with them going ahead and communicating with them, and they communicating with Him.

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. They would enter into the Promised Land where other tribes had already settled in – *the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites* (23:23). In addition, God specifically warned them that they should not bow down or serve and do the works of the gods of the inhabitants of the land. Instead they should utterly destroy their idols and images (23:24). The LORD promised that when they served Him, He would bless them with provisions and take away sickness from the midst of them.

### **The LORD Promises Success & Victory**

It was inevitable that when the Israelites enter the land they would meet with resistance and military attacks by the inhabitants. It is amazing to know the extent to which God was prepared to protect, provide and preserve His

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<sup>2</sup>Psalm 118:10 *All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.*

people. Look at the list of *I will* (23:22-31). There are twelve instances of *I will . . . and I will . . . for I will* in the list. What a comprehensive list: guidance in their journey so that they would reach the Promised Land with provision of food and water; preservation from illnesses and diseases; protection from their enemies and adversaries and the destruction of them! God would stop at nothing to bless His people whom He had chosen, loved and cared for as His very own!

The LORD imposed on the Israelites a condition. They should not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land. They should not dwell among them for these people would surely be *a snare unto thee* (23:33). What is *a snare*? A snare lures, entraps and destroys. The Israelites if they were not careful would be snared into making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and their gods. They would be lured into worshipping and serving the Canaanite gods, which seemed to

be more attractive. When this happened, they would have sinned against the LORD their God. This apostasy would destroy them. Indeed, Israel's greatest danger in their journey into the Promised Land was not just physical but more importantly spiritual. It was their moral faithfulness and submission to the LORD their God alone and none else that was vital.

### **Moses Reaffirms the Covenant**

God called Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron, and seventy elders of Israel. Only Moses was allowed to draw near to God. None of them should go up with him to God. But they might worship God *afar off* (24:1). 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.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> It is appropriate at this juncture to mention that Nadab and Abihu would have succeeded his father Aaron in the priestly

seventy elders who were representatives of the people were also involved, for they had the sacred responsibility and duty of administration and government. We see a broad three-level leadership. Moses was called by God to be His spokesman. The priesthood headed by Aaron and his descendants served 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 for the people who could bring to them their problems. This three-tier leadership serves a good pattern for the administration and government of churches today. Their counterparts would probably be the Pastor who will be responsible for the ministry of the Word and prayer. Then the Elders

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service unto the LORD. But their sin of offering “a strange fire” disqualified them 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.*

will take charge of the spiritual oversight of the church; and the Deacons take charge of the various ministries of the church. The ratification of the covenant involved two steps. Moses told the people of the judgments and laws of the LORD and the people made an unconditional commitment to obey. Then Moses wrote the laws and judgments in *the book of covenant*. Once again, Moses read the laws and judgment to the people and they repeated their previous commitment to obey (24:3, 7). This was the first step. Then the people offered burnt sacrifices upon the altar which Moses built including twelve pillars unto the LORD. Then Moses sent the young Israelite men to offer *burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD* (24:5). Moses took part of the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkled it on the altar which he had built. Then he took another half of the blood and sprinkled on the people saying (24:8): *Behold the blood of the*

*covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.* This sprinkling of the blood upon the altar and the people became an official sign of sealing the Covenant Treaty.

### **The Israelite Leaders See God**

Then Moses went up to the mount. Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders followed. It was obvious that they did not accompany Moses all the way to the top. They stopped at some point below and they *saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness* (24:10). No man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20).

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). 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 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 journeys.

Suffice to say that this revelation was a theophany, in which what the people saw was the Second Person of the Triune God. The sealing of the covenant climaxed in a covenant meal participated by the representatives of the people. They did eat and drink before the Lord their God (24:11).

### **The LORD Ratifies the Covenant**

The LORD called Moses to come up to the mountain. Moses took Joshua, his chief servant with him. This was the second time Joshua was mentioned in the book of Exodus (see Exodus 17:9). Joshua was later to be God's

appointed successor to Moses.<sup>4</sup> Before he took off to go up the mountain, Moses instructed the elders to remain with the people and to wait for him to return. He also instructed them that if they had any important matters to be resolved they could approach or consult Aaron and Hur (another of Moses' assistant).

Moses went up to *the mount of God* (24:13). A cloud covered the mountain. *And the glory of the LORD abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.* On the seventh day, the LORD called Moses *out of the midst of the cloud.* The sight of the *glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel* down

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<sup>4</sup> 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.*

below (24:17). When the LORD called him, Moses moved 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. There the LORD spoke to Moses and gave him the *tables of stone, and a law, and commandments* which the LORD had written. Moses was instructed to teach them to the people (24:12).

It defies the human mind even to 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 97:3-9, describes the glory of the LORD as majestic, brilliant, awesome, Holy and transcendent. Moses was in the mount in the midst of the cloud for forty days and night.

## *PRACTICAL VALUE*

This section ends the second major part of the book of Exodus. The laws and commandments that God gave to His people at this juncture, preparing them to enter the Promised Land, were for the progress and prosperity of the children of Israel. They had to have a right knowledge and understanding of who the LORD God is in all His glory and holiness. They had been warned of dire consequences if they did not keep the covenant which God had made with them. But when they in obedience keep the covenant, the LORD would bless them more than they could expect. They would be able to live together in peace and harmony, thus strengthening the whole godly community.

Just as God promised that He would send His Angel to lead and protect the Israelites, in the same way our Lord Jesus Christ has also promised to be with us in life in this world as we live for Him being separated from the world but

doing His will leading people to know Jesus Christ and believing in Him.

Although the Lord Jesus Christ is not physically visible to us, yet His presence is always with us as He has promised. I am sure that many of us can testify that had the LORD not been with us we would soon suffer loss, and be crippled and robbed, or even be destroyed and died. We should always have faith in Him, love, and serve Him unquestionably. We learn a precious lesson here. We are reminded of the inspired word given by Paul (Romans 8:31): *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

As we are in the world, there is always a danger in our midst. If we are careless, like the Israelites, there is every possibility for us to be physically and spiritually snared. How many Christians today have been snared by the false attractions and promises of

the world, and have their faith destroyed!<sup>5</sup>

There is also a lesson that we can learn for the fact that Moses spent forty days and nights in the midst of the cloud on top of the mountain with the LORD. Moses probably knew that his calling by the LORD to go up the mountain to receive instructions from the LORD and be in fellowship with Him might take some time. He made sure that his absence would not leave the children of Israel without a leader. He appointed Aaron, his brother and Hur to take charge. This shows that he cared for the children of Israel. The fact that he took Joshua, his closest and most loyal servant with him was significant in that he wanted the people to know that Joshua was not only his most trusted servant and helper but that he would be his successor, of course, in accordance

with the will of God. God also knew about this secret in Moses' heart, and He approved of it. Later, God told Moses to ordain Joshua as his successor. In the service of the LORD, leaders must never think that they are indispensable, so capable and great that others are unable to step into their shoes. This is a bad and false idea. Leaders' strength and ability and success in the work of God come from Him. If He had not been with us and for us, the leaders would have failed and nothing significant would be achieved. Leaders must learn to delegate wisely and give opportunities for younger and more capable men to continue the work of the LORD. AMEN

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<sup>5</sup> 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.*