

SESSION #7

2. Law

We turn now to consider “The Law”. Here it is in the structure diagram once again.

God delivers His people – the Exodus out of slavery into liberty. But that’s only half of the story of Exodus. The rest of it has to do with worship. And as they arrive at Mt. Sinai, God wants to meet with His people.

God gives to Moses His commandments for some particular purposes. One is to provide a standard of righteousness. Remember, this is a nation of people who have been in slavery for basically 400 years. They don’t know much at all about being a nation, about how to relate to one another as a free people. There has to be a whole standard of what is right and what is wrong, a reconstruction of them nationally. And God’s laws will help them to come to that new sense of nationhood and being able to live as God’s people.

Secondly, there will be an exposure of sin. In God’s ten commandments, the first four have to do with duties to God, exposing and identifying what is sin. What is it that cuts us off from relationship with God? He makes it very clear in the ten commandments and especially the first four.

And then to reveal divine holiness, the duties to man. Man to man in the last six of the ten commandments.

At this mountain, Mt. Sinai, so many things happen here besides the giving of the ten commandments. There is a covenant which God makes with His people, called the Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant. And it’s first stated in Exodus chapter 6 verses 6, 7 and 8. The three phrases that are crucial are these ones:

“I will bring you out... I will take you as my own people and I will be your God... and then I will bring you in to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” The *Abrahamic* Covenant specified that God’s people would live in the Promised Land. God now reiterates it here in this Covenant at Mt. Sinai.

Chapter 19 and verse 5 of Exodus contains these two significant words: “now *if* you will obey me fully and keep my covenant, *then*...” “If...then”. This covenant at Mt. Sinai is a conditional covenant. It is not unconditional like the agreement made between God and Abraham. There would be a requirement here for the people to obey God, according to what He had spoken to Moses.

So He tells Moses what are His basic requirements, what is His Law, and sends Moses down from the mountain with what is called the Book of the Covenant. And Moses reads God’s requirements to the people. Chapter 24 and verse 7, “*Then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. And they responded, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey.’*”

Now when you think about what it is that Moses passes on to them from God, what God requires... if you read it over and then you come to this verse, it really is a shocker! These people are pretty glib. They’re overly optimistic, to say the least. He reads the whole law of God to them and they just say, “*No problem. We can do that. We agree. Sign on the dotted line. We’re with you.*” They don’t seem to understand what is really involved. So quickly they agreed!

And Moses gets to go up the mountain again to get it written down now in stone. God writes it with His own finger, God signs on the dotted line, and Moses signs on the dotted line as it were. And while he’s up there doing that with God for 40 days, what happens down in the camp? Well, if you know the story, you know that chapter 32 of Exodus is an absolutely crucial chapter because it is the incident of the Golden Calf.

While Moses is up on the mountain, only a few short weeks have gone by and the people are already getting antsy about where is Moses, what’s happened to him. And they talk Aaron, the high priest, into making for them a golden calf. And Aaron declares to them when it is made, “*this is the god that brought you out of Egypt.*” An incredible statement! It proves utterly, conclusively, finally that these people are absolutely unable to keep the Law.

They worship the Golden Calf, which is breaking which of the ten commandments? Number one! They haven’t gone any further than the very first commandment and

within a few weeks they've broken the first commandment, never mind all the rest. *"Oh, we can keep it all. We can do it all."* No way! They break the first one in a matter of days.

And it becomes the first of a series of cycles, sad tragic cycles in Israel's history. We'll see more of these especially in the book of Judges. The people fall into sin. God judges them because of that sin. There is intercession usually by a godly person, in this case Moses. And God hears the intercessor. And there is a renewal of the people. And God forgives and they move on.

Their relationship with God at this point, as one of the commentators puts it, is "now pierced on the horns of the golden calf". How in the world are they going to move on from here living with God when they have done what they have done? How is it going to be possible? Their whole relationship is pierced, it's dead. But God still keeps them as His people.

And the amazing thing we see here so early in the OT story is that grace is not a reward for righteousness. Grace is offered despite *unrighteousness*. Grace – God gives us His grace not because we deserve it, but precisely because we *don't* deserve it. And God extends His grace to these very disobedient people.

3. The Tabernacle

There's something else going on here besides an offer of grace. While Moses is up on the mountain during this particular 40-day period, God not only gives him the ten commandments on stone, but He revealed to Moses another means of fellowship with God.

And He gives him while he's up on the mountain the architectural plans for a little building or tent which Moses will have to build when he comes back down. It is called the Tabernacle. Romans 8:3 gives us the NT slant on this: *"we aren't saved from sin's grasp by knowing the commandments of God, because we don't and can't keep them any more than those people kept them. But God put into effect a different plan to save us."*

A different plan than keeping His Law. What was that plan? Romans 8 says that He sent His own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful, and destroyed sin's control over us by giving Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. That was God's different way, a different plan than keeping the Law. Romans 3:20-22 says,

“Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners. But now God has shown us a different way to heaven --not by "being good enough" and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago).

“Now God says he will accept and acquit us – declare us "not guilty" – if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like.”

God reveals a way by which we disobedient, sinful people, can have a relationship with God. And it isn't by keeping the ten commandments. It will be described in what happens at the Tabernacle. Fifty chapters of the Bible are devoted to describing and discussing that little structure. Fifty chapters! Four hundred references. An indication of how very important this subject is.

It's so important because it's primarily a detailed picture of Jesus Christ and His ministry. An OT picture of some wonderful NT reality. John 1:14 tells us that the Word, God the Son, was made flesh and *tabernacled* among us. That's the word used:

“skenoō”. It means to pitch His tent among us, like the OT Tabernacle.

And it's very much what God has in view here as He gives to Moses the pattern of this little building where He will meet with His people. The major elements of the furniture of this building have tremendous significance but we only have time to go through this very quickly, I'm afraid.

Here's a birds-eye view of the Tabernacle. If we take a trip through it we see something of God's plan of salvation.

Beginning at the main gate (there's only one gate), and moving through to a brazen altar, then a brazen laver or wash basin, then to the little tent itself in which there are 3 pieces of furniture in the main room.

Then a cubic room 15 feet by 15 by 15, at the back called the Holy of holies. And in that small room there's only one piece of furniture called the Ark of the Covenant.

God said He would live with His people there at that Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of holies. A very localized, specific spot. He would meet with His people there. How do an unholy people ever have an opportunity to live with a Holy God?

Well, God shows us by the Tabernacle pattern of priestly ministry how that is possible. In our next session we'll complete our study of the Tabernacle.
