
Day 28 - January 28

Establishment of a Nation (1525 – 1400 BCE)

The Israelites Covenant with God

Readings: *Exodus 19:1-20:26; 23:20-24:18*

Reflections:

- This is one of the most significant passages in the story of Israel. Three months later, to the very day, they arrive at the desert below Sinai. Notice they stay to the very day. They recognize God's timing and note this very small detail. Moses is at least noting all the little details that indicate that God is in control and working things according to a plan.
- "I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself." This is the image of a mother eagle carrying her young. God has deep love and compassion for these new people and sees them like his young ones who cannot yet fly.
- Israel needed to keep the covenant to become his treasured possession and to become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. In Christ, that is all given to us by grace, regardless of our sin or ability to keep the law. We have that as our starting point, not our destination. See 1 Peter 2:9-10 -- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
- The notion of being a kingdom of priests means that this entire group stands between God and humanity to bring reconciliation. Israel was to bring the light of God to the world but they could not complete this mission because of their hearts. But in Christ, now with the Spirit, his Christ-followers have that same calling and the power to do it as God works in power in our weaknesses. We are to be a kingdom of priests to a broken and lost world.
- To be a holy nation did not mean that they would be morally perfect, but rather that they were to be set apart as a distinct people. They were to stand out and live as people set aside for God's mission.
- When Moses gathers the elders to establish the covenant, it is interesting how intentional God is about ensuring the people trust Moses. "I am going to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." We should note that the people's faith in God was also to result in their trust in Moses. God-inspired

faith multiplies faith just as doubt multiplies doubt. God wanted the people to trust the person he had chosen for them, not because Moses was an exceptional person, simply the person God had chosen.

- Purification, staying off of holy ground and abstinence from sex (a form of fasting) were all externalized forms of the people understanding the importance of this moment and the perfection of God. Now, this externalization of holiness was simply to teach a lesson and did not reflect reality as we will learn with Jesus. True holiness and purity comes from faith and being set apart in Christ.
- The presence of God adds a sort of "shock and awe" aspect to this encounter with Moses. Later with Elijah, God will not be in any of this. God will be in the gentle whisper (see 1 Kings 19:12).
- Again, we see that separation is strongly reinforced by penalty of death.
- The Ten Commandments are the centerpiece of the Law. It is a diagnostic tool to reveal how self-centered the human heart is. It should be understood as five commands dealing with your relationship with God and five commands dealing with your relationship with your neighbor.
- In each grouping of five, the commands move from most obvious (Set one - no gods, Set two - no murder) to least obvious (Set one - honor your mother and father, God's authorities in your life, Set two - do not covet). This is to show that the heart issue is still an issue to God. It isn't just the outward sins that are a problem, but there is also sin in our hearts as well. It is a diagnostic tool that will ultimately reveal that no one can keep the Law. Remember, sin isn't ultimately our biggest problem. Our biggest problem, going right back to the Garden of Eden, was our desire towards independence and trying to save ourselves. This diagnostic tool will show humanity that everyone needs the grace of God, from a King named David right down to a Pharisee named Saul.
- The shock and awe approach scared the people so that they did not want to come near to God. Interesting that God switches from a fear-based approach (Note even angels cause people a lot of fear. The most consistent first words out of an angel's mouth is, "Do not be afraid!") to one that is based on love and intimacy through the Holy Spirit dwelling within in our hearts.
- Moses declares that the fear of the Lord will keep them from sinning. Yet, the externalized fear of earthquake, thunder and observing the judgment against the Egyptians didn't actually keep the people from sinning. This is what the law was supposed to do. It was given to make them afraid of God so they wouldn't sin, but it actually didn't work. This is another reminder that the story of Israel is the story of "what doesn't work". As we will see with the coming of Jesus, only God's love through the Holy Spirit working from the inside out is able to train our hearts to loyally choose God and reject sin.

- The passage about the accompanying angel is interesting. Some of the statements made about the angel seem very Christ-like, particularly when God says, “My name is in him.” Was Jesus on this journey with them?
- God declares that he will advance against Israel's enemies and wipe them out. He will use terror and his power to destroy them. This is borne out many times over. This seems completely contrary to what we will learn of God's heart in Christ, but in this time and for God's ultimate plan, God brings judgment and wrath on these peoples.
- The people affirm multiple times that they will do what the Lord has commanded. This doesn't last long as you will remember. The elders do see God and are not put to death but are spared and are able to actually party afterwards, eating and drinking!
- We see that Moses goes with Joshua and Aaron with Hur to take care of the people. God’s desire is that virtually everything be accomplished in pairs. God tries to do everything through relationship.
- Moses enters the Lord's presence for forty days and forty nights. This becomes the time associated with seeking God or being with him in a desert experience.