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Prison Ministry

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **18: The Law of God**

AFTER the children of Israel left Rephidim, they came to the "desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord."

 The people here entered into a solemn covenant with God and accepted Him as their ruler, by which they became the peculiar subjects of His divine authority. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever." When the Hebrews had met with difficulties in the way, they were disposed to murmur against Moses and Aaron, and accuse them of leading the host of Israel from Egypt to destroy them. God would honor Moses before them, that they might be led to confide in his instructions, and know that He had put His Spirit upon him.

**Preparation to Approach God**

 The Lord then gave Moses express directions in regard to preparing the people for Him to approach nigh to them, that they might hear His law spoken, not by angels, but by Himself. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai."

 The people were required to refrain from worldly labor and care, and to possess devotional thoughts. God required them also to wash their clothes. He is no less particular now than He was then. He is a God of order, and requires His people now upon the earth to observe habits of strict cleanliness. And those who worship God with unclean garments and persons do not come before Him in an acceptable manner. He is not pleased with their lack of reverence for Him, and He will not accept the service of filthy worshipers, for they insult their Maker. The Creator of the heavens and of the earth considered cleanliness of so much importance that He said, "And let them wash their clothes."

 "And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount." This command was designed to impress the minds of this rebellious people with a profound veneration for God, the author and authority of their laws.

**God's Manifestation in Awful Grandeur**

 "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." The angelic host that attended the divine Majesty summoned the people by a sound resembling that of a trumpet, which waxed louder and louder until the whole earth trembled.

 "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." The divine Majesty descended in a cloud with a glorious retinue of angels, who appeared as flames of fire.

 "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them."

 Thus the Lord, in awful grandeur, spoke His law from Sinai, that the people might believe. He then accompanied the giving of His law with sublime exhibitions of His authority, that they might know that He is the only true and living God. Moses was not permitted to enter within the cloud of glory, but only draw nigh and enter the thick darkness which surrounded it. And he stood between the people and the Lord.

**God's Law Proclaimed**

 After the Lord had given them such evidences of His power, He told them who He was: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The same God who exalted His power among the Egyptians now spoke His law:

 "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

 "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

 "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

 "Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

 "Thou shalt not kill.

 "Thou shalt not commit adultery.

 "Thou shalt not steal.

 "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

 "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's."

 The first and second commandments spoken by Jehovah are precepts against idolatry; for idolatry, if practiced, would lead men to great lengths in sin and rebellion, and result in the offering of human sacrifices. God would guard against the least approach to such abominations. The first four commandments were given to show men their duty to God. The fourth is the connecting link between the great God and man. The Sabbath, especially, was given for the benefit of man and for the honor of God. The last six precepts show the duty of man to his fellow man.

 The Sabbath was to be a sign between God and His people forever. In this manner was it to be a sign--all who should observe the Sabbath, signified by such observance that they were worshipers of the living God, the creator of the heavens and the earth. The Sabbath was to be a sign between God and His people as long as He should have a people upon the earth to serve Him.

 "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

 "And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven." The majestic presence of God at Sinai, and the commotions in the earth occasioned by His presence, the fearful thunderings and lightnings which accompanied this visitation of God, so impressed the minds of the people with fear and reverence to His sacred majesty that they instinctively drew back from the awful presence of God, lest they should not be able to endure His terrible glory.

**The Peril of Idolatry**

 Again, God would guard the children of Israel from idolatry. He said unto them, "Ye shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold." They were in danger of imitating the example of the Egyptians, and making to themselves images to represent God.

 The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in Him. But if thou shalt indeed obey His voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries; for Mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off." The angel who went before Israel was the Lord Jesus Christ. "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." Exodus 23:24, 25.

 God would have His people understand that He alone should be the object of their worship; and when they should overcome the idolatrous nations around them, they should not preserve any of the images of their worship, but utterly destroy them. Many of these heathen deities were very costly, and of beautiful workmanship, which might tempt those who had witnessed idol worship, so common in Egypt, to even regard these senseless objects with some degree of reverence. The Lord would have His people know that it was because of the idolatry of these nations, which had led them to every degree of wickedness, that He would use the Israelites as His instruments to punish them and destroy their gods.

 "I will send My fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. And I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand: and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against Me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee." Exodus 23:27-33. These promises of God to His people were on condition of their obedience. If they would serve the Lord fully, He would do great things for them.

 After Moses had received the judgments from the Lord, and had written them for the people, also the promises, on condition of obedience, the Lord said unto him, "Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." Exodus 24:1-3.

 Moses had written, not the Ten Commandments, but the judgments which God would have them observe, and the promises on condition that they would obey Him. He read this to the people, and they pledged themselves to obey all the words which the Lord had said. Moses then wrote their solemn pledge in a book and offered sacrifice unto God for the people. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." The people repeated their solemn pledge to the Lord to do all that He had said, and to be obedient. (Exodus 24:7, 8.)

**God's Eternal Law**

 The law of God existed before man was created. The angels were governed by it. Satan fell because he transgressed the principles of God's government. After Adam and Eve were created, God made known to them His law. It was not then written, but was rehearsed to them by Jehovah.

 The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden. After God had made the world and created man upon the earth, He made the Sabbath for man. After Adam's sin and fall nothing was taken from the law of God. The principles of the Ten Commandments existed before the fall and were of a character suited to the condition of a holy order of beings. After the fall the principles of those precepts were not changed, but additional precepts were given to meet man in his fallen state.

 A system was then established requiring the sacrificing of beasts, to keep before fallen man that which the serpent made Eve disbelieve, that the penalty of disobedience is death. The transgression of God's law made it necessary for Christ to die a sacrifice, and thus make a way possible for man to escape the penalty, and yet the honor of God's law be preserved. The system of sacrifices was to teach man humility, in view of his fallen condition, and lead him to repentance and to trust in God alone, through the promised Redeemer, for pardon for past transgression of His law. If the law of God had not been transgressed, there never would have been death, and there would have been no need of additional precepts to suit man's fallen condition.

 Adam taught his descendants the law of God, which law was handed down to the faithful through successive generations. The continual transgression of God's law called for a flood of waters upon the earth. The law was preserved by Noah and his family, who for right-doing were saved in the ark by a miracle of God. Noah taught his descendants the Ten Commandments. The Lord preserved a people for Himself from Adam down, in whose hearts was His law. He says of Abraham, He "obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Genesis 26:5. {SR 146.1}

 The Lord appeared unto Abraham, and said unto him:

 "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." Genesis 17:1, 2. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Genesis 17:7.

 He then required of Abraham and his seed, circumcision, which was a circle cut in the flesh, as a token that God had cut them out and separated them from all nations as His peculiar treasure. By this sign they solemnly pledged themselves that they would not intermarry with other nations, for by so doing they would lose their reverence for God and His holy law, and would become like the idolatrous nations around them.

 By the act of circumcision they solemnly agreed to fulfill on their part the conditions of the covenant made with Abraham, to be separate from all nations and to be perfect. If the descendants of Abraham had kept separate from other nations, they would not have been seduced into idolatry. By keeping separate from other nations, a great temptation to engage in their sinful practices and rebel against God would be removed from them. They lost in a great measure their peculiar, holy character by mingling with the nations around them. To punish them, the Lord brought a famine upon their land, which compelled them to go down into Egypt to preserve their lives. But God did not forsake them while they were in Egypt, because of His covenant with Abraham. He suffered them to be oppressed by the Egyptians, that they might turn to Him in their distress, choose His righteous and merciful government, and obey His requirements.

 There were but a few families that first went down into Egypt. These increased to a great multitude. Some were careful to instruct their children in the law of God, but many of the Israelites had witnessed so much idolatry that they had confused ideas of God's law. Those who feared God cried to Him in anguish of spirit to break their yoke of grievous bondage and bring them from the land of their captivity, that they might be free to serve Him. God heard their cries and raised up Moses as His instrument to accomplish the deliverance of His people. After they had left Egypt, and the waters of the Red Sea had been divided before them, the Lord proved them to see if they would trust in Him who had taken them, a nation from another nation, by signs, temptations, and wonders. But they failed to endure the trial. They murmured against God because of difficulties in the way and wished to return again to Egypt.

**Written in Tables of Stone**

 To leave them without excuse, the Lord Himself condescended to come down upon Sinai, enshrouded in glory and surrounded by His angels, and in a most sublime and awful manner made known His law of Ten Commandments. He did not trust them to be taught by anyone, not even His angels, but spoke His law with an audible voice in the hearing of all the people. He did not, even then, trust them to the short memory of a people who were prone to forget His requirements, but wrote them with His own holy finger upon tables of stone. He would remove from them all possibility of mingling with His holy precepts any tradition, or of confusing His requirements with the practices of men.

 He then came still closer to His people, who were so readily led astray, and would not leave them with merely the ten precepts of the Decalogue. He commanded Moses to write, as He should bid him, judgments and laws, giving minute directions in regard to what He required them to perform, and thereby guarded the ten precepts which He had engraved upon the tables of stone. These specific directions and requirements were given to draw erring man to the obedience of the moral law, which he is so prone to transgress.

 If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved in the ark by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a token or pledge, they would never have gone into idolatry or been suffered to go down into Egypt, and there would have been no necessity of God's proclaiming His law from Sinai and engraving it upon tables of stone and guarding it by definite directions in the judgments and statutes of Moses.

**The Judgments and Statutes**

 Moses wrote these judgments and statutes from the mouth of God while he was with Him in the mount. If the people of God had obeyed the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the specific directions given to Moses, which he wrote in a book, relative to their duty to God and to one another. The definite directions which the Lord gave to Moses in regard to the duty of His people to one another, and to the stranger, are the principles of the Ten Commandments simplified and given in a definite manner, that they need not err.

 The Lord instructed Moses definitely in regard to the ceremonial sacrifices which were to cease at the death of Christ. The system of sacrifices foreshadowed the offering of Christ as a Lamb without blemish.

 The Lord first established the system of sacrificial offerings with Adam after his fall, which he taught to his descendants. This system was corrupted before the Flood, and by those who separated themselves from the faithful followers of God and engaged in the building of the tower of Babel. They sacrificed to gods of their own make instead of the God of heaven. They offered sacrifices not because they had faith in the Redeemer to come but because they thought they should please their gods by offering a great many beasts upon polluted idol altars. Their superstition led them to great extravagances. They taught the people that the more valuable the sacrifice the greater pleasure would it give their idol gods, and the greater would be the prosperity and riches of their nation. Hence, human beings were often sacrificed to these senseless idols. Those nations had laws and regulations to control the actions of the people, which were cruel in the extreme. Their laws were made by those whose hearts were not softened by grace; and while they would pass over the most debasing crimes, a small offense would call forth the most cruel punishment from those in authority.

 Moses had this in view when he said to Israel, "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" Deuteronomy 4:5-8.

Next Mailing: Story of Redemption Chapter **19: The Sanctuary**