

EXODUS

Lesson 24 - Chapters 24 and 25

For the last several chapters of Exodus we have witnessed Yehoveh present His covenant to the people of Israel. Unlike the covenants the Lord had made with Noah and Abraham (which were really more the form of promises of God and therefore didn't require a formal acceptance by Noah or Abraham), the one being made with Israel DOES require a formal acceptance. This formal acceptance is also called a ratification. So let's go to chapter 24 and see just how this covenant between God and Israel was formally ratified.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 24 all

Yehoveh tells Moses that he, Aharon and his two sons Nadav and Avihu, and 70 of the leaders (probably the chief Elders of Israel), are to approach God. We cannot be sure whether the number 70 is precise or is symbolic; because in Hebrew literature rounded numbers like this are often symbolic. It could be that 70 IS the actual number at the same time it is symbolic of totality or comprehensiveness. That is, this group represents Israel completely. All are to bow down lowly, at a distance. Likely, this meant that they were not to cross the boundary lines, which you see here in these pictures actually taken at the site, and carefully marked with a stone fence, that separated the Holy Mountain where God was, from the valley floor; only Mosheh was to cross that boundary and step foot on Mt. Sinai. For those of you who are relatively new to the class this is NOT at the traditional site of Mt. Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula, but rather at a site in Arabia that I am now think is the much more probable site of the Mountain of God...and, the location where St. Paul, Philo, Josephus, and others said the Holy Mountain was located.

Here is a map showing where that site is located, and these photos were taken.

Moshe went up, and when he came back down, it was with instructions from Yehoveh to recite again all the rulings God had given to Israel, that we see listed in Exodus chapters 19-23. The purpose was to present the TERMS of the covenant to the people; and they responded, "we will obey". Now, lets quickly revisit a couple of Hebrew terms, *dabar* and *mishpat*. Because, where it says in Ex. 24 v.3 that Moses spoke all "the rulings", or perhaps in your Bibles, the words or laws, the original Hebrew says what Moses spoke to the people was God's *mishpat* and *dabar*. Remember what the Hebrew word was for the 10 commandments? It was *dabar*.... the 10 *dabar*...in English, the 10 "words". And, AFTER Israel received the 10 *dabar* of Exodus 20, God said, in v.1 of Ex. 21, that He would now give Israel His *mishpat*, His system of Justice...what I believe we should even more rightly characterize as His Gospel. So as

would be completely proper (absolutely necessary, really) Moses re-spoke the 10 Commandments and then all the rules and regulations of Ex. 21-23 to the people, to which they responded they would obey. This was standard operating procedure for ratifying a covenant in those days.

We're told that Moses wrote these words down; unlike what some liberal theologians want us to believe, the fact is we're told right here that all the laws given to this point were recorded, written down, at this moment.....not later, from recollection. Then Moses built an altar...remember, an altar is not a monument.....it is a place where you sacrifice; it is a place where typically an animal is ritually slaughtered. And Moses set up 12 stones to represent the 12 Tribes of Israel. These are typically called "standing stones", which ARE memorials usually to something ascribed as an act of God. The use of standing stones was commonplace among the peoples of the ancient Middle East.

Next we see the ceremonial sacrifice; this is a necessary and standard part of every Middle Eastern covenant. The animals were killed and then typically cut up into pieces....or in the more literal Hebrew RIGHTLY DIVIDED (yes, that's right, that good old Christian saying of rightly dividing the Word was taken completely out of context....for "rightly dividing" concerned the proper cutting up of the sacrificial animal, it was not about Bible interpretation). The pieces of the sacrificial animal were arranged around the altar, and then usually, the two covenanting parties would walk together between the pieces of cut-up animal. We're not told if this happened here, but its almost unthinkable that it didn't. Some of the blood was captured in basins, and it was sprinkled upon the people. The reason? This signified that the blood of the covenant included, or covered, them.

Interestingly we're told that "young men" were sent to do the sacrificing. Many commentaries say it was necessary that young men, presumably picked because they were strong, were chosen because it was bulls that were going to be sacrificed and bulls are big and heavy. Yet in later Torah passages that mention the sacrificing of bulls (which was commonplace) there is no admonition to use young or particularly strong men to lug the bull carcasses around. Here's why: the young men spoken of were not simply any young men, they were firstborn. We see in this passage NOT that they were but strong men who did the heavy lifting while others performed the ritual; rather THEY actually did the sacrificial procedure. Why didn't the Levite priests do the sacrificing; after all that was perhaps their primary duty? Because the priesthood has not yet been established, as it soon will be.

Before the priesthood was established each family (separately) performed whatever rituals they traditionally followed.....and we don't precisely know just what these rituals consisted of. Sacrificing animals and food and sacred objects was normal and customary throughout all known ancient Eastern cultures and likely the Israelites down in Egypt did something similar. But the question is, WHO within each household actually performed the sacrifices and rituals? Our usual answer is that it would be the eldest male or the father (or perhaps a grandfather if he lived in that extended household). But that was not the case; rather, it was the firstborn male who performed these functions. Remember, firstborn does NOT mean the most senior male in a household; it means the first son a man's wife produced for him. The father or grandfather of the house was not necessarily a firstborn.

This reality of Hebrew life is going to play a significant role later on in Leviticus and then Numbers. The firstborn more or less had the position of the “family priest”; but ONLY until the Lord established an official priesthood (which would come from the tribe of Levi). Once the priesthood was established individual families could no longer perform their own sacrifices, on their own altars, in their own ways. Just as significantly the thousands of Israelite firstborns lost their valued status as the family priest. And in later Torah portions we find subtle mentions of the reluctance of families to give up their own private rituals, and of firstborns to release their rights as the family priest to certain members of the tribe of Levi.

Well, after Moses goes up the mountain and comes back down the book of the covenant, the 10 Commandments and the laws, is once again read, and once again the people respond that they will obey. This is typical of covenant ritual.

Then in verse 9 something extraordinary and unexpected happens: God permits Aaron, his two sons, and the 70 elders to cross the boundary wall and set foot on his Holy mountain. Of course! The blood of the covenant sacrifice had atoned for the sins of the people, and now their representative could approach God. This is EXACTLY as it is with us and Christ: when we accept Yeshua as Lord and Savior we are spiritually “sprinkled” with His blood, covered by His blood, and NOW we can approach God, pure in His eyes, whereas before we could not.

And, it says they **saw** God. Though, considering that “no man can see God and live”, and that the description of what they saw is something very similar to what St. John, 1400 years later would see (that is, the area where God stood was paved with precious stones) this must have been a vision. The Jewish sage Rashbam says that what happened here is quite similar to what happened with Abraham at the moment of cutting the covenant God made with him.....a visual manifestation of God in the form of a smoking firepot appeared to Abraham. Obviously the smoking firepot was NOT the actual image of the Lord, and what those men who were permitted to climb up Mt. Sinai saw was NOT the actual image of the Lord. And, they dined with God as opposed to the usual results of viewing God’s presence which is destruction; that is what is meant by the phrase, “and God did not reach out his hand against them.....”

Now, I think what we are seeing here a prefiguring of the great and future Marriage Feast of the Lamb whereby all Believers will be committed in formal marriage (as opposed to our current state of betrothal), a formal and completed union, to Christ accompanied with a great ceremonial feast. This eating a meal together is yet another indispensable part of the covenant ritual..... it completes the covenant. Once again, our covenant, our union, with Christ is not yet fully complete; but it will be 100% complete upon the formalizing of the Covenant of Christ when we who have accepted the terms of that covenant, faith in Yeshua of Nazareth, sit down at the feet of our Lord and dine with Him at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. Goosebump city, huh!?

The ceremony was over and the covenant was now complete. It has never been renewed, because there has never been a need for it to be renewed; the covenant is permanent (at least until the end of the age).

In verse 12 Yehoveh called Mosheh back to His mountain, and gave to him the 10 Words, the

10 Commandments, written on stone tablets by God's own finger. Interestingly Joshua went up with Moses; although Joshua is only briefly mentioned and then nothing further is said about him. Still this shows how early-on God had begun the process of separating out and training Joshua, son of Nun, the next leader of Israel. Aharon and Hur were left in charge at the encampment. Hur was not a son of Aharon, but tradition says he was a son-in-law. At the least it was obvious that even above Aharon's own natural sons, Hur was a specially selected man to be Aharon's assistant.

We're told that the people of Israel witnessed God's glory (in Hebrew, **kavod**) that burned like an unquenchable fire on top of that Holy Mountain, from down there in the valley floor on which all 3 million of them encamped. And, on top of that mountain, surrounded by Yehoveh's awesome presence, Moses stayed for 40 days and 40 nights, obviously receiving the most intense and important teaching that a man had ever experienced. However we're also told that the first 6 of those days the cloud hid the Lord's presence, and on the 7th day the Lord began to give Moses more instruction. Those first 6 days were a sort of preparation for Moses; a time of spiritual contemplation before He would stand in the very presence of God Almighty.

Let's move on to chapter 25. Before we read this chapter, however, I'd like to do a sort of introduction to it.

Chapter 24 ended the 3rd division of Exodus, called Covenant and Law. With Chapter 25, we enter the 4th division, a new and central theme of Exodus, concerning the Wilderness Tabernacle and the rituals associated with it.

As important are the beginning acts of Yehoveh to create the world, the creation of mankind and Adam's fall, the Flood that temporarily purged the earth of rampant wickedness, the story of Abraham as the first Hebrew, the story of Jacob as the founder of the tribes of Israel, the history of Israel's captivity in Egypt, and now the Hebrews' Exodus all are, little carries the importance of what we're about to study.....the Wilderness Tabernacle, the earthly dwelling place of God.

Let me tell you just HOW important it is: it's important enough that all, or parts, of 50 chapters in the Torah are taken up with the building and service of the Tabernacle. Every minute detail of its construction, the implements used, the garments worn, how the cultic rituals were to be conducted and WHO was to conduct them and more were laid out by Yehoveh with the repeated demand to "make it after the pattern I have shown to you". The sacrificial system is painstakingly explained: which animals are suitable for the various sacrifices, which kind of sacrifice is for what purpose, how the animal is to be killed and processed, who can partake of the meat and who cannot, and far more.

Now please hear this; the Jewish authors of the New Testament ASSUMED that the readers of the various letters and gospels (that eventually became collected into a Biblical canon) **already** understood the purpose of the holy Tabernacle and the Sacrificial System. The NT writers BEGIN at a point where it is a given that its readers are **already** familiar with all the essential points of Israelite society, tradition and worship.....including the Temple and its services, the complex sacrificial and purification rites, Israel's history, how marriage and family life

functioned, and so on. And where does one get all this prerequisite understanding? Well if one doesn't live in that society then it must be by studying and understanding the records of that society and the Laws that the Lord ordained to govern it: the Old Testament.

The Torah is all about instruction; and so it is that the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system are to teach us the Gospel. It is to teach us the PURPOSE of Israel. It is to teach us the Holiness of Yehoveh. It is to teach us the great and horrible cost that would be necessary for our sins to be pardoned.

We'll find a number of names for the Wilderness Tabernacle in the Bible. It was called a "sanctuary", in Hebrew "miqdash" (mic-dawsh), meaning a sacred and holy place. It was also called a "tabernacle", in Hebrew "mishkan" which means a dwelling place, in this case, a dwelling place of Yehoveh. "Tent" was another name, in Hebrew "ohel" (o-el), which indicated a simple Bedouin style cloth tent. The "tabernacle of the congregation" was another term used, in Hebrew "ohel moed"; it meant, most literally, the tent of the appointed times. Another expression was the "tabernacle of testimony", in Hebrew "mishkan ha eduth", the dwelling place of the testimony....that is, the place where the 10 Commandments is housed. It's been called the Wilderness Tabernacle, and the Tent of Moses. While the precise meanings of each of these terms focuses on different aspects of the Tabernacle's essence, they are all still referring to the same structure; that portable dwelling place of Yehoveh that the Israelites used beginning at Mt. Sinai and all throughout their time in the wilderness, and then for about 400 years AFTER that, until a permanent stone and wood building was erected by Solomon. That stone and wood structure was called The Temple. The Temple and the Tabernacle are two different things, but they were built for the same purpose; actually the Temple was just a permanent, non-moveable version of the Tabernacle. And, now, even the Temple has been replaced; for today these delicate fleshly bodies we Believers walk around in are the Tabernacle, the Temple, the place where Yehoveh's Holy Spirit dwells. Interesting isn't it, how the original Tabernacle was mobile, a temporary tent; and long after it was replaced once again the dwelling place of God, **us**, a tent with a limited life span, has been designed to go wherever He would direct us. Israel would move around for 40 years, so God's dwelling place had to move with them if His presence was to be with them. Then Israel settled in the Promised Land so God's dwelling place settled in the land; therefore if you wanted to come to God, you came to the Temple in Israel. Starting with Yeshua WE became the Lord's Temple, His earthly (NOT heavenly) dwelling place. So when we take His Word to the world, He goes with us.

The Tabernacle had one primary **purpose**: a place especially clean and holy so that Yehoveh could dwell amongst His people. Secondly it was a place where His people, His congregation, could **meet** with Him. The Tabernacle also had one primary **feature**: it was visible and it was placed in the center of the encampment of Israel. It was placed there to remind the people of God of His constant presence with them. It was there to remind the people to stay away from **other** gods, idolatry, and to serve Yehoveh and ONLY Yehoveh.

The Israelites' encampment consisting of hundreds of thousands of tents surrounded the Tabernacle. And the tribes were organized in an exacting order, carefully placed at each of the 4 sides of the Tabernacle. To the East were the 3 tribes of Issachar, Judah, and Zebulun,

composed of 186,000 men. To the West were Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin, consisting of 108,100 men. Camped on the North side were Asher, Dan, and Naphtali, and their 157,000 men. And to the South were the 151,400 men who composed the tribes of Simeon, Reuben, and Gad. The Levites were placed closest to the Tabernacle and they were divided up by family and placed on all four sides, as an inner ring BETWEEN the Tabernacle and the 12 tribes, like a buffer zone; the Levites numbered 22,300 men.

Notice I said men. Any census of Israel ONLY counted men. And even then only men capable of fighting in the army; those males who were too young, too old, or disabled, were not counted. Therefore when adding in the women, children, sickly, and elderly, there was something on the order of 3 million Israelites surrounding that Tabernacle; now, that was quite a tent city, wasn't it?

The order of the tribes' placement around the Tabernacle was NOT at random. Each set of 3 tribes represented the camping together of those who were one another's nearest blood relatives. For example: Manasseh and Ephraim, brothers, carried the authority of their father Joseph. They were coupled with Benjamin. Benjamin and Joseph had the same mother, Rachel. Therefore these 3 tribes formed a division and so camped together.

Simeon and Rueben were sons of Jacob's first wife, Leah. Since Levi, another son of Leah was set apart as the priestly tribe (no longer considered one of the 12 Tribes) Gad took his place in the encampment organization. Why Gad? Because Gad was a son of Leah's handmaiden, Zilpah.

Judah, Issachar, and Zevulun, were Leah's youngest 3 sons. So, they were organized to camp together.

Dan and Naphtali were born to Rachel's handmaiden, Bilah. They were coupled with Leah's handmaiden's youngest son, Asher.

So the order of encampment was indicative of a kind of pecking order of the tribes. And, I'm sure, that because particularly in the tribal system blood was definitely thicker than water, by grouping them in this way trouble between the tribes was kept to a minimum.

Now notice the symbolism of placing Moses, Aaron, and the priestly families, the Levites and their sub-groups the Merarites, the Kohathites, and the Gershonites, close in to surround the Tabernacle, like a moat around a castle; and all 12 regular tribes are stationed further away from God's dwelling place. Here we have the concept of **mediation** at work. Priests, from the set-apart Levite tribe, are about to become the intermediaries between the people and God. The people cannot come directly to God; they must go through the priests in Yehoveh's system. So the camp presents a visualization of that idea; the people of the 12 regular tribes have to LITERALLY go through, walk through, the encampment of the priests to get to God (or better, to approach His Tabernacle). And the way it worked was that the people went to the priests, who went to God FOR them. This whole concept was prophetic and prefiguring of ONE of Christ's most important ministries.....He was to be our high priest.....our mediator between Yehoveh and us, His people. We cannot go directly to the Father; so we go to Messiah, who

goes to the Father Yehoveh for us.

Each of the groupings (or divisions) of 3 tribes (remember, there were 4 groups of 3) had a dominant tribe, a leader tribe, which was Judah (east), Ephraim (west), Dan (north), and Rueben (south). Remember I told you sometime back to always pay attention to the direction EAST in the Bible. It almost always has spiritual significance. The Tabernacle was always set up so that the Holy place faced EAST; and that is where Judah was located. Judah....the tribe that was to carry the authority, according to Jacob's Blessing, for ALL Israel. That is Judah was to be the preeminent tribe that ruled over all the other tribes. And what tribe did Yeshua, the King, come from? Judah.

Notice that at the opposite end of the encampment, to the West, but NEAREST to the Holy Place was the tribe of Ephraim. Ephraim had been given the other half of the split first born blessing according to Jacob's Blessing. That is while Judah was given the right to rule over Israel, Ephraim was given the tribe's wealth, and the blessing of fruitfulness.....called the Double Portion blessing. We studied this very carefully in Genesis 48,49, and 50. This study is critical in understanding the entire Bible. So, if you missed it, I heartily suggest you get the CDs of this. I think those of you who went through that particular study found it pretty eye opening.

So the placement of these tribes around the Tabernacle had tremendous prophetic symbolism and meaning. Let me show you something else that is going to help you understand OT and NT prophecies. Each of the 4 dominant, or leader, tribes had a specific symbol, an emblem, by which they were known (in fact all 12 tribes did). We all know the symbol of Judah is the Lion.....we even call Christ the Lion of Judah. Well the tribe of Ephraim's symbol was a male calf, a Bull, sometimes shown as a male Ox . Dan's tribal symbol is a little more of a mystery, as is the tribe itself; at times it was a snake, at other times a flying snake, and more traditionally it has been accepted that it was an Eagle. Rueben's symbol was a man, a human.

So, the 4 dominant leader tribes, which represented all 12 tribes, each had a symbol: One was a Lion, one seems to have been an Eagle, another a Bull or Ox, and the last was a man, or human. And these tribes surrounded God's earthly dwelling place, the Tabernacle. They protected the Sanctuary of God from outsiders, and the Lord protected them from their enemies.

Nothing in the Bible stands alone. It's all connected. To demonstrate this turn to Ezekiel 1:10. Ezekiel was a prophet that lived about 700 years after the time of Moses. God seemed to communicate to Ezekiel through visions at times. And some of his visions were real lu-lu's. The vision he had in the first chapter of Ezekiel begins with a view of Heaven, and God's throne area, and it speaks about four living creatures. They had 4 wings, and 4 faces. Now notice Ezekiel 1, verse 10:

"...as for the appearance of their faces), they had human faces in front, each of the four had a lion's face on the right, each had a Bull's face on the left, and each of the four had an eagle's face toward the rear".

And, we're told that wherever the Spirit of God went, they went.

Hmmmm. The 4 Living Creatures each had faces of a Lion, an Eagle, a Bull, and a man.

Now where did we just see those same symbols? Right! Those were the representative symbols of the 4 dominant tribes of Israel. Coincidence? Even more, just like wherever the Tabernacle with the Spirit of God went, the Israelites went with it; so these strange creatures went wherever the Spirit of God went.

Notice something else: the Lion was to the right. The right of anything, in the Bible, was symbolic of the best, the dominant, the strongest or most important, and at times it was even the Holy position. For instance, your right hand, your right eye, your right foot, symbolized the best or most important. Left was symbolic of lesser value.

Right was also equivalent to EAST. Right was the dominant and holy, east was the dominant and holy. The Lion was on the Living Creature's right; Judah was encamped on the right side, east side, of the Tabernacle.

The left side was equivalent to West. The Bull face was on the left side of the Living Creature, just as Ephraim whose symbol is the Bull, was encamped on the left side, the west side, of the Tabernacle. The front, or south side, of the Living Creature was a man, a human; a man symbolized Reuben who encamped on the front, or south side, of the Tabernacle. And, finally on the back, rear side of the Living Creature was the face of an Eagle. The Eagle was the symbol of Dan who camped on the rear side, the North side, of the Tabernacle.

Oh, but it doesn't end there. Turn now to Revelation 4:6.

READ REVELATION 4:5-8

This is a vision given to John that, not surprisingly, is quite similar to that of Ezekiel's because **both were visions of heaven** and of God's throne. Now remember, what was the primary purpose of the Tabernacle? It was God's **dwelling place** on earth. And Moses was told to make the Tabernacle "after the pattern he had been shown" by God. The Tabernacle was an earthly, physical replica made after the pattern of God's heavenly, spiritual dwelling place. As was, by the way, the Garden of Eden a physical earthly, replica of God's heavenly dwelling place.

So Rev. 4 speaks once again of these Living Creatures, or Living Beings. Notice again what these beings appeared to be composed of: A Lion, an Ox (or Bull), a human (or man), and an eagle.

So these Living Creatures in Ezekiel and in Revelation are the same creatures and they are directly associated with the 4 dominant tribes of Israel that represent ALL Israel. In fact the Living Creatures have direct correlation even as concerns which DIRECTION, which SIDE of the Living Creature each of the various faces is placed, and it is exactly as the tribes of Israel are placed around the Tabernacle.

So, again we encounter this amazing REALITY OF DUALITY. Ezekiel's and John's Revelation visions were of Heaven, or more specifically, of God's dwelling place in Heaven. The Living Creatures are some type of guardian or servant spirit for God, and they surround

His throne. So the Tabernacle, the physical dwelling place of God was built in the image of God's Heavenly throne, the spiritual dwelling place of God. The 4 dominant tribes of Israel were the physical model of the spiritual creatures right down to the way they surrounded and moved with His earthly dwelling place, the Tabernacle, and His Heavenly dwelling place. This is likely why the various Israelite tribes had their symbols modeled after those of the Living Creatures, because each of these tribes were to serve a specific purpose in relation to serving God.

Wild is it not? Don't forget this. While this information might wow your friends in a game of Bible Trivia it is also crucial in understanding prophecy, isn't it? So, suddenly those strange Living Beings aren't so difficult to understand.

Next week we'll begin studying Exodus chapter 25.