

Chapter Seventeen

The High Priest and the Law

For twenty-five hundred years, from Adam to Moses, there was no written Law of God. The Law written upon tables of stone was given to Moses after the children of Israel had been delivered and redeemed by blood from the bondage of Egypt. For twenty-five hundred years man had the light of nature and the light of conscience, but no Law to reveal to him the perfect righteousness and holiness of God. Then God gave to Israel through Moses the Law. There was a threefold giving of the law. The first time it was orally spoken to Moses on the mount, and communicated by mouth to the children of Israel, Israel accepted that Law and promised to keep it perfectly. They answered Moses,

“All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8).

How little they realized that they were unable to keep God’s Law perfectly, and that their only hope was to remain under the grace of God that had delivered them from their bondage. Israel in their blindness having proclaimed their ability to keep God’s Law, the lord now calls Moses back up the mountain to give him a written copy of that law, inscribed upon the tables of stone. This was the second giving of the Law.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them...And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount...And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights” (Exodus 24:12, 15, 18).

“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18).

We can’t help but wonder, *“Why did Moses remain in the mountain for forty days?”* The Lord could have given Moses the two tables on the Law immediately and sent him back to deliver them to the children of Israel. There seems to be two reasons for the delay of forty days. **(1)** To permit Israel to prove that they could not keep God’s Law, even for forty days. They had so arrogantly and confidently boasted, *“All that the Lord has commanded, we will do.”* They must be convinced of their utter sinfulness and inability to please God by their own efforts. See how this is demonstrated by the action of Israel during the absence of Moses for forty days:

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him” (Exodus 32:1).

The rest of the story of the golden calf is familiar. This people who had heard the word, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,*” are now dancing, drinking, carousing, and offering sacrifices to a dead idol. What a demonstration of the wickedness of the human heart! This was the reason Moses was delayed in bringing down the tables of stone. It was to demonstrate that they were unable to serve God perfectly.

There is a second reason for the delay of forty days before Moses returned to the people. It was **(2)** to make a provision for escaping the judgment of the broken Law. According to that Law that Moses was to deliver, the immediate death penalty was pronounced. The sin must be atoned for or else the nation must perish. And so at the same time God gave the Law that damned, cursed and condemned the transgressor, God also made provision for their redemption from the curse.

The Tabernacle

When Moses went up to the mount of Sinai to receive the tables of the Law, he received something in addition to the two tables of the Decalogue. It was the plan of redemption in the worship of the blood-sprinkled Tabernacle. Observe carefully that between Moses’ going up into the mount (Exodus 24:12-18) and his coming down from the mountain (Exodus 32:7), there are *eight chapters* devoted to the pattern of the Tabernacle – God’s answer to the broken Law. During the forty days Israel was breaking God’s Law, He was giving Moses His provision for salvation for those who were transgressing those very commandments. Had Moses come down from the mountain with only the tables of the Law, it would have been the end of the nation of Israel, but together with the tables of the law came also the message of salvation and redemption by blood. The writer of the Hebrews tells us Moses received the pattern of the Tabernacle at the same time he was given the tables of stone. Hebrews tells us:

“...Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:5).

This Tabernacle in the wilderness was a picture, shadow, type and prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is clear from Hebrew 8:

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man...But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building...Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 8:1-2 & 9:11-12)

The Tabernacle was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was called “*the tent of meeting,*” for here on the basis of the blood, the sinner could come to God. So I repeat,

when Moses came down from the mount after forty days, he brought with the two things:

1. The law that condemned the sinner; and
2. The pattern of the Tabernacle pointing to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

The Law condemned the sinner, and Moses in his righteous anger cast the tables of the Law upon the rocks, and smashed them in pieces, to dramatize what Israel had already done by their worship of the golden calf. Before Moses could present them with the tables of stone, they had already broken them. But God had anticipated Israel's failure, and so in mercy He provided the Lord Jesus Christ who by His own blood would atone for the broken Law, so the transgressors might be spared and not perish.

This provision in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ was symbolized and taught by the pattern and instructions for the Tabernacle that was God's answer to the judgment of the law. Every part of this Tabernacle pointed to God's substitutionary, atoning Lamb, but was climaxed in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

Third Giving of The Law

Before looking into the Ark of the Covenant, let me mention the third giving of the Law. The tables of stone that God made were broken at the foot of the mount, and the only thing that spared Israel from death was the blueprint of the blood-sprinkled Tabernacle carried by Moses. Now there is to be a third giving of this Law:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai . . . And he (Moses) hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone” (Exodus 34:1-2, 4).

Notice what was to be done with this copy of the Law. It was to be hidden in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle. The Ark of the Lord was the central object, the very heart of the Tabernacle teaching. It was a wooden, oblong box, overlaid with gold and covered by a lid of solid gold with two cherubims over-shadowing it. In this box, or Ark, was to be placed these *second* tables of the Law – the Law that Israel had broken. This Law demanded punishment and cried out for justice. And so God placed over this Law a lid called *“the Mercy Seat.”* Within the Ark the Law pronounced the sentence of death, but God had provided a covering. The *“Mercy Seat”* or cover of the Ark was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is called our *“Mercy-Seat”* in Romans 3:25. Here we read concerning Christ,

“ Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood... ” (Romans 3:25).

The word translated “*propitiation*” is from the Greek word, “*hilasterion*,” and means literally “*Mercy Seat*.” Upon this Mercy-Seat covering the broken Law that called for the death of the nation, the High Priest, once a year on the day of atonement, took blood from the alter in the Court of the Tabernacle, and sprinkled it upon the Mercy-Seat over the broken Law, and then when God descended in the cloud of shekinah glory into the Holy of Holies, He did not see the broken Law, but the blood instead. God Himself had said before . . .

“ . . . *when I see the blood, I will pass over you*” (Exodus 12:13).

This was all fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. He was here upon earth for thirty-three years to prove the same two things Moses proved by his sojourn on the mount for forty days and nights. The two things were:

1. The awful sinfulness of the human heart, and the failure of the law to make men better
2. To demonstrate God’s provision of salvation, that the Law could not provide.

Look at Paul’s statement again in Romans 8:3, “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.*” God did do by sending His Son to deliver us from judgment and death.

The first thing the coming of Christ proved was the exceeding sinfulness of sin. After fifteen hundred years of the thunderings and threatenings of the Law, the nation of Israel committed the crime of all time, by condemning to death the only man who had ever kept God’s Law perfectly, the only One whom the Law could not condemn. Now if that were all, God would have been compelled to damn all humanity into Hell forever. But as Moses came from the mount with *two things*, the death-dealing Law and the life-giving pattern of the Tabernacle, so Christ’s coming also revealed the failure of the Law to make men better, but by dying on the cross and shedding His blood He opened a way whereby these same guilty, godless, hopeless, lawless sinners could be declared righteous, for the blood now stands between the believer and God who said,

“ . . . *when I see the blood, I will pass over you*” (Exodus 12:13)

I’ll close with the same emphasis with which I began – what the Law could not do, Jesus did! By His life and by His death, He condemned sin in the flesh, but at the same time He provided forgiveness for the sinner who will flee to Him in faith.

By the shedding of His blood, by His substitutionary, atoning death and resurrection, the Throne of God that by the Law was a throne of judgment and death, became a throne of mercy and life.

What the law could not do, Jesus did!

