

Justice for All!

Pray

Lord God, "I will praise You with an upright heart as I learn Your righteous laws" (Psa. 119:7).

Read

EXODUS 23:1-33

Meditate

CONSIDER • Reflect on God's "justice." Thank him that he has offered you his love instead of justice.

THINK FURTHER • *Impartiality in the administration of justice* (1-9). Litigants, witnesses and judges are told not to be swayed by malice (1), popular opinion (2), sentimentality (3), prejudice (6), bribes (8) or racism (9). God will not countenance miscarriages of justice (7). The "enemy" of vs. 4,5 is probably the opponent in a law case. The point is that legal disputes are to be kept within certain bounds and not allowed to damage wider community life, something that remains relevant, however complex our modern legal systems.

Laws about religious festivals (10-19). Much of the detail here has no relevance for Christians today. We need to work out how, in our situation, we should show the same thankfulness to God for his goodness to us (15,19a). It is worth pondering that the Sabbath was given for rest and refreshment (12), not to be filled with so much "religious" activity that you get neither! Note also the concern shown for the welfare of both wild and working ani-

mals (4,5,11,12).

Warnings and promises (20-33). Ancient near-eastern collections of law commonly end with curses and blessings (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Verses 20-33 end the collection that began with the Ten Commandments. In the context of modern examples of "ethnic cleansing," they raise questions too complex to deal with briefly. It is, however, worth noting that the driving out of the immoral Canaanites is seen as a "judicial punishment" (Lev. 18:24,25; 20:22,23), and that God waited 400 years before enacting it, so that the justice of the "sentence" would become plain (Gen. 15:16).

APPLICATION • "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong" (2). Are your actions towards others influenced by the "crowd" around you? How is God and his Word influencing you in decisions you make concerning all people, rich or poor? How will you show God's attitude to those you meet today?

Pray

Lord, keep me from being a "crowd" pleaser, or follower. Guide me in all my relationships, and may my life be pleasing to You above all.

Our God Is a Consuming Fire

Pray

May Your consuming fire burn out the dross in my life today, O Lord.

Read

EXODUS 24:1-18

Meditate

CONSIDER • “Fire” usually brings fear to hearts. But it can also be a cleansing agent—burning out the dross of our lives.

THINK FURTHER • This is a key chapter in the story of God’s relationship with Israel, recording the ratification of the covenant foreshadowed (19:5). The significance of all the actions in the covenant-making ceremony is not explained, but the meaning of some seems fairly clear. The altar and the twelve pillars represent God and Israel. The burnt offering was an act of worship in which the whole animal was burnt (Lev. 1:9). It symbolizes complete dedication to God, also expressed by the promises of obedience (3,7). Part of the fellowship offering was burnt on the altar, the rest was eaten by the people. This was the meal eaten on the mountain (9-11). It symbolized the intimate relationship between God and Israel. The sprinkling of the blood (6,7) probably symbolized the new “blood relationship” (like that of “kinsfolk”) between God and the people, based on the covenant, and due to God’s grace. That Moses and the others “saw” God and lived (11, compare 33:20)

can only be attributed to God’s grace on this special occasion.

There are important New Testament perspectives on the events here, most obviously in Jesus’ words, “This is my blood of the covenant” (Mark 14:24). His new covenant-relationship is one in which God’s instruction is not written on stone, but inwardly, on the heart (Jer. 31:33). As God’s glory “tented” (16, NIV “settled”) on Sinai, appearing as a consuming fire (17), so Jesus “lived for a while [literally, ‘tented’] among us,” revealing God’s glory (John 1:14). The God of the new covenant is the same as the God of the old, and must still be treated with awe and reverence. Hebrews says, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

APPLICATION • Just as an animal was offered as a burnt offering to God in the Old Testament, so the Lord Jesus offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sin (see Heb. 9:11-14). How has his sacrifice changed your life? What sacrifice are you making to express love and gratitude for his sacrifice for you?

Pray

Thank You, Father, that in Jesus’ sacrifice for me, I am part of the new covenant. May I, through Your Spirit, live out the life You have written within me.

God's Dwelling Place

Pray

Lord, show me what needs changing in my heart, so that I will be a fit temple for Your Holy Spirit.

Read

EXODUS 25:1-22

Meditate

CONSIDER • Where does God dwell now? How does he dwell in us?

THINK FURTHER • Following the covenant-making, God gives Moses instructions for a portable sanctuary for a people on the move. Its purpose is that God may dwell with his people (8). Behind the detailed instructions are spiritual principles regarding making the dwelling of God with his people possible.

Two principles are exemplified in vs. 1-9. Behind the request for freewill offerings is the principle that God does not force his presence on people. He looks for a willingness and openness to receive his presence. He stands at the door and knocks, waiting to be let in (Rev. 3:20). However, he comes on his own terms. The tabernacle is to be built exactly to the pattern he gives.

The visible symbol of God's presence was the ark (10-22). In the ancient near east, cherubim (sphinx-like creatures) were placed at the entrance to holy places and beside thrones (see Gen. 3:24). Here they guard the invisible throne of "the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim"

(2 Sam. 6:2). Psalm 132:7 calls the ark God's "footstool." It is the place where his presence touches earth in a special way. In the ark were the stone tablets engraved with the Law (16). This exemplifies the principle that the worship of God is not to be something confined to the sanctuary; it is to determine the way we live, as we obey his commands. Finally, the cover on the ark was the place of atonement (17), the place where sin was dealt with so that God could continue to be present in blessing, not judgment.

In Jesus, God touched earth in a unique way. He made atonement for sin once and for all. As a result, we can know God's presence with us always through his Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION • "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you ... You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (2 Cor. 6:19,20). What does this say to you concerning the care and use of your body? Are you honoring God with your body?

Pray

"Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind" (Psa, 26:2). May my body be a clean temple for Your Holy Spirit.

Bread, Drink and Almonds

Pray

Lord, You deserve our very best. Show me how to give my best today and every day.

Read

EXODUS 25:23-40

Meditate

CONSIDER • Do you say grace before meals? If so, is it just a habit or does it really mean something to you?

THINK FURTHER • In many cultures offerings of food and drink are put before the gods in the temple because it is assumed that the gods need sustenance from those who worship them. It might seem that the table laden with drink offerings and the “bread of the Presence” (29,30) fits in with this idea. However, in Psalm 50:7-14 the God of Israel denounces any such understanding of the offerings given to him. So what was the significance of this table and what was on it? It must be said that the answer to that question is not clear. The offering of “first-fruits” that we met in 22:29,30 and 23:19 suggests a possible answer. Maybe the placing of fresh loaves on the table each week (Lev. 24:8), probably with the accompaniment of drink offerings, was a way of expressing thanks to God for the provision of the basic necessities of life. It might also be a visible way of expressing the prayer, “give us today our daily bread,” which is a recognition of our dependence on God. It is all too easy to take his pro-

vision for granted.

The significance of the lampstand is equally unclear. The fact that its decoration gave it an almond-tree-like appearance suggests that it was a symbol of something and not just a source of light. In Israel the almond was the first tree to flower in the spring, and so might be a symbol of new life. Perhaps it represented the tree of life that stood in the center of the Garden of Eden. This too would be a reminder of human dependence on God, our Creator, for life.

APPLICATION • How do you express your thankfulness and dependence on God? Are you sharing the bountiful provision he has given you with someone less fortunate?

Pray

I am so blessed by the gifts from Your hand, Lord, and for the love You show to me. As I have been blessed, help me to share that with others.

Unbearable Holiness

Pray

You are worthy, Lord, of all my praise, for You are the holy God. Renew my love today.

Read

EXODUS 26.1-37

Meditate

CONSIDER • When confronted with a vision of the holiness of God, Isaiah responded, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" (Isa. 6:5).

THINK FURTHER • Although some of the details are unclear, the main pattern of the portable sanctuary described here is clear. The tabernacle itself was made of best quality linen embroidered with cherubim, supported on a framework of acacia-wood "trellises" fitted into silver sockets (1-6,15-30). It was about fifteen meters long, five wide and five high. Over this there was a covering "tent" of goats' hair, the normal material for Bedouin tents (7-13). It is not clear whether v. 14 refers to yet another layer of covering or to a bag or wrapper that was to be used for transportation. In its structure the tabernacle symbolized both warning and promise. The ark of the Testimony which spoke of God's presence was kept in the Most Holy Place, which was curtained off from the Holy Place (31-37). The cherubim on the ark are a reminder of those that guarded the Garden of Eden after the fall (Gen. 3:24). Only priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the high priest could enter the

Most Holy Place, and then only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The tabernacle itself stood within a courtyard which separated it from the surrounding Israelite camp (27:9). All this speaks of the need to separate the people from the holy presence of God. It is a warning of the incompatibility of God's holiness and human sinfulness.

And yet there is promise in the fact that God gives instructions for the building of this portable sanctuary. God wants to be with his people, sinful though they are, and wants to journey with them. He therefore makes this possible through the tabernacle and its associated sacrificial rituals. This foreshadows Jesus' promise to be with us always (Matt. 28:20) and Paul's description of the church as God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17).

APPLICATION • Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we now have full access to God. In view of that, we are to offer our "bodies a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1). Can you say that your life is "holy and pleasing to God"? What is God challenging in your life today, so that your life will be good and pleasing to him?

Pray

Thank You, Lord, that Your sacrifice has dealt with my sin and made it possible for me to know You. With Your help, may I live a life "holy and pleasing" to You.

The Beauty of Holiness

Pray

Help me to understand the true meaning of worship. I offer You my worship and praise today.

Read

EXODUS 27:1-21

Meditate

CONSIDER • “O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, bow down before him, his glory proclaim” (J.S.B. Monsell, based on Psa. 96:9, KJV).

THINK FURTHER • What is beauty? In part, it is the aesthetic attraction of color and pattern, as displayed in the tabernacle’s skillfully dyed and embroidered curtains, and its carefully wrought wooden framework, furniture and metal utensils. But this collection of items must be arranged appropriately to be appreciated: beauty also has to do with symmetry and pleasing proportions. The tabernacle courtyard (9-19) is a rectangle about fifty meters long and twenty-five wide, and so made up of two twenty-five meter squares. If the description of Ezekiel’s visionary temple (Ezek. 40-42) is a guide, the entrance to the tabernacle lay in the invisible dividing line between these two squares. The ark would then have stood at the middle of the western square, and the bronze altar at the middle of the eastern square. If such careful geometrical symmetries and proportions marked Solomon’s temple (as they do Ezekiel’s visionary one), they may be what the psalmist has

in mind when saying, “strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (Psa. 96:6, KJV). These aspects of the Old Testament sanctuaries indicate that beauty—both as “aesthetics” and “orderliness”—must have its place in the corporate worship of God. Thus, the apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to ensure that in their exercise of spiritual gifts “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). Two other desirable characteristics of worship are hinted at in this chapter. The Hebrew term used for the oil in v. 20 indicates that it is the best quality oil, just as the linen used in the tabernacle was the finest quality (16). We should bring to God our best in worship, which leads to the other characteristic, that worship sometimes involves sacrifice, as indicated by the altar (1-8).

APPLICATION • How far are these characteristics of worship expressed in the corporate worship you experience week by week? Are there ways in which they could be expressed more adequately? How does your life show true worship to God?

Pray

“Worthy of worship, worthy of praise, Worthy of honor and glory; / Worthy of all the glad songs we sing, Worthy of all the offerings we bring. You are worthy...” (T.W. York).