

Chapter 6

The Covenant Nation Is Organized

Exodus

PURPOSE

The purpose of Exodus, as we have seen, is to present the story of the organization of Israel as the covenant nation. We have taken note of the first step in that process. Now, in the second part of the book, we come to the formal procedure by which Israel becomes the theocratic nation.

ANALYSIS

God's Covenant with Israel

God has brought Israel out of Egypt and down the Sinai Peninsula to Mount Sinai. Here it was that He had called Moses. Here He had promised Moses, "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Ex. 3:12). Here the covenant was to be made.

The purpose of the covenant is made plain in Exodus 19:5, 6a: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." It is by means of this covenant that Israel is organized into a nation. But she was not an ordinary nation. Israel was to be a God-centered nation. She would be a theocracy, a nation ruled by God.

The covenant is here presented as being voluntary. That is, Israel can choose to enter the covenant or not to enter it. And the means of entering is obedience. Is this a covenant of works? Not at all. Remember that this covenant is made after the exodus from Egypt. And that exodus is the symbol and type of redemption. It is as a redeemed people that Israel becomes the covenant nation. The obedience required from Israel is that obedience to the redeeming God which always follows His redeeming work.

There is a purpose behind this demand for obedience. It stresses the fact that the nation about to be organized is distinct from other nations. It is a theocracy. It is not man, but God, who makes the laws of Israel. Therefore, it is not man but God who rules. In Israel there can

be no distinction between church and state. They are identical. They have the same head. The God whom they worship is the ruler. The God who rules them is the object of their worship.

The Law of God

This close union of religion and government is found even in the Ten Commandments. The commandments are broad principles. They are applicable far beyond the borders of Israel. They are the sum of God's requirements for all of mankind. But notice how they begin, "I am Jehovah thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:1). The call to obey these commandments is based upon what God has done for Israel.

The Ten Commandments are for all men in every age. They are ethical standards which flow from the very nature of God Himself. When properly understood — as Jesus understood and explained them — they cover all of life and demand nothing less than perfect love and perfect obedience to God. They tell us how we are to worship God and how we are to treat our fellow men. They are broad principles which apply to all the situations of our lives.

Just because the commandments are broad and general, and just because the problems of life are so practical and specific the commandments must be applied to the various situations of life. As Christians, we are responsible for doing that for ourselves, using all of God's Word as our guide, and with the Holy Spirit as our teacher. But in the young theocratic nation, it was necessary for God to spell out in detail just how the commandments were to be applied to Israel's life. So God did not give Israel just the unchangeable moral law; that is, the commandments, the standard of right and wrong; He also gave the civil law and the ceremonial law. The civil law contains God's rules for Israel's life. The ceremonial law contains God's rules for Israel's worship. But in Israel life and worship were closely united. Therefore we often find the ceremonial and the civil laws presented together. We make the distinction to aid our understanding. The Bible simply presents the ordinances of God.

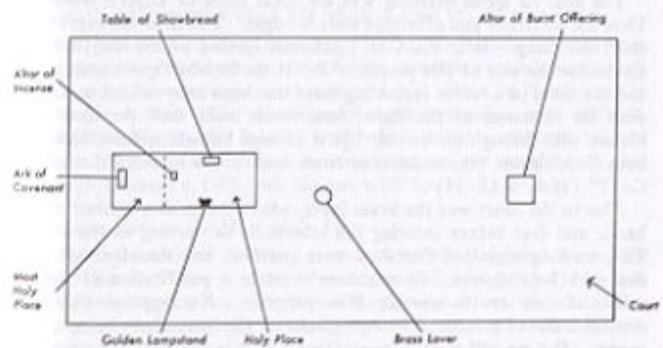
The Tabernacle

In the theocratic nation, it was necessary that the worship of God should be central in all of life. In fact, if God had made the people into a nation, and had not given them their form of worship, they would not have become a truly theocratic nation. The giving of the instruction for building the tabernacle is closely connected with the giving of the law. In the giving of the law the God who redeemed His people from bondage asserts His right to rule them. In the giving of the tabernacle the God who is their ruler asserts His right to declare how He shall be worshiped.

The tabernacle lies at the center of all Old Testament worship. The temple was simply a permanent sanctuary, built on the pattern of the tabernacle. We can get some idea of the purpose of the tabernacle by the names that are given to it. It is called:

1. The dwelling place, to signify that here God dwells among His people and is truly their God.
2. The tent of meeting, to show that here God meets with His people and has fellowship with them.
3. The tent of testimony, because it testifies constantly to the covenant which God had made with His people.
4. The holy place, because it is set apart from everything else by virtue of God's presence there. It is to be viewed with reverent awe, and God's ordinances concerning it are to be scrupulously obeyed.

The form of the tabernacle, and the placing of the various articles of furniture, is indicated in the sketch below.



The Priests

The worship ritual in the tabernacle was performed by the priests. God had promised to make Israel a kingdom of priests, but she had not yet attained to that position. The entire nation of Israel was not yet sufficiently advanced spiritually to be allowed to enter the house of God. So a group of Israelites, taken from the tribe of Levi, were to represent their brethren and serve as priests. They were given the responsibility of carrying out the ritual of worship on behalf of their fellow Israelites. They were mediators between God and man. This was not their own idea. They were chosen for this task by God. In this they were types of Christ, "the one mediator between God and man."