

Story of the Old Testament

Lesson 4B - Formation of God's Kingdom - Exodus and the Birth of a Nation

Welcome back. We are going to continue with Part B of Lesson 4 in the story of the Old Testament. We are looking at this period of the formation of God's kingdom, the Exodus to the birth of a nation. We have already talked through an overview of these five books from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. In this lesson, we will highlight a few points in each of these books that reinforce the story at this point in the narrative.

This portion of the lesson begins on page 26, and we are looking at some key thoughts out of the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is often a book that many choose not to spend much time reading, or we skim through it quickly. It is filled with many specifics of feasts and sacrifices and lots of details on the law and how the people of God were to live in relationship with him.

You can see at the top of page 26; there are some really valuable points for us to take away from the book of Leviticus as it fits into the story of the Old Testament. When we think of Leviticus, here is a good summary.

God forgives sin and makes people holy through blood sacrifice. God then expects his people to live in fellowship with him by following his laws.

We mentioned that the key word for Leviticus is holiness, and the central part of Leviticus deals with the tabernacle, the people of God could meet with God through the high priest and through the priesthood.

Key words for Leviticus are holy and holiness, clean and unclean, the doctrine of atonement, someone to take the place, a substitute to take our place to cover over our sin, to renew or maintain our relationship with a holy God. Chapter 11 is a key chapter focused on the requirement to be holy. God says, even in the key verse 44, that He is the Lord their God and they are His people, and He is a holy God, so be holy as He is holy.

We read this same truth 1 Peter 1:13-15, "be holy as I am holy". God expects this even of us. Now, we have the Holy Spirit of God living within us, at that point, they had the presence of God right there in the very midst, but it was always God's desire for His people to live holy lives for the glory of God.

He is calling his people to walk in a manner that's worthy of this calling that we have received. Chapter 16 is also a key chapter in Leviticus. It is where we read about the day of atonement and how once a year, the sins of all the people, could be forgiven and atoned for.

We learn in the New Testament that the blood of goats and sheep and bulls never took away sin. These sacrifices were just a covering over, not permanent forgiveness. Here is another red thread, The Day of Atonement in the OT was looking forward to Jesus being the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate atoning sacrifice for our sin. This becomes so clear when we read in the New Testament, Hebrews chapter 8, 9, and 10. Jesus, he is the great high priest, and he is the atoning sacrifice, the once and done sacrifice for sin.

You can see that the tabernacle was symbol of God's presence. In the NT, God indwells or tabernacles with every believer through the indwelling the Holy Spirit. Our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit. God lives within us by grace through faith.

In Leviticus, Israel is instructed on how to worship God in the tabernacle. Later in the story, we will see how the temple will replace the tabernacle, and this tabernacle became the center of worship for the next 500 years. What you see on page 26 is just a simple diagram of the tabernacle.

On the left, you can see the tabernacle where the various tribes are camped around the tabernacle. In the daytime, there would be a pillar of cloud coming out of the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant resided, and at nighttime, there was a flame. The pillar of cloud and fire represented the presence of God, the Shekinah glory of God. To the right, you can see a diagram of the tabernacle. There was only one way into the tabernacle. There was a gate on the east where the sun rose on the east, so people were to have their back to the sun as they would enter in, people and the priests would enter into the tabernacle and then later into the temple.

Many in that day worshipped the sun god. God's people were not to worship idols and false gods that the world worshipped. They were called to worship the one true God. As they entered the tabernacle, their back would be turned from the gods of the world as they faced the Living and True God.

This reminds us that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the light. No one can come to the Father except through me." We will see as we talk through these different elements of the tabernacle, is that every aspect points to Jesus. Another red thread of Jesus in the OT.

Each element points to some aspect of the character of Jesus or a type of Jesus. Refer to the chart at the bottom of the page.

The gate or the door refers to only one way to God, In John 10:9, Jesus said, I am the door, and John 14:6, I am the way, the only way to the Father.

There was an altar where the sacrifices would be made. This reminds us that substitution is necessary, a substitutionary death. A perfect lamb, a perfect goat had to have its blood shed to make atonement for the sin of the people. In Mark 10:45, Jesus says, I give my life as a ransom for many. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.

There was also a basin that would be filled with water in which the priests would wash, themselves before they entered into the holy place. Purification was needed to enter into God's presence.

At the Last Supper, where Jesus was washing the feet of his disciples in John 13:8, he said, If I do not wash you, you have no part in me. When we trust in Christ, there is a sense of baptism, a cleansing, a washing of rebirth that the Holy Spirit provides for us. As we go through the day, there is the sin of the world, and even our own lives, that leaves us dirty or tarnished.

We need an ongoing confession of sin, an ongoing cleansing. Our relationship with God is secure, but we need an ongoing renewing of our intimate fellowship with God. In the tabernacle, the priests, after doing all the work of the sacrifice, needed to clean themselves, be cleaned before entering into the presence of God.

Next there were two parts in the main portion of the tabernacle.

There was the Holy Place, and then the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place had four elements in it.

The golden lampstand, the illumination, light is needed for the people of God. In John 8:12, Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

There was the table of the bread, they called it the table of showbread. It was on the opposite wall of the Holy Place. God's people needed sustenance, they needed to feed, to grow physically, and they needed to be growing spiritually. In John 6:48, Jesus said, I am the bread of life. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. We know and trust in Jesus. We feed on Him, and we abide in Him. There's spiritual growth that takes place.

There was a veil, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. In front of the veil was an altar, called the altar of incense. And intercession, the idea of prayer was needed for the people of God. The priest would bring the people of God before God.

In the New Testament, the veil gets torn when Jesus dies, and His sacrifice is acceptable to the Father. The way into the presence of God is opened as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus, the veil is torn, and we can now enter directly before the throne of grace. We do not need to go through a high priest; we do not need to go through an intermediary.

Jesus is the only intermediary between God and man. And Jesus even says in John 17:9, that He is praying for His disciples. In Hebrews 7, we read that Jesus lives to make intercession for us and to save us completely.

The veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was made of fabric, about five inches thick, and it was about 30 feet high, and it separated these two areas.

And only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would pass through the veil, into the holy of holies. So, the veil meant that there was a separation between God and His people. God is holy, and His people needed atonement for their sin to be able to enter into the presence of God.

Inside the Holy of Holies, there was the Ark of the Covenant. Inside was the Ten Commandments and a jar of manna, and the staff of Aaron that budded. And on top of the Ark of the Covenant were two angels, two cherubim, and God would meet, the presence of God would be between the wings of the cherubim.

Once a year, the high priest would bring the blood of the sacrifice on the day of atonement and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, and that would be symbolic of the atonement for sin for a year, and every year that would have to be repeated.

It is interesting to see how every element in Leviticus points ahead to the picture of Jesus. It is really a picture of the red thread all throughout Leviticus.

And you can see this continuing on page 27; there was a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night coming up from the Holy of Holies. These were symbolic of God's presence and were the manifest presence of the glory of God in the midst of His people. In Exodus chapter 40:34-38, we read about the glory of God filling the tabernacle.

God's people are instructed how to worship God in this new tabernacle.

The book of Leviticus provides the recording of laws and services for the Levite priests with a stated purpose. The theme of holiness is key in Leviticus. Leviticus shows that atonement and forgiveness are needed for the people of God to walk in holiness and be set apart for God's purposes. The tabernacle remained the center of the nation's worship for 500 years until it was replaced by Solomon's temple. Chapters 1-10 talk about the way to God through sacrifice. There were various offerings of dedication, expiation, there were burn offerings and meal offerings and peace offerings and sin offerings and guilt offerings, and you can see the different references there.

Leviticus also instructed Israel on how to walk in the way of holiness, to walk in fellowship with God. We read about this in chapters 11-27. In chapters 11 through 22, there are all kinds of laws and requirements for how the people of God would live on a daily basis in relationship with the Holy God. And then there were many festivals that were recorded, in chapters 23-25. You can see there were seven listed on this page along with the New Testament, and the significance or meaning. Once again, these are each a red thread pointing ahead to Jesus.

The Passover reminds us of the death of Christ.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread points to the holy walk of believers.

The Feast of First Fruits points to the resurrection.

The Feast of Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks represented the future coming down of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church.

The Feast of Trumpets looks ahead to the regathering of Israel. This will ultimately take place when Jesus comes the second time.

The Day of Atonement was the day of national cleansing.

The Feast of Tabernacles looks ahead to the Messianic Kingdom rest, the ultimate rest that God's going to provide when Jesus returns and sets up his kingdom here on earth where we will reign with him for a thousand years. You can read also about the Sabbath years and the year of Jubilee as well.

The Book of Leviticus ends with many different promises and warnings for God's people in chapters 26 and 27. Leviticus supports the narrative that we read about in Exodus, and after all this takes place at Mount Sinai, the time comes for the people of God to leave Mount Sinai and to begin their journey to the Promised Land.

This story continues in the Book of Numbers. The theme in Numbers is trust, the people of God must learn to trust fully in God.

Over to the left on page 27, you can see a little gray box, it gives you a three-point outline for the Book of Numbers.

Chapters 1-10 last about 20 days, where God provides direction and guidance.

Chapters 11-14 are when the spies are sent into the land at Kadesh Barnea, they come back and give a bad report and the people rebel. That takes about 70 days, and then because of their disbelief and rebellion, there's discipline from God.

God's discipline covers chapters 15-36. Chapters 15-20 cover 38 years. Chapters 21-36 cover five months. This period is meant to prepare God's people to enter the Promised Land and live for Him as their God and King.

You can see some highlights there at the bottom of page 27. The key word for the Book of Numbers is wandering. Chapter 14 is a key chapter. This is where we read about the unbelief that took place at Kadesh Barnea. Let us read chapter 14:26 through the end of the chapter.

“And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, how long shall this wicked congregation grumble against Me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against Me. Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in My hearing I will do to you. Your dead bodies shall fall in the wilderness, and all of your number listed in the census from 20 years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, who you said would become prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in the wilderness, and your children shall be shepherded in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know My displeasure. I, the Lord, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all the wicked congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die. And the men whom Moses sent out to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against Him by bringing up a bad report about the land, the men who brought up the bad report of the land died by a plague before the Lord. Those men who went to spy out the land, only Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, remained alive.”

This is a good summary of what took place. This was the discipline that God brought on the people of Israel. Because of their belief, all those twenty years of age or older would die in the wilderness. At the end of those forty years, God would renew the covenant with His people, and then they would be prepared to enter into the promised land. The number 40 is a helpful reminder for the story in the book of Numbers as God's people grow from unbelief and rebellion to begin to trust in God as their king.

As you continue on to page twenty-eight, you can see then the book of Deuteronomy. A good summary of that is at the top. “As Israel is ready to enter the promised land, God reminds Israel about his mighty acts, his covenant promises, and his commandments, through three farewell speeches by Moses.”

So, the key thought for Deuteronomy is the word renewal.

It is a renewing of the covenant that God presented to Moses in Exodus. Some of the key words for us are to observe, to do, to keep, to obey. The people of God are to walk in obedience with a holy God; to walk in faith demonstrated through obedience to God's Word.

That is the same principle we see even in the New Testament. We are saved by grace through faith, but the evidence of that faith is seen in how we walk in obedience. Chapter eight is a key chapter in the book of Deuteronomy.

It is an exhortation to obey and to keep the covenants with God.

Key verse, 10:11-13:

“And the Lord said to me, Rise, go on your journey at the head of the people, so they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good.”

God wants us to walk in obedience; to demonstrate that we are in relationship with him.

It is a demonstration of our faith. You can see the breakdown of the three messages that Moses gives to the people.

You can see the first one. What has God done for Israel? A summary of all the way God had provided for them over these years and wandering.

The second message, what God expects from his people, chapter 4 to 26.

And then the last message deals with what God will do for Israel in chapter 27 to 34.

These promises of the blessings that come with walking in obedience and the discipline that will come when they would walk in disobedience. Deuteronomy is a second telling of a law. It is not a second law. It is just a second telling. It is a reminder of all these people who were young when they began to wander in the wilderness. Now, 40 years later, it is time to have these covenant promises renewed for them as they prepare to enter into the promised land.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses dies on the east side of the Jordan. He gets to look into the promised land. He does not lead the people in. God had already raised up Joshua to be the leader, to be the replacement for Moses. And in Joshua chapter 1, God tells Joshua that Moses is dead. Joshua, you are going to lead the people into the land. Do not be terrified. Do not be discouraged. Do not let the book of the law depart from your lips. Meditate on it day and night and you will be successful. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will deliver the land into your hands and will fulfill the promise that was made to Abraham, more than 450 years earlier.

The picture to introduce the Book of Joshua shows the priests crossing the Jordan carrying the Ark of the Covenant. God fulfills his promises to Israel to give them a land through the conquest of Canaan and through the allocation of the land among the tribes under the leadership of Joshua.

To the right there, you can see a little box. It provides some background for Joshua the man. He was born in Egypt. He was an aid to Moses. He was a great military commander. He was with Moses on Mount Sinai. He was one of the 12 spies that came back and gave a good report back at Kadesh Barnea in Numbers chapter 13 and 14. He became Israel's leader after Moses. He was a faithful servant of the Lord. And you can see even when he dies, he still has a heart that is fully devoted to the Lord in Joshua 24:15.

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Some key thoughts ...

The book of Joshua is about entering the land. It covers a period of 30 years.

Key word would be victory.

Chapter 6 is a key chapter. It is the beginning of the conquest of Joshua and to then the division of the land amongst the 12 tribes.

Key characters: Joshua and Caleb, the two spies that gave the good report. They are at the center of this part of the story.

An outline for the book of Joshua:

Chapter 1 to 5. It is the crossing of the Jordan River.

Chapters 5 to 12, the conquering of the enemies in the land.

Chapters 13 to 21, the claiming of the inheritance, the dividing up the land.

And we will look at the map on the next page in a moment.

The final three chapters deal with the consecration of the people, preparing them to begin to live in this land with God as their king. This period in the story of the OT is known as the Theocracy. The people of God will be living in God's land, under God's rule, with God as their king.

The people of God are going to serve him with the purpose of God, to love him with all their heart and soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as himself.

Joshua 24:15 is a helpful verse to memorize for the book of Joshua.

“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

And if you look then at the next page on page 29, you can see a map of the promised land, the land promised by God to Abraham and the division of the land.

The tribes are Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh settled on the east side of the Jordan river.

To the west of the Jordan river are the tribes of Asher and Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar, the other half tribe of Manasseh, Ephraim, Dan, Judah, and Benjamin. And then Simeon is a portion of the territory tucked inside of Judah.

That is the land that was promised to Abraham that now was fulfilled. And through Joshua, the land was divided up. And now the people of God had an opportunity to serve him as king.

And we will see how the story continues. The picture that we started drawing at the very beginning of the story of the Old Testament is shown on page 30.

Remember, you have the kingdom of God and kingdom of man is in conflict that started in Genesis chapters 3 to 11. This conflict is evident throughout the story of the Old Testament.

To have a kingdom, you need a king, you need people, you need a land and a purpose. In Genesis chapter 12, God promised Abraham, that he was going to be a great. God would give him a land and a great nation would come from him. All the nations of the earth would be blessed as God's people walk in obedience, loving Him and loving others.

On the right side of the chart, the nations of the world are represented. Because of the fall, the nations have set themselves up against God and they are separated from God. Their hearts are hardened. Their hearts are darkened because of sin. They are prisoners of sin.

When the people of God are living in relationship with God and loving him and loving others, not in a perfect way, but God's laws are written on their hearts.

When the people of God are living in obedience to God's word, by His grace, they will reveal the One True God to the nations. And one by one, people who are separated from a holy God have an opportunity to respond to the promise of God and enter into God's kingdom by grace through faith.

Abraham believed God's promise in Genesis 15:6 and God's righteousness was credited to him. It was not Abraham's good works that saved him but rather that he had faith in God's promise of a redeemer and a kingdom. God's righteousness was placed on him by grace through faith, because of his faith in the promises of God.

And as the story continues, we will see people one by one demonstrating that same kind of faith as Abraham. It is a picture of the gospel. So, this gospel, although veiled, is evident even in the Old Testament.

It becomes more clear, more revealed as the New Testament unfolds, where the New Testament shows us all the things that were promised in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ. But the story of the kingdom of God begins in the Old Testament. It is a picture that continues on throughout the New Testament as well.

This lesson ends with the people of God now in the land that God had promised, they are serving their king under a theocracy, living out God's law to love him with all their heart and soul, mind and strength and to love others.

This story will soon show us how God's people live in this new land?
Will they be faithful to the promises of God?
Will they be obedient to God?
Where will the story go?

We know that God is a faithful God.
No matter what the people do, God is going to fulfill his promises.
There will be discipline for disobedience, but God is a faithful God.
There will always be a remnant, and God will fulfill his promise to build his kingdom.

In look forward to continuing the story with Lesson 5.

God bless you.