

LESSON FOUR: THE PATRIARCHAL AND MOSAICAL DISPENSATIONS

At the close of Lesson Three we saw that God expelled man from paradise, but that at the same time He intimated a plan by which man could one day be saved from his sins, a plan which culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ. Thousands of years were to pass before this coming, however, and during this preparatory time God dealt with man according to the terms of the Patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations. The history of these periods was surveyed in Lesson Two. In the present lesson we will focus on God's purposes in each period and on those events, ordinances, and prophecies, which he designed to prepare man for the coming of Christ and his church.

THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION

From the creation of man until the giving of the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai, God dealt directly with the patriarchs, or fathers of households faithful to him. Hence this period is called the Patriarchal Dispensation.

Abel's Sacrifice

(Genesis 4:3-4)

Adam, of course, was the first patriarch, whose history we have already studied. Yet an act of worship performed by Adam's son Abel requires our further attention, for it was the first recorded example of animal sacrifice, an ordinance that throughout the Old Testament period anticipated the death of Christ. Details of how this worship foreshadowed Christ's own sacrifice became more apparent as the history of God's people unfolded, but Abel's offering established the first of a series of types or actions and events which symbolized and resembled in shadowed form the events of the life and death of Christ and those of the New Testament period. Abel's offering for example involved the death and bloodshed of an innocent lamb (Genesis 4:4), typifying the death of the Lamb of God, the sinless Christ (John 1:23). Probably millions of animal sacrifices were made in this fashion before Christ came, and each one reminded the worshipper that his sin required the shedding of innocent blood (Hebrews 9:22). Tragically, however, the blood of animals could never suffice to cleanse sin (Hebrews 10:4). As we saw in Lesson Three, God himself in the person of his Son would have to die in man's place for him to be saved. Hence all animal sacrifices of the Old Testament period only served to point toward the death of Christ, whose blood would finally wash away the sins of those who believed on and obeyed him. Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, "this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Please read Hebrews 9:13-10:25 on the subject of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

Noah's Salvation

(Genesis 6-9)

A second major event of the Patriarchal Dispensation was that of the great flood by which God destroyed the sinful world and from which he saved Noah. Noah and his family were preserved because of their righteousness and obedience, and thus their salvation served as a type of that of the Christian (1 Peter 3:20-21).

The Promise to Abraham

(Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:3-5; 17:2-8; 22:17-18)

About 2000 B.C. God called Abraham and gave him four great promises: (1) He would be the father of a great nation of people (Genesis 13:16); (2) God would be a God for him and his descendants (Genesis 17:7); (3) Abraham's descendants would possess the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8); and (4) through Abraham and his seed all the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). As we have seen the first three of these promises were fulfilled in the development of the nation of Israel from the twelve sons of Jacob, Abraham's grandson. The last promise, however,

was the most significant, for it meant that from Abraham's seed would come one who would be the Savior of all mankind. In the New Testament this promise is spoken of as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ: Acts 2:39; 13:23, 32; 26:6; Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:18, 22, 29.

Circumcision

(Genesis 17:9-14)

As a token of the covenant between himself and Abraham's descendants, God instituted the right of circumcision for all males who were either born into his family or who entered it as purchased servants. The physical act of circumcision served as a type of the spiritual putting off of sin that became possible under the New Testament after Christ's death. Paul said to the Christians of Colossae that in Christ they were:

circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11-12).

During the Old Testament period, then, God's people were those descended from Abraham and those who were physically circumcised. But under the New Testament period there is no physical characteristic required. Rather anyone who puts off his sin in baptism becomes a member of God's family (See Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3; Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Deliverance From Egypt

(Exodus 1-15)

Perhaps the greatest moment in the history of God's people before the coming of Christ was that when he delivered them by the hand of Moses out of Egyptian bondage. This mighty act demonstrated both God's power over his enemies and his love for his people. And thus the exodus out of Egypt serves as a spiritual type of God's deliverance of man out of the bondage of sin through his son Jesus Christ. Just as the Egyptians had made Israel captive, so all men have become the slaves of sin and the devil (Romans 3:23; John 8:34; 2 Timothy 2:26). And just as Moses, the type of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-12), was sent by God to deliver Israel out of slavery, so Christ was sent to save man from the bondage of sin (Matthew 1:21; John 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 2:14-15, 18; 1 John 3:5, 8).

THE MOSAICAL DISPENSATION

The Purpose of the Law of Moses

After Israel left Egypt they came to Matthew Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). These ten formed the heart of the Law of Moses, and to these were added hundreds of other instructions concerning conduct and worship which are found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The purpose of this law was at least threefold.

First, as suggested above, it provided a system of types or symbols of events and truths that would be revealed and fulfilled in the New Testament period. This purpose is illustrated in Hebrews 7-9.

Second, it gave Israel a standard by which to judge their conduct, with the result that they could realize just how guilty their lives were (cf. Romans 3:19-20; 7:7-13).

Third, the law was designed to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). It did this by showing them their need for a Savior and by instilling the concept of a sinless sacrifice to be made in the place of the people.

The Passover and Other Sacrifices

The law called for several different kinds of offerings and sacrifices from Israel as acts of worship. Prominent among these were the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 20) and the Sin Offering (Lev. 16), both of which involved the shedding of the innocent blood of an animal and thus typified the shedding of Christ's blood. The Passover sacrifice is especially significant because of detailed parallels with the death of Christ (See John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7):

1st. The Passover lamb was without blemish (Exodus 12:5), and Christ was without the blemish of sin (1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 4:15).

2nd. The lamb was to be killed between noon and sunset (Exodus 12:6), and Christ died at 3:00 in the afternoon (Matthew 27:45-50).

3rd. No bone of the lamb was to be broken (Exodus 12:46), and no bone of Christ was broken (John 19:36; Psalms 34:20).

4th. The blood of the lamb saved the lives of the Israelites who obeyed God's commandments (Exodus 12:13), and the blood of Christ saves the souls of all who obey him (Hebrews 9:11-28; 1 John 1:7).

Thus every time the Passover lamb was offered, the act prepared mankind for the sacrifice of Christ.

The Tabernacle and the Temple

In order that they might have a place to witness God's presence among them, God commanded Israel to build a structure called the tabernacle as a place of worship (Exodus 25:40). The tabernacle was designed so that it could be moved with the journeys of the Israelites. Later, after they settled in Canaan, a comparable but permanent and magnificent temple was built by Solomon in its place (2 Sam. 7, 24; 1 Chronicles 22, 28-29; 2 Chronicles 3-7; 1 Kings 5-6). The tabernacle was divided by a veil into two parts, the holy place and the most holy place (Exodus 26:33). In the most holy place was the Ark of the Covenant, where God met with his people (Exodus 25:22). Once a year the high priest of the Israelites entered through the veil into the most holy place and into the presence of God to make a sin offering of blood for them (Lev. 16).

In Hebrews 9 and 10 the significance of their offering is made clear. The most holy place was a type of heaven, and the animal blood symbolized that of Christ shed for the sins of the world. The veil typified his flesh (Hebrews 10:20). When he died, the way into heaven and into the presence of God was opened for all men who would obey his word. This is why the literal veil in the temple in Jerusalem was torn asunder at the moment of his death (Matthew 27:51). Therefore the veil, the most holy place, and the sacrifice made there were all in preparation for the death of Christ and its wonderful result.

The Priesthood

To make sacrifices for the people and to perform the services of the temple. God appointed priests from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 21: 27-29). These men were dedicated wholly to the service of God (Exodus 29:44) and had no physical blemish (Exodus 21:17). Thus they typified the Christian, the priest of the new covenant (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:5-6), who seeks the kingdom of God first in his life (Matthew 6:33) and keeps himself free of spiritual blemish (Ephesians 5:27). The high priest had additional responsibilities and requirements, especially that of offering each year the atonement sacrifice in the most holy place. He therefore served as a type of Christ, our

high priest, who once for all offered his own blood to take away the sin of the people, thereby entering the most holy place of heaven and making it available for us all (Hebrews 9:7-14).

The Promised Land of Canaan

After the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were completed, Israel entered the land of Canaan. This was the land, which God had promised Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:8), a rich land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8, 17). Thus it typified heaven, the beautiful place promised under the new covenant to the people of God if they will obey him (Hebrews 12:22-23; John 14:2-3; Matthew 25:34, 37; Revelation 22:14).

Throughout the entire Old Testament period, God was preparing his people for the coming of the Savior through events and ordinances that typified his atoning death and the spiritual blessings, which it would bestow on man. In Lesson Five, we will study the wonderful life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

Please feel free to read and study this lesson as many times as you wish to do so. After you are comfortable with the knowledge you have gained you may want to test yourself to learn how well you remember. Questions for review and study on this lesson may be found by going to <http://64.177.52.39/8LESSONS/4Q.htm> .

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