

Lesson 9

THE PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT



As directed by God Moses went up to Him on Mount Sinai. There God gave him the tablets of the commandments. He was on the mountain for forty days and nights.

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron, and said to him; “Come make gods for us, who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” Aaron said to them; “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me”. So all the people took off their gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron.

Aaron melted the gold and cast an image of a calf with it... He then built an altar in front of the golden calf... The people offered sacrifices to this idol... They sat down to eat and drink and to make merry, to have fun. (Ex. 32:1-6).

Idolatry: Grave Sin

The people of Israel committed a grave sin through idolatry. Forgetting the Lord, the one and only God they worshipped a calf of Gold. They neglected God their saviour. There were many offences that the Israelites committed against God. But the chief among them was the sin of idolatry.

The LORD said to Moses: "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them. They have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it" (Ex.32:7-8).

Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hands. When he came near the camp he saw the golden calf, and he saw them dancing. His anger flared up, and he threw down the tablets at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made, burnt it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it (Ex.32:19-20). Moses could not bear this grave sin of Israel, God's own people. Moses, the leader of the people scolded them.

Atonement for Sin

On the next day Moses said to the people; "You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonements for your sin". So Moses returned to the LORD and said; "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin-but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written" (Ex.32:30-32).

Moses begged forgiveness of God on behalf of the Israelites. He was prepared to accept on himself the punishment for their sins. God forgave them and said to Moses; "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you broke" (Ex 34:1). So God wrote the commandments on two other stone tablets to replace the ones that Moses broke.

Uniqueness of the People of the Covenant

The covenant that God made with Israel turned them into the people of the covenant. Through the covenant they became:

1. God's own people.
2. The people chosen by God.
3. The people being led by God.
4. The priestly people who offer sacrifices to God.

God had informed through Moses that the people of Israel would be His own people, most dear to Him among all the nations, if they lived by the covenant. This was fulfilled once the covenant was sealed. There were however several instances in the history of Israel when they were unfaithful to God.

God's Commandments

The commandments that God gave through Moses were of fundamental importance in the life of the Israelites. The commandments were norms in the relation of Israelites to God and one another. Through these the Israelites were able to understand the will of God. They realized that by following the laws they could maintain a good and healthy relationship. In short these commandments were the basis of all relationships of the people of Israel.

The Commandments gave the people great responsibilities too. They were obliged to lead ideal lives befitting the status of God's own children. Detailed directions for this were given in the laws.

As laws were given through Moses these were known as the Law of Moses. The Ten Commandments form a short summary of the Law of Moses.

The Ten Commandments exercised great influence over the entire life of the people of Israel. To obey them had become the goal of their life. They were convinced that, if they obeyed the commandments they would receive blessings and life, where as disobeying the commandments would shatter them and lead them to death. The commandments were not meant to cause fear in the Israelites. They were the signs of God's justice and faithfulness. Therefore the Israelites accepted the commandments gladly.

Commandments in the Church

In the Church, which is the new Israel, there are two kinds of Commandments. They are:

Commandments of God, and
Commandments of the Church.

Over and above these we also have the directions that the Church gives us from time to time. The children of the Church have obligation to obey all of them. As children of God we have to obey the Commandments of God. As the children of the Church we have to obey the laws of the church established by Jesus. Obeying these laws and keeping the Kingdom of God as our goal, would help us to progress in our life without going astray.

These Commandments will help us to live in a way pleasing to God and to other people. It is these commandments that point to us continuously the right path. Obeying those shall lead us to life and disobeying them shall lead us to destruction.

Let us Pray

O God who guided Israel giving the commandments,
help us to lead a life following your commandments.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the event of Moses getting the tablets of commandments for the second time (Deut. 10:1-11)



Word of God for our Guidance

Pardon our Iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance (Exodus 34:9).

My decision

I will live my life pleasing to God and men by obeying God's Commandments.

Let us do

Among the following statements mark the right ✓ and the wrong ✗

1. Ten Commandments are known as God's commandments ☐
2. God established the covenant with Israel at Mount Horeb ☐
3. God gave the commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai ☐
4. Idol worship was the gravest sin committed by Israelites ☐
5. The army of Israel was drowned in sea ☐
6. Israel is the people of covenant ☐

Let us find out the answer

1. What was the gravest sin committed by Israel?
2. Why did Moses destroy the tablets of commandments?
3. What are the specialities of the people of covenant?
4. Why are the Ten Commandments known as the law of Moses?
5. How many types of commandments are there in the Church, the New Israel?
6. How do the commandments help us in our life?