

CHAPTER NINE

1 THE TENT OF MEETING

2 UNBELIEF

3 JUDGES, KINGS AND PROPHETS

1 THE TENT OF MEETING

As we said in the last chapter, no doubt there were those Israelites who thought they could be acceptable to God by keeping the Ten Commandments. Foolishly, they had chosen a path that led into a spiritual wilderness. On the other hand, there were others who were ready for God to show them the only way to acceptance.

Taking the broad scope of Scripture, let's speculate for a moment. If God was writing a lesson plan to teach man exactly what he must do to be *right* or *righteous* with him, how would he have started? Just what would have been his first point?

LESSON OUTLINE—POINT #1:

Illustration: A man swimming across a river was caught in the swift-flowing current. Floundering, he called for help! A group of people were watching but none were capable of helping the drowning man, except one strong swimmer.

Those on the bank kept urging this likely rescuer to go to the drowning man's assistance. But he didn't respond. He stood watching while the struggle for survival became more and more desperate. Finally, when the man became utterly exhausted, the strong swimmer dived into the water and pulled him ashore.

When the people criticized the rescuer for waiting so long, he said, "The drowning man would never have allowed me to help him while he had any strength of his own. I could only save him when he gave up trying to help himself."¹

Conclusion: The first step to approaching God is to realize you are a *helpless* sinner, incapable of saving yourself from the eternal consequences of sin.

If the Lord had presented his lesson this way, you can almost hear the Israelites crying out in frustration, "But God, you have already made that point. We know that!"

We could presume that God would reply, "Yes, I know, but that is the very point I want you to understand. The first step to acceptance by me is to realize that you are a helpless sinner. I can only rescue those who have given up trying to save themselves."

The above lesson may be imaginary, but the application is fact. It's what the Scripture consistently teaches. Now let's go a step further.

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

Exodus 25:1,2,8

A VISUAL AID

The Israelites were to build a *sanctuary*, a sacred place called the *Tabernacle*, where God could live among them. God was *not* asking them to do this because he needed a house. Rather, God was creating an elaborate visual aid. As we study, we will slowly gain an understanding of its full meaning. It takes a few pages to explain, so don't get impatient and jump ahead to the next chapter. It's an important piece of the puzzle.

It began with God asking for voluntary contributions for a building project. He only wanted people to give willingly, from the heart. There were no appeals or arm-twisting. What each one gave was up to him. However, God made one thing clear:

"Make this Tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

Exodus 25:9

BASIC LAYOUT

The Tabernacle could be disassembled and moved. The tent-like portion had solid walls with rug-like coverings for the roof. It was divided into two parts: one-third forming a room called *The Holy of Holies* or *The Most Holy Place*, and the other

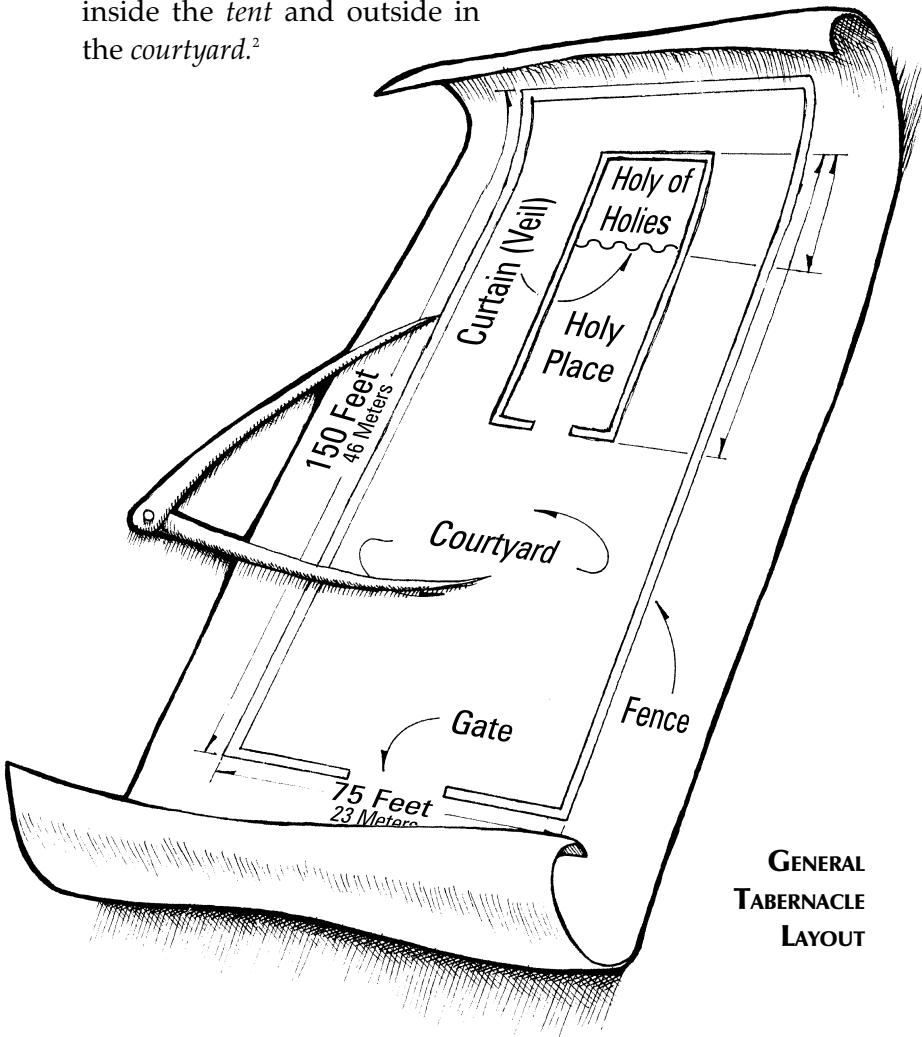
two-thirds forming *The Holy Place*. A heavy curtain, sometimes referred to as the *veil*, separated the two areas.

"The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place."

Exodus 26:33

The Tabernacle was completed with an external courtyard which, in turn, was surrounded by a fence approximately seven feet (2 m) in height. Access to the entire compound was gained through a single gate.

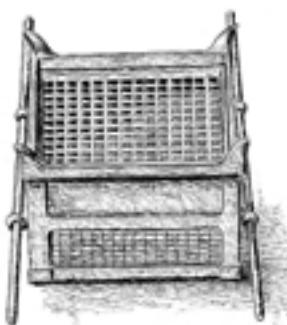
There were seven primary pieces of furniture inside the *tent* and outside in the *courtyard*.²



The Courtyard

1 THE BRONZE ALTAR:

Just inside the courtyard gate was the first piece of furniture. It was quite large, made of wood overlaid with bronze, having four horns on the corners, and long poles on each side so that it could be carried.



2 THE BASIN:

This large bronze bowl was situated halfway between the Bronze Altar and The Holy Place. Filled with water, it was used for ceremonial washing, and signified that man must be pure when he approached God.



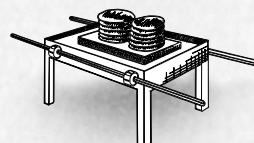
3 THE LAMPSTAND:

The size of the lampstand was not defined by God, but we know its shape. It had a main shaft branching into seven arms. The fact that it was made of pure gold undoubtedly limited its size.



4 THE TABLE WITH THE BREAD:

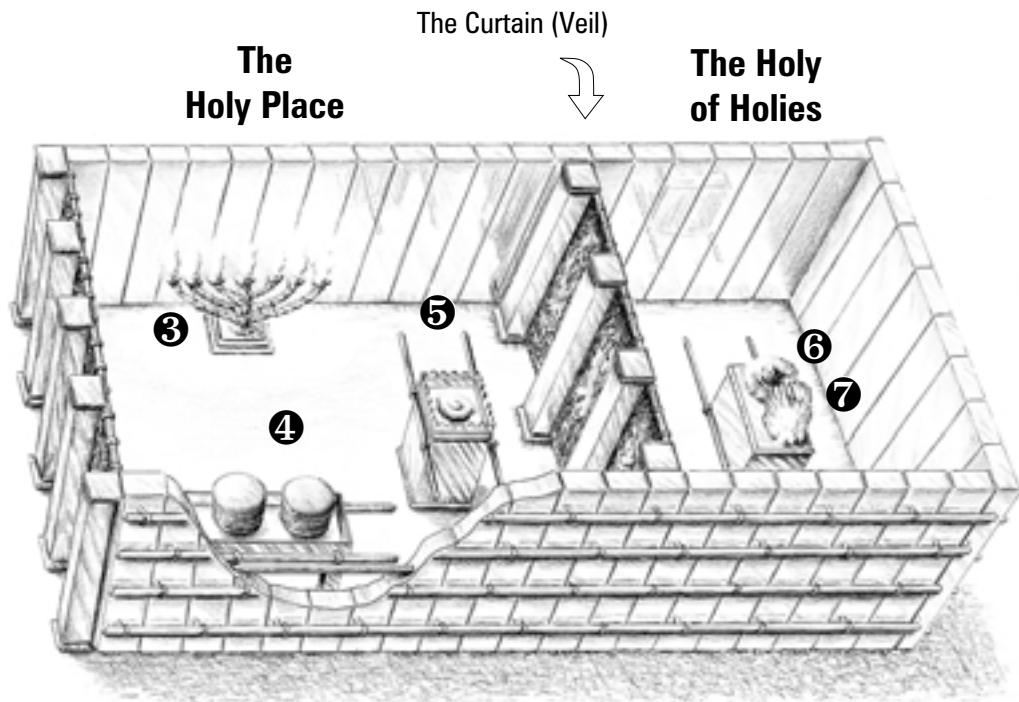
On this special table were placed twelve loaves of bread, each representing one of the tribes of Israel.



5 THE ALTAR OF INCENSE:

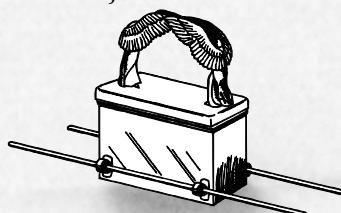
This altar was placed squarely before the curtain that divided *The Holy of Holies* from *The Holy Place*. Incense was offered on it as the Israelites gathered outside to pray. The scent wafting toward the sky was symbolic of prayers going up to God.





6 THE ARK OF THE COVENANT:

This small wooden box overlaid with pure gold was designed in part to function as a chest. A couple of the objects it held are already familiar to us—the tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them and a pot containing a sample of the bread God was providing for them in the desert.



7 THE ATONEMENT COVER:

The Ark of the Covenant had an intricate gold lid or cover comprised of two angels with outstretched wings.

The Ark and its Atonement Cover were the only pieces of furniture placed in the Holy of Holies. God said ...

“There, above the [atonement] cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”

Exodus 25:22

THE PRIESTS

“Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons... so they may serve me as priests.”

Exodus 28:1

God asked Moses to appoint Aaron and his sons as *priests* in the Tabernacle with Aaron appointed as the *High Priest*. God set these men apart from the others, not because they were special in themselves, but because the Lord wanted the people to respect His holiness. God didn't want an unorganized rabble taking care of the Tabernacle. The priests were specially trained to perform God's instructions and they functioned as custodians, taking care of the Tabernacle as the nomadic Israelites moved from one place to another.

THE TABERNACLE COMPLETED

The entire structure was finished nine months after the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai.

“Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded.”

Exodus 39:43

“So the Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year.”

Exodus 40:17

With the Tabernacle completed, the cloud that led the Israelites moved into position above the Holy of Holies. It signified God's presence in the midst of his people.

“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting...”

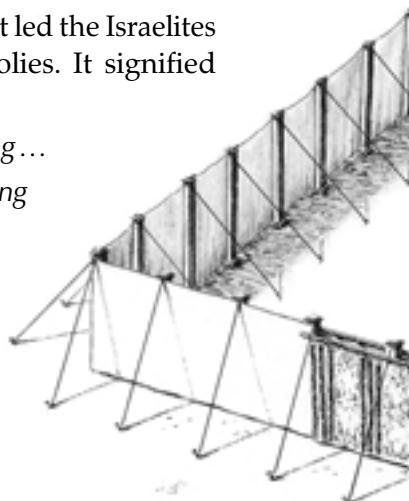
“Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.”

Exodus 40:34,35

THE VISUAL AID IMPLEMENTED

With the Tabernacle in place, it was time to implement this large visual aid. God said to Moses...

“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock...’”



God was telling man to bring a sacrifice to the Tabernacle.

It had to be "...from the herd..."

Leviticus 1:3

It could be a sheep, goat or bullock, but it could not be any other animal such as a pig, horse or camel.

They were to "...offer a male..."

Leviticus 1:3

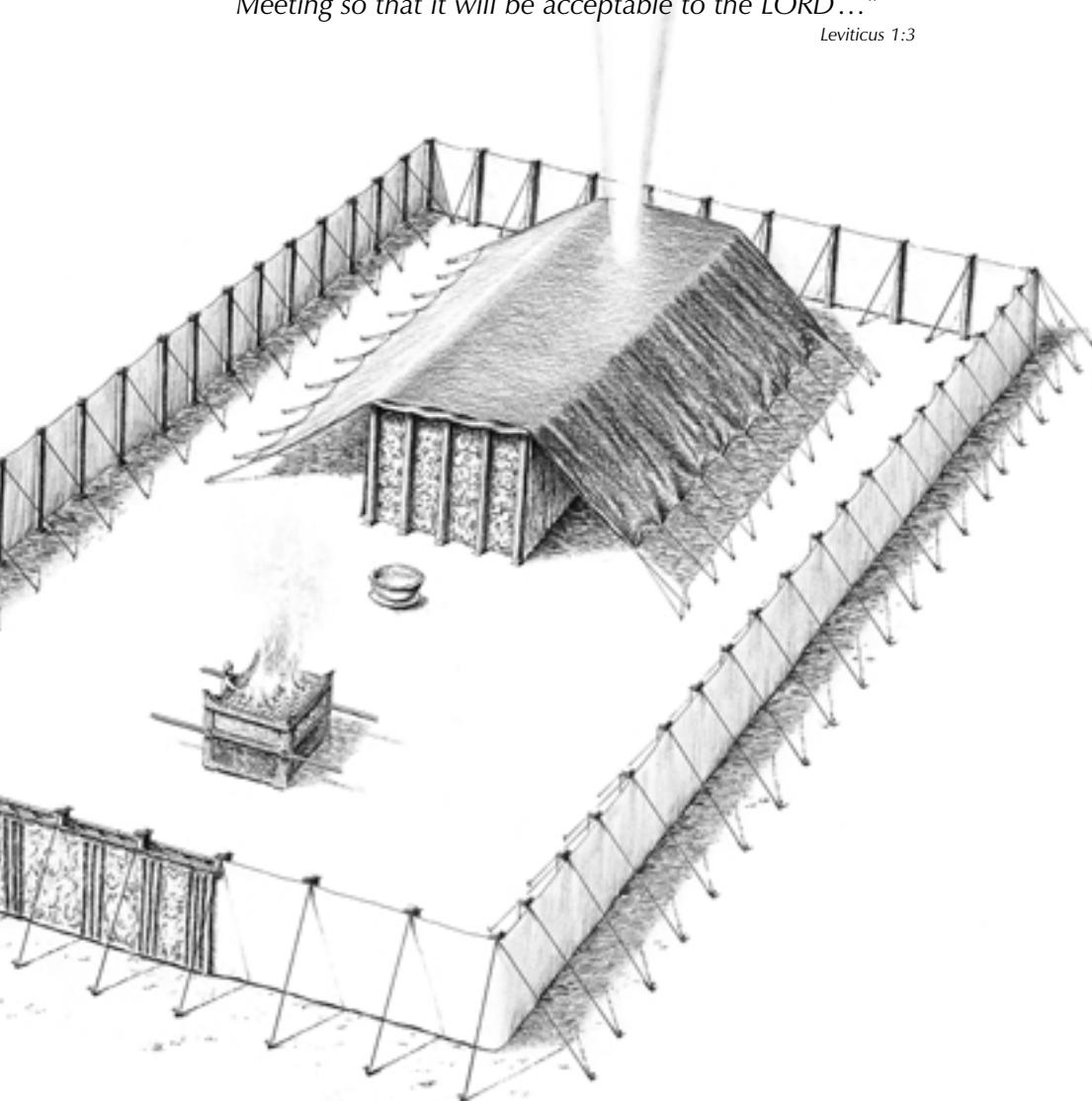
It was to be "...without defect..."

Leviticus 1:3

There could be no disease nor lameness.

"...He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD..."

Leviticus 1:3



The sacrifice was to be offered just inside the door of the courtyard on the *Bronze Altar. In addition to acknowledging oneself as a helpless sinner, this was the first step in approaching God. The individual bringing it was ...

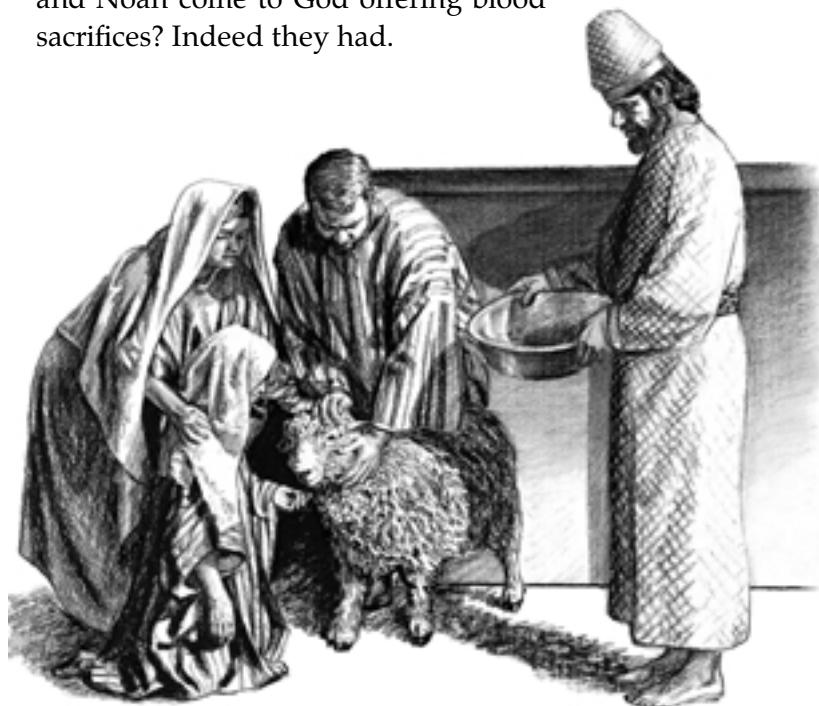
“...to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it [would] be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him...”

Leviticus 1:4

*In Scripture, bronze is commonly associated with judgment on sin.

In placing his hand on the head of the offering, the man identified himself with the sacrifice. The hand on the head symbolized the individual's sin and guilt being moved from the man onto the animal. Because the animal now carried the man's sin, it had to die. *Death is the penalty for sin.* The one offering the sacrifice slit its throat, a final acknowledgment that it was *his* sin that caused the death of the animal. It was a case of *the innocent dying in the place of the guilty*—as a substitute. The Bible says that God accepted the sacrifice on his behalf.

This must have sounded very familiar to the Israelites. Had not all those who truly believed God since the days of Adam, Abel and Noah come to God offering blood sacrifices? Indeed they had.



A RIGHTEOUS SAVIOR

Once again, the Lord was reminding his people that the only way to acceptance was to believe that he is ...

...A righteous God and a Savior...

Isaiah 45:21 NASB

In offering the animal sacrifice, the people were giving outward evidence of an inner trust in God—it showed they believed the Lord. Because death is the penalty for sin, the sacrifice pictured what was necessary for sin to be forgiven.

...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” *Leviticus 17:11*

When God saw the death of the animal, he was satisfied that the requirement of *the law of sin and death* had been justly met—there had been a *death payment* for sin. God would not hold man’s sin-debt against him; man would not be judged; the eternal consequences would no longer apply. Instead, the Lord would honor the person’s trust in him and credit righteousness to his account, just as he had to Abraham.

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Romans 4:3

Because that righteousness was coming from God, it fully provided man with the perfection needed to live in God’s presence.

There was nothing new about this at all. It was the way that Abel, Noah, Abraham and all the other righteous men down through the ages had come to God. Of course, the blood (or life) of animals could not permanently cancel man’s sin-debt, since the life of an animal is not equal in value to the life of a human. Thus, the Scriptures teach us that animal sacrifices were ...

*...only a shadow [a visual aid]... not the realities themselves
...because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats
to take away sins.*

Hebrews 10:1,4

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

In fulfilling their duties, the priests had complete freedom within the Tabernacle compound, with one exception. They were absolutely forbidden to enter the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies was where God's presence symbolically lived with man. Sinful man wasn't even to peek into the room. The curtain that hung between the two rooms was thick, shielding all from an inquisitive eye. It protected the most sacred of all places. Even Aaron, as High Priest, was not to enter the Holy of Holies except on the Day of Atonement.³

But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

Hebrews 9:7

Any violation of this instruction would result in his death.

The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."

Leviticus 16:2

The Day of Atonement offering was a yearly ceremony, a constant reminder of man's need to have his sin hidden from the eyes of a holy God. This ceremony was repeated each year because, although God did not hold man's sin against him, the blood of animals did not remove the sin-debt. The blood was only a temporary covering.

The Tabernacle, the furniture, the priests, the sacrifices, the Day of Atonement—all were part of God's elaborate visual aid. These *visuals* helped to explain what the Lord was planning to do for mankind.

2 UNBELIEF

The Israelites were learning more and more about the Lord. God was faithfully providing them with food and water. The Bible tells us that God even made their shoes especially durable—they didn't wear out. The Israelites now had a moral code by which to live. Although observing the Ten Commandments did not

result in acceptance with God, it did provide a standard of right living that united the nation. They knew what was right, and what was wrong. God had also shown his love by providing a way to be accepted—by faith—as evidenced through the blood sacrifice. You would think the Israelites would have been eternally grateful for all that the Lord was doing for them. If they were grateful, their outward actions didn't demonstrate it. They began to grumble—again.

In case we should take a self-righteous attitude and think that it was only the Israelites who were hardheaded, we must remember that we are made out of the same flesh and blood.

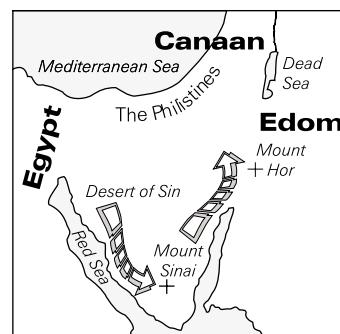
In a very real sense, the Israelites were functioning as representatives of the entire human race. As such they were becoming much better acquainted with God each year, but the knowledge they gained also brought additional responsibility. The Scripture says...

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

—Luke 12:48

Collectively, the Israelites now knew more about God than any other nation on earth.

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" Numbers 21:4,5



These accusations were not true—God, the Great Provider, *was* meeting their needs. But instead of thanking the Lord for his daily care, they accused him of neglect. They ignored God's Law, telling lies and dishonoring his name.

As we have seen before, to break a law has consequences. Just as defying God's law of gravity results in fractured bones, so violating God's Moral Law has ramifications.

In the past, God had repeatedly *overlooked their sin—he had been gracious. But the Israelites were no longer beginners in their relationship with their Creator-Owner. They had learned many things about God. They now knew the Ten Commandments and that knowledge made them accountable. God could not condone the people's sin and say, *"Oh forget it. We'll pretend it never happened."* No, sin has its consequences. It always does.

*God only overlooks sin for a period of time. He does judge all sin. Compare Acts 17:30

...the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.

Numbers 21:6

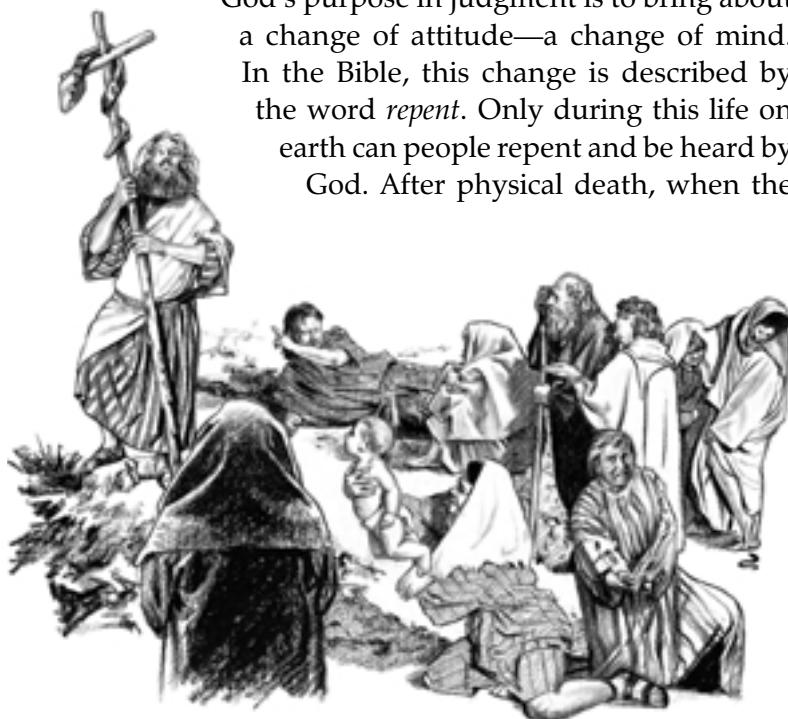
From the very beginning, God had said that sin would lead to death—physical, relational and eternal. Now that truth was graphically illustrated as many died.

The Israelites were desperate and realized that only God could save them from his punishment. They were helpless.

The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us."

Numbers 21:7

God's purpose in judgment is to bring about a change of attitude—a change of mind. In the Bible, this change is described by the word *repent*. Only during this life on earth can people repent and be heard by God. After physical death, when the



sinner is facing judgment in the Lake of Fire, it is too late to have *a change of mind*.

The Israelites recognized that they had sinned, so they repented and asked God to deliver them. They were trusting God again.

So Moses prayed for the people.

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.”

So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

Numbers 21:7-9

The serpent on the pole was not some sort of *mind-over-matter* gimmick. God was simply giving the Israelites an opportunity to demonstrate that they believed Him. When an Israelite was bitten, all he had to do was turn and look at the bronze serpent and he would be healed. With that look, the individual expressed his faith in the Lord, trusting him to be true to his word.

Let's suppose one fellow was bitten and did not look at the bronze serpent. Instead he told his neighbors, "Old Moses is really demented. If he thinks looking at that ridiculous snake is going to heal a venomous bite, he's got to be crazy. I don't believe it." Such a person would have died, not only because of his snake bite, but also because he did not believe God. God honors faith, but judges unbelief.

It is important to understand that God holds us responsible for all that we understand of him. We are accountable for what we know.

REVIEW: DEATH

The Bible speaks about death in three different ways:

1. **Death of the body:** Separation of man's spirit from his body
2. **Death to a relationship:** Separation of man's spirit from God
3. **Death to a future joy:** Separation of man's spirit from God forever

... the wages of sin is death ...

Romans 6:23

3 JUDGES, KINGS AND PROPHETS

We have now come to a lesson that compresses centuries of events into just a few pages. For those of you who are allergic to history, be assured that it's a painless study and, even if you don't understand it all, you will pick up needed tidbits of background information. It will help if you compare the titles at the head of each section with the time line on pages 170–171.

Forty years passed from the time the Israelites left Egypt until the time they entered Canaan. Moses died before he entered the promised country and was replaced by an able general named *Joshua*.

After entering the land, it took years before the Israelites were able to fully settle it. The land was divided according to *tribes*, each tribe equating with, for the most part, one of Jacob's (or Israel's) twelve sons.

TIME OF THE JUDGES

For a period of time the Israelites trusted God, but then they began to drift from the truth, and ended up believing in idols. The Lord punished Israel for worshiping false gods by allowing them to be overrun by foreign nations who forced Israel to serve them and pay tribute. After a time the Israelites would repent and call on God to deliver them from their oppressors. God would raise up a leader, called a *Judge*, and the Israelites would throw out the foreign conquerors. So began a cycle that was to last approximately 300 years. This cycle occurred over and over again. During this time there were fifteen Judges.



On some occasions, God used other nations to punish the Israelites when they trusted a false god. At other times, God used Israel to punish different nations for being idolatrous. God is impartial—he has no favorites, as it were. He wants all people of all nations to trust in him alone.

TIME OF THE KINGS

Of all the nations of the world, Israel was the most fortunate, for God himself was their Leader and King. But as time passed and the Israelites observed other nations, they rejected God and demanded a human king. God granted their request, but their propensity to wander off and trust false gods remained.

Israel was to have many kings, but only a few believed and obeyed the Lord. Because of this, the cycle of earlier years continued, only instead of a *Judge*, they now had a *King*.

Several of the kings were especially noteworthy. Probably the greatest and best known of Israel's monarchs was David. Unlike many of the other kings who ruled over Israel, King David truly trusted God. He believed that only God could save him from the consequences of sin. David called the Lord, "*my Savior*."

King David was also a great Prophet, inspired by God to write down Scripture. He is noted for the songs he wrote, praising God for his love and mercy. David wrote specifically about THE PROMISED DELIVERER, and God made a pledge to him that THE ANOINTED ONE would be one of his descendants.⁴ King David had a great ambition to replace the portable tabernacle with a permanent structure of similar design. It would be called the *Temple*. He wanted to build it in Jerusalem, which had become the capital of the country during his reign. Although David gathered the building materials, it was his son, Solomon, who actually saw the task accomplished.

King Solomon is known for two things: his great wisdom and the Temple he built. This magnificent structure was constructed in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, possibly on the same site where Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac.

After Solomon's death, the nation split in two: the northern ten tribes retained the name *Israel*, while the southern two tribes became the nation of *Judah*. This division seemed to be the Israelites' first step towards a semi-permanent distance from God. The northern tribes led the way. The people went through the motions of doing what the Lord said, but their hearts were far from God. They had failed to be a testimony to the world in a way that pleased God.

PROPHETS

God sent prophets, men who not only preached against the wandering morals of the people, but also warned of judgment to come. These prophets thundered against Israel, warning the nation that God would judge them for their self-centeredness. They had become callous to foreigners, insensitive to the powerless, taking that which was not theirs to take.

This is what the LORD says:

"For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.

Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines...

Amos 2:6-8

Many of the prophets were also prompted by God to write Scripture. They also gave specific information about the coming PROMISED DELIVERER.

Generally speaking, the prophets were not well received by the Israelites or their respective kings. There was a reason. The prophets were giving them a message they did not want to hear. For example, the prophet Isaiah told the people...

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

Isaiah 29:13

The majority despised the prophets' message and refused to trust God. They persecuted and killed them. To complicate matters further, false prophets inspired by Satan churned the spiritual scene. Even though God provided clear instructions to enable his people to discern the difference between truth and error, the false prophets were much more popular, for they were telling the people the very things they wished to hear. God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn them to beware of false prophets...

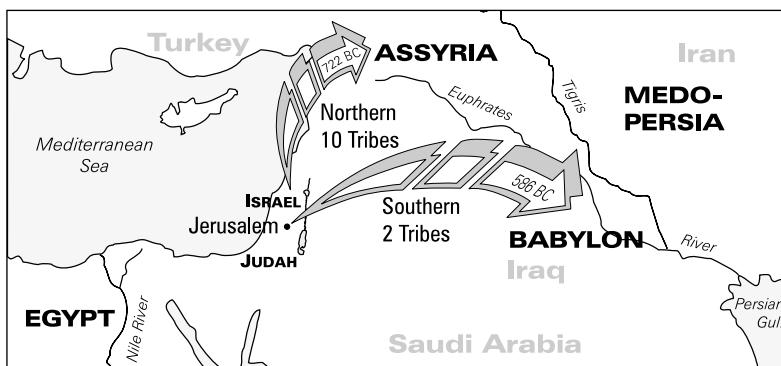
This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you

with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The LORD says: You will have peace.' ... I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds!"

Jeremiah 23:16,17,21,22

DISPERSAL OF ISRAEL

Eventually the Lord did send judgment. The Assyrians invaded the ten northern tribes in 722 BC and took them into captivity. The Bible does not record an organized return of these people to the land of Israel.



JUDAH TAKEN CAPTIVE

The two southern tribes continued as a distinct political entity until 586 BC, when the *Babylonians ravished the city of Jerusalem, demolished the great temple of Solomon and took them into exile.

While in exile, the people began to be called *Jews*, a reference to the fact that most of them were from the tribe of Judah. With the temple no longer available as the center of worship, the Jews introduced the **synagogue as a place for social interaction, teaching and the study of the Scriptures.

*People from the area where the Tower of Babel was built.

**Greek for the word assemblies.

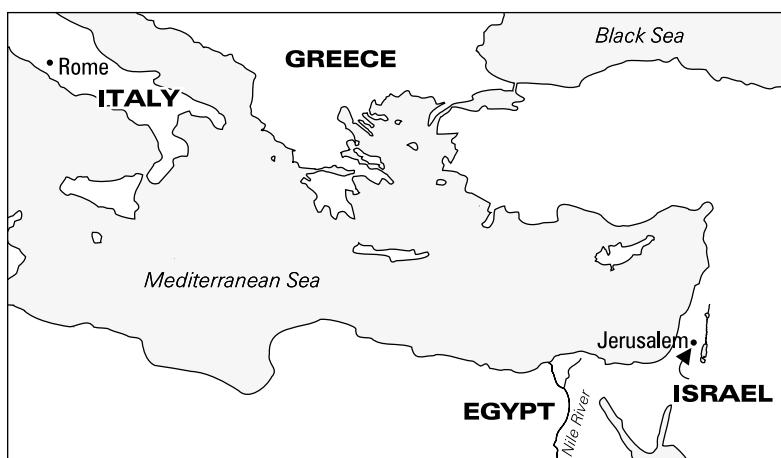
The exile continued for 70 years, but in 536 BC the two southern tribes began to trickle back to their homeland to settle in and around Jerusalem, in the area formerly occupied by the tribe of Judah. The temple was rebuilt, though not in the grandeur of Solomon's day, and the sacrificial system was reinstated.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREEKS

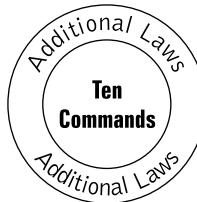
Around 400 BC, the biblical record pauses and remains silent for a period of some four centuries. History didn't stand still though. Alexander the Great, the brilliant general of the Greeks, swept through the Middle East engulfing the Jews in the process. His emissaries introduced **Greek** as the trade language and the Hellenistic culture became a status symbol for centuries to follow.

Some Jews freely embraced the Greek culture, combining it with their beliefs about God. These people were called *Sadducees*. Though small in number, they were people of wealth and influence. They tended to control the high priest, a position that had come to be bought and sold. Unfortunately, they also denied parts of the Bible as being true. **The Sadducees took away from God's Word.**

For about two hundred years, the Jews knuckled under a succession of Greek occupying forces and then in 166 BC they revolted. Judas Maccabeus led the people into a period of autonomy.



During this time a party of Jewish religious zealots, called *Pharisees*, came to the forefront. The Pharisees fought the influence of the Greek culture and clung to the *law* given to Moses. In their zeal, they created a protective ring of other laws around Moses' law so that none of the *real law* would be broken. These additional laws became an authority of their own, assuming equal weight with the *law of Moses*. **The Pharisees added to God's Word.**



Another significant social force in Jewish life was the *Scribes*, the human equivalent to photocopiers. Long before the advent of printing presses, these men copied with extreme care the Word of God over and over again. The term *Scribe* implied education and religious fervor. It was more of a job description than a religious or political party. Unfortunately, their diligence was often mingled with arrogance.

THE ROMANS

The Jews' liberty under the Maccabean leadership lasted barely 100 years. The iron heel of Rome crushed the Jews' freedom in 67 BC when General Pompey entered Jerusalem.

Rome was quite accommodating of the Jewish religion as long as the Jews paid their taxes and did not foment rebellion. The civilized world of the day had entered into an uneasy peace.

The Roman empire was far too large to be administered effectively from Rome, so local leaders were selected to rule the different regions. In Judea, now a province of Rome, a man named *Herod* was appointed as a puppet king. He would come to be known as *Herod the Great*. Cruel beyond belief, Herod was a follower of the Jewish religion in name only. Under Rome's authority, he and his descendants would rule the resentful Jewish world for the next one hundred years. The people yearned for rescue—for one who could give them relief.

More than two thousand years had passed since God first promised Abraham that one of his descendants would be **THE PROMISED DELIVERER**. Throughout the centuries God had those people, sometimes only a few, who believed His Word

and were *right* with him. They had waited in eager anticipation for THE ANOINTED ONE to come. In these early years of the Roman empire, those who clung tenaciously to God's promises were still waiting to see them fulfilled. The time had come, but they were unaware of it. The stage was now set. The angels of Heaven must have hushed. Satan must have shuddered. Who would this PROMISED DELIVERER be?

THE PROPHETS SAID . . .





In this book, we can only touch on a handful of those 300 prophecies. Whenever you see a “scroll icon” in the text, it indicates a prophecy. In most cases, I will give the Prophet’s name and how many years passed from the time the prophecy was given to its fulfillment. In a future chapter, I quote an entire passage of Scripture that God gave to the Prophet Isaiah to write down. You can read “prophecy in the raw” and judge for yourself of whom it is speaking.

ADAM
EVECain
ABEL
SETH
Enosh
Kenan
Mahalaleel
Jared**ENOCH**Methuselah
Lamech**NOAH****Japheth**
Ham**SHEM**Arphaxad
Shelah
Eber
PelegReu
Serug
Nahor

Terah

A FAMILY TREE: FROM ADAM TO JESUS

Solid line indicates ancestral line

Bold face indicates stories covered in detail

ISHMAEL**Hagar**
(ABRAM)**ABRAHAM****Sarah**
(SARAI)**ISAAC**

Nahor

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JOB

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