

Worship

Lesson 6: "Worship and Song and Praise"

The search has been on for the lost ark of the covenant ever since its disappearance around the time of the Babylonian captivity of ancient Israel. The list of "raiders" is too numerous to mention. Their motives are even more varied and questionable.

For centuries the ark of the covenant has been lost. Jesus' highly priestly ministry has been one of preparing a people to die. But ever since 1844 Jesus is preparing a people for translation in order to bring an end to sin and prepare them for His second coming. It is "the finishing of the mystery of God" (Rev. 10:7)--the gospel work of reconciling alienated hearts.

Suddenly appears the real "sanctuary" in heaven where Jesus Christ ministers as our High Priest, fighting His battle with Satan. The climax comes in Revelation 11:15-19 where the great "door" into the Most Holy Apartment is flung open and we can peer into "the ark of the covenant."

The restoration of "the ark of the covenant" is the foundation of all worship ("and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" Rev. 14:7). The "ark" is the gospel and the law combined--cemented. The love for sinners that motivated Jesus to die is the heart-transforming dynamic which leads to repentance and conformity to the law of God. These are the foundation principles of God's government--God's self-denial and His character of love revealed in His law. The fear (love) of the Lord is the basis of worship.

Of all the kings of Israel David had an understanding of God's everlasting covenant promise as the foundation of worship. When he was finally brought to the throne and relative peace settled upon the land, his purpose was to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and give it a permanent home. The ark was the symbol of God's presence with Israel and contained the founding principles not only of God's government but of the constitution of the nation itself. Being the central sacred piece of furniture in the ancient wilderness Tabernacle, it taught the principles of God's covenant promise of salvation in the coming Messiah and the glorious plan of salvation in harmony with God's ten commandments.

So the day that the symbol of God's presence went up to Jerusalem was made an occasion of grand celebration in which the whole nation might participate. The Levites as well as the worshipers and government officials and King were all involved in events of worship, singing, and prayer. Asaph, a gifted Levite, was placed in charge of the official ceremonies. David composed a thanksgiving song for the occasion (1 Chron. 16:7). The theme of God's covenant was central to the psalm. "Even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac" (vs. 16).

The 1888 message was a restoration of the idea of the two covenants. God gave to E. J. Waggoner the true understanding of the third angel's message in the two covenants. "The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones"--"the priceless covenant blessings" (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 91, 92).

Here are the promises, seven of them, that God made to Abraham. By virtue of Christ's sacrifice, you have become a child of Abraham, so the same promises apply to you (they're in Gen 12:1-3): (1) "I will make of thee a great nation"--that is, an important, respected person. (2) "I will bless thee" (the word means make you happy). (3) "I will ... make thy name great," in other words, He will make you worthy of people's high respect. (4) "Thou shalt be a blessing," that is, you'll make other people happy. (5) "I will bless them that bless thee." God will honor you like someone special. (6) "I will ... curse him that curseth thee." Oh yes, you'll have enemies, probably plenty of them; but God will confound every one of them and will honor you. (7) "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed [made happy forever]." A promise that Christ would come through Abraham's descendants, but a promise to you that you will share with Christ the joy of telling the world about Him.

How did Abraham, respond? Well, he stumbled and staggered for many years, unable to believe such fantastic Good News. But finally he broke through the clouds: "And Abraham believed in the Lord, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (15:6).

God repeats the seven fantastic promises He had made to Abraham previously, renews them all to Outstanding Sinner Jacob, and doesn't ask Jacob to promise one blessed thing in return (Gen. 28:11-22). This is included in David's hymnology: "And hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (1 Chron. 16:17).

Of course the new covenant promise of the everlasting inheritance of a land grant was in righteousness, which was contained in the package. "Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance" (vs. 18). Only those clothed in righteousness

may possess the land in perpetuity. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

The concept of covenant is central to this psalm of David. The repeated references to "covenant" and the covenantal name of God ("LORD," references to the patriarchs, mention of the land promised in the Abrahamic covenant; and reminder of God's protection of His people, 1 Chron. 16:16-18, 21). The poet David's declaration, "Be ye mindful always of His covenant; the word which He commanded to a thousand generations" (v. 15), provides the theological foundation for the community's songs of joy, declarations of praise, and expressions of faith.

"The solemn ceremonies attending the removal of the ark had made a lasting impression upon the people of Israel, arousing a deeper interest in the sanctuary service and kindling anew their zeal for Jehovah. David endeavored by every means in his power to deepen these impressions. The service of song was made a regular part of religious worship, and David composed psalms, not only for the use of the priests in the sanctuary service. ... The influence thus exerted was far-reaching, and it resulted in freeing the nation from idolatry. Many of the surrounding peoples, beholding the prosperity of Israel, were led to think favorably of Israel's God, who had done such great things for His people" (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 711).

As in the day that the symbol of God's presence (the ark of the covenant) went up to Jerusalem was made an occasion of grand celebration in which the whole nation might participate, likewise in this our Day of Atonement may our worship reflect the solemnity of the principles of God's government which are the foundation of worship.

--Paul E. Penno.