*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 17 - 22

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four*

**Monday, August 17 Exodus 23:20-24**

*“My angel will go before you”*

 Although not a dominating character, the angel has been involved in Israel’s redemption throughout Exodus. He was there at Moses’ call (3:2) and was involved in Israel’s escape from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (14:19-20). Hence, it is fitting that he guide Israel on the next stage in their journey, the way toward Canaan. The people are told to listen carefully to what the angel says and obey him, but we are not told how the angel will speak to them. Because we do not read about the angel of God communicating with the people, giving them commands and so forth, but of God doing so, we take this to indicate the close identification of the angel and God, with their roles being somewhat interchangeable.

 Verse 24 issues another command, not to worship the gods of the Canaanites. Israel’s great temptation after entering the land will be to mix with its inhabitants and assume some or all of their religious practices. To help minimize this influence, the angel will wipe these pagan people out, and the Israelites are to destroy the Canaanite idols and break their sacred stones.

*Your angel is still with us, Lord - he is your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 18 Exodus 23:25-31**

*“My terror will go before you”*

 In addition to the angel leading the Israelites in their journey, God says that he will send his “terror” ahead of them to throw the nations into confusion. The same word was used in chapter 15 where the topic was also Israel’s conquest of Canaan. This “terror” is not some personification of God or the angel, but the report that Canaan will hear of God’s dealings with the Egyptians: “The nations will hear and tremble, anguish will grip the people of Philistia . . . terror and dread will fall upon them” (15:14-16).

 The conquest of the land by the Israelites will take place little by little. Their numbers are not yet large enough to take complete and sudden possession of the land. Canaan certainly supports a much larger population than the Israelites who will be displacing them. Simply annihilating or chasing off the inhabitants will leave the land to be overrun by wild animals. Its arable land cannot be cultivated in the absence of a sufficient number of workers and will therefore become desolate. Hence, the conquest will happen in stages.

*When your power is made known, Lord, the nations tremble. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 19 Exodus 23:32-33**

*“Make no treaties with them or their gods”*

 Once again the Israelites are reminded about worshipping other gods. This has been a refrain from the Ten Commandments and throughout the giving of the various laws. It is, therefore, a fitting conclusion to this important scene on Mount Sinai that began in 20:22. What anchors the message of this entire section is God’s insistent teaching to his people that they belong to him and him alone. They are to worship none but him.

 The history of the Israelites shows the need for repeatedly returning to this warning against idolatry. In Second Kings we read this summary: “The people of Israel had also secretly done many things that were not pleasing to the Lord their God . . . They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles at the top of every hill and under every green tree. They offered sacrifices on all the hilltops, just like the nations the Lord had driven from the land ahead of them. So the people of Israel had done many evil things, arousing the Lord’s anger. Yes, they worshipped idols, despite the Lord’s specific and repeated warnings” (2 Kings 17:9-12).

*Daily vigilance is required, Lord, so we will not sin against you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 17 - 22

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four*

**Thursday, August 20 Exodus 24:1-8**

*“We will do everything the Lord has commanded”*

 The chapter opens with Moses being called to ascend Mount Sinai, along with Aaron and his two oldest sons (Nadab and Abihu), and the seventy elders, in order to worship God. Before making their ascent, Moses repeats to the people all the commandments and laws that God had given, whereupon the people declared their obedience to the Lord. Then, Moses wrote down all that God had said, that is, the Ten Commandments and the subsequent laws.

 After recording God’s words to them, Moses builds an altar and sets up twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Upon the altar is offered burnt offerings, which are typically made for forgiveness of sin and to indicate devotion and commitment to God, and fellowship/peace offerings which celebrate the nation’s relationship with God. The blood of the sacrificed animals is collected, with half sprinkled on the altar and the other half sprinkled on the people. The former represents the covering of sin by blood, the latter the fellowship the Israelites have with God through his covenant with them and their obedience to his instructions.

*We accept your love for us, Lord, by obeying your will for us. Amen.*

**Friday, August 21 Exodus 24:9-14**

*“They saw the God of Israel”*

  Moses and the others ascend the mountain, and we are told that they “went up and saw the God of Israel.” What this means precisely is hard to know, especially since 33:20 will seem to say the exact opposite: “No one may see me and live.” It is interesting that the passage itself recognizes the tension with verse 11 emphasizing that those who saw God did *not* die. In other words, for the biblical writer, the fact that they saw God but did not die is worthy of special comment. Thus, it seems that 24:10 and 33:20 are both based on the same premise that seeing God is something that ought to have severe ramifications.

 After they ate a “covenant meal,” thus ratifying the commitment of the Israelites to obey God’s covenantal commands, it was time for Moses to leave the others behind and proceed up the mountain to meet personally with God. Apparently, Joshua is allowed to come part of the way and must then wait while Moses goes on alone. Aaron and Hur are left in charge of dealing with disputes among the Israelites which, as we will see in chapter 32, does not end well.

*You are glorious, Lord, and one day we will see you face to face. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 22 Exodus 24:15-18**

 *“Moses remained 40 days and nights”*

 Moses goes further up the mountain. God calls to him, whereupon he enters the cloud and continues his journey upward. He stays on the mountain forty days and nights. God’s presence on the mountain is represented as cloud. The significance of the cloud in chapter 24 is not simply another indication of God’s presence with Moses. It is also an element in the story which sets the stage for what is to come.

 Moses will come down off the mountain after his 40 days and nights, carrying not only the Ten Commandments inscribed on two stone tablets, but also with God’s specific instructions for the building of the tabernacle, the portable tent which the Israelites will keep with them until Solomon builds the Temple in Jerusalem some 500 years in the future. Both Mount Sinai and the tabernacle are where God’s glory settles in the form of a cloud. God has met with his people at Mount Sinai, and the tabernacle with the cloud of God hovering over it will be a way of making God’s presence “portable” when they continue their journey.

*You are present with us, Lord, through your Spirit who lives in us. Amen.*