

Study 0053

Scripture Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-20

In Study 0052, we saw that the initial problem the children of Israel had with God's covenant, was their desire to get the promises of God, without having to obey God's word. In other words, they wanted God to play His part in the covenant, even though they were not willing to play their part. We also saw the excuses they had given for not heeding God's covenant, and they were;

- (a) Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain (so, they made the gold calf);
- (b) God delayed in taking them into the Promised Land (so, they murmured, complained, and rebelled); and,
- (c) God was taking them into a land of giants to be killed by the giants because He did not love them (so, they refused to go in and possess the land).

Eventually, they (that is, those of the children of Israel who were 20 years and above), were destroyed in the wilderness and denied entry into the Promised Land, except Joshua and Caleb.

The Old Covenant Era Worship: Problems with the Worship of God

After 40 years of wilderness wandering, and the last of the generation that were not to enter the Promised Land died off, Moses again prepared the generation that remained for life in the Promised Land. This began with Moses recalling God's faithfulness in the past to them; then restating God's laws in their hearing; followed by a cutting of a covenant with the generation that was to enter the Promised Land (**Deuteronomy 29:1ff**). God even made a provision for their deliverance and restoration if they would turn to Him again in repentance after they might have turned away from Him (**Deuteronomy 30:1-10**). God also encouraged His people to be true to the covenant through their obedience to its terms which He noted are not difficult to keep (**Deuteronomy 30:11-20**). In some of his discourses, Moses told the surviving generation not to forget God or His covenant (**Deuteronomy 4:23; 6:12; 8:11, 14**). This was to prove a very vital counsel to the generations to come. Put another way, Moses was saying to them (and in many ways, to us also), to continually keep God in their memory, as well as His covenant, His word, His faithfulness, and so on. As we have stated in time past, the weekly and annual holy convocations (more like our modern day church and communion services) were given to help Israel accomplish the task of not forgetting God. Also, the priests were told to teach God's laws to the people (**Deuteronomy 31:9-13**); as were parents told to teach the same to their children and wards. God even told Moses that the people will abandon Him and turn to other gods after his (Moses') death, and so God asked Moses to sing a song He (God) wrote, in their hearing, about the future of the nation, if they forgot Him and went after other gods (**Deuteronomy 31:16-30; 32:1-47**).

Upon entering into the Promised Land, the children of Israel were victorious as long as they followed God, but were defeated when they disobeyed God. A point in case is what happened after the conquest of the Jericho, which was followed by a disastrous defeat by Ai (a much smaller city state). When Joshua enquired of the Lord, the problem was traced to Achan's disobedience in taking what he was not supposed to take and then hiding it in his tent. And even though no one knew about it, the consequence of his action led to the nation's defeat. Following the discovery of Achan, and his subsequent punishment (he was stoned to death along with his family), Israel was again back to winning wars (**Joshua 7:1-26; 8:1ff**).

Shortly after Joshua and the generation he led into the Promised Land died, however, signs of collapse and degeneration began to appear in Israel. The new generation of Israelites forgot

God, and turned to idols (**Judges 2:6-15**)! The result: God allowed His people to become captives to marauding foreigners in the Promised Land. However, when the people cried out to God for help, He was gracious to send them a deliverer, who waged war against their oppressors, delivered the nation from bondage, and brought peace and prosperity to them. A pattern soon emerged: after some years of peace and prosperity (usually during, and shortly after the lifetime of the deliverer), the children of Israel would again forget God. And again, they become captives in their own land, and then they would cry unto God, Who will again choose a deliverer from among them and set them free from their captivity. This pattern became a cycle of peace and prosperity for some time; then they would forget God and turn to other gods (idolatry); which then led to their captivity and bondage; which would then result in them becoming sorrowful for their sins and then repent before God with tears; which will lead to God bringing deliverance to His people through a chosen ‘messiah’; and, finally peace and prosperity would then return to the land. This was the recurring story throughout the history of the children of Israel in the Promised Land, as recorded in the book of Judges.

The Book of Judges also records a time of deep apostasy in Israel (**Judges 17-19**); for the people had so forgotten God that stealing was condoned by parents, people with means had personal priests, a Levite acted as priest in the practice of idolatry, and another, had a concubine who was brutally raped; which crime became an abhorrence in Israel, leading to a civil war; the children of the tribe of Dan left the territory God allotted to them and went and settled in another location, taking along the Levite practicing idolatry who became their chief priest!. Then there was the case of the sons of Eli (priests in Israel), who were categorized as “*sons of Belial*”, and who practiced despicable abominations in the house of God; and there was their father, Eli, who could not discipline his sons, neither did he stop them from officiating as priests; an action which led to God’s judgment against the priestly line of Eli (**1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-36**). Indeed, this period in the history of Israel, could be said to be the ‘Dark Ages’ in Israel.

From the history of Israel of old so far, we can learn some helpful lessons:

1. It is not enough to expect God to play His part in the covenant He cuts with us. We must necessarily play our own part, which is to obey Him and His word.
2. The old covenant was meant to help the children of Israel to maintain a right relationship with God, and thus, be able to worship God acceptably. And as long as they maintained the right relationship with God, their worship was acceptable, and they were able to live in peace, prosperity, and enjoy tremendous blessings in the Promised Land.
3. When people forget or abandon God, thus, turning to idolatry, they invariably go into captivity, and bondage, and are oppressed by the devil and his demons.
4. Only true repentance (sorrow for, and confession of, sin, as well as abandonment of sinful living) followed by a return to the true worship of God brings about deliverance from captivity, bondage, and oppression.
5. Deliverance is only permanent in so far as the true worship of God is permanent. For as long as we worship God in spirit and in truth, we are permanently free from any captivity, bondage, or oppression by the devil.
6. Correct and proper teaching about God, His word, and the true worship of God, is the surest way to ensure that the true worship of God continues from generation to generation by those who have listening ears and obedient hearts.
7. A generation that inherits peace and prosperity, without recognizing that it came through the true worship of God by the generation before them, will turn to vanity, squander that peace and prosperity, and, end up in captivity and bondage.

8. The continued true worship of God is how we build a lasting relationship with God, thus, ensuring our eternal prosperity.
9. If we love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our might, and with all our strength, we can never forget Him; rather, we will worship Him even more and thus, ensure our eternity.
10. No one is immune from falling into idolatry and apostasy; hence, we must all take heed to the word of God, lest we fall into the same sin of idolatry and apostasy as Israel did (**1 Corinthians 10:1-12**).

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The 'Dark Ages' of the Old Covenant Era was due to the abandonment of God by His people.
2. God's warning to Israel through the song He asked Moses to sing in the hearing of the people, was to let them know the dangers of forgetting Him.
3. True peace and prosperity comes from the true worship of God.
4. Captivity, bondage, and satanic oppression are the result of the abandonment of God.
5. Only true repentance can reverse captivity, bondage and satanic oppression.
6. Unless we continue in the true worship of God, we shall likewise fall into idolatry and apostasy.
7. Unless people respond to proper and correct doctrinal teaching, they will very soon enter into idolatry and apostasy.
8. A generation that inherits prosperity without recognizing that it came from the true worship of God will fall into captivity, bondage, and oppression.
9. It is impossible for a minister of God to fall into idolatry and deep apostasy.
10. Permanent deliverance is the result of permanent true worship of God.