

Hearts of Stone

We read in the book of Exodus that the children of Israel left Egypt and went directly into the wilderness to Mount Sinai. There they received the word of God spoken not only from Moses but from God Himself. He spoke to them the Ten Commandments and also gave the Commandments on two tablets of stone. They had spent many generations in the land of Egypt and did not know the ways of God. They only knew the ways of Egypt, representing the ways of the world. They needed to be taught how to live and treat one another and what God expected from them. He made a covenant or agreement with them as He did with all of His people over the ages saying, "If you will be my people, I will be your God," Jeremiah 7:23.

Now, to be God's people they needed to live and do God's ways. This is why He brought them to Sinai, to give them instruction. In Exodus chapters 20-23 it is shown that God gave basic instruction for how to treat one another and how to approach Him. The people responded by saying in Exodus 24:3,7 "This we will do." In other words, we will be the people of God. These are the words many people have said over the ages. Thankfully God is merciful and patient. We can read about his mercy in scriptures and can also experience it in our own lives. As you know the children of Israel failed and we and many others have failed to walk in God's ways; to live and act like God's people.

It has been long misunderstood what it means to be the people of God. Would God Himself have destroyed His own people in the wilderness because they sinned against Him? Wouldn't He have shown them mercy and forgive them as He did with others such as King David? In the wilderness of the books of Moses He raised up another generation that would obey His voice; who were not so attached to the ways of the world. Micah 6:8 tells us, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you; to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This is what it means to be the people of God. It should be recognized that the foreigner or gentile has always had the right and means to be one of the people of God. The characteristic is the condition of the heart, not a birth right. We see in Exodus 12:48-49 that there is one law for both Jew and Gentile. They both enter the Covenant of Abraham through circumcision. That is why circumcision is to be done on the 8th day. The child being a full week old will start a new beginning on the 8th day. It is a new week and a new beginning. It is pointing at a new creation. The old creation had sinned and distanced itself from God. Because of His love for His creation He desired to make a new creation in the hearts of His people. This is what King David prayed for in Psalm 51.

Keep in mind that God's covenant with Abraham was the same as with all His people, "I will be your God if you will be my people." What God was requiring from Abraham was that he believed His promises. Faith would allow God to shape Abraham's heart. Circumcision was to show that a person was entering into covenant with God. God chose circumcision because it represented the molding of the heart. We see this in the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6. First He tells them to circumcise their hearts, then He says He will circumcise their hearts. This is because it was a covenant, an agreement. Both parties have a responsibility. With God it is for Him to instruct and chastise; for us, to submit, believe and obey. We see this same pattern in the family with parent and child.

In Exodus God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone for His people. The Ten Commandments basically tell us what not to do if we love someone, including God. The problem with the Commandments is that they only state the minimum of what it means to love someone. If the only thing you did for your wife was to not commit adultery, you would not have much of a marriage. The worst part is that many people think they are righteous just because they keep those commands. A just person will give to others as well as not steal from or cheat them. Remember Micah 6, love mercy? In Deuteronomy 10:12 we are told again what God requires of us – to love Him. We know the two greatest commands are to love God and love your neighbor as self. The problem here is that who wants someone to love them because they are commanded to. We all would prefer love to come from the heart. This is why circumcision is pointing at the heart, which brings us to a new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31:31-33, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Do you remember the old covenant and the peoples’ response? They all in one accord said, “this we will do”. With this new covenant God removes all of our promises and abilities and declares “I will put the law in their hearts.” In Ezekiel 36:26 He says it another way, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” The great benefit for us is that love and righteous become who we are instead of something we try to do. The way God will do this is by teaching us and giving us understanding of the law. He will show us not to try to keep it but fulfill it. Love fulfills the law. God will show us what it means to love Him and each other; all the whys and how tos. This is the purpose of the law. It shows us what is an offense to God and your neighbors. It also shows what to do for God and your neighbor to show your love. It even shows us to love our enemies. This is what it means to be the people of God, to walk in His ways. Any interpretation of the Law of Moses has to be pointing at love.

Coincidentally, a man named Jesus of Nazareth came to Israel some 2000 years ago teaching the same things. He came to give understanding of the laws and ways of God. The Jews at that time were serving the law and their traditions instead of God. One of Jesus’s most famous quotes is, “the law was made for man, not man for the law.” He spent much time expounding on the Law. He talked about the more important aspects of the Law like forgiveness, mercy and love. The religious leaders of that time had put their traditions and interpretations of the Law of Moses above God’s ways.

The books of the prophets had even prophesied that he would come. Isaiah is the book of the messiah just as Jeremiah is the book of the new covenant. It has many prophesies in it concerning a coming messiah or “christ” in the Greek. The first is in Isaiah 7:13-16, “...his name shall be called Immanuel,” which means in the Hebrew “God is with us.” This was to be interpreted literally. Jehovah would leave His throne and be born a man. This is why Isaiah was given the privilege of seeing the Lord on His throne in chapter 6. There is a steady revelation of the messiah throughout Isaiah. In chapter 9 we are told of His position and character, and he is called, “the mighty God.” Israel should look for God

himself, Jehovah leaving His throne and coming down to rule His people. First He will come to rule the hearts of His people, then again to rule over the Earth in a literal kingdom. Psalms 110 makes reference to this in another prophecy. King David wrote, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Even though Jesus is anointed king, he has not yet taken rule over the nations. We see this same picture with King Saul and David the son of Jesse. Samuel anointed David king over Israel, although David did not rule until God removed Saul. This Jesus of Nazareth is Jehovah. For one person to make such an impact on humanity he had to be the person of God. Through him the promise of Abraham is fulfilled. Abraham is the father of many nations and through his seed many nations would be blessed. That seed is and would be the messiah who came 2000 years ago.

Jehovah is the God of all the nations and peoples. His people can be and are from every nation that do His will; that do justice and walk in God's ways. Isaiah 11 explains that the nations will seek Him. Jesus of Nazareth not only taught and set the pattern for walking in God's ways but also gave the answer for the problem of sin. God himself died for the ungodly. He paid the penalty for the sin of all humanity in order that anyone, no matter what nation, Jew or Gentile could be reconciled to God if they so desired. A life had to be given for a life; and it had to be a life of equal or greater value. The life of an animal could not satisfy the penalty of death that a person should pay for their sin. We see this picture in Isaiah 53. The one born is subjected to suffering and death. Not only did he die for the sins of his people; also, God raised him from the dead. He conquered death for everyone. Jesus of Nazareth set a pattern to walk in God's ways so that whoever would walk in his steps would also be raised from the dead. For he who was not worthy of death gave his life, the just for the unjust.

It is worth reading Isaiah start to finish. These are serious matters of the issues of the heart. In Deuteronomy 10:17 God says He is no respecter of persons. Everyone will answer for their behavior. That is why He recommended that they and we circumcise our hearts and learn to love Him. Jesus Christ came to teach a relationship with God through faith and through him. If we did not have a command to love God, would we love Him? Through Jesus Christ is where we experience and understand the love of God so that we can know Him and love Him. To have the law written on our hearts is to have love written on our hearts. How do you love someone without having some kind of relationship with them? The messiah and God of Isaiah is someone to relate to. God revealed to him who He was and who He will be. We only need to believe the prophet. Read Isaiah. Let the word of God convince you. Get a copy of the New Testament; see if these things are so. The New Testament quotes and expounds on the law and prophets time after time. Ask God what is right and true, be convinced yourself.