

## **June 2021**

### **Covenant and the true nature of marriage**

#### **Part II: Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua**

God gave his people a whole way of life. He explained how to resolve disputes, what to do when their ox gores their neighbor, and where to dig their latrines. He established festivals and Sabbaths and types of sacrifice. But their top priority would be their sacred relationship with him! He commanded them to have no other gods. No idols. No graven images. No human sacrifice. In short, no living like the pagan culture around them! This would be the deepest meaning of honor. This was to be their act of love.

Several central beliefs defined Israel's identity. First, they had been rescued from slavery. Second, two commandments summarized the whole of the law: love God with all your heart, soul, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself (see Luke 10:27). Third, obedience was an act of love and the key to receiving the promises God had made to their ancestors. Finally, God was uniquely present to them, first in the tabernacle and then in the temple.

Their possession of the land that had been promised to Abraham and their life in that land depended totally on their fidelity to the covenant. Unfortunately, despite all of God's goodness and actions on their behalf, they regularly fell into sin and idolatry. They struggled with their faith. In a moment of great weakness, they even made a golden calf, an image that resembled the chief god of the Canaanites, who was often depicted as a bull. The painful story can be found in Exodus 32.

Their lack of faith led to their wandering in the wilderness for a whole generation. Loss of faith and idolatry are depicted as a longing to return to Egypt, a longing to return to slavery. But finally, they entered the land that God had promised to Abraham. They defeated their enemies and were settling into the land when Joshua, now an old man nearing the end of his life, summoned Israel to Shechem. It was time to renew the covenant.

Joshua knew that the danger of forgetting what God had done for them and turning to other gods was as grave as the danger from the enemies they had defeated (see Joshua 24:15-25). As Moses had said, it is precisely in forgetting that we become vulnerable to being led astray, and this will not go well (see Deuteronomy 30). Like Israel, we are challenged at every turn to remember Moses' words and to respond to Joshua's question, "Whom shall we serve?". Whom shall our families serve—God or Pharaoh, the God of Abraham or the gods of Egypt, of the Canaanites, of other neighbors?

Love in our marriages, love in our relationship with God, is a choice that we can make. Choose life, and live. We are called to renew our covenant with the Lord and our spouse on a regular basis. Can we say with Joshua, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord"?