

Exodus 24

This is an interesting chapter in that we are confronted with several odd incidents that interpreters have struggled to explain. Even so, this chapter will set the stage for the “Golden Calf Incident” which we will examine in a few more chapters. Here are the strange incidents.

Strange incident one concerns God inviting not only Moses, but Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders onto the mountain. We are not sure why these individuals are being invited or who they are (there is no mention of elders having been chosen or appointed). Also, if they are all going up on the mountain, why is only Moses allowed to draw near to the Lord?

Strange incident number two concerns the very odd blood ceremony which Moses seems to have concocted out of thin air. Recalling that Moses had received the words from God (which are at best a preliminary list of rules/regulations), Moses proceeds to ask the people if they agree to be bound by these words (an action which God didn’t ask him to take). When the people answer in the affirmative, Moses builds an altar and sets up twelve pillars (again without any direction from God). Moses then sacrifices animals and splashes half of the animal blood on the altar and half on the people (once again without any direction from God). Alter, in his commentary on this text, suggests that this is a renewal of the Covenant with Abraham...sort of a second circumcision. Kass, on the other hand, argues that Moses has decided on his own that the people need some physical ritual to bind them to this new word. Unfortunately, again in Kass’ opinion, this adlibbing religious rules by bathing the people in blood will open the door for the community to adlib the worship of the golden calf.

Strange incident number three concerns the picnic with God. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders go up the mountain and “see” the God of Israel. While there, the men see what appears to be a pavement of sapphire (no one really knows what this implies) and then proceed to eat and drink. Does this imply that these people actually saw the invisible God? Does it mean that they had a picnic with God? Does it mean this is what God intended? Finally, what are we to make of the comment that God “*did not lay his hand on the chief men of Israel*”? Does this mean that God was displeased with the picnic? That instead the men ought to have lowered their heads and worshipped God? Been afraid of God? Not taken this moment so lightly?

Strange incident number five concerns the sudden appearance and disappearance of Joshua. Recall that Joshua was not among those listed to come up the mountain (unless he was one of the seventy), yet there he is with Moses headed up the mountain together when God made it clear that only Moses was to have approached the Holy One. Then, after Moses tells the people to consult Aaron and Hur if they have any issues which need resolving (not a good choice as we will see), Moses proceeds alone to meet God and Joshua vanishes from the scene. Why was Joshua there? Where did he go?

Strange incident number six concerns Moses’ arrival on the mountain. Once Moses arrives, he must wait six days to encounter God (six days of creation?). Unfortunately, what follows, is God appearing as an all-consuming fire and Moses being gone for forty days and nights, making room for the people to assume that Moses has been consumed and will not return.

Reflection: Human beings have always struggled with how to relate to the divine. We have created rituals and rites that we believe will orient us to the divine in hopes of pleasing the gods we cannot see. This is a natural process followed by people since the dawn of homo sapiens. The question becomes for those of us who are recipients of “words”, how far should we go with our rituals and rites rather than simply allowing the “words” to guide our lives?

Questions:

1. Which of these strange incidents intrigues you the most and why?
2. What church rites and rituals help to enhance your faith in and following of Jesus?
3. Have you ever encountered God? If so how would you describe that encounter?