

On This Mountain

When Moses met God at the burning bush, he was told, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain (1).” But as we read on through the book of Exodus, there does not appear to be any worship. The only singing is in praise of the golden calf that Aaron has made (2). Instead, Moses receives a whole lot of instructions to pass on to the people, many more than just the ten commandments, including detailed plans for the creation of the tabernacle. A whole ten chapters are devoted to explaining how these are carried out to the letter, culminating with the oft-repeated refrain ‘as the Lord commanded’ (3). God’s response to their obedience is to so fill the tabernacle with his presence that the priests are unable to enter it. Talk about sensing the presence of God in the meeting!

So what is going on?

It’s a case of the Hebrew word *‘bd* (pronounced *arvad*) having two meanings – worship and serve. So one could equally translate the words above, “you will serve God on this mountain.” *‘bd* is used of the ruthless work and hard labour that Pharaoh imposed on the Israelites in Egypt. We would not think of this as worship, but to the Hebrews, the concepts unite. Service and worship are one.

Note the role of obedience in service and worship. This is a strong theme in Scripture. The people worshipped God by their obedience. When Joshua became leader after Moses’ death, God instructed him to be careful to obey the book of the law, and meditate on it day and night (4). As John put it, “This is love for God: to obey his commands (5).”

We now jump forward many centuries. Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well whose personal life was out of tune with God. When he gently pointed this out to her, her response was to change the subject to worship. “Our fathers worshipped God on this mountain, but you Jews say we should worship God in Jerusalem (6).” Jesus pointed out that where is not the issue: it’s worshipping God in Spirit and in truth that matters. Could the lady be doing that in her present state? Whatever happened to her obeying God?

Fast forward to today. I hear encouragements to worship about once a month in church circles these days, by which people mean singing worship songs to the Lord. I haven’t heard a call to obedience for many years. I would love to find a church which searches out the commands of Jesus and makes them the number one focus, and sees that as its worship.

For example, Jesus said we are to love our enemies and seek first the kingdom of God. So let’s take time to ask who our enemies are and make a plan as to how we can love them and draw them into the kingdom (7).

Sung worship without obeying God’s commands is just lip service to my mind (8). It’s not right.

David Pennant, March 2021

1. Exodus 2:12.
2. Exodus 32:18.
3. Chapters 25 - 30 and 36 – 39. The refrain comes in chapter 40 verses 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32.
4. Joshua 1:7-8.
5. 1 John 5:3.
6. John 4:20. Note verse 34 on obedience – see www.pennantpublishing.co.uk/Jesus_Didnt.pdf.
7. Matthew 5:44, 6:33.
8. Hebrews 13:15, the origin of the phrase lip-service, talks about praise being a sacrifice.
Obedience is often costly.