

RESTORATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

The nature of both God and the Old Testament are important matters that help the Christian to understand the attitude of God to apostasy. In addition the need to return to God is also evident from the Old Testament.

The Nature of God

Malachi reveals that God is changeless (Mal. 3:6) so does the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 13:8). If God does not change and the nature of man has not changed, it is evident that there is no need for truth to change (truth relative to man's salvation).

This changeless God works today as he once did (Heb. 2:2-3). This is why the Old Testament can serve as a record of things that are examples to us (1 Cor. 10:6). The Old Testament serves as a negative example (of what not to do). The Old Testament also serves as a positive example (of what to do). But one may say "the Scriptures are not able to deal with modern day problems." There is no new thing under the sun (Ecc. 1:9). Our technology has just enabled us to commit the same sins more rapidly and more efficiently (by our communication and transportation systems). However men are still committing the same sins.

The logical conclusion of these points is that the things that pleased God in principle in the Old Testament, will still please God today, i. e. love, obedience, etc. (This applies to all things not changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament.) The Old Testament serves to teach us (Rom. 15:4). The things that happened to the Old Testament people serve as examples to us to admonish us (1 Cor. 10:11).

The Institution of, and Departure From, the Pure Religion in the Old Testament

All things that God does are pure and flawless. When the Godhead instituted the Law of Moses, it was a pure religion, but God prophesied of an apostasy (departure from it). Moses revealed the pure religion of God (Jn. 1:17). God cursed them for changing the word of God (Deut. 12:32).

God prophesied of their departure from the word of God (Deut. 31:27 and 29). He informed them that they would be punished for their departure from His Word. The first example will be derived from the book of Judges. Note how they departed from the will of God as soon as their good leaders all died (Jgs. 3:7-11). Because of this departure God was forced to punish them (by withdrawing His protection of Israel). When they began to suffer, they repented and God forgave them (Jgs. 3:9-11). This was repeated many times in the book of Judges.

The second example is derived from the kings (in Hezekiah's days-2 Kgs. 18-20). The departure (apostasy) was realized (2 Kgs. 17:7, 18-19), but their good king (Hezekiah) brought them back to the will of God. When Judah returned to God, He forgave them and

they received His blessings (2 Kgs. 18:4). Note the reaction of God to their return (2 Kgs. 18:7).

The third example is from the days of king Josiah (2 Kgs. 21-23). Again, the people go into apostasy (2 Kgs. 22:17). While Josiah was a very good king, the people did not return to God with all their heart and his restoration was ineffective. Their return was only half-hearted (2 Kgs. 22:17-20) and God's reaction to their half-hearted return was to punish them (2 Kgs. 23:26).

The fourth example is derived from the days after the return from Babylonian captivity (Neh. 8:8-9 and 13-16). Nehemiah gives an account of their numerous apostasies (Neh. 1:7-9). Their departure (apostasy) was from the truth (Neh. 1:7) and they must return to it in order to please God (Neh. 1:8-9). When they returned, we see the reaction of a merciful God (Neh. 1:9).

This pure system was designed to end (Jer. 31:31-34) and to be replaced by a better covenant (Heb. 8:6-ff.). However a failure to obey the first covenant (the Law of Moses) brought punishment (Heb. 2:2) and a failure to obey the better covenant (Heb. 2:3) will bring about an even greater responsibility to obey (with a greater punishment for disobedience).

Summary of the Apostasies in the Old Testament (Neh. 9:26-31)

Neh. 9:26-31 Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their back, and slew thy prophets that testified against them to turn them again unto thee, and they wrought great provocations. 27 therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their adversaries, who distressed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours who saved them out of the hand of their adversaries. 28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee; therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies, 29 and testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law. Yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thine ordinances (which if a man do, he shall live in them), and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. 30 Yet many years didst thou bear with them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit through thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless in thy manifold mercies thou didst not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

The Children of Israel were first disobedient (verse 26), then they rebelled against God (verse 26), then they cast the law of God behind their backs (verse 26), then they slew the prophets (verse 26). The prophets had worked to turn them again to God (verse 26) and to bring them again to God's law (verse 29).

Summary of the Principles Learned

When God speaks He does not want His will changed in any manner and when men change His will (either by perverting the doctrine, substituting a different doctrine, or keeping the people in ignorance of His will), he punished those who failed to work in their stewardship (keeping and teaching His will). When He punished them and they repented and returned to His will (were converted), He was merciful and forgave them.

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