

Exodus 23:20-33
God Will Lead Israel to Canaan

In the book of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul makes an interesting connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament

- He records these words in 1 Corinthians 10, “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.’ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.” (10:1-13)

Verse 6, “Now these things happened as examples for us”

- We need to learn from the characters in the OT, lest we make the same mistakes

Verse 11, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction”

- The acts of God in the lives of the OT characters were written “for our instruction”
- So that we can benefit

I hope that as we march through the book of Exodus, you see application to your life

- Mistakes to avoid
- Lessons to learn
- Instruction to heed

God’s character hasn’t changed from the OT to the NT

- Man’s sinfulness hasn’t changed, either

Throughout Exodus 20-23, God has been giving His people a list of various law codes

- Moral law
- Civil law
- Ceremonial law

In other words, God has been given an all-encompassing view of life

- How they should respond to one another in the various arenas of life, government, and religion

How gracious God is to give His people such guidelines!

- Otherwise, we would left to ourselves
- Otherwise, we would all be guessing what to do

In today's sermon, God will give Israel a reminder¹

- Who they are
- Where they are going
- How they will get there

At the end of Exodus 23, God reminds Israel of the Promised Land

- He has them look forward with faith to the land of Canaan

In other words, it is easy to become focused on the details of the Law and forget what God is doing

- He is preparing His people for life in the Promised Land!
- That was why He delivered Israel out of Egypt

Every once in a while, we need to be reminded to focus on the future

- To have a forward-looking perspective

Otherwise, we will always be looking at the present

- Or we will be looking back over our shoulder at the past

God reminds Israel of what is awaiting them

- A land of milk and honey
- A land of fertile soil
- A land filled with enemies

Let's read Exodus 23:20-33

This passage gives four (4) directives that Israel is to take as they march toward the Promised Land

- Be obedient (23:20-23)
- Be loyal (23:24-26)
- Be patient (23:27-30)
- Be faithful (23:31-33)

I. Be obedient (23:20-23)

20 Behold, I am going to send an angel before you

The verse begins with the word, "Behold"

- Don't miss this!
- Pay attention!

For the past few chapters, they have heard law after law

- But now God is announcing something special

God promises, "I am going to send an angel before you"

- This is interesting, isn't it?

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *NAC, Exodus*, 542.

God told Moses in Exodus 3, “I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” (3:8)

- Promise of deliverance
- Presence of Yahweh
- Problems with enemies

But what a promise this was!²

- God was going to use Moses to lead His people toward the Promised Land

Back in Exodus 13, God went ahead of His people

- “And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light” (13:21)

It was not just a pillar

- It was the LORD Himself going before His people
- In the appearance as a cloud by day and a pillar by night

Now, God promises once again to direct His people

- Not through a cloud
- Not through a pillar
- But through “an angel”

At this point, we don’t know who this Angel is

- We just know “an angel” will go ahead of Israel

Some possibilities include³

- Moses
- Joshua
- Or someone else

In Scripture, angels divert the attention away from themselves⁴

- In Colossians 2:18, Paul warns against the worship of angels
- In Revelation 19:10, John attempts to worship an angel, and the angel says, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God”

to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

Two primary purposes are assigned to the Angel in relation to Israel

- “to guard you along the way”
- “to bring you into the place which I have prepared”

The Angel will guard and guide Israel as they journey toward Canaan

- They won’t be alone
- They won’t be defenseless

² Michael Bentley, *Travelling Homeward*, 251.

³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 446.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus*, 765.

God isn't giving Israel a map or GPS⁵

- He is giving Israel Himself!

Notice that God has already “prepared” the Promised Land for Israel

- Israel just needs to follow in obedience

This rules out Moses as the angel

- Because Moses wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land

21 Be on your guard before him and obey his voice;

Two commands are given in rapid-fire succession

- “be on your guard before him”
- “obey his voice”

These are clues that will help us determine who this Angel is

- An Angel who demands Israel's attention
- An Angel who Israel is commanded to obey

do not be rebellious toward him,

Israel is told not to be “rebellious” toward this Angel

- A rebel is someone who opposes authority
- A rebel is someone who doesn't submit or obey

Positively, Israel is to obey this Angel

- Negatively, Israel is not to rebel against this Angel

for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.

Up to this point, we may still have questions about the identity of this Angel

- But the last half of verse 21 should clarify it

If Israel proves to be rebellious toward this Angel, “he will not pardon your transgression”

- In other words, this Angel has the power to forgive

In Mark 2, some unbelieving scribes uttered these words, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk 2:7)

There is only one Angel who is given authority to forgive

- That is Jesus

Jesus is frequently referred to as “the Angel of the Lord” throughout the Old Testament

- He is an Angel because He is a Divine Messenger

⁵ Bentley, 252.

What we have to see is that Jesus appeared occasionally in the OT

- Before His Incarnation

It is my understanding that this Angel in Exodus 23 is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ

- Guarding Israel
- Guiding Israel

To bolster my case that this is the pre-incarnate Jesus, notice the last phrase of verse 21, “My name is in him”

- God says that His very “name” – His very essence – would be “in him”
- In this Angel

I don’t know of any other angel in Scripture who is given such a description

- The power to forgive
- The very Name within him

22 But if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

Israel is given a tremendous promise

- But that promise is conditional upon their obedience⁶

This isn’t a blanket promise, regardless of Israel’s actions

- No, Israel must obey

Notice the wording of verse 22, “if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say”

- Did you catch that?

God says if you will obey “his voice” and do all that “I say”

- Notice how God links Himself with this Angel
- They are interchangeable⁷

Obedying the Angel is the same as obeying Yahweh

- This is further evidence that this is a very special Angel
- I believe, none other than Jesus

If Israel obeys, then God gives a tremendous promise

- “then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries”

Does this remind you of something that God had spoken to a man named Abraham back in Genesis?⁸

- “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3)

God promised Abram

- He would bless those who bless him
- He would curse those who curse him
- All the families of the earth would be blessed because of him

⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentary, Exodus*, 182.

⁷ John L. Mackay, *A Mentor Commentary, Exodus*, 409.

⁸ Cole, 182.

If Israel obeys, then God will oppose their enemies and adversaries

- The bad news is that Israel would have enemies
- The good news is that Israel would have a Provider and Protector

23 For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.

For the first time in Exodus, this Angel is called “My angel”

- In a very unique manner, this Angel belongs to Yahweh

God promises that Jesus will go ahead of Israel

- He will bring Israel into the Promised Land

But God is also quick to point out that the Promised Land is already inhabited

- With enemies!
- “the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites”

Isn't God good, though, to follow-up that statement with the last phrase of verse 23, “I will completely destroy them”?

- God would make sure that these temporary enemies would eventually be taken care of

The first major directive that is given to Israel is to be obedient

- How simple this sounds!
- But how hard this is sometimes!

- **Be obedient (23:20-23)**

II. Be loyal (23:24-26)

24 You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds;

Last week, we discussed the truth of verse 13, “Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth”

- God didn't want Israel even to mention the names of other gods on their lips

Stated positively, Israel was to worship one God

- To love Him alone
- To serve Him alone

Here in verse 24, we see a similar statement of fidelity

- Don't worship other gods
- Don't serve them
- Don't do according to their deeds

Yahweh was calling for a singular focus from Israel

- A heart that was set on the worship of Himself alone

but you shall utterly overthrow them, and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces.

What would happen when Israel went into the Promised Land?

- The group of people who lived there served other gods
- They weren't committed to the singular worship of Yahweh

As Israel came upon their pagan worship facilities, what were they supposed to do?

- “utterly overthrow [their gods]”
- “break their *sacred* pillars in pieces”

These “pillars” were free-standing stones that were associated with various deities⁹

- You might think of a gravestone, although they served a far different purpose

Notice what Israel was not to do

- Dabble with the idols
- Discuss which ones they should get rid of

No, this wasn't to be a casual approach to idolatry

- They were to smash the idols
- They were to destroy the pillars

Can you imagine the courage that this took?

- Walking onto someone else's turf and destroying their idols?

25 But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.

If Israel would be courageous and obey the LORD, then God made further promises

- “He will bless your bread and your water”
- “I will remove sickness from your midst”

God promises to provide “bread” and “water” for Israel

- These are the basic, essential needs that everyone has
- Food and drink

But then God also promises protection from sickness

- Remember, this promise was contingent upon Israel's exclusive worship

26 There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

Three additional details are mentioned in verse 26

- “no one miscarrying”
- “[no on] barren in your land”
- “I will fulfill the number of your days”

⁹ Kaiser, 446-47.

These are the blessings of covenant obedience (cf. Deut 28:1-14)¹⁰

- However, Israel wasn't obedient!

What we need to see is that what God promises is what Adam and Eve experienced before the Fall

- No sickness
- No miscarriage
- No barrenness
- No shortened lives

The reality is that this awaits us in the new heavens and the new earth

- We will have renewed, glorified bodies!
- We will not deal with sin any longer!

God is making some pretty incredible promises, isn't He?

- Israel is simply told to be loyal and faithful

These are not unconditional promises

- These are conditional promises

God will do certain things IF Israel does her part

- She must worship and serve the LORD God alone
- She must not worship and serve false gods
- She must destroy the sacred pillars

- **Be obedient (23:20-23)**

- **Be loyal (23:24-26)**

III. Be patient (23:27-30)

27 I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you.

Israel has listened to God give momentous promises

- Regarding the Promised Land
- Regarding protection and provision from the Angel
- Regarding victory over her future enemies in the land of Canaan
- Regarding physical blessings of fertility and long life

Israel might be wondering, "How in the world will God accomplish this?"

- In other words, what means will God use to destroy these enemies?

Verse 27 deals with that very issue

- I am sure it surprised Israel
- It may surprise you as well

God tells Israel, "**I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come**"

- What does God mean by "**terror**"?

¹⁰ Mackay, 410.

To put it simply, God promised that there would be a panic and sense of distress that would grip the hearts of Israel's enemies¹¹

- They would dread going against this nation

An example of this is given in the book of Joshua

- "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11, emphasis mine)

The result of this terror would be, "I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you"

- Victory again is promised

The word picture is clear in the English translations

- "I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you"
- They will turn and run

Israel is assured that they would see the backs of their enemies, as they ran away

- What a picture of victory!

28 And I will send hornets ahead of you, that they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.

Not only would God send His "terror"

- He would also send "hornets ahead of you"

The word here for "hornet" only appears three times in the entire Old Testament (Ex 23:28; Deut 7:20; Josh 24:12)

- Is this a literal hornet?
- Or is God speaking figuratively?

If the literal meaning is intended, then God used the wasp-like animal to run the enemies out of Canaan

- If the figurative meaning is intended, God was using other means to drive these nations out

Michael Bentley, in his commentary on Exodus, wrote these words

- "Those who obey Christ find him to be as the Angel, [while] those who refuse him discover him to be as a hornet"¹²

The result of this hornet would be clear

- "they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you"

The list of six enemies in verse 23 is condensed to three here in verse 28

- The Amorites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites are not mentioned

¹¹ Cole, 183.

¹² Bentley, 257.

They would be driven out of the land of Canaan

- In order for Israel to settle there

29 I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate, and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.

But Israel needed to understand something

- All the enemies wouldn't be driven out immediately

Of course, this is what Israel would have wanted, right?

- Get rid of ALL the enemies
- THEN we will move in

God gives two major reasons why He won't do this

- This makes sense, if we think about it

The first reason God doesn't remove all the enemies at once is this, **“that the land may not become desolate”**

- The Promised Land was a huge area

If God removed every single enemy, then Israel wouldn't be able to tend to the all this area by themselves

- Even though they were a large group coming out of Egypt, they still couldn't occupy and cultivate the entire land

Parts would become infested with weeds

- Other parts would become a desert¹³

Isn't it interesting that God has Israel living side-by-side with their enemies, even in the Promised Land?

- The enemies were actually helping them to maintain the Promised Land!
- Amazing!

The second reason God doesn't remove all the enemies at once is, **“the beasts of the field become too numerous for you”**

- If all the enemies were to leave Canaan, what would happen to the wildlife?
- They would flourish!

Again, even the enemies of Israel prove to be helpful in this regard

- They would help to keep the beasts either tamed or killed off
- They would help to manage the beast of the field

30 I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.

God does promise, though, to drive out the enemies **“little by little”**

- Not instantaneous
- But gradual

Could God have removed them immediately and entirely?

- Of course

¹³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT, Exodus*, 421.

Could God have resolved the issue of cultivating the land and dealing with the beasts of the field?

- Of course

But what God was teaching His people?

- Trust Me
- Obey Me
- Follow Me, one step at a time

Think of how this principle manifests itself in our lives today

Do we live side-by-side with people who are enemies of God?

- Yes!

Are we tempted to adopt the practices of the world?

- Yes!

Does God use even the unbelievers to keep things going politically, financially, and culturally?

- Yes!

In the Christian life, does God remove all the obstacles at one time?

- No!

How nice would it be for God to remove all sin from our lives when we believe!

- But that would be heaven

We are called to live here on Earth, as redeemed Christians

- Being a witness to the unbeliever
- Living side-by-side with them, without being contaminated by their pagan practices

We have to exhibit patience, just like Israel did

- God will achieve victory

It will happen little by little

- But it will eventually be complete

- **Be obedient (23:20-23)**

- **Be loyal (23:24-26)**

- **Be patient (23:27-30)**

IV. Be faithful (23:31-33)

31 And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.

God continues to point Israel forward in their thinking

- Now He actually gives them the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land
- This was all given before Israel ever stepped foot in Canaan

Back in Genesis 15:18, God had given broad boundary descriptions to Abram¹⁴

- Now God was reinforcing this to Israel

When did Israel see these boundaries become theirs?

- During the united kingdom of David and Solomon¹⁵

These boundaries are spoken of in general terms¹⁶

- Not precise GPS coordinates
- But broad land and water markers

Back in verse 23, God promised, “I will completely destroy” the enemies of Israel

- Here in verse 31, God tells Israel, “you will drive them out before you”

It’s not either/or

- It’s both/and

God will drive them out

- But He is calling His people to action
- Israel would have a part in this

32 You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods.

As if God had not stressed this fact enough, He reminds Israel about their exclusive loyalty and faithfulness to Him

- Israel is not to “make [any] covenant with them or with their gods”

Entering into a covenant was serious business

- It was to declare that two parties were entering into an agreement

God didn’t want Israel doing this with the enemies once they reached the Promised Land

- It would have been very tempting to do

For political reasons, it would have been easy to think, “If we partner with this group, then we can take on the other enemies.”

- But that would be faulty thinking

Once Israel entered into a covenant with a certain people group, they would be even more tempted to adopt their religious practices

But the major reason why Israel was not to enter into a covenant with these nations and their gods is simple

- God was calling Israel into a covenant with Himself!¹⁷

What we will see next week, the Lord willing, is Israel entering into a covenant with Yahweh

- The covenant will be ratified

¹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, 422.

¹⁵ Kaiser, 447.

¹⁶ Stuart, 549.

¹⁷ Cole, 184.

Israel couldn't have an exclusive covenant with Yahweh and then pretend that it was ok to enter into other covenants with other people groups and their gods

- This was unacceptable

Jesus said it this way in the NT, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24)

- You can try to serve two masters

But in the end, you can only have one master in your life

- Something or someone has to take second place

The reality is that it is easier to be influenced than to influence

- We need to have a zero tolerance for idolatry in our lives¹⁸

33 They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

The Israelites are once again warned of the dangers of following after other gods

- “lest they make you sin against Me”

Furthermore, if Israel served these gods, “it will surely be a snare to you”

- It would be a trap

As we think about Israel's history, don't we see this happen time and time again?

- Israel doesn't follow Yahweh completely
- Israel begins to compromise
- Israel follows after other gods
- God has to bring judgment and discipline

Yet God is much more committed to us than we are to Him

- Praise God for this!

Oftentimes, we are fickle

- Yet, He remains faithful

It is no surprise just how many times God calls His people to exclusive worship¹⁹

- He doesn't tolerate idolatry

The first two of the Ten Commandments deal with this very issue

- 1st – no other gods before Me
- 2nd – don't make an idol or likeness

What is God calling us to do this morning?

First, rest in God's victory

- Jesus has achieved victory through the cross at Calvary
- Glory and revel in this

¹⁸ Ryken, 773.

¹⁹ John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Exodus*, 335.

Second, realize that sanctification is progressive

- It is slow and gradual
- It isn't instantaneous

Third, don't compromise

- Worship and serve God alone
- Don't dabble in secret sin