

The Agents of A Truly Christian Nation

Joshua 8:33-35

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, June 4th 2023

I. Introduction - brief review of last week's lessons on a nation receiving and believing the Gospel

The passage we just read is one of several passages where an entire nation enters into covenant with God and commits itself (from top to bottom) to live out God's law by His grace. And believe it or not, over the past 2000 years there have been numerous tribes and nations that have done exactly this. Last week we looked at the rich symbols of God's grace - a grace sufficient to sustain even a national covenant. Let me briefly review that.

The cursings of Deuteronomy 27 were read from mount Ebal, and all the people on Gerizim would say "Amen" to each curse. Then the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 were read from mount Gerizim, and all the people on Mount Ebal would say "Amen" to each blessing. In the valley in between the two mountains was the ark of the covenant, which represented God's throne and presence and the presence of His angels in Israel's midst.

We saw that God's presence in their midst produced either curses or blessings. How does a nation receive the blessing rather than the curse? It's not by the works of the law since all nations break God's laws to some degree. It's been a long history of nations breaking God's laws just as individuals do. The Gospel to the Nations that Jesus gave in the Great Commission is not a legalistic Gospel. Nations can only have God's blessing through Christ's redemption - a redemption that goes "far as the curse is found" (to quote the Christmas hymn, Joy to the World). For there to be a Christian civilization, redemption must apply to absolutely every facet of everything we do.

Anyway, we saw that Christ's redemption was symbolized by the sacrifices in these verses. And interestingly, the sacrifices were made on the mount of cursing (Mount Ebal) because they symbolized the fact that the only way people could be at peace with God was if Christ bore God's curse in their place. This is true for individuals and it is true for nations. What spared Nineveh from judgment in the book of Jonah? It wasn't their good works. They didn't have any. It was their repentance and faith in the coming Messiah. And if Jesus bears the curse for us, then we can say "Amen" to any curses of the law without fear, and we can say "Amen" to the blessings of the law without fear of losing them. The sacrifice of Jesus was what made the difference.

And God commanded Joshua to make the altar of sacrifice with stones taken from the field without any iron implement fashioning them. Those uncut stones symbolized the fact that man can contribute nothing to his salvation. The Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim. After all, wouldn't you rather have blessings than cursings? But Jesus rejected their worship in John chapter 4. And He rejected their worship because they sought to have the blessings of Mount Gerizim without the sacrifices of Mount Ebal - which meant, without the

curses of Mount Ebal falling on the future Messiah in their place. But this made for a works-righteousness salvation that robbed them of any blessing. Without both mountains you have either an antinomian grace or a graceless law. In contrast, God wanted the law written on the stones of grace (the stones of the altar) to make it clear that both are united in Jesus.

We also saw last week that this whole event was a national covenant just like the Scottish national covenant. So last week focused on the nature of the grace needed for there to be a Christian nation. And we are going to park on these six verses for three weeks.

Next week we will look at all of the other elements that are absolutely essential to becoming a Christian nation - which is the goal of the Great Commission - making disciples of all nations.

II. Who covenants with God within a Christian nation? (v. 33)

But today we are going to look at all the agents of a truly Christian nation. England still claims to be a Christian nation in name, but because the *people* of England have abandoned their roles in the national covenant, God has abandoned the nation. It is no longer a true Christian nation. And this is true of a lot of other formerly Christian nations. So we need to examine who it is that covenants with God within a Christian nation? Is it only the leaders? I would say, “No.”

A. Every citizen (“all Israel”)

Verse 33 begins, “Then all Israel, *with* their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark...” Notice that it was *all* Israel, and the “all” there is distinguished from the leadership. This speaks of each individual, and it refers to the first of four governments that are essential to a Christian civilization - self-government. Unlike many statist counterfeits of Christian nationalism, the first and most important government is not the state. Not by a long shot. The first and most important government was the self-government God established with Adam in Genesis 2. The next most important government was the family government that God established with Adam and Eve. They are the only pre-fall governments. Those two governments have the most freedom and liberties by far. After the fall God established church government and state government, both of which were hugely restricted in their scope. Yet sin makes both of those last two governments grow and grow and grow at the expense of individual and family. Anyway, God starts with the individual citizen.

Citizens have a huge impact upon the character of a nation, so to the degree that the individuals within a nation are sincerely committed to the true Gospel and the comprehensive claims of the Law, that nation will likely move in a good direction. When the citizenry as a whole becomes pagan, it is likely that all the institutions of a nation will become pagan too.

So this speaks to the priority of evangelism and discipleship of individuals into a comprehensive worldview. Without evangelism and Christian education, a nation is lost.

America slid down the slippery slope into lostness when it established non-Christian public schools.

We saw last week that God intended Israel to be a paradigm to make the Gentiles jealous of the blessings of the Gospel and His law. Was He successful in doing that? Absolutely. As we will see later in today's sermon there were a lot of Gentiles who were entering into covenant with God on this day. They are referred to as the "strangers" in verses 33 and 35. In chapter 9 we will see an entire Gentile nation that covenants with God because they see that God is real and His laws are good. They don't go about it right, but they do covenant with God.

In any case, it is critical that individuals within a nation hear and believe the Gospel and then get disciplined and taught how God's Word applies to everything they do. Christian education, not government education. We will see in verse 35 that these individuals include even the very young children. They are never too young to start learning. But here it is enough to say that it was "all Israel" that became immersed in the law of God during this massive conference.

B. Church elders

But verse 33 goes on to mention the leadership of Israel. And the first part of that leadership is summarized with the word "elders." I may be wrong, but it is my studied opinion that the word "elders" *usually* refers to the officers of the synagogue system - a system that was established in Exodus 18 and Numbers 11. Do you wonder why we have the form of government that we do? Well that synagogue system is identical with Presbyterian church government. On every level there is a one-to-one correspondence. There was no change in church government from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The temple system passed away, but not the synagogue system. The synagogue system continued on, and the New Testament even calls the church a synagogue. That's why the first time that the word "elders" is used in the New Testament to describe church officers is in Acts 11:30, and that verse indicates that those elders had always been there. Where did they come from? We have no record of the apostles setting something new up before Acts 11. They were just there. Well, the church started with the remnant of Israel, and the synagogue system was transferred right over into the New Testament church.

Jeremiah 19:1 divides the elders up into two groups: "the elders of the people," which would be the ruling elders, and "the elders of the priests," which would be the teaching elders. Both were called elders and both had equal authority in the synagogues. And if you want a very detailed analysis of how our Presbyterian views on church government are found in the New Testament and in the synagogue system of the Old Testament, read Douglas Bannerman's book, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church Historically and Exegetically Considered*. It's a marvelous treatment. Or just read some of the Scottish Reformers like Gillespie or Rutherford. All of the elders in the synagogue system met in graded courts from local session to the General Assembly, with Numbers 11 showing how only 70 of the elders from the presbyteries represented the people at the General Assembly level. Enough by way of background.

Now, if I am right, and the word “elders” here refers to church elders (which I am convinced that it does), it means that the church is not just under the ministry of grace, but it is also under obligation to the laws of God that are mentioned in this paragraph. And it is shameful that the modern church has abandoned the law of God. That’s like throwing out all the blueprints for a skyscraper and throwing out the roadmaps for life and trying to explore the wilderness on our own. As we saw last week, people misunderstand the Gospel if they separate law and grace. Romans 3:31 says that faith and grace establish the law. So the church officers were committing themselves to live out God’s Biblical blueprints and to do so by His grace. Do you want to have a Christian nation? Then start convincing churches that they need to embrace all the blueprints of God’s Word. Don’t wait for the state. Start with the first three governments - individual, family, and church.

C. Civil officers

But interestingly the *civil* officers are also committing themselves to both law and grace. Some people think of the church as being the institution of grace and the state being the institution of law. That is a false dichotomy. 1 and 2 Kings makes it clear that rulers who aren’t saved lead the country into sin. Rulers too must pray and experience God’s grace if their rule is to be blessed. Psalm 125:3 says that any time unsaved rulers rule, citizens reach out their hands to iniquity. It’s just the way the covenant works. The state too must be redeemed by Christ and submit to Christ’s laws.

Now, there are some people (like Stephen Wolfe) who insist that the civil government only follows natural law and the *church* follows Biblical law. But what do we see here? We see each of the civil officers committing themselves to the laws of Moses as well. Here it mentions “officers and judges,” but Joshua and his assistants were also in covenant. So let’s spend a bit of time looking at each of those agents of civil government. Each one is needed in a Christian nation.

1. Executive civic officers (such as Joshua)

Joshua acted in the capacity of the chief executive officer. Already in the time of Moses the clerical and civil offices were clearly separated into Aaron and Moses. Some people misrepresent theocracy and Christian civilization as if it meant the church ruling over the state or the state ruling over the church. No. Neither is true. In the Bible there was a jurisdictional separation between church and state. There was not a separation between *God* and state, or *Bible* and state, or *grace* and state. No. It was a separation between the two *governments* of church and state, both of whom need grace and law.

And Joshua here represents the chief executive office. Though there were differences between Joshua, later judges, and kings, they all held the office of civil rule. And David later made it clear in 2 Samuel 23:3 that “he who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” And God’s law defines justice. When America threw out God’s law, it broke covenant with God. The stories of 1 & 2 Kings illustrate that without a godly ruler as chief executive, a nation can go downhill very quickly.

John Jay, who was a signer of the American Constitution and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court said, “Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is

the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”¹ Does that surprise you?

Let me give you a tiny peak into a forgotten history - the history of the first two centuries of America’s states. In 1645, John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts, established a covenant for all civic officers and citizens and stated this:

The covenant between you and us is the oath you have taken of us, which is to this purpose, that we shall govern you and judge your causes by the rules of God’s laws ...²

Massachusetts has changed a lot, hasn’t it? It started off covenanting with God just like this nation did in Joshua 8. And many governors of the various states in the first 200 or so years of the existence of those states have said the same thing.

So did Presidents of the United States. Sometimes they were sincere and other times they were hypocrites, but the presence of a strong Christian culture made many of those in America’s executive offices in the past affirm that God’s laws were over the nation. Let me give you a tiny sampling, some of which may totally surprise you. George Washington, the first president, said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.”³ In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson said, “America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture.” In 1926 President Calvin Coolidge said, “The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.” President Harry S. Truman said, “The fundamental basis of this nation’s law was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings we get from Exodus and St. Matthew, from Isaiah and St. Paul.”

Did our country always understand how the law should apply or perfectly live out Biblical law? No. And some of those presidents were absolute hypocrites - and they had to be hypocrites to make it into office because it was still a largely Christian population. They had to pander to the Christian population. But the point is that they were not embarrassed to

¹ William J. Federer, *Great Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Quotations Influencing Early and Modern World History Referenced according to Their Sources in Literature, Memoirs, Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions* (St. Louis, MO: AmeriSearch, 2001).

² William J. Federer, *Great Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Quotations Influencing Early and Modern World History Referenced according to Their Sources in Literature, Memoirs, Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions* (St. Louis, MO: AmeriSearch, 2001).

³ As quoted in *Maxims of Washington: Political, Social, Moral, and Religious* by A.A. Appleton

acknowledge Biblical law. Nowadays it is hard to find even *Christians* who are willing to say that Biblical law is the basis for a truly Christian republic.

Romans 13 envisages a civil government so in tune with God's law that each and every resistance to the civil authority is resistance to Biblical law. That could only be possible if the only laws of the nation are the laws of the Bible. It says that God instituted the executive office to be a terror to evil works, not good works. That's not describing Nero. That is describing an ideal civil government. The civil magistrate is called by Romans 13:4 to be "God's minister to you for good." So Romans 13 is affirming a continuing need for the sword-wielding executive office to be in covenant with God just they entered into covenant with God in Joshua chapter 8.

2. Administrative civic officers (שוטרים)

The next word in verse 33 is "officers." It is the Hebrew word *shoterim* (שׁוֹטְרִים), which is a general word for all civil officers, administrators, or those who functioned under the chief executive of the nation or tribe. As John Winthrop said in the quote I gave earlier, they too were subject to God's law and administered God's laws within a very limited God-ordained sphere of jurisdiction. There were actually numerous early officers in America who thought that our federal constitution committed us to God's law, but there are many parts of our Constitution that go way beyond what the law of God allows a civic sphere to go. But certainly if you go back earlier you see it.

I think that Connecticut's first constitution in 1639 was a fine example of what it means for civic officers to be in covenant with God. Let me read you the first four articles.⁴ Article I says,

Article I. That the Scriptures hold forth a perfect rule for the direction and government of all men in all duties which they are to perform to God and men, as well in families and commonwealths as in matters of the church.

It was committing the civil officers to exercise their rule by the Word of God and nothing but the Word of God. But it also recognized the God-ordained legitimacy of the other three governments: self-government, family government, and church government. Article II states the Regulative Principle of Government rather well. It says,

Article II. That as in matters which concern the gathering and ordering of a church, so likewise in all public offices which concern civil order,...

⁴ Connecticut, Fundamental Orders (Constitution) of 1639, in the articles of the constitution of Connecticut drawn up in Quinipiack (New Haven), Connecticut. Benjamin Franklin Morris, *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), pp. 67–68. Gary DeMar, *God and Government—A Biblical and Historical Study* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision Press, 1982), pp. 113–114.

And I will pause there and comment. What Connecticut's first constitution was saying is that the civil government is *just as constrained by the Word of God* as we all know the church to be totally constrained by the Word of God. Another way of stating this Regulative Principle of Government is that just as the church is restricted in its authority to only do what God's Word has explicitly authorized it to do, so too a just civil order is restricted to only do what God's Word allows it to do. Well, that makes for a rather limited civil government. And the government of Connecticut was 99-point-something-% smaller than it is today. Article II goes on:

—as the choice of magistrates and officers, making and repealing laws, dividing allotments of inheritance, and all things of like nature,—they would all be governed by those rules which the Scripture held forth to them.

Again, that is a beautiful declaration that the state can only do what the rules of Scripture allow it to do. This is not some strange new doctrine. Connecticut was simply reviving laws that had been practiced in various Christian nations over the previous 1000 years. It was at the heart of the Christian Commonwealth, though England had backslidden from it. Article III says,

Article III. That all those who had desired to be received free planters had settled in the plantation with a purpose, resolution, and desire that they might be admitted into church fellowship according to Christ.

It was stating that its immigration policies preferred Christians in good standing in a church. It was assuming that if it was to have a Christian civilization in its state level, every citizen must be a member of a church. In saying this it was being a bit more strict than Joshua 8 was. Joshua 8 allowed Gentiles or aliens to stay with Israel if they were willing to abide by Israel's laws. And most states in America *did* allow for that. So it is possible for a state that is Christian to inadvertently be too strict or too lax. That's why more exegetical work needs to be done on the boundaries and functions of the state. Article IV states,

Article IV. That all the free planters held themselves bound to establish such civil order as might best conduce to the securing of the purity and peace of the ordinance to themselves, and their posterity according to God.

In other words, citizens *themselves* had a duty to ensure that the civil government was following the Word of God. Did they apply the Word of God perfectly? No. But they were seeking to do so to the best of their ability. Again, this is why grace comes before law. When a nation puts its trust in Christ, it can have God's favor even when it is not totally consistent with the Word. Which of you perfectly live out God's law? None of you. So don't think nations can't be Christian nations unless they perfectly conform to Scripture. Some people avoid politics because they are perfectionistic. But we should be striving to be more consistent.

Let me give you another example. Until 1868, the North Carolina Constitution said, "That no person who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Christian religion, or the divine authority of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of

trust or profit in the civil department within this State.”⁵ After 1868 it was changed, but still had similar language. North Carolina was a Christian state for over a hundred years after the Federal Constitution was ratified. And other states remained as Christian states. Because of government school brainwashing we have forgotten this history. We think that Joshua 8 can’t be replicated in our day, but it can. And there are good books out there that show the Christian character of America. When you read them, you realize that a revolution has taken over America. The seeds were planted in the Constitution, but it was not really till my lifetime that the nation has fallen faster and faster down the slippery slope into an anti-Christian philosophy.

Maryland’s toleration act of 1649 doesn’t seem very tolerant by modern standards. It stated,

Be it therefore enacted... That whatsoever person or persons within this Province... Shall from henceforth blaspheme God, or shall deny our Savior Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, or shall deny the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost... or the Unity of the Trinity... shall be punished with death and confiscation or forfeiture of all his or her lands...

In other words, unbelief was kept private. If you were a Buddhist, you wouldn’t build a temple in that state. Delaware’s constitution stated,

Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house... shall make and subscribe the following declaration: I _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament to be given by divine inspiration.

And by the way, some of these civic officers would reference passages like Joshua 8 or Nehemiah as the reason why they were covenanting with God. I bring these quotes up because there have been legitimate differences of opinion among the founders and later scholars on whether the United States of America was Christian or not. Some said yes and some said no. Those who said yes tended to emphasize the fact that it was a confederation of Christian states (or Christian nations) and that the states continued to have strong Christian foundations long after the Constitution was ratified. And that is true. But here’s the thing - you would be hard pressed to find any Biblical basis for most articles in our federal constitution. It goes way beyond the Scripture. So the true view of whether we were a Christian nation is somewhere in between. We were a confederation of Christian nations.

But once this world is fully Christianized, civic officers will once again affirm belief in the Gospel, will covenant with God, submit to His Lordship, be bound by His laws, and find empowerment by His grace.

⁵ North Carolina Constitution, till 1868 - similar wording after 1868.

3. Judicial civic officers (שפוט)

The next word in verse 33 is “judges.” The shaphat (שפוט) judge was a judge who settled cases in court. By coming into covenant with God in this grace-law covenant, the judges were committing themselves to judge according to the law of God, not man’s law. Only God’s law reflects Gods unchanging, perfect justice. And a lot of people think that is impossible nowadays. But American courts started off upholding Biblical laws, and as late as 1943, H. B. Clark reported that “many provisions of biblical law are still seen in American statutes and court decisions.” That was 1943. Prior to that time American courts would cite the Pentateuch for various decisions. For example, I read the 1939 decision of Ex Parte Kurth, which cited Deuteronomy 1:16-17; Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Leviticus 19:15, and several New Testament passages as part of its basis for its decision.⁶

4. Note what was absent: there were no congressmen, senators, tax collectors, police, agency czars, or heads of innumerable departments - only the throne of God (“altar”)

But I now want you to notice in this list of civic officers that there is a very clear absence of congressman or senators because law-making is the prerogative of God alone. The laws of a nation reveal the god of that nation. Sadly, even Christian nations have been repeatedly tempted to have lawmakers. But inevitably, when they have them, law makers make laws; new laws; hundreds of thousands of new laws. And the citizens exchange the perfect law of liberty in the Bible for the heavy heavy yoke of man’s law. Interpretation of the law, yes; but new laws, no.

It is popular in Christian circles to disparage God’s civil laws as heavy handed. After all, they call for the death penalty for adultery - that is, if the victim calls for the death penalty. It’s victim’s rights. But people think that is too severe. God’s laws call thieves and vandals to pay up to 400% restitution to the victim. How antiquated is that? Forget about the victim. Every enlightened person knows that the vandal should be housed at the victim’s expense in prison for years at a minimum of \$35,000 a year, where he can learn more criminal behaviors from other prisoners. Obviously I am being facetious. The truth is the opposite. God’s law is the perfect answer to demotivate criminals and to protect future victims. And the only things that can be considered crimes are broken laws that actually have a penalty attached to them by God. Wow! That means that there aren’t a very large body of criminal laws in the Bible.

Let’s contrast that with the heavy yoke of man’s law that has arisen ever since God’s laws were thrown off. It is so heavy that even the agency responsible for printing the federal laws says that it is impossible to calculate how many statutes at large, resolutions, agency regulations, edicts, and other forms of law there are. In 1982 the Justice Department started a full-time project of trying to determine the total number of *criminal* laws on the books (not counting the myriad regulations and other forms of law out there - just criminal

⁶ <https://casetext.com/case/ex-parte-kurth>

law).⁷ After two years they gave up in frustration stating that calculating the number of criminal laws was absolutely impossible. Ronald Gainer, who headed up this well-funded and well-staffed research project reported, “you will have died and been resurrected three times” and still not come up with an answer to this question. I asked Open AI if it knew how many federal criminal laws there were, and it said that as of 2021 (which is its information cutoff date) no one has any idea.

Well, if no one knows all the criminal laws, how can anyone know whether or not they have broken them? You can’t. Just for fun I asked Open AI how it could be fair to be held accountable to these laws if we don’t know them. It said,

The vast and complex nature of the federal criminal code makes it ... difficult for individuals to know if they have potentially violated a specific federal criminal law, especially if they are not legal professionals or have access to legal resources.

However, ignorance of the law is generally not considered a valid defense if someone is charged with a crime. The legal principle of “ignorantia legis neminem excusat” (ignorance of the law excuses no one) holds that individuals are expected to be aware of and abide by the laws of their jurisdiction, including federal laws.

It went on to say that we need to depend on experts and agencies. But my further question is, since Open AI admits that no agency in DC knows all criminal laws, then isn’t everything up for grabs? You can have a bit of fun in Open AI.

But let’s contrast that with the easily accessible, open-book policy of Biblical law. In this passage we read that every civil, ecclesiastical, family, and personal law was read to the people during the time of this conference. *Every* law was read. Look at verse 35: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.” And the civil section of God’s law is a very small portion of God’s law - very small. God’s laws are honest, open book, and bring liberty. America’s laws are so numerous that they can’t be known, and they are so intrustive that it is likely (according to one federal agent) that every American has unwittingly broken some federal law without knowing it. IRS laws alone are impossible to digest by any accountant and make it impossible for anyone to avoid violating IRS regulations at some point in their life. Keep that in mind when the news media accuses some politician of tax evasion or violating tax code. Almost anybody could be accused of that.

But its worse. Each agency also makes laws and regulations, and there are 443 official federal agencies.⁸ You may not have realized it, but those agencies are all unconstitutional

⁷ For a summary of this failed project, see <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2013/03/frequent-reference-question-how-many-federal-laws-are-there/>

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/waynecrews/2017/07/05/how-many-federal-agencies-exist-we-cant-drain-the-swamp-until-we-know/?sh=4b28da0d1aa2>

according to Article I, section 1 of the constitution, which does not allow Congress to delegate legislative functions. But those agencies are also clearly unbiblical. And they all negatively impact every citizen in our nation, and have been doing so for every year I have been alive. Man's law is suffocating.

Yet they have the gall to criticize Biblical law as oppressive. God's law restricts the *state*. It is oppressive to the *state*. It doesn't let the *state* do everything that it wants to do. God placed huge limits upon the power of every branch of civil government. In contrast, both Republicans and Democrats very self-consciously called the people who oversaw agencies, "Czars." Czars were dictators in Russia who had almost unlimited powers and no accountability. And both Democrats and Republicans admit that the modern Czars (such as the Drug czar, the intelligence czar, the cybersecurity czar, etc) have broad powers entrusted to them that are not specified in law. George W. Bush appointed 33 Czars. Barak Obama appointed 38. There was very little difference.

I bring all this up not only to show that we have long ago ceased to be a Christian nation, but also to help you appreciate how beautiful the Biblical system is in comparison to what we have today. The more our nation has drifted from the God of our forefathers, the more it begins to look like it is trying to be god. Statism seeks to almost unconsciously be a god to the people. When you think of the extensive unconstitutional *powers* of the Federal agencies, think of the attribute of omnipotence. When you think of the surveillance the Federal Government and its desire to institute a digital currency this summer where your spending habits can be tracked, think of the attribute of omniscience. When you think of agencies regulating everything you do, think of the attribute of omnipresence. When you think of welfare, think of the attribute of God's grace and provision. The modern state is seeking to be as God. And what does God do with anyone who tries to take His rightly place? He declares war upon them just like He declared war on the Canaanites, Pharaohs, and emperors of the past. If we are to avoid the judgments that the Canaanites received in this book, our nation will eventually have to bow the knee to King Jesus once again. Our money still says, "In God we trust," but it's a lie.

D. Priests and Levites who bore the ark of the covenant

Let me quickly comment on each of the other parts of this Christian civilization. Verse 33 mentions "the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant." These were not the priests and Levites who were teaching elders scattered in the synagogues of every tribe and clan. Those Levitical priests were elders. These are specifically identified as the Levitical priests who carried the ark and were associated with the tabernacle and later the temple. That whole temple system was ceremonial law that passed away. If the ark represents God's throne and the priests and Levites who bore the ark represent His heavenly kingdom, then this represents the presence of God and His angels within the nation. The warrior angels were carved onto the ark of the covenant to represent the angels of heaven warring on our behalf. They were at the center of this massive assembly, not at the periphery. And they were at the center to symbolize that everything must be patterned after heaven, empowered by heaven, and in submission to heaven.

So if everything we have been talking about seems like a hopeless cause, realize that we have vast armies of angels and God's very presence to empower those who are willing to live by faith. Verse 33 says,

Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them...

As mentioned, the ark of the covenant represented God's throne room in heaven. When heaven invades earth (as we pray it will in the Lord's Prayer, right? Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven), then earth begins to be transformed, starting with us as individuals. And with the incredible Gospel imagery that we saw in these verses last week, there is no reason whatsoever that God's kingdom cannot come on earth as it is in heaven. How extensively is God's law lived out in heaven? Perfectly. That's because at Christ's ascension, demons were cast out of heaven. If that's our goal, we obviously have a long ways to go.

Why do we not see more advancement? It may be because we as individuals don't want His kingdom advanced that far in *our* own lives. If there are certain pockets of our life that we leave untouched by grace and unsubmitive to His law, then don't expect God to answer our prayers for culture.

Second, it may be that we are not praying in faith that God's kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. You can only have faith if you believe the promises of God, and if you don't believe God has promised that all nations will be converted and the Great Commission fulfilled, you will be just as unsuccessful as the previous generation under Joshua was - a generation that lacked faith. Scripture says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Eschatology is critical to faith. When a nation is given the faith this generation had in the book of Joshua, in one generation you can have huge advancements of Christian civilization. And examples abound.

In the Old Testament, Nineveh went from being a thoroughly God-hating culture to a culture in submission to God's law - and did so almost overnight. In the next chapter we will see an entire nation of the Gibeonites converted, and in later history you will find that they remained more faithful to God than Israel did. In the last 2000 years you have numerous examples, with some being more biblical than others. The Roman Empire converted in AD 313. Ireland underwent a Christianization process in the 5th century through men such as St. Patrick. England Christianized in the 6th through 7th centuries under men like Augustine of Canterbury. The conversion of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark took several centuries, but the results were sweeping. Poland converted in AD 966. Russia also converted in the 10th century. And there have been modern conversions that I have mentioned in the past where entire tribes convert and submit to God's laws in their culture in a rather short period of time. The two tribes I grew up with in Ethiopia are almost entirely Christian now. All of those conversions looked impossible because every conversion is a miracle of God's grace. But our God is a God of miracles, and I would encourage us to really believe that our God reigns. He is on His throne and Jesus will not stop reigning until all enemies are placed under His feet according to 1 Corinthians 15.

E. The resident aliens (גֵּר)

The next word, “stranger,” is the Hebrew word *ger* (גֵּר), which throughout the Old Testament meant resident alien. A *ger* was never a Jew. If he got circumcised, he would be called a Jew. He would no longer be a *ger*. Instead, a *ger* was a Gentile who had decided to leave His pagan nation and live in Israel but who remained a Gentile. And this shows that Joshua’s conquest of Canaan was not simply judgment. It was magnetically attracting Gentiles to its cause. Citizens could always defect. We saw last week that the entire book of Deuteronomy was written onto the large whitewashed stones that represented grace so that they could act as a billboard for all to read. And in Deuteronomy God gave as His purpose for this that He wanted the Gentiles to become jealous of the Gospel and to forsake their gods and to embrace the liberties enjoyed in Israel. This national covenant included *them*. even if they weren’t converted, they still agreed to the civil religion of Israel. Some people think, “Oh, you shouldn’t have a civil religion. It leads to hypocrisy.” No. A civil religion is unavoidable. A nation always has a civil religion. Christianity was the civil religion of every state of the union. Now we have adopted a civil religion of humanism and statism.

In any case, based on what we see here, our own nation should be willing to receive immigrants if they are willing to affirm submission to God’s laws like these resident aliens were - if they at least formally agree with the civil religion of the Bible - pledging that we are a nation under the God of the Bible - which is what citizens used to affirm in America.

F. The natural born citizen (אֶזְרָח)

The next phrase, “as well as he who was born among them” is actually one Hebrew word with the preposition “as” in front of it. And that word is the normal word for a natural born citizen. You would expect natural born citizens to be in covenant with God, but the Gentile had to at least outwardly embrace the national covenant in order to enjoy the benefits of that nation. People wonder why the early states in America absolutely insisted upon Christianity being the foundation of the nation when not everybody was Christian. And the answer is that the moment you allow equal footing to other religions or no religions, you lose the liberties of God’s laws. So literally this says “the resident alien just as the natural born citizen.”

G. The women (v. 35)

Verse 35 indicates that it wasn’t just the heads of households who covenanted with God. So did the women. I emphasize this because it is one of several proofs of what I said last week - that for Christian civilization to be successful, all four governments that God established must embrace God’s law and Gospel. The four governments are self-government, family government, church government, and civil government. Hyper-patriarchy sometimes evaporates the importance of self-government because the patriarch makes every decision. For him to single out women and little ones shows the need for individual self-government in a Christian civilization as well. But it also implies the families.

H. The little ones (v. 35)

And I think it is especially significant that the little ones are mentioned because they could not self-consciously come into agreement with God's law - at least not all of them, yet God considers them to be citizens under His law anyway. They came into covenant with God without even having a choice. The point is that these children will benefit from the liberties of the law that we looked at last week, but they enjoy those liberties because they are citizens subject to the laws of the nation. The moment you break the nation's laws, you lose those liberties - even if you are a covenant child. Leaders cannot turn a blind eye to the rebellion of covenant children.

I. Any stranger within its jurisdiction (v. 35)

And then finally, he mentions any stranger who happens to be visiting or living among them for a time. This is really true of any nation. To enjoy the benefits of America, visitors to America must abide by its laws. That's pretty obvious, right? And God intended all those living within Israel to abide by His written law code as given in Deuteronomy. We will get into that part in more detail next week, but for now let's pray for and seek to influence every form of government that is mentioned in this passage for Christ. Amen.