



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V24 N37 September 11, 2022

WAY OUT

“Gaining the Good God Offers”

Exodus 23:20-33

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Faithfulness

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

“I Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.”

Proverbs 3:3-4



Are God's blessings contingent?

Following their emancipation, the descendants of Jacob entered into an agreement with Yahweh, their God, who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. Six centuries earlier, God promised Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation” (Ge 12:3); the Israelites who escaped Egypt needed two things to become a nation, law and land. Law was given to them at Sinai in anticipation of their later possession of the land of Canaan.

When the LORD (Yahweh) gave the Israelites the Decalogue, the book of the Covenant, and the rest of laws he set before them, they entered into a covenant with him, agreeing to do all that he commanded. It was a covenant like the great kings of that day made with their vassals. Exodus 19:4-6, 8 records what Moses is to tell the people, followed by their reply.

A covenant is a contract agreed to by the parties involved. It's “a formally stated agreement between specified partners to act in the future for the benefit of the other partner, confirming the agreement by an oath” (Elliott E. Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, Hebert W. Bateman IV gen. ed., 121). There are two types of covenants, *bilateral* or *conditional* and *unilateral* or *unconditional*. A covenant is *unconditional* or “*unilateral* when one partner alone assumes the responsibility to meet the provisions of the agreement toward the other partner” and is *conditional* or “*bilateral* when both partners assume some responsibility to meet the provisions of the agreement” (Johnson, 122).

The Mosaic Covenant is an example of a *conditional* or *bilateral* agreement that makes blessings contingent on faithfulness. Exodus 23:22-23, 25 makes this perfectly clear: “If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out . . . Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land.

I will give you a full life span.” The Mosaic Covenant offered blessings for obedience but curses for disobedience (cf. Dt 28). In the end, ongoing disobedience to the covenant resulted in the exile of Israel (the northern kingdom) in 722 B.C., followed by the exile of Judah (the southern kingdom) in 586 B.C.

Conversely, the Abrahamic covenant is an example of an *unconditional* or *unilateral* covenant. Genesis 15:7-21 makes this perfectly clear—Abraham is unconscious when the covenant is “cut.” In his promise to the patriarch (Ge 12:1-3), God pledges to bless Abraham and his descendants through Jacob and to bless “all peoples on earth” (v. 3) through them. Its fulfillment does not depend upon Abraham's obedience—his obedience is expected but not determinative with respect to whether God will keep his promise or not. The Abrahamic Covenant was made with Abraham (15:7-21) and while Gentiles are not a party to the agreement, they are alluded to in the promise—“all people on earth” (12:3). According to Paul, Gentiles receive blessings according to the terms of the covenant. Galatians 3:29 reads: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's *spiritual* descendants, and heirs according to the terms of the promise (Gal 3:29 NET; cf. vv. 8, 14).

The Mosaic Covenant was made with Israel. While it has revelatory value, it does not contain terms that extend blessings or portend curses applicable to any other nation—including the United States. In fact, the Mosaic Covenant has been set aside with the coming of Christ. The Abrahamic Covenant was made with Abraham, and while Gentiles do not inherit all that was promised to Abraham and his descendants through Jacob, spiritual blessings do accrue to Gentiles through their relationship to Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:7, 9 reads: “Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham . . . So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Christians must understand that neither blessings nor curses follow mathematically from either their obedience or their disobedience—certainly not with respect to the Old Covenant and neither with respect to the New Covenant. That's not how grace works.

1 EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Exodus 23:20-33

20 "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. 21 Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. 22 If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. 23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. 24 Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. 25 Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, 26 and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.

27 "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. 28 I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. 29 But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

31 "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. 32 Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. 33 Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "angel" in v. 20.
- Underline "place" in v. 20 and "land" in v. 23.
- Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 21.
- Box "if" indicating a *condition* in v. 22.
- Bracket "my Name is in him" in v. 21.
- Draw a line from "he" to "I" in v. 22.
- Bracket "wipe them out" in v. 23 and "drive them out" in v. 31.
- Highlight vv. 24-26.
- Circle "my terror" in v. 27.
- Circle "the hornet" in v. 28.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 29.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in vv. 29, 33.
- Underline "little by little" in v. 30.
- Circle "your borders" in v. 31.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Verses 20-23 refer to “an angel” (or “messenger”). Describe his relationship to the LORD (cf. pronouns in v. 22).
2. Explain the *conditional* (“if”) vow in verse 22.
3. The Israelites are to *actively* respond to the idol worship they face in Canaan. How so and why so?
4. Identify the *implied* condition, and describe the blessings promised for obeying it in verses 25-26.
5. To what exactly does “my terror” refer?
6. God isn’t going to drive out the inhabitants of the land all at once (v. 29). Why not?
7. *All at once* or *little by little*, which is more favorable to faith? Explain.
8. Verse 30 raises an important question. What is it?
9. The Israelites were to dispossess the Canaanites of their land — “drive them out” and “not let them live” in it. How could this be just? (Cf., Ge 15:16)
10. **Discussion:** As long as the people of Israel obeyed the commandments God gave them in the law they were blessed. Is the same true for Christians today? Talk about it.

Commentary On The Text

The Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33), following on the heels of the Decalogue (Ex 20:1-21), closes on a positive note. In Exodus 23:20-33, the LORD promises three things: to guard the Israelites along their way and to bring them into Canaan (vv. 20-26), to cause the occupants of Canaan to turn tail and run when the Israelites arrive (vv. 27-30), and to secure the extended borders of Canaan from south to north (vv. 31-33). Blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience to the covenant is a continuing theme running throughout the passage. One writer comments: “The Covenant Code is thus a means to an end: fidelity to the one on whom Israel’s wellbeing entirely depended. Without Yahweh, they were nothing, could do nothing, and would end up as nothing. With him leading and them following obediently, however, all would fall properly into place, and their purpose as a people would come to fulfillment” (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, NAC, 542).

The first paragraph (vv. 20-26) contains a promise (v. 20) followed by various instructions related to the theme of obedience. God promises to lead the Israelites into the land he vowed to give them, which is presently occupied by various ethnic groups together called “Canaanites” (v. 23). The close connection between God and the “angel” that he is sending makes it clear that the LORD *himself* is going to accompany his people into Canaan. The “angel,” better yet, “messenger,” can forgive (v. 21), has God’s Name, i.e., his very nature (v. 21), and what he says is what God says (v. 22), which leads to the conclusion that the angel and Yahweh are one and the same. After the promise comes a warning to obey. If the Israelites obey the messenger, the LORD will be their enemies’ enemy and will oppose their opponents (v. 22). What’s more, if they neither worship the Canaanites’ gods, nor follow Canaanites’ religious practices, but instead obliterate their sacred places (v. 24), and worship the LORD their God only, he will bless every aspect of their lives. They will enjoy an “abundance of food and rain” (‘his blessing will be on your food and water’), health (‘I will take away sickness from among you’), fertility (‘none will miscarry or be barren in your land’), and long life (‘I will give you a full life span’)” (Stuart, 546). If they disobey, they will forfeit these blessings and presumably invite their contrary curses.

The second paragraph (vv. 27-30) contains another promise to the effect that Israel’s enemies will be ripe for the picking when God’s people arrive in Canaan. Why? Because he will terrify them and throw them into confusion (v. 27). Hearing of Yahweh’s dealings with the Egyptians, Israel’s enemies will “turn their backs and run” as prophesied in the Song of Moses and Miriam: “The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia . . . the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall on them” (Ex 15:14-16a). Hear the confirming testimony of Rahab: “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that

a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Jos 2:9-11). The Canaanites will flee as if hornets are in pursuit of them. But dispossession of the Canaanites’ land would not take place all at once but rather little by little, lest the land become desolate and overrun by animals. The number of Israelites must increase in number to the point that they can tend the land they take. This raises a question regarding the number of people who crossed over the Jordan to enter the land. The text implies that given their relative number, they could not be expected from the outset of the conquest to continue cultivating all of the land under cultivation by the Canaanites upon their arrival and thus keep out all of the wild animals that could eat their crops and threaten their herds. So God determined to pace their offensive (cf. Jos 24:8-13). In the end, because of disobedience, the Israelites’ conquest of the land is not merely gradual but is actually partial (see Jos 13:13; 23:13; Jdg 1:27-36; 2:21-3:6). Full possession of the land does not take place until the time of David.

The third paragraph (vv. 31-33) contains a final promise to establish the borders of the nascent nation congruent with the promise made to Abraham (cf. Ge 15:18-21). The Israelites are to drive out the people of the land, not make a covenant with them, and not permit them to continue living within their borders. Should they not obey, the Canaanites and their gods will be an ongoing snare to God’s people ultimately causing them to sin.

This passage pertains exclusively to God’s old covenant people, the Israelites, who are promised blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience. It assures them that the LORD will guard them along the way to the land he promised to give to Abraham and his descendants, and once they arrive in it, that he will take it from its inhabitants, the Canaanites, and give it to his people. Only by way of analogy is it relevant to God’s new covenant people. One commentator writes: “God conditioned obtaining all that He promised the Israelites as an inheritance on their obedience. They could only enter into all that He promised by obeying God. Their inheritance, like some of the Christians’ future rewards, was something different from their salvation, which came to them—as it does to Christians—only by faith in God (Gen. 15:6; Exod. 12:13; 14:31). The New Testament, likewise, teaches that justification comes solely by faith in God, but only obedient Christians will obtain the full inheritance (reward) that God has promised them (cf. Heb. 3:12–4:14)” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Exodus,” 2022 ed., 226, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/exodus.pdf).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 20 *angel* "It is better to translate the word by the neutral 'messenger', and leave it to the context to decide the messenger's nature" (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 181). "This angel is to be treated with the same fear and respect as Yahweh, for Yahweh will be speaking in him. U. Cassuto (*Exodus*, 305-6) says that the words of the first clause do not imply a being distinct from God, for in the ancient world the line of demarcation between the sender and the sent is liable easily to be blurred. He then shows how the 'Angel of Yahweh' in Genesis is Yahweh. He concludes that the words here mean 'I will guide you'" (*The NET Bible*, 48^{sn} on Ex 23:20). "Paying close attention to the Presence of Yahweh's messenger and listening to his voice is equal to paying close attention to Yahweh's Presence and listening to Yahweh's voice" (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, *Exodus*, 335).

v. 20 *place* Cf. "land" (v. 23). "God's plan involved more than merely making Israel his people; it also involved giving them a place. Their identity as his people would in part be displayed by their having Canaan as a possession" (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, NAC, 542-43). The gift of the land first promised to Abraham (Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:7, 18; 17:8) is a prominent theme throughout the book of Exodus (see 3:8, 17; 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; 20:12; 23:23, 30, 31, 33; 32:13; 33:1).

v. 21 *my Name in him* "My name is in him seems to translate the 'messenger' into the supernatural realm, for God's 'name' is the equivalent of His revealed nature. 'Angel' may indeed be here a reverent periphrasis for the presence of God Himself" (Cole, 181). "This latter statement is virtually an assertion of equivalence: the 'messenger' = Yahweh" (Durham, 335).

v. 22 *he, I* The identification of what "he says" with what "I say" identifies the *messenger* as *Yahweh*. "It becomes clearer as the discourse progresses that the angel and Yahweh were one and the same. Here 'what he says' and 'all that I say' are treated syntactically as synonymous" (Stuart, 543),

v. 23 *wipe them out* Cf. "drive them out" (v. 31). "God, in the form of the angel manifesting his identity and presence, was willing to exterminate the various Canaanite groups whose doom was already announced in the judgment sentence spoken against them to Abraham in Gen 15:16 . . . The point is that God would wipe them out – the Israelites mainly would go through the motions of war rather than have to experience its terrors and ravages" (Stuart, 544).

vv. 24-26 *Do not bow down* . . . After entering the land, the Israelites are to spurn Canaanite religions – not just *passively* avoid but *actively* destroy (v. 24). As a result,

God would bless them with an abundance of food and water (rain), health, fertility, and long life (v. 26). They would not merely possess the land but would enjoy it and live life to its fullest in it. "Two demands were made upon the Israelites. The first was a prohibition of worship of the gods the Israelites would encounter once they reached the promised land, gods worshiped by the local Canaanites. The second was a demand for action: the people must destroy both idols and sacred stones, the means and reminders of worship" (Stuart, 544).

v. 27 *my terror* I.e., the terror caused by God. "The word has the thought of 'panic' or 'dread.' God would make the nations panic as they heard of the exploits and knew the Israelites were drawing near" (*The NET Bible*, 61^{tn} on Ex 23:27).

v. 28 *the hornet* "We should probably understand the 'hornets' (v. 28) figuratively, though some interpreters take them literally (cf. Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). There is no reference in the text to God using real hornets to drive out the Canaanites, but He did use other hornet-like forces" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Exodus," 2022 ed., 225, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/exodus.pdf). "Like running to escape the sting of a hornet, they would flee in fear and panic (cf. 15:15; Num. 22:3; Josh. 2:9-11, 24; 5:1; 9:24). Some Bible students, however, take the reference to 'the hornet' literally. Others say it refers to the Egyptian army" (John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 145).

v. 30 *little by little* Verse 30 calls into question the number of Israelites that left Egypt, suggesting a smaller number than traditionally proposed (see discussion in Stuart, 297-303).

v. 31 *your borders* "The traditional borders of the promised land are here described, beginning with the 'Red Sea' (presumably the Gulf of Aqaba at its extreme northern shore) on the southeast; and from there to the 'Sea of the Philistines' (the Mediterranean) all along the west; and from the 'desert' (the wilderness Negev of Judah, south and southwest) to the 'River' (the Euphrates on the northeast). The promise to Abraham of this same land in Gen 15:18 uses only the wording 'from the river of Egypt to the great River, the Euphrates,' thus from the southwest to the northeast, including by implication everything in between and the borders intended by the other compass points as well . . . These (and others also found in the OT) are all somewhat imprecise generalization akin to 'from Maine to California' or 'from Canada to Mexico' as ways of describing the United States" (Stuart, 549).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

While Christians' blessings are *not* contingent, New Covenant believers are to obey the law of Christ even as Old Covenant believers were to obey the Law of Moses.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

Obedience brings blessing. This is a spiritual principle one of my former Bible study leaders used to talk about frequently, and through the years I've repeated it to my kids. Sometimes when my kids would obey, that blessing was a reward of ice cream and other times it was staying in my good graces because I was ready to throw in the parenting towel and walk away from their nonsense. Who am I kidding, even then we would go get ice cream! Our passage today reminds me of this important principle. God reveals a blessing for the Israelites. He promises to send an angel to guard and guide the Israelites, then promises to level the path as He drives out other nations they will encounter. Furthermore, He reminds the Israelites of what is to come—they will enter the land He promised. But this isn't just a free handout. The Israelites had certain responsibilities in order to take hold of this blessing. They had to obey God and His commands because (say it with me) obedience brings blessing. God very graciously gave them a guide to go ahead of them and lead the way. Their responsibility was to listen and pay attention to this angel. God repeats the first commandment to them as a reminder that they are not have any other gods. How often do you miss out on the blessing because you failed to obey? Ouch! We aren't too far off from the Israelites. Next time your child fails to listen or obey, remember a whole nation did the same. Love them as God loves you and be their guard and guide.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Exodus 23:20-33

1. Who did God send to help the Israelites?
2. How was the angel going to help the Israelites?
3. What responsibility did the Israelites have?

What Do You Think?

Which of the 10 Commandments do you find in our story today (20:31-33)?

What Do You Do?

Set up an obstacle course around your house. Take turns guiding family members wearing a blindfold. Is it scary to be led when you can't see your way? Do you think the Israelites were afraid?

CORE COMPETENCY: Faithfulness

I am loyal to God and others, so they know they can count on me.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Peter 2:9

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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