

THE ANGEL SENT BEFORE US
or
CHRIST OUR PROTECTOR

graciously encourages them. He promised his people the care of his infinite love and assured them that he would send an Angel before them to keep them in the way and to bring them into the land he had prepared for them.

We will begin in verse 20 and work our way through the end of this chapter. As we go through these verses, remember that they were written “*for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Rom. 15:4). This is more than a historic record. This is the Word of God to you and me. The promises contained here are not merely ancient promises to an ancient people. They are the present promises of our ever-present God to his “*holy nation,*” to his church, called by his Spirit “*the Israel of God*” (Gal 6:16).

Proposition: Just as the Lord God fulfilled all his promises to that physical nation (Joshua 23:3, 9-12, 14), so he will fulfill every promise of his grace to us.

THE ANGEL

(Exodus 23:20) “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.”

The Land of Canaan was specifically created and prepared by God for the children of Israel. It is used in Scripture to represent two things.

- The Land of Canaan represents Heaven. That is obvious, because it is the Land of Promise; and it is used in Scripture to represent our final place of rest with Christ.
- But Canaan also represents the believer’s present life in Christ. That is obvious because there were in the Land of Canaan many enemies and much trouble.

Canaan represents our whole experience of grace, culminating in Heaven’s everlasting glory. Here the lord God promises to send an Angel before us; and this Angel has two specific assignments, two tasks, two responsibilities:

- 1st. It is his responsibility to keep us in the way.
- 2nd. It is his responsibility to bring us into the place the Lord God has prepared for us.

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Who is this Angel? This is not one of the created angels sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation. This Angel is the Angel of God's presence, — that One who spoke to Moses out of the bush, — the Angel who was with the Israel at Sinai and in the wilderness, who saved them, redeemed them, bore them, and carried them all the days of old, — the One against whom they rebelled against, — and the One they tempted forty years in the wilderness.

To say that Christ is "*an Angel*" does not in any way contradict the fact of his eternal Deity. The word "*angel*" simply means "messenger." And our Lord Jesus Christ is both Jehovah and Jehovah's Messenger. In his eternal Deity, our Savior is God himself, over all and blessed forever. In his mediatorial capacity, as our Surety and Substitute, he is "*the Angel of the LORD.*" When the Scriptures speak of our Savior as "*the Angel of the LORD,*" appearing in the form of a man before he actually assumed our nature in the incarnation, they are telling us that God's own Son, the Surety and Mediator of the covenant, the man Christ Jesus, is the Revelation of God. Jesus Christ, our Mediator, is, always was, and ever shall be the only one in whom and by whom God makes himself known to men. Christ is God's Message; and Christ is God's Messenger.

But there are two things in our text that make it unmistakably clear that this Angel is our Savior. I am certain that he is because...

- (1st.) in verse 21 we are told that this Angel has the authority and ability to forgive sin.
- And (2nd.) the Lord God declares, at the end of verse 21, "*my name is in him.*"

Christ our Lord is that Angel of whom the prophets so often spoke of as our Savior and Protector (Isa. 63:9; Psa. 34:7). He is the Angel of the Lord standing among the myrtle trees, defending his people, interceding for us, Michael the Archangel who resisted Satan when he accused Joshua, and the Angel who stands as God to defend his feeble ones in the earth (Zec. 1:11-12; 3:1-7; 12: 8).

(Psalms 34:7) "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

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(Isaiah 63:9) “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.”

Now, look at what the Lord God declares to us about Christ as the Angel of the Lord sent before us. — “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.” **First, he declares “I send an Angel before thee.”** Christ is an Angel (a Messenger, a Heavenly Proctor) sent before us.

- He was sent before us as our **Surety** in old eternity.
- He was sent before us to judgment as our **Substitute**, dying under the wrath of God to put away our sins.
- The Lord Jesus was sent before us as our **Forerunner** into heaven. He has walked this path before us and leads the way to Heaven.
- Blessed be God, just as “*he must needs go through Samaria*” to save the Samaritan woman at the appointed time of love, our Lord Jesus is sent before his chosen as our **Savior** to save the people of his choice at the appointed time of mercy.
- Our Lord Jesus was sent before us into Heaven to be our great **Benefactor**, our mighty Joseph!

Second, the Lord God here promises that our Savior, the Lord Jesus, his Angel will keep us in the way.

- He is the Way.
- He put us in the Way.
- He leads us in the Way.
- And he Keeps us in the Way.

Third, not only is it his work to keep us in the way, it is the work and responsibility of Jehovah’s Angel, Christ our Protector, to bring us at last into heaven. — “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.” Is that not what he tells us in John 10?

(John 10:14-18) “I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. (15) As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) And other

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sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd. (17) Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. (18) No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

The Obedience Required

I have been talking to you about promises of grace, pure, free, unconditional grace. But now, in verses 21 and 22 we see that a condition is set before us. Everything is conditioned upon obedience, obedience to the Angel who is God.

(Exodus 23:21-22) “Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name *is* in him. (22) But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.”

Does this mean that God’s grace is conditional? Does God require obedience from us as a condition of mercy? Does God’s promise depend upon our obedience? Certainly not! You may be thinking, “But, Pastor, these verses seem to read that way.” Let’s see. **Did the children of Israel obey the Lord?** Did they obey his commands? Not by a long shot! He declares, again and again, that “*they provoked him to anger*” with their high places, with their counsel, and with their iniquities (Psa. 78; 106). **Did their disobedience keep the Lord from fulfilling every word of his promise?** Not by a long shot! (Psalm 106:8; Joshua 23:3, 9-12, 14)

(Psalms 106:8) “Nevertheless he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

(Joshua 23:3) “And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God *is* he that hath fought for you.”

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(Joshua 23:9-12) “For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but *as for* you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. (10) One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he *it is* that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. (11) Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. (12) Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:”

(Joshua 23:14) “And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof.”

What obedience does God require of us? It is not the obedience of our hands, but “*the obedience of faith*” (Rom. 16:26), by which we establish the law (Rom. 3:31).

The Lord God declares that Christ, his Angel, “*will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him*” (v. 21). And in a strict, legal sense that is exactly the case. Our blessed Savior never just “pardons” sin. He put our sins away! He removed them altogether, so thoroughly so that they are not and never can be the slightest barrier to God’s fulfillment of his promised mercy!

SALVATION SURE

The Angel sent before us was sent before us to make salvation sure, and he has done it! Christ our Angel, our Protector, our Savior gave the law, kept the law for us as our Representative, and satisfied the law as our Substitute. He has thereby (by his obedience and death) cut off and destroyed all our sins and will bring us into the land (v. 23).

(Exodus 23:23) “For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and

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the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.”

In verses 23-26 the Lord God again demands that we keep ourselves from idols and from idolatry, promising his unfailling grace to all who worship him.

(Exodus 23:24) “Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. (25) And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. (26) There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.”

- To our enemies, Christ is an enemy.
- To our adversaries, he is an adversary.
- He blesses our bread and water, making them nourishing and refreshing to us.
- He frees his own from sickness and disease, from all the consequences of sin.
- In the kingdom of grace there are no abortions, no miscarriages, and no barren, fruitless souls (Gal. 5:22-23).
- Every heaven born soul shall have his days fulfilled (Psa. 91).

(Psalms 91) “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (3) Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and* from the noisome pestilence. (4) He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler. (5) Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day; (6) *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday. (7) A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee. (8) Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. (9) Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High,

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thy habitation; (10) There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. (11) For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (12) They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (13) Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. (14) Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. (15) He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I *will be* with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. (16) With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.”

OUR ENEMIES

(Exodus 23:27) “I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.”

Our enemies are not the people of this world. We spend our lives preaching the gospel to the people of this world, seeking their everlasting salvation. But if men set themselves in opposition to God’s church, they shall fail. If men and women resolve to hurt or injure God’s people, they shall find themselves fleeing, though no one is pursuing them.

(Proverbs 28:1) “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

(Exodus 23:28) “And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.”

Only God could drive out armies and destroy nations with hornets!

But, really, our enemies, those with whom we must constantly do battle, those with whom we are continually at war, are like the Amorites and Hittites, the Perizzites and Hivites and Jebusites, enemies within! They **are the Canaanites dwelling in our hearts, the lusts of our**

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flesh! But for wise and holy purposes known only to him, in his great mercy, the Lord our God, the God of all grace, promises that **these foes shall not be quickly destroyed** (v. 29).

(Exodus 23:29-30) “I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. (30) By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.”

It is better that we live with our old, fallen, depraved nature, until we inherit the land of our inheritance.

- That we might ever remember that salvation is God’s work of grace.
- That we might ever be reminded that the only difference between us and others is the distinguishing grace of our God.
- That we might prove day by day that his grace is sufficient!

The Lord God has set the bounds of our habitation from the river to the ends of the earth, for these are the bounds of our Savior’s dominion (vv. 31-33; Psa. 72:8; Zec. 9:10).

(Exodus 23:31) “And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. (32) Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. (33) They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.”

Does the Lord Jesus go before us? That thought should revive our hearts continually. Let everything in me remember him! Let me never lose sight of him, going before me and gone before me! — The Angel of the lord! — The Angel of the Covenant! — The Angel of God’s Presence! Rejoice, my heart, Jehovah’s name, all his character and being, are in him who is my Savior, my Redeemer, and my Protector!

Oh, blessed Angel of Grace, O Son of God, send your Spirit in a constantly renewing work of grace to subdue and drive out the corruptions of my heart before you! Make me entirely the conquest of your omnipotent mercy, and

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do the same for these immortal souls who have heard this message! Safely carry through the whole of this wilderness journey. Bring us soon into that heavenly Canaan prepared for us from eternity, that everlasting home you have gone before to prepare for us, where we shall see you face to face, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away forever!

Amen.