

Exodus – Lesson 17

The Covenant Ratified

Read Exodus 23:20-24:18

1. (a) According to Exodus 23:20-22, *who* would lead the people from Sinai to the Promised Land? How and why is this *different* from how the Hebrews have been led up to this point?

God would not send an “*angel*” before the people to lead them from Sinai to the Promised Land. Up until now, God *himself* in a pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led the Israelites. However, now God would send an angel to lead them, and this angel would be unique (see 1b below). It is probable that this angel is a *manifestation* of the Person of God himself, possibly an appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God (see 1c below). The *reason* for this difference is important: God is now *going before the people himself*, leading them *directly* and *intimately* as their God. They are no longer to follow manifestations of natural events, but to follow God. Since they have met with God and have had a relationship established with him, they can now travel *with* him as he leads them forward.

- (b) From Exodus 23:21, what makes this angel *unique*? Why is this *significant* (compare this verse to Exodus 20:7)?

What makes this angel unique is that this angel has “[*God’s*] name in him.” This means that this angel *bears* the name of God, thus it is not an angel in the technical sense, but probably a manifestation of God himself. Since the *name* of God represents the fullest *character* of God, then anything that bears the *name* of God must be God himself. So, for this angel to carry God’s name must mean that this angel is, in fact, *God* in some “visible” sense. This is borne out from the third commandment: since the *name* of God bears the full *character* of God, then this angel must be *more* than a created being; it must be a visible appearance of God himself and a manifestation of the *fullest* nature of God in a tangible person.

- (c) Who do *you* think this angel really is? Is there any *correlation* between this angel and the one who meets with Hagar in Genesis 16?

It would appear that this angel is the Second Person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Jesus. This is borne out by a similar “angel” that appears to Hagar. The exchange that the “angel” has with Hagar reveals that he is *more* than just an angel, but a representation of the Second Person. The message of the “angel” consists of the message of the gospel: where have you come from and where are you going? The question “where have you come from” belies a central tenet of the gospel: as Hagar was running away from her master, so all humanity runs away from God. The question “where are you going” reveals the remainder of the message: just as Hagar was running back to Egypt (a figurative picture of slavery), so human beings run from God back to slavery. By commanding her to return to Sarai and submit to her authority, the “angel” is instructing Hagar to trust *him* and to submit to *him*. If she would do so (by faith), the “angel” would “multiply her offspring” and make her descendants a great nation. This promise, *spoken in the first person by the “angel,”* can only be something that God can do, implying that the “angel” was, in fact, God himself.

2. (a) What does Exodus 23:23 say that God intends to do with the *nations* the Hebrews will encounter on their journey? *Why* does God intend to do this (see also v. 24)?

God intends to “*blot out*” these nations, to utterly wipe them off the face of the earth. He intends to destroy them in order that 1) the Israelites could occupy their territory, which was *originally* given to Abraham, 2) punish these nations for their continuing denial of him as the only God, and 3) prevent the Israelites from being *overcome* by their pagan worship and deities. By destroying these current occupants, God eliminates the obstacles that people might encounter in their fellowship with him; it would remove anything that would detract them from the worship of God alone.

- (b) List some of the *blessings* that will come to Israel if they will destroy the religions of the native peoples of the land (see vv. 25-28)? What do they *represent*?

God promises 1) that he would “*bless your bread and your water,*” probably meaning that they would have good harvests and plenty of food; 2) that he would take away their sicknesses, implying that he would protect them from the natural diseases of the land and its people; 3) that none would miscarry or be barren, meaning he would make them “*fruitful*” as a people; and 4) that he would “*fulfill the number of your days,*” probably meaning that he would give them long and productive lives.

- (c) Compare these verses to Romans 9:14-24. How would Paul see the *sovereignty* of God in his dealings with these other nations?

In Romans 9, Paul speaks of *both* the mercy of God and the justice of God. On the one hand, God is patient and kind; he allows the people of the earth to go about ignoring him or actively rebelling against him. However, there comes a point when God *must* deal with evil, and he does so as he chooses to do so. These various nations had been given time to allow their sin to reach its fullest before he moved against them; God’s patience has an end, and rebellious nations will be judged in due time. However, Paul also sees this within the *larger* scope of God’s sovereignty over all things. On the one hand, God judges those who disobey him, those who defy him, and he does so as the time of his judgment draws near. On the other hand, however, God also *sovereignly* decides how *all* things come to play, regardless of how human beings act. In other words, the sovereignty of God also determines how nations (or individuals) are treated within the entire plan of God, within his *divine decree*. It is a mistake to say that God *only* deals with people *according to their deeds*; God also works the destiny of peoples on the basis of *his divine purposes and plans*. To assume that all things happen based on what *we* do is to *deny* the sovereignty of God, for his plans are accomplished as he sees fit to carry them out, regardless of what they may mean for nations or people.

- (d) How does Exodus 23:23-33 *prefigure* the events of 2 Kings 17:6-13?

God promises, in Exodus 23, that if the people will serve the Lord in their new land, and *not* turn to the gods of the pagan nations that he drives out before them, he would prosper them in this land and keep them there as his own. However, if they *refuse* to do this, and turn to pagan gods, he would drive them out of this land. That is *precisely* what happened to the 10 northern tribes headquartered at Samaria during the period of the Divided Kingdom: they turned away from the pure worship of Jehovah and went after foreign pagan gods instead. Thus, God drove them out of the land under the hand of the Assyrians, and the northern tribes of Israel were no more.

3. What does Exodus 23:27-30 imply about the *future* success of the Conquest under Joshua? How does this fit with the *history* recounted in Judges 1:27-36?

In these verses, God tells the people that he will remove these other nations “little by little,” meaning that they will not have one spectacular victory and the entire land will be empty. Instead, God will employ a series of events to destroy these nations: 1) he will send confusions upon them, making their planning against the Israelites come to naught, 2) he will use natural events to cause them problems (i.e. hornets), and 3) he will give them *successive* victories over time. This is what is recorded in Judges; the *initial* goal of the Conquest was to give the people access to the hill country. Further battles would secure their position over the western plains, the Jordan valley, and the Transjordan area. The eventual land occupied by the Israelites would not come until David secures a complete nation and Solomon occupies it all.

4. (a) From Exodus 24:3-8, how did the people *respond* to God when he finished giving them laws?

The people responded *affirmatively* to the covenant that God had made with them. They indicated, through sacrifice, that they would “do” all that the covenant required. It is significant that they say this twice: a twice-affirmed covenant seems to indicate that they are *completely* satisfied with their ability to do what is necessary.

(b) Compare Exodus 24:8 to Matthew 26:27-28. Explain the *symbolism* of blood as it is used to ratify a biblical covenant (see also Genesis 15 and Hebrews 9:11-15).

In Scripture, blood represents life: the blood of an animal (or a person) represented the *life* of that living being. The *shed* blood represented the *giving* of the life of the living being. In Genesis 15 and Matthew 26, the shedding of blood becomes a *seal* for the covenant: those making the covenant *promise* to keep their end of the bargain. Failure to do so would require the death of the one who fails. Thus, a covenant is sealed with blood, the blood acting as a *promise* between the two parties that neither would fail to keep their end of it. By killing an animal, draining its blood, and then sprinkling that blood upon the people, the people were committing themselves to this covenant *by blood*, meaning that they would take upon themselves the punishment of death if they broke the covenant. In retrospect, however, it is important to remember that this covenant (like all biblical covenants) are God-ordained and *one-way only*. In effect, all covenants made by God are *made by God alone*; human beings are *unable* to participate in covenants because of their inherent inabilities. This covenant, like all the rest, was *instituted by God*, and the blood represented *his commitment to keeping the Israelites as his own*. This symbolism is noted by the sprinkling of blood on the “*Book of Covenant*.” Because the law represents the character of God, the blood sprinkled there represents *his promises* to the people to do all that he has promised to do.

5. What is the *significance* of the events of Exodus 24:9-11? How does it *contrast* with the events of Exodus 33:14-23?

God invited the leadership of the people, including Moses and Aaron, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu (the chief priests), and 70 of the elders of the people up onto the mountain *directly into his presence*. Unlike the later event where Moses was *prohibited* from seeing the glory of God, in this case, the eldership was granted direct access to God. God does not “lay his hand on them” (i.e. destroy them by his holiness) just because they have seen him face-to-face. This is an *inaugural* event: the elders are welcomed into the presence of God, as representatives of the people, they usher in a time of *intimate* fellowship with God and are able to enjoy his presence as the people will throughout their history.