

THE CONCLUSION OF THE LAW, THE MOSAIC COVENANT (PART 1): THE REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE EXODUS 23:20–33

Introduction

Picture the scene. Over three million people are camped around Mt. Sinai; hundreds of thousands are stretched out all across the desert floor surrounding the mountain — men, women and children of all ages. Who are these people? The Israelites of ancient history, the Israelites who had been cruelly enslaved for over four hundred years by the Egyptians. But now they were freed, miraculously set free by the mighty hand of God. And here they were camped out before Mt. Sinai, the mountain that is known as the “mountain of God.” Why? Because of the great event that had just taken place: God had just given His people...

- the Ten Commandments, the same Ten Commandments that are followed by God’s people today
- the great civil laws that were to govern ancient Israel, the civil laws that hold so many lessons for us

God had one great expectation of His people: obedience. God’s people were to...

- obey the Ten Commandments
- obey the civil laws of the nation

If God’s people obeyed, the people would be greatly rewarded. Three extraordinary things would happen. This is the subject of this passage: *The Conclusion of the Law, the Mosaic Covenant: The Rewards of Obedience*, Exodus 23:20-33.

- I. Reward 1: God’s Angel (messenger), His protection and guidance to the promised land (vv. 20-23).
- II. Reward 2: God’s provision and blessing (vv. 24-26).
- III. Reward 3: God’s conquering power and gift of the promised land (vv. 27-33).

I. *Exodus 23:20–33 God’s Protection and Guidance to the Promised Land*

The first reward is that of God’s Angel, of His protection and guidance to the promised land. The people were on their way to the promised land of God. They had just been delivered from the evil bondage of Egypt (a symbol of the world). They were about to break camp and embark on the most amazing journey imaginable: that of journeying through the wilderness and desert country of the land that lay between Egypt (the world) and Canaan (the promised land, symbolizing heaven). The amazing journey is what is known among believers as the *wilderness wanderings*. (See note, Division Overview, Exodus 13:17-18:27.) The journey of God’s people to the promised land was to take

about forty years, and the journey was to be arduous and difficult. Trial after trial and enemy after enemy were to attack God's people as they journeyed to their destination. They would often become worn and weary. They were going to need God's help, His protection and guidance in order to reach the promised land. This is the first great promise God makes to His people: He will protect and guide His people if they will just obey His commandments.

Who is this Angel who protects and guides God's people? The word Angel means messenger. Note what verse 21 says about this messenger of God: He is to be obeyed and never rebelled against. Why? Because He has the authority and power to forgive sins and because the very name of God is in Him. This description is far, far too high to apply to an ordinary angel. This Angel, this messenger, must be the Lord God Himself, more particularly, the second person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great messenger of the covenant, the covenant God has made with His people.

Mal 3:1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

(See note, Exo 3:1-3; *Angel of the Lord*, Gen 16:7.)

1. Now, what is the believer's duty? Scripture is clear, very clear: God's people are to heed and obey the Angel (God's special messenger). They are not to rebel against him. Note that the Angel was to speak to God's people, giving them directions and guiding them step by step. They were to listen, to pay close attention to the directions. The idea is that of heeding, of being very careful, of making absolutely sure that a person obeyed and did exactly what God's special Angel said. God's people were never to rebel against His instructions, never strike out on their own, never do their own thing, never go their own way. If they did rebel and disobey God, the special Angel would not forgive their rebellion. And note, the Angel had the authority to forgive or not to forgive their sin: God's very name was in the Angel.

Thought 1. God speaks to us through His Word, the Holy Bible, and through His Holy Spirit. God guides us and directs us through the wilderness of this world as we journey to the promised land. Our duty is to listen, to do exactly what He says, to obey His Word and the leadership of His Spirit.

Psa 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

Psa 73:24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

Isa 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Isa 42:16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

Isa 63:9 *In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

Mal 3:1 *“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.*

John 16:13 *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

2. Now note the great promises of God. God’s special Angel would guide and protect His people, but His protection and guidance were conditional. The people had to obey the angel, follow His directions and do exactly what He said. If God’s people would follow His special Angel (messenger), then God would do three great things for them as they journeyed to the promised land.
 - a. God would stand against the enemies of His people (v. 22). An enemy of God’s people is an enemy of God, for God’s name is in His people. The person who stands against God’s people stands against God and opposes God, for they oppose the witness of God in His people. Therefore, the person makes himself an enemy of God. But note: God promises to protect and secure the believer. If the believer will just obey God, God will stand against the enemies of the believer. God will protect and guide the believer from the enemies of this world.
 - b. God’s special Angel (messenger) would guide His people to the promised land (v. 23). He will actually walk out ahead of the believer as the believer journeys day by day. God’s special Angel will make sure, absolutely sure, that the believer reaches the promised land of God.

Thought 1. Most of us know where we want to go. If there really is such a place as the promised land of heaven, then we want to go there and live eternally with God in a perfect world. Our problem, however, is this: we just do not know how to get there. It is at this point that Jesus Christ enters: we get into heaven through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our Guide, our Saviour, our Lord who has already gone before us and prepared the way.

John 14:1-3 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

1 Tim 2:3-6 *This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

Heb 4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*

Psa 48:14 *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*

Psa 73:24 *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

- c. God would even wipe out the believer's enemies (v. 23). This is a pronouncement of judgment upon the enemies of God's people. No one — no person, not even a spiritual being — can stop a true believer from reaching the promised land of God. God will destroy any person or being who opposes the believer, any person or being who tries to keep the believer from reaching the promised land of God. (See *Canaanites and the Promised Land*, Exo 3:8 for discussion on the nations listed here.)

Thought 1. The magnitude of this promise is overwhelming. God promised to go before His people. If we really believed and lived what this verse is saying...

- we would not go our own way
- we would not run ahead of God
- we would let God guide us

When we go our own way, when we get ahead of God and do not allow God to fight for us, we will always lose the battle. The cry of each heart should be, "O God, deliver me from evil, from all those who stand against and oppose me."

Psa 91:3 *Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.*

Isa 46:4 *Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

Jer 1:8 *"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.*

Dan 6:27 *He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

II. *Exodus 23:24–26 God’s Special Provision and Blessing*

The second reward is that of God’s special provision and blessing. Note exactly what God says:

No matter how deep our need, God promises to provide for His people. God promises to provide every necessity of life. But again, the promise is conditional. God’s people had an obligation to fulfil. Note the believer’s obligation.

1. God’s people had to follow and worship God and God alone.

⇒ They must never bow down and worship false gods.

⇒ They must never follow the practices of false gods.

⇒ They must demolish and crush the sacred stones of false gods.

This may seem harsh, a violent reaction toward other religions. But the following must always be remembered about the religion of the ancient Canaanite nations:

The idolatries of the heathen were connected “works of darkness,” which it is shameful even to speak of. The rites of Baal and Ashtoreth, of Chemosh, Molech, Rimmon, and the other Canaanite and Syrian deities were at once defiled by the abomination of human sacrifices, and polluted with the still more debasing evil of religious impurity. “The sacrifice offered to Ashtoreth, ” says Dr. Dollinger, “consisted in the prostitution of women: the women submitted themselves to the visitors of the feast, in the temple of the goddess or the adjoining precinct. A legend told of Astarte (Ashtoreth) having prostituted herself in Tyre for ten years: and in many places matrons, as well as maidens, consecrated themselves for a length of time, or on the festivals of the goddess, with a view of propitiating her, or earning her favour as hieroduli of unchastity....In this way they went so far at last as to contemplate the abominations of unnatural lust as a homage rendered to the deity, and to exalt it into a regular cultus. The worship of the goddess at Aphaca in Lebanon was specially notorious in this respect. The temple in a solitary situation was, as Eusebius tells us, a place of evil-doing for such as chose to ruin their bodies in scandalous ways.... Criminal intercourse with women, impurity, shameful and degrading deeds, were practised in the temple, where there was no custom and no law, and no honourable or decent human being could be found.” (Jew and Gentile, vol. 1. pp. 428, 429; Darnell’s translation.)

Thou shall utterly overthrow them. *The heathen gods are identified with their images. These were to be torn from their bases, overthrown and rolled in the dust for greater contempt and ignominy. They were then to be broken up and burnt, till the gold and the silver with which they were overlaid was calcined and could be stamped to powder. Nothing was to be spared that had been degraded by idolatry, either for its beauty or its elaborate workmanship or its value. All was hateful to God, and was to be destroyed. (Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 1, Exodus, p. 212)*

2. Again, God's people had an obligation to worship God alone. There is only one true and living God, only one great Creator, only one Sovereign Lord and Majesty of the universe: the LORD God Himself (JEHOVAH, YAHWEH). It is, therefore, only logical that He would demand that He and He alone be followed and worshipped. This was the condition to receiving the great promises of God. If God's people followed and worshipped Him — faithfully followed and worshipped Him — God promised to meet the basic necessities of life:

⇒ God would bless and provide the food, water and health that His people needed.

⇒ God would give many offspring to His people and give them a long and fulfilling life.

Thought 1. Godly, righteous living makes the human body stronger and more vigorous, both mentally and physically. In addition to this, if we truly follow and worship God and Him alone, He promises to meet all the necessities of life. He promises to meet every need we have.

Mat 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

John. 15:11 *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

Phil 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Exo 23:25 *Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.*

Mal 3:10 *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*

Deu 29:9 *Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do.*

1 Chr 22:13 *Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.*

2 Chr 26:5 *As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success.*

Psa 1:1-3 *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

III. *Exodus 23:27–33 God’s Conquering Power and the Gift of the Promised Land.*

The third reward is that of God’s conquering power and the gift of the promised land. The goal of Israel was the promised land of God. But as they journeyed toward the promised land, they were to face enemy after enemy. They had one hope and only one hope: God’s conquering power. They could reach the promised land only if God’s power was with them. Note the great promise that God now makes to His people.

1. God gave Israel four specific promises.
 - a. God would cause the enemies of His people to fear, become confused, and flee (v. 27). Note: it was not Israel’s great ability to make weapons of mass destruction that caused its enemies to fear. It was not their great bravery that sent chills into the inhabitants of Canaan. Note what Scripture later records:

Josh 2:9-11 And [Rahab] said to them, “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.”

- b. God would send the hornet (some enemy, plague, or symbol of the power of God) ahead of His people (v. 28). Whatever this “hornet” was, it was very effective. As organized nations, the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites became a distant memory in the history of the world. The reference to the hornet occurs only here and in Deu 7:20 and Josh 24:12.
 - c. God would carefully plan the deliverance of His people: He would defeat the enemies little by little (v. 29). The reason for this procedure was to save the land and give Israel time to multiply population-wise. God had to make sure that the land would not waste away before Israel had a chance to inhabit it. A mass exodus of their enemies would have ruined the fields. The weeds, briars, wildlife and animals would have taken over the land. On a more spiritual level, God knew that His people were in no position spiritually to assume control of the entire promised land. In fact, Israel did not fully enjoy this promise until the kingdoms of David and Solomon — hundreds of years later.
 - d. God would give His people the promised land, a great land (v. 31). It was a land so great that:
 - => it stretched from the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) to the Philistine Sea (Mediterranean).
 - => it stretched from the desert (southern border) to the river (northern border).

Israel came close to possessing all the land promised here during the united kingdoms of David and Solomon.

2. But again note: these promises were conditional. God's people were to live a life of spiritual separation, a life totally separated and different from their unbelieving neighbours. They were not to let unbelievers live with them...

- because of their sinful influence
- because of their false gods that would be a snare to God's people

God's people were not to expose themselves to the sin and evil, the immoral and unrighteous ways of unbelievers. Being around sin causes a person to become more and more insensitive to sin. The more a person is around immorality or exposes himself to immorality, the more he accepts the immoral ways of society. God knows this; therefore He demands that His people separate themselves from all unbelievers. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says this:

No covenant was to be made with these people (though the Gibeonites did succeed in making one, (Jos 9:3-15). The potential snare of their gods, practices and worship was too great; thus there was to be no peaceful coexistence between these nations and Israel in Canaan. (Frank E. Gaebelin. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 447).

Thought 1. God demands a *life of separation, a life of sanctification*: we are to separate ourselves as much as possible from the sin and evil of this world and live a *life of sanctification* before God.

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

Eph 5:10-11 *And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

2 Th 3:6 *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.*

Isa 52:11 *Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the LORD's house.*

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Thought 2. In today's society, there is a strong temptation for the believer to compromise and make a covenant with an unbeliever. The believer is playing with fire when he makes these critical errors of judgment:

=> There are covenants with a business partner who is lost.

=> There are covenants with a young man or lady who is lost, a covenant that far too often ends up in marriage, in being unequally yoked together.

=> There are covenants with a friend who is lost.

God has given clear instructions on how to avoid making a covenant with an unbeliever.

(1) The believer is not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

Psa 1:1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.

(2) The believer is not walk in the path of the wicked.

Prov 4:14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.

(3) The believer is not to keep company with a brother who is living a life of sin and rebellion.

1 Cor 5:11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

(4) The believer is not to be associated with evil talk.

1 Cor 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Eph 5:10-11 And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

(5) The believer is not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Thought 3. The best way to avoid falling into temptation is to avoid temptation. The believer has no business flirting with unbelievers and their false gods. Satan has a ready snare for any believer who seeks to stray away from an exclusive relationship with God.

Prov 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

Prov 4:14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.

Rom 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

2 Cor 2:11 *In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

2 Cor 11:3 *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

1 Thes 3:5 *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain.*

2 Pet 3:17 *Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ■*