

Renewal of the Covenant *Exodus 23:20 – 24:18*

Introduction

Last week, Chris talked about such exciting topics from Exodus as the laws governing self-defense versus premeditated murder, what to do if your ox gores another animal or a person, what to do if you find your enemy's ox or donkey wandering about – such helpful instructions for your daily life, I'm sure. Actually, several of you have commented how much you enjoyed Chris' message last week. So much so, that I will be sure to be out of town the next time such a passage comes up in a preaching passage!!

Chapters 20-23 of Exodus set out the terms of the covenant God was making with Israel. Then from the end of chapter 23 through chapter 24 we see how the covenant was ratified.

Turn in your Bible to the book of Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament. We pick up in chapter 23 where Chris left off.

Exodus 23:20-33

Let's begin then with the requirements of the covenant:

I. Requirements of the Covenant

A. Listen – God says, “Pay careful attention to what the angel has to say.” One of Israel's habitual sins was that they just didn't listen; they didn't pay attention to what God was saying to them. Over and over God says to his people, “Open up your ears and listen to what I say.” Jesus said the same thing over and over in his earthly ministry. The Gospels record Jesus saying, “Let the one who has ears to hear, hear.”

B. Obey

Verse 21 – “obey his voice.” Verse 22 – “obey his voice.”

First of all: who is this angel and why should they listen to him? God says that this angel has the power to pardon sin and that God's name was in him. What does that mean?

There is a number of possibilities as to the identity of this angel. Because of the two things mentioned in the text: the power to forgive sin and the fact that God's name is in him, leads me to the conclusion this might well be the pre-incarnate Christ who we see several times in the Old Testament appearing as “the angel of the LORD.”

John Mackay, in his commentary on Exodus, says the Name is a “revelation of the character and attributes of God,” which means that “[h]ere we have a unique dignity accorded to the angel as manifesting all that God has made known regarding himself. That is why the angel can command complete obedience and trust: his presence is the equivalent to the presence of the LORD himself.”

The third requirement of the covenant mentioned in these verses is to serve.

C. Serve – Verse 25: “You shall serve the LORD your God.”

How were they to serve God? A number of ways would be apparent from this book. They were to serve God through their offerings and sacrifices. Service would include how they treated each other and how they treated the sojourner in their midst. Service would be evident in their obedience to God’s commands and instructions about living their daily lives.

Service must also be tied into worship. It stands opposite God’s warning to the Israelites not to serve the gods of the people into whose land they were to go and conquer and occupy.

Just as with other covenants in the ancient world, God’s covenant with his people, Israel, came with a listing of requirements. Then there are the promises of the covenant.

II. Promises of the Covenant

A. Presence – The first was God’s presence. His presence was that of the angel that we considered a little bit ago. Just as God’s presence was manifested in the burning bush in Exodus 3, and in the cloud and the pillar of fire that guided Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, now his presence was manifested through the angel.

The people of Israel would not travel alone. What a comforting thought that must have been for Moses and the people. Think of the fear and uncertainty if they knew they were on their own; that God was just some heavenly being removed from their experience, who set everything into motion and then stepped back and left them on their own? What a frightening and unsettling thought.

B. Protection – Next, God promised protection – Verse 20. Not only would he guard the people, he would stand with his people before their enemies – Verse 22. Then God promises that he will drive out the people of Canaan so the Israelites would be able to begin the process of occupying the land that had been promised to Abraham 450 years before.

C. Provision – Through all this, God would provide for his people. He had already demonstrated to Israel his presence – the cloud and pillar of fire; God had already proven his protection by holding Pharaoh’s army at bay while he parted the waters of the Red Sea so the people could pass through on dry land. And He destroyed the army of Egypt lest they should destroy Israel. And God had already demonstrated his provision for the people with manna to eat and fresh water to drink.

Look at Verse 25 again.

III. Means of the Covenant – Now, in chapter 24 we see the means by which the covenant is ratified. Follow along as I read from chapter 24.

Exodus 24:1-8

It’s a little hard to follow the sequence throughout verses like these because Moses goes back and forth up the mountain and then returns to speak to the people.

Moses told the people all that God had spoken to him. Then he wrote down the words of the Lord.

What is most important is what followed. Moses had sacrifices offered to the Lord and then sprinkled the blood, first on the altar and then upon the people.

The heart of this is the visible reminder that a right relationship with God was only possible through sacrifice, through blood being spilt. This was instructive to the people concerning the only proper way in which one could approach God and experience his favor.

This offering of the blood sacrifice was tied to the covenant – Verse 28. Peter Enns writes:

This covenant is essentially not a matter of a mutual agreement or pact made between God and the Israelites. It is, as we read, “the covenant that the LORD has made with you.” It is by his initiative. He is the instigator. What the Israelites are to do is to accept and agree to live by the terms of the covenant that God and God alone has stipulated.

After this incident, Moses and select others go back up the mountain. Look at the text beginning with verse 9: Exodus 24:9-18

Two things happen: first, there is essentially a worship service on the mountain. They saw God – in some form or fashion. And God did not strike them dead, but they “beheld God, and ate and drank.”

Then God summoned Moses even higher on the mountain where he said he would give Moses the tablets of stone. There were two tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. We know it was limited to this because of what Moses writes in Deuteronomy 4:13 –

And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.

Usually when you see renderings of Moses with the Ten Commandments, you see five on one tablet and five on the other. But that's not what is in view here. God gave Israel two complete copies of the Commandments. In ancient custom, two copies were made of a covenant document, one for each party to the covenant. Here, God wanted Israel to have both copies – reminding them that they were bound to this covenant that God made with Israel – a covenant that He would never forget.

Finally, we see Israel's response to this covenant the God made with his people.

IV. Response to the Covenant

Go back to Verse 3. Then again, Verse 7. The people said the right thing. But as we know, they often failed to live up to their promise. That is why sacrifice would forever be part of the requirement of their worship. God made a way to deal with their sin and failure to obey.

Application

Now, let's go back through all we have considered this morning and look at application to us.

I. Requirements of the Covenant

A. Listen – We are called to do what the Israelites were to do – listen, pay careful attention to what God has to say to us. What an advantage we have over the Israelites in two ways: We have the written Word – the Bible, God's word to us today. Second, we have the Holy Spirit to enlighten our understanding. Oh, what a blessing these are for us – things Israel did not have. But with that blessing comes a greater responsibility and a more severe accountability.

B. Obey – The logical follow-on to listening is obedience. We listen; then we obey. Remember that these requirements were given to Israel as a redeemed people, a people God had delivered out of bondage. We obey because we have been redeemed, not to get redeemed. Obedience is the fruit of salvation, not the root of salvation. We are saved by

God alone by grace alone. Then because we are saved, we respond to this covenant of grace by listening and obeying God.

That naturally, then, leads to service.

C. Service – our service to God includes obedience; it includes serving others in the name of Christ; it includes worship. Listen to the writer of the NT book of Hebrews:

Through him then (that is, through Christ) let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. – *Hebrews 13:15-16*

What about the promises of God's covenant with us. May I suggest we consider the same three as with Israel?

II. Promises of the Covenant

A. Presence – Even more so than Israel, we – as believers in the New Testament age, enjoy God's presence. God's presence with Israel was always external, but something new was added at Pentecost. God gave his Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer.

We will see at the end of our study in Exodus the dedication of the tabernacle that God instructs Moses to build as his dwelling place among the people of Israel. There is something so much greater for those of us who have believed the Gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul speaks of this in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. – *I Corinthians 6:19-20*

God's presence is no longer just external; it is internal. Every believer in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit – God himself resides within. What an utterly amazing truth!

B. Protection – We also have the promise of God's protection. We should see this application first as spiritual protection. John writes in his first epistle:

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning (that is, as a way of life), but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. – *I John 5:18*

God guarantees our salvation through his protective power. The Apostle Peter speaks of this protection in his first epistle:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. – *1 Peter 1:3-5*

That is all good and well, but does God protect us physically as he did Israel. From my experience, I would say definitely. It is hard for me to imagine surviving potential dangers growing up on a farm and being alive today or not maimed in some way.

However, there is a different understanding we need as New Testament saints as opposed to the people of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. Philip Graham Ryken writes in his commentary:

This does not mean that people who obey God never get sick. Still less does it mean that people who are starving or childless or who die young have been disobedient. These promises were for the Old Testament people of God, given at a time when God was using material blessings to teach spiritual truths. Therefore, we need to be careful not to apply these blessings and curses too literally. Our Savior was a suffering servant, and like him we must pass through suffering to enter glory. Only then will we be delivered from hunger, pain, and death. But even if the suffering church may not receive the material blessings God promised to Israel, the principle still holds true: Obedience is the pathway of blessing.

C. Provision – God promises to supply our needs. Jesus reminded his disciples that they should not worry and fret over food, clothing and shelter. He told them that they were of great value to God and that their Heavenly Father was aware of all they needed. Then he added the thing of greater importance than these: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

We can pray the prayer Jesus gave to his disciples and trust God to meet our needs: “Give us this day, our daily bread.”

Now, what about the means of the covenant God has made with us?

III. Means of the Covenant

It was the blood of the animal sacrifices that covered over the sins of the people, that provided the means of acceptance by God. This was, of course, a picture of what was to

come – a foreshadowing, a type, of the perfect sacrifice which was to be provided by God in the fullness of time.

The ritual of sacrifice will be an important and central part of the people's worship and the practices within the tabernacle. We see in Christ and in his sacrificial death the fulfillment of the means of God's covenant of grace with us.

Turn in your New Testament to the book of Hebrews, chapter 9 – Hebrews 9:11-28

Our redemption, our salvation, is possible only through the shed blood of Christ. The New Testament is filled with references to this means of God's covenant with us.

Romans 5:9 – “We have been justified by his blood.”

Ephesians 1:7 – “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...”

Ephesians 2:13 – “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Colossians 1:19-20 – “For in him (that is, in Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

Without the shedding of Christ's blood, there is no forgiveness; there is no redemption; there is no salvation.

IV. Response to the Covenant

What is to be our response to this covenant of grace that God has made with us? – Acceptance, gratitude, thanksgiving, worship.

After Moses shared God's word with the people and after sacrifices were made, he was invited up to the mountain by God to worship him. Dr. Ryken writes:

Consider how significant it is, therefore, that the prophet, the priests, and the elders of Israel ate and drank with God, and furthermore that this happened in the context of public worship. Remember, Exodus 24 is a covenant worship service. The service included a call to worship, the reading of God's word, a confession of faith, and the sprinkling of sacrificial blood.

Then the whole thing concluded with a sacramental meal – the sharing of food and drink that symbolized communion with God. First God invited the leaders of Israel to worship. He spoke to them through his word, and they responded in faith, promising to obey. But their obedience could never be perfect; so God provided a sacrifice for their sin.

Finally, God invited Israel's representatives to sit down for a meal of covenant friendship. Atonement had been made for their sin, and now the way was clear for them to have table fellowship. They not only saw God, but they also ate and drank with him.

This is a wonderful picture of how we enjoy what they did when we come for public worship – worship that includes the reading of God's word, a confession of faith, and a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us.