

## The Promises for Canaan, A Preview of Heaven (Exodus 23:20-33)

Preached March 24, 2024, by Pastor Phil Layton ([www.gcb.church](http://www.gcb.church))

There's a question many little kids have asked their parents on a long road trip. What is it?

- Are we there yet? Obviously not if still driving, mine said 'how much longer?'
- Think of Disneyland with kids who've never seen the blessings but also need warnings.
- 'Don't wander off, do what we say, obey the rules, you may see your beloved character.'

The children of Israel were on an even longer journey in the wilderness before they got there.

- Their Father in heaven told them how great the place would be and what to do on the way
- He gave them warnings and blessings as they would look for a particular character.
- Their land and kingdom was to be earth's happiest

They're not there yet, but it will be well worth the wait and unlike any other place

Let's join Israel's journey in Ex 23 and today we come to a turning point in the book.

- God saves Israel from Egypt in ch 1-19, and God speaks at Sinai in ch 20-40.
- Most of the rest is about a promised land to come of happiness, wellness, and peace.
- There's things to look for and do as they go:

**Ex 23:20** Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to **the place that I have prepared.** <sup>21</sup> Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. <sup>22</sup> "But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. <sup>23</sup> "When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites [**Canaan**], the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, <sup>24</sup> you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. <sup>25</sup> You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. <sup>26</sup> None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. <sup>27</sup> I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. <sup>28</sup> And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. <sup>29</sup> I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. <sup>30</sup> Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. <sup>31</sup> And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. <sup>32</sup> You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. <sup>33</sup> They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Some of this is familiar from the 10 Commandments God thundered to all Israel in ch 20.

- #1 is no other gods, and #2 is no images in worship and no idols you bow to or serve, etc.
- God spoke that audibly publicly and wrote that by His own finger on tablets of stone.
- Ch 21-23 He says privately to Moses to pass it on and to write it down on a Torah scroll.

**24:3** Moses came and **told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules...** <sup>4</sup> And Moses **wrote down all the words of the LORD...** <sup>7</sup> Then he took **the Book of the Covenant** and read it in the hearing of the people. So this is what the Lord spoke for Israel that Moses told and wrote in this 'Book of the Covenant.'

- There's moral absolutes in ch 20 but some of ch 21-23 is temporal applications.
- Some parts are temporary for the Canaan conquest (heavenly messenger, health, hornets).
- This isn't about a middle ages crusade or a health and prosperity gospel today.
- It does raise questions of promises about healing and Hamas in the land promised to Jews
- v. 31 talks about the river Euphrates to the Sea, that relates to a phrase chanted today:
- From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free (college presidents, congresswomen, etc.).

- Rising voices call for the reverse of Ex 23, Israel blotted out or at least Jews driven out.
- Militant Muslims basically take v. 33 as their life verse: *'they shall not dwell in your land.'*
- Their twisted teaching makes 'they' the Hebrews in the Islamic holy land claim.
- Like v. 24, some want Israel utterly overthrown, not little by little (all this year).
- Like v. 27, some bring terror to confuse, cause enemies, or people to turn backs on Israel.
- It's likely we'll see more terrorism and turning against Israel or confused people.
- More will cry 'cease fire,' but Israel will cease to exist if it doesn't defend and drive back
- Ex 23 won't resolve that, but it isn't just an ancient history, it's in modern headlines.

Teaching Bible books verse by verse raises controversial questions Christians differ on.

- God's law has very contemporary subjects: slavery, capital punishment, abortion (ch 21).
  - It speaks to reparations, social justice debates, immigration-legal and illegal (ch 22-23).
  - The Bible is very up to date and relevant, especially if you preach the Old Testament!
  - This text isn't directly for a church to have a public policy on Israel and Palestine at war.
- And we need to be careful and contextual, Ex 23 isn't about Israel's secular state today.

It's for the old covenant theocracy and even then, v. 22 is conditioned on obedience: *But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies...*

- That's a divine messenger and if they didn't live right, land wasn't theirs by divine right
- Unbelievers were to be driven from the land and unbelieving Israel was driven out later.
- v. 21 told Israel to hear His word carefully, and we need to as well.

*Dt 30 says Israel would lose this land but be restored later to full blessings with saved hearts<sup>1</sup>*

All those other 'ites' have been blotted out from history, but there's still many Israelites.

- God has preserved the Jews despite their failure to obey or enjoy all of their promises.
- v. 24-25 is for a time of no sickness or stillbirths, but it wasn't unconditional or perpetual.
- It's not a promise for all or all time, it's for that generation of Jews entering the land
- v. 24 told them to break pillars (like Samson in Canaan), but not in every place and time.
- This wasn't for Jews in Egypt, Babylon, Persia, etc., it's for this covenant place and era.
- If it seems harsh the natives were driven out this land Israel would occupy, consider:
- Gen 15 says God was gracious 400+ years before Amorite sin was complete and judged.
- God is so patient but is under no obligation to let sinners live at all, much less in His land.
- And consider also His terror in v. 27 led some to repentant faith (Rahab the Canaanite).
  - o And He's saved terrorists from Hamas, Hezbollah today.

*Ex 12 says a mixed multitude of Gentiles had already joined the Jews by faith*

One writer says Israel wasn't 'to drive out or destroy the Canaanites because they were pagans; Israel had no mandate to destroy pagans anywhere and everywhere. It is rather that Israel was to keep its homeland free of paganism. Canaanites who left the land would not be pursued...this is not a holy war analogous to the Islamic jihad...no mandate to conquer lands so that...under pressure and persecution [infidels]...convert. There was no promulgation of Israelite religion by the sword...no authorization to conquer lands beyond...no right to wage imperialistic wars...' <sup>2</sup>

*No ethnic nationalism here, His international grace for every ethnicity flowed from Israel*

[Some of this is historical but there's principles that apply to us. 1<sup>st</sup> takeaway: trust and obey](#)

v. 20 begins '*Behold...*' the idea here is see, believe, trust God's guarding and guiding.

*'What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, who thro' life has been my guide?'* <sup>3</sup>

All the way the Savior would lead them through a protecting preserving angel. At the Red Sea,

**14:19** Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them,<sup>20</sup> coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel...without one coming near the other all night...<sup>24</sup> And in the morning watch **the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down** on the Egyptian forces...<sup>25</sup> clogging their chariot wheels... the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for **the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.**”

The text says the terrified enemies were thrown into confusion and overthrown in the sea

In Ex 23:27 God says He will send His terror and throw into confusion all enemies.

- Israel could see God’s pillar of cloud and fire leading them and fighting their enemies.
- The Lord Himself is before and behind and between them and Egypt and bringing safely.
- Israel needed to trust He would do that with future enemies in Canaan they would fear.

Look at v. 27 and listen to Rahab: *I know that Yahweh has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us...For we have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt... our hearts melted, and a courageous spirit no longer rose up in any man because of you...*(Joshua 2 LSB, Jericho walls about to tumble).

But God’s people can sing ‘bid my anxious fears subside...land me safe on Canaan’s side’<sup>4</sup>

It says God sends hornets to drive out, maybe a plague like Egypt or a panic like insect attack?

- Whatever the terror was, Israel needed to trust God because it wouldn’t be overnight.
- v. 29 says it wouldn’t be over a year either, driving out fast wouldn’t be good for the land
- Little by little is the phrase in v. 30, and often how God works so we’ll trust His timetable
  - o Israel had to increase and grow over time, and we need to in our faith and growth.
- We want quick deliverance, instant answers, but God knows what we need, what’s best.
- Trust day by day, little by little, He will guide the future as He has the past.
  - o We sang ‘I will wait for you,’ we patiently trust and obey.

<sup>21</sup> Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice... [v. 22 adds] *carefully obey his voice and do all that I say...*

‘God will take care of you, thro’ every day, o’er all the way, He will take care of you’<sup>5</sup>

God says basically trust and obey me and I’ll take care of your enemies in my timing.

- It’s not Israel in v. 23 blotting people out, it’s God’s angel like He did Egypt’s firstborn.
- The command to obey in v. 24 is don’t bow to or serve anyone or anything besides God.
- The end of v. 24 says Canaan’s idols are to be overthrown, broken in pieces, demolished.
- This isn’t a command for all believers of all times in other lands to start smashing statues.
- The NT doesn’t call you to grab and destroy other people’s shrines,
  - o but Col 3:5 says put to death your sin, and greed is idolatry.

The application for us today is individual and internal

I’m not to break pillars of pagans out there, I need God to break the power of sin in me.

- PTL by the grace of repentance, my sin can be overthrown, I can be more than conqueror.
- We have spiritual warfare, idols or ideology strongholds must come down like Jericho.

2 Cor 10:4: *weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds* [NIV, NKJV ‘destruction of fortresses’].<sup>5</sup> *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

All speculation or lofty opinion must be pulled down, objections torn down to obey Christ

Ex 23:21 *Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.*<sup>22</sup> “But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then...

- Notice God says ‘do all **I** say’ parallel with ‘obey **his** voice’—the *his* is parallel to God.
- He’s on the same level with God, to be listened to like God, bearing the name of God.
- In v. 20 the word *angel* is often translated *messenger* (almost 50% of uses in the OT).
- Moses uses it 7x of human messengers,<sup>6</sup> but it can mean heavenly ones based on context.
- v. 21b mentions power to pardon transgressions, but no created being has that power.

- No mere angel or man can, so I think best to translate v. 20 as Messenger with capital M.
  - o He's not just *of* the Lord, He *is* the Lord to obey.
    - Who is this Messenger? What's the SS answer if you're not sure?**

**Takeaway #2. Turn your eyes on Jesus.** v. 20 *Behold* [turn your eyes], *I send an angel* [messenger]...

- In Exodus an angel saved Israel out of Egypt,
- in Jude 5 ESV '*Jesus...saved a people out of Egypt.*'

Ex 14 says an angel followed Israel in the desert, 1 Cor 10 says it was Jesus following.<sup>7</sup>

- In Ex 3 God's angel says in the burning bush '*I am the Lord*' (what Jesus says in the NT).
- They saw in fire and cloud the Lord, they just didn't know His name would be Jesus yet.
- Israelites beheld a pillar before them that they were to follow and obey when He spoke.
- They turned their eyes to this visible representation of God guiding them in the desert.

Gen 48 equated the angel to God:<sup>15</sup> *...the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,* <sup>16</sup> *the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless...*

- That's Jacob, father of Israel, saying the angel/messenger is the redeemer and is God
  - There's 1 God and 3 persons, in Ex 23 another with personal pronouns (his/him) equal but distinct**

Gen 49:10 promised a Messiah to come to be obeyed by all, so Israel knew this.

- Now in Ex 23:20 God says He'll send the messenger/redeemer/shepherd, so obey Him.
- Dt 18 prophecies Messiah from their brothers with '*Obey...voice...speak in my name...*'<sup>8</sup>
- Moses and his readers heard these same phrases from Ex 23 about Messiah as a man.
- Not just a human prophet like his brothers in every way, and not just a supernatural being
  - o He's both fully man and fully Divine.

The OT later uses this word angel/messenger in prophecies about Jesus.

- Similar to v. 20, Mal 3:1 '*Behold I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before...*'
- It's not an angel there, a human messenger announces the heavenly divine Messenger.
  - o Who is that? What's the SS answer?

**His Word is God's to obey, and in the beginning He was the Word who is with God and is God**

In v. 20 that word *behold* is in many OT prophecies of Jesus: *Behold the virgin shall conceive... Behold my servant...Say to the daughter of Zion, "behold your salvation [Yeshua] comes..."*<sup>9</sup>

*'Jerusalem! Behold your King is coming to you...humble and mounted on a donkey'* (Zech 9:9).

- Ex 23 is pre-incarnate (before He came in human flesh), behold God sent Him before.
- Turn your eyes on Jesus in v. 20 as you read of Him sent to guard Israel on their way.
- 1 Pet 2:25 says you need to turn in faith to see Jesus, '*Shepherd and Guardian of your soul.*'<sup>10</sup>
  - o All this applies to us!

A hymn says '*We are Thine, do Thou befriend us, be the Guardian of our way;*

*Keep Thy flock from sin, defend us, Seek us when we go astray. Blessed Jesus...*'<sup>11</sup>

God says behold/believe the messenger I send to go before and bring you, obey Him.

- Sounds like John's gospel: Jesus goes before His own and brings all who obey His voice:
- '*he who sent me is with me...whoever believes in me believes...him who sent me.*'<sup>12</sup>
- In the upper room, He calls Himself a messenger God sent who's not greater than Him.
- Ex 23:20 says the Messenger will guard them on the way, Jesus says '*I Am the way...*'

He prays '*I have kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them...*'<sup>13</sup>

- v. 21 warns judgment if you disobey Him,
- Jn 3:36 '*whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life.*'

Look at v. 21 as I read Heb 2-3 about His word: *‘we must pay more careful attention...if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion...’*<sup>14</sup>

- But rebels can be pardoned, obeying His gospel call

**Turn from your transgressions, trust His death and life and Lordship over you to save**

Don't be like NT Jews rejecting His power with *‘who can forgive sins but God alone?’*

- They weren't wrong, but were wrong to think Jesus wasn't God, with His name in Him.
- They rebelled and didn't obey Christ's voice and their transgression was not pardoned.
- From Mt. Sinai God said of this One *‘listen to him,’* sounds like Mt. of Transfiguration?
- What Moses heard in Ex 23 was heard again after Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah:

*This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.*

**Like Ex 23 Peter later wrote of that event we need to pay careful attention to His Word**<sup>15</sup>

It has precious and magnificent promises, in His precious blood, to us He is precious.

- Today we hear His voice in His Word and obey Him and that guards our path all the way.  
Turn your eyes on Jesus, turn off your electronics for a time and take in more of His word
- If you turn from lesser things to Him, the things on earth will grow strangely dim.

1 Cor 3 says *‘when one turns to the Lord...beholding the glory of the Lord [we're] being transformed into the same image...’*

- The more we behold the glorious Christ in His Word the more we become like Him.
  - o When we see Him, we will be like Him, 1 Jn 3:2.
  - o Don't focus on sin or struggles, fix your eyes on Jesus.

**There's a 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this 2<sup>nd</sup> point this ultimately points to: Turn your eyes on Jesus and heaven**

- Ex 23 is looking to the Jews' promised land, but Heb 12 says keep *‘looking to Jesus.’*

And right before, Heb 11 says by faith OT Israel was *‘looking forward... they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city... By faith Moses...considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward... [not Canaan, the reward and riches of Christ as his greatest treasure. It says by faith Joseph looked beyond his death, and others died in faith trusting they will] rise again to a better life.’*<sup>16</sup>

**So by faith some saw forever promises to Israel being fulfilled beyond their life and land**

OT saints looked forward to rising to a better life in a better heavenly city and country.

- Many years before Moses, Job knew his Redeemer lives
  - o and in the end he knew the Redeemer will stand on the earth,
  - o even after his skin was destroyed, he'll behold Him with his eyes (Job 19:25-27).
- In Gen 28, Jacob's ladder is a vision connecting the promised land to heaven's gate.
- Then God promised earthly land to his offspring so they would bless all nations on earth.
- So there's a connection of heaven to earth specifically with the land promised to Israel.

And right after Ex 23, look at Ex 24:10 *And they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.*

- It's a vision of what looks like heaven, following the promised land text

**It seems to me the promises of Canaan are also previews of heaven**

Moses knew something of the exodus as symbolizing deliverance or departure in death.

- In Lk 9 Moses and Elijah appear on the Mt. of Transfiguration talking to Jesus about this.
- It says they spoke of His death as a *departure* in Jerusalem (the Greek word is *exodus*).<sup>17</sup>
- Jesus spoke of it on the cross as paradise, but it's also an exodus from this life to that.
  - o Just as Israel was delivered in the exodus departure to Canaan,
  - o our death is also an exodus -- free of this body and old world!

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven...at hand, glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land<sup>18</sup>  
In Ex 23:19 there's instructions about the house of God in the promised land to come.

- And v. 20 says the messenger goes before to bring His people to the place He prepared.  
Listen to Jn 14:2: *'In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.'* Sounds like Ex 23:20, Jesus connects and applies that to heaven to come

- v. 23-24 didn't fully happen under Joshua but will ultimately under Jesus' kingdom.
- In heaven all paganism is blotted out and all idols and enemies are utterly destroyed.
- End of v. 25 says sickness will be taken away from among them, it will in heaven.

- o Israel crossing the Jordan to Canaan is seen in some songs<sup>19</sup> as a type and preview

*'On Jordan's stormy bank I stand, and cast a wishful eye*

*To Canaan's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie...*

*Sickness and sorrow, pain and death Are felt and feared no more'*<sup>20</sup>

*[Another picks up] 'In the sweet by and by, we shall rest on that beautiful shore.*

*There's a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar [the song says our God] waits over the way, to prepare us a dwelling place there.'*<sup>21</sup>

This weekend at Pastor Dale's graveside I read his handwritten notes for a graveside. Phil 1:23 *I desire to depart to be with Christ which is FAR BETTER*. His last memorial behind this pulpit

Far better to be there beyond all sorrow, to be beyond the sin, stress, and strife

To be where there can be no dark tomorrow, beyond the claims and cares of mortal life

Far better to be there beyond temptation, beyond the scene of conflict and of strain

To be in that blessed wondrous habitation, where ransomed ones can taste no more pain

Far better to be there with Christ in glory, to know the wondrous bliss of being free

Than to have tarried here till years were hoary, unless He had designed it so to be

Far better to be there, thus we may leave them, until there breaks that resurrection day

When we once more with new joy perceive them, and share the bliss that will never pass away

Dale "Far better! I'm saying that with the apostle Paul, too...far better to depart be with Christ"

<sup>1</sup> Note especially v. 6 "your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love," salvation language amid regathering to the land and repossession of it in v. 3-5, and restoration of blessings in v. 7-9 that were promised in Exodus 23.

<sup>2</sup> Duane Garrett, *Exodus*, 539.

<sup>3</sup> Fanny Crosby, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me."

<sup>4</sup> William Williams, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah."

<sup>5</sup> Civilla Martin, "God Will Take Care of You."

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 32:3, 6, Numbers 20:14, 21:21, 22:5, 24:12, Deuteronomy 2:26.

<sup>7</sup> See v. 4 and the context before and after speaking of the time of the book of Exodus and beyond.

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15 "from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen..." (referencing "voice" of Yahweh in v. 16 at Sinai), and a warning in v. 19 for "whoever will not listen to the words that he shall speak in my name" (same key words from Exodus 23).

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 7:14, 52:13 and context, 62:11.

<sup>10</sup> NASB95.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Thrupp, "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us."

<sup>12</sup> John 10:4, 8:29, 12:44.

<sup>13</sup> John 13:16, 14:6, 17:12.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 2:1, 3:15 NIV84, note the context of v. 14 applying it to Christ's voice.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Peter 1:16-19.

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 11:11, 16, 22, 25, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Luke 9:31.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Ross Cousin, "Immanuel's Land."

<sup>19</sup> Consider the old spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" lyrics, imagining a heavenly transport 'comin for to carry me home... I looked over Jordan and what did I see...A band of angels comin after me...If you get there before I do...tell all my friends I'm comin too...I'm sometimes up and sometimes down...But still I feel I'm heaven bound, comin for to carry me home.'

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Stennett, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks."

<sup>21</sup> Sanford Bennett, "In the Sweet By and By."