



E X O D U S

GOD'S COVENANT CODE

Before Life Group

Read Exodus 20-23

This was a momentous occasion for the people of Israel. Where they had previously felt abandoned by God crying out for His help during their time of slavery, a magnificent scene was unfolding before them. A thick veil had fallen over Mount Sinai and the presence of the Lord had descended upon it to meet with Moses. God was present. Not metaphorically, not just an inner feeling or nudging, but a literal presence. For all the complaining and whining that the people of Israel had done up until this point and the various times they had almost abandoned their faith, God came to His people.

Thus, a covenant was established with Moses and the people of God. Through numerous trips up and down the mountain, God spoke the conditions of the covenant. This would be a sign of a relationship between the High King and Sovereign and the vassals that served Him. During that time, a covenant represented something similar to a legal contract, only much stronger. There were requirements on both sides and representation that each would have to make. Furthermore, the severe consequences of breaching this covenant were laid out.

The people of Israel were God's people. He would guide and protect them through their daily lives and into eternity. This was the promise of God. They needed only to follow God where He went and obey Him and their King. The consequences of this were simple: if you followed the leading of God, you would be with God; but if you did not, then you would be leaving God. Thus, there were clear indications given to the people for how they were to live their life. Stipulations were laid down on the way to treat their servants and injuries to others, how their property was to be handled, and the ramifications when property was abused. God gave them guidance on how they should live as a society and how to live a religious life. Everything was built and enacted according to the divine plan and design that God had laid out for their own protection and good.

Around this time, if you are like many people, this is where the book of Exodus honestly gets challenging. The previous sections were predominately narrative, weaving the grand story of God's redemption of His people. There was flash and drama as the people squared off with the Egyptians, followed by supernatural flair as God rained down provision from heaven and water sprang forth from stones. Yet, here we are in the midst of the desert as Moses is traveling up to Mount Sinai, receiving God's covenant code. The narrative portion has ended for now and we hear the stipulations of the covenant that God was making with His people. But for the Israelites, the choice was laid before them: would they obey the covenant code that God had laid down in meeting face to face with Moses, and would they allow themselves to be guided by the messenger that God set before them?

Obeying The Word of God

Throughout the course of Exodus 20-23 (and well into the next few books of the Bible) God lays down some specific instructions related to the stipulations of the covenant He is making with His people. To be completely honest, some of these stipulations are challenging to understand. This is partially due to the change in culture of what took place thousands of years ago and our current era. In addition, some of the things that God says are challenging to understand. In some cases, the punishments given by God seem extreme, and in other cases, not extreme enough. I can't claim to understand every line, but this is the covenant code given by God himself to Moses.

At no point was God obligated to save His people. The consequences of sin were made abundantly clear in the moment that Adam introduced sin into the world. Sin resulted in the death of whomever it infected. It was a decay of holiness that required blood as penance. The covenant of God is an expression of a loving God who desires a relationship with His people. It paved a path so that the people would be able to approach God and understand the means of living that would go beyond civil rules and regulations, while giving a glimpse into how God intended life to be. Following God is an act of trusting Him even without fully understanding.

Faith comes from understanding that God created the heavens and the earth to function in a designed and intentional way. Faith is looking back on our lives and seeing things happen, doors open, and lives changed that we would never have thought would be the case. This is how we are able to follow God, not because we have a firm grasp on the situation (history would say we don't), but that God has a firm grasp on eternity.

The Messenger of God

Towards the end of the stipulations given to Moses as to how the people should conduct themselves, the Lord makes it abundantly clear that He will not only be *with* them but will go *before* them. God describes His messenger who would go before them as their salvation and protection. There were promises that the people were still in the process of receiving. They were moving into the Promised Land that God had set apart for them. But the journey would not be easy; there would be battles to fight. Yet the messenger of God would go before them and handle their enemies. The role of the Israelites was to follow the word of God wherever it took them.

The question from the God's covenant is whether or not we will submit to the His teaching and covenant. During Exodus 23: 20-33, the consequences of following God and rebellion against God are made abundantly clear. There is safety in the word of God and in His message, and there is danger in straying outside of the word of God. For as long as the Israelites followed the messenger of God, they stayed according to the will of God and they were fine regardless of however difficult the situation may be. Yet, if they were to branch out into territories not secured by God, they would depart from the perfect plan of God and find difficulties because if it.

Rebellion against the messenger of God is rebellion against God Himself. The two are equated as one and the same. The word of God is the embodiment of His character and being. The messages that flow out of God bare His name throughout the whole of creation. Thus, when God provides the messenger, it is a representation of God providing Himself. Where the messenger goes, God has gone before Him. The same is true in the sending of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. In Jesus we have the benefit of God's Word made flesh. Jesus came, not as a representative of God or being similar to God, but as God Himself. He is the Word and the embodiment and incarnate God.



Being a part of the new covenant established by Jesus Christ, we have an even greater messenger than the Israelites had. The very person of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, has come incarnate as mankind. Furthermore, as Jesus returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell inside of us. God the Father sent His Son, the Word, who sends His Spirit to live inside of us. We will be pushed into places we may not fully understand or agree with, but there is safety in the word of God. He is for us, not wanting us to suffer but instead going before us. Jesus, as the messenger of God, went ahead of the people, conquering the enemies on Israel's behalf. Jesus conquered death on our behalf so that we might have the lives that God intended for us. Jesus paved a way for our salvation so that we might have the opportunity to be fully reliant and in relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Discussion Questions

Read [Exodus 23:20-33](#)

1. God commands multiple times that the people are not to have any other gods or permit the gods of the old county to persist. Why does God use this harsh language? What does this say about the nature of holiness and perfection that is required for righteousness?
2. In the latter part of Exodus 23, what were the consequences of following the messenger of the Lord? What were the consequences of not following the messenger?
3. How does Jesus Christ serve as the Word of God? How are Jesus Christ and the angel (messenger) of God similar? In what way does the idea of the messenger prepare the Israelites for Jesus Christ?
4. Have we ever been hesitant to obey the word of God because we didn't understand it? Where have we done this in our life? Why do we hesitate when we don't understand?
5. How does understanding the character of God and seeing His guiding hand in the past help us to obey Him even if we don't understand?
6. What role does faith play in obedience to God? Where does the strength come from to obey God?
7. What are some of the challenges we face in the pursuit of holiness? How is God's word the solution to the problems of our pursuit of holiness?

About the Author.

Pastor Daniel Burton lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. In May 2015, Daniel graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with his Master of Divinity. It was here that he began to explore his passion for Theology and deeper exploration of the word of God. Daniel believes that, at its core, Theology should be fun. Check out more of his work at <http://thegospeloutpost.com>

