

Brad Jordan / General

Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / Exodus 23:20–33

The promises of God, to the people of God, kept by the power of God alone.

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## Introduction

In 1773 fearing that a sudden bout of depression and darkness was fixing to come on him, the famous hymn writer William Cowper ran home and penned these words:

### **God Moves in a Mysterious Way**

God Moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform  
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm  
Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sov'reign will  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread  
are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;  
behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;  
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r  
Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

The encouragement that believers experience regarding the certainty of the work of Christ in their lives is one that does not come from any worldly source, it is only found in the true promises of God and the understanding

that not only is He the promise maker, He is also the promise keeper. We read in John 6:26-40

**John 6:26–40 LSB**

Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, set His seal."

Therefore they said to Him, "What should we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"

"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD FROM HEAVEN TO EAT.'"

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

"For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

"But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

"Now this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Notice the authoritative statements made in the final two verses of this passage. Notice the promise "everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life". What a beautiful promise and one that millions of people, who profess to be Christians, would willingly proclaim, but a promise is only as good as the promise keeper. Unfortunately for so many, although they will state this truth, they find little comfort in this truth because at the end of the day, the promise keeper that they are relying on is themselves. The thrust of this passage, however, is NOT that you are doing anything, but that the promise maker is also the promise keeper. Note in verse John 6:37 ""All that the Father gives Me will come to Me..." and John 6:39 ""...that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing,..." and finally in John 6:40 "... I Myself will raise him up on the last day."" Note here that ultimately it is God who gives us, God who keeps us, and God who will raise us up. The only thing that truly helps us find beauty in a promise is the certainty and reliability of the promise keeper.

In our text for this morning we will be looking at the conclusion to the "book of the covenant". A covenant is a formal legal agreement that is under a seal, or an attestation of assurance. In the ancient world, it was common for covenants to end with promises and warnings dealing with the failing of one party to uphold their end of the agreement. In wonderful legal ease, if the party of the first part fails to uphold the promise to the party of the second part then this would be the repercussions that the party in the first part would receive. If you are shopping and you pick an item out from the shelf, you and the store have entered into a loose covenant that is then solidified at checkout. You have loosely promised to pay the asking price for that item and the store has agreed to let you leave with that item assuming you uphold your end of the covenant. If you walk out

and do not pay, you have broken the covenant and can be prosecuted. There is a promise, the exchange of the item for payment, and a warning, you can go to jail if you do not uphold your end. God and the Israelites were in a covenantal relationship and this passage describes the promise that will be received, entrance into the land of promise, if the Israelites uphold their end of the covenant. These words, this promise/warning passage to Israel, is to us a shadow of the new covenant promises and the certainty of the promise keeper. Let us stand as we read God's word together:

**Exodus 23:20–33 LSB**

"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to keep you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

"Keep watch of *yourself* before him and listen to his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.

"But if you truly listen to his voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

"For My angel will go before you and bring you in to *the land of* the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will annihilate them.

"You shall not worship their gods, you shall not serve them, and you shall not do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly pull them down and shatter their *sacred* pillars in pieces.

"But you shall serve Yahweh your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.

"There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

"I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you.

"And I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.

"I will not drive them out before you in a single year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.

"I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take the land as an inheritance.

"And I will set your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River; for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out from before you.

"You shall cut no covenant with them or with their gods.

"They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Word. We praise you for the message that it contains, the foundation upon which it rests and the certainty that it provides. Father we know that Your Word is the "power of God for Salvation to all who believe". We simply ask this morning that as we gather around Your Holy Truth that Your Spirit would illuminate our understanding and deepen our love for You and Your Holy Word. We ask these things in the name of Your blessed Son, christ Jesus. Amen

You may be seated.

## The One Who Goes Before

In the supernaturally charged climate in which we live it would not be uncommon to find yourself in a discussion regarding supernatural beings, one of which is angels. Biblically speaking, there are many accounts and mentions of angels but the common place practice of exalting these beings. Scripture, in Colossians, Hebrews and Revelations teaches that these beings are not to be worshipped. They, just like we, are created beings meant to worship and serve the creator. Angels mentioned in scripture are always subservient to God, they are His messengers, sent to do His will. Here in

verse 20 God tells the Israelites that He is sending an angel to them and this angel has a specific set of purposes.

First the angel will be there to keep the people along the way. The word translated as keep here is being used in the sense of keeping watch over or guarding the people. The role of the angel of God would be to cover and protect Israel until they entered into and settled into the promised land. Along with keeping, the angel was to bring them into the land. It is important to note a couple of things regarding the action of the angel before we proceed any further. This is the promise we find in the first verse, that the angel will protect and will bring them safely home. As we continue into verse 21, we see additional promises, but also warnings.

The first direct instruction here to the people of Israel is to “keep watch”. This word carries the same root as keep in verse 20 but here it is being used in the sense of making sure that someone makes a point to act in a purposeful and intentional way, specifically to listen and obey the angel. By this time, most of us would be responding with questions like, just who is this messenger and why are we supposed to listen to him. There are multiple “ideas” out there about the identity of this angel. Some have stated that it is Moses, but Moses never enters the promise land. Some have said it is Joshua and while he enters the promise land, the truth is that this still does not quite reconcile with the text. In fact, what I believe is very clearly the answer to this question is found right here in this verse.

The next clause of the verse states that the messenger will not pardon the transgressions of the people and the reason that it will not pardon these transgressions or accept this rebellion is that “My name is in Him”. This verse would seem to equate the Angel of God with God himself, it would seem that he carries the same weight, they were to obey him; the same strength, he would guard or keep them; and the same power to deliver, he will bring you to the place. We might remember that this is not the first time in the book of Exodus that we have encountered the Angel of God, in Exodus 3:2 we read “And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.” Moses has already witnessed what we call a Theophany, a manifestation of God, and here again he is told that the people will have the angel of God to go before them. One last piece to this puzzle can be found in Judges 13:17-22

### **Judges 13:17–22 LSB**

Then Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, "What is your name, so that when your words come *to pass*, we may honor you?"

But the angel of Yahweh said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to Yahweh, and He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on.

Indeed, it happened when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of Yahweh went up in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife saw *this*, so they fell on their faces to the ground.

Now the angel of Yahweh did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of Yahweh.

So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God."

Note the response of the angel in verse 18, the statement regarding his name, and maybe your mind is recalled to Isaiah 9:6 "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." John Calvin stated 'But let us inquire who this Angel was?... The ancient teachers of the church have rightly understood [it to be] the Eternal Son of God in respect to His office as Mediator.' Who other than the pre-incarnate Christ truly fits this role of keeper, guide and deliverer. The one who goes before.

The full weight of verses 20-22 should be felt when we come to Exodus 23:23 ""For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will annihilate them." The angel of God, the pre-incarnate Christ will proceed the people of God into the land of promise, he will bring the people into the land and he will completely deliver the land to them. The ultimate promise of God to the people of Israel was full and final defeat of their enemies, by God alone, and entrance to and acquisition of the land which he has promised, through His power alone... I hope that this sounds

familiar, it is the same promise that is made to every believer still today. The message is not follow me to have your best life now, it is surrender all to me, place all your faith, hope, trust in me and I will fully and finally and wholly deliver you into the eternal presence of myself.

For Israel the commands that are found in these verses constitute their responsibility in the keeping of the covenant. Overall the covenant language from God was "If you will obey all that I command and worship me alone, then I will be your God and you will be my people and I will keep all of the promises that I have made to you." This is obviously a very broad command and so God in His gracious love for His people gave to His nation the covenant laws, which were designed to teach them how to please the covenant Sovereign. In the next two verses God once again reminds His people of their responsibility to Him.

In verse 24 we see 4 different clauses pertaining to the response of Israel towards all other gods. They were not to worship, serve, or obey them. Worship here is a word that can also be translated as bow down or submit to them. Serve is actual working for the gods of the people of the land and obedience speaks of participating in the rituals that exist for the purpose of worshipping and serving their god. With only these three commands one may be tempted to understand that as long as they did not do these things, or involve themselves in these beliefs then they could just continue along. Today we would call this "going along to get along" or tolerance towards other beliefs, but God demonstrates in the last clause of this verse the totality of His expectation.

The people of God were not supposed to just avoid the idolatrous and false religious practices of the people of the land, they were to actively seek out the places of worship and destroy them. The original language of this last clause adds an emphasis to these commands that we do not truly capture in the English language. There is a repetition in the commands to tear down and shatter. The LSB adds the word utterly to try and convey the fullness of this in the first part but there is also a repetition in the second part of this command. A direct translation would be that they were to pull down, pull down and shatter, shatter. It was not enough that they take a passive role in the belief systems of others, but that they seek and destroy the very places and means of the worship of the people. We find the reason in the last two verses, we will get to them in more detail in a few

minutes, but for the moment we see that the danger is that they would adopt these practices. The reality of this is exactly what happened even when the people entered the land, they were disobedient, they did not seek and destroy these places and items of worship and later they adopted them and rebelled against God, the very one who delivered them into the land.

It is important for us to remember that these are commands to a specific people at a specific time for a specific purpose and as such they are not direct commands on our lives today. This is not a call for the Christian to physically destroy but there is still a principle here that must be understood and applied in the life of a believer. The first thing that we have to understand is that where the people of Israel were to be obedient in order to receive, we have already received and because of what we have received, we are to be obedient. The principle in question here is the reality of the utter and total destruction of the sin in our lives. We are called to cease living the way of the flesh and start living according to the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Rome. Romans 8:9-14

**Romans 8:9–14 LSB**

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body, you will live.

For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

We are called to take an active role against the sin, or the flesh, in our lives. We have been empowered by the Spirit of the living God to fight, and fight

we must “mortify the deeds of the body” or be “putting to death” the sin in our life.

Verse 25 begins with a conjunction pointing out that this next command is in direct opposition to the preceding commands. Instead of worshipping, serving and working for the gods of the land, they are commanded to worship and serve the one true God. What follows in the second half of verse 25 down through verse 31 is what God will do for the people in the land. That He will accomplish amongst them for their good and His glory.

## The One Who Conquers

At the end of verse 23 God tells the people that He “will annihilate them”. This statement is delivered with a force in the original language that makes it clear that it is God and not the people of Israel doing this work and as we come to the second half of verse 25 God begins to elaborate on that work and it becomes even more evident, that these things are accomplished by Him alone. The overarching truth that is found in these verses is the protection and provision of God for His people. The first promises we find in verses 25 and 26 deal with the health and prosperity that God will provide. These statements demonstrate the range of his care. In the Hebrew the words for food and sickness are antithetical to each other, in other words they are opposite to each other. The purpose of this structure is to show the fullness, compare this to the God’s description of Himself as Alpha and Omega, two concepts on either end of a spectrum that demonstrate a range.

In the statements found in verse 26 God is demonstrating to the watching world that He is Lord over all things. The specific statement here regarding the lack of loss of children in the womb and the fulfillment of the days speak to His authority over fertility. In the cultures surrounding the Israelites there was much worship, sacrifice and service to gods who were supposed to increase the fertility of the people and of the land, Yahweh demonstrates, as He did in Egypt, that He is Lord of all and His people have no need to perform worthless pagan rituals to dead gods to hopefully gain their favor. He is telling them to continue worshipping and serving the God who lives, who speaks, who hears, who delivers that He is sufficient for all their needs.

Verses 27-30 contain a progression of the work of God in the land to

remove the inhabitants and prepare the way. He begins this by telling His people that He will literally make their enemies “turn tail and run”. He proceeds to elaborate this point through the next few verses and culminating in verse 31 with a statement regarding the general boundaries of the land He will provide.

In the original text of verse 27 the word we translate as terror is the first word as a way of placing an emphasis on this terror. In Job 41:14 the same word is used to describe the teeth of a crocodile ““Who can open the doors of its face? Around its teeth there is dreadful terror.” and in Job 39:20 ““Do you make him leap like the locust? His splendid snorting is terrible.” it is used to describe the snorting of a warhorse. Both of these images and the use of the word here in Exodus are to give an understanding to the people of how great and mighty and fearsome this terror truly is. He continues this imagery in verse 28 by stating that He will send hornets. The original word is an obscure one and there is some question about the literal translation, it can also be translated as terror, fear, dejection, and discouragement, and there are some experts who believe that this word is related to the Hebrew word for leprosy. In any case, the thrust of the language here is this terror is so great that it drives out the inhabitants of the land.

Verses 29 and 30 finish the thoughts regarding the emptying of the land. First, God tells His people that He will not empty the land in a single year. The people of God were not nearly as numerous at this point as was necessary to properly care for and protect the land that they had been given. Since this was the situation, the land would slowly be emptied, the text of verse 30 literally says little by little by little, indicating two things. One, that the progression would be gradual and second that it would be to the highest degree. In other words, when God completed His work, there would not be even so much as a hint of the inhabitants remaining.

As the people of God, we should hear these words and immediately be reminded of the work of the Spirit within our lives. The seeking out and destruction of the sin in our lives is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Alone, we cannot and would not accomplish this work. Again, while these promises are given to a specific people at a specific time for a specific situation, there is still a principle for us to understand. In Philippians 2:12–13 Paul writes regarding our salvation: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my

absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Peter states it this way in 1 Peter 1:13-16

**1 Peter 1:13–16 LSB**

Therefore, having girded your minds for action, being sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, not being conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* conduct;

because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

And Christ in John 15:1-5

**John 15:1–11 LSB**

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-grower.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He cleans it so that it may bear more fruit.

"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit from itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be

My disciples.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be complete.

Like the Israelites, apart from the working of God in our lives, there is no entry into the land of promise. In the last 150ish years there has been a gradual increase in the church of teachings that ignore the progressive work of the Spirit within the lives of the believer. From half truths meant to subtly undermine the teaching of scripture, to outright contradiction of the Word this danger is very real within the church today. Stemming from concepts such as easy believism, to prosperity teaching, to the idea that we have the power to stand in direct opposition of the will of God the church today is under attack from the enemy and the greatest threat is the attacks that come from within. Much like the hydra in Greek mythology this heresy has many different heads and it seems that when one is removed, two more grow back in it's place. It is no wonder the command of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is to "keep watch of ourselves" as verse 21 commands. This same truth directly applies today, we are to keep watch, we are to stand fast and firm on the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, protected by the armor of God, and Jude 3 "...contend[ing] earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

I want to make sure that I am being crystal clear here, the people of God, the elect, believers, have a responsibility, truly an obligation, that stems from the saving work of Christ in our lives and the influx of power that comes from the indwelling of the Spirit, to boldly proclaim the truth of God's Word. Take in the promises that we have right here in front of us: 1. God WILL guide you, protect you, and deliver you to the land of promise. 2. He WILL utterly annihilate your enemies. 3. He WILL throughly prepare you for the land that you are about to enter (Romans 8:29–30 "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He

called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified.”

## Without Compromise

In the remaining three verses we see a reminder of the ultimate promise, deliverance into the land of promise. Remember, as we have been studying the book of Exodus we have been talking about the fact that God was not just delivering His people out of bondage, but also to a promised land. God has delivered us out of the bondage of sin, but He is also preparing and delivering to a promised land. The rough description that we have of this land in verse 31 will be firmed up as the people take possession of the land. This is a truth that will not see fulfillment until the days of King David because of the disobedience of the people. We also know that because of their disobedience the land will be taken. This is why the covenant of grace is so beautiful, the entirety of the covenant rests on the promise made by the one who is also the promise keeper, meaning that it is fully and completely the work of God alone.

One final warning to the people of God, both the Israelites and us here today...there can be no compromise. Summing up in verses 32-33 God commands the people not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land or with their gods so that they would not sin against Yahweh. Note the last line, for if you serve their gods it will surely be a snare to you...

Compromise is a dangerous proposition because in order to compromise, you have to give up something. Compromise, as a verb, in the sense that we are using it means to make a dishonorable or shameful concession. If the Christian compromises with the world, the world does not look more like christian, the christian looks more like the world.

The beauty of the covenant of grace lies in its absolute reliance on God's faithfulness, not on human effort. While Israel's disobedience resulted in the temporary loss of their inheritance, the new covenant through Christ offers a greater promise—one that cannot be lost because it is secured by God Himself. Just as God promised Israel a land, He promises believers today an eternal inheritance in Christ. This promise is not contingent upon our perfection, but upon the finished work of Jesus. However, just as Israel was warned not to make covenants with the pagan nations around them, we too are called to avoid compromising with the sinful systems of this world. Our deliverance from sin is not just a one-time event, but a

continuous journey of sanctification, in which we must reject the lures of worldly idols and remain faithful to God's calling. The warnings against compromise remind us that anything that takes priority over God in our hearts becomes a snare, pulling us away from the fullness of life He offers. Thus, we must continually guard ourselves, standing firm in the truth of God's Word and living as His set-apart people.

## Conclusion

In closing, we are reminded through the promises of Scripture that God's providence is ever-present, even in the most difficult circumstances. Cowper's hymn, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, encourages believers to trust that behind the trials we face, God's hand is working for our ultimate good, though we may not always see it clearly. This same truth is powerfully echoed in John 6, where we are assured that Christ not only draws His people to Himself but that He will lose none of those the Father has given Him. The certainty of salvation lies not in our own strength, but in the faithfulness of God—the true promise keeper.

As we reflect on the journey of the Israelites in Exodus, we see how God's promises to lead, protect, and ultimately deliver His people are fulfilled through His sovereign grace. Just as Israel was commanded to trust and obey God without compromise, we too must stand firm on His promises, resting in the assurance that God is our ultimate refuge. He guides us, protects us, and will one day bring us fully into His presence. Let us trust in His sovereign will, knowing that He who promised is faithful and will accomplish all He has declared. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that it is truly a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We thank You that your promise is secure, not because of anything in us but because of you, the true promise-keeper, the One who holds all things together by the might of His word. Father we pray that Your word would dwell richly within us. We ask these things in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.