

FULFILL YOUR COVENANTAL RESPONSIBILITY

23 ²⁰Listen; I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹Pay attention to him and obey him*; do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgression, because my Name is in him. ²²But if you will obey him and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries, ²³for my angel will go ahead of you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. ²⁴You shall not bow down to their gods or serve them, nor shall you follow the practices of those people; rather, you shall demolish their idols and break their sacred pillars to pieces. ²⁵You shall serve Jehovah your God, and he will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. ²⁶None shall miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span. ²⁷I will send my terror ahead of you and will throw into confusion all the people you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run from you. ²⁸I will send "the hornet" ahead of you to drive the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites out of your way. ²⁹I will not drive them out of your way in a single year, so that the land does not become desolate and the wild animals multiply against you. ³⁰Little by little I will drive them out of your way, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. ³¹I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates River; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out of your way. ³²You shall not make any covenant with them or with their gods. ³³You shall not permit them to live in your land, or else they will cause you to sin against me; for if you serve their gods, that will certainly be a snare to you. (Ex. 23:20-33)

*Literally, "listen to his voice"

Introduction

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin was the president of Columbia Bible College, Columbia, South Carolina. One day he spoke in chapel, and to the surprise of all, he announced his resignation from the presidency of the school. Why was Dr. McQuilken resigning? Was it another scandal? A misuse of college funds? A matter of marital unfaithfulness?

No. Quite to the contrary, Dr. McQuilkin was resigning his position in order to better fulfill his marital obligations—his covenantal responsibility to his wife. His wife had Alzheimer's disease, and Dr. McQuilkin was resigning his college presidency in order to better care for her.

In his chapel message that morning he said,

"In a way, this decision was made 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel 'in sickness and in health till death do us part.'

“As a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. Muriel has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years. If I cared for her the next 40 years, I would not be out of debt.

“Duty, however, can be grim and stoic—there is more: I love Muriel. She is a delight to me.”

Commenting on this testimony made by Dr. McQuilkin, a Christian writer remarked,

“Such beautiful Christ-like love didn’t just happen. It comes from the inner resolve of a husband who determined 42 years before to live under the authority of God’s directives.” (*Power*, 12/5/93, p.8).

Here was a husband who determined to fulfill his covenantal responsibility.

As the LORD enters into covenant with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He requires their commitment to Him in return, even as He commits Himself to them.

When you make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you are entering into a divine covenant with the LORD your God, and He requires you, in reliance upon His grace, to fulfill your covenantal responsibility. If you want to experience the divine benefits of the covenant, you must, by God’s grace, be true to your covenantal responsibility.

I. Fulfill Your Covenantal Responsibility, by Showing Reverence to Christ

The LORD declares, *“I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared”* (vs. 20.) This unique "angel" would serve to guide the people of Israel through their wilderness journey until He had finally brought them into the Promised Land of Canaan. This angel was no mere angel, He was the Angel of the LORD, an Old Testament manifestation of Christ Himself—note that the LORD declares, *“My Name is in him”* (vs. 21.)

Because this angel has been sent by God, and is in fact Christ the LORD, the people are instructed and warned to *“pay attention to him.”* The people of Israel were to reverently listen to the word of God as it was communicated by the Angel of the LORD. Likewise, we as Christians must not be like King Jehoiakim, a man who disregarded the Word of God and treated it with contempt,

It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. ²³Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll (the portion of Scripture the LORD had commanded Jeremiah to write and present to the king), the king cut them off with a scribe’s knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. ²⁴The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. (Jer.36:22-24)

On the contrary, may we be like the Psalmist as he testifies, *"Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word"* (Psl. 119:161.) Let us take careful note of the LORD's own testimony: *"This is what Jehovah says, ...²...this is the man I will regard, namely, he who is humble and who has a contrite spirit, he who trembles at my word"* (Isa.66:1-2.)

Furthermore, with regard to the Angel of the LORD, Israel is exhorted to *"obey him."* The people of Israel were to put into practice what they learned from the Angel of the LORD and faithfully follow Him. Likewise, we as Christians must put into practice what the Word of God teaches us, heeded the exhortation given by the Apostle James, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"* (Jam. 1:22.)

Then, finally, Israel is warned, *"do not provoke Him."* The people of Israel were not to be rebellious against the Angel of the LORD. Likewise, we as Christians must not defiantly resist and rebel against Christ's lordship over our lives. Let us be careful to take to heart the word of 1 Samuel 15:23, *"rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry."*

The reason the people are warned to obey the Angel of the LORD, [Christ] and not provoke Him is due to the fact that *"he will not pardon your transgression"* (vs. 21.) *"Transgression"* has the meaning of willful, stubborn, determined and defiant disobedience without repentance—it is refusal to yield to Christ's lordship over your life. This is something Christ will not tolerate. Note Luke 19:27, a passage in which, by means of a parable, the Lord Jesus expresses His attitude towards defiance against His divine lordship: *"those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."*

But if you listen to Him and obey Him, then, declares the LORD, *"I will be an enemy to your enemies"* (vs. 22.) If you defy Christ, you make the LORD God your Adversary, as the Apostle James informs us, *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God"* (Jam. 4:4.) But, if you submit to Christ, you will have the LORD God as your Defender. You will receive the blessing pronounced by the Psalmist: *"May Jehovah answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. ²May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion"* (Psl. 20:1-2.)

Fulfill your covenantal responsibility, by showing reverence to Christ.

Jehovah of hosts, him you must sanctify; he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread—¹⁴and he will be a sanctuary [for you.] (Isa. 8:13-14a)

II. Fulfill Your Covenantal Responsibility, By Separating Yourself from the World

The LORD instructs Israel that when they enter the land of Canaan, *“You shall not bow down to their gods or serve them, nor shall you follow the practices [of those people]”* (vs. 24.) We gain some understanding of what the pagan Canaanite culture was like when we consider 2 Kings 21:1-9, 16-17, a passage that describes how the ungodly Israelite king, Manasseh, followed the detestable practices of the nations that inhabited the land of Canaan:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. ²He did evil in the eyes of Jehovah, following the detestable practices of the nations Jehovah had driven out before the Israelites. ³He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴He built altars in the temple of Jehovah, of which Jehovah had said, “In Jerusalem I will put my Name.” ⁵In both courts of the temple of Jehovah, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of Jehovah, provoking him to anger. ⁷He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which Jehovah had said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. ⁸I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them.” ⁹But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations Jehovah had destroyed before the Israelites. ... ¹⁶Furthermore, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. ¹⁷As for the other events of Manasseh’s reign, and all he did, including the sin he committed, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? (2 Kgs. 21:1-9,16-17)

Baal and Asherah were the chief god and goddess of a pagan fertility cult. Baal worship apparently had its origin in the belief that every tract of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, or baal, that dwelt there (*Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p.53.) The pagan view held that nature was inhabited by spirits, which had to be appeased (sometimes by infant sacrifices) and pleased (by sexual orgies) in order for it to yield its fruit.

Manasseh *“bowed down to all the starry host and worshiped them.”* Here is reference to astrology, the belief that the life and circumstances of men are governed by the heavens, and the secrets of the future can be ascertained by the use of astrologers. Mention is also made of the practice of consulting mediums

and wizards and the use of enchantments (incantations, charms, spells, etc.), all for the purpose of tapping into the supernatural and seeking to harness its power. The passage goes on to say that the reign of Manasseh was also a time of great violence and bloodshed throughout the land (vs. 16.) Departure from devotion to the God of heaven inevitably results in a society given over to violence and oppression.

Rather than follow the ways of the pagan nations, the people of God were to totally repudiate those ways of the Canaanites by demolishing every vestige of their religion: *“you shall demolish [their idols] and break their [sacred] pillars to pieces”* (vs. 24b.) Take note of the act of the Ephesians who became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:18-20)

Note also, the apostle Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 10:14,19-21

Therefore, my beloved brothers, flee from idolatry ...¹⁹... [Am I saying] that meat offered to idols has any special significance? Or that an idol is anything?²⁰ [No!] But [what I am telling you is] that the sacrifices of the Gentiles are being offered to demons, not to God; and I do not want you to have communion with demons.²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and also of the table of demons. (1 Cor. 10:14-21)

The people of Israel are warned to make no covenant with the Canaanites, nor with their gods, or else they will cause you to sin against me; for if you serve their gods, that *“will certainly be a snare to you”* (vs. 33.) The Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian Christians, *“Do not be misled, ‘Bad companions corrupt good morals’”* (1 Cor. 15:33.) In his second epistle to the church in Corinth, he further exhorts them,

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers, for what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [i.e.; the devil]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Cor.6:14-15)

Fulfill your covenantal responsibility, by separating yourself from the world. We are not to engage in their pagan religious practices nor are we to accept their pagan worldview, which features such beliefs as 1) a denial of moral absolutes; and 2) a conviction that life is to be lived for self-fulfillment and self-gratification as opposed to being lived in submission to the LORD God and for His glory. We

are not to develop deep and bonding relationships with people who by their statements and or lifestyle refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, note 2 Timothy 2:22, *“Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”* We must take to heart the warning of Revelation 18:4-5, and, by the Lord’s grace, seek to live by it, *“Then I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her [“Babylon” is symbolically representing the lifestyle and philosophy of the world], my people, so that you have no fellowship with her sins and that you do not receive the plagues that will come upon her. ⁵Her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”* (Rev. 18:4-5)

III. Fulfill Your Covenantal Responsibility, and You Shall Have God’s Blessing

In this passage the LORD makes a dozen promises to His people; 12 times the LORD declares, *“I will [do such and such for you].”* The dozen promises can be broken down into three great promises: 1) I will defeat your enemies; 2) I will give you the Promised Land; and 3) I will grant you abundant blessing. All the promises can be summarized as parts of the LORD’s one great promise: I will be your God and you shall be My people.

According to Psalm 23, when you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Shepherd, you will experience the following blessings:

- He will meet your needs (vs. 1)
- He will restore your soul (vs. 3)
- He will guide you in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake (vs. 3)
- He will bring you safely through the valley of the shadow of death (vs. 4)
- He will cause you to dwell in the house of the LORD forever (vs. 6)

Fulfill your covenant responsibility, and you will enjoy God’s blessing.

Conclusion

Our covenantal relationship with the LORD includes both divine benefits as well as personal responsibility: *“I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared”* (vs. 20,) *“Pay attention to him and obey him”* (vs. 21.) If you want to experience the divine benefits of the covenant both now and in eternity, you must, by God’s grace, maintain your covenantal responsibility.