

Exodus 23:20–33 (See chart on page 9)

I. What does LAND have to do with COVENANT???

This morning, we reach the end of the Book of the Covenant. After all the Words and all the Rules (after the Ten Commandments and the Righteous Judgments) we come, now, to the conclusion. And the conclusion is this: “**If you** trust and obey and worship the Lord and the Lord only... **then I** will give you possession of the *land*. And, **if you** *continue* to trust and obey and worship only the Lord *when you have possession of the land*, **then I** will continue to give you abundant and long life in the *land*.” Notice how we begin in verse twenty:

- Exodus 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.

And then notice how we have five references to the **land** in verses 26-33. The main theme of these verses is the hope and the promise of life in the land – in the **place** that God has prepared for His people. Wasn’t this the ultimate goal of bringing Israel out of Egypt in the first place? All the way back in chapter six, the Lord told Moses to say to the Israelites:

- Exodus 6:6–8 (cf. 3:8, 17; 6:3-4) — I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them... **I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God [covenant relationship]**... I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.

The point of the land was to be **the place** where God and His redeemed people could live together in covenant relationship. *The point of the covenant* was to make it possible for God and His redeemed people to live together in the land. We’ve already seen this connection between the covenant relationship and the land in which this covenant relationship could be enjoyed in the 5th commandment:

- Exodus 20:12 — Honor your father and your mother [covenant requirement], that your days [as a nation] may be long **in the land** that the LORD your God is giving you.

Some of the other commandments are also worded in such a way that they’re already assuming Israel’s life with God in the land even while Israel was still at Mount Sinai in the desert. (cf. Exod. 20:10, 17) When we come to the “Righteous Judgments” in the Book of the Covenant, we see the same thing – many of these are also worded in such a way that they’re already assuming Israel’s life in the land, even before they get there.

Why is the reality of the land so tightly woven into the making of the covenant itself? It’s really simple. The land isn’t just a *reward* for keeping the covenant; the land was the **place** where covenant relationship with God was to be experienced and lived out to its fullest. The hope and promise of the land was the hope and promise of life lived in the fullness and richness of covenant relationship with God. Covenant and land—covenant and place—are intimately tied

together – they **cannot** ultimately be separated. (Does this make you wonder about us under the New Covenant?)

In light of all this, it's pretty obvious that in order for Israel to enjoy life in the place that God has prepared for experiencing covenant relationship, Israel must **keep** the covenant. That's the whole point! So, here's where we really have to emphasize all the alternating "I's" and "You's." (See chart on page 9) The point is not simply "If you obey Me, then I'll give you lots of good stuff," but rather, "If you *keep* My covenant then you will enjoy all the blessings of life lived with Me in covenant relationship (which is to say, life **in the land**).

Can you see, now, why the land is such a pervasive theme throughout the entire Old Testament? Can you see why the land is such an essential part of God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and why the land is woven into the very heart of the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai? So, what does this have to do with us? Or, *does it* have anything to do with us?

II. LAND and COVENANT in Genesis 1-2

In order to fully understand and make sense of the *place* that God has prepared for Israel, we first have to go back to the very, very beginning. Genesis one tells how God created and formed the heavens and the earth. And then, when this "place" was all prepared and ready, God created Adam and Eve to live in this wonderful, beautiful, perfect **place**.

- Genesis 1:27-28 — God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth..."

God first prepared the place (the whole world), and then He created the people to live in that place, and then on Day 7, God Himself took up residence in that place (this is the meaning of God's rest). The earth was to be the **place** where Adam and Eve would share with God in His own festive and joyful "**rest**."

When we move on to Genesis chapter two, the camera zooms in to give us a more detailed picture.

- Genesis 2:8 — And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

So, in the midst of this whole big creation, there was a garden. We could say that the world was God's temple, but the garden was the holy of holies. The Garden was the place where God walked. (Gen. 3:8) The Garden was the place where the tree of life grew – which was the symbol of God's special, life-giving presence. (Gen. 2:9) The Garden was the place where every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food grew. It was a place of rivers, and gold, and precious stones. (Gen. 2:9-14) And it was into this holy garden sanctuary that God placed Adam. The point of the garden was not simply lots of good "stuff" (materialism)! The garden was the **place** where Adam was to experience all the joy and abundance of **living life** in covenant relationship with his Creator (sharing with God in His rest). And so, eventually, as Adam worked the ground,

and as Adam and Eve were fruitful and multiplied, this garden was intended to cover the entire earth. (Gen. 1:27-28) This special “**place**” was eventually to extend around the entire globe, filling the **whole world**.

From the very beginning, covenant and land—covenant and place—have gone together; they can’t be separated. And from the very beginning, this place has been nothing less than all the earth – the whole world.

Of course, it’s pretty obvious that in order for Adam and Eve to enjoy life in this **place** that God has prepared for living in covenant relationship with Him, they will have to **keep** the covenant. That’s the whole essence of the **place**! That’s the whole point! But, we know they didn’t, and so they were expelled from God’s place, and the land was cursed.

It’s only against **this** backdrop that we can understand, here in Exodus 23, the place that God has prepared for Israel. But before we come back to Exodus 23, let’s skip ahead now from the first two chapters of the Bible to the last two chapters of the Bible.

III. LAND and COVENANT in Revelation 21-22

- Revelation 21:1-4 — Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God [covenant relationship]. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

The Bible ends the same way it began – with the creation of a **place** where covenant life with God can be lived, and where all the *blessings* of covenant life with God can be *experienced* (rest; cf. Heb. 4). In Genesis, this **place** was *intended* to be all the earth (the whole world). In Revelation, this **place** *is* the whole world – it *is* all the earth. And so, in Revelation 22, we see again a life-giving river flowing from the throne of God, and even the tree of life itself growing all along the banks of the river. (Rev. 22:1-2)

It’s only in **light** of these “bookends” of the Bible, it’s only against this backdrop of the beginning and the end that we can understand, here in Exodus 23, the **place** that God has prepared for Israel.

IV. The LAND and COVENANT in the Middle

- Exodus 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.

In comparison with the universal, worldwide scope of the “place” at the two bookends of the Bible, this “place” is geographically very small and limited. It’s like the narrowing in the middle

of an hour glass. This is *specifically* the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. (Exod. 23:23, 28) The borders of this land are specifically identified:

- Exodus 23:31 — I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates.

So the question is, what does this “little” place in the middle have to do with the “whole world” at the beginning and the end? One thing that all three “places” have in common is that each one of them is to be the place where all the blessings and delights of covenant relationship with God are enjoyed. The point of all three places is identically the same. So, just like the two creations in Genesis and Revelation, so also Canaan is described as a place where God’s people share in God’s rest.

- Joshua 1:13 (cf. Heb. 4) — The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.

But isn’t it pretty obvious that this place in the middle, this place called Canaan, can’t possibly be what the Bible envisions in Genesis 1-2 and what we see ultimately fulfilled in Revelation 21-22? “Rest” in Canaan can’t ultimately be the rest intended for Adam and Eve in Genesis and fulfilled in the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation. So, what’s going on here? Why *Canaan*? Why *this* place? How does it **fit**?

V. God’s AWESOME PROMISE to Abraham!!!

Listen to the first promises God made to Abraham:

- Genesis 12:1-3 — Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the **land [Canaan]** that I will show you. And I will make of you a great **nation [Israel]**... and in you **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed.

Here we see Abraham as the father of a **single** nation living in **one** specific land. And yet, somehow, in Abraham **all** the families of the earth are to be blessed. How will this happen? Look what happens in Genesis seventeen! God says to Abraham:

- Genesis 17:4-6 — You shall be the **father of a multitude of nations**. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the **father of a multitude of nations**.

Somehow, Abraham is not simply to be the father of a single nation, Israel, but rather the father of a **multitude** of nations. How is it that in Abraham all the nations of the earth are to be blessed? Simple. Abraham is ultimately to be the **father** of all these nations (not just of Israel), and they are all to be his offspring. But if Abraham is to be the father of this “**multitude of nations**,” then ultimately the place and the land promised to Abraham and to his offspring must be all the earth – the **whole world**. This **multitude** of nations who are **all the offspring of**

Abraham couldn't possibly all fit into Canaan. So God expounds His promise to Abraham even further in Genesis 26:

- Genesis 26:3–4 — Sojourn in this **land [Canaan]**, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give **all these lands [plural]**, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. **I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands.**

If Abraham is to be the father of a multitude of nations all living in covenant relationship with God, then he'll have to inherit more than just the land of Canaan. (cf. Gen. 22:17-18) The land promised to Abraham and his offspring ultimately has to be the whole world. Paul read these same verses in Genesis, and he saw that here was a “promise made **to Abraham** that he would be **heir of the world.**” (Rom. 4:13)

So we see that there are different **layers** in God's original promise to Abraham. On the one hand, we have as Abraham's offspring a single nation living in Canaan in covenant relationship with God. On the other hand, we have as Abraham's offspring a multitude of nations living in all the earth in covenant relationship with God. These are not two separate promises or two separate covenants. This is one covenant and one promise with two intimately connected layers inside.

What's clear is that when a multitude of nations descended from Abraham and living together in all the earth in covenant relationship with God comes to fulfillment, it will no longer make sense to talk about a single nation descended from Abraham living in the land of Canaan! When it finally arrives, the second layer of God's covenant promise to Abraham (all the earth) will absorb into itself the first layer (Canaan) – thus fulfilling the whole *meaning* and *intent* of Canaan. In other words, right there *within* the original promise made to Abraham is both shadow *and* substance, copy *and* original, type *and* antitype. **When the substance of the promise does finally come (all the earth), the shadow (Canaan) will be fulfilled and taken up into the substance. When the original finally arrives (the whole world), the copy (Canaan) will be fulfilled and taken up into the original.**

VI. Tracing the Promise (Part I): A Shadow and a Copy

So, what we have here in Exodus 23 is the copy and the shadow. Remember all the “you's” in our passage this morning? God says to the **single** nation of Israel, “If **you** keep my covenant, then you will enjoy abundant and long life in **Canaan** – the **place** that I've prepared specifically for experiencing the joy and the blessings of covenant relationship with Me.” Fast forward about fifty years into the future and we read in the book of Joshua:

- Joshua 21:43–45 — Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

God had kept his promises, but Israel didn't keep the covenant; and so in the book of Judges we see them losing the land to their enemies – along with all the joys and blessings of covenant

relationship with God. Fast-forward almost five hundred years from now, and David's son Solomon is ruling over Israel in Jerusalem. We read in 1 Kings chapter four:

- 1 Kings 4:20–21 — Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

Here's another example of how God has kept His promises, yet again. But once again, Israel will fail over and over again to keep the covenant, leading eventually to being exiled out of the land.

Can you see what's happening here? Exile isn't just a punishment because God was angry with the Israelites. Exile was the loss of the **place** that God had prepared for His people to experience the joy and abundance of covenant life with Him. Israel's exile from Canaan was the expelling of Adam and Eve from the garden all over again. But this is only Canaan, the copy and the shadow. What about the substance of God's promise to Abraham? What about God's promise to Abraham that His offspring would inherit all the earth – that the **whole world** would be the **place** where Abraham's offspring would enjoy all the blessings of covenant relationship with God?

With the growing threat of exile, the prophets began to speak of Israel's return to the land. And they did return in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Once again, God was keeping His promises, but Israel still failed to keep the covenant. So they lived in the land, for the most part ruled by foreign powers. The land had ceased to be a place where the joy and abundance of covenant life with God was experienced.

But now, the time was drawing near when the **copy** (Canaan) was to be fulfilled and taken up into the **original** (all the earth) – when the **shadow** (Canaan) was to be fulfilled and taken up into the **substance** (the whole world) – when the first layer of God's *one* promise to Abraham would be fulfilled and taken up into the second layer of that *same* promise. The prophets began equating Israel's return to the **land of Canaan** with a **brand new creation** – a whole new heavens and earth. (cf. Isa. 65:17-25) We remember from God's promise to Abraham the *reason* that all the earth will be necessary; the reason is that the children of Abraham will be **too many** to fit in Canaan!

- Isaiah 54:1–3 (cf. Gen. 22:17-18; Ps. 72) — Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

Abraham's children will be so numerous and so spread out that the whole world will be their home, the **place** that God has prepared for them to live together with Him in covenant relationship. But how can this be? How will God keep His promise to Abraham?

VII. Tracing the Promise (Part II): The Shadow caught up into the Substance, the Copy into the Original

Jesus, the seed and offspring of Abraham, will keep the covenant that Israel broke, and then through His own shed blood He will make a New Covenant with the people – a covenant that will actually turn the people into covenant-**keepers**, a covenant that will actually incorporate the Gentile nations into the single seed of Abraham, **and SO ALSO a covenant that brings into existence the PLACE that God promised long ago to Abraham – the PLACE where the offspring of Abraham will all live forever with God, experiencing all the joy and abundance of covenant life.**

Covenant and land—covenant and place—are intimately tied together – they can't ever be separated. And so when the New Covenant comes, the land comes **with** it – no longer just the land of Canaan, but now all the earth. The Psalmist said, under the Old Covenant:

- Psalm 37:11 — The meek shall inherit the **land [Canaan]** and delight themselves in abundant peace.

When Jesus comes to bring the New Covenant, He shows how the shadow is being fulfilled and taken up into the substance when He quotes the Psalmist:

- Matthew 5:5 — Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the **earth**.

Covenant and land—covenant and **place**—*can't ever be separated*.

And so the promise of land (from now on, I'll say the promise of a **place**) made to Abraham has now been fulfilled in Christ for all of us who are Abraham's offspring. Already, we are **citizens** of the Jerusalem that is above – of the heavenly land and country where God is. Paul writes to Jewish and Gentile Christians just like you and me (quoting Isaiah fifty-four!):

- Galatians 4:26–27 — The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”
- Hebrews 11:9–10 — By faith [Abraham] went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Abraham saw very clearly a shadow (Canaan), but he knew that that shadow was being cast by something else (or someone) else. Abraham saw in the first layer of God's promise to him (Canaan) only the shadow and copy of its ultimate fulfillment in the second layer **of that same promise** that God had made to him (all the earth). This was true not only of Abraham, but of all the Old Testament saints:

- Hebrews 11:13–16, 39–40 — These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth... They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he **has [now] prepared for them a city**... And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Once again, the “already” is our guarantee of the “**not yet.**” The city and land of which we are citizens *now* will be fully **revealed** one day in a new creation—a new heavens and a new earth—the **place** where all the offspring of Abraham will live together, forever, in all the bliss and joy of covenant life with God. (cf. Rom. 8:18-25)

VIII. Call to HOPE and HOLINESS

- Exodus 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.

This was the shadow in the promise to Abraham. Jesus came in order that the shadow called Canaan might be fulfilled and caught up into the substance of that awesome promise that God made to Abraham so long ago. And so, Jesus says to us:

- John 14:1–3 (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-10) — “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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.

“Let not your hearts be troubled”; instead, let them be brimming with hope, and overflowing with joy – because He has prepared a **place** for us, a place—a land—where we will all live together, forever, in all the bliss and joy of covenant life with God. *No more* will we ever fear the threat of exile and banishment from the land. Jesus, through His own shed blood, has kept the covenant for us and in our place, so that in Him, we too might become covenant-keepers – all the “you’s” of our passage this morning finally fulfilled in us. (cf. Rom. 8:1-4) In other words, not only has God prepared the place for us, but He has prepared—and *is* preparing—*us* for that place. (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-5, 17)

- 2 Peter 3:13–14 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13-16; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Jn. 3:2-3) — According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, in peace.

Exodus 23:20–33

Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the PLACE that I have prepared.

[YOU] 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. 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.

When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out,

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.

YOU shall serve the LORD your God,

and HE [I] will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your LAND; I will fulfill the number of your days [in the land].

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. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the LAND become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the LAND. 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.

YOU shall make no covenant with them and their gods. 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.