

Ezekiel 20:1-38

And I will bring you into the bond of the covenant – v. 37

The bond of the covenant was very likely the issue on the minds of the elders when they came to Ezekiel to inquire (v.1). They knew – they had been raised under the teaching that they were the chosen people of God. And yet they found themselves now taken into captivity by the Babylonians. They were marched out of the promised land as vanquished vassals and yet the city of Jerusalem still stood at that point. There was still a remnant there. And so the captives would have cause to wonder – will they soon be delivered from their captivity? Would Jerusalem in the end prevail against the superior nation of Babylon?

What the exiles, perhaps, didn't know (but Ezekiel knew it, for God had told him – 11:15) was that the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem were so puffed up with pride that they were persuaded that the city had been purged from its dross by the removal of the others – and they that remained were the true chosen ones to inherit the land.

Now we know from the book of Jeremiah that there was some correspondence between the exiles and the ones who remained at Jerusalem. Jeremiah had written to the exiles and told them to settle in the land of their captivity and pray for the peace of the land in which they now lived. And yet there were false prophets in Jerusalem that were promising deliverance and proclaiming a short captivity for those who had been removed.

And so these elders that approached Ezekiel were of such a frame of mind and heart that there was only one thing they wanted to hear. And when they didn't hear what they wanted to hear they concluded, to Ezekiel's dismay, that he was speaking to them in parables {20:49}.

So they came to Ezekiel – seemingly to inquire – but God said to them he would not be inquired of by them – but He nonetheless had a message for them. And Ezekiel, acting as a judge would judge them in proclaiming that message. And basically that message amounted to a history lesson.

Ezekiel recounts the sins and abominations of their fathers and then makes the application of the lesson by telling them that they are just like their fathers. And yet in spite of it all – in spite of their hard hearts and sinful ways – in spite of the fact that Ezekiel and Jeremiah were both preaching the destruction of Jerusalem – in spite of the fact that the city would be destroyed, and the temple burned to the ground and the remaining inhabitants of the city taken into captivity – in spite of all of that the Lord's purpose in grace would still be accomplished. Speaking to what Paul in the New Testament teaches is a *spiritual Israel* we're told in v. 37 *And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.*

The primary feature of the bond of the covenant and the feature that applies to us as believers in Christ is God's pledge to take a people to Himself so that those people would be His and He would be theirs. You could sum up that covenant in its essence by the statement we find in the preface to the 10 commandments – *I am the Lord thy God*.

We're called upon to remember and reflect upon that truth this morning around the table of the Lord. And we're called upon to remember all that was required of God in order to bring it to pass and all that is expected of us in the light of who our God is and what He's done for us in order to take us to Himself and be our God by the bond of the covenant.

Now in the passage we've read just now we find two recurring phrases:

We find *the lifting up of God's hand* – and we find *the pouring out of God's fury*. Look at the references with me – { **see highlighted verses** }.

Each of these statements has something to say to us about how God brings us into the bond of His covenant. And I think these are appropriate things for us to remember around His table this morning.

The Lifting of His Hand – The Pouring Out of His Fury – and their Bearing on the Bond of His Covenant.

I. The Lifting of His Hand – {20:5,6}

The picture that comes to mind by the lifting up of a single hand is the taking of an oath. {**cf. the oath taken at a trial – or a high official being sworn in to office**}

We find an example of this in Rev. 10:5,6

And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

I like what one commentator says about this action of lifting up the hand - *The thrice lifting up of God's hand implies the solemn earnestness of God's purpose of grace to them i.e. His people.*

Our God who cannot lie – who is ever faithful to His word because He's faithful to Himself, nevertheless condescends to bind Himself to an oath in His gracious dealings with His people. So in Heb. 6:17,18 we read: *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*

Verse 18 tells us that *by two immutable things* we might have a strong consolation. The first immutable thing is not hard to discern – that’s given to us in back in v. 13 – the promise God made to Abraham that he would be blessed – that promise was made with an oath.

The 2nd immutable thing I believe is revealed to us in Heb. 7:21 (*For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:*) And so the promise came to Abraham by an oath that he and his seed would be blessed. And the promise came to Christ by His Father by an oath that He would be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Our assurance, therefore, of the blessings of salvation are based upon the promise made to our spiritual father – Abraham, and to the promise made to Christ our great High Priest. Both promises have been confirmed with an oath made by God Himself.

Now that same epistle to Hebrews teaches us that for Christ to be our great high priest He must become one of us. *Every high priest*, we read in 5:1 *taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God.* To be our Great High Priest – Christ must become a man in order to represent us in things pertaining to God. And just as every high priest was called into that office so Christ was called into His office. But one of the distinctive things about Christ’s calling that was not true of the Levitical priests is that Christ entered into His office with an oath.

Now if you would turn back with me to Ezek. 20 – bearing in mind, now – that the lifting of God’s hand pertains to His oath in grace – we’re able to see the things that God obligated Himself to by this oath.

The first thing is given to us in v. 5 – *In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God.*

God took an oath – or He lifted up His hand to become the God of His people. He chose them it says in the verse and He swore to His chosen ones that He would be their God.

This is an incredible manifestation of grace when you think about it. Fallen man had no claim on God. Mankind violated the covenant of works through Adam in the garden of Eden. He was created by God – he was blessed by God with all that he needed or could wish. He had the opportunity given to him by God to enter into life with the blessing of God becoming his portion forever – but he forfeited the blessing and instead accrued the penalty of death.

And since that day no man has ever been able to lay claim on God as being his God. The natural man is at enmity with God. Our natural propensity was and is to remove God from His throne that we might set ourselves on that throne instead. But in spite of our rebellion and guilt and spiritual death which would lead to physical and then eternal

death – instead of dealing with us for our sins – God lifted His hand to be our God nonetheless. This is condescending grace.

And it carries to us the obligation to be loyal to Him as He is to us. One of the things we must do around this table today is to search our hearts on that issue. Have we been loyal to Him as we should be? Have we put away our idols and our abominations and kept from defiling ourselves? And if we discover that we haven't been loyal to Him in this fashion then we must first confront that issue around this table before we partake of it.

Some time ago we went through the 10 commandments in our catechism studies when I was conducting those studies. And I pointed out at the time how often in those 10 commandments reference is made to the fact that God is our God.

The preface of the 10 commandments which is foundational to all that follows makes the statement – *I am the LORD thy God*. And of course based on this preface the 1st commandment tells us we're to have no other gods before the Lord our God. I've often marveled at the grace revealed in that commandment. Would God have us take Him to be our God? Does He have a desire for us? And indeed He does – and that desire is shown in the strength of His commandment that we're to take Him as our God. And no wonder – He's lifted His hand in an oath to take us to be His people. I surely follows that we would take Him as our God.

In the 2nd commandment we read as a reason for obedience – *For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God*. In the 3rd commandment the point is made again – *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain*. In the 4th commandment we're told *the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God*.

We're to remember today that in order for these references to the LORD thy God to become real – God first took an oath to take us to be His people. And in keeping with that oath He sent His Son to become One of us to meet our obligations – to remove every obstacle that stood in the way of God being our God and we being His people.

But we must note something else in connection with that oath in Ezek. 20:5. Notice in that verse also that God lifted up His hand and manifested Himself to His people – **{20:5}**. He has not sworn to be our God afar off – but He's sworn to be near at hand. This is why we should expect that around this table we'll know His presence in our midst and in our hearts. In swearing to be our God He accompanied that oath with the manifestation of His presence. I think it would be correct to say that with the same oath by which He bound Himself to be our God He also bound Himself to manifest Himself to His people.

Something else we may note in verse 6 as it concerns this oath – we see in that verse that He lifted up His hand to deliver His people out of Egypt and to bring them to the promised land – **{20:6}**. We, of course, enjoy the spiritual counterpart to the historical

narrative of the book of Exodus. We could say that God lifted up His hand to deliver us from the guilt and bondage and damnation of sin.

By lifting up His hand in this fashion – He took to Himself the responsibility of bringing us from spiritual death to spiritual life. He pledged with an oath that He would bring His people safely to glory. Reference is made to this lifting up of His hand when we read in Heb. 7:21,22 – *For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by Him that said unto Him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec – By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*

We see, therefore, that by the lifting up of His hand He takes the responsibility to bring His people into the bond of His covenant. He will not let His own get away from Him. He has sworn to that end. But would you note with me next:

II. The Pouring Out of His Fury in Respect to this Covenant – {See highlighted references}

And the thing I would have you see first under this heading is the restraint that was exercised by God on account of the oath He had taken toward His covenant –

Ezekiel is recounting the unfaithfulness of Israel in spite of God's purpose and God's grace and God's uplifted hand. By their sin they invited God's fury. And so we've read in these various references that God initially determined to pour out His fury – but in each case their follows a statement that indicates what God did instead {see highlighted references}.

We would do well this morning to reflect on the longsuffering of God toward us. How patient was God with you during the days that preceded your salvation. How often did you deserve to have it said of you by God – *I will pour out my fury upon him.*

You can say that there's a sense in which the wrath of God is suspended above the head of every sinner in the world today. Paul tells us in Rom. 2:5 that the sinner – *after his hard and impenitent heart treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God* (Rom. 2:5). That wrath has not yet fallen and the fact that it has not yet fallen is traceable to the goodness of God according to v. 4 of that same chapter in Romans.

But the sinner despises the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God and rather than repenting he continues in sin and thus stores up wrath against the day of wrath. Can you remember being in that condition? Can you remember the time in your life when you went skipping merrily after sin without a thought in the world toward God and His judgement?

His fury mounted against you – and yet He stayed His hand because He had a purpose in grace. How thankful we can and should be that our lives were spared and that we weren't sent instantly to hell in those days.

And how often do we try God's patience even as His people? This was the problem with the nation of Israel. They professed to belong to God and yet pursued their own ways with no thought or no fear of the righteous retribution of God.

Would you notice in these passages that refer to the pouring out of His fury that there is a definite aim in view that must be accomplished because of God's character. It says in v. 8 – *I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.* (cf. also v. 21).

These verses indicate to us that there must be satisfaction to God's anger. His anger is just. His anger rises due to the violations of His holiness and righteousness. That anger cannot simply be set aside. There must be the accomplishment of His righteous anger.

And in v. 33 we see that this poured out fury is closely connected to God's rule over His people. *As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you.*

It's the same for you and for me. God's dealings with us – His rule over us must be grounded in this fury poured out – which leads me to say that at the cross when darkness came over the world for the space of 3 hours this fury was poured out. It was poured out on His Son. And as a result of this poured out fury – God's anger against you and against me was accomplished – which is to say that Christ in the pouring out of His blood was the propitiation for our sins.

And so we're able to approach God this morning on this basis – His fury has been poured out – His anger has been accomplished – His justice has been satisfied and therefore we can approach Him and worship Him and strive to live for Him in the knowledge that He is just and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus.

The cup – which is the emblem of His blood, serves to remind us that by the shedding of His blood His anger has been appeased.

And so as we come to His table this morning – let's come with confidence. We are His people – He is our God. He has lifted His hand to make it so. He has sworn to that effect and has executed His purpose in grace with that aim in view.

And He has poured out His fury with that aim in view as well. He could not be our God and we could not be His people apart from the pouring out of His fury. Today we should be humbled and at the same time exalted to think of His oath, His blood, and its bearing on the covenant of His grace.

May we find the grace to search our hearts this day to be done with those defiling and abominable things that called for the pouring out of His wrath and may we with grateful hearts remember the truth that His wrath has been poured out on His Son that we wouldn't have to endure everlasting damnation. As we think upon His body and blood this evening let's make it our prayer that we may brought more intimately into the bond of His covenant.