

THE COVENANT CODE: FEASTS, CONQUEST EXODUS 23:14-33

Yahweh commanded the Israelites to celebrate three feasts to Him every year. At this point in the narrative, He didn't elaborate on the specifics of the feasts, but He did specify the names of the feasts and He issued the command that all the Israelite males celebrate them by appearing before Him at those times and in the place he designated. Exodus 34, Leviticus 23, Numbers 28-29, and Deuteronomy 16 and 26 reveal more specific instructions for the administration of these feasts.

Exodus 23:14, 17 ¹⁴“Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast [גָּגָל] to Me....
¹⁷“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

Implied in this command is the fact of a location where the people would go to celebrate these feasts which, by travelling to that location, would place them in the presence of the Lord. This location would be marked by the presence of the Tabernacle, the location of which could vary, and later by the Temple in Jerusalem which, of course was permanently located on the Temple Mount. Isaiah called Jerusalem (or Zion) “the city of our appointed feasts” (Is. 33:20).

The Lord's presence was verified by the glory of the Lord which filled the Tabernacle.

Exodus 40:34–35 ³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

The same thing happened when the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple immediately prior to Solomon's dedication of the newly constructed house of the Lord.

1 Kings 8:10–11 ¹⁰It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

The Lord's presence in the Temple lasted until just before the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Ezekiel 10:18–19 ¹⁸Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. ¹⁹When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

The Lord never returned to reestablish His residence in the rebuilt Temple and obviously at this time there is no Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. Only upon the return of the Lord will His presence once again reside in the Temple and that will not only be the glory of the Lord residing there, but His physical presence will be there for 1,000 years ruling from the Millennial Temple on the throne of David. Once the Millennial phase of the Kingdom has run its course and the New Heaven and New Earth begin, the Lord will permanently, physically manifest His presence among His people for eternity.

Revelation 21:3 ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

At the time under discussion in Exodus 23, these things were all still in the future and some of them have yet to take place. The point is, the Israelites were to attend three feasts each year in the Lord's designated place which would also serve to put them in His presence where they could celebrate Him through these feasts.

Celebrate a feast, *תָּגַג*, means to hold or celebrate a festival, to hold a feast or to celebrate a holy day; it refers to making a pilgrimage to a holy place to worship in a festive atmosphere. It is usually used in the context of rejoicing and refers to festive attitudes and actions. This is not referring to feasts in general but to the appointed feasts the Lord identified in this Scripture. In this context, this is a "happy" word. Celebrating the feasts to the Lord in the presence of the Lord was to be a joyful occasion; it wasn't supposed to be boring mental drudgery. These feasts are also called "holy convocations," (Lv. 23; Num. 28-29) *מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ*, an assembly, a group, or a convocation referring to a collective of people gathered for a purpose, hence, there is a sense of appointed times for these feasts. Isaiah called them the "appointed feasts," *מוֹעֵד*, meaning appointed or designated time referring to a particular point of time with a focus that the time has a purpose designated by an authority. The purpose was to conduct a meeting between God and man for specific holy reasons. These feasts do have a specific purpose; they tell the story of God's plan for Israel and for history. They begin with the Passover which pictures the death of the Messiah to pay the redemption price and they end with the Messiah ruling over His people on earth.

One suspects the feasts were also intended to keep the people's minds focused on Yahweh and to give them the sense of a shared community commitment to Judaism and the one true God who established it and brought them out of slavery in Egypt. The people needed to have a sense of national unity and identity brought together by worshiping the one true God.

These feasts were and still are specifically Jewish in nature; they were not and are not given to the church. It is not necessary to participate in them in order to be a Christian. There is a movement afoot today wherein some Christians mistakenly believe they must adopt Jewish practices in order to be true Christians, but this could not be a more erroneous line of thought. Conversely, one does not have to be a Jew in order to receive the blessings pictured in them. This is due to the blessings clause of the Abrahamic Covenant in which the promises to Abram—land, seed, blessing—would actually be a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3) and not just to Abram's descendants.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is the first feast they are to gather together to observe.

Exodus 23:15 ¹⁵“You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib [Nisan], for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.

This feast originated in the Exodus when they left Egypt in such haste there was no time to leaven their bread and allow time for it to rise. In addition to that, leaven represents sin and they were not to have any leaven in their dwellings for

seven days (Ex. 12:14-20). Originally, the months of the Hebrew calendar were named after the tradition of the Canaanites, but after the Babylonian captivity the Babylonian names of the months were adopted and that system is still in use today. Originally celebrated in the month of Abib, the feast is now in the month of Nisan and nothing but the name of the month changed.

Passover is celebrated on Nisan 14, Unleavened Bread from Nisan 15-21, and Firstfruits on Nisan 16. By the time of Christ, Passover and Unleavened Bread were essentially considered to be one celebration and together they were referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Luke 22:1. ⁷ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching.... ⁷ Then came the *first* day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover *lamb* had to be sacrificed.

The first and seventh days of the feast were to be a Sabbath, no work was to be done, and they were to present a sacrificial offering to the Lord each of the seven days (Lv. 23:7-8). Those offerings coupled with the offering of the firstfruits are what the Lord was referring to when He said, "none shall appear before me empty-handed."

The other two feasts consist of one more spring feast and a fall feast.

Exodus 23:16 ¹⁶ "Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.

The spring feast is the Feast of the Harvest also known as the Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, or Pentecost. This feast always occurs on Sivan 6 seven weeks

after the Feast of Firstfruits. In Hebrew, Shavuot, singular: שְׁבוּעַת; plural: שָׁבועֹת, refers to a period of seven units of time. In Greek, Pentecost, πεντηκοστή, refers to fiftieth or a fiftieth part which are derived from the number five, hence, fifty days from the Feast of Firstfruits to the Feast of Weeks.

On this day, the firstfruits of the summer wheat crop were brought to the Temple. The earlier Feast of Firstfruits were the first of the spring barley crop. The Feast of the Harvest marked the beginning of the summer harvest period. The Jews also came to refer to this feast as *Atzeret* which means conclusion because it marked the beginning of an interval between the end of Passover and the spring harvest to the fall feasts. The Jews could not eat of the barley at Firstfruits nor of the wheat at Weeks until the firstfruits offerings were made.

At Weeks, two loaves of leavened wheat bread were used as a wave offering before the Lord. They could not be burned on the altar because they contained leaven; therefore, they were to be eaten during the priest's meal at the end of the day.

The fall feast, the Feast of the Ingathering, is also known as *Sukkot*, Booths, or Tabernacles and it is observed on Tishri 15 five days after the Day of Atonement. *Sukkot*, from the Hebrew סֻכּוֹת, means a dwelling place or shelter; it means housing of various shapes and sizes with a special focus on where one dwells as booths, huts, tents, etc. During this feast, the Israelites constructed little huts or booths and covered them with tree branches and palm fronds to serve as their

abodes during the festival. Numerous offerings to the Lord were made during this time.

This feast marked the end of the summer harvest season and the beginning of the rainy season which would prepare the land for the next year's crops. The feast was a celebration of the goodness of God for providing the harvest just past and it also served as a reminder of their wilderness journey during the Exodus when they had no permanent shelter.

The concept of Tabernacles refers to the fact the Lord will be living among the people during the Kingdom. He will gather the Remnant back into the land as He inaugurates the Kingdom. Additionally, He will save the believing Gentiles to enter the Kingdom.

How does the fulfillment of each the feasts relate to history and to the future? Every feast marks some significant event in world history. Passover relates to redemption; the Lamb of God has been sacrificed and propitiation has been made (John 1:29). Unleavened Bread relates to sanctification; the holy sinless One did not experience decay in the grave (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35, 37). Firstfruits was fulfilled in the resurrection of the Lord. He is the firstfruits of all who will one day be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:20). The Feast of Weeks inaugurated the dispensation of Grace when the Holy Spirit began His indwelling ministry for believers (Acts 2:1-4) and the barrier between Jew and Gentile was removed (Eph. 2:11-22).

It is therefore reasonable to conclude the three fall feasts will likewise mark significant events in Judeo-Christian history. If the spring feasts have been fulfilled in historical events, then it is more than reasonable to believe the fall feasts will likewise be fulfilled in historical events. The Feast of Trumpets represents the Rapture of the Church and the initiation of the dark days of judgment the Jews and the world are about to experience. The Day of Atonement represents the judgment of the wicked, Jew and Gentile, and the salvation of the faithful Jewish Remnant and believing Gentiles. Tabernacles represents the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom when God will be dwelling with His people on planet earth.

The only fulfillment of these feasts that is questioned by some dispensationalists is the occurrence of the Rapture of the Church at the Feast of Trumpets, but that fits perfectly into the prophetic timeline of the feasts. The Day of Atonement is widely acknowledged to be fulfilled in judgment and salvation and Tabernacles is likewise acknowledged to be fulfilled in the Second Coming and the inauguration of the Kingdom. If Trumpets isn't fulfilled in the Rapture, then the prophetic sequence of the feasts, spring and fall, is broken. Some dispensationalists want to place the Rapture at Pentecost, but that was fulfilled in the establishment of the Church and this age seems to represent the summer growing period between Pentecost and Trumpets when the harvest at the end of the age will be gathered.

Trumpets occurs on Tishri 1 at a new moon which is only a sliver of a crescent moon and it is a period of dark night; all the other feasts occur during the

time the moon is bright. This sets up the Days of Awe that represent the judgment that is going to fall on the Jews and on the world. It is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). The blowing of the shofar serves as a call to repentance and as notice that the most awful days on the Jewish holy calendar are beginning. The Feast of Trumpets then is a warning to the Jews of impending judgment. What better warning could they have that the Tribulation is imminent than the Rapture of the Church? Many of the Jews know these things now; they know the dispensational understanding of the end times concerning Israel, but they don't believe it. When these things begin to happen one day, they will at least start to wonder about them instead of simply denying them. That will begin with the Rapture.

The next command dealt with sacrifices.

Exodus 23:18 ¹⁸"You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning.

The Canaanites engaged in many agricultural worship services and feasts and it seems that Yahweh instituted some regulations to differentiate what the Israelites were to do in comparison to Canaanites practices.

We know that the life of a creature is in the blood and man was forbidden to eat the flesh of an animal with the blood.

Genesis 9:4 ⁴"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood.

This command was issued long before the Mosaic Law was given. It wasn't followed, of course, and the command was repeated as part of the Law.

Leviticus 7:26 ²⁶You are not to eat any blood, either of bird or animal, in any of your dwellings.

Pagans apparently used the information that the life is in the blood to consume blood. Whether they did this in an attempt to identify with the animal, many of which they deified, or to prolong their own lives, I wasn't able to discover. Whatever the reason, the Israelites were not to partake of the blood as the pagans did. The wording of this command suggests the leaven and the blood were mixed. It is possible the command is referring to a pagan practice of mixing blood into their leavened baked goods. However it was done, leaven was not to be mixed with the sacrificial blood on the altar and burnt together. Actually, leaven was never to be burnt on the altar. We know now the blood of Christ represented His holiness and His perfect, sinless righteousness and the Israelite sacrifices were pictures of that perfect sacrifice; therefore, burning leaven on the altar where the sacrifices represented the Messiah was unthinkable and forbidden.

Leviticus 2:11 ¹¹No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD.

The Lord made the connection between His sinless blood and the provision of life for all who placed their faith in Him.

John 6:53, 55 ⁵³So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.... ⁵⁵"For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.

The command prohibiting leaving the fat of His feast to remain overnight may refer to the Passover lamb which, if left overnight, was to be burned. The parallel passage in Exodus 34:25 amplified this command.

Exodus 12:10 ¹⁰“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.

Exodus 34:25 ²⁵“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.

It may also refer to keeping some of the fat until the next day, for whatever reason, that was supposed to be burned on the altar as an offering to God. That would constitute depriving God of what was rightfully His and keeping it for oneself.

The next command concerns the quality of the firstfruits offering and a command to avoid a pagan practice.

Exodus 23:19 ¹⁹“You shall bring the choice [ראשית] first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. “You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.

Some commentators claim there are two elements involved in the offering of the firstfruits. First is the quantity. If the offering was a tithe of grain, then one could fudge on the quantity and short the offering by claiming the harvest was smaller than it really was. That cannot be done with an animal; the whole animal was sacrificed or nothing was sacrificed. We do know they tithed some of the agricultural production; the Lord mentioned it in Matthew 23:23 when He was pronouncing woes on the scribes and Pharisees and one of the woes was

for faithfully tithing “mint and dill and cummin [sic]” while neglecting the “weightier provisions of the law.” In the case of firstfruits, however, the tithe wasn’t an issue. They offered a sheaf of barley as a representative sample of the whole harvest to come. Quantity does not seem to be the issue in this verse; quality is the issue. Choice, ראשית, refers to what is first, but it also refers to the best or the choicest meaning that which is superior in value to all others in the same class or kind. The barley sheaves brought to the offering were to be composed of the best stalks producing the most grain in the best condition. They were not to bring the scraggly stalks with little grain of poor quality on them. Firstfruits required the best offering available.

The command prohibiting boiling a kid goat in its mother’s milk has puzzled people for a very long time. There have been some manuscripts or inscriptions found that indicate boiling a kid in its mother’s milk was a pagan fertility rite; therefore, the Israelites were not to engage in that activity. Apparently, the Bedouins still practice this cooking method, but whether or not they attach any kind of fertility significance to it or not, I couldn’t determine. Some commentators want to deny any connection with pagan practices, but it seems most likely that is the reason for the prohibition. Unger elaborated on the pagan practice. “[This command] constitutes a protest against a Canaanite fertility cult practice of preparing a sacrifice. Milk so boiled was sprinkled on the earth to insure good crops. The idea was that the new life of a kid added to its mother’s milk produced double fertility. God’s people were to abhor such rites of occult religion

and look to God to bless the soil. This principle comprised all other heathen practices, which were to be outlawed.”¹

One common but mistaken interpretation of this verse is based on so-called humanitarian grounds, that is, they think it is cruel to kill a young animal and then boil it in its mother’s milk. This view can only be propagated by people who have never had to raise their own animals and then slaughter them and butcher them for food. This was an agrarian way of life and slaughtering animals, young and old, was not a problem to which they gave any kind of humanitarian thought.

Another mistaken view interprets the verse from philosophical grounds which says it is improper or unseemly to use the substance that fed the infant animal then use it to cook young animal to improve its flavor. It is said that something which brings life, the milk for nourishment and sustenance, should not be used to bring death, the milk for cooking it. This is a joining of life and death which they claim is not right. Again, this could only be thought up by well fed people who eat what others produce and who have too much time on their hands. The facts are incorrect. The milk used for cooking did not bring about the death of the kid; a sharp knife to the neck caused the death of the kid. This philosophical concept seems to be the product of a wealthy western worldview that doesn’t understand the Semitic, agricultural mindset of the time. This doesn’t square with the fact it seems to have been a pagan fertility rite.

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 132.

Next, God issued some commands and made some promises through Moses to the Israelites concerning the conquest of the land God promised them.

Exodus 23:20–23 ²⁰“Behold, I am going to send an angel [מלאך] before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹“Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. ²²“But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. 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 completely destroy them.

The exact identity of this angel is disputed. The three options seem to be an angel in general, Moses, or the Angel of the Lord referring to the preincarnate Christ. The most likely explanation and the one held by the majority of commentators is the Angel of the Lord. Verse 23, which says, “I will destroy them” seems to confirm that option.

If it refers to a created angel, it may refer to any angel, or it may be a reference to Michael the Archangel because he is said to be the angel of the Jewish nation. Archangel, ἀρχάγγελος, refers to chief angels of which only two are mentioned in Scripture, Michael and Gabriel. Michael was identified as the angel who stands guard over the sons of your people referring to Daniels' people the Jews, and he was called Daniel's prince.

Daniel 12:1 ¹“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise....

Daniel 10:21 ²¹“However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these *forces* except Michael your prince.

One argument against understanding this to refer to the Angel of the Lord is the Hebrew vocabulary isn't the same. This verse simply refers to an angel, מַלְאָךְ and not to the Angel of the Lord, מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה. The Old Testament uses "Angel of the Lord" so often, it seems odd that specific title wasn't used here if that is what was meant.

Whatever the identity of the angel, either a created angel or the Angel of the Lord, this angel is closely aligned with God because His name is in the angel. God promised the Israelites divine guidance and protection as they journeyed to and into the Promised Land. Subsequent Scriptures also seem to indicate it was Yahweh who was leading the Israelites which would make it more likely this angel is the Angel of the Lord.

The responsibility of the Israelites was to listen to the voice of the angel as it was mediated through Moses. They were to obey him and refrain from rebelling against him; therefore, rebelling against Moses and rebelling against the angel would have been one and the same. The Israelites were not supposed to strike out on their own and do things their own way which would inevitably be the wrong way. Of course, that is exactly what was going to happen, but it didn't have to be that way if they had listened, trusted, and obeyed. For that transgression, they were going to suffer temporal discipline and die in the wilderness without possessing the land. If they had listened and obeyed, God would have destroyed the Canaanites and led them into the land.

Once again God warned the Israelites not to worship the false gods of the Canaanites.

Exodus 23:24 ²⁴“You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their ~~sacred~~ pillars [מִצְבֵּה] in pieces.

This warning was issued over and over again and it obviously was not heeded, with the exception of a few brief periods of time, and which would become more and more obvious throughout the history of the nation culminating in the Babylonian destruction of the Temple and the seventy years of captivity. The Israelites were not to utter the name of the Canaanite's pagan deities, they were not to worship them, serve them, or leave their sacred pillars intact and standing in the land.

Pillar, *מִצְבֵּה*, means something set upright. In the beginning, it referred to an unhewn block of stone utilized for religious and memorial purposes, but it later encompassed wooden objects designed to represent pagan deities most notably Asherah who was a fertility goddess known as the mother goddess, the wife of El and the mother of seventy gods the most notable being Baal.

The Israelites were an agricultural based economy and the Canaanite gods were fertility gods intimately connected to agricultural production and to human reproduction. It would be very enticing for the Israelites to embrace these pagan practices, if they were not completely banished from the land once God conquered it for them. Unfortunately, the Bible refers to the fact the Israelites did not destroy the pillars and banish paganism as commanded.

2 Kings 13:6 ⁶Nevertheless they [the people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel] did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel sin, but walked in them; and the Asherah also remained standing in Samaria.

This was one of the reasons, and probably a primary reason, why God directed Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom.

2 Kings 17:16–18 ¹⁶They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. ¹⁷Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. ¹⁸So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah.

This was also a problem in Judah. When Hezekiah became king, he was a faithful servant of Yahweh and obeyed this command.

2 Kings 18:3–4 ³He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. ⁴He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.

This was short lived because his son Manasseh rebuilt them in Judah.

2 Kings 21:2–7 ²He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. ³For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. ⁴He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." ⁵For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. ⁶He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD provoking *Him to anger*. ⁷Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever.

Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, destroyed much of what his grandfather and his father had done in terms of idolatry. The story of his reforms is recounted for us in 2 Kings 23:1-25.

2 Kings 23:4, 6-7, 11-15 ⁴Then the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.... ⁶He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD outside Jerusalem to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and ground *it* to dust, and threw its dust on the graves of the common people. ⁷He also broke down the houses of the *male* cult prostitutes which were in the house of the LORD, where the women were weaving hangings for the Asherah.... ¹¹He did away with the horses which the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the official, which was in the precincts; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. ¹²The altars which were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king broke down; and he smashed them there and threw their dust into the brook Kidron. ¹³The high places which were before Jerusalem, which were on the right of the mount of destruction which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled. ¹⁴He broke in pieces the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones. ¹⁵Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah.

At that point in Judah's history, it was too late. Manasseh's idolatry was the final nail in the coffin of Judah and God determined to destroy them at the hands of the Babylonians for their rebellion. Just as idolatry played a large role in God's destruction of Israel, it played a large role in His destruction of Judah.

2 Kings 23:26–27 ²⁶However, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. ²⁷The LORD said, “I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’”

God promised the Israelites blessings for obedience which were amplified and further explained in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Exodus 23:25–26 ²⁵“But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. ²⁶“There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

It is worthwhile to note the promises of blessings were all done away when the fifth cycle of discipline was invoked and the Jews were scattered around the world in the *diaspora*. The Israelites are now being regathered back into the land of Israel in preparation for passing under the rod of judgment which will identify and banish the rebellious among them and leave the believing Remnant who will then enjoy the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom as promised in the covenants God made with Israel.

God promised the Israelites He would be with them and go before them in order to drive the Canaanites out of the land. This was going to happen by the power of God who was going to go before the Israelites and sow confusion among the pagans as a result of the terror they felt about the encroachment of the Israelites on their land. It was God who was going to defeat these people, not the Israelites although they were used as His instruments of conquest.

Exodus 23:27–30 27“I will send My terror [אַיִמָּה] ahead of you, and throw into confusion [הֵמָּם] all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you. 28“I will send hornets [צִרְעָה] ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. 29“I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. 30“I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.

Terror, אַיִמָּה, means terror, fear, dread leading to a state of great emotional distress. We know this happened because Rahab told the Israelites spies in Jericho that the terror of the Lord had fallen on them.

Joshua 2:8–11 8Now before they lay down, she [Rahab] came up to them on the roof, 9and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror [אַיִמָּה] of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. 10“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11“When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Confusion, הֵמָּם, means to throw into confusion, to cause panic or to rout and that happened as well which Rahab alludes to.

Hornets, צִרְעָה, does mean hornets, the stinging insects, but here it is used figuratively to mean the dread and fear the Lord put on the Canaanites as the Israelites approached the land to invade it.

The Gibeonites deceived the Israelites into entering into a covenant with them because their fear of the Israelites and their God caused them to be greatly afraid they were going to die.

Joshua 9:24 ²⁴So they answered Joshua and said, “Because it was certainly told your servants that the LORD your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

Because the population of the Israelites going into the land was too small to occupy, cultivate, and defend the entire land promised to them at that time, God was going to drive the Canaanites out little by little until the Israelites could productively farm the entire area and defend it from invaders. This didn't happen due to the disobedience of the Israelites which left some Canaanites in the land who then proved in various ways to be a thorn in their side for the duration of the history of the nation. The biggest problem, of course, was their idolatry.

God established the boundaries of the land He promised to give to the Israelites.

Exodus 23:31 31 “I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.

This encompasses the land from the Red Sea north to the Mediterranean Sea and the Negev between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba north and east to the Euphrates River. God promised Abraham the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). Many commentators think the River of Egypt is a wadi southwest of Gaza and Beersheba, but that isn't a river. River, נָהָר, means a large flowing body of water. My personal conviction is the River of Egypt refers to at least the Nile River delta north from the Gulf of Suez. The exact boundaries of the land are impossible to determine with specificity.

The Israelites were not to enter into covenants with the Canaanites nor were they to allow them to live in the land.

Exodus 23:32–33 ³²“You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods.
³³“They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

This is another amplification of the command not to intermingle with the pagan Canaanites in any way because God knew they would seduce the Israelites away from Him to worship and serve their pagan gods. That happened. When it did, the Israelites were ensnared and led away from their God which placed them into rebellion and called for divine discipline which was eventually imposed.