

Exodus Chapters 23b-24 - John Karmelich

Let me open with a warning. This is one of those tough (but necessary) lessons Christians must grasp as believers. I call it "Conditional Obedience". A false view of Christianity goes this way: "All I have to do for eternal salvation is accept Jesus as God, plus His payment for sin, and then I can go about my life". Another false Christian idea is, "All I have to do is go to church every now and then, listen to the sermon, sing a few songs, give some funds and then I can go about my life! If you've read any of these studies for a while or have listened to good preaching, then you'd realize that living the Christian life is much more than that! Let me first state I know I'm saved because I know with 100% certainty Jesus is God as He paid the full price for my sins. The big question I love to ponder is now what? That is when conditional obedience comes into play. It's not to get more saved (so to speak), or greater rewards after we die. It is about not wasting the most valuable thing God gave us, our time! He saved us so we'll use our lives as a witness for Him.

Let me explain how that relates to the text here. In the last few chapters God gave the Israelites the 10 Commandments. Then we got a few chapters with other rules He expects out of conditional obedience to Him. In this text God is saying in effect, now that you know the "ground rules" will you be obedient to Me or not? The Israelites agreed to the "ground rules" (my term) and as most of us know they'll soon break some of those rules and suffer for it! Obviously they weren't perfect (like the rest of us). What I need to get across here is these rules (with a few exceptions as taught in the New Testament) are for us as well! Again, it's not about being "more saved" or earning points with God. It is about telling God in effect that we're grateful for Him saving us and in exchange we're going to use our lives to be a witness for Him as again, that's why we were created in the first place!

Like all of us, I'm not perfect and make my own share of mistakes. God in effect says to us, "I know all of that. I know what your faults are. Learn from them and through My power turn from them. Pray for My guidance to be the kind of person I (God) want you to be. Let Me guide you (us) so we can use our lives as a living witness for Me." I'm positive God can't resist a prayer of total surrender to Him as I've watched Him work that way over and over again in my life as well as the lives of many other people! I assume most of us are aware of this. We should spend time daily in His Word to remind us He is there, He's in charge and He cares for our lives and yes He wants that conditional obedience we need in order for us to be the type of person God wants us to be!

OK with that lofty speech out of my system, time to talk specifically about the text here. It begins with God telling the Israelites that He will have an angel guide them to the Promised Land. Obviously, God knew the Israelites would mess up (which by the way led to 40 years wandering the wilderness). That's why the text says the Israelites must obey what the angel says and God will not forgive their sins! This is in effect a "balancing act" as God made the unconditional promise that the land of Israel would go to the Israelites balanced with the fact He would not forgive their sins! Again think of the balancing act as a reminder that our salvation is unconditional (if we accept Jesus as God and in charge of our lives plus accept His full payment of our sins). That's balanced with the fact we Christians will be punished if we fail to be a witness for Him! (E.g., we can end up in prison if we steal or murder!) God in effect saying the same thing to those Israelites as beginning their 40 years in the desert! Remember during all of that time, the manna never failed to come down to feed them despite their sins.

I have to admit I was fascinated by who this angel was will guide them. My commentaries deny that it is a reference to say the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The text says "an" angel versus "the" angel. The text does say that God's name is in this angel and he (the angel) won't forgive their sins if they turn from God!

This leads to promises made by God. The key word is "if" which again implies conditional obedience. God says if they're obedient God will be an enemy to their enemies! Does this mean He plays favorites with people? Only in the sense, God guides those who trust in Him for their salvation! The text refers to the land of Israel by those who live there at the moment. If you wonder why God called for the end of those people, let's just say the archeology evidence shows child sacrifice and sex with animals. What I'm fascinated by is the fact God was as patient as He was dealing with those types of sins! Meanwhile the promises include no miscarriages, their food will be blessed, and long lives. Obviously that doesn't mean Christians will be immune from say miscarriages or cancer! One has to think in terms of all them being blessed as a whole! Think about the fact the Jewish nation has survived so long. Think about the fact the Christian church has been around for 2,000 years despite serious efforts to wipe it out! I'm just saying God blesses us in ways we don't think about very often! The final part of the blessing says that God will wipe out their enemies "little by little" as a reminder that He guides us to deal with the issues we face in life. The final blessing is a future prediction. It is that the borders of the land of Israel will be great. (What God promised was greater territory than what they ever had at the peak of their power.) Personally I feel sorry for those nations who mess with Israel today. They've got no idea who they are messing with!

That leads to Chapter 24. The first thing we read is that 72 people (besides Moses) were invited closer to Mt. Sinai and will watch Moses be called up the mountain to spend 40 days alone with God. If you don't know it was during those 40 days the Israelites built the Golden Calf, which we'll discuss soon in this book. I don't know why the 72 were called up, but I suspect it's to be a witness to see Moses leave to talk to God alone. It shows no excuse is acceptable for the Golden Calf story!

We then get a statement that Moses told the people all that God spoke. Since we don't know specifics I suspect it is the 10 Commandments plus the three pages of rules we got over the last few chapters. The next part is significant: The text says the 72 (representing all the Israelites) agreed to obey God. If we agree to be obedient to God there has to be a moment where we say so! For most of us, we get a moment of understanding where we grasp that God wants that conditional obedience and agree to it!

Next we get a ritual where oxen are killed. Some of the blood was thrown on an altar they built. Blood was then sprinkled on the 72 men to associate the blood sacrifice of the innocent with God and us! The text says they all saw God. My view it's a little like seeing a beautiful sunset and thinking we see God in that beauty! The amazing thing is they all ate there! With all of those things God told them to do, it amazes me they could enjoy a big "steak dinner" with the animals they killed! (So to speak!)

The final part of the chapter describes Moses going up alone to see God (the beginning of what was a 40-day time period where he not only got the 10 Commandments written in stone, but what I jokingly say was a set of blue prints on how to build a tabernacle to worship God the main topic of the next 15 chapters more or less!) The final key point is it said Moses had to wait there six days, then on the 7th day Moses began the 40-day process. Since the 7th day represents rest with God, to me it represents a sense of peace one gets spending time with God, which is what He desires of us.

Bottom line of this section is God demands obedience of us. Yes we can enjoy spending time with Him as well as with other believers as implied in this text. I know it's a "tough pill to swallow", but we must realize God's in charge, He makes the rules and through His power we can live as He desires! Yes we'll mess up and ask for forgiveness which is when He does forgive us. He says in effect that punishment's an issue for our sins, but we never lose our relationship with Him! He's telling us to keep going and to keep being My witness to a lost and dying world! If you get that, you get the purpose of this text!

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John