

## Are We Keeping the Covenant that We Made with God?

Russell Kemp—April 15, 2023

Welcome and happy to be here and have a chance to talk to you today. We're currently now in the countdown to the Feast of Firstfruits or otherwise Pentecost. I think it's time that we take a look at the fact that we made a covenant with God at baptism.

Are we keeping the covenant that we made with God? It's very important when we think about that! If you remember, the Israelites—when they left Egypt and eventually got to Mt. Sinai, they also made a covenant with God. But they didn't keep that covenant, and as result they never made it to the 'promised land.'

We need to make sure that we stay faithful to get to the 'promised land.' They wanted to turn back, they wanted to go back to where they were before, slaves to the Egyptians! They also lacked faith in God, which is unbelievable after all the miracles that were performed. Also, *they had no vision* of the 'promised land.'

Let me take a look at those things, because there are lessons that we need to learn as Israel departed Egypt and they traveled to the promised land.' What were the problems? I think the lessons for us today are:

1. never turn back
2. have faith in God
3. never lose sight of the Kingdom of God

It was amazing how soon Israel forgot all the miracles! When confronted with the Egyptian army what did they want to do? ***They wanted to turn back!***

Let's take a look at that in Exo. 14. They weren't happy and thought that the Egyptian army was going to kill them.

Exodus 14:11: "And they said to Moses, 'Have you taken us away to die in the wilderness because *there were* no graves in Egypt? Why have you dealt this way with us to carry us forth out of Egypt? Did we not tell you this word in Egypt, saying, "Let us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians?" For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness'" (vs 11-12).

They apparently didn't remember the miracles. In other words, they were slaves to sinful Egypt and they were willing to return to that life instead of moving forward to the 'promised land' a

land of 'milk and honey.'

When we were baptized, we were also rescued from slavery, ***the slavery of sin!*** We were guaranteed a 'promised land,' as well, a land of milk and honey, ***and that would be God's Kingdom;*** much better than the milk and honey.

Unlike Israel, we need insure that we don't look back; we can't turn back! As Israel passed through the Red Sea, they actually began their journey to the 'promised land.' Of course, we're looking at the 50-day countdown to Pentecost. They were promised a new lease on life. They were out slavery, and when they came out that watery grave of the Red Sea, they made a covenant with God:

- to live His way of life
- to follow His laws
- to follow His commandments

In a similar fashion, as we repented and buried our old way of life in baptism, we came up out of that watery grave and we made a covenant with God to live His way of life.

However, at least with the laying on of hands, we received the gift of God's Holy Spirit to help us to keep the commandments. As the nation of Israel, we're firstfruits as a nation to God, ***we are the spiritual firstfruits to receive God's Kingdom!***

After Israel passed through the Red Sea, they journeyed for six weeks in the wilderness and came to Mt. Sinai. Three days later God spoke to them His Ten Commandments. What a frightening thing that must have been! I mean, they really didn't want to face God, and told Moses to deal with it.

At that time God revealed to Moses His purpose, that this nation of Israel was to be His special people and represent Him to the rest of the world. That was the purpose. They were to be the firstfruits at the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost.

God always has a purpose for what He does. His covenant with Israel was not exception. Let's see exactly what God's intentions were, what did He intend for Israel?

Exodus 19:3: "And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians... [that certainly would have been frightening enough] ...and *how* I bore you on

eagles' wings and brought you unto Myself. Therefore, **if**... [which always indicates a condition of some kind and is necessary for completion] ...you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant... [these are conditions and once those conditions are met] ...**then** you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation." These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (vs 3-6).

Isn't it interesting that God uses the words that they were to be *a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation*? ***We have been offered the same opportunity!***

Revelation 5:9: "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book, and to open its seals because You were slain, and did redeem us to God by Your own blood, out of every tribe and language and people and nation... [and here's our calling]: **...and did make us unto our God kings and priests...** [just like He promised ancient Israel] **...and we shall reign on the earth**" (vs 9-10).

What a wonderful calling ***IF*** we don't turn back! From what we just read in Exo. 19, it's pretty clear, pretty evident that God wanted the nation of Israel to set an example to the rest of the world. He wanted the rest of the world and nations to see the benefits and blessings of keep God's commandments, statutes, judgments, ordinances and laws. ***It was a blessing!***

Back to Exo. 19—this is where we see the people of Israel promise to obey God and keep His covenant, just like we did.

Exodus 19:7: "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words, which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, '**All that the LORD has spoken we will do.**'..." (vs 7-8).

God intended for this nation of Israel to an example to the rest of the world. So that all the nations of the earth could see what a tremendous blessing it would be to follow God's way of life. That was their calling!

Deuteronomy 4:5—*Moses speaking*: "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you should do so in the land where you go to possess it.... [makes it clear, you're to be an example] ...And you shall keep and do *them*, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say... [stating the purpose for God doing this]: ..."Surely

this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people." For what nation is so great whose God *is* so near to them, as the LORD our God *is*, whenever we call upon Him? And **what great nation has statutes and judgments that are so righteous as all this Law, which I set before you today?**" (vs 5-8). *Do what I tell you, set an example to the rest of the world!*

How clear can it be that God intended Israel to be an example to all people that they would come into contact with. However, as we go through the Old Testament, we very clear see that the nation of Israel never lived up to God's expectation. They failed to keep the covenant that they made with God, and failed to be an example that God had intended them to be.

Ezekiel 20:11: "And I gave them My statutes and showed them My ordinances, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them. And also I gave them My Sabbaths **to be a sign between Me and them**, that *they* might know that I *am* the LORD Who sanctifies them. **But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes, and they despised My ordinances**, which *if* a man does, he shall even live in them. And they greatly polluted My Sabbaths. And I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them in the wilderness to destroy them'" (vs 11-13).

They didn't keep God's laws and commandments. They didn't follow the way of life that He laid out for them.

Read all of Ezek. 20 to see time and time again God tried to get them over and over to follow His laws, statutes and ordinances without success. God eventually sent them into captivity.

This is the people who were supposed to be an example to the rest of the world and they were not! When we were baptized, we entered into a New Covenant with God.

Like ancient Israel, we have not reached the 'promised land'; in other words the Kingdom of God. We're not there, yet. We're basically still in the wilderness. We're putting Satan and sin behind us, ***but we're still in the wilderness!*** We have the same responsibility as Israel, and we are to set an example to the rest of the world and be a witness to the rest of the world.

Once again, we see the duality of God's Plan. At first we see the physical nation of Israel was to be a Holy nation of priests and then we see that spiritually the firstfruits—those who have been given God's Holy Spirit—in the resurrection will be a Holy nation of priests under the rule of Jesus Christ. There's the physical and there's the spiritual!

Notice that we are to have the fruits of the Spirit and we are to be known by our fruits.

Matthew 7:16: “You shall know them by their fruits....”

The good fruits of the Spirit are found in:

Galatians 5:22: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (vs 22-23).

Verse 25: “If we live by *the* Spirit, we should also be walking by *the* Spirit.”

This is how we are to be a witness to the rest of the world. This is how we are to set an example to the rest of the world.

Ancient Israel did not keep their covenant with God! They continued to break the covenant that they made with God, and as a result they were sent into captivity. They were not the example that God intended them to be for the rest of the world.

- Will we?
- Will we set an example to the rest of the world?

We in the Churches of God—spiritual Israel—made a covenant with God at baptism, and we’ve been given God’s Holy Spirit to help us keep that covenant. We’re still on our journey to the ‘promised land,’ the Kingdom of God. We will face trials and tribulations along the way. There’s no doubt about it! Satan will cause temptations and he will do everything in his power to thwart God’s plans. He doesn’t want you to make it!

Nevertheless, we have the responsibility to keep our promise, the New Covenant, to God and to be an example and a witness to the rest of the world—*physical and spiritual!*

Peter gave us fare warning of what we will face in the future.

1-Peter 4:12: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you *which is* taking place to test you, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you.”

Just look at the trials that God allowed Job to go through. We need to be prepared to handle whatever comes our way in the future:

- ***without giving up***
- ***without turning back***
- ***without losing faith in God***

*When these things happen:*

- Will you look back?
- Will you lose faith?

***or***

- Will you continue to move forward toward the Kingdom of God!

We must have vision, and our sight needs to be continually focused on the ‘promised land,’ the Kingdom of God! Never lose sight!

Because of Israel’s lack of faith all the adults that left Egypt died in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. In other words, they never reached the ‘promised land.’

We’ve been offered a better ‘promised land,’ ***one that’s eternal! Not corruptible!*** Of course, that’s God’s Kingdom! However, like Israel, ***we must go forward to receive and be part of God’s Kingdom!*** Have to keep going forward. Could we grumble and complain along the way and be denied entrance into the Kingdom of God? Unfortunately, the answer to that is *yes! The possibility is there!*

We’re told that *above all things, we are to seek the Kingdom of God!* That should be our primary goal, because everything else is insignificant.

Matthew 6:31: “Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we be clothed?’ For the nations seek after all these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. ***But as for you, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*** Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall take care of the *things* of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil of that *day*” (v 31-34).

Good advice! The Kingdom of God is our ‘promised land.’ Christ came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. He instructed the apostles to go and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Like ancient Israel, ***we will be tried and tested along the way!***

Acts 14:21: And [Paul] after preaching the Gospel to that city, and making many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, *where* they established the souls of the disciples, ***exhorting them to continue in the faith, and declaring that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God***” (vs 21-22).

Notice that uses the term “...much tribulation...” *or temptations!* This walk through life is not always going to be an easy trip.

- we can’t quit
- we can’t give up
- we can’t turn back

*Or we may never reach the Kingdom of God!* It's not going to be an easy walk through life. We are going to have some problems. But we must go forward as Paul tells us in:

Colossians 1:12<sup>[transcriber's correction]</sup>: "Giving thanks to the Father, Who has made us qualified for the share of the inheritance of the saints in the Light."

Romans 8:32<sup>[transcriber's correction]</sup>: "He Who did not spare even His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not also grant us all things together with Him?" *What a wonderful promise!*

Verse 35: "What shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Accordingly, it is written, 'For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are reckoned as sheep for the slaughter.' But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us" (vs 35-37).

Then Paul goes on to give us some real encouragement:

Verse 38: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vs 38-39). *What a wonderful promise!*

We've made a covenant with God and we can't make the mistake of breaking that covenant like ancient Israel did. *We can't! We have a Kingdom and a crown waiting for us **IF** we stay **focused and faithful!***

Revelation 3:11—*Christ speaking*: "Behold, I am coming quickly; hold fast that which you have so that no one may take away your crown."

We're also reminded in Heb. 12 what we can expect if we hold fast!

Hebrews 12:22: "But you... [that's us, all those who have been baptized in Christ] ...have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem... [our 'promised land'] ...and to an innumerable company of angels; to the joyous festival gathering; and to the Church of the Firstborn... [the firstfruits of God, represented at Pentecost] ...registered in the Book of Life in heaven; and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just who have been perfected; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant... [the covenant we promised to keep, at baptism] ...and to sprinkling of the blood of ratification, proclaiming superior things than that of Abel" (vs 22-24).

*As firstfruits we will be given a new name;* Revelation 2:17: "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give the right to eat of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except the one who receives it." *What a wonderful promise!*

As firstfruits we will have a lot to look forward to. The vision of our future couldn't be anything more than crystal clear. Nothing we leave behind in this world is worth what God has in store for us! **Nothing!**

As we read earlier, God makes it clear what we can expect:

Revelation 20:6: "Blessed and Holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection... [the firstfruits] ...over these the second death has no power. But they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." *We know that it goes on even beyond that!*

***Never look back! The goal is still in front of us; it's ahead of us!*** We're not there, yet. ***No matter how tough things seem to get, do not lose faith! Whatever else you do, stay focused on the 'promised land,' the Kingdom of God!***

#### Scriptural References:

- 1) Exodus 14:11-12
- 2) Exodus 19:3-6
- 3) Revelation 5:9-10
- 4) Exodus 19:7-8
- 5) Deuteronomy 4:5-8
- 6) Ezekiel 20:11-13
- 7) Matthew 7:16
- 8) Galatians 5:22-23, 25
- 9) 1 Peter 4:12
- 10) Matthew 6:31-34
- 11) Acts 14:21-22
- 12) Colossians 1:12
- 13) Romans 8:32-39
- 14) Revelation 3:11
- 15) Hebrews 12:22-24
- 16) Revelation 2:17
- 17) Revelation 20:6

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