

Bible Study # 62 Exodus 34.10–28 04–19–2021

The beginning and end of this section confirm that what is recorded was a covenant formulation ('I am making a covenant', v. 10; 'I have made a covenant with you and with Israel', v. 27). The exclusive nature of this renewed covenantal bond is illustrated by the call for obedience to the LORD's demands and the due recognition of his exclusive claims.

This section is sometimes called 'the ritual decalogue', as it can be divided into ten sections that constitute the core of the relationship (and is so marked in the NIV text of vv. 15–26). There is a remarkable similarity between verses 10–26 and 23:21–33.

The opening words must have been very comforting to all in Israel, as they gave the reassurance that God was again binding himself and them in a covenantal bond. The declaration, 'I am making a covenant', is preceded in the Masoretic Text by the word 'behold', which is left untranslated by the NIV. This particle often introduces significant statements, and it should be translated in some way in this verse.

It is needed to emphasize that the making of this covenant was occurring right at that time (cf. the rendering in the Revised English Bible, 'here and now I am making a covenant'; see also the RSV, NASB, NKJV, and ESV for fairly literal translations of the Hebrew text).

The reference that follows this opening statement, 'before you', is ambiguous, as it could refer to Moses or to all the people. Most probably the NIV and ESV are correct in taking this 'you' here as the people, and then consistently throughout the rest of this narrative.

The assurance was that dramatic wonders would be performed before them such as had not occurred before, thus eclipsing in greatness those they had already seen performed in Egypt. The verb here for 'never done before' is 'to create', the verb best known for its use in Genesis 1 to describe God's creative work.

The power seen at creation was also demonstrated in the LORD's wondrous deeds on behalf of His people. Israel's neighbors in Canaan would observe divine interventions on Israel's behalf that they would find awesome.

The LORD's commands had to be followed explicitly. This theme of obedience is expanded in Deuteronomy 8:1–20; 10:12–22, and 11:13–32. A close relationship with the people who inhabited Canaan at the time of the Israelite invasion was not to be encouraged.

Long before, Abraham had been promised that the land occupied by these various tribes would become Israel's (Gen. 15:18–21), and much more recently the Lord had again told of how these Gentile nations were to be driven out (Exod. 23:28–33).

The detailed instructions that commence with verse 12 are in the main a repetition of 23:12–33, though not always in the same order. The command not to enter into treaty arrangements with the Gentile nations is a repetition of an instruction already given in 23:32. Having close links with Gentiles would constitute a constant snare for Israel.

Hence, the heathen sites of worship and devotion—altars, pillars, and carved images representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah—were to be destroyed entirely. The reason for such decisive action was because there could only be worship of one God, the LORD. No worship of another god was permitted.

This is the only time that this expression is used in the Old Testament, as normally the expression is in the plural, no 'other gods', as in 20:3. What was meant by 'another god' is spelt out in Psalm 81:9, where worship

of 'a foreign god' or 'an alien god' is proscribed. The LORD is further defined as having the name 'Jealous', and as being 'a jealous God'.

This is simply an emphatic way of expressing the truth brought out in the Second Word (20:4). Verse 15 is much more closely connected with the preceding verses than is suggested by the NIV ('Be careful not to make a treaty ...'). The continuity in thought is shown by the fact that the verse commences with 'lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land'.

The preceding instructions were given to guard against the specific sins enumerated here. This explains the repetition of the command not to enter into covenant arrangements with the Gentiles because that would bring them into close contact with their heathen worship and its associated practices.

The men of these nations are depicted as lusting after their gods, and offering sacrifices to them. When they invited Israelites to share in their sacrificial feasts, then they would probably accept. A further stage of syncretism would involve marriages between heathen women and Israelite men resulting in the men lusting after the foreign gods.

Making gods of metal was again forbidden (cf. 20:4, 23). This prohibition had special relevance for that time, as the golden bull made by Aaron was a molten image (32:3–4).

The first of the feasts again ordered was the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see 12:14–20 and 23:15 for earlier passages relating to it). For seven days the people had to eat unleavened bread as a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. This celebration was held on the fourteenth day of the first month, Abib.

The instruction in verse 19 is a repetition of 13:2, with the added specification that it applied to all animals, oxen and sheep/goats from the flock. The first part of verse 20 is like 13:13, while the second part echoes 23:15. The principle was that there had to be an acknowledgement of God's bounty, with the same instruction being repeated in Deuteronomy 16:16–17.

The Fourth Word dealing with the Sabbath was given in 20:8–11, reiterated in 23:12, and now restated yet again. To the earlier instructions is added a direction regarding the two very busy periods of the agricultural year, ploughing and harvest. Even at those times the sabbatical principle had to apply and the due rest taken on the seventh day. Work on food supplies did not take precedence over the Sabbath rest.

The two feasts mentioned in verse 22 have already been described in 23:16. The one main difference between the two passages is the different name used here, 'the Feast of Weeks,' instead of 'the Feast of Harvest'. The other feast, 'the Feast of Ingathering,' is known by this title in Exodus (23:16; 34:23), whereas in Leviticus and Deuteronomy it is called 'the Feast of Sukkot' (Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13, 16).

The thought of these festivals leads into the requirement that all males had to make the journey to Jerusalem three times every year (v. 23). The wording is the same as in 23:17, except that in addition to the words 'all your males shall appear before the 'Lord God' (adonai yhw) is added 'the God (Elohim) of Israel'. This places emphasis on the expression by appending the most characteristic name for God in the Old Testament.

The absence of reference to women going to the pilgrimage feasts should not lead to the conclusion that women were prohibited from joining in such worship. Other passages (such as 1 Sam. 1:1–2:11; 1 Sam. 9:11–14; Neh. 8:1–11) show that women were participants in worship and covenantal meals.

Also, the pattern prevailing in the New Testament was carrying on an established practice (see the references to Anna, and the presence of Jesus' mother at the temple, Luke 2:36–38, 41–51). In view here is the situation that would prevail once occupancy of the land of Canaan was obtained. God was going to drive out the heathen nations and enlarge Israel's territory.

The NIV rendering of v. 25 suggests that drinking blood was only forbidden when bread made with yeast was offered. However, the point was that no blood, and no bread containing yeast, were to be offered. The provision regarding not letting what was left of the Passover feast remain till the next morning reinforced what was said in 23:18. Prompt offerings and speedy consumption of the Passover meal were required.

V. 26a is an exact reproduction of 23:19a. The first-fruits were to be dedicated to God as recognition that he, after redeeming his people from Egypt, had given them the land of Canaan. Deuteronomy 26:1–11 sets out the procedure to be adopted at the first harvest, and probably to be repeated annually. V. 26b is another exact repetition from the earlier regulations in 23:19b.

The section setting out the renewed covenant closes with a short statement that serves as a corollary to the opening statement in verses 10–14. Both specify that what took place after God's revelation of his glory (vs. 5–9) was the making of a covenant, a renewed bond that was a sovereign gift of God to His people.

The emphasis is on God's initiative in making this covenant, as it was with earlier covenants such as the Noahic (Gen. 9:8–17) and the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:12–21). The wording here is significant for another reason, as a literal translation brings out: 'I have cut with you (singular) a covenant and with Israel.'

The wording suggests that the relationship between God and Israel may still have been regarded as strained, and the mediatorial role of Moses had continued priority. The instructions to Moses were to write down all 'these words', that is, all the words that God had spoken but not including 'the Ten Words'. While the Ten Words had been referred to as 'words' before (20:1), this is the first occurrence of the phrase 'the Ten Words'.

The difference between the general words and the specific 'words of the covenant' were marked by the different methods of recording them. Moses had to record in writing the general words, but it was God himself who wrote the Ten Words on the new stone tablets.

The concluding words of verse 28 may seem to leave open the possibility that Moses wrote on the tablets, yet 'the LORD' (yhwh) is the grammatical antecedent, and this then confirms what God had earlier said (34:10). Moses spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain, neither eating nor drinking, which replicated his earlier experience there (Deut. 9:9–12).

We will continue our study examining Exodus 34:29–35.