

Text: Exod. 23:20-33

Title: "Israel's Apostle"

Time: 1/30/2022 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Around 1860 the renowned English pastor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, visited Queen's College in Belfast, Ireland, where he preached on the importance of foreign missions. The son of a Presbyterian farmer named William Wright was studying Latin and Greek there, who after hearing Spurgeon's challenge responded to the Lord's call on his life. Wright became a missionary to the Jews in Damascus, where he learned Arabic and became involved in archaeological discovery.

Wright's conviction that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God gave him insight into the interpretation of certain mysterious new finds of inscriptions in a widespread Indo-European language that had been discovered in Syria and at sites in Turkey. This new language utilized both hieroglyphics and cuneiform script. Up until that time, there had been no historical recognition of the Hittite people mentioned here in our Exodus passage. Wright proposed that the uninterpreted finds were from the Hittite people based on his knowledge of the Scripture, and his theory (and his Bible along with it) was proved to be accurate.

Wright wrote of this finding in a paper titled, "On the Empire of the Hittites." After mentioning the incidental references to the Hittites we find in Scripture, Wright noted this about man's unreasonable distrust of the Bible's record of history:

"Had these references been found in any ancient secular book, even among the shreds and fragments of the shady Sanchoniathon [works by a Phoenician author], they would

have been hailed as historical, and the empire of the Hittites would long since have occupied a recognized place among the great empires of antiquity.

“The references, however, were worked into the texture of the Bible, and they were therefore ignored; for while Biblical critics in Germany accounted for the most important of them on the theory of ‘interpolation,’ English Biblical Critics went further still, and pronounced them ‘unhistorical.’ To the thoughtful it seemed strange that an ancient people should interpolate unhistorical statements into their sacred books without sufficient cause, but to the critics it seemed quite scientific simply to say they had done so” [*Journal of the Transactions of the Victorian Institute*, vol. 21, 1887-88, p. 57; available online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044090845264&view=1up&seq=83>].

Our passage is not really about the historicity of the Hittites. Rather, this reliable history tells us about the Lord’s promise of Someone the Lord would send ahead of Israel for their benefit. This morning, the challenge of our faith is to affirm that this Sent One was just as much a part of the real historical experience of the Israelites as were the Hittites. Although the best scholars did not accept the Hittites until the 19th century, the Hittites were real and the unbelieving scholars were wrong. And though many unbelievers reject the notation today, this same record tells us of an Angel who is equally real. Will we believe that part of this history?

This is a passage about Someone Jehovah promises to send before Israel as they anticipate their journey from Sinai into the Promised Land and beyond, Someone we might call “Israel’s Apostle.” *Apostle* means *sent one*, and that is what the Lord calls this Angel that He promises to send before Israel (v. 20). The passage goes on to promise Israel an amazing opportunity to experience the center of the Lord’s love

and blessing if they were careful to believe what God says about this promised Apostle. I want us to see this morning that God says three important things that Israel had to believe about their Apostle to realize this blessing.

I. Israel's Apostle is God's divine Messenger who must be obeyed (vv. 21-22).

Illustration: These descendants of Abraham would have known that this Angel was no mere created spirit. From childhood, they would have known about the divine Angel who visited a newly impregnated Hagar as she fled the wrath of Abraham's wife Sarah. The Angel of the Lord found her (Gen. 16:7). This same Angel promised to multiply the seed of Hagar's son (v. 10). Then the text goes on to describe the Angel that spoke to Hagar this way: "And she called the name of the LORD (Jehovah/Yahweh) that spake unto her, 'Thou God seest Me' (El Elyon)" (v. 13). The Angel of the LORD who spoke to Hagar that day was the LORD in angelic form, the omniscient God who saw Hagar wherever she went.

Application: This is the divine Angel, the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the One who bears the nature of God. We see His divinity in our passage as well. To hear this Angel's voice is to hear God speak (v. 22). To hear this Angel speak is to hear someone far superior to Moses. At times, Moses spoke according to the iniquity of the people, and for this reason could not enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:1-13; Ps. 106:33, "They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." Understood correctly, verse 21 tells us this would never happen to this divine Angel, and the reason it would not is that God's name is in the midst of Him.

Keil and Delitzsch comment on the significance of this phrase about God's name being in the midst of this Angel: "The name of Jehovah was in this angel (v. 21), that is to say, Jehovah revealed Himself in him; and hence he is called in chap. xxxiii. 15, 16, the face [or presence] of Jehovah, because the essential nature of Jehovah was manifested in him" (2.152).

Israel would know God's blessing to the degree they listened to this Angel because this Angel is God and He spoke God's Word. The same is true in our life. Just like what the Bible says about the Hittites resulted in the rewriting of ancient history, so also what the Bible says about God and you and I has the power to rewrite the story of our lives.

Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

God has given us His Word so that we need not perish. We can be like a tree planted by rivers of life. We must listen to His voice, just like Israel's Apostle had to be obeyed.

II. Israel's Apostle is God's divine Savior who must be trusted (vv. 23, 27-31).

Illustration: Trust can be a difficult thing to give to another person because trustworthiness is such a rare thing. I have recently been asked by some physicians to trust them in a way I have never had to trust a physician before, and the best I can do is trust but verify. Unfortunately, the trustworthiness of the medical industry as a whole has been undermined by the way governmental agencies have handled the Covid-19 pandemic. Especially when it comes to Covid, it is very difficult to know who to trust today.

Application: The good news, however, is that the Bible tells us that God is trustworthy in an ultimate sense. He can be trusted in a way no one else can be. Trust and verify does not work with Him, because His trustworthiness is worthy of unquestioning faith, the faith of a child.

Israel is going to have a big problem trusting the Lord as they approach the Promised Land (Kadesh Barnea). The Lord is saying to them that their Apostle is going to bring them to the enemy, and He is going to be the enemy of their enemy. He never tells them how to fight. He simply tells them that He is going to fight for them. They had seen Him do so many times resulting in their freedom from Egypt. God redeemed them from slavery. They did not redeem themselves.

When it comes to the enemies and slavery we face, our sin, our guilt, and Satan who wants to use those things to enslave and destroy us, God does not tell us to fight better, work harder, or achieve more. Instead, He tells us that He is the Savior who will save us. He tells us to trust Him: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God promises salvation. All we must do is turn from our sin and believe His promise to save us by grace, not works.

We who have been saved by grace through faith know from experience the importance of that phrase in verse 30, "Little by little." Israel would be saved from their enemies little by little, and that is our experience as believers as well. Our sin, our guilt, and the enemy Satan who wants always to use those things against us are not yet completely driven from our lives. But God is in control of that too as we who are saved still trust Him as our Savior.

The Scripture promises that if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Little by little, Jesus is fighting our battles for us and saving us from not only the penalty of sin, but also its power over us and its presence in our lives.

III. Israel's Apostle must not be confused with the man-made gods of this world (vv. 24-26, 32-33).

Illustration: This past fall we had some repairs ongoing at the parsonage, which made it easier for mice to enter our home. My mother-in-law lived with us then, and although I had set a few traps and caught a few mice, Mom felt that I needed to multiply my efforts and set a bunch of traps all at once. To prod her stubborn son-in-law in the right direction, Mom decided one night to put out a bunch of traps with cheese on them all. She could not set the trap, only put the cheese on it, and she did so hoping I would get the message and set all the traps for her. Well, to my shame I must admit that her hopes went unfulfilled, and the next morning the mice had eaten all the cheese without getting caught.

Application: No trap works well unless it has two features: (1) it must be attractive – it has to have the cheese; and (2) it

has to be deadly – it has to be set to kill. The Lord explains to His people the danger of man-made gods, what the Bible calls idolatry, as though it were an effective trap. He wants them to understand that there is going to be something popular, something attractive, about making your own gods. But He also wants them to understand how deadly that practice is. Idolatry is an attractive trap that kills any hope we may have of experiencing the full blessing of the Lord as His people. Have we made a covenant that we shall make our own gods, thereby forfeiting any hope of knowing the true God and experiencing His best for us? Israel tragically fell into that trap over and over again. They met with judgment from the true God rather than salvation.

Conclusion: And so, Israel needed to follow their Apostle. They needed to obey Him and trust Him and not replace Him with the gods men make for themselves. Many were the days they did not listen to Him or trust in Him. Many were the days they worshiped and served and lived for idols. This is the tragic “rest of the story” about Israel and their Apostle.

But then Israel’s Apostle became a man, the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son. When Israel’s Apostle became man, He became the Apostle and High Priest of our profession as a local church (Heb. 3:1). Jesus is the Apostle of our profession as local church members, just like the preincarnate divine Angel was the Apostle of the nation of Israel. Jesus is our leader to be followed (Matt. 28:18-20, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”).

Jesus is the divine messenger we must listen to and obey (Matt. 17:5, “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”).

Jesus is the Savior whom we can trust to defeat our enemies of sin through the cross of Calvary (Rom. 16:20, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”).

Jesus is not to be confused with man-made gods (Matt. 24:24, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”; 1 Thess. 1:9-10, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”).

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*