

• *God's oath*

1. The Israelites in the wilderness - an oath of wrath

Let us pursue further this matter of the 'oath of God'.

1. **The case of the Israelites in the wilderness was that of an oath of wrath.** God promised to give Israel the promised land, but they refused to believe, and rebelled again and again. Finally God took an oath. In Numbers 14 they grumble in disbelief once more, refusing to believe that God can give them the promised land. Moses intercedes for them ^{☒1}. God had sworn on oath that He would give the land to Israel ^{☒2}. God replies. He **will** forgive them ^{☒3}, but He will take an oath that **that** generation will not enter Canaan. For **that** generation the promise has been withdrawn. God has 'changed His mind' about that generation. He takes an oath ^{☒4}, swearing that that generation will never enter Canaan.

^{☒1} Numbers 14:13–19
^{☒2} Numbers 14:16
^{☒3} Numbers 14:20
^{☒4} Numbers 14:21–23

• *The matter is settled and no change can take place*

After the oath has been taken no change can take place. The Israelites **now** resolve to go into Canaan ^{☒1} but it is too late. It could have been done yesterday but it cannot be done today.

^{☒1} Numbers 14:40

The oath is the point where the matter is settled; after the oath no change can take place.

2. Saul - an oath of wrath

• *The matter is settled and no change can take place*

2. **The case of Saul was that of an oath of wrath.** God can withdraw a promise. God chose Saul to be the king of Israel. His line '*would have lasted for ever*' ^{☒1} but there came a point where Saul sinned so severely that God 'changed His mind' and rejected Saul from being king ^{☒2}. It is **after** this event that it is said that '*He is not a man that He should change His mind*' ^{☒3}.

^{☒1} 1 Samuel 13:14
^{☒2} 1 Samuel 15:26
^{☒3} 1 Samuel 15:29

The oath is the point where the matter is settled; after the oath no change can take place.

3. Nineveh - a situation where no oath has been taken

• *Not settled – change possible*

3. **The case of Nineveh was that of a situation where no oath has been taken.** Jonah told the city of Nineveh that in forty days' time God would destroy the city ^{☒1}. Yet the king of Nineveh said '*Who knows? God may turn around and change His mind and withdraw His burning anger...*' ^{☒2}. He was right! 'God changed his mind concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring...' ^{☒3}.

^{☒1} Jonah 3:4
^{☒2} Jonah 3:9
^{☒3} Jonah 3:10

When no oath has been taken a change can take place. Promises can be lost; threats can be averted.

4. The high-priest after the order of Melchizedek - an oath of mercy has been given

• *The matter is settled - no change can take place*

4. **The case of the high-priest after the order of Melchizedek is one where an oath of mercy has been given.** The letter to the Hebrews points out that the priests in the order of Levi '*became priests without an oath*' ^{☒1}. God could abolish the levitical priesthood because He had not taken any oath that it would continue for ever. But in the case of the '*priest after the likeness of Melchizedek*' there was an oath. '*The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind*' ^{☒2}. The reason why God abolished the levitical order of priests but does not abolish the priestly work of Jesus is that He has taken an oath. God **cannot** withdraw the priesthood of Jesus since He has taken an oath.

^{☒1} Hebrews 7:21

^{☒2} Hebrews 7:21; Psalm 110:4

Again, we note, the oath is the point where the matter is settled; after the oath no change can take place.

• *The Christian is in covenant with God*

The Christian is in covenant with God. There is a relationship in which God is our Father and we are His children. 'Covenant' is a promise which has an oath added to it. As soon as we come to salvation we are God's children but we will not experience the oath of God straightaway. God's covenant is His **offer** of an 'oath of generosity' (there are different kinds).

We are not under the Mosaic law which was a different kind of covenant altogether.

• *The climax of the covenant is when God takes an oath and the Christian 'enters into his rest'*

The climax of the covenant is when God takes an oath and the Christian 'enters into rest'. At such a time he has secured God's promises to him. He is powerfully fulfilling his life's calling. His work for God cannot be overthrown. It is certain that the promise is coming. It is supremely restful. God pours out abundance of blessing.

For the Christian the covenant goes forward on the basis of sacrifice. He lives daily on the blood of Jesus which gives him eternal redemption ('having obtained eternal redemption', Hebrews 9:12), daily cleansing ('How much more **will** the blood . . . cleanse your conscience?', Hebrews 9:14) and makes it possible to obtain our reward, the oath of God ('Those who have been called **may** receive the promise...', Hebrews 9:15). The tenses in Hebrews 9:12, 14 and 15 are significant. Redemption **has been** obtained; cleansing **is being** daily obtainable; inheritance **may be** reached.

• *The oath may be many years after our first salvation*

A covenant of generosity is unconditional after it has been given. The oath is given after faith and patience, maybe many years after our first salvation. When God swears in His mercy, His promises of achieving the 'good works ordained that we should walk in them' has been obtained and cannot be lost.


• *Covenant is designed to encourage and to motivate*

Covenant is designed to encourage and to motivate. God offers the blessing of His oath to us, and invites us to pursue it. All Christians are 'children of Abraham'. We follow in the footsteps of our father. We too are in covenant with God. God is wanting to say to us also 'Now I know that you fear me' and pour out abundant blessings upon us in which we 'enter into rest' and inherit God's promises.

The experience of the oath of God involves a direct witness from God

The experience of the oath of God involves a direct witness from God, or (as the New Testament might say) a direct witness of the Holy Spirit. God did not say to **Himself**, 'Now I know that Abraham fears me...' (contrast Genesis 22:12). He said to **Abraham** 'Now I know that you fear me...' ¹. God lets us know His will. He gives us gifts of His Spirit. He gives us a calling and a ministry. By faith and patience, like Abraham, we pursue His will. The greatest day of our life comes when we inherit what He is promising to do in us and through us. When He says 'I swear I will bless...', we enter into rest.

¹ Genesis 22:12

		<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p> 
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