

GOD'S PROMISE TO MAKE A HOLY NATION

Leader pages on pp. 114-117

THE POINT:
GOD'S PROMISE TO SET APART HIS PEOPLE WAS CONDITIONED ON OBEDIENCE.

EXODUS 19:1-8

¹ In the third month from the very day the Israelites left the land of Egypt, they came to the Sinai Wilderness.

² They traveled from Rephidim, came to the Sinai Wilderness, and camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there in front of the mountain.

³ Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: "This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites:

⁴ 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

.....
⁵ Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine,

⁶ and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.' These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites."

.....
⁷ After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

⁸ **Then all the people responded together, "We will do all that the LORD has spoken." So Moses brought the people's words back to the LORD.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

The Israelites (v. 1)— God had chosen and set apart the Israelites out of all the nations to be His people (Ex. 6:6-7).

Mountain of God (v. 3)—Also known as "Mount Sinai." The mountain stands as the symbol of covenant and a reminder that the Lord meets with His people.

You will be my own possession (v. 5)—God had reminded the Israelites who He was and what He had done for them. Now He defined who they were in relation to Him—His own possession.

My holy nation (v. 6)—To be holy *qadosh* is to be sacred or set apart by God for His plans and purposes.

HOW DOES GOD'S PROMISE TO MAKE US A HOLY NATION IMPACT OUR DAILY LIVES?

No matter our age or status, rules are a part of life. Most of us as children likely had to hold a parent's hand when we walked across the street or through parking lot. Our parents had rules for us because they wanted to keep us safe. At the time, we probably thought of the rules as limiting our freedom. Some of us broke the rules in rebellion, while others waited it out until reaching an age where that rule no longer applied.

Many aspects of our lives come with rules. The places we work have procedures to follow. We have traffic laws that tell us how fast we can drive on roads, when we need to stop, and more. Sports in which we engage, such as basketball, football, and volleyball also have rules.

People sometimes question certain rules and their relevance, but they still obey them because they know they must. If we're honest with ourselves, we probably consider some of life's rules a bit restrictive or even irrelevant.

Similarly, when it comes to one's relationship with God, many people view His commands as confining, obsolete, or as mere suggestions. However, God intends His commands for our

blessing, and when we obey them, we experience life to the fullest, as it is meant to be.

Carried on His Wings //

Exodus 19:1-4

An old hymn challenges us, "Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." We can list good things, but they are not the best blessing God has given us. He has given us Himself. He established a personal relationship with us by grace through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God, through Moses, challenged the Israelites to remember what He had done for them.

- He rescued them from over 400 years in bondage to the Egyptians.
- God parted the waters of the sea so His people could cross on dry ground. Then He drowned the Egyptian army by closing the sea on them.
- He provided manna in the wilderness for them.
- He gave them victory over the Amalekites.



THE POINT: **GOD'S PROMISE TO SET APART HIS PEOPLE WAS CONDITIONED ON OBEDIENCE.**

The reference to “the third month from the very day the Israelites left the land of Egypt” (v. 1) indicates a date in late spring or early summer. Exodus 12 records how the people left Egypt following the Passover, God's judgment against the firstborn of Egypt. This occurred in the Jewish month of Nisan, which usually occurs in our calendar around March-April. Bible scholars estimate God's people had journeyed about two hundred miles from Egypt to Sinai.

Moses ascended to meet God on Mount Sinai. This was not the first time Moses had met God on that mountain. Exodus 3 records how it was on that mountain that God first spoke to Moses from a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-6). Moses had no idea how greatly God would use him. The Lord was about to give Moses commands for His people to follow. What God did was evidence of His grace. He had rescued the people from slavery before they received His law. Now, He would give the law to them and bless them with the opportunity to live by it.

God told Moses the challenge He would put before His people. The words, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians” (v. 4), stressed how God's people personally witnessed His miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness. They had seen Him bring plagues to humble the Egyptians (Ex. 5-12), and they had seen His provision for them as they journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Ex. 16).

God affirmed of His people, “I carried you on eagles' wings” (v. 4). Visualize an eagle soaring in the sky, high above everything below. In comparison, God had exalted His people in the eyes of the Egyptians and had led them triumphantly out of Egypt. When the Egyptian army tried to pursue the Israelites, the Lord miraculously destroyed the army (Ex. 14:26-28). No army could overcome the people God had chosen and redeemed!

The Lord affirmed that He had brought the Israelites out of bondage by delivering them from the Egyptians and sustaining them through the wilderness so He could confirm His relationship with them as a budding nation. More important than anything else God would give to the Israelites in the wilderness or in the promised land, He gave Himself.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO REMEMBER GOD'S PROVISION IN OUR LIVES?

Likewise, God has done so much for us. Bless Him and forget not his benefits (Psa. 103:2) and blessings. Just as He gave of Himself to the Israelites, He has given Himself to us through Jesus. Although we can never repay God's love shown to us, we can be obedient to his commands. In I John 5:3, we are reminded that God's commandments are not burdensome but are acts of our love for Him.



DIGGING DEEPER COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

The Mosaic covenant was made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:5). Its purpose was not to provide a means for people to initiate or merit a relationship with the Lord. Rather, the covenant was a means of communicating what Israel should do as a people who already belonged to Him. The covenant was tied to what the Lord had already done for the Israelites. This was why it was appropriate for them to keep it. The mention of being carried on eagles' wings implied a comparison between the Lord's bringing Israel out of Egypt and eagles that sometimes carried their young on their backs (Deut. 32:10-11). The Lord's past provision should be the basis for Israel's future decisions. The Lord wanted Israel to be known by what He had done as well as by what they would do.¹²

How does Israel's response to God's covenant challenge or encourage you?

Sometimes people view God's commands as restrictive and difficult to follow. Unbelievers may even suggest we are hampered from living our best lives. But God's commands do not represent a shabby way; rather, they represent the sure way. As we live by them, we will experience life as God designed it to be.

Called into His Kingdom //

Exodus 19:5-6

God called the Israelites to be set apart for His purposes and for His glory. The word "now" that begins verse 5 indicates the Lord was getting to the "bottom line" of what He wanted to tell His people. The Hebrew construction (literally "if listening you will listen") stresses God's desire for His people to give careful attention to His commands. In fact, the construction goes beyond suggesting careful listening to active obedience.

God wanted His people to keep the terms of His covenant. The word translated "keep" has the sense of guarding or watching, and suggests the careful attention God's people should give to the covenant.

The covenant at Mount Sinai did not begin the relationship between God and His people, for that had been long established. God had first established His covenant with Adam and then Noah. Then He established His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now at Sinai, He was taking His people to a deeper understanding of Himself. His commands would further set apart His people for His purposes and glory.

Our obedience to God reflects our relationship with Him as His special possession. God told the Israelites they would be His special possession, even though all people and nations on earth were His.

The Lord told Moses to tell the Israelites that if they faithfully followed His commands, they would be His "kingdom of priests" and His "holy nation" (v. 6). The fundamental meaning of the Old Testament word for "priest" is "mediator." Priests functioned as mediators between God and His people. They represented God to the people and guided them in understanding and following God's commands.

They also represented the people to God and offered prayers and sacrifices on their behalf.

In the Old Testament, only male members of the tribe of Levi through the line of Aaron functioned as priests. However, the apostle Peter told his audience that believers today are all part of God's royal priesthood and His holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). We are to bring God's message to a world that needs to hear it and bring repentant sinners to God for salvation.



We also can point unbelievers to God through our holy living. So many people in the world are looking for examples of holiness and righteousness—people who live for a purpose higher than themselves.

HOW DO WE BENEFIT BY LIVING HOLY LIVES?

Confirmed through My Surrender // Exodus 19:7-8

Moses returned from meeting with God on the mountain and met with Israel's elders. Moses could not make this covenant with God by himself; God's people would need to agree to it, and the elders' approval was an important first step.

The terms of the people's obedience were in the law God would give to Moses and were summarized well in what we call the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). The first four commandments pertain to relationship with God. The last six commandments pertain to relationship with one another.

THE POINT: GOD'S PROMISE TO SET APART HIS PEOPLE WAS CONDITIONED ON OBEDIENCE.

The Israelites affirmed they would do all God commanded, and Moses brought their words back to the Lord. Sadly, the Biblical record reveals they often failed to do so. The New Testament also supports that we, God's people today, cannot meet the demands of the law. We often fail God, but Jesus Christ, God's Son, met the demands of the law for us (Rom. 8:1-4). The apostle Paul would later confirm, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

God's covenant with His people was at one level conditioned on their obedience. Even so, today, our relationship with God as His special possession expects our obedience to Him. When we disobey God's commands, He may allow us to experience the consequences of our sin. Our relationship with Him remains, but we fail to experience all He has for us.

God's promise to set apart the Israelites was conditioned on their obedience. He gave them His laws and commands to bless them, not to put a burden on them. They did not need to keep His laws to become His people; rather, they received His laws because they were His people. As we ponder all God's past blessings to us, we will see better why He wants to set us apart for His purposes and glory.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND LOVE FOR GOD?

DID YOU KNOW?

When thinking of wedding ceremonies, several Scriptures may come to mind. The attributes of Love found in 2 Corinthians 13 are regularly quoted. Ruth's declaration, "Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16) is also frequently used. Although these words uttered by Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi were under different circumstances, they are often incorporated into wedding vows as they exemplify true commitment. "The book of Ruth demonstrates how the Lord shows His covenant faithfulness to His undeserving people, often in surprising ways." And, "Ruth's covenantal faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi and her God provided a model showing that those who were not ethnic Israelites could be incorporated into the people of God through faith."¹³ In parallel, under God's New Covenant, we are reconciled to Him and incorporated in His family of believers through acceptance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Biblical Truth: Jesus is the believer's guarantee and mediator of a new and better covenant.

What comfort can believers take in the fact that our covenant with God is dependent on Christ alone?

LIVE IT

How does our daily activity show we live under God's rule and authority?

Just as our parents or caretakers gave us rules to live by, our Father, God gave us rules to govern our lives. His commands were not meant as a form of punishment, but generated from His love for all so that we would walk in his blessings and live the life He predestined for us. Read Exodus 19:1-8 reflectively. Imagine yourself standing with God's people at the foot of Mount Sinai. Consider the following:

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- **Remember what God has done.** Take some time to reflect on all that God has done in your life. Set aside intentional prayer time to thank God for all He has done.
- **Remember you are set apart.** God wants us to submit our lives to Him. In what ways does your life demonstrate that you are set apart for God's purpose and glory?
- **Remember God requires our obedience.** Ask God to help you identify areas of your life where you need His grace to live better as His witness to the world.

DAILY READINGS

1. DELIVERED "FROM" AND "TO" // GENESIS 19:4-5

In Genesis 19:4, God reminds Moses that He delivered the children of Israel from the Egyptians and brought them to Himself. God delivered them from oppressive slavery and the hands of a powerful nation. God wanted His chosen people to live obediently in His presence. We all have struggles and things we want God to deliver us from. We pray to God with a list of requests, including deliverance from those we consider enemies. We wish the difficult situations and people to go away. Do we often think of where we want to be delivered to? Do we ask God to bring us to Himself?

Pray for God to deliver you and ask Him to bring you to Himself.

2. QUICK DEPARTURE FROM OBEDIENCE // EXODUS 19:8

Enjoy the moments when God speaks into your heart and you feel like you do anything with the Lord on your side. Treasure the times God blesses you beyond imagination. Remember the humbling moments when you repent from wrong and turn to God. In these moments, we are clear about our love and commitment to God. In Exodus 19:8, the people affirm they will follow the Lord's commands. By Exodus 32, the people grow weary of waiting for Moses to return from the mountain. So they go to Aaron and convince him to make idols they can worship. Even though the people witnessed signs and wonders, they quickly turned from God.

Stay humble and before the Lord. Resist the temptation to turn from Him in times of weakness.

3. THE PATH TO LIFE // PROVERBS 10:17

On a recent trip to the airport, I looked at the bookseller's shelf marked, "Spirituality." The titles on the shelf were everything but Christian. The rack was full of self-help titles and provided endless ways to live the best life. The problem is that these instructions were from man and not from God. In Proverbs 10:17 Solomon affirms, "The one who follows instruction is on the path to life." Look at

your bookshelf, check your podcast subscriptions, and flip through your digital books. Whose instructions are you following? Are you listening to man more than God? If you are, it is time to make a change.

Decide to seek the Lord's instruction above all else. Whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness.

4. THE COMING KING // LUKE 1:31-33

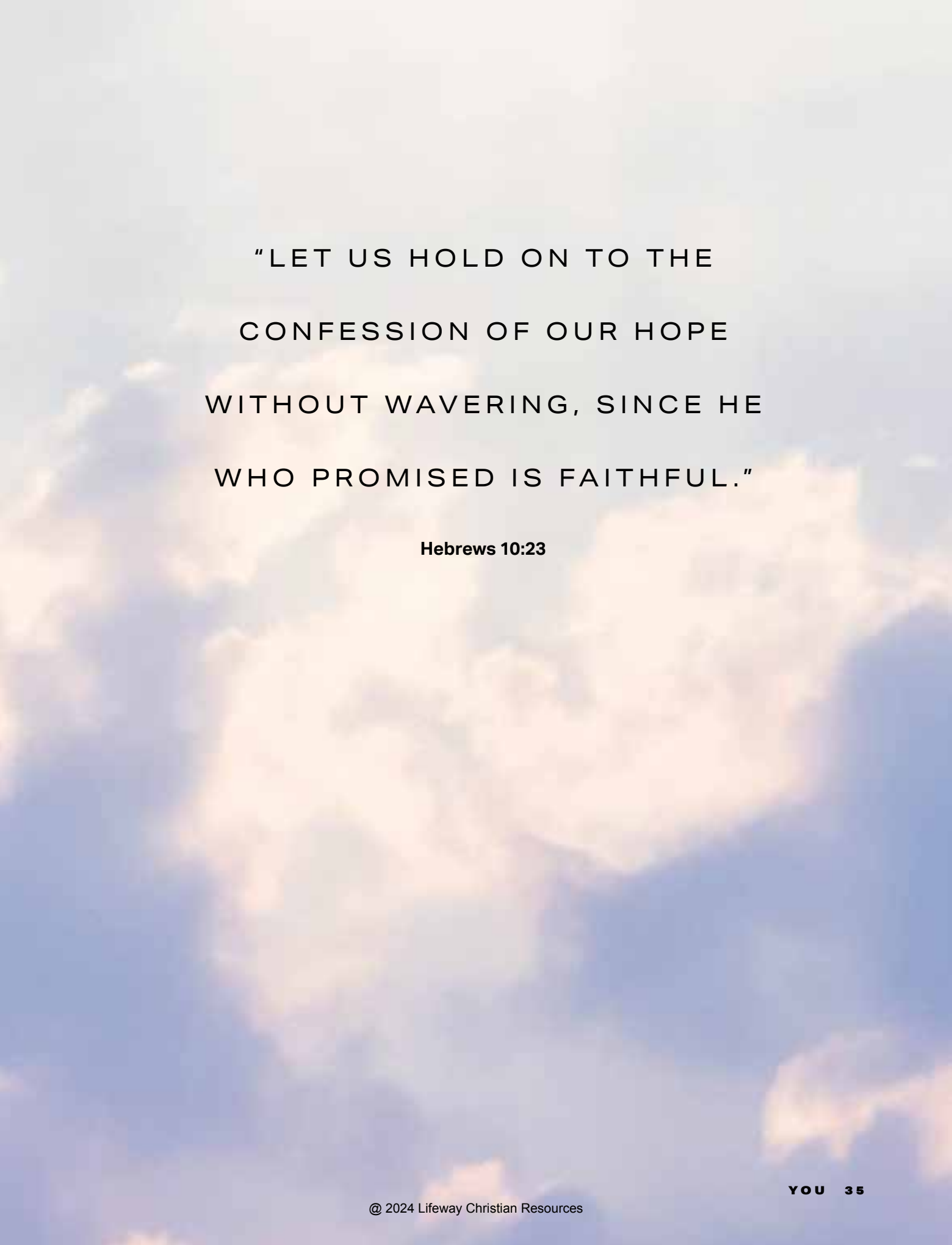
This fall's election will showcase men and women seeking to establish earthly reigns through politics. Candidates will spend millions and galvanize individuals to promote their agendas. A tremendous amount of effort will go into campaigns that represent temporary leadership. Their reign will expire when the term is complete. Not Jesus. Mary is told that she will bear a son whose name will be Jesus. He will be great, and His term will never expire. Christ came as King to save the world that through Him all might be saved. Elections are important but remember that no earthly ruler has the power to save.

Choose to follow Christ who rules with all power for eternity.

5. PRESENT THE BEST CANDIDATE // JOHN 10:9-10

During election season, candidates ask individuals to support their campaigns. Everyday people will show their support of candidates with pictures on social media. Others will donate money. Most importantly, people will testify about what they like about one candidate and dislike about the others. It is interesting that even quiet people find the strength to voice their opinions during election time because they feel that something is at stake. Sometimes we promote people more than we promote God. Jesus proclaims that He has come to save, protect, and provide abundant life. He asks us to tell all we know about him. Make sure that you testify about God more than man.

Intentionally witness and testify of the Lord. Eternity is at stake, and we should present the best candidate.



"LET US HOLD ON TO THE
CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE
WITHOUT WAVERING, SINCE HE
WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL."

Hebrews 10:23