

Exodus Chapter 23 Continued

Exodus 23:17 "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD."

In the city of Jerusalem, when they were come into the land of Canaan, and the temple was there built: here they were to show themselves before the Lord as being his, and devoted to his service. Concerning which the Misnic doctors have the following canon, "all are bound to appear except a man deaf and dumb, a fool, a little one, one of neither sex, or of both sexes, women, servants not free, the lame, the blind, the sick, an old man, and he that cannot go on his feet".

This seems to be a strange statement in that the women were not required to go, but you must remember that they had large families and it would have been very difficult for the women to go and carry the children. Sometimes these trips to the temple took several days and you could see how difficult the trip would be with the family. They were required to go wherever the tabernacle was. These three feasts, or festivals, that we discussed in the last lesson were the three they were required to attend, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Ingathering.

Exodus 23:18 "Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning."

This belongs to the feast of the Passover; for, as all the Jewish writers agree, this sacrifice is the sacrifice of the passover, as it is sometimes called (see Exodus 12:27). Now when the paschal lamb was killed, and its blood was shed, and its flesh eaten, there was to be no leaven along with it. It was to be eaten with unleavened bread, and there was to be no leaven in their houses at this time.

It was not to be slain until all was removed. This was the first thing the Jews did, as soon as the fourteenth day was come, to search for leaven, remove and burn it. And this sense of the law is confirmed by the Targum of Jonathan, which is, "not a man shall slay, while there is leaven in your houses, the sacrifice of my passover. And to the same purpose is the note of Jarchi:

"Neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning": And indeed, no part of the passover lamb was to remain until the morning, what did was to be burnt with fire (Exodus 12:10). The Targum of Jonathan is, "neither shall there remain without the altar the fat of the sacrifice of my passover until the morning, nor of the flesh which ye ate in the evening"; and so Jarchi interprets it of its not remaining without the altar.

Leaven is symbolic of sin and it would be wrong to include sin in this ceremony. "My sacrifice", probably means that this was the sacrificial lamb. This was the most symbolic sacrifice, since it typifies Jesus Christ, the Perfect Lamb. In the lamb sacrifice, it was all to be eaten that night and there was nothing to be left.

Exodus 23:19 "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk."

“Not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk”: Canaanite ritual, according to excavations as Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), called for sacrificial kids to be boiled in milk. But the damaged Ugaritic text does not clearly specify mother’s milk. If it were so, then it is understandable that Israel was being prevented from copying pagan idolatrous ritualism. Another option suggests that the dead kid was being boiled in the vary substance which had sustained its life; hence the prohibition. Until more archeological information comes to light, the specific religious or cultural reason remains as supposition.

It seems that, the custom of the land was to boil the kid (goat) in milk. It would have been extra cruel to boil the baby goat in its own mother's milk. Perhaps this was why God commanded them not to do this. In Orthodox homes, milk and meat are not served together at the same meal. Perhaps, this is the reason why they do not. God expects firstfruit gifts, and then He can multiply the gift. To multiply something, you have to have something to start with.

Verses 20-33: “Behold, I send an Angel before thee”: God promised “an angel” or “mine angel” (verse 23), for Israel’s protection and success. This is no ordinary angel, for God’s “name is in him” and He can “pardon your transgressions”, for “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (Luke 5:21). This must be the Angel of the covenant (Isa. 63:9; Mal. 3:1), the preincarnate Christ Himself. Obedience would result in blessing; therefore, “obey his voice, provoke him not” (something they really did in Num. 14:11; Psalm 78:17, 40, 56).

Besides “sending” His Angel, God would “send my fear before thee” [Joshua 2:9-11 for fulfillment] ... “and I will send hornets.” He promised to send panic and confusion to every nation they had to face in military action. Some have taken the hornets as literal ones; others identify it as a reference to the Egyptian armies. However, it is probably best viewed as a figurative expression referring to the panic-producing power of God which aided in overcoming both king, Sihon and Og. This is supported by the proximity (of verse 28 to verse 27). In one sense, this is synonymous parallelism (Deut. 2:25; 7:20). Panic certainly did play an important role in the victories both in Trans-Jordan and Canaan (Num. 22:3; Joshua 2:9, 11; 5:1; 9:24).

This “Angel” that the Lord sent to keep Israel on the right path may have been a special guardian angel (perhaps Michael; see Dan. 12:1). But more likely, it was the Lord Himself or the preincarnate Christ (Gen. 24:7).

Exodus 23:20 "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared."

Not a created angel, but the uncreated one, the Angel of God's presence, that was with the Israelites at Sinai, and in the wilderness. Who saved, redeemed, bore, and carried them all the days of old, whom they rebelled against and tempted in the wilderness. As appears by all the characters after given of him, which by no means agree with a created angel.

Aben Ezra observes, that some say this is the book of the law, because it is said, "my name is in him", or "in the midst of it". Others say, the ark of the covenant; but he says this angel is

Michael; and if indeed by Michael is intended the uncreated angel, as he always is in Scripture, he is right.

Some of the ancient Jewish writers say, this is the Angel that is the Redeemer of the world, and the keeper of the children of men. And Philo the Jew applies the word unto the divine Logos, and says, "He" (God), uses the divine Word as the guide of the way. For the oracle is, "behold, I send my Angel", etc., which agrees with what follows:

To preserve the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness, from all their enemies that should set upon them, and to bring them safe at last to the land of Canaan. Which he had appointed for them, and promised to them, and had prepared both in his purpose and gift for them. And would make way for their settlement in it by driving out the nations before them.

"Angel" here is capitalized and this probably indicated the Lord. Just as the Lord went before them to help them, He goes before us, the Christians too; leading the way. The place for them was already prepared. They would have a few struggles to overcome along the way, but they would make it to the Promised Land.

Exodus 23:21 "Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name [is] in him."

Of His face or countenance; observe His looks towards you in a providential way, whether frowning or smiling. Observe His directions and instructions, laws and commands.

"And obey His voice; hearken to what He says, and cheerfully, readily, and punctually do as He orders.

"Provoke Him not": By unbelief, by murmurings and complaints. By unbecoming words and actions, by transgressing his commands, and acting contrary to His will.

"For He will not pardon your transgressions": Or suffer them to pass unchastised and uncorrected, but will, as He did, take vengeance on their inventions, and on them because of them. Though He forgave their iniquities; for that He was such an Angel as could forgive sin, which none but God can do, is evident. Because it would be absurd to say He will not pardon, if He could not pardon their transgressions (see Matt. 9:6).

"For my name is in Him": The Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father; the nature and perfections of God are in the Word and Son of God, and so His name Jehovah, which is peculiar to Him. Christ is Jehovah our righteousness: or "though my name is in Him"; as Abendana and others, His name the Lord God, gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, as afterwards proclaimed in Him. And yet, notwithstanding this, He would not clear the guilty, or suffer the Israelites to go unpunished, if they offended Him. The Targum of Onkelos is, "or in My name is His word," He is my ambassador and speaks in My name.

This is surely speaking of the Lord (only God can pardon sin). This is the second person in the Trinity. God demands our obedience. God esteems obedience more than sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey [is] better than sacrifice, [and] to hearken than the fat of rams."

The quote "My name is in Him" indicates that this is truly the Lord.

Exodus 23:22 "But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries."

Or "hearkening hearken", to it attentively, listen to it, and diligently and constantly observe and obey in whatever he shall direct and order.

"And do all that I speak": By him; or whatsoever he had spoken, or was about to speak; for as yet all the laws and statutes were not delivered, especially those of the ceremonial kind.

"Then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries". Which they should either meet with in their passage through the wilderness, or when they came into the land of Canaan. Signifying that he would protect them from their enemies and subdue them under them. Giving them victory over them as that they should be utterly destroyed. And so in this way, made for the possession of their land in the following words:

You see obedience to God brings Divine Protection. God will fight your battles for you. What God is saying here, is that anyone who attacks God's people physically or verbally, have actually attacked God. God takes care of His children.

Verse 23-33: The Lord had already announced the ban on the peoples of Canaan in His covenant with Abram (Gen. 15:16, 19-21). The reasons for His judgment are given as well: "their gods ... their works." The Canaanites had polluted the Promised Land with their debased practices and would corrupt the people of Israel if allowed to remain in the land (see Judah's experience in Genesis 38; Deut. 20:16-18). God promised to not only "deliver" the enemy into Israel's hands but bless Israel's obedience.

Exodus 23:23 "For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off."

"Mine Angel": Usually taken to be a reference to the Angel of Yahweh, who is distinguished from the Lord who talks about Him as another person (see note on 3:2). Yet, He is identified with Him by reason of His forging sin and the Lord's name being in Him (verse 21). Neither Moses nor some other messenger or guild qualifies for such descriptions. The key to victory in the upcoming takeover of the Land would not be Israel's military skill but the presence of this Angel, who is the pre-incarnate Christ.

God was angry with all these people who were occupying Canaan or the Promised Land. They worshipped false gods and God had given them a time to repent; but they did not. Now, God was going to take their land and give it to the Children of Israel. They could not fail, God was with them.

Exodus 23:24 "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images."

“Break down their images”: Stone markers of pagan shrines were intolerable once the land has been taken from the tribes just mentioned in the previous verse.

We see why God was angry with these people, they were worshipping false gods. The first thing God wanted the Children of Israel to do was destroy the images of these false gods.

Verses 25-26: Proper worship brought with it due rewards, not only good harvests and a good water supply, but also physical health, including fertility and safe pregnancies.

Exodus 23:25 "And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee."

And him only, who had brought them out of Egypt, and done so many great and good things for them at the Red sea, and now in the wilderness. By which he appeared to be the true Jehovah, the one and only living God, and to be their God in covenant, who had promised them much, and had performed it. And therefore was in a special and peculiar manner their God, and they were under the highest obligations to serve and worship him in the way and manner he directed them to.

"And he shall bless thy bread and thy water": And make them nourishing and refreshing to them, and preserve them thereby in health, as well as prosper and succeed them, and increase their worldly substance.

"And I will take sickness away from the midst of thee". The stroke of bitterness, or the bitter stroke, as the Targum of Jonathan, any grievous disease, which is bitter and distressing. Signifying that there should be none among them, but that they should be healthful, and free from distempers and diseases.

If these Children of Israel stayed obedient to God and worshipped Him only and tore down these images of false gods, we see wonderful blessings spoken upon them. They would have plenty to eat and drink and not one of them would get sick. Many sicknesses in our society today are brought on because of sin in our lives. Aids are a very good example of that. Not every single person brought it on himself, because there are those who acquired it from blood transfusions; but the great majority got it, because of sins they were committing. Many other diseases would be nearly done away with if people would lay their cigarettes and whiskey down.

Exodus 23:26 "There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil."

There shall be no abortions or miscarriages, nor sterility or barrenness, either among the Israelites, or their cattle of every kind, so that there should be a great increase, both of men and beasts.

"The number of thy days I will fulfil; which was fixed for each of them, in his eternal purposes and decrees. Or what, according to the temperament of their bodies and the course of nature, which, humanly speaking, it might be supposed they would arrive unto. Or generally the common term of human life. It may be considered whether any respect is had to the time of their continuance in the land of Canaan, the term of which was fixed in the divine mind, or the fullness of time in which the Messiah was to come.

God had even promised that there would be no miscarriages. To the Hebrews, it was thought to be a curse not to have children. Here God promised them children. He was also saying, that there would be no untimely deaths, but everyone would live his allotted days out.

Exodus 23:27 "I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee."

What should cause fear among the nations of the land of Canaan; either the hornets mentioned in the next verse as the explanative of this. Or the fame of his mighty works, which he had done for Israel in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness. Which struck the inhabitants of Canaan with such a panic, that they were ready to faint and melt away, and lost all courage (Josh. 2:9).

"And will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come": That is, the greatest part of them.

"And I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee": Flee away, not being able to face them and stand a battle. Or however, not stand it long, but run and make their escape. "Or I will give thee the neck of them"; cause them to submit, to lay down their necks and be trampled upon. An expression denoting their subjection, and an entire conquest of them (see Psalm 18:39).

God said here, that Israel would move into an area and the people's fear would be so great that they would retreat even without a fight. God had already fought for them.

Exodus 23:28 "And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee."

"Hornets": This figurative expression of the panic-producing power of God parallels My terror" (verse 27). Which was the obvious effect of "My angel" having been the advance guard to the conquest (verse 23). In anticipation of the conquest of their Land, Israel was being given another reminder that victory depended on God and not their own efforts alone. Fear and panic did play a strategic role in the victories in Transjordan and Canaan (Num. 22:3; Joshua 2:9, 11; 5:1; 9:24). An alternative non-figurative view is based upon the bee or wasp being a heraldic symbol of

Egyptian pharaohs whose steady succession of military strikes into Canaan year after year God providentially used to weaken Canaan prior to the invasion by Israel.

These hornets could be literal or this could be speaking of many kinds of plagues. It could even be speaking of some army that God caused to go through the land. Whatever or whoever it was, we know that God caused them to go and weakened these people, so that the Children of Israel would have no problem taking them over. Remember the people being run out were heathens, and they worshipped false gods.

Verses 29-30: The occupation would be a gradual but effective process taking longer than a year to accomplish, but ensuring full control of a land in good condition and not left desolate by a sweeping and destructive warfare. The reference to the multiplication of wild beasts if the land was desolated underscores the fertility of the land and its ability to support life.

Exodus 23:29 "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee."

This is observed beforehand, lest the Israelites should be discouraged, and fear they should never be rid of them; and it was so ordered in Providence for the following reason:

"Lest the land be desolate": The Israelites were not numerous enough to people all the land immediately. Providence had likewise another end in view in suffering some of the Canaanites to remain in the land. They were to prove Israel, and show whether they would hearken unto the commandment of the Lord (Judges 3:4).

"And the beast of the field multiply": The wild beasts from Arabia Desert made frequent inroads into Canaan, in quest of prey, and were not to be driven out but by continual hunting.

We see that God would do this a little at a time to save the crops. Also, if He totally destroyed this area of people, there would be no one to thin the animals out. And that could become a problem.

Exodus 23:30 "By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land."

Not the beasts of the field, but the inhabitants of Canaan, who were left partly to keep up the cities and towns, that they might not fall to ruin, and to till the land, that it might not be desolate. And partly, to be trials and exercises to the people of Israel, and to prove whether they would serve the Lord or not. Just as the corruptions of human nature remain with the people of God when converted. For the trial and exercise of their graces, and that they may have their dependence not on themselves, but on the grace of God to keep them in his ways, and to preserve them safe to eternal glory. And by completing the work of grace, which is gradually done, they might be made meet for it.

"Until thou be increased, and inherit the land": For as their enemies were driven out gradually, little by little so they multiplied gradually. Until at length they became a sufficient number to fill all the cities and towns in all the nations of Canaan, and take an entire possession of it, as their inheritance given unto them by God.

This was done gradually to preserve the quality of the land, and also so the Israelites could take their time in settling there.

Exodus 23:31 "And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee."

"I will set thy bounds": God gave both broad and more detailed geographic descriptions of the Land. Even limited demarcation of borders was sufficient to lay out the extent of their possession. It would extend from the Gulf of Aqabah to the Mediterranean and from the desert in the Negev to the river of the northern boundary.

God established the borders of the Holy Land in the Scripture above. There would be a struggle, but God had promised success. We see the Children of Israel didn't kill all of them, they just drove them out.

The river here meant the Euphrates. River translated means Nahar, which referred especially to the Euphrates.

Exodus 23:32 "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods."

"Make no covenant": International diplomacy, with its parity or suzerainty treaties, was not an option open to Israel in dealing with the tribes living within the designated borders of the Promise Land (Deut. 7:1-2). All these treaties were accompanied by the names of the nations' gods, so it was fitting to deliver a charge not to make a treaty (covenant), with them, nor to serve their pagan gods. The situation with other nations outside the land being given to Israel was different (Deut. 20:10-18).

This would be some good advice for us in the United States. People who do not believe in God are not apt to keep their agreements. These Israelites were forbidden by God to go into agreements with these people, or to compromise God and go into agreement with their false gods. God will not be compromised. He will not stay where there are false gods.

Exodus 23:33 "They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee."

The land of Canaan, given by God for an inheritance, and now would be in the possession of the Israelites; and therefore, were not to suffer the old inhabitants to dwell with them in it, at least no longer than they could help it. They were to do all they could to root them out.

"Lest they make thee sin against me": By their ill examples and persuasions, drawing them into idolatry, to which there is no greater sin against God, it being not only contrary to his law, his mind and will, but directly against his nature, being, perfections and glory.

"For if thou serve their gods": Or "for thou wilt serve"; this would be the consequence of their dwelling in the land, they would draw the Israelites into the worship of their idols, to which they were naturally prone; and should they commit idolatry.

"It will surely be a snare unto thee": Idolatry would be the cause of their ruin and destruction, they would be snared by it, as fishes in a net, or birds and beasts by traps and gins. Or "for it will be a snare", that is, the Canaanites dwelling among them would be a snare to draw them into their idolatry and go into ruin.

God will not allow His people to fellowship with people of the world. God expects our total loyalty. God would not allow any worship of heathen gods at all. God knew if they made a treaty with them that each would tolerate the other's worship, and in so doing the true God would be compromised. God would not bless them, if any of the world around them crept into His church. We Christians today, should take note of this. God will not allow compromise. We should be careful to keep the world out of the church.

Exodus Chapter 23 Continued Questions

1. How many times a year shall all the males appear before God?
2. Why were the women, probably, not required to go?
3. What kind of bread was forbidden with the blood sacrifice?
4. What is symbolic of sin?
5. What did "My sacrifice" indicate?
6. What does the lamb sacrifice typify?
7. What was meant about seething a kid in the mother's milk?
8. In verse 20, why was Angel capitalized?
9. What would the Angel do?
10. In verse 21 what statement left no doubt that this is speaking of the Lord?
11. What is more important to God than sacrifice?
12. What did God promise in verse twenty-two, to do if they obeyed Him?

13. What people would have to be removed for the Israelites to go into the promise land?
14. What did God warn His people about false gods in verse 24?
15. What two things would God bless of the Israelites, if they served the Lord?
16. What special blessing would He bring also?
17. In verse 26 He promised a full life and what else?
18. When God went before them into the land, what would He do for them?
19. What did God say He would send to drive them out?
20. Why was God not going to drive them out in one year?
21. In verse 31 God sets the boundaries of what?
22. The river in verse 31, was what specific river?
23. What did God warn them against doing?
24. Why did God not want them to live in the land with the Israelites?
25. What lesson can we Christians learn from this?