

Exodus Chapter 23

Verses 1-9: Include a list of miscellaneous laws, which included the protection of equitable and impartial justice for all. False testimony, undiscerningly following a majority, favoring one over another, and accepting bribes, all contribute to the perversion of true justice. The attitude of impartiality was to include the helping of another with his animals regardless of whether he be friend or foe. If no help was given, his livelihood could very well be adversely affected, which was a situation others in the community could not allow to happen.

To act with integrity and to show mercy and humanity – even to one's enemy – was essential to the Law. These verses anticipate the "Golden Rule" (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 12:20).

Exodus 23:1 "Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness."

"Thou shalt not raise": Hebrew, not take up, to wit, into thy mouth (as Exodus 20:7), either by the first raising, or further spreading of it. Or not bear, or endure, as that word oft signifies; not hear it patiently, delightfully, readily, approvingly, as persons are very apt to do. But rather shalt discourage and reprove the spreader of it, according to (Proverbs 25:23). Possibly the Holy Ghost might choose a word of such general signification to show that all these things were forbidden. Put not thine hand, i.e. not conspire or agree with them, which is signified by joining hands (Prov. 11:21). Not give them a helping hand in it, not encourage them to it by gifts or promises, not assist them by counsel or interest. Others not swear with them; but swearing is not noted by putting the hand, but by lifting it up.

False accusations are very dangerous. In a court of law, if you are caught witnessing falsely, you can be put in jail. God will not allow us to testify falsely, because it damages the person you are testifying against. This is not just for court either. God will hold us responsible for the false reports or rumors we tell on others.

Exodus 23:2 "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to [do] evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest [judgment]:"

We or these Hebrews are not to follow the crowd. The way of the crowd leads to destruction. That is what is wrong in our churches today. They have compromised with the world so, that it is difficult to tell what is of God and what is the world. The New Age Movement which has penetrated the church brings the way of the world into the church.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide [is] the gate, and broad [is] the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at:" Because strait [is] the gate, and narrow [is] the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

You see, the way of the multitude leads to Hell. As we learned in our last lesson, we must be a separated people. Our only leader must be God. We must at all times tell the truth even if we are the only ones telling the truth.

Exodus 23:3 "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause."

We must not "pervert judgment" either in favor of the rich or of the poor. Justice must hold her scales even, and be proof equally against a paltry fear of the rich and a weak compassion for the indigent. The cause alone is to be considered, not the persons (compare Leviticus 19:15).

We see in this Scripture that we are not to be on the side of the poor just because they are poor. Justice is to be fair, whether they are poor or rich. People have a tendency to be on the side of the poor, but we must be honest and give a fair deal to all, poor and rich.

Exodus 23:4 "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again."

Romans 12:20-21 "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The Bible teaches us to be good to our enemies.

Exodus 23:5 "If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

This would be for the animal's benefit, as well as the enemy's. Probably this would cause these enemies to forget their differences. Helping all who are in need is always the thing to do, whether they are friends, enemies or strangers.

Exodus 23:6 "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause."

As a judge should beware, lest through motives of compassion, or an affectation of popularity, he be biased in favor of the poor. So, on the other hand, he must not despise a man because he is poor and without friends. He must not take advantage of his poverty to misrepresent his cause. To refuse to give him an impartial hearing, to strain a point of equity to his prejudice, or pass sentence wrongfully against him. The words thy poor, are emphatical, importing that they were members of their body, though poor.

We are not to look down upon people because they are poor.

Exodus 23:7 "Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked."

We must tell the truth all the time. It is especially important to tell the truth, when a falsehood would hurt someone else. God will not overlook us lying when we hurt someone else. If you have done this, ask God to forgive you and don't tell a falsehood and hurt anyone anymore.

Exodus 23:8 "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."

Namely, from such whose causes are depending before thee; because if thou does not sell justice for it, yet thou will both seem to do so, and be tempted to do so (compare Deut. 16:19; 1 Sam. 8:3; Prov. 17:8, 23; 19:6).

"The wise": or, the open-eyed, and quick-sighted, which in this case cannot see, partly because they will not see. And partly because interest and affection do exceedingly corrupt the judgment, and render it very partial.

"The words of the righteous": I.e. the judgment of the righteous judges, and of them who before were such, and are inclined to be so, and probably would be so, were they not tempted with bribes. Or of them who by their place should be righteous. So they are called righteous, to admonish them of their duty to be so. And to aggravate their sin when they are unrighteous, and consequently to aggravate the mischief of gifts, which make those unrighteous whose office obliged them to be righteous. Or thus, the matters or causes of the righteous, which may be understood not of the judges, but of the parties pleading. Whose righteous cause is by this means perverted by the judge, and a wrong sentence given.

This is speaking of taking a bribe. Being paid to lie is even worse than just lying to get something done. Lying is a sin. Being paid a bribe to lie is two sins.

Exodus 23:9 "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

As these were not to be vexed and oppressed in a private manner and by private men (see Exodus 22:21). So neither in a public manner, and in a public court of judicature, or by judges on the bench when their cause was before them. And then by not doing them justice and then showing a partiality to those of their own nation against that of a stranger. Whereas a stranger ought to have equal justice done him as a native, and the utmost care should be taken that he has no injury done him, and the rather because he is a stranger.

"For ye know the heart of a stranger": The fears he is possessed of, the inward distress of his soul, the anxiety of his mind, the tenderness of his heart, the workings of his passions, his grief and sorrow, and dejection of spirit. The Targum of Jonathan is, "the groaning of the soul of a stranger". This the Israelite judges knew, having had a very late experience of it."

"Seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt": Where they had been vexed and oppressed, brought into hard bondage, and groaned under it. And therefore it might be reasonably thought and expected that they would have a heart sympathizing with strangers. And use them well, and especially see that justice was done them, and no injury or oppression of any kind.

These Hebrews should be able to relate to being a stranger. Of all people, they should not oppress strangers. The 430 years they were strangers in Egypt should make them kinder to strangers.

Verses 10-12: The command to let the poor “eat” from the resting land in the “seventh year” is one of many passages in the Law that charged the wealthy to make provision for the impoverished (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; 25:25, 35-38).

Exodus 23:10-11 "And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:" "But the seventh [year] thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, [and] with thy oliveyard."

“Seventh year”: A sabbatical year of rest after 6 years of farming benefited both the land and the poor. This pattern of letting a field lie fallow appears to have been unique with Israel.

This was a sabbath of rest for the land, as well as the Sabbath for the people. We have talked before of the one thousand year sabbath that will occur at the end of the six one thousand years of work here on the earth. This is called the millennium reign of Jesus; the one thousand year day of rest for the believers. God set everything up on these six days of work and one day of rest. There would be a voluntary crop of fruit. The poor could benefit from this.

Exodus 23:12 "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."

The law of the weekly Sabbath is here repeated in conjunction with that of the Sabbatical year, to mark the intimate connection between the two, which were parts of one and the same system. A system which culminated in the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:8-13). Nothing is added to the requirements of the fourth commandment; but the merciful intention of the Sabbath day is more fully brought out. It is to be kept in order that the cattle may rest, and the slave and stranger may be refreshed.

This is just saying that Sabbath was for everything and everyone to rest.

Exodus 23:13 "And in all [things] that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth."

Idolatry was to be avoided right down to the level of not causing the name of other deities to be remembered. This perhaps served also as a prohibition of intermarriage with other nations, for in the marriage contract recognition was given to the deities of the parties involved. Which would have had the effect of putting God on a par with pagan gods.

"Circumspect" means to take heed to or observe. God here was just telling them to observe all the ordinances that He had given them. He warned them again, that He was jealous of other gods. They were not to even speak the name of a false god.

Verses 14-19: “Three annual feasts were appointed for Israel (Lev. 23), the “Feast of”:

- (1) "Unleavened Bread," which includes Passover;
- (2) "Harvest," also known as the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost;
- (3) "Ingathering" or the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth).

"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk (Deut. 14:21). Prohibited the types of cruelty committed in ancient Canaanite sacrifices. Jewish authorities later interpreted this verse to mean that one must not eat dairy products with meat products, a standard law among observant Jewish people today.

Requiring all males to be present for 3 specified feasts at a central sanctuary would have had a socially and religiously uniting effect on the nation. The men must trust the Lord to protect their landholdings while on pilgrimage to the tabernacle. (34:23-24). All 3 feasts were joyful occasions, being a commemoration of the Exodus (the Feast of Unleavened Bread). An expression of gratitude to God for all the grain He had provided (the Feast of the Harvest). And a thanksgiving for the final harvest (the Feast of In-gathering). Alternative names appear in the biblical record for the second and third feasts: the Feast of Weeks (34:22), or Firstfruits (34:22; Acts 2:1), and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (Lev. 23:33-36).

Exodus 23:14 "Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year."

This was the institution of the great religious festivals "The feast of unleavened bread," or the Passover. "The feast of harvest," or Pentecost. "The feast of Ingathering," or the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a memorial of the dwelling in booths in the wilderness, and which was observed in the seventh month (Exodus 12:2). All the males were enjoined to repair to the tabernacle and afterwards the temple and the women frequently went.

The institution of this national custom was of the greatest importance in many ways, by keeping up a national sense of religion and a public uniformity in worship. By creating a bond of unity, and also by promoting internal commerce among the people. Though the absence of all the males at these three festivals left the country defenseless, a special promise was given of divine protection, and no incursion of enemies was ever permitted to happen on those occasions.

There were to be three special times a year, when all of the men in the family were required to go to wherever the tabernacle was and worship and praise God.

Exodus 23:15 "Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)"

The Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover were in the same time element. Jesus is the Lamb of God (the sacrificial Lamb of Passover, the first day). He is also, the Bread of Life (unleavened, free from sin). Jesus at His crucifixion was the Unleavened Bread and the Passover Lamb. He fulfilled this feast. Passover was the fourteenth day of the first month (Abib or Nisan). April, on our calendar, would be a similar time. Good Friday and Easter would fall during this

period. The killing of the Passover Lamb (Jesus), was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus' body was symbolic of unleavened bread.

This Feast of Unleavened Bread continued through the twenty-first. The first day and the eighth day of this feast, or festival, were holy days. No one was to work on either of these days. (Psalm 81), commemorates this festival. This was a commemoration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It also commemorates the Christians' deliverance from sin by Jesus.

Exodus 23:16 "And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, [which is] in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field."

These were two different feasts. Firstfruits were the same as Pentecost and Feast of Weeks. Pentecost occurred 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. "Fifty" means jubilee or setting the captives free.

"Pentecost" means fifty. Certainly, the disciples, and in fact the whole 120 people present, were set free when they received the Holy Spirit of God (see Acts 2:1-4). This "firstfruits" is of the harvest. The Bible speaks of the great harvest at the end of the world. This "Pentecost" was a first fruit of this harvest. It was at the beginning of the harvest, and "ingathering" was at the end of the harvest (The Feast of Ingathering).

The Feast of Ingathering is known by several other names: Festival of Tents, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Ingathering, Festival of Jehovah and Feast of Trumpets. This feast was celebrated at the end of the farm year. By our calendar, it would be about the month of October. By the Jewish calendar, this would occur on the 15th day of their seventh month (Tisri): five days before Day of Atonement. There were sacrifices made of bullocks, rams, lambs and goats. These three feasts were to be celebrated every year by all the males. This does not mean that women could not participate; it just means they were not required to come if they were unable because of family duties.

Exodus Chapter 23 Questions

1. Raising a false report would classify a person as what type of witness?
2. If you are caught lying in court, what can happen to you?
3. Who are we warned not to follow?
4. What is a major problem in our churches today?
5. Enter in at the _____.
6. Should we be on the side of the poor all the time? Explain.

7. If you see your enemy's animal straying, what should you do?
8. If your enemy hungers, what should you do?
9. Overcome evil with _____.
10. Verse eight was talking about what?
11. How many years was Israel in Egypt?
12. How many years should you work the land before it rests?
13. Is the Sabbath of rest just for you? Explain.
14. What does "circumspect" mean in verse 13?
15. Make no mention of _____.
16. How many times a year was every male to keep a feast to God?
17. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be eaten how many days?
18. What other feast was covered in the same time element, actually the first day?
19. Jesus, at His crucifixion, was what two things?
20. What two days do Christians celebrate that fall at the same time as Feast of Unleavened Bread?
21. What month was "Unleavened Bread"?
22. What Psalm commemorates this festival?
23. What did the Feast of Unleavened Bread remember?
24. The Feast of Firstfruits was known, also, as what?
25. What does "fifty" mean?
26. When did "Pentecost" occur?
27. Pentecost was a _____ of harvest.
28. What was "Ingathering"?
29. What are several other names for Ingathering?
30. When was it celebrated?
31. What month on our calendar would this be?

32. Name four animals sacrificed at this festival.