

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 14

Chapters 23:1-13

Instructions Concerning the False Witness and Unjust

With chapter 23, Moses continues delivering the ordinance of the LORD which represents His judgment on specific topics that are to guide the Nation of Israel throughout her existence.

Part 27 – False Witness

Exodus 23:1 " **You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.**

The Ninth Commandment states, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” In this expansion on that commandment, the passage warns a person to “**not bear a false report.**” The Hebrew wording is *lo tissa* and it means *to publish, to make known, to spread or broadcast*. We can infer from this judgment that we should publish, make known, spread or broadcast truth but never something that is false.

The Scripture goes on to say, “**do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.**” The classic example of this sin is found in Jezebel’s enlistment of worthless men who brought false testimony against Naboth to have him found guilty of cursing God and the king in order that they might stone him and allow his vineyard to fall into the hands of her husband, King Ahab.²⁸

Part 28 – Pervert Justice

Exodus 23: 2 " **You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; ³ nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.**

We must look at the word “**multitude**” first. In this passage, the context seems to mean that we should not go along with a crowd out of control, set on doing evil deeds, and that can be argued justifiably in other portions of the Bible. But here, the word used is *rabbim* and in other places it is translated as the great chiefs or mighty ones. Therefore, it is best to understand this passage to say that no one should follow into sin those who hold power by their position, prestige or wealth. Examples of this sin prevail ad nauseum in all civilization throughout human history. Our legislators are constantly bombarded with lobbyists who have the position, power, prestige and wherewithal to sway a congressional vote in favor of some scheme to increase their advantage and as a result the revenue of some business deal to the detriment of the masses of those of less influence and power. But neither should the poor person have an unjust advantage in “**his dispute.**” Right should be right and wrong should be wrong as defined by the LORD and in His judgment, no one should take the side of wrong to serve their purposes.

²⁸ 1 Kings 21

Instructions Concerning Enemies

Part 29 – Enemy's Property

Exodus 23:4 " **If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.** ⁵ " **If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.** ⁶ " **You shall not pervert the justice *due* to your needy *brother* in his dispute.**

Under the heavens where we live and throughout all human history, this judgment from the LORD might be the most difficult to follow because it deals with our enemies. National enemies such as those who would form armies to attack our country are not the focus in this order; here, the attention is on the relationship among individuals, neighbors in dispute with each other within the nation of Israel. Jesus summed up this judgment in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (King James Version)

In this passage, even the property of those whom you hate or who hate you, should be protected and provided for as if it was yours for the good of its owner even though you and the owner are at odds with each other.

Instruction Concerning the Innocent or Righteous

Part 30 – False Charges

Exodus 23:7 " **Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.**

This judgment includes a serious and fatal warning, "**I will not acquit the guilty.**" False matters are present in every accusation; furthermore, even the innocent and the righteous often have accusations cast their way. This judgment warns that anyone who is guilty of participating in the act of bringing death to the "innocent or the righteous" will not experience the grace of the LORD. This judgment speaks past the temporal life in this world and includes life in the eternal future. Without any repentance, without falling before the LORD to ask forgiveness, without remorse for a sin against this judgment, salvation cannot be obtained.

Instruction Concerning Bribes

Part 31 – Bribe

Exodus 23:8 " **And you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.**

It is often taught that every man has a price for which he will willingly sell his soul and do that which he would otherwise detest, reject, abhor or condemn. The bribe, once accepted, will cause a person to close his eyes to an injustice, vote for that which is wrong, embrace that which is evil and close his mouth in deference to those who are perverse. Surely there are in every generation

people who cannot be bought for any price and will stand for what is right and honorable in the LORD at all times. Surely there are, but surely they are few!

Instruction Concerning Oppression of Others

Part 32 – Strangers

Exodus 23:9 " And you shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Once the pharaoh who *knew not Joseph* arrived in Egypt, the nation of Israel was squeezed by the new leaders into bondage for about 400 years. They were treated as strangers, forbidden to leave the country and forced into daily labor that did not benefit their families as it would if they were living freely in their own land. The nation of Israel had been in that situation just a little more than 90 days before they heard this part of the LORD's ordinance and they understood the common sense of the words, perhaps better than we who were never in such oppression can understand. But try we must to understand and never oppress the stranger we encounter.

Instructions Concerning Planting and Working

Part 33 – Planting of the Land

Exodus 23:10 " And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, ¹¹ but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.

It was the direction of the LORD for the Israelites to allow the land to have its sabbath year of rest and freedom just as the work of those paying off debts were freed from the labor in the seventh year. Therefore, a great trust in the LORD was required in the sixth year, the harvest had to be great enough to provide grain and other products from the land for the entire seventh year. In a small way, it was the same as the manna that they were collecting every day for their sustenance. On the sixth day of the week enough manna was collected for the sabbath; no manna was available to them on the sabbath. In this passage, the instruction allowed the land to rest from being seeded and therefore whatever grew would grow and during this seventh year the animals were allowed to graze at will. In addition, the grape vines as well as the olive trees were allowed to grow without manicure, cultivation or harvest. The produce of all was allowed to fall to the ground where it returned to the soil or was eaten by animals. It is hard to comprehend the state of Israel as every part and parcel of land in the nation was allowed to rest ungroomed every seventh year. It is also hard to comprehend the work required in the sixth year to prepare for the seventh. Goods were sold, money was stored and in the seventh year, that which was needed was purchased from other nations if available. But for those who followed this judgment faithfully, that which they stored provided adequately for the year!

Part 34 – Working in the Week

Exodus 23:12 " Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

The seventh day's rest was for a much greater purpose than just one person; it was for the rest of the nation, all its guests, all its servants and all its animals. This judgment required that the master could not take a vacation day each week and at the same time impose on all living things that he controlled a day's hard work and production. This judgment required that all of Israel rested on the sabbath day each week. The master could take another day while his force continued work, but the seventh was restricted from labor for all, the Israelite and the foreigner, the servants and the animals.

Instructions Concerning Strange Gods

Part 35 – Mentioning Names of Gods

Exodus 23:13 "Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth.

Here, it is the LORD's judgment that everyone in the nation of Israel was not to recognize even the remotest possibility of the existence of other gods in this world, even by mere mention of their names. Other gods had been dreamed up and worshiped by hundreds of people throughout the world and the freed nation of Israel had seen its lion's share of them in Egypt. The rest of the world had companion names for the Egyptian gods and Israel would once again encounter those man-made gods in the land of Canaan when it became the Promised Land under their control. Solomon would ignore this judgment and allow the worship of perverted fake gods in the beautiful new Temple he had built in deference to this judgment. He would not be the only king to lead the nation to embrace imaginary gods; so would all the kings of the north and several of the kings of the south after Solomon dies.