

## Exodus 23

Tonight, in chapter 23, we will read more commandments of the LORD. Many are straightforward and need no further explanation. But I will comment by the way of additional scriptures that will flesh out more of the meaning and intent of the verses.

(Exodus 23:1 NKJV) "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

Deuteronomy 19:16-19 NKJV (16) If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, (17) then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. (18) And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if* the witness *is* a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, (19) then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

Proverbs 6:16-19 NKJV These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: (17) A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, (18) A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, (19) A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

(Exodus 23:2 NKJV) You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice*.

After the spies returned from Canaan, some reported that there were giants there who “devour its inhabitants”:

Numbers 14:1-4 NKJV So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. (2) And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! (3) Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (4) So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

Proverbs 1:10-16 NKJV My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. (11) If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to *shed* blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; (12) Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit; (13) We shall find all *kinds* of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil; (14) Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse"— (15) My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path; (16) For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood.

(Exodus 23:3 NKJV) You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

Proverbs 22:2 NKJV The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD *is* the maker of them all.

Deuteronomy 15:11 NKJV For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

(Exodus 23:4 NKJV) "If you meet your **enemy's** ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. (Exodus 23:5 NKJV) If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

Romans 12:17-21 NKJV Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. (18) If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (20) **Therefore "IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP COALS OF FIRE ON HIS HEAD."** (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

BTW: Paul is quoting Proverbs 25:21-22.

In Luke 10:30-36, Jesus tells the story of a certain man who traveled to Jericho. Along the way, thieves attacked him leaving him half-dead. A priest and levite saw him and ignored his plight. (33) *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. (34) So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35) On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'* (36) *So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"*

(Exodus 23:6 NKJV) "You shall not pervert the judgment of your **poor** in his dispute.

Isaiah 10:1-2 NKJV "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, *Which* they have prescribed (2) To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the **poor** of My people, That **widows** may be their prey, And *that* they may rob the **fatherless**.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 NKJV (7) "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not harden your heart** nor shut your hand from your poor brother, (8) but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

(Exodus 23:7 NKJV) Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.

(Exodus 23:8 NKJV) And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

Deuteronomy 27:25 NKJV 'Cursed *is* the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.'  
"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"

Isaiah 33:15-16 NKJV He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: (16) He will dwell on high; His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water *will be* sure.

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Ephesians 4:25 NKJV Therefore, putting away lying, "LET EACH ONE OF YOU SPEAK TRUTH WITH HIS NEIGHBOR," for we are members of one another.

(Exodus 23:9 NKJV) "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:14-18 NKJV (14) "You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. (15) Each day you shall give *him* his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he *is* poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you.

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(17) "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. (18) But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.

(Exodus 23:10 NKJV) "**Six years you shall sow your land** and gather in its produce, (Exodus 23:11 NKJV) **but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat.** In like manner you shall do with your vineyard *and* your olive grove. (Exodus 23:12 NKJV) Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

The principle of the Sabbath applied to more than the workweek. There were also Sabbath years, where the land was to **rest and lie fallow** one year out of seven.

By tradition, some in Israel accomplished this by only cultivating six-sevenths of their land at any one time, and practicing a method of crop rotation. It appears to be a way around the commandment because they were certainly not trusting Him in full.

In the days of Jeremiah, the Israelites had been in the Promised Land for roughly 800 years, and for 490 years, they disobeyed His 7-year Sabbath rest. The Jews were allowed to work the land for six years, but on the seventh year they had to let the land get a rest. God commanded this **because the land needs to recuperate, gaining back its minerals.** The LORD is a teacher as well. This is going to be part of their livelihood in the Promised Land as agriculture expands. Also, this was an act of **trust and obedience to God.** By not

trusting for His provision, they had to spend 70 years in Babylon for the 10 7-year Sabbath rests they ignored.

Read [Leviticus 25:2-5](#) for more information.

In this current passage, there is another reason for the Sabbath year: **“That the poor among you may eat.”**

[Deuteronomy 15:7-8,11 NKJV](#) (7) "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, (8) but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

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(11) For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

**The principal is humility!** [Proverbs 22:2 NKJV](#) The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD *is* the maker of them all.

1 [John 3:17-18 NKJV](#) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, **how does the love of God abide in him?** (18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

[James 1:27 NKJV](#) Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

[Ephesians 4:1-3 NKJV](#) I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, (2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[Exodus 23:13 NKJV](#) “And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

“be circumspect” – synonyms include vigilance but also cautious. The implication is that we are to be thinking on these things that God has told us, so that we do not succumb greed, covetousness, and idolatry. Therefore, every commandment was of the LORD. At no time should one’s mind wander to consider any other god other than the LORD God.

[Ephesians 5:15-16 NKJV](#) See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, (16) redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

For the above 13 verses, it is very clear, upon careful reading, that the issue with which the LORD is dealing is the HEART. Love and compassion for one’s brother or sister and even for strangers and aliens in the land is of upmost importance. Clearly, the flesh wants to codify all of this into simple Laws to be followed “religiously”. God wants these things done because they are the right thing to do,

especially considering the grace and mercy extended to the Israelites from before Egypt until now!

So, when the LORD said it will be best for the land to let it lie fallow, the clever Israelites came up with the 6/7<sup>th</sup> plan, leaving 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the land fallow and simply swapping that out each year with a different segment. That's not what the LORD wanted!!! Besides, the fallow land was to be used to feed the poor and other animals. Remember I taught about legalism using the following verse?

**Leviticus 23:22 NKJV** 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.' "

The rabbi's decided to try to measure the corners "to be fair". But God didn't want a measurement made with a ruler but with the heart!

The two greatest laws are

**Deuteronomy 6:5-6 NKJV** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (6) "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

**Leviticus 19:18 NKJV** You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

Lying, following after wickedness, treatment of the poor, enemies, bribes, sabbath rests for the land and other commandments in this chapter all relate directly to who we believe God is and what we believe he desires for His creation. Impersonal, dead idols will lead one to act contrary to the perfect desires of our God. Idolatry will not lead to compassion and love. We have seen that idolatry is a trap that only leads to death, first, death inside and death of a relationship. Then ultimately, eternal death instead of eternal life!

But the Love of God and the Love of Others is based on the very nature of the Living God. **Without Him, we cannot love** because He first Loved Us and showed us the meaning of love.

Obviously, what is being taught is also the imperative of compassion, empathy and love. These things "appear" to be natural, but it is only by God's grace on all mankind that they can manifest. We have come to understand that because of our flesh, our sin-natures, we must cry out "Forgive us LORD for we cannot do this on our own!". We cannot love from the external commandments but only from an internal transformation. Any attempt at love and compassion will fail if Christ is not in us, impressing upon us the need of agape love, selflessness and sacrifice.

Here's what legalism did for the religious leaders of Jesus' day:

**Matthew 23:4 NKJV** For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

And here is our "Law"

**Galatians 6:2 NKJV** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

And here is another definition of the Law of Christ

**Colossians 3:12-17 NKJV** (12) Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; (13) bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. (14) But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (17) And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

**Galatians 2:20-21 NKJV** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (21) I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."