

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

10-21-20

Exodus 23

Laws of Justice and Mercy: Do What Is Right - Verses 1-5

¹ "Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. ² "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, ³ and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. ⁴ "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. ⁵ If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.

23:1 Making up or spreading false reports was strictly forbidden by God. Gossip, slander, and false witnessing would undermine families, strain neighborhood cooperation, and make chaos of the justice system. Destructive gossip still causes problems. Even if you do not initiate a lie, you become responsible if you pass it along. Don't circulate rumors; squelch them.

23:2-3 Justice is often perverted in favor of the rich. Here the people are warned against twisting justice in favor of the poor. Justice should be impartial, treating rich and poor alike. Giving special privileges to either rich or poor only makes justice for everyone more unlikely. Withstand the pressure of the crowd to sway your decision about a person. Let the fairness God shows to each of us guide your judgment.

23:4-5 The thought of being kind to enemies was new and startling in a world where revenge was the common form of justice. God not only introduced this idea to the Israelites, he made it law! If a man found a lost animal owned by his enemy, he was to return it at once, even if his enemy might use it to harm him. Jesus clearly taught in Luke 10:30-37 to reach out to all people in need, even our enemies. Following the laws of right living is hard enough with friends. When we apply God's laws of fairness and kindness to our enemies, we show how different we are from the world.

Be just in everything and towards everyone - Verses 6-9

⁶ "Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. ⁷ Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸ "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. ⁹ "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

23:6-9 Verses 6-9 deal with justice. Treat people fairly. Many of the great problems in the world have been caused by injustices, which have led to revolts, revolutions, wars, slavery, etc. While it probably deals specifically with judges or those settling disputes, it could also apply to bosses, teachers, politicians or anyone with authority. Treat those under you fairly and justly. If they have a complaint or two together have a dispute, listen to both sides and make a right decision.

Sabbath Laws – Verses 10-13

¹⁰ "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, ¹¹ but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. ¹² "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. ¹³ "Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.

23:10-13 These laws served at least four purposes. 1. It was good for the land. Letting land go fallow for a year meant that it wouldn't be overused. 2. It gave the needy people a chance to gather from the fallow fields the food that was growing wildly or from the seeds that fell from the last year's crops. 3. To remind people of Creation where God worked 6 days and rested the seventh. Therefore people should also rest on the seventh day. 4. It also protected the servants, workers, and animals from overwork. This is a reminder that not only the landowners/bosses need time off, but all workers need time off too. Otherwise they face possible burnout.

The Three Annual Festivals – Verses 14-19

¹⁴ "Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. ¹⁵ "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ "Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. "Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. ¹⁷ "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁸ "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast. "The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning. ¹⁹ "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

23:14-19

These feasts were to be celebrated yearly. The purpose was to give thanks to God and remember what He had done for them. The Feast of Unleavened Bread remembered the Passover and their Exodus from Egypt. The Feast of Harvests was meant to show gratitude for the coming harvest. This Festival was much like Thanksgiving. And the Feast of Ingathering was after the harvest was over as thanks for God's provision. Every male was to appear before the Lord (at the tabernacle or temple) three times a year. Besides being a time for unity, for worship, and for fellowship, it was a time for sacrifice. The people were not to come empty handed. They were to bring gifts to God from their soil of the firstfruits. Why firstfruits? This was the best and the first of the harvest. It ensured that God was the priority and people gave to God first before keeping for themselves. It was a recognition that everything they had was from God to begin with.

God's Angel to Prepare the Way – Verses 20-26

²⁰ "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹ Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against

him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. ²² If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. ²³ My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. ²⁴ Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. ²⁵ Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, ²⁶ and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.

23:20-21 Who was this angel that went with the Israelites? Most likely the angel was a manifestation of God. God is not present in all the angels in this way. Angels are God's created messengers (Hebrews 1:14). God chose to make himself known in this special way for a special purpose. God was in the angel in the same way he was present in the pillars of cloud and fire (13:21-22). "My Name is in him" means the essential nature and power of God were made known in this angel.

23:24-25 If you're in the furnace, it's easy to catch on fire. God warned the Israelites about their neighbors whose beliefs and actions could turn them away from him. We also live among neighbors whose values may be completely different from ours. We are called to maintain a lifestyle that shows our faith. This can be a struggle, especially if our Christian lifestyle differs from the norm. Our lives should demonstrate that obeying God takes precedence over conforming to our neighbors' way of life. God's Word, not society, dictates how we should live.

God's Angel to Prepare the Way - Verses 27-33

²⁷ "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. ²⁸ I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. ²⁹ But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. ³⁰ Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. ³¹ "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. ³² Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. ³³ Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

23:29 Not all of God's solutions are instantaneous. Nor does delay justify inaction. In this case, God's cause would require constant cooperation, persistence, and effort by the Israelites. Success would come step by step.

23:32-33 God continually warned the people to avoid false religions and false gods. In Egypt they had been surrounded by idols and sorcerers, but leaving that land did not mean they were free from pagan religious influences. The land of Canaan was just as infested with idol worship. God knew his people needed extra strength, so he continually emphasized guarding against the influence of pagan religions.