

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 23:1-19

“More Rules”

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Exodus 23:1-19

(Beginning with Exodus 21 we enter a difficult section of the book of Exodus which deals with the working out of the 10 commandments practically and the ceremonial expectations of the law. Often, these passages are skipped over by Christians as having little to do with our modern, New Testament life. However, 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is inspired and profitable for our instruction. Therefore, we will study these sections of the Bible over the next several weeks to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to the truth they contain.)

Verse 1

“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.”

- This rule relates to the commandment, “Thou shall not bear false witness.” Literally, a man’s word in all matters should be truthful. He should not say anything that is false or help another spread a story that is not true.

Verse 2-3

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.”

- It is wrong to be misled by our peers into doing evil. We are admonished to do right regardless of what those around us do.
- It is wrong to show any favoritism in a lawsuit. Even to support a poor man because he is a poor man is wrong.

Verse 4-5

“If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there: be sure you help him with it.”

- These rules concern those who are against you, your enemies. They require that you help your enemy if you discover him in need.

Verse 6-7

“Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 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.”

- While it is wrong to show favoritism to the poor, it is also wrong to deny them justice because they are poor. Each case must be decided fairly on its own merit.
- False charges are forbidden and those who allow an innocent person to die on the basis of a false charge will be accountable to God.

Verse 8

“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.”

- Bribes blind those who are supposed to judge fairly and twist the words of witnesses.

Verse 9

“Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.”

- See notes on Exodus 22:21.

Verse 10-11

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 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 they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.”

- God declared that every seventh year would be a Sabbath year. The fields would be left unplowed and the vineyards and groves unattended. The poor would glean in the unplowed field. But every seventh year the land was to be at rest.

Verse 12

“Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.”

- The seventh day is to be set aside each week as a Sabbath, as a day of rest.

Verse 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.”

- The Hebrews are to follow all the rules which God has given, and they are not to appeal to any other god but YHWH.

Verse 14-15

“Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Feast 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 Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed.”

- Israel is to observe three celebrations annually. The first of these is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is held for one week in the first month of the Hebrew year. It commemorates the Exodus, the time when God intervened in history to save his people.
- Gifts are to be given to God at this feast.

Verse 16a

“Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field.”

- The second annual celebration is the Feast of Harvest. This celebration is also called the Feast of Weeks and Pentecost. It was held seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- It was a joyful celebration in which the Hebrews thanked God for the promise of the harvest.

Verse 16b

“Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.”

- The third feast the Hebrews were to celebrate each year is the Feast of Ingathering. This feast is sometimes called the Feast of Booths. It was held after the harvest and was a thanksgiving to God for all that he had provided for his people.

Verse 17-19

“Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign YHWH. 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. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of YHWH your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.

- All of Israel was required to keep these three celebrations annually.
- Yeast was a symbol of evil and sin. Offerings made to God were to be made free of sin.
- A Canaanite religious ritual involved cooking a goat in its mother’s milk. This ritual was believed to be invested with magic. Israel was forbidden from engaging in anything like this.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *More Rules*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)