

EXODUS

Lesson 23 - Chapters 22 and 23

Let's continue with our study of Exodus chapter 22 by reading from verse 18 to the end of the chapter.

READ EXODUS 22:18 - end

As quickly and matter of fact-ly that we're told of these acts which must immediately bring death upon the offender, beginning in verse 21 we get a series of instructions reflecting God's mercy and compassion especially upon some particularly vulnerable social groups. Israel is told they are to welcome and respect the **ger**, which is Hebrew for strangers, foreigners, non-Hebrews, gentiles, who come to live with them. What this actually contemplates is a foreigner, a gentile, becoming a member of Israel. This instruction will be built upon as we move forward in the Law, eventually making it clear just HOW a foreigner can become a Hebrew, and HOW they are to be considered first-class citizens.....no higher nor lower than a natural-born Hebrew. This concept is central to gentile Christianity because the spiritual manifestation of this instruction is that gentiles CAN become spiritual Israelites, by being spiritual "seed of Abraham", and being included in Israel's covenants. Remember even the Covenant of Christ, which we call the New Covenant, was given to Israel. Christ then said that by means of "faith" gentiles, foreigners could partake of that covenant, and all the other covenants given to Israel.

Widows and orphans are to be treated kindly and with compassion. In fact, God emphatically states that He will become greatly angry with those who abuse or take advantage of such helpless women and children, and there will be severe consequences.

The loaning of money to a poor person is now considered. And that poor person is to be treated with mercy because the desperate can be easily exploited. No interest is to be charged, and if that poor person offers his cloak, his coat, as security for the money, it must be given back to him in the evening so he isn't cold. The **salmah**, Hebrew for garment or cloak, was a piece of cloth that wrapped around the body and was used both as clothing and a blanket. Often this was a poor person's only possession. Naturally the philosophy here is not to take the basics of life away from a helpless person as a promise for repayment of a loan. Compassion is not optional to Yehoveh; it's a major element of His character and we are to take on His character. Compassion and mercy are integral and foundational in God's system of justice. In fact we are warned throughout the Bible that if we expect to be beneficiaries of Yehoveh's compassion, and forgiveness, and mercy, we are to do likewise with our fellow man.....especially the weakest of those among us.

BTW: please notice something very key, here: this law applies to **Hebrews** lending money to other **Hebrews**. Of God's family lending to God's family. This does NOT apply to those of God's family lending to those OUTSIDE of the group. In fact we even get a definition of an often-asked question in Christianity: who is my neighbor? Here it is made clear that the "neighbor" is one of God's set apart people. This is not to say that those in God's family are given license to treat those OUTSIDE of the family badly. Mercy is always called for. But God calls for special treatment, and special priority, for those within the community of God. As much theological error is contained within the Mormon community, we could learn a lot from them about how to operate a community of God.

Verse 27/28 needs to be looked at. First, if you have a KJV, it probably says, "you shall not revile the gods.....". The word here for "gods" is Elohim. And, it CAN mean gods, little "g" gods, in the plural. But that is so far out of context I'm surprised the excellent translators of the KJV chose to translate it this way. There is a form of the word Elohim that is called "the plural of majesty". That is when referring to God Almighty, the El, when making the word "El" plural you come up with "El-ohim", and often it does **not** mean more than one it just indicates greatness.....hence the scholarly term, "the plural of majesty". So this verse is obviously referring to Yehoveh and Yehoveh alone.

But, then it goes on to say we're not to "curse" God, or in some texts, we're not to revile God. The Hebrew for curse here, **qalal**, is EXACTLY THE SAME as when in Ex.21 we are instructed not to curse, **qalal**, our parents. As members of God's set-apart people, we're not to humiliate Him, to try Him by our being a no account bum, to make Him look bad by our incorrigible behavior and character. And this is DIFFERENT than how verse 27 is finished off when it ALSO says not to "**curse** a leader of your people". Here, curse is an entirely different Hebrew word, "**arar**", which means curse more in the sense that we typically think of it. That is, no one is to swear a curse against the leader, either in the sense of invoking something magical, or simply wishing evil or harm for them, or swearing at them in anger or bitterness. So in modern English this verse basically says not to bring disrepute upon the Lord by our bad behavior, and next not to put a curse upon your tribal leader.

And, the last verses of Ex.22 enjoins people to give to God their tithes and offerings in a timely manner. We're not to hold them back, to our own benefit, and then give them at OUR convenience. Further these people Israel who God, in His grace, has separated from the entire rest of the world are not to eat meat, as so many heathen do, that has been killed by wild animals. God values animals; but men are no more animal-like than God is simply a higher form of man. Therefore, God does NOT partake of what man partakes, and man is not to partake of what animals partake.

Let's go to Exodus chapter 23.

READ EXODUS 23 all

We're going to receive a long series of laws in machine guy type fashion; they're going to come at us fast and furious. Most are quite easy to understand and so we won't examine every one of them, only to read them as we just have.

We start with a series of “laws” that are very general in nature in the first 3 verses of this chapter; and the idea is that one is not to be untruthful, or partial, or unjust. Generally speaking these verses are referring to judicial integrity; that is, they are about the proper behavior for witnesses, judges, and the litigating parties. These verses are broad enough that they could have come right from a modern day Church sermon concerning right and wrong. Many of the rules we have encountered so far have been very bound up in ancient Hebrew culture but these laws are plain, contemporary, and timeless: don't be a party to repeating false rumor; don't help someone in validating a lie; don't do wrong just because the majority wants it. Don't allow what is popular to become what is right. Don't administer justice one-way for a rich man and another for the poor.

And interestingly it is the turning away from these very rules that are the root of our declining societies all over the world. In modern terms God is speaking **against** Political Correctness, relativism, favoritism, tolerance and appeasement and even denial of evil, and the end-justifies-the-means mentality. Of course these terms are the very definition of Secular Humanism, a political and social philosophy that is the pride of Europe and one that many in America want to see adopted in our society. Secular Humanism is the polar opposite of Judeo-Christianity. If we were to step back and be completely honest about it we would have to admit that it is our human nature to follow the crowd.....if it wasn't, Yehoveh would NOT have found it necessary to tell us what He just told us, would He?

This list of “laws”, in fact, **ensured** something that, in the modern Church, is looked down upon: division. That is God set out to accomplish something very purposefully; something that the Church has worked very hard to defeat. The simple fact is that God creates His kind of unity by means of division. While that may sound like double talk, it is the truth. He sets up principles that are, by their very nature, dividing lines. Man is given a free choice to stand on one side or the other. If he stands on the side of God's principles then he has unity with God but conflict with man. If he stands on the other he has unity with men but conflict with God. The reason that Israel has always been a pariah to the rest of the world is that (generally speaking) they dedicated themselves to obeying Yehoveh regardless of the consequences. That automatically puts them in conflict with the world. The reason the Church has steadily lost it's power is that it has stopped BEING a pariah; since the European Enlightenment of the 18th century it seems as though the goal of the Church has become to make the Church as close and attractive to the world as possible; to camouflage itself, while still maintaining an aura of religiousness. The current era of the Mega-Church is simply the culmination of the Enlightenment philosophies and man's desire NEVER to divide, but always to find ways to unite through compromise. Compromise and consensus has replaced unity. Majority rules has replaced God's rules. Tolerance has replaced our obligation to discern between good and evil. Christ said, 'take up your Cross and follow me'. Translation: if you're not a pariah to the world, you're not doing what I told you to do.

Starting in verse 4 we get some instructions that are usually credited to Jesus as being to first to say them; these next verses are about the humane treatment of the enemy. Then we get another instruction often thought to be anti OT, and occurring only in the NT.....be merciful and help the poor. You see, Yeshua didn't come to abolish the ways of the Torah.....he was the most Torah observant man in the history of the world. Every saying of Christ came either

verbatim, or in principle, **from the OT.**

In verse 9, God reminds Israel that they were, at one time, foreigners and under the cruel and unjust hand of a merciless dictator. And that perhaps the best example of how NOT to treat a foreigner that has come to live amongst Israel is how they were treated in Egypt. As we discussed before God was laying the foundation for gentiles (**ger**) to become part of Israel not only in the physical sense (by literally becoming Israelites), but also in the future **spiritual** sense that Yeshua's death on the cross would make possible; gentile Believers JOIN with Hebrew Believers, by faith, and become the Israel of God, spiritual Israel if you would.

Next in verses 10-12 we see the principle of the Sabbath applied in the practical, physical, earthly sense. In Genesis we saw God set up the Sabbath principle of 6 days of work, and then 1 of rest. The 7th day He made Holy.....not symbolically Holy..... **literally** Holy. Yet Christ told His followers that the Sabbath was not made for God, rather God made it for man. Some theologians have tried to make this a conflict whereby we either choose the Holiness of the true Sabbath as correct, OR, the practical sense of it as a health benefit to mankind. Here we again run into the REALITY of DUALITY: every principle of God, His every instruction, His every action has an earthly, physical side to it, AND a heavenly, spiritual side to it. The Shabbat was declared Holy....in a purely spiritual essence. Yet it also served a very tangible physical purpose in being a day of rest and rejuvenation for ALL living things, not just man.

So in verses 10-12 we see the Sabbath principle is applied not just to days, and weeks, but also to years. And notice that its benefits are applied to plants and even to the soil they grow in.....use the ground for six years and then let it rest in the 7th. Then it's applied to animals.....work 6 days and rest the 7th SO THAT YOUR OX AND DONKEY MAY REST. Then finally to people.....and that includes foreigners, gentiles.... work 6 days and rest on the 7th to catch your breath.

We have talked about the Sabbath before, and will do so again occasionally; but here is one observation I'd like you to consider: the holiness of the 7th day Shabbat is really only relevant to God's people. Let me explain: there are two basic aspects to the Shabbat: 1) as a day of physical rest, and 2) as a day of observance of a God-commanded holy day. The first is about a physical benefit, the second is about a spiritual benefit. Because of the way the Lord designed all things.....humans, animals, plants, and the dirt of the earth..... a regular rest helps all to physically rejuvenate. One can be an atheist and benefit from resting one day in 7. But animals, plants, the dirt, and all humans who are NOT part of God's people are restricted to ONLY the PHYSICAL benefit of the Shabbat. If one wants the spiritual benefit of Shabbat....the benefit that comes from observing the Lord's command to "be holy as I am holy"..... then one must be declared part of God's people.

Therefore as a Christian who recognizes the God-ordained benefit of resting one day in 7, you will indeed be blessed from a **physical** standpoint no matter what day you choose to rest....the same as would an atheist or a plow horse. But there is one day and ONLY one day that brings with it the **spiritual** benefit that the Lord has ordained.....and that is the particular day the Lord set apart as holy: the 7th day that is formally called Shabbat.

Verse 12 was the end of the first category of rules and regulations God was setting up: those between man and man. Now, from verse 13 to 20 the 2nd category is begun... and Yehoveh is now dealing with how man is to relate to Him. He starts by reiterating that other gods will not be tolerated. Thus far in the Torah Israel has been told not to make images of other gods, not to worship other gods, and now not to even TALK about, or invoke, the names of other gods. See the Hebrews are just like us....always looking for loopholes. Is it really an image of God if I have a statue or painting of Christ? Do I tithe on my income before or after taxes? Isn't worshipping God the same thing as my sitting watching someone else sing a Christian song? Isn't my Pastor praying for me the same thing as me doing the praying? God was making it about as clear as it can get that the Israelites were to have NOTHING to do or say about other gods. Period. And, no, there are no loopholes.

Beginning in verse 14, the Hebrew religious calendar is set up and Yehoveh ordains 3 pilgrimage festivals for Israel. In Leviticus these festivals will be discussed in more detail. Although eventually God would set up 7 Feasts for Israel to celebrate, these 3 are special because as the word **pilgrimage** suggests the Israelites are to journey to a specific place to celebrate these feasts. For now, out in the Wilderness, they're simply told to come before the Lord; presumably meaning the Wilderness Tabernacle that went with them wherever they went. Later, after settling in the land of Canaan, they will be told to journey from wherever they might live to Jerusalem, home of the Temple, for these 3 feasts.

And like the instructions we just saw regarding the physical, earthly purposes of the Sabbath we see now the physical, national, purposes of the 3 festivals. Oh, they have an enormous spiritual element to them that we won't go into right now, but that's not the purpose of these particular instructions to teach about the spiritual, prophetic character of these 3 feasts. These are all about Yehoveh ordaining a special set of 3 celebrations that sets Israel apart from all other nations. It goes a long way in establishing a unique national identity for Israel.

The 3 festivals are all agricultural based, and therefore since Spring is looked at as the beginning of the agricultural yearly cycle, the first festival is a Spring festival.

The first pilgrimage feast, called the festival of Matzah, is also sometimes called Passover (though that is not technically correct since Passover is a separate one-day feast) and occurs in the spring; it is a time to celebrate God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. The 2nd pilgrimage feast, known as the Feast of Weeks...or in Hebrew Shavuot, occurs 50 days following the Feast of Matzah and is to celebrate the 2nd harvest of the year. Christians have a different name for this holiday: Pentecost. The 3rd pilgrimage festival is the Feast of the Ingathering, also known as Succoth or the Feast of Tabernacles. Succoth is a Fall feast and represents the final ingathering, that is, the last of the harvest is taken in before winter begins.

By the time we reach Leviticus Yehoveh will have established precisely 7 feasts. Every ancient culture had established feasts and days honoring their deities, usually centering on the agricultural cycles. But the difference is that these 7 feasts, beginning with the 3 we just discussed, are GOD ORDAINED. Now sometimes in both the Old and New Testaments instead of the word "feasts" we'll find the phrase "appointed times" to refer to these special holy days (which is certainly a correct translation and captures the essence of a God appointed

feast). But as we study God's Word we must be very careful to notice the difference between MEN's appointed times and God's appointed times. Disregarding this difference has caused enormous confusion in Bible interpretation and teaching. Some teachers have St. Paul declaring the end of the Biblical Feasts, appointed times, when in fact he is cautioning against observance of MEN's appointed times, not God's appointed times.....and at other moments telling his listeners that the rituals and procedures the Rabbis had devised for some of the festivals was not from God. We must never think that the NT at any point invalidates these holy days; after all, Jesus HIMSELF participated in all the Biblical Feasts and most of the recorded major events of His ministry occurred on one or another of these holy days. Yeshua died during Passover, was raised on Firstfruits, sent the Holy Spirit on Shavuot.

The last half of verse 19 has a puzzling instruction that even the Hebrews have argued over for centuries: "You are not to boil a young animal in its mother's milk". As a tradition the Jews have enforced this by effecting a prohibition against serving or eating meat and dairy products at the same time. Depending on just HOW stringent a certain Jewish sect might be one would either have to wash and purify utensils that touched meat before those same utensils could touch dairy products or utilize completely separate SETS of utensils for each. In some cases, today, meat products and dairy products have to be kept in completely separate refrigerators. So those of you going to Israel.....don't order a Ham and cheese sandwich unless you want some frowns directed at you.

The why of this law has generally been attributed to some kind of animal cruelty Yehoveh was trying to avoid: I mean, going out and milking a cow, and then taking that cow's own calf and cooking it in that same milk is a tad tacky. But, it's also thought that this may have been a well-known custom of the pagans during worship of some heathen deity, so God ordered the practice abandoned by His people.

Suddenly, in verse 20, the tone of the chapter changes and Yehoveh moves from ordaining rules and regulations, to giving some promises to Israel. He says that He is going to send an angel, a *malach* (in Hebrew), to prepare the way for Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. And that the people are to obey the angel because Yehoveh says that this particular angel carries HIS name. In other words this angel either carries God's full authority OR as is more often taught this angel was a manifestation of God Himself. We could argue which of those views is correct 'till the cows come home but I don't think it would change much. The thing I would like you to take from this, though, is the inscrutable mystery that is our God. I've about come to the conclusion that if I'm pretty sure I can comprehend Him, I must have it wrong. God will manifest Himself however He decides to whether as an angel, a cloud, a burning bush, or whatever. The fact that we have a hard time squaring that with our doctrine of the Trinity, whereby we've decided that every visible form of God must be Jesus, I doubt worries Him very much. And we shouldn't be too concerned about it either. Some things about God just are.... And we need to simply accept it.

In any case Israel is to be unquestionably obedient to this angel. And just as important, as Israel begins to encounter this list of nations in verse 23 they are to avoid worshipping their gods; in fact they're to destroy the idols and smash the various stone altars and monuments erected to these false deities. And IF they'll do this God will be an enemy to Israel's enemies.

Yehoveh tells them that if they will serve Him, He will make them very fruitful. He'll keep them from falling ill, he'll make them multiply very rapidly by keeping the Hebrew women from miscarrying, and by making the Hebrew population in general live out their full life spans.

Further God is going to put terror in the hearts of Israel's enemies even before they arrive. In other words all these nations are going to have an irrational, supernatural fear of Israel that will cause them to run away. Of course the hoards of stinging hornets the Lord is going to send against the various inhabitants of Canaan that might consider staying even in the face of that fear, are going to be very painful and another good reason to get out of Dodge.

Verse 29 says something interesting: God is going to lead Israel to such a swift victory that it actually becomes necessary to slow them down; therefore He is not going to allow Israel to defeat Canaan in but a single year as apparently they are perfectly able to do. Why? Because if all the inhabitants of Canaan flee at once the land will go fallow from lack of care and then wild animals will take over. So God is going to have Israel take over Canaan step-by-step at a rate they can properly assume stewardship over the rich lands and resources.

Then in verse 31 we're told what the boundaries of the land that God is giving them is going to encompass. It 's going to go from the Gulf of Aqaba (a finger of the Red Sea) to the East, to the domain of the Philistines, the Mediterranean Sea, on the West. The River to the north is the Euphrates, and the wilderness to the south is probably the Negev, bordering the Sinai Peninsula. This is a very large tract of land, which Israel has yet to EVER fully possess.

Verse 32 speaks of not making a covenant with any of the Canaanite peoples. In other words, no peace treaties, no buying land, no appeasements of any kind. Why? Verse 33 tells us that if Israel allows these various tribes of Canaan to stay their mere presence will "make you sin against me by ensnaring you to serve their gods". As we'll see in later studies, during the time when Joshua was leading Israel, in their human idea of mercy, they ignored God in this and made treaties, allowed intermarriage, practiced tolerance, and Israel suffers from this disobedience to this very day. While it may be difficult for us to swallow the reality is that had Israel followed God's instructions when invading Canaan there would be no Middle East crisis today.

What we have been witnessing since Chapter 19 of Exodus is the making of a covenant; or in more exact Biblical language, the **cutting** of a covenant. Chapter 24 is all about the **ratification** of the covenant that has been spelled out over the last few chapters. A covenant is far more than a contract. It is far more than a legal agreement between two parties; in the Bible, a covenant creates a binding together of the parties, a **union** of sorts. Some scholars have likened the covenant process here in Exodus as to a marriage; I would argue with that somewhat, but yet the UNION element of a covenant indeed reminds one, to a degree, of the union which occurs in human marriage.

In Exodus 19-23, we saw the TERMS of the covenant between Israel and Yehoveh being laid out. And, by the way, the style of its structure very much resembles ancient Middle Eastern treaties and pacts among people and nations.....particularly those treaties of the highly developed culture of the Hittites. Archeologists and Papyrologists (Papyrologists are those who

study ancient documents from the standpoint of both writing methods and content, to help determine WHEN a particular document was written, WHO might have written it, and WHAT body of literature it might belong to), have a wealth of written treaties and covenants from ancient times to compare with the Biblical Covenants; and while there are many similarities which enable us to be certain of the era the Covenant of Moses occurred (1300-1400 BC) there are some glaring differences between those treaties and the Mosaic Covenant written at Mt. Sinai.

First, no covenant ever discovered from any ancient culture was in effect a written agreement between man and a god. **Second**, every document ever found that comprised what we might term a law code (such as the famous Hammurabi Code), separated the people into classes, with varying degrees of privilege and deference to the rich and royal over the general population, then the poor, then the slave class. **Third**, these law codes tended to make religious ritual and regulation separate from civil law, with religious law having little or no effect upon civil law. Religion was compartmentalized, made into its own little world if you would, and used as that time when the people dealt with their gods. Obviously, the Covenant of Moses was a complete departure, opposite practically, of all these law systems. God Himself was a covenant partner with the people of Israel, God did not ordain a class structure of people and actually sought to begin to destroy the lines between even slave and freeman, and He made religion and civil law one in the same, inseparable. That is, ALL justice, ALL mishpat, comes from Yehoveh.

So, The Covenant of Moses was quite unique; it was even a departure from the previous covenants that God had made with Noach, and then with Abraham. For in both of those much earlier covenants, they were but one-sided promises. And, the promises were God's promises. The Covenants of Noach and Abraham were uni-lateral. The Covenant of Moses was bi-lateral, that is, both sides had obligations and responsibilities. The Covenants of Noach and Abraham were UN-conditional..... nothing man could do would cause God to retract His promises. The Covenant of Moses was conditional.... The people of Israel had to follow through with their end of the deal, the terms of the covenant, or a variety of disciplinary actions, or even temporary withdrawal of certain blessings by Yehoveh, would occur.....and they eventually did.

One final point, and we'll move forward. Law codes in those ancient days, as now, tend to be very formal, very cold, and very legalistic in their structure. Unquestioned obedience, without necessarily understanding the reason for a particular law, was required. Although it might not have occurred to you, the WAY the laws of God were given to the people of Israel was full of warmth, and rich with symbolism. And, the laws were given with MUCH narration, much explanation. Why? Because, it is the principles behind the laws that God is teaching. The purpose of the law, as with all the Torah, was to teach. In fact, the word "Torah" means "teaching". And, while many of the **details** of the Mosaic Laws are very Hebrew in their cultural content, the **principles** behind every one of these laws are timeless, and the principles are applicable to all humans in any culture. For, in these laws, Yehoveh has expressed the basics of the way His universe operates. We trespass upon these principles at our own risk.

Next week we'll examine Exodus chapter 24 and see just how this covenant between God and Israel was formally ratified.