

Laws of the Mosaic Covenant

Deuteronomy 23

Deuteronomy 23:1-8 - *“He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.*

²*“One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord.*

³*“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵ Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. ⁶ You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.*

⁷*“You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. ⁸ The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord.”*

Background Notes

Deuteronomy 23 is a continuation of the second address or sermon that Moses gave to the children of Israel after their forty years in the wilderness, just before they crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. This chapter is a long address because it is a review of the many laws of the Mosaic Covenant, and an exhortation to keep them carefully. As we read through this chapter, we'll find a number of verses that we probably won't want to memorize as our favorite Bible memory verses. However, while many of these laws contain sensitive issues, spiritual lessons for today can be gleaned from these laws.

Doctrinal Points

There are spiritual lessons to be learned from the Law.

Seven different areas of law are covered in this chapter, and they will be our sub-points under our one Doctrinal Point.

a. Laws concerning public worship (v1-8).

The phrase *“enter the assembly”* (v1, 2, 3, & 8) is a key phrase in this section. The restrictions here do not mean that eunuchs were put out of the covenant community of Israel, or that foreigners could not become proselyte Jews and come to know the one true God of Israel. No, these regulations were in reference to **public worship**. Perhaps the

law about an emasculated person (v1) was designed to draw a major distinction between Israel's worship and the Canaanite practice of castration as part of their worship. Verse 2 may refer to the offspring of the Canaanite temple prostitutes. Restrictions on the foreign nations show that God's judgment of these nations was longstanding, because of the way these nations mistreated God's people.

There are many spiritual lessons from these laws for worship in the church today. Separation from worldly practices and maintaining church discipline are spiritual lessons here. The lesson of verse 2 is that only those that are born into the family of God are true members of the Church, and only true believers can offer worship that is acceptable to the Lord.

b. Laws concerning personal hygiene.

Deuteronomy 23:9-14 - *"When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing. ¹⁰ If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. ¹¹ But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp.*

¹² "Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; ¹³ and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse. ¹⁴ For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you."

Verse 13 is another verse you probably don't want to name as one of your favorite Bible verses - but you can't say the Bible doesn't "call a spade a spade." Seriously speaking, these laws were given primarily for maintaining personal hygiene and sanitation, especially when the army was in the field. If the armies in this world had practiced this simple sanitary measure, many plagues could have been avoided. The seminal emission law in verse 10 is also covered in Leviticus 15.

Just as God was interested in the personal hygiene and physical health of the people of Israel under the Law, so He is interested in the spiritual health of His people today.

c. Laws concerning the treatment of slaves.

Deuteronomy 23:15-16 - *"You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. ¹⁶ He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him."*

The slaves mentioned here would be those who had fled from their cruel masters in the surrounding foreign nations, and taken refuge with Israel. Our responsibility to be kind and helpful to folks who have been abused and mistreated is certainly an appropriate lesson here.

d. Laws concerning cultic connections.

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 - *“There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. ¹⁸ You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.”*

The term “dog” (v18) referred to a male temple prostitute. Male and female temple prostitutes were part of pagan Canaanite worship. Prostitution was **not** to be associated with Israel’s worship of the Lord, including donating money from these practices to the house of the Lord.

The spiritual lesson for us today should be obvious. The Lord does not want our tithes and offerings to come from money that was wrongfully earned. However, we can channel the money of this world into the Lord’s work. (Remember, some of the gold from Egypt went into the Tabernacle.) But giving money that’s been illegally or sinfully earned is unacceptable.

e. Laws concerning charging interest.

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 - *“You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. ²⁰ To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”*

The laws about charging interest (also in Exodus 22 & Leviticus 15) especially referred to not charging interest to fellow citizens who were in need, as opposed to a freeloader who wanted to get an interest-free loan! No. These laws were designed to help those who were in need.

The spiritual lesson is, “Don’t take advantage of one another.” Galatians 6:10 says, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

f. Laws concerning making vows.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 - *“When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. ²² But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. ²³ That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.”*

Under the Mosaic Law, no one was required to take a vow before the Lord. However, if a person voluntarily chose to make a vow, he or she was required to keep it. What does this say about how seriously the Lord views our marriage vows today – solemn vows that were made before Him?

g. Laws concerning eating crops.

Deuteronomy 23:24-25 - *“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container.²⁵ When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”*

Under this law, if you were hungry you could eat some grapes from your neighbor’s vineyard or some grain from his field. But you could not harvest your neighbor’s crops to put away in your own home - that would be stealing! The Lord and His disciples were following this law when they ate grain in Matthew 12.

The spiritual lesson for us is that we should share what the Lord has given us with others, and not hoard everything for ourselves and our selfish pleasures. Under this law, would some of us have put up fences and no trespassing signs around our fields?

So here in Deuteronomy 23 we see that there are spiritual lessons to be learned from the law.

Practical Application

Watch out for travel temptations when you’re away from home!

“When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing” (v9). When the army was out on a campaign away from home, there were many temptations that didn’t exist at home, where you were held more accountable.

The same is true today - and not just for military personnel. Businessmen, businesswomen and people on holiday travels face many more temptations on the road than they face at home. It’s a well-known fact that even Christians watch things on hotel room TVs that they would never watch at home.

Who you really are is indicated by what you allow yourself to do when no one is watching. Be careful. Watch out for travel temptations when you are away from home!