

Further Laws for the Protection of Society under the Mosaic Covenant

Exodus 23

Exodus 23 - *"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. ² 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. ³ You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. ⁴ If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. ⁵ 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. ⁶ You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. ⁷ Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. ⁸ And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. ⁹ Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

¹⁰ Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); ¹⁶ and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. ¹⁷ Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.

¹⁸ You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. ¹⁹ The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

²⁰ Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. ²² But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³ For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. ²⁴ You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.

²⁵ So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. ²⁶ No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

²⁷ I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. ²⁸ And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and

the Hittite from before you. ²⁹ I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. ³⁰ Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. ³¹ And I will set your ^[1]bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the ^[2]River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. ³² You shall make no ^[3]covenant with them, nor with their gods. ³³ They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

Background Notes

After listing the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the next three chapters (Exodus 21-23) give further laws under the Mosaic Covenant. These laws covered all areas of life, and if followed, brought justice and blessing to the society. It is easy to understand why most of these laws were given, and many of them have direct application for today. Take verse 8, for example: *“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.”* Now that’s pretty self-explanatory, isn’t it?

However, some of the laws under the Mosaic Covenant are **not** easy to understand, and need some explanation. Look at verse 18, for example: *“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.”* and verse 19: *“...Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.”* These laws need explanation, don’t they?

What about this law of not offering blood sacrifices with leavened bread? Blood sacrifices were not to be offered with leavened bread, because leaven (or yeast) was a symbol of moral corruption and evil, because of the way it spreads and permeates throughout the entire batch of bread dough.

What about not leaving any of the fat of the sacrifice until morning? The fat of the offerings (which was considered the choice part of the offerings, by the way!) was to be burned on the altar at the time of the sacrifice. It was not kept overnight with some of the meat of the offering, which was food for the priests.

What about the law that forbade them to “boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” (We’re obviously talking about young goats here, not children!) Most likely this law was given to keep the people of Israel from common occult practices that the Canaanites used in their fertility rites. It may also have been given to protect the lives of very young goats, so that the flocks would not be decimated.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Mosaic Law was given for the protection and regulation of society.

a. Under the law the courts were to be just. (v1-9)

Under the Law, justice was not to be perverted by false testimony, or by following the whims of the crowd, or by showing favoritism. When it came to justice, you were not to show partiality to the rich over the poor (v6) – but notice in verse 3 that you were not to show partiality to the poor over the rich, either! In the Mosaic Law there

were no “Robin Hood” clauses that allowed poor struggling people to get away with robbing the filthy rich. However, under the Law, rich people were to give to the poor, and they were not to charge the poor interest on a loan. In addition, they were to not to harvest the corners of their fields so the poor and needy people could gather food for themselves.

When you had a legal disagreement with someone called your enemy (v4), or one who hates you (v5), you were not justified in letting his stray animal run away. You were to help his donkey if it was struggling and in need of assistance. An application of this law for today might be: Don't refuse to help your neighbor with a problem, even though he hates you and he's taking you to court in a property dispute!

b. Under the Law the Sabbaths were to be kept. (v10-12)

The children of Israel were not only to rest **themselves** on the seventh (Sabbath) day of each week so that they would be refreshed, but they were to let the **land** rest every seventh year so that the land could be refreshed and renewed with nutrients, etc. Furthermore, whatever was left in the field during the Sabbath year was free for the taking by the poor and needy and the wild animals. By the way, throughout the Mosaic Law we see that God wanted His people to be kind to animals – and He still does!

c. Under the Law the Feasts were to be celebrated. (v13-17)

There were seven religious feasts throughout the year for Israel. Three times a year all the males in Israel were to come to the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) to celebrate three of the feasts: The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost, and the Feast of Ingathering (or the Feast of Tabernacles). Wives and families could come along as well, but they were not required. Remember the Lord came up to Jerusalem with his family to celebrate the Feast of Passover when he was twelve years old (Luke 2). By attending these three feasts the children of Israel actually got to celebrate **most** of the seven feasts in Jerusalem. Since the Feasts of Passover and First Fruits were actually part of the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread, and since the Day of Atonement was within five days of the Feast of Tabernacles, three trips to Jerusalem per year covered almost all of the feasts.

This law of required attendance at three of the Feasts provided for national, spiritual and social unity in the nation of Israel, and it kept the name of the Lord before the people. This was especially important. Even mentioning the names of other gods was a danger and was forbidden (v13). So the Mosaic Law was given for the protection and regulation of society.

2. The Mosaic Law was given for the direction and caution of conquest. (v20-33)

In these verses the Lord promised to bring the Israelites into the land of Canaan. He promised to bless them and drive out the enemy from before them -- **if** they would just trust the Lord, follow Him, and not turn to foreign gods. If they would worship Him alone, the Lord even promised to keep them from sickness and miscarriages (v25-26).

The “guiding angel” who was promised in verses 20-23 is most likely “the Angel of the Lord” – that is, the Lord Himself, the pre-incarnate Son of God. Notice verse 21: *“My name is in him.”* This is an indication that this “angel” was the Lord Himself.

In verse 27 the Lord promised that He would make the Canaanites afraid of God’s people, and that they would run away in defeat. What about the hornets (v28)? This may be a symbolic name for the Egyptian army that periodically invaded Canaan. On the other hand, God may have used literal hornets to drive the Canaanites out! Have you ever run into a swarm of hornets? There’s no doubt about it -- you will run the other way as quickly as possible!

The boundaries of the land are given in verse 31. “The River” mentioned here is the Euphrates River; the Sea of Philistia is the Mediterranean Sea. This land finally came under Israel’s authority during the days of King Solomon.

Verse 33 gives us the reason why God directed His people to clean out the Canaanites from the Land: *“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.”* Of course, Israel did not heed this warning. They failed to drive out all the Canaanites from the Promised Land, and they reaped the consequences of their failure: they turned away from the Lord to pagan worship and idolatry, and suffered severe punishment for their sin.

So, we see that the Mosaic Law was given for the direction and caution of conquest.

Practical Application

Let’s practice the “little by little” principle.

In verses 29-30, God said that the conquest would not be over quickly, not even in a single year. Why? So that the land would not become desolate before the twelve tribes could completely settle in it. If the enemy were to be driven out too quickly, the land would become desolate and wild beasts would overrun it. Thus, the Lord planned for the conquest of the Land to be accomplished “little by little.”

“Little by little” is a biblical principle. When we become Christians, we don’t become spiritually mature overnight, but little by little the enemy’s toeholds and pockets of resistance are eliminated from our lives. As we fill our lives with wholesome activities, the old habits are pushed out. There is no chance of a vacuum being created, in which Satan can move in with other sins. “Little by little” is a good principle to remember when we disciple new Christians. Let’s practice the “little by little” principle.