

Presumably the rule forbidding the eating of animals torn in the field rested on the fact that such animals were not properly bled in slaughtering. The people who ate of them would eat blood. See Lev. 17:11-15.

What lesson or truth is there for Christians in the ancient rule about not eating torn beasts? Firstly, Christians should practice the same restriction, since we also are not to eat blood. Acts 15:20. Secondly, Israel's atonement was provided by the blood offered on the altar. Blood was not to be thought of as applicable to other purposes. This points out to us the incomparable value and unique power of the blood of the Lord Jesus. His blood was a covering for our sins.

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#### THE TEXT OF EXODUS TRANSLATION

**23** Thou shalt not take up a false report: put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. (2) Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to wrest *justice*: (3) neither shalt thou favor a poor man in his cause.

(4) If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. (5) If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, thou shalt forbear to leave him, thou shalt surely release *it* with him.

(6) Thou shalt not wrest the justice *due* to thy poor in his cause. (7) Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. (8) And thou shalt take no bribe: for a bribe blindeth them that have sight, and perverteth the words of the righteous. (9) And a sojourner shalt thou not oppress: for ye know the heart of a sojourner, seeing ye were sojourners in the land of E-gypt.

(10) And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather

in the increase thereof: (11) but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, *and* with thy oliveyard. (12) Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may have rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the sojourner, may be refreshed. (13) And in all things that I have said unto you take ye heed: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

(14) Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. (15) The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep: seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month A-bib (for in it thou camest out from E-gypt); and none shall appear before me empty: (16) and the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labors, which thou sowest in the field: and the feast of ingathering, at the end of the year, when thou gatherest in thy labors out of the field. (17) Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord Je-ho-vah.

(18) Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my feast remain all night until the morning. (19) The first of the first-fruits of thy ground thou shalt bring into the house of Je-ho-vah thy God. Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

(20) Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. (21) Take ye heed before him, and hearken unto his voice; provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgression: for my name is in him. (22) But if thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. (23) For mine angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Am-or-ite, and the Hit-tite, and the Per-iz-zite, and the Canaan-ite, the Hi-vite, and the Jeb-u-site: and I will cut them off. (24) Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works; but thou shalt utterly overthrow them,

and break in pieces their pillars. (25) And ye shall serve Je-ho-vah your God, and he will bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. (26) There shall none cast her young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. (27) I will send my terror before thee, and will discomfit all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. (28) And I will send the hornet before thee, which shall drive out the Hi-vite, the Ca-naan-ite, and the Hit-tite, from before thee. (29) I will not drive them out from before thee in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beasts of the field multiply against thee. (30) By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. (31) And I will set thy border from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Phi-lis-tines, and from the wilderness unto the River: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. (32) Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. (33) They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me; for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

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EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE  
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. After careful reading propose a topic for the chapter.
2. What was the law about spreading false reports? (23:1)
3. How might this be done? Where? (23:1)
4. What was the law about following a mob? (23:2-3)
5. What law was given about witnessing in court? (23:2-3)
6. Why was it necessary to forbid the people to "favor a poor man in his cause"? (23:3; Lev. 19:15)
7. How were the people to treat their enemy's overloaded fallen donkey? (23:5) Was the general attitude that is

commanded in the law about the fallen donkey limited to that one situation?

8. What was the law about justice to the needy? (23:6)
9. What was the law about bribes? (23:8)
10. How were the Israelites to treat strangers? Why? (23:9; 22:21)
11. What was the law about farming in the seventh years? (23:10-11)
12. What was the purpose of the sabbath day according to 23:12?
13. What was the law concerning talking about other gods? (23:12-13)
14. Name the Israelites' three annual compulsory feasts. (23:14-15; Compare Ex. 34:22-24; Deut. 16:16)
15. What did God mean by saying "Ye shall not appear before me empty"? (23:15)
16. What was not to be offered with their sacrifices? (23:18)
17. What law was given about preparing a kid to be eaten? (23:19)
18. What was to be sent before Israel? (23:20)
19. What divine characteristics did the guiding angel have? (23:21)
20. What was to be done with Canaanites' religious objects? (23:24, 32)
21. What promise was given about sickness? (23:25)
22. How would God help the Israelites to conquer the Canaanites? (23:27-28)
23. Were the Canaanites to be driven out suddenly? Why or why not? (23:29-30)
24. What were to be the boundaries of the promised land? (23:31; Compare Gen. 15:18)
25. What "River" is referred to in 23:31?
26. Were the Canaanites to live among the Israelites? (23:33) Why or why not?

EXODUS TWENTY-THREE: GOD'S COVENANT ORDINANCES  
(CONCLUDED)

1. Justice and goodness to all men; 23:1-9.
  2. The sacred seasons and feasts; 23:10-19.
  3. Conquering the Canaanites; 23:20-33.
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EXODUS TWENTY-THREE: GOD'S GOOD ORDINANCES

1. Ordinances about JUSTICE; 23:1-9.
  2. Ordinances about WORSHIP; 23:10-19.
  3. Ordinances about VICTORY in the Lord; 23:20-33.
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SLANDER! (Ex.23:1)

1. Don't start it.
  2. Don't listen to it.
  3. Don't repeat it.
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ADMINISTERING JUSTICE (Ex. 23:1-3, 6-9)

1. Avoid perjury; 23:1a.
2. Avoid collusion; 23:1b.
3. Avoid mob pressure; 23:2.
4. Avoid false sentiment; 23:3.
5. Avoid oppression; 23:6-7, 9.
6. Avoid bribes; 23:8.
7. Remember that judges shall themselves be judged; 23:7.

DUTIES TO ENEMIES (23:4-5)

1. Protect their interests; 23:4.
  2. Restrain our impulses to leave them; 23:5.
  3. Help their difficulties; 23:5.
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SABBATIC YEARS AND SABBATH DAYS (23:10-12)

- I. Sabbatic years; 23:10-11.
    1. Required faith in God; Lev. 25:20-22.
    2. Benefited the land; Lev. 25:5; Ex. 23:11.
    3. Benefited the land owner; Lev. 25:6.
    4. Benefited the poor and the beasts; Ex. 23:11.
  - II. Sabbath days; 23:12.
    1. Rest for animals.
    2. Rest for men.
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RELIGIOUS FEASTS (23:14-17)

1. Kept unto God; 23:14.
  2. Kept as memorials; 23:15.
  3. Kept by bringing offerings; 23:15.
  4. Kept frequently; 23:16.

(The Lord requires dedication of our time, as He required it in Israel's time. The Lord blesses those who worship Him.)
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## FEASTS REQUIRED BY GOD (23:14-17)

1. A feast to commemorate past deliverance; 23:15.
  2. A feast to dedicate the first-fruits of our labor; 23:16.
  3. A feast to celebrate the year's final ingathering; 23:16;  
Lev. 23:39-47.
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## JESUS, THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT (23:20-23)

- I. His nature.
    1. Equal with God. "My name is in Him." 23:21.
    2. Able to forgive sins; 23:21.
  - II. His work.
    1. Keeping God's people; 23:20.
    2. Overcoming enemies; 23:22.
    3. Bringing God's people to their destination; 23:23.
  - III. Our attitude toward Him.
    1. Take heed; 23:21.
    2. Provoke Him not;
    3. Hearken; obey; 23:21-22.
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## FALSE GODS! (23:24, 32-33)

1. Treatment of them.
  - a. Don't bow down to them; 23:24.
  - b. Destroy them; 23:24.
  - c. Drive them out; 23:31.
  - d. Make no covenant with them; 23:32.
2. Dangers from them.

## GOD'S COVENANT ORDINANCES 23:1-33

- a. Cause sin; 23:33.
  - b. Be a snare; 23:33.
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### BLESSINGS FOR THE OBEDIENT! (23:25-30)

1. Bless their food; 23:25.
  2. Bless their rainfall; 23:25.
  3. Bless their health; 23:25.
  4. Bless their productivity; 23:26.
  5. Bless them with long life; 23:26.
  6. Give victory over enemies; 23:27-30.
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### AN EXCLUSIVE FAITH! (23:24-33)

1. Destroy false religious objects (23:24; Acts 19:19.)
  2. Drive out sinful associates; (23:27-31, 33; I Cor. 15:33.)  
(See I Cor. 5:9-13)
  3. Make no covenant with evildoers; (23:32; II Cor. 6:14-18; II John 10-11)
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## EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### 1. *What is in Exodus twenty-three?*

This chapter contains the closing group of God's covenant ordinances, which are given in chapters 21-23. By the acceptance of this "book of the covenant" (24:7), Israel entered into its covenant with God and became God's special people, a holy nation.



The chapter deals with three main themes: (1) justice and goodness for all men (23:1-9); (2) the sacred seasons and feasts (23:10-19); (3) conquering the Canaanites (23:20-33). This last section forms an epilogue to chapters 21-23, and looks forward to future triumphant conquests in Canaan.

2. *What were the people to do with a false report they heard?* (23:1-2)

They were not to pick it up and tell it to others, nor to utter it in court as testimony.

Ex. 23:1-2 could be translated rather literally, "You shall not take up something you have heard (that is) false (or vain); put not your hand with a wicked (man, to conspire together) to be a witness of violence."

There are five brief negative commands in 23:1-3, each introduced by a negative particle (in Hebrew). These would be guidelines in maintaining justice. Ex. 23:1-3 is an expansion of the ninth commandment, which forbade bearing false witness.

We could "take up" a false report by repeating it as gossip, or by telling it in a court hearing. Ps. 101:5: "Who-so privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I destroy." Lev. 19:16: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people."

The word translated "report" means something heard, a rumor, report, reputation, fame. "False" might also be translated "vain," since it is the same word as that used in Ex. 20:7 with reference to taking God's name in vain.

An "unrighteous witness" is a witness of violence, that is, one who inflicts violence upon others. Violence need not always be physically violent to be terribly hurtful!

A witness who made false charges against someone was to be punished with the same penalty which he had tried to bring upon someone else. (Deut. 19:16-21).

The Israelites were not to follow a mob (multitude) in its efforts to do evil. Mobs sway people into doing or tolerating acts that they would not do if they considered the matter without pressure. Christ was crucified through mob

action instigated by a few leaders (Matt. 27:20). Mobs, multitudes, and majorities are often in the wrong. Only Noah was righteous in his time. (Gen. 7:1. Compare Matt. 7:13-14.)

If some cause (lawsuit) was being heard, no Israelite was to give false testimony just because a certain feeling was popular (and probably loud!) just then. Many innocent people have died because a multitude was stirred up against them and many were screaming for their blood. Note the cases of Stephen (Acts 6:11) and Naboth (I Kings 21:10).

3. *Why should they not favor a poor man in his cause? (23:3)*

The Israelites were to promote JUSTICE. Justice favors neither the poor nor the rich; nor does it disfavor either the poor or the rich.

Lev. 19:15: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment. Thou shalt not respect (show partiality to) the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor."

God is NOT indifferent to the plight of the poor. See Ex. 23:6; 22:25-27; Deut. 15:7-11. The poor are often oppressed by the rich and powerful (Amos 5:12). They have their special temptations (Prov. 30:9, 14).

Nonetheless, the poor man may be fully as selfish, cruel, dishonest, lazy, and covetous as anyone else. Men can be "minded to be rich" even when they are not rich (I Tim. 5:9). When a poor man has broken the law, he is to be punished just as anyone else. Note Ex. 22:3.

Neither pressure from a crowd, sympathy for the poor, or even revenge, was to influence the Israelites' conduct.

Our times have seen the rise of the foolish notion that we should pass every possible law to take wealth from the rich and give it to the poor. There is not enough material wealth in the world for all (or even most of us) to live like kings. When there are no longer any wealthy people to help the poor, all become poor.

4. *What was to be done if one saw his enemy's donkey going astray? (23:4-5)*

In such a case, one was *surely* to bring it back to him

again. (The *surely* is emphatic.)

Deut. 22:4: "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fallen down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again."

How beautiful! Animosity is not to destroy one's willingness to be of assistance in the times of need. Your enemy is also your brother! It is only a short step from the kind actions suggested by these verses to the "Love your enemy" of Matt. 5:44. Compare Romans 12:20.

Lev. 19:18: "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am Jehovah."

Ex. 23:5 describes a situation in which a man sees his enemy with his donkey. The enemy obviously has been cruel to his beast and has overloaded it till it has fallen down under the load and cannot get up. The enemy has brought the problem upon himself. What shall the man of God do? He shall forbear doing his natural inclination of walking off and leaving his enemy to solve his own problem. Rather, he shall most certainly give assistance, and working WITH his enemy, release the ass!

If the law taught men to be good to their enemies (as it surely did!), what did Jesus mean by saying, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy"? (Matt. 5:43.) Some Jewish authorities are incensed at these words, which they regard as a baseless charge against the Torah and the rabbis.<sup>1</sup>

We happily acknowledge that the law taught men to do good to their enemies. However, there are a few verses in the Old Testament which indicate that even some Godly men did *hate* their enemies. See Psalm 139:21, 22; 26:5). Also certain passages in the apocryphal books (like Ecclesiasticus 12:4, 7) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls show that Jesus was telling the truth when he indicated that some pre-Christian Jews really

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

advocated hating enemies. *The Manual of Discipline* (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) declared about their chosen members, "He is to bear unremitting hatred towards all men of ill repute, and to be minded to keep in seclusion from them."<sup>2</sup> We hasten to add (in shame and pain) that some who claim to be Christians have also taught their followers to hate their enemies. Consider the bloodshed in northern Ireland. But this has never been God's approved attitude for men.

The R.S.V. on Ex. 23:5 reads "You shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up." The footnote on this verse says that this is the Greek reading and the Hebrew is obscure.

The Hebrew of 23:5 could be literally translated "If you see the ass of him who hates you [lying] under his (or its) burden, you shall beware that you leave him not, but you shall surely release [it] with him."<sup>3</sup>

As you can see, this is hardly an "obscure" verse. It is only slightly difficult because no object follows the verb "release." Probably it is best to supply an indefinite object, such as the *it* inserted in italics in the American Standard version. The Hebrew does not make completely clear whether the man is releasing the ass or its load (although both involve the same actions). The Greek reading makes it clear that it is the *ass* that the verb *release* refers to,<sup>4</sup> and the Hebrew very probably means that also.

5. *What command is given about the justice due to the poor?*  
(23:6-7)

Men were not to wrest the justice due to the poor man in his lawsuit. ("Wrest" means "stretch out," "distort," "turn aside," or "pervert.")

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<sup>2</sup>Theodore Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English Translation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1964), pp. 46, 68.

<sup>3</sup>This translation is adapted from that in Alexander Harkavy's *Hebrew and Chaldean Dictionary*.

<sup>4</sup>The genders of the Greek pronouns and articles indicate clearly that the object being released was the ass rather than its burden.

The word translated *justice* in 23:6 is *mishpat*, or judgment. It is the same word occurring in 21:1, translated “judgments” (or ordinances).

Note that the poor are “*thy* poor.” Probably this hints that the poor are our brothers and our responsibility. We cannot say, “They are no concern of mine.”

Ex. 23:7 commands men to keep far away from a false “matter.” In its setting this “matter” appears to refer to false utterance in a lawsuit. Ex. 23:7 is primarily directed at judges in court.

We must take heed to our court decisions, because God also holds court; and all our witnesses and judges are on trial before HIM. Our decisions must be in harmony with His! God will not justify (that is, acquit, declare not guilty) the wicked person. (The word “wicked” is singular, emphasizing every individual’s responsibility in this matter.)

#### 6. *What is the effect of a bribe?* (23:8)

A bribe blinds those whose eyes are usually open and watchful, and perverts (tangles, twists) the words of those usually righteous.

“They that have sight” (KJV, “the wise”) are the judges and officials. Ex. 23:8 (like 23:7) is directed at the judges.

Ex. 23:8 is very much like Deut. 16:19. We simply must not let ourselves be deceived about the power of a bribe upon us.

Bribery was a very common practice in Biblical times (and still is!). See Amos 5:12; I Sam. 8:3; Ps. 26:10; II Chron. 19:7; Isa. 1:23; Ezek. 22:12. Prov. 15:27: “He that hateth bribes shall live.”

No specific penalty is set in the law for accepting bribes. But in the rule of God over men, it did NOT go unpunished!

“The words of the righteous” seem to be the words of usually-righteous judges who have been influenced by bribes. It may also refer to the *causes* (or lawsuits) of the poor, who are referred to as the righteous (or innocent) in 23:7. (The word translated “words” also may have the meaning of “causes.”)

7. *Why were the Israelites not to oppress sojourners?* (23:9)

They had been sojourners in Egypt and therefore knew the "heart" of a sojourner. Compare 22:21.

"Heart" is from the Hebrew *nephesh*, meaning soul, life, feelings, self, and numerous related meanings. The use of *nephesh* here makes a transition to the next paragraph (23:10-12), where a related word (the verb *naphash*) is translated "be refreshed" in 23:12.

8. *For how many years were Israelites to sow the land and gather crops?* (23:10-11)

Israel was to sow seed and gather crops for six consecutive years, but in the seventh years the land lay fallow, uncultivated. The oliveyards (literally "olive trees") and vineyards were to be treated the same way. This seventh year is commonly called the *sabbatical year*. The laws about this year are given more fully in Lev. 25:1-7 and Deut. 15:1-3. Grain which grew by itself in the seventh year was not harvested, but was left for the *poor* of the people to eat, and for the *beast* of the field. God plainly promised that the land would produce enough in the sixth years to carry them over until the harvest of the eighth year. See Lev. 25:20-22 and Neh. 10:31.

The spiritual basis for this law is stated by God in Lev. 25:23: "For the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

The word *rest* in 23:11 is not from the verb *shabath* (meaning "to keep sabbath"), but from another verb (*shamat*), meaning to let rest, or to release (as of a debt). (That has interesting spiritual implications.) See Deut. 15:1-2.

Note that God cares for the *beasts*. Ps. 36:6: "O Jehovah, thou preservest man and beast." Compare Ps. 104:21. God cares for sparrows and feeds the raven (Luke 12:24).

In the following centuries Israel neglected keeping its sabbatical years. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity was partly intended to make up for unkept sabbatical years. II Chron. 36:21.

To a child of God, his relationship with God controls all his life, even the way he farms and eats.

9. *What was the purpose of the seventh-day rest? (20:12)*

It was a time of *rest* for all, even for the work (draft) animals, the servants, and the sojourners. It was to bring refreshment and rest. The reference here to the sabbath emphasizes its humanitarian character rather than its memorial character, which is stressed in Ex. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15.

“Be refreshed” is from a verb (*naphash*) related to the noun (*nephesh*) meaning *soul*. It can be translated “to breathe, to take rest, to draw breath, to be refreshed.” On the Sabbath days people were to “catch their breath.” By keeping the Sabbath, every Israelite was reminded that he had a soul and there was a higher life than mere drudgery.

10. *What mention of pagan gods were the Israelites to utter? (23:13)*

NO mention was to be made of the name of other gods. While the Israelites were not to oppress sojourners, they were not to utter the names of the sojourners’ gods. This prohibition about uttering the names of gods should have prevented marriages and other contacts with idolatrous peoples.

This verse probably accounts for the dropping of the name *Baal* in the names of several men whose names included Baal’s name. Instead of *Baal* the word *bosheth* (meaning *shame*) was inserted. Thus Jerubbaal (Judges 6:32) became Jerubbesheth (II Sam. 11:21); Eshbaal (I Chron. 8:33) became Ishbosheth (II Sam. 2:8); Meribaal (I Chron. 8:34) became Mephibosheth (II Sam. 4:4). Note that the book of Samuel, which is prophetic in character, avoided the name *Baal*.

The apostle Paul tells Christians to avoid mentioning several sins, in a manner similar to the way the Israelites were to avoid mentioning the names of gods. (Eph. 5:3)

Ex. 23:13 opens with a general exhortation to obey: “In all things that I have spoken unto you, take ye heed.”

11. *How many annual feasts was each Israelite required to keep? (23:14, 17)*

Three. Compare Ex. 34:23; Lev. ch. 23; Deut. 16:1-17.

All male Israelites were required to come before the Lord for these three feasts. Though not required, women and boys often went with the men to the feasts (I Sam. 1:3, 4, 22; Luke 2:41-43). Israel's religious observances were the one factor in their society that could hold the nation together.

The three feasts are not mentioned here for the first time nor in full detail. Probably they are mentioned as part of the privileges of the people bestowed on them by Jehovah. This view relates the observance of the feasts to the nearby paragraphs. Ex. 23:13 told of a false way to worship God. 23:14-17 gave the true way.

"Three *times*" is literally "three *feet*," suggesting pilgrim festivals to which they marched on foot.

Critics (Martin Noth, for example) say that the three feasts were taken over by Israel only after the settlement in Canaan, long after Moses' time. (This view eliminates Moses as author of Exodus.) The proof (?) of such a view is mainly the presupposition that such feasts could not have originated from direct divine revelation and commandments, but gradually developed through cultural contacts with other peoples who observed similar feasts.<sup>5</sup>

12. *What were the three annual compulsory feasts? (23:15-16)*

(1) *The feast of unleavened bread.* This seven-day observance was immediately preceded (the day before) by the Passover, which, surprisingly, is not mentioned here. Perhaps the reason for this was that the Passover in early days was more of a family meal than a central religious activity.<sup>6</sup> Another possible reason for not mentioning the Passover may be that the extremely close linkage of the Passover to the feast of Unleavened bread probably caused most Israelites to think of both when they heard either one mentioned.

Noth in his usual manner contends that the Passover is not mentioned here with the rules about Unleavened Bread because the Passover came into Israel's practice much later

<sup>5</sup>Noth, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>6</sup>Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 180.



than the feast of Unleavened bread.<sup>7</sup> There is no real evidence for this view.

An allusion is made by God in 23:15 to the previous commandment about keeping the feast of unleavened bread, "As I commanded thee." See 12:14-20; 13:6-10. Regarding the month *Abib*, see 13:4.

The Passover was observed sporadically by Israel during the days of the kingdom. (II Kings 23:22).

"None shall come before me empty" means that no man was to come to the central place of worship during the three compulsory feasts without an offering, that is, empty-handed. They were to bring animals and other things for offerings. See Deut. 16:16-17; Lev. 7:32-34; Ex. 34:20. We feel that the same rule about not coming before the Lord empty should be a guideline to Christians: Do not come to the Lord's services without an offering.

(2) *The feast of harvest.* This is the same feast that is called the "feast of weeks" (Lev. 23:9-21; Deut. 16:9-12) and the "day of firstfruits" (Num. 28:26). It is called *Pentecost* in the New Testament (Acts 2:1; 20:16). It came fifty days after the first grain was harvested. It was a harvest feast of dedication and thanks to God.

(3) *The feast of ingathering.* This is the same feast that is called the feast of booths or tabernacles. Its observance is described fully in Lev. 23:34, 39-43; Deut. 16:13-15. Note John 7:2. This feast occurs in late September, "at the end of the year," that is, of the civil year, which begins in the autumn, as distinguished from the religious year, which began in the spring. Its name "Ingathering" is taken from the gathering in of the grapes and olives, which had been completed by that time each year. During this feast the Israelites lived outdoors in temporary brush arbors called booths or tabernacles. This was to remind them year by year of their wilderness wandering experiences. An extensive

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<sup>7</sup>Noth, *ibid.*

series of sacrifices was offered each day of this feast.

On 23:17, see 23:14.

13. *What was NOT to be offered with blood sacrifices?*(23:18)

They were not to offer leavened bread with the blood of sacrifices. Also they were NOT to let the *fat* or sacrificed animals remained unburned overnight.

Lev. 3:17: "It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings, that ye shall eat neither fat nor blood."

The fat or sacrifices was all burned, even in the peace offerings, which were partly eaten by the offerer. (See. Lev. 1:8; 3:3-5; 4:8, 19.) Thus no fat should have ever been left unburned overnight. Compare Lev. 19:6.

Israel's burnt-offerings (animal sacrifices) were to be accompanied by a grain (or meal) offering, which was sometimes presented in the form of baked bread (Lev. 2:4-5; Num. 15:1-9). These meal-offerings were NOT to be made with leaven (Lev. 2:11; 6:17). This would be doubly enforced during the week of the feast of unleavened bread, when no leaven at all was to be seen in their property (Deut. 16:4; Ex. 13:6-11; 12:15-20). Leaven is a symbol of evil influence and sin (I Cor. 5:7-8).

During the feast of unleavened bread no flesh sacrificed at evening was to remain all night until the morning: eat it or burn it. See Deut. 16:4. At the original passover, nothing was left till the morning. See Ex. 12:10. This custom of not leaving sacrifices unconsumed overnight seems to have applied to all Israel's sacrifices. The practice impressed Israel with the seriousness and the unique function of sacrifices. They were not to be treated as leftover garbage.

Regarding the offering of first fruits (23:19a), see 22:29-30 and Deut. 26:2-11.

14. *How were kids NOT to be cooked for eating?* (23:19)

They were not to be boiled in the milk of their mother.

This law is now generally understood to make allusion to a Canaanite religious practice, in which a kid was boiled in its mother's milk. This practice was included in the

rituals at Ugarit, when such a dish was prepared at festal ceremonies pertaining to the fertility of the soil. In the Ugaritic tablet on "The gods pleasant and beautiful," it is written, "Boil a kid in milk, a lamb in butter."<sup>8</sup> The practice of boiling small cattle in milk has been continued among Bedouin to this time. God did not want His people's practice even to resemble those of the heathen.

Partly on the basis of 23:19b Jews do not prepare or serve meat dishes and milk dishes at the same meal. Orthodox Jews even keep separate kitchens for preparation of milk and meat dishes. The connection between this custom and Ex. 23:19 seems rather remote, although the *Kosher* diet laws of the Jews would certainly eliminate any possibility of cooking a kid in its mother's milk. J. H. Hertz,<sup>9</sup> a Jewish commentator, says that the practice of not eating milk and meat together was doubtless observed long before the age of the rabbis (about 400 B.C.-A.D. 500), and in connecting the practice with this text, they merely sought a support in the Torah for the very ancient Jewish practice. That is a fair and accurate statement. The Jewish diet laws are not directly derived from this verse, although it is an indirect support for their practice.

Christians are not obligated by the diet laws of the O.T., although they may find some helpful guidance in them. See Mark 7:19; I Cor. 8:8; I Tim. 4:3; Rom. 14:13-17.

15. *Who was sent with Israel to keep them in their journey?* (23:20-21)

An angel was sent. Ex. 20:23 reads literally, "behold, I (the *I* is emphatic) am sending an angel before thy face to guard you in the way and to bring you unto the place which I have prepared." Compare Ex. 14:19; 3:2; Acts 7:38.

This angel was a personality. Israel was to hearken unto his voice. He could pardon transgressions and God's name was in him, literally, "in the midst of him," in the inward part of his being and body.

<sup>8</sup>Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>9</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 318.

"My name is in him" means "My (God's) presence is in him." In Biblical usage, *name* often refers to one's entire being, nature, and authority. See Ps. 8:1; 20:1; Acts 8:12.

We believe that this angel was none other than that divine person called the Word (John 1:1), who later came to earth as Jesus Christ. The word *angel* means a *messenger*. Jesus has certainly always been God's communicator (John 1:18). Malachi 3:1 prophesied the coming of the "messenger (or *angel*) of the covenant whom ye desire." Certainly no one since Malachi's time has claimed to be eternal with God and to have power to forgive sins and to know all truth, other than Jesus. He backed up these claims with miracles done in the presence of many witnesses.

Isa. 63:9: "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the *angel* of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity, he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

Numerous O.T. prophecies foretold the coming of God's Messiah, who would bear God's *name*. "Unto us a son is given; . . . and his *name* shall be called. . . Mighty God, . . ." (Isa. 9:6). Jer. 23:6 spoke of the coming "branch" from David, that "his name . . . shall be called *Jehovah* our righteousness." We believe that these prophecies refer to Jesus. They help us to understand what God meant when he said of the "angel," "My name is in him."

Israel was to take care that they did not provoke the angel of God. "Provoke" means "to make bitter." (The verb is related to *Marah*, bitter.) Sadly, we learn from Ps. 78:40, "How often did they provoke him in the wilderness."

Not surprisingly, "liberal" and Jewish commentators strongly deny that the "angel" could be the Word (Jesus). But they disagree among themselves as to who or what the angel is. Some seek to identify the "angel" with the ark of the covenant that went before the tribes.<sup>10</sup> (This is

<sup>10</sup>Broadman Bible Commentary, I, (1968), p. 428.

impossible. The angel was personal and the ark very impersonal.) Hertz maintains that the angel is Moses himself (How could Moses himself go "before thee," when God was talking to Moses? Furthermore, Moses did not bring Israel into the land, as the angel was to do. See 23:23.) Cassuto<sup>11</sup> argues that the "angel" is not distinct from God himself and simply is a term for God's own actions. (It surely seems unlikely that God would say "My name is *in him*, if He only meant "My name is in myself.") Some feel that the pillar of cloud was the angel. See Ex. 14:19. (How could the pillar of cloud "pardon your transgressions"?) The "angel" manifested his presence in the cloud, but was distinct from the cloud. These views show how far men will go in their determined refusal to confess the Lord Jesus.

16. *What would the angel do for Israel if they were obedient? (23:22-23)*

He would bring them unto the Canaanite nations, and there God would "cut them off" (destroy them). This act of cutting them off would be done gradually. See 23:29.

Observe in 23:22-23 how very closely linked are God and the "angel." "If thou shalt indeed hearken unto *his* voice, and do all that *I* speak; . . ." This is exactly the relationship of Jesus and the Father. John 10:30: "I and the Father are one." John 8:28-29: "I (Jesus) do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things . . . for I do always the things that are pleasing to him."

Concerning the Canaanite tribes, see notes on Ex. 3:8, 17.

To "cut them off" (R.S.V., "blot them out") meant to hide or conceal, cut off, efface, destroy. The Canaanites were finally indeed utterly effaced from the earth, although it took Israel a long time.

For God to be "an enemy unto your enemies" is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:3. Ps. 139:21-22 indicates that God's enemies become enemies

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<sup>11</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 305-306.

of God's people. Even the New Testament speaks about those that are "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 1:18).

Some interpreters feel that the idea of God's being an "enemy" to Israel's enemies is theological propaganda justifying Israel's conquest of the land, and differs from the view expressed elsewhere in the O.T. that God is the God of all nations. This idea fails to consider the depravity of the Canaanites. It also injects the implications that the Bible teaches contradictory points of view. We feel that further study will always show that the Bible is completely harmonious.

17. *What was Israel to do with Canaanite religious objects?* (23:24)

They were not to bow down to them or serve them, but were to destroy them utterly. Compare Ex. 20:5; 34:13; Deut. 7:5; Num. 33:52; Ex. 23:32-33. The Hebrew text emphasizes the *utter* destruction of these things. "Thou shalt *utterly* destroy them, and you shall *utterly* break in pieces their pillars."

They were particularly to break in pieces their *pillars*. These were upright standing stones, sometimes as much as ten feet tall. Such pillars have been found in excavations at Gezer and Tanaach. See Deut. 12:3.

The "works" of the Canaanites included burning their sons and daughters in fire to their gods. See Deut. 12:30-31. Israelites were not even to "inquire" about their gods. Compare Deut. 6:14.

18. *What would God bless if Israel served Him?* (23:25-26)

He would bless their bread, their water, and their health.

Their "bread" would be their grain harvest, from which bread was made. See Deut. 28:5. The "water" would be the needed rainfall. See Deut. 28:12.

Malachi 3:11: "I will rebuke the devourer (such as locusts) for your sakes . . . , neither shall your vine cast its fruit before the time in the field." Compare Amos 4:9.

The promise to protect the Israelites from *sickness* is repeated several times in the scripture. See Ex. 15:26.

Deut. 7:15: "Jehovah will take away from thee all sickness." It is painful to compare this promise with Israel's later afflictions sent upon them because of their unfaithfulness. See Amos 4:10; Isa. 1:5-6. (In this passage the sickness spoken of seems to be a collective national sickness of soul.)

God further promised that there would not be a woman miscarrying in the land, or a barren woman. Deut. 7:14 enlarges this promise to declare that "there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your cattle." Compare Deut. 28:4.

Another promise yet more! "The number of thy days I will fulfill." Their people would not die young, before they had fulfilled their potential in life. Compare Ex. 20:12: "That thy days may be long in the land." It would be true of Israelites generally as it was of Abraham: "Abraham gave up the ghost and died . . . an old man, and *full* . . ." (Gen. 25:8). So also David: "David was old and *full* of days" (I Chron. 23:1).

As Christians we do not claim all of these material physical promises in the law. But we do live under a covenant with "better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

19. *How would God prepare things so as to help Israel conquer Canaan? (23:27-28)*

God would send his *terror* before Israel and would discomfit (that is, bring into confusion, or disturb) all the people in Canaan to whom Israel would come; and God would cause Israel's enemies to turn their back (literally "neck") unto Israel, that is, to turn and flee.

God spread this terror ahead of Israel by causing reports and rumors about Israel's invincible power to be circulated widely. See Josh. 2:9, 11; Deut. 2:25; Ex. 15:14-16; Num. 22:2-3; I Sam. 4:6-8.

God further promised to "send the hornet" before Israel, which would drive out the Canaanite nations. Compare Deut. 7:20. The closeness of verses 27 and 28 suggests that "hornet" and "terror" refer to the same thing, the psychological and social weakening of the people's courage and

ability to resist. The word *hornet* as here used seems to have a figurative and indefinite meaning, and could refer to anything which helped Israel to be victorious in its conquest - psychological terror, storms (Josh. 10:11), or such. The word *hornet* is singular (not like KJV and RSV "hornets"), but it is probably used in a collective sense for all the means used by God to "soften up" the Canaanites for Israel's conquest. Josh. 24:12 indicates that God surely did send the hornet before Israel, as He had promised.

The archaeologist John Garstang,<sup>12</sup> who excavated at Jericho in the 1930's, suggested that since the "hornet" (or wasp) was the sacred symbol of some of the Pharaohs of Egypt, that the "hornet" may have referred to the Egyptian armies that fought victoriously in Canaan against the Hyksos and other peoples about eighty years before Israel conquered the land. These Egyptian conquerors supposedly weakened Canaan's ability to resist Israel. We consider this theory very improbable. God did not say "I *have sent* the hornet before you," but "I *will send*" (future).

Furthermore, God never indicated that the Canaanites would be weak (or weakened) adversaries. They are described as being "greater and mightier than yourselves." (Deut. 11:23; 4:38).

20. *Would God drive out the Canaanites quickly? (23:29-30)*

No. Israel would need considerable time to occupy the land. And if the land were left without people, it would soon become desolate and run-down. Israel would occupy the houses, cities, fields, and vineyards of the former inhabitants (Deut. 6:10-11). These things would soon be in disrepair if left unoccupied.

The danger that wild beasts (lions, bears, wild dogs, etc.) would multiply and become a peril in the land if people were not occupying it was a very real menace. (II Kings 17:24-26; Lev. 26:22).

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<sup>12</sup>Joshua-Judges: *The Foundations of Bible History* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), p. 259.



Israel's conquests of Canaan required six or seven years. See Josh. 14:7, 10; Num. 14:33. Jehovah cast out those nations before Israel little by little. Deut. 7:22.

Further reasons for the slowness in conquering the land were (1) that Israel transgressed God's covenant, and He wanted to test Israel whether they would walk in His ways or not (Judges 2:20-23; 3:4); and (2) to teach them war, that is, how to fight (Judges 3:2).

Even after Israel had conquered much of the land, various tribes were slow in occupying it. See Josh. 18:1-3. They lacked the aggressive faith to take over the land.

Skeptical critics think that the promise to drive the Canaanites out little by little indirectly suggests that the number of incoming Israelites was actually considerably smaller than the two and a half million people "often presupposed" on the basis of 600,000 fighting men.<sup>13</sup> This view is not a presupposition, but merely an acceptance of the statistics given in the scripture (Ex. 12:37). The people who operate on presuppositions are those who feel that the record just could not be true as it stands and therefore it isn't.

21. *What were to be the borders of Israel's land? (23:31)*

From the Red Sea (probably from the tip of the Gulf of Akabah at Elath) to the sea of the Philistines (the Mediterranean); and from the wilderness (probably the Sinai wilderness of Shur) unto the river (the Euphrates).

The boundaries of Israel's promised land are given several places in the scriptures. See Deut. 11:24 ("from the river [Euphrates] even unto the hinder sea" [the Dead Sea]); Gen. 15:18 ("from the river of Egypt [probably the Wady el Arish in the northern Sinai peninsula] unto the . . . river Euphrates"); I Kings 4:21 ("from the River [Euphrates] unto the land of the Philistines"). This passage in I Kings tells of the extent of the land in the days of king Solomon. It reached nearly to that extent in the time of Jeroboam II

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<sup>13</sup>Broadman Bible Commentary, I, (1969), p. 429.

of Israel (II Kings 14:25) and Uzziah of Judah (II Chron. 26:1-2, 6).

The reference to the "Red Sea" in 23:31 is literally to the "Sea of Reeds." This is the same body of water known as the Red Sea. See notes on Ex. 13:18.

Observe that while God would deliver the inhabitants of the land into Israel's hand, that Israel had to "drive them out." Human effort must work with the divine assistance.

22. *What sort of covenant was Israel to make with the Canaanites?*

NO covenant was to be made with them or with their gods! The Hebrew says that no covenant was to be made "TO" them, rather than "with" them. Israel was to enter the land as a conqueror, who might condescend to make a covenant of amnesty to the conquered people. But they were not even to do this. Much less were they to deal with the people as equals, *with* whom a covenant might be made. Compare Ex. 34:12-16; Deut. 7:2-3.

Israel was permitted to make peace covenants with cities far off from their land. See Deut. 7:1-2; 20:10-15.

The Canaanites and their gods would cause Israel to sin against God and would surely be a *snare* (trap) unto Israel. The word *snare* (like *stumbling-block* in the New Testament) expresses the idea of being trapped into *destruction*, rather than simply into sin (as bad as that is!). The warning is very severe and stern.

Israel did fall into this snare! Psalm 106:36-37: "And (they) served their (the Canaanites') idols, which became a *snare* unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto demons, and shed innocent blood."

Ex. 23:33 marks the end of the "book of the covenant." This section has included chs. 21-23, and perhaps part of chapter twenty. It told the terms upon which God would enter into covenant with Israel. The next chapter moves on to the actual ratification of this covenant. In view of the exclusive nature of the relationship between God and Israel, it is appropriate that the covenant book should end with

commands forbidding Israel to make any covenant with any other gods or men.<sup>14</sup>

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THE TEXT OF EXODUS  
TRANSLATION

**24** And he said unto Mo-ses, Come up unto Je-ho-vah, thou, and Aar-on, Na-dab, and A-bi-hu, and seventy of the elders of Is-ra-el; and worship ye afar off: (2) and Mo-ses alone shall come near unto Je-ho-vah; but they shall not come near; neither shall the people go with him. (3) And Mo-ses came and told the people all the words of Je-ho-vah, and all the ordinances: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which Je-ho-vah hath spoken will we do. (4) And Mo-ses wrote all the words of Je-ho-vah, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Is-ra-el. (5) And he sent young men of the children of Is-ra-el, who offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto Je-ho-vah. (6) And Mo-ses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. (7) And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that Je-ho-vah hath spoken will we do, and be obedient. (8) And Mo-ses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which Je-ho-vah hath made with you concerning all these words.

(9) Then went up Mo-ses, and Aar-on, Na-dab, and A-bi-hu, and seventy of the elders of Is-ra-el: (10) and they saw the God of Is-ra-el; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. (11) And upon the nobles of the children of Is-ra-el he laid not

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<sup>14</sup>Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 184.