
EXODUS 23:1 "You shall not spread a false report. Don't join your hand with the wicked to be a malicious witness.

Laws against evil-speaking, Exo 23:1. Against bad company, Exo 23:2. Against partiality, Exo 23:3. Laws commanding acts of kindness and humanity, Exo 23:4, Exo 23:5. Against oppression, Exo 23:6. Against unrighteous decisions, Exo 23:7. Against bribery and corruption, Exo 23:8. Against unkindness to strangers, Exo 23:9. The ordinance concerning the Sabbatical year, Exo 23:10, Exo 23:11. The Sabbath a day of rest, Exo 23:12. General directions concerning circumcision, etc., Exo 23:13. The three annual festivals, Exo 23:14. The feast of unleavened bread, Exo 23:15. The feast of harvest, and the feast of ingathering, Exo 23:16. All the males to appear before God thrice in a year, Exo 23:17. Different ordinances - no blood to be offered with leavened bread - no fat to be left till the next day - the first fruits to be brought to the house of God - and a kid not to be seethed in its mother's milk, Exo 23:18, Exo 23:19. Description of the Angel of God, who was to lead the people into the promised land, and drive out the Amorites, etc., Exo 23:20-23. Idolatry to be avoided, and the images of idols destroyed, Exo 23:24. Different promises to obedience, Exo 23:25-27. Hornets shall be sent to drive out the Canaanites, etc., Exo 23:28. The ancient inhabitants to be driven out by little and little, and the reason why, Exo 23:29, Exo 23:30. The boundaries of the promised land, Exo 23:31. No league or covenant to be made with the ancient inhabitants, who are all to be utterly expelled, Exo 23:32, Exo 23:33.

Verse 1

Thou shalt not raise a false report - Acting contrary to this precept is a sin against the ninth commandment. And the inventor and receiver of false and slanderous reports, are almost equally criminal. The word seems to refer to either, and our translators have very properly retained both senses, putting raise in the text, and receive in the margin. The original **לֹא תִשָּׂא** lo tissa has been translated, thou shalt not publish. Were there no publishers of slander and calumny, there would be no receivers; and were there none to receive them, there would be none to raise them; and were there no raisers, receivers, nor propagators of calumny, lies, etc., society would be in peace.

EXODUS 23:2 "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; neither shall you testify in court to side with a multitude to pervert justice;

Verse 2

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil - Be singular. Singularity, if in the right, can never be criminal. So completely disgraceful is the way of sin, that if there were not a multitude walking in that way, who help to keep each other in countenance, every solitary sinner would be obliged to hide his head. But **רַבִּים** rabbim, which we translate multitude, sometimes signifies the great, chiefs, or mighty ones; and is so understood by some eminent critics in this place: "Thou shalt not follow the example of the great or rich, who may so far disgrace their own character as to live without God in the world, and trample under foot his laws." It is supposed that these directions refer principally to matters which come under the eye of the civil magistrate; as if he had said, "Do not join with

great men in condemning an innocent or righteous person, against whom they have conceived a prejudice on the account of his religion," etc.

EXODUS 23:3 neither shall you favour a poor man in his cause.

Verse 3

Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause - The word דל dal, which we translate poor man, is probably put here in opposition to רבִּים rabbim, the great, or noble men, in the preceding verse: if so, the meaning is, Thou shalt neither be influenced by the great to make an unrighteous decision, nor by the poverty or distress of the poor to give thy voice against the dictates of justice and truth. Hence the ancient maxim, Fiat Justitia, Ruat Coelum. "Let justice be done, though the heavens should be dissolved."

EXODUS 23:4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.

Verse 4

If thou meet thine enemy's ox - going astray - From the humane and heavenly maxim in this and the following verse, our blessed Lord has formed the following precept: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;" Mat 5:44. A precept so plain, wise, benevolent, and useful, can receive no other comment than that which its influence on the heart of a kind and merciful man produces in his life.

EXODUS 23:5 If you see the donkey of him who hates you fallen down under his burden, don't leave him, you shall surely help him with it.

EXODUS 23:6 "You shall not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.

Verse 6

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor - Thou shalt neither countenance him in his crimes, nor condemn him in his righteousness. See Exo 23:5, Exo 23:7.

EXODUS 23:7 "Keep far from a false charge, and don't kill the innocent and righteous: for I will not justify the wicked.

EXODUS 23:8 "You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds those who have sight and perverts the words of the righteous.

Verse 8

Thou shalt take no gift - A strong ordinance against selling justice, which has been the disgrace and ruin of every state where it has been practiced. In the excellent charter of British liberties called Magna Charta, there is one article expressly on this head: Nulli vendemus, nulli negabimus aut differemus, rectum aut justitiam - Art. xxxiii. "To none will we sell, to none will we deny or defer, right or justice." This was the more necessary in those early and corrupt times, as he who had most money, and gave the largest presents (called then oblata) to the king or queen, was sure to gain his cause in the king's court; whether he had right and justice on his side or not.

EXODUS 23:9 "You shall not oppress an alien, for you know the heart of an alien, since you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Verse 9

Ye know the heart of a stranger - Having been strangers yourselves, under severe, long continued, and cruel oppression, ye know the fears, cares, anxieties, and dismal forebodings which the heart of a stranger feels. What a forcible appeal to humanity and compassion!

EXODUS 23:10 "For six years you shall sow your land, and shall gather in its increase,

EXODUS 23:11 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 animal of the field shall eat. In the same way, you shall deal with your vineyard and with your olive grove.

Verse 11

The seventh year thou shalt let it rest - As, every seventh day was a Sabbath day, so every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year. The reasons for this ordinance Calmet gives thus: - "1. To maintain as far as possible an equality of condition among the people, in setting the slaves at liberty, and in permitting all, as children of one family, to have the free and indiscriminate use of whatever the earth produced. "2. To inspire the people with sentiments of humanity, by making it their duty to give rest, and proper and sufficient nourishment, to the poor, the slave, and the stranger, and even to the cattle. "3. To accustom the people to submit to and depend on the Divine providence, and expect their support from that in the seventh year, by an extraordinary provision on the sixth. "4. To detach their affections from earthly and perishable things, and to make them disinterested and heavenly-minded. "5. To show them God's dominion over the country, and that He, not they, was lord of the soil and that they held it merely from his bounty." See this ordinance at length, Leviticus 25 (note).

That God intended to teach them the doctrine of providence by this ordinance, there can be no doubt; and this is marked very distinctly, Lev 25:20, Lev 25:21 : "And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years." That is, There shall be, not three crops in one year, but one crop equal in its abundance to three, because it must supply the wants of three years.

1. For the sixth year, supplying fruit for its own consumption;
2. For the seventh year, in which they were neither to sow nor reap; and
3. For the eighth year, for though they ploughed, sowed, etc., that year, yet a whole course of its seasons was requisite to bring all these fruits to perfection, so that they could not have the fruits of the eighth year till the ninth, (see Lev 25:22), till which time God promised that they should eat of the old store.

What an astonishing proof did this give of the being, power, providence, mercy, and goodness of God! Could there be an infidel in such a land, or a sinner against God and his own soul, with such proofs before his eyes of God and his attributes as one sabbatical year afforded?

It is very remarkable that the observance of this ordinance is nowhere expressly mentioned in the sacred writings; though some suppose, but without sufficient reason, that there is a reference to it in Jer 34:8, Jer 34:9. Perhaps the major part of the people could not trust God, and therefore continued to sow and reap on the seventh year, as on the preceding. This greatly displeased the Lord, and therefore he sent them into captivity; so that the land enjoyed those Sabbaths, through lack of inhabitants, of which their ungodliness had deprived it. See Lev 18:24, Lev 18:25, Lev 18:28; Lev 26:34, Lev 26:35, Lev 26:43; 2Chr 36:20, 2Chr 36:21. Commentators have been much puzzled to ascertain the time in which the sabbatical year began; because, if it began in Abib or March, they must have lost two harvests; for they could neither reap nor plant that year, and of course they could have no crop the year following; but if it began with what was called the civil year, or in Tisri or Marcheshvan, which answers to the beginning of our autumn, they would then have had that year's produce reaped and gathered in.

EXODUS 23:12 "Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your handmaid, and the alien may be refreshed."

Verse 12

Six days thou shalt do thy work - Though they were thus bound to keep the sabbatical year, yet they must not neglect the seventh day's rest or weekly Sabbath; for that was of perpetual obligation, and was paramount to all others. That the sanctification of the Sabbath was of great consequence in the sight of God, we may learn from the various repetitions of this law; and we may observe that it has still for its object, not only the benefit of the soul, but the health and comfort of the body also. Doth God care for oxen? Yes; and he mentions them with tenderness, that thine ox and thine ass may rest. How criminal to employ the laboring cattle on the Sabbath, as well as upon the other days of the week! More cattle are destroyed in England than in any other part of the world, in proportion, by excessive and continued labor. The noble horse in general has no Sabbath! Does God look on this with an indifferent eye? Surely he does not. "England," said a foreigner, "is the paradise of women, the purgatory of servants, and the hell of horses."

The son of thy handmaid, and the stranger - be refreshed - שִׁפְיָי yinnaphesh may be respired or new-souled; have a complete renewal both of bodily and spiritual strength. The expression used by Moses here is very like that used by St. Paul, Act 3:19 : "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing (καιροι αναψυξεως, the times of re-

souling) shall come from the presence of the Lord;" alluding, probably, to those times of refreshing and rest for body and soul originally instituted under the law.

EXODUS 23:13 "Be careful to do all things that I have said to you; and don't invoke the name of other gods, neither let them be heard out of your mouth.

EXODUS 23:14 "You shall observe a feast to me three times a year.

Verse 14

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year - The three feasts here referred to were,

1. The feast of the Passover;
2. The feast of Pentecost;
3. The feast of Tabernacles.

1. The feast of the Passover was celebrated to keep in remembrance the wonderful deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt.

2. The feast of Pentecost, called also the feast of harvest and the feast of weeks, Exo 34:22, was celebrated fifty days after the Passover to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, which took place fifty days after, and hence called by the Greeks Pentecost.

3. The feast of Tabernacles, called also the feast of the ingathering, was celebrated about the 15th of the month Tisri to commemorate the Israelites' dwelling in tents for forty years, during their stay in the wilderness. See on Leviticus 23 (note). "God, out of his great wisdom," says Calmet, "appointed several festivals among the Jews for many reasons:

1. To perpetuate the memory of those great events, and the wonders he had wrought for the people; for example, the Sabbath brought to remembrance the creation of the world; the Passover, the departure out of Egypt; the Pentecost, the giving of the law; the feast of Tabernacles, the sojourning of their fathers in the wilderness, etc.

2. To keep them faithful to their religion by appropriate ceremonies, and the splendor of Divine service.

3. To procure them lawful pleasures, and necessary rest.

4. To give them instruction; for in their religious assemblies the law of God was always read and explained.

5. To consolidate their social union, by renewing the acquaintance of their tribes and families; for on these occasions they come together from different parts of the land to the holy city."

Besides the feasts mentioned above, the Jews had,

1. The feast of the Sabbath, which was a weekly feast.
2. The feast of the Sabbatical Year, which was a septennial feast.

3. The feast of Trumpets, which was celebrated on the first day of what was called their civil year, which was ushered in by the blowing of a trumpet; Lev 23:24, etc.
4. The feast of the New Moon, which was celebrated on the first day the moon appeared after her change.
5. The feast of Expiation, which was celebrated annually on the tenth day of Tisri or September, on which a general atonement was made for all the sins, negligences, and ignorances, throughout the year.
6. The feast of Lots or Purim, to commemorate the preservation of the Jews from the general massacre projected by Haman. See the book of Esther.
7. The feast of the Dedication, or rather the Restoration of the temple, which had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. This was also called the feast of Lights.

Besides these, the Jews have had several other feasts, such as the feast of Branches, to commemorate the taking of Jericho.

The feast of Collections, on the 10th of September, on which they make contributions for the service of the temple and synagogue.

The feast for the death of Nicanor. 1 Maccabees 7:48, etc.

The feast for the discovery of the sacred fire, 2 Maccabees 1:18, etc.

The feast of the carrying of wood to the temple, called Xylophoria, mentioned by Josephus - War, b. ii. c. 17.

EXODUS 23:15 You shall observe the feast of unleavened bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib (for in it you came out of Egypt), and no one shall appear before me empty.

EXODUS 23:16 And the feast of harvest, the first fruits of your labours, which you sow in the field; and the feast of ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in your labours out of the field.

EXODUS 23:17 Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

Verse 17

All thy males - Old men, sick men, male idiots, and male children under thirteen years of age, excepted; for so the Jewish doctors understand this command.

EXODUS 23:18 "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread, neither shall the fat of my feast remain all night until the morning.

Verse 18

The blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread - The sacrifice here mentioned is undoubtedly the Passover; (see Exo 34:25); this is called by way of eminence My sacrifice, because God had instituted it for that especial purpose, the redemption of Israel from the Egyptian bondage, and because it typified The Lamb Of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. We have already seen how strict the prohibition against leaven was during this festival, and what was signified by it. See on Exodus 12 (note).

EXODUS 23:19 The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

Verse 19

Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk - This passage has greatly perplexed commentators; but Dr. Cudworth is supposed to have given it its true meaning by quoting a MS. comment of a Karaite Jew, which he met with, on this passage. "It was a custom of the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid and boil it in the milk of its dam; and then, in a magical way, to go about and besprinkle with it all their trees and fields, gardens and orchards; thinking by these means to make them fruitful, that they might bring forth more abundantly in the following year." - Cudworth on the Lord's Supper, 4th.

I give this comment as I find it, and add that Spenser has shown that the Zabii used this kind of magical milk to sprinkle their trees and fields, in order to make them fruitful. Others understand it of eating flesh and milk together; others of a lamb or a kid while it is sucking its mother, and that the paschal lamb is here intended, which it was not lawful to offer while sucking.

After all the learned labor which critics have bestowed on this passage, and by which the obscurity in some cases is become more intense, the simple object of the precept seems to be this: "Thou shalt do nothing that may have any tendency to blunt thy moral feelings, or teach thee hardness of heart." Even human nature shudders at the thought of causing the mother to lend her milk to seethe the flesh of her young one! We need go no farther for the delicate, tender, humane, and impressive meaning of this precept.

EXODUS 23:20 "Behold, I send an angel before you, to keep you by the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

Verse 20

Behold, I send an Angel before thee - Some have thought that this was Moses, others Joshua, because the word מלאך malach signifies an angel or messenger; but as it is said, Exo 23:21, My name is in him, (בקרבו bekirbo, intimately, essentially in him), it is more likely that the great Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, is meant, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We have had already much reason to believe that this glorious personage often appeared in a human form to the patriarchs, etc.; and of him Joshua was a very expressive type, the names Joshua and Jesus, in Hebrew and Greek, being of exactly the same signification, because radically the same,

from *יָשָׁא* yasha, he saved, delivered, preserved, or kept safe. Nor does it appear that the description given of the Angel in the text can belong to any other person.

Calmet has referred to a very wonderful comment on these words given by Philo Judaeus De Agricultura, which I shall produce here at full length as it stands in Dr. Mangey's edition, vol. 1., p. 308: Ως ποιμην και βασιλευς ο Θεος αγει κατα δικην και νομον, προστησαμενος τον ορθον αυτου λογον πρωτογονον υιον, ος την επιμελειαν της ιερας ταυτης αγελης, οια τις μεγαλου βασιλεως υπαρχος, διαδεξεται. Και γαρ ειρηται που· Ιδου εγω ειμι, αποστελω αγγελον μον εις προσωπον σου, του φυλαξαι σε εν τη οδω "God, as the Shepherd and King, conducts all things according to law and righteousness, having established over them his right Word, his Only-Begotten Son, who, as the Viceroy of the Great King, takes care of and ministers to this sacred flock. For it is somewhere said, (Exo 23:20), Behold, I Am, and I will send my Angel before thy face, to keep thee in the way."

This is a testimony liable to no suspicion, coming from a person who cannot be supposed to be even friendly to Christianity, nor at all acquainted with that particular doctrine to which his words seem so pointedly to refer.

EXODUS 23:21 Pay attention to him, and listen to his voice. Don't provoke him, for he will not pardon your disobedience, for my name is in him.

Verse 21

He will not pardon your transgressions - He is not like a man, with whom ye may think that ye may trifle; were he either man or angel, in the common acceptance of the term, it need not be said, He will not pardon your transgressions, for neither man nor angel could do it.

My name is in him - The Jehovah dwells in him; in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and because of this he could either pardon or punish. All power is given unto me in heaven and earth, Mat 28:18.

EXODUS 23:22 But if you indeed listen to his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies, and an adversary to your adversaries.

EXODUS 23:23 For my angel shall go before you, and bring you in to the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; and I will cut them off.

Verse 23

Unto the Amorites - There are only six of the seven nations mentioned here, but the Septuagint, Samaritan, Coptic, and one Hebrew MS., add Girgashite, thus making the seven nations.

EXODUS 23:24 You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor follow their practices, but you shall utterly overthrow them and demolish their pillars.

Verse 24

Break down their images - מצבתיהם matstsebotheyhem, from נצב natsab, to stand up; pillars, anointed stones, etc., such as the baitulia. See Clarke on Gen 28:18 (note).

EXODUS 23:25 You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from your midst.

Verse 25

Shall bless thy bread and thy water - That is, all thy provisions, no matter of what sort; the meanest fare shall be sufficiently nutritive when God's blessing is in it.

EXODUS 23:26 No one will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will fulfil the number of your days.

Verse 26

There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren - Hence there must be a very great increase both of men and cattle.

The number of thy days I will fulfill - Ye shall all live to a good old age, and none die before his time. This is the blessing of the righteous, for wicked men live not out half their days; Psa 55:23.

EXODUS 23:27 I will send my terror before you, and will confuse all the people to whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

EXODUS 23:28 I will send the hornet before you, which will drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before you.

Verse 28

I will send hornets before thee - הצרעה hatstsirah. The root is not found in Hebrew, but it may be the same with the Arabic saraa, to lay prostrate, to strike down; the hornet, probably so called from the destruction occasioned by the violence of its sting. The hornet, in natural history, belongs to the species crabro, of the genus vespa or wasp; it is a most voracious insect, and is exceedingly strong for its size, which is generally an inch in length, though I have seen some an inch and a half long, and so strong that, having caught one in a small pair of forceps, it repeatedly escaped by using violent contortions, so that at last I was obliged to abandon all hopes of securing it alive, which I wished to have done. How distressing and destructive a multitude of these might be, any person may conjecture; even the bees of one hive would be sufficient to sting a thousand men to madness, but how much worse must wasps and hornets be! No armor, no weapons, could avail against these. A few thousands of them would be quite sufficient to throw the best disciplined army into confusion and rout. From Jos 24:12, we find that two kings of the Amorites were actually driven out of the land by these hornets, so that the Israelites were not obliged to use either sword or bow in the conquest.

EXODUS 23:29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the animals of the field multiply against you.

EXODUS 23:30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and inherit the land.

EXODUS 23:31 I will set your border from the Red Sea even to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

Verse 31

I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea - On the south-east, even unto the sea of the Philistines - the Mediterranean, on the north-west; and from the desert - of Arabia, or the wilderness of Shur, on the west, to the river - the Euphrates, on the north-east. Or in general terms, from the Euphrates on the east, to the Mediterranean Sea on the west; and from Mount Libanus on the north, to the Red Sea and the Nile on the south. This promise was not completely fulfilled till the days of David and Solomon. The general disobedience of the people before this time prevented a more speedy accomplishment; and their disobedience afterwards caused them to lose the possession. So, though all the promises of God are Yea and Amen, yet they are fulfilled but to a few, because men are slow of heart to believe; and the blessings of providence and grace are taken away from several because of their unfaithfulness.

EXODUS 23:32 You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

Verse 32

Thou shalt make no covenant with them - They were incurable idolaters, and the cup of their iniquity was full. And had the Israelites contracted any alliance with them, either sacred or civil, they would have enticed them into their idolatries, to which the Jews were at all times most unhappily prone; and as God intended that they should be the preservers of the true religion till the coming of the Messiah, hence he strictly forbade them to tolerate idolatry.

EXODUS 23:33 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."

Verse 33

They shall not dwell in thy land - They must be utterly expelled. The land was the Lord's, and he had given it to the progenitors of this people, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The latter being obliged to leave it because of a famine, God is now conducting back his posterity, who alone had a Divine and natural right to it, and therefore their seeking to possess the inheritance of their fathers can be only

criminal in the sight of those who are systematically opposed to the thing, because it is a part of Divine revelation.

What a pity that the Mosaic Law should be so little studied! What a number of just and equal laws, pious and humane institutions, useful and instructive ordinances, does it contain! Everywhere we see the purity and benevolence of God always working to prevent crimes and make the people happy! But what else can be expected from that God who is love, whose tender mercies are over all his works, and who hateth nothing that he has made? Reader, thou art not straitened in him, be not straitened in thy own bowels. Learn from him to be just, humane, kind, and merciful. Love thy enemy, and do good to him that hates thee. Jesus is with thee; hear and obey his voice; provoke him not, and he will be an enemy to thine enemies, and an adversary to thine adversaries. Believe, love, obey; and the road to the kingdom of God is plain before thee. Thou shalt inherit the good land, and be established in it for ever and ever.