

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 23

This chapter contains several laws, chiefly judicial, relating to the civil polity of Israel, as concerning witness borne and judgment made of cases in courts of judicature, without any respect to poor or rich, and without the influence of a bribe, (⁽¹²³¹⁾Exodus 23:1-3,6-8), concerning doing good to an enemy in case any of his cattle go astray, or fall under their burden, (⁽¹²³⁴⁾Exodus 23:4,5), and of the oppression of a stranger, (⁽¹²³⁹⁾Exodus 23:9), and then follow others concerning the sabbath of the seventh year, and of the seventh day, with a caution against the use of the names of idols, (⁽¹²³⁰⁾Exodus 23:10-13), next are laws concerning the appearance of all their males at the three feasts, (⁽¹²³⁴⁾Exodus 23:14-17), and concerning the slaying of the sacrifice of the passover, and bringing the first of the firstfruits of the land, (⁽¹²³⁸⁾Exodus 23:18,19) and then a promise is made of sending an angel to them to bring them into the land of Canaan, where they should carefully avoid all idolatry, and show a just indignation against it, and serve the Lord, and then it would be well with them, (⁽¹²³¹⁾Exodus 23:20-26), and particularly it is promised, that the Lord would send his fear, and his hornets, before them, to destroy the inhabitants of the land, and drive out the rest by little and little, until they should possess the utmost borders of it, which are fixed, (⁽¹²³⁷⁾Exodus 23:27-31), and the chapter is concluded with a direction not to make a covenant with these people, or their gods, nor suffer them to dwell among them, lest they should be a snare unto them, (⁽¹²³³⁾Exodus 23:32,33).

Ver. 1. *Thou shalt not raise a false report*, etc.] Of a neighbour, or of any man whatever, either secretly by private slanders, whispers, backbiting and tale bearing, by innuendos, detracting from his good name and credit, suggesting things false and wicked concerning him; or publicly in a court of judicature, bringing a false accusation, laying a false charge, and bearing a false testimony against him: or “thou shalt not receive a false report”^{f715}; if there were not so many, that say, Report, and we will report it, that are ready to receive every ill thing of their neighbours, there would not be so many that would raise such ill things of them; everything of this kind

should be discountenanced, and especially by judges in courts of judicature, who are chiefly spoken to and of in the context; these should not easily admit every charge and accusation brought; nor bear, or endure a false report, as the word also signifies, but discourage, and even punish it:

put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness; which is not a gesture used in swearing, such as with us, of putting the hand upon a book, which did not obtain so early; nor is there any instance of this kind in Scripture; the gesture used in swearing was either putting the hand under the thigh, which yet is questionable, or lifting of it up to heaven; but here it is expressive of confederacy, of joining hand in hand to carry on a prosecution in an unrighteous way, by bearing false testimony against another; and such were to be guarded against, and not admitted to give evidence in a cause, even a man that is known to be a wicked man, or to have been an unrighteous witness before; on the one hand, a man should be careful of joining with him in a testimony that is unrighteous; and, on the other hand, judges should take care not to suffer such to be witnesses. The Jews say^{f716}, that everyone that is condemned to be scourged, or has been scourged for some crime committed, is reckoned a wicked man, and he is not to be admitted a witness, nor his testimony taken.

Ver. 2. *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*, etc.] The Targums of Jerusalem and Jonathan add, but to do good. As in private life, the examples of the many, who are generally the most wicked, are not to be followed, though they too often are; examples, and especially of the multitude, having great influence, and therefore to be guarded against; so in public courts of judicature, where there are many judges upon the bench, if one of them is sensible that the greater part go wrong in their judgment of a case, he ought not to follow them, or be influenced by them, but go according to the dictates of his own conscience, and the evidence of things as they appear to him, and neither agree to justify the wicked, nor condemn the righteous:

neither shall thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment; or “thou shalt not answer”^{f717}; either in pleading in a cause, and taking the side of it the majority is on, and for that reason, though it is a manifest perversion of justice; or by giving a vote on that side, and on that account, whereby a wrong judgment passes; and this vote given either according to the number of witnesses, which ought not always to be the rule of judgment; for it is not the number of witnesses, but the nature,

evidence, and circumstances of their testimony, that are to be regarded: Jarchi says, in judgments of life and death, they go after the mouth of one witness to absolve, and after the mouth of two to condemn: or according to the number of judges on the bench, and their superiority in years and knowledge; and so some render the word, “after the great ones”^{f718}; for a judge is not to be influenced by names or numbers in giving his vote, but to judge according to the truth of things, as they appear to him: hence the Jews say, that the younger or puisne judges used to be asked their judgment first, that they might not be influenced by others superior to them; and a like method is taken with us in the trial of a peer, the younger lords always giving their opinion first: as to the number of votes by which a cause was carried in court, it is said^{f719}, not as the decline to good, is the decline to evil; the decline to good, i.e. to absolution, is by the sentence of one (a majority of one); the decline to evil, i.e. to condemnation, is by the mouth or sentence of two, a majority of two.

Ver. 3. *Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.*] Because he is a poor man, and for that reason endeavour to carry his cause for him, right or wrong, from a foolish pity to him as a poor man, and from an affectation of gaining the applause of people on that account; or “thou shalt not honour” or “adorn” a poor man^{f720}, by a set speech in favour of his cause, though wrong, dressed up in the best manner, and set off with all the colourings of art, to make it appear in the most plausible manner; the law is against respect of persons, as not the person of the rich, so neither is the person of the poor to be accepted, but the justice of their cause is to be regarded; so the Targum of Jonathan,

“the poor that is guilty in his judgment or cause, his face (or person) thou shalt not accept to have pity on him, for no person is to be accepted in judgment.”

Ver. 4. *If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray*, etc.] Or any other beast, as the Samaritan version adds; for these are only mentioned for instances, as being more common, and creatures subject to go astray; now when such as these are met going astray, so as to be in danger of being lost to the owner, though he is an enemy; or as the Targum of Jonathan,

“whom thou hatest because of a sin, which thou alone knowest in him;”

yet this was not so far to prejudice the finder of his beasts against him, as to be careless about them, to suffer them to go on without acquainting him with them, or returning them to him, as follows:

thou shalt surely bring it back to him again; whether it be an ox, or an ass, or any other beast, the law is very strong and binding upon the finder to return it to his neighbour, though an enemy, and bring it either to his field or to his farm.

Ver. 5. *If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden,* etc.] Fallen down, and such a burden upon him that he cannot rise up again, but lies under it, and the owner of it is not able of himself to raise it up again:

and wouldst forbear to help him; show an inclination to pass on without giving him any assistance to get up his beast again; or “wouldst thou forbear to help him?”^{f721} as Jarchi, and others, read with an interrogation, could it be in thine heart to forbear helping him? couldst thou go on, and take no notice of him and his case, and not join him in endeavouring to get up his beast again, that he may proceed its his journey? canst thou be so cruel and hardhearted, though he is thine enemy? but if thou art, know this,

thou shalt surely help with him; to get up his ass again: hence the Jewish canon runs thus^{f722},

“if an ass is unloaded and loaded four or five times, a man is bound, i.e. to help, as it is said, “in helping thou shalt help”; if he (the owner) goes away, and sets himself down, seeing the command is upon thee, if it is thy will and pleasure to unload, unload, he is free; for it is said, with him; if he is an old man, or sick, he is bound, the command of the law is to unload, but not to load.”

The words may be rendered, “in leaving thou shalt leave with him”^{f723}; either leave or forsake thine enmity to help him, as Onkelos; or leave thy business, thou art about, to lend him an hand to raise up his beast again.

Ver. 6. *Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.*] As the poor man was not to be favoured when his cause was bad through an affected pity for him as a poor man, so his judgment was not to be wrested or perverted, when his cause was good, because of his poverty; which is too often the case, through the power of rich men, and the prevalence of their gifts and bribes, and to curry favour with them: the phrase, “thy

poor”, is very emphatic, and intended to engage judges to regard them, as being of the same flesh and blood with them, of the same nation and religion; and who were particularly committed to their care and protection under God, who is the Judge and protector of the poor, of the widow and the fatherless.

Ver. 7. *Keep thee far from a false matter*, etc.] Or “word” ^{f724}; from receiving a false testimony, or taking the false or wrong side of a cause, or engaging in a bad one; keep aloof off from it, as much at a distance from it as possible:

and the innocent and the righteous slay thou not; that is, do not condemn them to death, nor join with the majority in their condemnation, if they appear to be innocent and righteous; nor give orders, or join in giving orders to the executioner to put such to death. The Targum of Jonathan is,

“he that goes righteous out of the house of thy judgment (out of the sanhedrim, to which he belonged), and they find out his sin (afterwards), and he that goes out guilty, and they (afterwards) find out his righteousness, do not slay:”

for I will not justify the wicked: the wicked judge in pronouncing an unjust sentence on innocent and righteous men, or if they absolve wicked men, at the same time they put to death the innocent and righteous, God will not justify those wicked men cleared by them, but will, in his own time and way, sooner or later, inflict the deserved punishment on them: this is not contrary to (^{<5015>}Romans 4:5) for though God justifies the ungodly, he does not justify ungodliness in them, or them in ungodliness, but from it, and that by the imputation of the righteousness of his Son.

Ver. 8. *And thou shalt take no gift*, etc.] Of the persons whose cause is to be tried in a court of judicature before judges; neither of those on the one side nor on the other, neither before the trial nor after, neither by words, by a promise, nor by facts, by actually receiving money; and not even to judge truly, as Jarchi observes, neither to clear the innocent nor to condemn the guilty: a gift was not to be taken on any consideration whatever:

for the gift blindeth the wise; or the “seeing” ^{f725}; the open ones, who used to have both their eyes and their ears open, and attentive to the cause before them; and yet a gift so blinds them, by casting such a mist before them, that they are inattentive to the true merits of the cause, and their

affections and judgments are to be carried away in favour of those that have bribed them, as to pass a wrong sentence:

and perverteth the words of the righteous; either the sentences of righteous judges, as they ought to be, but a gift perverts their judgment, and they give a wrong decree; or the causes of the righteous that are brought before those are perverted by giving the cause to their adversaries, who are wicked men.

Ver. 9. *Also thou shall not oppress a stranger*, etc.] As these were not to be vexed and oppressed in a private manner and by private men, (see ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 22:21) so neither in a public manner, and in a public court of judicature, or by judges on the bench when their cause was before them, by not doing them justice, showing a partiality to those of their own nation against a stranger; whereas a stranger ought to have equal justice done him as a native, and the utmost care should be taken that he has no injury done him, and the rather because he is a stranger:

for ye know the heart of a stranger; the fears he is possessed of, the inward distress of his soul, the anxiety of his mind, the tenderness of his heart, the workings of his passions, his grief and sorrow, and dejection of spirit: the Targum of Jonathan is,

““the groaning of the soul of a stranger”: this the Israelitish judges knew, having had a very late experience of it:”

seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; where they had been vexed and oppressed, brought into hard bondage, and groaned under it; and therefore it might be reasonably thought and expected that they would have a heart sympathizing with strangers, and use them well, and especially see that justice was done them, and no injury or oppression of any kind.

Ver. 10. *And six years thou shall sow thy land*, The land of Canaan, given to their ancestors and to them, and which they were now going to inherit; and when they came into it they were to plant it with vines and olives; or rather, these being ready planted, they were to prune and dress them; and they were to till their land, and plough it, and sow it with various sorts of grain, for six years running, from the time of their possession of it:

and shall gather in the fruits thereof; corn and wine, and oil, into their own garners, treasuries, and cellars, as their own property, to dispose of as they pleased for their own use and profit.

Ver. 11. *But the seventh year thou shall let it rest, and lie still,* etc.] From tillage, and make its fruits common, as the Targum of Jonathan; the note of Jarchi is, “let it rest”, from perfect tillage, as ploughing and sowing; “and lie still”, from dunging and harrowing, or weeding: this law was intended to show that God was the original proprietor and owner of this land, and that the Israelites held it under him; and to teach them to depend upon and trust in his providence; as well as that there might be both rest for the land, and so it became more fruitful afterwards, having by this rest renewed its vigour, and also for servants and cattle; and that the poor might have an equal share in the fruits of the earth, and appear to be joint lords of it with others under God, as it follows:

that the poor of thy people may eat: that which grows up of itself, of which there were great quantities; for the sixth year bringing forth for three years, a great deal of seed fell, which grew up again; and especially, as through plenty they were not so careful to gather it all up; and besides this, there were the fruits of trees, of vines, olives, etc. which brought forth their fruit in course as usual, and which were all this year common to poor and rich; so that the former had an equal propriety and share with the latter:

and what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat; signifying that there should be such plenty that there would be enough for all, and to spare; that there would be much left, and which should be the portion of the beasts of the field, and who would also be sufficiently provided for by the produce the earth brought forth of itself, as herbage, etc. and the fruits the poor left:

in like manner thou shall deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard; that is, these were not to be pruned, nor the grapes and olives gathered, but were to be in common with all: a larger account is given of this law in (^{EXD}Leviticus 25:2-7).

Ver. 12. *Six days thou shalt do thy work,* etc.] That is, they might do what work they would on the six days of the week:

and on the seventh day thou shall rest; from all the work and labour done on other days, and give up themselves to religious exercises:

that thine ox and thine ass may rest; and so every other beast, as horses, camels, etc.

and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed; the former, the Targum of Jonathan, and so Jarchi, interprets, of one

uncircumcised, and the latter, of a proselyte of the gate: this law is here repeated, partly to show that it is of the same kind with the former, namely, ceremonial and temporary; and partly, as Jarchi observes, lest it should be said, since all, the year is called the sabbath, there was no need to observe the weekly sabbath.

Ver. 13. *And in all [things] that I have said unto you, be circumspect,* etc.] Or observe them, be careful to keep them punctually and constantly, even all that are delivered in this and the preceding chapters:

and make no mention of the name of other gods; neither call upon them, nor swear by them, nor make vows to them; and, as little as possible, ever utter their names, and never with pleasure and delight, and showing any honour of them, and reverence to them, but with the utmost detestation and abhorrence:

neither let it be heard out of thy mouth; not any of their names; the same thing in different words, the more to inculcate and impress the thing upon the mind, and to show with what vehemence and earnestness this is pressed.

Ver. 14. *Three times thou shall keep a feast unto me in the year.*] The feast of the passover, on the fourteenth of the month Nisan or March; and the feast of weeks or pentecost fifty days after that; and the feast of tabernacles on the fifteenth day of Tisri or September.

Ver. 15. *Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread,* etc.] Which began on the fourteenth of the month Abib or Nisan, and lasted seven days, during which time no leavened bread was to be eaten by the Israelites, or to be in their houses, of which see the notes on: (See Gill on “⁴²¹²⁸Exodus 12:15, 18-19”) (See Gill on “⁴²¹³⁶Exodus 13:6-7”)

thou shall eat unleavened bread, seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; from the fourteenth of the month to the twenty first:

for in it thou camest out of Egypt; in such haste that there was no time to leaven the dough in the troughs; in commemoration of which this law was given, and this feast was kept:

and none shall appear before me empty; at this feast and the two following ones; for, besides the offerings and sacrifices appointed, at the feast of

passover was brought a sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest; and at the feast of pentecost the two wave loaves or cakes of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and at the feast of tabernacles they appeared with palm tree branches, and boughs of goodly trees, and poured out water fetched from Siloam, before the Lord: but to this appearance the Jewish doctors ¹⁷²⁶ say,

“there was no measure fixed; for everyone, if he would, might go up and appear, and go away: according to another interpretation, for the burnt offering of appearance, and the peace offerings of the Chagigah, which a man is bound to bring, as it is written, “ye shall not appear empty”; there is no measure from the law, as it is written, “a man according to the gift of his hand”,
(¹⁶¹⁷Deuteronomy 16:17), but the wise men fix a measure; to the burnt offering a meah of silver, to the Chagigah two pieces of silver:”

some understand this, not of their bringing anything with them to appear before the Lord with, but of what they should be blessed with there; even with the presence of God, and communion with him, and with the blessings of his grace and goodness; so that however they came, they should not remain, nor go away empty, and so have no cause to repent their appearance before him; but the former sense seems best.

Ver. 16. *And the feast of harvest*, etc.] This is the second feast, the feast of wheat harvest, between which and barley harvest were fifty days; or between the firstfruits of the one and the first fruits of the other were seven weeks, as Aben Ezra observes, and was sometimes called the feast of weeks; at which feast were to be brought,

the first fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field; the two wave loaves or cakes, made of the first new wheat, which was the effect of their labour in tilling the field, and sowing it with wheat, and reaping it:

and the feast of ingathering, [which is] in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field; this is the third feast in the year to be kept, and was kept at the close of the year, at the revolution of it, when a new year began that is, according to the old account, which made Tisri the month in which this feast was kept, the first month of the year; whereas, according to the new count, it was the seventh month from the month Abib, now made the first of the months upon the Israelites coming out of Egypt in that month: this is the same feast with the feast of

tabernacles, but here called the feast of ingathering, because at this time of the year all the fruits of the earth were gathered in; the corn, and wine, and oil, and all other fruits, on account of which there was great rejoicing, as there ought to be.

Ver. 17. *Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord thy God.*] In the city of Jerusalem, when they were come into the land of Canaan, and the temple was there built: here they were to show themselves before the Lord as being his, and devoted to his service; concerning which the Misnic doctors have the following canon¹⁷²⁷,

“all are bound to appear except a man deaf and dumb, a fool, a little one, one of neither sex, or of both sexes, women, servants not free, the lame, the blind, the sick, an old man, and he that cannot go on his feet.”

Ver. 18. *Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread,* etc.] This belongs to the feast of the passover; for, as all the Jewish writers agree, this sacrifice is the sacrifice of the passover, as it is sometimes called, (see ⁽¹⁷²⁷⁾Exodus 12:27) now when the paschal lamb was killed, and its blood shed, and its flesh eaten, there was to be no leaven along with it; it was to be eaten with unleavened bread, and there was to be no leaven in their houses at this time; nay, it was not to be slain until all was removed: this was the first thing the Jews did, as soon as the fourteenth day was come, to search for leaven, remove and burn it; and this sense of the law is confirmed by the Targum of Jonathan, which is,

“not a man shall slay, while there is leaven in your houses, the sacrifice of my passover;”

and to the same purpose is the note of Jarchi:

neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning; and indeed no part of the passover lamb was to remain until the morning, what did was to be burnt with fire, (⁽¹⁷²⁸⁾Exodus 12:10) the Targum of Jonathan is,

“neither shall there remain without the altar the fat of the sacrifice of my passover until the morning, nor of the flesh which ye ate in the evening;”

and so Jarchi interprets it of its not remaining without the altar.

Ver. 19. *The first of the first fruits of thy land*, etc.] Both of the barley and wheat harvest, and of the wine and oil; yea, Jarchi says, the seventh year was obliged to first fruits; and Josephus ^{f728} relates, that the Jews were so tenacious of this law, that even in the famine in the time of Claudius Caesar, the first fruits were brought to the temple, and were not meddled with:

thou shall bring into the house of the Lord thy God; to the tabernacle, during the standing of that, and the temple when that was built; which were the perquisites of the priests who officiated in the house and service of God: so Pliny says ^{f729} of the ancient Romans, that they tasted not of the new fruits or wines before the first fruits were offered to the priests, which seems to have been borrowed from hence:

thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk: and so a calf, or a lamb ^{f730}, as Jarchi interprets it; which some understand of slaying a young kid and its dam together, and so is a law against cruelty, like that law of not taking the dam with the young, on finding a bird's nest, (^{f731}Deuteronomy 22:6,7) others, of killing, dressing, and eating a kid, while it sucks the milk of its mother, before it is eight days old, and so a law against luxury; but the Jews generally understand it of boiling, or eating the flesh of any creature and milk together ^{f731}: so the Targum of Onkelos paraphrases it,

“ye shall not eat flesh with milk;”

and the Targum of Jonathan is,

“ye shall neither boil nor eat the flesh and the milk mixed together:”

hence, according to the rules they give, the flesh of any beast, or of a fowl, is not to be set upon a table on which cheese is (being made of milk), lest they should be eaten together; nor may cheese be eaten after flesh until some considerable time, and then, if there is any flesh sticks between a man's teeth, he must remove it, and wash and cleanse his mouth; nor may cheese be eaten on a table cloth on which meat is, nor be cut with a knife that flesh is cut with ^{f732}: so careful are they of breaking this law, as they understand it: but the words are, doubtless, to be taken literally, of not boiling a kid in its mother's milk; and is thought by many to refer to some custom of this kind, either among the Israelites, which they had somewhere learnt, or among the idolatrous Heathens, and therefore cautioned against; Maimonides and Abarbinel both suppose it was an idolatrous rite, but are not able to produce an instance of it out of any writer of theirs or others:

but Dr. Cudworth has produced a passage out of a Karaite author^{f733}, who affirms,

“it was a custom of the Heathens at the ingathering of their fruits to take a kid and seethe it in the milk of the dam, and then, in a magical way, go about and besprinkle all their trees, fields, gardens, and orchards, thinking by this means they should make them fructify, and bring forth fruit again more abundantly the next year:”

and the Targum of Jonathan on (^{f734}Exodus 34:26) seems to have respect to this, where, having paraphrased the words as here quoted above, adds,

“lest I should destroy the fruit of your trees with the unripe grape, the shoots and leaves together:”

and if this may be depended upon, the law comes in here very aptly, after the feast of ingathering, and the bringing in the first fruits of the land into the Lord’s house.

Ver. 20. *Behold, I send an angel before thee*, etc.] Not a created angel, but the uncreated one, the Angel of God’s presence, that was with the Israelites at Sinai, and in the wilderness; who saved, redeemed, bore, and carried them all the days of old, whom they rebelled against and tempted in the wilderness; as appears by all the characters after given of him, which by no means agree with a created angel: Aben Ezra observes, that some say this is the book of the law, because it is said, “my name is in him”, or “in the midst of it”; others say, the ark of the covenant; but he says this angel is Michael; and if indeed by Michael is intended the uncreated angel, as he always is in Scripture, he is right: Jarchi remarks, that their Rabbins say, this is Metatron, whose name is as the name of his master; Metatron, by gematry, is Shaddai, which signifies almighty or all-sufficient, and is an epithet of the divine Being; and Metatron seems to be a corruption of the word “mediator”: some of the ancient Jewish writers say^{f734}, this is the Angel that is the Redeemer of the world, and the keeper of the children of men: and Philo the Jew^{f735} applies the word unto the divine Logos, and says,

“he (God) uses the divine Word as the guide of the way; for the oracle is, “behold, I send my Angel”, etc.”

which agrees with what follows:

to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared; to preserve the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness, from all their enemies that should set upon them, and to bring them safe at last to the land of Canaan, which he had appointed for them, and promised to them, and had prepared both in his purpose and gift for them, and would make way for their settlement in it by driving out the nations before them.

Ver. 21. *Beware of him*, etc.] Of his face or countenance; observe his looks towards you in a providential way, whether frowning or smiling; observe his directions and instructions, laws and commands:

and obey his voice; hearken to what he says, and cheerfully, readily, and punctually do as he orders:

provoke him not; by unbelief, by murmurings and complaints, by unbecoming words and actions, by transgressing his commands, and acting contrary to his will;

for he will not pardon your transgressions: or suffer them to pass unchastised and uncorrected, but will, as he did, take vengeance on their inventions, and on them because of them, though he forgave their iniquities; for that he was such an Angel as could forgive sin, which none but God can do, is evident; because it would be absurd to say he will not pardon, if he could not pardon their transgressions, (see ⁴⁰⁸⁶Matthew 9:6),

for my name is in him; the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father; the nature and perfections of God are in the Word and Son of God, and so his name Jehovah, which is peculiar to him; Christ is Jehovah our righteousness: or “though my name is in him” ^{f736}; as Abendana and others, his name the Lord God, gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, as afterwards proclaimed in him; and yet, notwithstanding this, he would not clear the guilty, or suffer the Israelites to go unpunished, if they offended him: the Targum of Onkelos is,

“or in my name is his word,”

he is my ambassador and speaks in my name.

Ver. 22. *But, if thou shall indeed obey his voice*, etc.] Or “hearkening hearken”, ^{f737} to it attentively, listen to it, and diligently and constantly observe and obey in whatever he shall direct and order:

and do all that I speak; by him; or whatsoever he had spoke, or was about to speak; for as yet all the laws and statutes were not delivered, especially those of the ceremonial kind:

then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries; which they should either meet with in their passage through the wilderness, or when they came into the land of Canaan; signifying hereby that he would protect them from them, subdue them under them, and give them victory over them, as that they should be utterly destroyed, and so way made for their possession of their land, as in the following words.

Ver. 23. *For mine Angel shall go before thee*, etc.] The same as before described:

and bring thee in unto the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite; six nations are only mentioned, though there were seven; the Girgashites are omitted, though added in the Septuagint version; and this omission of them might be, either because they were swallowed up by one or other of the other nations, particularly the Amorites, who were the most powerful; or rather, having mentioned the most and chiefest, the Lord was not careful, as Aben Ezra observes, to take notice of the least:

and I will cut them off; from being a nation, either of them; for though there were some of them left, and dwelt about in the land, yet not as a kingdom and nation of themselves, as they had been, but became tributary to the Israelites.

Ver. 24. *Thou shalt not bow down to their gods*, etc.] In a way of honour to them, doing them reverence, expressing thereby an high esteem of them, trust in them, and expectation of good things from them;

nor serve them: in any kind of service in which they usually are served by their votaries; as by offering sacrifice, incense, libations, etc. or by praying to them or praising of them, or in whatsoever way they are served by idolaters:

nor do after their works; the works of the worshippers of idols; all those wicked works in general done by them, which should not be imitated; and those particularly relating to the service and worship of their deities:

but thou shalt overthrow them; the heathen gods; utterly destroy them, and break them to pieces, or demolish their temples, the idolatrous houses built for them, and their altars; for the word has the signification, of demolishing buildings, and razing up the very foundations of them:

and quite break down their images; or, “in breaking break down”^{f738}; utterly and entirely break them down, break them to shivers, all their statues of gold or silver, brass, wood, or stone, or of whatsoever materials they were made; none were to be spared, nor any remains of them to be seen, that they might not prove a snare to any to worship them; and hereby they were to express their detestation of idolatry, and their strict and close adherence to the true God, and the worship of him as follows.

Ver. 25. *And ye shall serve the Lord your God*, etc.] And him only, who had brought them out of Egypt, and done so many great and good things for them at the Red sea, and now in the wilderness; by which he appeared to be the true Jehovah, the one and only living God, and to be their God in covenant, who had promised them much, and had performed it; and therefore was in a special and peculiar manner their God, and they were under the highest obligations to serve and worship him in the way and manner he directed them to:

and he shall bless thy bread and thy water; and make them nourishing and refreshing to them, and preserve them thereby in health, as well as prosper and succeed them, and increase their worldly substance:

and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee; the stroke of bitterness, or the bitter stroke, as the Targum of Jonathan, any grievous disease, which is bitter and distressing; signifying that there should be none among them, but that they should be healthful, and free from distempers and diseases.

Ver. 26. *There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren in the land*, etc.] There shall be no abortions or miscarriages, nor sterility or barrenness, either among the Israelites, or their cattle of every kind, so that there should be a great increase, both of men and beasts:

the number of thy days I will fulfil; which was fixed for each of them, in his eternal purposes and decrees; or what, according to the temperament of their bodies and the course of nature, which, humanly speaking, it might be supposed they would arrive unto; or generally the common term of human life, which, in the days of Moses, was threescore years and ten, or

fourscore, (see ^{<1846>}Job 14:5 ^{<2002>}Ecclesiastes 3:2 ^{<900>}Psalms 90:10), it may be considered whether any respect is had to the time of their continuance in the land of Canaan, the term of which was fixed in the divine mind, or the fulness of time in which the Messiah was to come.

Ver. 27. *And I will send my fear before thee*, etc.] What should cause fear among the nations of the land of Canaan; either the hornets mentioned in the next verse as the explanative of this; or the fame of his mighty works, which he had done for Israel in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness; which struck the inhabitants of Canaan with such a panic, that they were ready to faint and melt away, and lost all courage, (^{<1800>}Joshua 2:9-11)

and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come; that is, the greatest part of them:

and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee; flee away, not being able to face them and stand a battle, or, however, not stand it long, but run and make their escape: “or I will give thee the neck of them” ^{f739}; cause them to submit, to lay down their necks and be trampled upon; an expression denoting their subjection, and an entire conquest of them, (see ^{<1839>}Psalms 18:39,40).

Ver. 28. *And I will send hornets before thee*, etc.] Which may be interpreted either figuratively, and so may signify the same as fear before which should fall on the Canaanites upon hearing the Israelites were coming; the stings of their consciences for their sins, terrors of mind, dreading the wrath of the God of Israel, of whom they had heard, and terrible apprehensions of ruin and destruction from the Israelites: Aben Ezra interprets it of some disease of the body, which weakens it, as the leprosy, from the signification of the word, which has some affinity with that used for the leprosy; and so the Arabic version understands it of a disease: or rather, the words are to be taken literally, for hornets, which are a sort of wasps, whose stings are very penetrating and venomous; nor is it any strange or unheard of thing for people to be drove out of their countries by small animals, as mice, flies, bees, etc. and particularly Aelianus ^{f740} relates, that the Phaselites were drove out of their country by wasps: and Bochart ^{f741} has shown that those people were of a Phoenician original, and inhabited the mountains of Solymi; and that this happened to them about the times of Joshua, and so may probably be the very Canaanites here mentioned, as follow: the wasps, in Aristophanes’s

comedy which bears that name, are introduced speaking of themselves, and say, no creature when provoked is more angry and troublesome than we are^{f742}:

which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee; which three are mentioned instead of the rest, or because they were more especially infested and distressed with the hornets, and drove out of their land by means of them.

Ver. 29. *I will not drive them out from before thee in one year*, etc.] This is observed before hand, lest the Israelites should be discouraged, and fear they should never be rid of them; and it was so ordered in Providence for the following reason:

lest the land become desolate; there being not a sufficient number of Israelites to replace in their stead, to repeople the land, and to cultivate it; and yet their number was very large, being, when they came out of Egypt, as is generally computed, about two millions and a half, besides the mixed multitude of Egyptians and others, and during their forty years in the wilderness must be greatly increased:

and the beast of the field multiply against thee; there being so much waste ground for them to prowl about in, they would so increase as to make head against them, and be too many for them; or, however, it would be difficult to keep them under control: the Targum of Jonathan adds,

“when they shall come to eat their carcasses (the carcasses of the Canaanites slain in war), and may hurt thee.”

Ver. 30. *By little and little I will drive them out from before thee*, etc.] Not the beasts of the field, but the inhabitants of Canaan, who were left partly to keep up the cities and towns, that they might not fall to ruin, and to till the land, that it might not be desolate; and partly to be trials and exercises to the people of Israel, and to prove whether they would serve the Lord or not. Just as the corruptions of human nature remain with the people of God when converted, for the trial and exercise of their graces, and that they may have their dependence not on themselves, but on the grace of God to keep them in his ways, and to preserve them safe to eternal glory; and by completing the work of grace, which is gradually done, they might be made meet for it:

until thou be increased, and inherit the land; for as their enemies were driven out gradually, by little and little, so they multiplied gradually, until at length they became a sufficient number to fill all the cities and towns in all the nations of Canaan, and take an entire possession of it, as their inheritance given unto them by God.

Ver. 31. *And I will set thy bounds*, etc.] The bounds of the land of Canaan, which in process of time it should reach unto, though not at once, not until the times of David and Solomon, (~~1000~~ 2 Samuel 8:1-18 ~~1000~~ 1 Kings 4:24) which bounds were as follow:

from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines: the Red sea was the boundary eastward, as the sea of the Philistines, or the Mediterranean sea, was the boundary westward:

and from the desert unto the river; the desert of Shur or Arabia, towards Egypt, was the boundary southward, as the river Euphrates was the boundary northward, and is the river here meant, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it; and so Jarchi interprets it, and generally others:

for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; the greater part upon their entrance into it, and settlement in it, and the rest afterwards:

and thou shalt drive them out before thee; not all at once, but by degrees, as before observed.

Ver. 32. *Thou shalt make no covenant with them*, etc.] A covenant of peace, a league, a confederacy, so as to take them to be their allies and friends; but they were always to consider them as their enemies, until they had made an utter end of them; though the Gibeonites by craft and guile obtained a league of them; but the methods they took to get it show they had some knowledge of this law, that the Israelites might not, or at least would not, make any league or covenant with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. This may be also extended to marriage covenants, which they were forbid to make with them; which yet they did, and proved a snare to them, for this brought them to makes a covenant with their gods, and serve them, which is here also forbidden:

nor with their gods; making vows unto them, promising to serve them, if they would do such and such things for them.

Ver. 33. *They shall not dwell in thy land*, etc.] The land of Canaan, given by God for an inheritance, and now would be in the possession of the Israelites; and therefore were not to suffer the old inhabitants to dwell with them in it, at least no longer than they could help it; they were to do all they could to root them out:

lest they make thee sin against me; by their ill examples and persuasions, drawing them into idolatry, than which there is no greater sin against God, it being not only contrary to his law, his mind, and will, but directly against his nature, being, perfections, and glory:

for if thou serve their gods, or “for thou wilt serve”^{f743}; this would be the consequence of their dwelling in the land, they would draw the Israelites into the worship of their idols, to which they were naturally prone; and should they commit idolatry,

it will surely be a snare unto thee: idolatry would be the cause of their ruin and destruction, they would be snared by it, as fishes in a net, or birds and beasts by traps and gins; or “for it will be a snare”^{f744}, that is, the Canaanites dwelling among them would be a snare to draw them into their idolatry, and go into ruin.