

Free Bible study on Exodus 22-31

Introduction: After recording the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, Moses began writing down a number of more detailed laws and commandments of God for daily living and worship. In chapters 22 and 23 there is more of this, plus directions concerning entrance into the land of Canaan. In 24 Moses, the priests and elders eat a meal before God on the mountain and Moses goes up to receive the tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments. 25-27 contain detailed directions for making the tabernacle (tent of meeting) and its furnishings. 28 and 29 contain directions for making the priestly garments and consecrating the priests. In 30 and 31 there are more directions for the tabernacle and its furnishings, along with a section on the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

Notes on Exodus 22-31:

The laws in these chapters give insights into the mind of God about justice and how to keep the land pure.

22:1 - pay back - The principle of restitution is bound up in repentance. If my heart is truly sorrowful over my sin, I will want to undo the damage as far as possible, including returning things I have stolen.

five head...four sheep - The extra animals are punitive damages for the trouble caused to the owner.

22:4 - double - Punitive damages.

22:6 - make restitution - We are responsible for damage caused by our actions.

22:12 - stolen...make restitution - Perhaps because the neighbor should have taken precautions against theft. He was responsible for safekeeping.

22:16 - not pledged to be married - The pledge or betrothal in Israel was different from our engagement today, for it was part of the binding marriage covenant.

be his wife - Deuteronomy 22:28, 29 adds that he can never divorce her, because he has violated her. If a man seduced a betrothed woman, he and she both were liable for the death penalty just as if she were already living with her husband in marriage - Deuteronomy 22:23, 24.

22:17 - refuses - The father had this right because the virgin daughter was still under his jurisdiction. Under our laws a father would still have this right today if the girl were a minor.

still pay - Because he has taken away her virginity and made her much less desirable as a wife for someone in future, as that culture viewed things.

22:18 - sorceress - A woman who dealt in the occult including magic and witchcraft. Occultism is so spiritually deadly to people, bringing them under the power of Satan and taking them away from God. So God attached the severest penalties to it.

22:19 - with an animal - This form of sexual perversion is known as bestiality.

22:20 - sacrifices to any god - Again, idolatry is so destructive spiritually that God attached the death penalty. Why does God prohibit worship of other gods? Not because he is self-centered and has to be the only one. Not because he is narrow-minded. But because God knows that idol gods are false and distract people from the one Living God who can help them. Also all kinds of sin, immorality and perversion were practiced in the worship of pagan idols, including human sacrifice. Whenever people turn from the holy and true God to gods of their own making, they also turn from righteousness to their own evil, perverted and even demonic desires. Compare Romans 1:18-32.

22:21 - mistreat an alien - Foreign visitors would already be at a disadvantage and Israelis were not to take advantage of them.

22:22 - The widow and orphan were protected for the same reason.

22:23 - hear their cry - There is a court higher than any earthly court, to which the oppressed can appeal and find a judge who will listen. Those who oppress widows, orphans and aliens will have God to deal with.

22:24 - widows...fatherless - Justice.

22:25 - charge...no interest - This applied only to loans to Israelis ("my people"). By charging exorbitant interest it is possible to squeeze the poor and keep them in debt. Does this passage apply in principle to Christians lending to Christians today?

22:26 - pledge - collateral for a loan.

by sunset - The people often used their outer cloak as a blanket when sleeping at night. So keeping the person's cloak overnight would work an undue hardship on the debtor. Notice how these laws show God's concern for the weak and helpless.

22:28 - do not blaspheme - Reverence for God and respect and honor for officials is something we have nearly lost in our freedom-obsessed, informal Western culture. Even though we have a legal right of free speech and can say anything we want to about our leaders, that doesn't make it right as God views things. We owe rightful honor and respect to those who rule over us. We need to restrain our tongues from slanderous and disrespectful talk about them.

If I have something against an elder or minister in the church, it is not right to complain to others about him. I need to go and tell him personally - Matthew 18:15. Some people have "roast preacher" or "roast elder" after church on Sunday, but the preacher or elder is not the person who hears the criticism.

22:29 - granaries...vats - God was due the firstfruits and also a tithe (tenth) of all grain, wine and other produce - Leviticus 27:30. To hold back contributions was to rob God - Malachi 3:7-12.

sons - See the commandment about the firstborn, Exodus 13:1, 2, 12, and 13.

22:30 - cattle...sheep - The people were to offer the firstborn animals to God, and also a tithe of the increase in the flocks and herds - Leviticus 27:32,33. If we are serious about following the Lord, we will give seriously and willingly. The Lord and his work become the most important things in our life. If we love God and the work of redemption, we will rejoice to have a part.

seven days - God had compassion even on the animals and allowed the young to stay with the mother a time before being sacrificed. Or this may have been so that the animal would be healthy and viable, a fit offering for God.

22:31 - torn by wild beasts - Compare Leviticus 17:15. This prohibition may have two reasons: 1) the meat may not have been bled properly and the Israelis were prohibited from eating blood or unbled meat - Leviticus 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:12-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16, 23; compare Acts 15:20, 29. 2) The wild beasts who tore the animal may have been ceremonially unclean, or the carcass may have been set upon by unclean scavenger birds.

23:1 - false reports - Similar to the ninth commandment against false testimony, but the law here applies even outside court. You don't have to shoot or knife a person to do grave damage to him or her. All you

have to do is start false, slanderous rumors about the person. Because gossip and slander are socially acceptable, "polite" sins, people who would never physically attack a person will frequently slander him/her. Christians are commanded to slander no one - 2 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Titus 3:2; James 4:11; 1 Peter 2:1.

23:2 - Do not follow the crowd - That is so easy to do, but God's people are to think for themselves and stay with what is right, even if they have to stand alone. This is particularly important when a crowd is intent on convicting a person contrary to the evidence.

23:3 - favoritism to a poor man - He is not to be favored just because he is poor. The only issue is right and wrong, guilt or innocence.

23:4,5 - enemy's ox...donkey of someone who hates you - Do not take advantage of your enemy's misfortune but do for him just what you would want him to do for you. Some of these regulations seem to have echoes in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. It is clear that our obligation to love our neighbor includes concern for his property. Notice: This is the kind of law that could only have come from God. Fallen, selfish man does not write this kind of rule for himself.

23:6 - deny justice to your poor - The poor are usually without power or influence, so it is easy to mistreat them, even in court. We can see from these laws how important it is for judges and court officials to have integrity. Our practice of forming legal aid societies and appointing free attorneys for poor defendants is an effort to obey the principle in this verse.

23:7 - Whoever causes the death of a person by a false charge is as guilty of murder as if he had simply killed the person with his own hands. This is how Jezebel killed Naboth in order to take his vineyard - 1 Kings 21:1-25. Yet it feels less like murder if we do it through a court procedure and at the hands of others..

23:8 - bribe - When bribery becomes customary in a country, honesty and virtue have perished and the government becomes a curse to the people. It seems that it would also be wrong to *pay* a bribe, since it contributes to wrong. The writer of these notes knows of a case where missionaries probably could have stayed in a certain foreign country had they been willing to pry a bribe to immigration authorities. On principle the missionaries refused, and had to leave the country. But the writer believes they did the right thing. If God had wanted them to stay, he could have opened the way without bribery.

23:9 - you...know how it feels - A negative form of the golden rule is, "Do nothing to anyone which you would not want done to you." Before we do or say something to another person, we need to stop and remember how we have felt in similar circumstances.

23:11 - seventh year - God gave Israel Sabbaths of years as well as the weekly Sabbath.

land lie unplowed - Not only would this help the land, but it taught God's people to restrain their greed, to be prudent, and to trust God for their needs. We of the Western world, in our greed for more and more, are increasingly disregarding these principles. When the Israelites ignored the seventh-year Sabbaths and kept on making crops contrary to God's law, God eventually allowed the people to be carried away captive so that the land could have its Sabbaths - 2 Chronicles 36:20,21.

23:12 - refreshed - God, who made us, knows that we need to stop and rest. Though Christians in the New Covenant are not under the Sabbath law, the principle of times of rest is still from God.

23:14 - Three times a year - God required all the males within reach to attend three major religious festivals each year at the tabernacle (later the temple): the Feast of Unleavened Bread (connected with Passover); the Feast of Harvest (also known as Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, when they brought the first fruits of the land); and the Feast of Ingathering (a time of thanksgiving when all the crops were in).

23:18 - yeast symbolized corruption and evil.

23:19 - Do not cook - We do not know why God made this ordinance. Was it because it seemed uncompassionate and hard-hearted to cook the young goat in its own mother's milk? Was it for health reasons which we may not fully understand? Was it because the Canaanites had a similar practice with pagan meanings?

23:20 - This angel was not Yahweh, but he was his direct agent and stood in place of Yahweh in dealing with the people - see verse 21.

23:22 - enemy to your enemies - One could ask no more than to have God on one's side against one's enemies.

23:24 - demolish...break - God understands human nature and knew that if the pagan objects of worship survived, soon his people would be trying them out in worship and would stray away from the true God who could give life. Are there things around our houses that we need to get rid of because they will draw us to sin and away from God? Music? Videos? Publications? Pictures? Objects? Types of clothing? An Internet connection? Even a TV that we can't say no to?

23:25-27 - [bless] food and water...take away sickness...full lifespan...make...enemies...run - One could not have it any better than what God offered to do for Israel if she would only remain faithful to God. It would seem insane to turn away from God whatever the enticement offered by Satan.

23:31 - Sea of the Philistines - The Mediterranean. River - The Euphrates. This is the territory God would ideally have given to Israel had they obeyed him fully. God's promise was conditional. Because they failed to obey God in driving out all the Canaanites, and because they turned to idolatry, God never gave them this much land.

23:32 - Do not make a covenant - The Canaanites were so idolatrous and wicked that God-fearing people could have no ties with them. We are not to be "unequally yoked" ("mismatched") with unbelieving pagans - 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

23:33 - Do not let them live in your land - God knew the pagans would draw his people away from God, and so they did.

24:1 - Aaron was high priest and Nadab and Abihu were two of his priestly sons. The covenant between Israel and God is to be ratified.

24:3 - Everything - The people repeat their agreement to the covenant.

24:4 - altar - Sacrifice will seal the covenant.

24:7 - Book of the Covenant - All the words God had said on his side of the covenant.

we will obey - Again the people agree to keep their side of the covenant.

24:8 - blood - The Old Covenant of Moses was sealed with the blood of animals; the New Covenant of Christ with Jesus' own blood - Matthew 26:27,28; Hebrews 9:11-10:4; 1 Peter 1:18,19. All of God's major covenants have involved blood because blood indicates the cost of sin.

24:10 - saw the God of Israel - Other scriptures plainly say that no one has seen God, and that no one can see him and live - John 1:18; 6:46; Exodus 33:20. When God called Moses from the burning bush, Exodus 3:2-4, it is said that God spoke from the bush. Yet scripture also says it was an angel who spoke

from the bush - Acts 7:35. It seems clear, then, that when scripture says people saw God, they were seeing an angel representing God, or a vision or appearance revealing God partially and not in his full glory and presence. When Paul writes that "the law was put into effect through angels, by a mediator" (Galatians 3:19), he may well be thinking of this appearance of an angel representing God to Moses, Aaron and the leaders on the mountain.

24:11 - ate and drank - Covenants were often ratified by a meal.

24:12 - tablets of stone - The ten commandments would be written in stone, perhaps symbolizing the permanence of God's great moral and spiritual standards. Our Western world has rejected more and more the idea of moral absolutes. People think right and wrong are relative, depending on situations. God thinks otherwise.

24:13 - Joshua - This man is also military commander and will someday succeed Moses as leader of Israel.

25:2 - heart prompts - This was to be a free will offering. Our Christian giving is to be the same - 2 Corinthians 9:7.

25:3ff - gold, silver, bronze, etc. - These materials would be used in making the tabernacle of worship and its furnishings.

25:10 - chest [KJV, NASB: ark] - The "ark of the covenant." This was the most sacred object in the tabernacle. Its cover was known as the atonement cover (KJV, NASB: mercy seat) and God would meet there with Moses and with the high priest representing the people - verse 22.

A cubit was the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of his fingers, about eighteen inches.

25:13 - poles - The ark must never be touched but was carried by its poles.

25:16 - Testimony - The tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments.

25:18 - Cherubim - plural for cherub, a type of angel often associated with the throne of God. The suffix "im" on the end of a Hebrew word shows that it is plural.

25:23 - table - This table would hold the "bread of the presence" representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

25:31 - The lampstand would light the Holy Place.

26:1 - ten curtains - These would form the inner tent and would be protected by other layers outside.

26:7 - curtains of goat hair - This layer would form part of the protective covering.

26:14 - covering of ram skins...hides of sea cows - These outer coverings would completely waterproof the tent.

26:15 - upright frames - The lengthy details of the tabernacle pattern tax the patience of the Western reader. But even in this kind of writing there are things we can learn about the mind of God. Some of the details help us understand later references in the Bible. We need to remember also that this is the pattern the craftsmen would have to follow. They needed details.

26:31 - curtain [KJV, NASB: veil] - This separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place inside the tent. This is the curtain which was torn in two when Christ died - Matthew 27:51 - signifying the opening of the way between earthly worshipers and heaven.

27:1 - altar - There were two altars associated with the tabernacle, the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering. This one is the altar of burnt offering which stood in front of the tabernacle.

27:2 - horn - These horns provided tie points when securing sacrificial animals and firewood on the altar.

27:9 - courtyard - This was a 72 foot cloth fence forming an enclosure 150 by 75 feet around the tabernacle.

28:1 - Chapters 28 and 29 concern the garments of the priests and the consecration of the priests for service.

Nadab...Abihu...Eleazar...Ithamar - Sons of Aaron who would assist him in the holy priesthood.

28:2 - sacred garments - Not ordinary clothing but special for God's service.

28:4 - ephod - an outer garment, probably for the upper body.

28:15 - breastpiece - This would be attached to the ephod.

for making decisions - In the breastpiece would be mounted the Urim and Thummim by which the will of God were determined.

28:16 - span - about nine inches.

28:30 - Urim...Thummim - two objects which probably operated like lots and were used to determine answers from God.

28:35 - sound of the bells - Out of reverence for God the priest was never to come into his presence unannounced.

28:36 - HOLY TO THE LORD - Set apart, belonging to the Lord.

28:42 - undergarments...covering for the body - In contrast to the sensual pagan worship, God's worship was to be characterized by modesty and purity.

29:1 - consecrate - Cleanse and set apart, empower, ordain.

29:2 - bread...cakes...wafers - Cereal products often accompanied offerings of animal flesh.

29:4 - wash them - Outward washing to symbolize the moral and spiritual cleanness necessary in one who approaches God on behalf of the people.

29:7 - anointing oil - Often used in Israel at the appointment of kings and priests. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit who empowered the leaders. The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as an anointing - Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; compare 1 John 2:20, 27.

29:10 - lay...hands on its head - Symbolically transfer their sins to the bull so that it can be sacrificed for their sins.

29:15 - lay...hands on its head - to transfer dedication. The ram as a burnt offering symbolized total consecration and dedication of the worshiper.

29:20 - lobes...thumbs...big toes - Total consecration: ears to hear and obey, hands and feet to serve.

wave offering - Called this because they were waved in all directions before the Lord.

29:28 - contribution - The priests and their families had to eat and live just like other people did. God provided for their material support through this and various ordinances.

each day: two lambs - The offering of a lamb each morning and a lamb each evening was to be done perpetually. Other scriptures refer to this as the "morning sacrifice" or the "evening sacrifice" or the "continual daily sacrifice."

30:1 - altar - God now returns to directions for the making of the tabernacle and its furniture. This altar is the altar of incense. It stood near the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

30:8 - regularly - The incense offerings were daily and perpetual like the morning and evening sacrifices. Zechariah was offering incense in the temple when the angel Gabriel told him of the coming birth of John the Baptist, Luke 1.

30:12 - ransom for his life...no plague - The taking of a census was always potentially displeasing to God - see 1 Chronicles 21 and 2 Samuel 24. This may be because God wanted Israel to rely on him and not on their numbers. However God did allow a census on occasions when there was a practical need. The book of Numbers takes its name from a census.

30:13 - half shekel - Each Israeli male was to give this contribution yearly to support the temple service. It is this tax that Jewish officials wanted to collect from Jesus and his disciples - Matthew 17:24-27.

30:18 - bronze basin [KJV, NASB: laver] - This basin sat between the altar of burnt offering and the entrance to the tabernacle. The priests washed there ceremonially so as to show holiness before the Lord.

30:25 - anointing oil - A special oil for anointing of priests and leaders and the furnishings of the tabernacle.

30:32 - sacred - not common or ordinary.

30:35 - incense - Again, a very special recipe for God's holy worship.

31:2 - Bezalel - The chief craftsman working on the tabernacle.

31:3 - filled him with the Spirit of God - In the Old Testament God did not give his Spirit to all his people, but only to selected leaders and craftsmen - see Numbers 11:25-29. But one prominent mark of the New Covenant of Christ is the outpouring of the Spirit on all God's people - Joel 2:28, 9; Mark 1:8; Acts 2; 5:32.

31:6 - Oholiab - Helper to Bezalel.

31:13 - Sabbaths...sign between me and you - The Sabbath would always remind the people of their special covenant with God.

31:14 - put to death - This is how important God considered the Sabbath to be. It was a principal feature of his covenant with Israel. Not long after this a man was executed for Sabbath-breaking - Numbers 15:32-36.

31:17 - Israelites - Notice that the Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, not between God and the Gentiles. Gentiles were never commanded to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

forever - In the Old Testament God sometimes used the words "forever" and "everlasting" in a relative sense, meaning throughout that dispensation of God's dealing with Israel. God did not mean that the Saturday Sabbath would last into the Christian age as a requirement of God for his faithful people. See earlier notes.

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