

Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 4:10 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Exodus 22-23

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart! You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up..." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Last week, remember how God told Moses to remind the children of Israel how, in giving the Ten Commandments, He had spoken to them from heaven, and how that they were not to have any other gods besides Him alone (in effect reiterating the first commandment), and that they were to set up an altar and offer sacrifices to Him (there at Mt. Sinai--and) at "every place where He caused His name to be remembered"! He is a God who desires "worship" from His people! Then He gave Moses an array of "ordinances" to pass on to the people, which were to govern how the Ten Commandments were to be applied in specific situations of everyday life, to ensure that justice and fairness would be carried out in the lives of His people and characterize the nation as a whole! The first grouping, recorded in Exodus 21--and discussed in last week's lesson--dealt primarily with the treatment of slaves, and slaves' wives; the relationship between children and their parents; cases of person injury; crimes "worthy of death;" and even rules for managing oxen! All in all, some very down-to-earth issues! As "Shepherd's Notes" notes: "God made His people aware that they were responsible to one another!"

Last nite's lesson, on Exodus 22-23, continues that same theme with more examples of ordinances given by God for His people to live by, ending with more instructions on how they were to worship God first and foremost! (Interesting that Jesus would one day tell an inquiring lawyer, in Mathew 27:37-49, that the whole moral duty of man rested and depended, in essence, on one's ability to love God with all his heart and soul and mind--and love his neighbor as himself"!)

The first grouping of ordinances, last nite, dealt basically with "property rights" and a call for "restitution" whenever rights were abused or in other ways violated! Exodus 22:1-4 says that " if a man steals an ox, or a sheep and slaughters it, or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep!" And "if the thief is caught (in the act) while breaking in (presumably at nite) and is struck so that he dies, there will be no "blood guiltiness" (culpability) for his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be blood guiltiness on his account"! And the thief, if he survives, will have to make "restitution" (and pay "double")!

Other examples involve a man who allows his animals to go loose and graze in another man's field; and the fate of a man if he's responsible for a fire breaking out and destroying the "stacked grain" on another person's field; the case of a man who gives his neighbor money or goods to keep for him and it gets stolen, and the thief is not caught!; a case where a guy is given a donkey or ox, or another animal, and it dies or is hurt, or "driven away" when no one was looking; and finally a case when a man who borrows anything from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it"!

Some kind of "restitution" was called for in each of the above cases, Exodus 22:1-14 says; in some cases, determined by a judge! The concept of restitution was a significant part of the law God gave to Moses! Having to do with returning something that had been lost or stolen and compensating for the damages! Restoring and making things right with a neighbor! Constable notes that it was completely "Biblical" for someone to pay for damage done to someone else, although not necessarily today for a Christian who is a victim to demand restitution! (And, nowhere in the Bible does it call for "reparations" to be paid for violations and damages in past generations!)

But, interestingly, restoring and making things right with a neighbor was not really the end of the story, under Mosaic law! Leviticus 6:1-7 makes it clear that when one steals or extorts or deceives his neighbor, he also sins against God! And so, in addition to making restitution to his neighbor, even more importantly, he has sinned, and become guilty before God! And thus, must obtain forgiveness by bringing a "guilt-offering" before the priest who would offer the sacrifice and make "atonement" for him before God! And restitution was to be made on the same day that the guilty one brought his sacrifice before God! Thus, we see that the Old Testament quest for justice points beyond reparations between men to forgiveness and restitution before God--thus pointing to the need for God's redemptive plan through the gospel of Christ!

There is a beautiful story involving restitution, in Luke 19:1-10, about a "chief tax collector," named Zacchaeus! Somehow, after hearing about Jesus, he was convicted of his unsavory life of defrauding others and desperately sought to see Jesus who was traveling by in a large crowd of people that day, even resorting to climbing a sycamore tree (in a very undignified way) to gain access to Jesus--then promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and restoring four times the amount he had defrauded from anyone! Jesus noted his repentant heart and proclaimed that "today, salvation had come to this house!" And so, making restitution fulfilled the law in this case but, more importantly, did not "save" him! Making restitution was the result of his salvation, not a requirement for it! And this again foreshadows God's redemptive plan, and what it means to be "saved"!

Exodus 22:16 through 23:13 (and related passages) record more "ordinances"--including some that might be considered by some as very "egregious" and "out of step" with our culture today! For example:

- In 22:16, the case of a man having to marry a "virgin" he has "seduced," and paying a "dowry" whether or not the father consents to the marriage!
- Deuteronomy 22:22 says that "if a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die!"
- Leviticus 20:13 says, "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act, and surely shall be put to death!"
- Exodus 22:19 calls for the "death penalty" for anyone "lying with an animal"!
- Exodus 22:18 says, "You shall not allow a sorceress to live!"
- Deuteronomy 18:10-12 calls "divination, witchcraft, sorcery," and the like, "detestable things" which need to be "driven out from the land"!
- Exodus 22:20 says, "...You shall not curse the ruler of your people!" ("Shepherd's Notes" notes that "the worship of God was not to be corrupted by these kinds of things!")

On the other hand, some of the ordinances might be widely accepted in our culture!

- Exodus 22:21 says, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were (once) strangers in the land of Egypt!"
- Verse 22 says, "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan...for I (God) will surely hear their cry!"
- Verse 25 says, "If you loan money...to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him or charge him interest!"
- Verse 26 says (in the same light), "If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge (for a loan), you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for it is the only covering for his body (when he sleeps)...and when he cries out, I will hear him!"
- Exodus 23:1 says, "You shall not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness!"
- Verse 2 says, "You are not to follow the masses in doing evil!"
- Verse 4 says, "You shall return your enemy's ox or wandering donkey!"
- Verse 8 says, "You are not to take a bribe!"
- Verse 12, says "You are to cease from all your labor on the seventh day!" (the Sabbath)

Whew! And that is only a representative sample of "ordinances" on how we are to live and treat our "neighbors"! (There're actually 613 of them in the Mosaic law, we are told!)

Well, Exodus 23:14-19 returns to "worshipping God" (something obviously very important to Him)!

"Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast for Me...and all your males shall appear before the LORD God...to commemorate what He has done for the children of Israel!"

- The Feast of Unleavened Bread (following the Passover), commemorating the exodus from Egypt, to be held "at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name" (Mt. Sinai and, eventually, Jerusalem!)
- The Feast of Harvest (or "First Fruits"), 50 days after the Passover, expressing gratitude for the LORD's provision of grain. (Interestingly, Pentecost would take place on this day, in Acts 2:1, when the Holy Spirit would come as "the first fruits of the believers' inheritance"!)
- The Feast of the Ingathering (or "Booths"), a time of thanksgiving for the final crops!

Thus, great acts of "salvation" in the lives of His people were to be remembered in regular religious celebrations! (Just as Christians are instructed to meet together for worship, and in I Corinthians 11:23-26, to celebrate "the Lord's Supper, in remembrance of Him"! To "proclaim His death until He comes"!)

There is an interesting "ordinance" that follows, in Exodus 23:19, that seems, at first take, to be out of place: "You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother!" It is given in context, however, with the concept of "first fruits" and, therefore, is sometimes interpreted as banning the sacrifice of a newly born goat while still being nursed by its mother! And the very cruel idea of using the life-giving milk of the mother to boil (or sacrifice) the "kid"! (Interestingly, Leviticus 22:27-28 says that a newborn sheep or goat should remain with its mother for at least seven days before being sacrificed, and that the mother and its young one should never be sacrificed on the same day! Amazing "tidbits" cited by the God of heaven!)

Well, this verse is probably better interpreted as prohibiting the act since it would be following an idolatrous practice by the pagan Canaanites, who boiled young goats in the milk of the mother and poured it out on their fields of grain to bring about (presumably) greater growth! (Orthodox Jews apparently still reject mixing meat and milk with their food because of this verse!)

And so we reach the end of Exodus' record of the "book of the covenant," with the promised appearance of "an angel" (in Exodus 23:20) "to guard you (Moses, and the children of Israel) along the way and bring you into the place which I have prepared" (the "promise land")--and all the many, and awesome, promises, if they would only worship, and follow and obey, God! The angel is widely understood as the "pre-incarnate" Jesus Christ (appearing in a theophany, or "Christophany") who earlier had appeared to Moses "in a burning bush" (in Exodus 3:2), calling him to deliver His people from Egypt; and the same one who appeared to Joshua (in Joshua 6:14) as the "captain of the host of the LORD," leading to Israel's victory at the battle of Jericho!

John Durham, in his commentary on Exodus, notes that the Ten Commandments "begin with the command that His people have no other gods before Him (the LORD God of Israel), and also that the "Book of the Covenant," begins in Exodus 20:23 and ends in 23:33 with the same command! And that all that lies in between (all the ordinances) are designed to ensure that they honor God by responding with their worship, and (then) by keeping His commandments! And by treating others with justice and mercy! Or, as Jesus put it (tying it all altogether): "loving God with all their hearts and soul and minds--and their neighbors as ourselves"!

Men let us "hear" and believe and obey the "words of the Lord" and teach them diligently to our children and talk of them when we sit in our houses, and when we walk by the way, and when...!

May God bless you all!

Lowell