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C0640 – October 29, 2006 – Ex 23:1 – 13-Justice For All

Let's review the flow of the Book of Exodus. Exodus starts with the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt for a period of 400 years, beginning in 1845BC and lasting until 1445BC.

During that period of history the Pharaoh is a portrait of Satan, the god of this world, Egypt portrays the world over which he rules and the bondage of the Hebrew people portrays the natural man who is in bondage to sin. God has to supernaturally reach down and deliver ten tremendous judgments against Egypt and the satanic realm in order to redeem the Hebrew people from sin and the world system. On that night, each family that had faith in God that He would pass-over their home put the blood of an unblemished lamb over the door according to God's selective procedure. This pictured substitutionary atonement. That night the angel of the Lord passed over those who placed the blood over the door resulting in the salvation of the physical life of the firstborn son and cattle. On that night the people enjoyed the salvation of God and went out of Egypt, out of the world system controlled by Pharaoh and entered the kingdom of God. So, the condition for entering the kingdom of God is faith alone. That night, the majority of Israelites believed and were justified. Both Paul and the author of Hebrews conceive of that generation as having believed (1 Cor 10:1-13). Then, over a period of 50 days, during the year 1445BC, they traveled behind the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.



This was the Shechinah Glory, a visible manifestation of God that led them through the wilderness to the Red Sea. Again, God saved them from their Egyptian enemies by dividing the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites walked through on dry ground with a wall of water on their left and a wall of water on their right. When the Egyptians chased after them the waters fell upon them and they all drowned. God had saved the Israelites from their enemies through faith. We see the Israelites faith fail when there was no water and when there was no food and when there was no provision for war or wisdom. The nation of Israel portrays the carnal Christian wandering in the wilderness. Graciously, each time God's carnal children failed to have faith God saved them. Finally, after 50 days God led them safely to Mt Sinai (Horeb) where He revealed His law. He gave this law to a believing, justified people. He did not ask unbelievers to obey. He asked believers to obey, He wanted them to become experientially holy so they could be His treasured possession and a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. So, while the nation was justified by faith alone they needed to be sanctified by faithful obedience to God's commandments. If they obeyed these commandments they would be sanctified and would enjoy a future inheritance and rest, that is, they would enter and own the Promised Land and enjoy rest on all sides from their surrounding enemies. If they hardened their hearts and disobeyed, which they did, they would suffer divine discipline, the sin unto death and ultimately disinheritance. This is precisely what happened. The author of Hebrews says,

Hebrews 3:7-11 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹ WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰ "THEREFORE I

WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; ¹¹ AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

Hebrews 3:16-19 For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

That generation of Israelites portray the carnal Christian, the believer who hardens his heart to the things of God, continues in sin although he sees the works of God. This angers God and that generation committed the sin unto death, their bodies falling in the wilderness and they did not enter His rest, that is, they did not enter into their inheritance because of disobedience. It was not until the next generation under Joshua and Caleb's godly leadership that we have a picture of the spiritual Christian who goes to battle. He meditates on the word of God. He does not turn from it to the right or to the left. He walks by faith and not by sight and when the believer does this he experiences victory and ultimately is rewarded with an unfading inheritance.

So, you have the natural man in bondage to sin, the carnal Christian whose had faith alone in Christ alone but continues in disobedience and you have the spiritual Christian who has faith alone in Christ alone and goes to battle with his spiritual assets and is victorious through obedience to the commandments of God.

Natural man	Carnal Christian	Spiritual Christian	Rewarded Christian
Egypt	Wilderness	Promised Land	
Exod 1-11	Exod 12-Dt 34	Josh 1-11	Josh 12-22
		Battle	Victory
In the World	Enter the Kingdom		Inherit the Kingdom

We're studying the generation that portrays the natural man and then the carnal Christian (Orange and Green Columns above), the period from 1445-1405BC. They received the law that they should be obedient to if they wanted to be spiritual Christians, enjoy victory and enter into their inheritance. But, we're going to see failure in this generation. This does not mean they won't be in the kingdom or in heaven. They entered the kingdom of God by faith alone. They will therefore be in the kingdom and heaven. But they will not have an inheritance in the kingdom or heaven because of disobedience. It's important to keep in mind the bigger picture as we study Exodus.

Last week we looked at how the individual Israelite was to exercise love and compassion for the needy and honor and respect toward those in authority positions. This week we are looking at Exodus 23:1ff where we learn that justice is for all. The individual Israelite was to exercise justice toward all.

XIII. Ordinances Regarding Justice (23:1-9)

Exodus 23:1 "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

² "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;

³ nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

Verse 1, **you shall not bear false report**, that is, generally speaking you should not go about spreading tales about others. More pointedly, **do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness**. Of course you should never bring a **false report** into a court of law. Nor should you ever join hands with the litigant that is wrong in his claims. He is a **wicked man** and if you give evidence to support wickedness then you defeat the whole goal of justice. You hide evidence or distort evidence to support wickedness and become yourself **malicious**. These verses, of course, fall under the eighth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exod 20:16). You should not commit perjury. Perjury is a serious offense. When you commit perjury you ruin someone else's reputation. You cast them in a bad light before all society. You have no right to ruin someone's reputation. To do so is a **malicious** act. You are subverting justice.

Verse 2 **you shall not follow the masses in doing evil**, that is, generally speaking, if everyone else is **doing evil** you are supposed to swim against the tide. You are supposed to do good even if you are all alone. You are not to fall into the trap of “Everyone else is doing it so I guess I will too.” Then, more pointedly, verse 2 says **nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice**. Let’s say you are called into court to **testify** between two parties and a **multitude** of witnesses side with a litigant who is in the wrong. They distort the evidence so the judgment will fall in favor of one man. If this happens you are not to **turn aside** from the truth, you are not to distort justice. If you do you will be a part of the **multitude** and will be responsible for **perverting justice**. Perverting justice is very serious. In a real life court situation it would be difficult to go against the tide of a multitude because you know your life could be at risk. You’re sticking your neck out there when you stand up for justice. Those who love God should also love justice since God is just. Justice is placing responsibility where it truly rests.

Verse 3, **nor shall you be partial to a poor man in a dispute**. In other words, in a court of law when you have compassion on a **poor man** you cannot allow that to cause you be partial. If the **poor man** is wrong in the dispute then justice must be served. You have to remain objective and make the judgment on the basis of the evidence. “Justice and only justice you shall follow” (Cassuto, 297).

Verse 4, **If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him**. How was one to treat their enemy? How was one to treat the animals of one’s enemy? No different than you would treat your friend or your friend’s animals. If you saw your friend’s animal wandering loose you would **return it** and this is exactly what you were to do for your enemy.

Verse 5, **If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load**, you may be tempted to laugh but **you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him**. That is, **one who hates you** is perplexed about how to arrange things on the back of his **donkey** and you should not just walk on by and laugh because of your enemy’s frustration. Rather, you should go over and help him arrange everything so the donkey can carry the load.

PRINCIPLE: How many times do we treat our enemies and those who hate us in the same way we treat our friends? See Matt 5:44-48

Verse 6 **You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute.** If you were in a court of law and a poor man and a rich man were **in a dispute** you may be tempted to **pervert justice** in favor of the rich man because this would put you in good standing with the rich man. You are not to do this. Perverting justice, while it seems to get you ahead in this life, will not get you ahead in the next. “Justice and only justice you shall follow” (Cassuto, 297).

Verse 7, in general, **Keep far from a false charge.** A **false charge** will contaminate you and lead down a path of unrighteousness. **and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.** This is almost proverbial. “You, O judge, must pay heed to this, *for* you should know that if you, in your court, will declare the righteous [i.e. the one who is in the right] guilty and acquit the wicked [i.e. the one who is in the wrong] , *I*, In my court, *will not acquit the wicked*, and if you pronounce a wrong judgement and become thereby wicked in My sight, you will not be held innocent by My court—a punishment befitting the crime, emphasized by alliterative word-play” (Cassuto, 299). “Justice and only justice you shall follow” (Cassuto, 297).

Verse 8, **You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.** Again, this is almost proverbial. It is surely insightful. These ways of perverting justice are all too common. **You shall not take a bribe**, accept some form of payment that guarantees that in a court of law you will give a false report and pervert justice. You think it will yield financial gain for you but it will actually **blind the clear sighted.** You may have been a righteous and wise man and may say, “Only this once” but when you try to return to a righteous and wise path you have already lost your sight. Willful perversion of justice blinds the one bribed. Not only that, it also **subverts the cause of the just** for they have not seen justice and the **cause** for which they were striving is subverted and cannot come to fruition.

PRINCIPLE: All willful sin blinds us to spiritual truth and stunts our spiritual growth (Rom 1:18-22).

Verse 9, **You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.** An Israelite from that generation could sympathize with being a **stranger**. They were once **strangers in the land of Egypt** for 400 years. They experienced oppression under evil Pharaoh's. They should not therefore, oppress strangers, for they knew how bitter such oppression was.

PRINCIPLE: Just because a person is not in your club does not mean they shouldn't be treated justly. All people are to be treated justly. "Justice and only justice you shall follow" (Cassuto, 297).

XIV. Ordinances Regarding the Seventh Year and Seventh Day (23:10-12)

¹⁰ **"You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield,**
¹¹ **but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.**

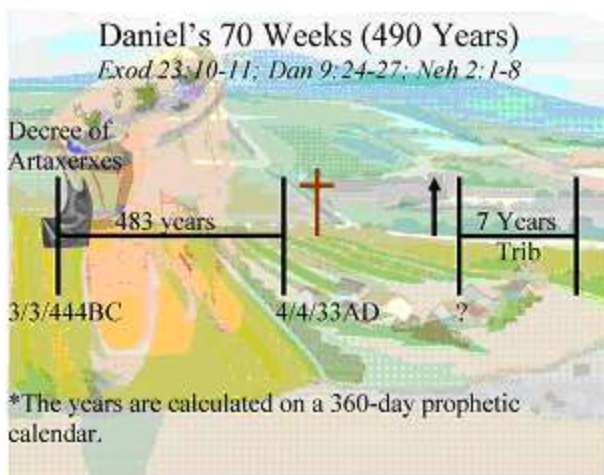
¹² **"Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.**

These ordinances rest on the divinely ordained six to one ratio of work and rest established at creation. God worked for six days and rested on the seventh day.

Verse 10, **You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow.** No plowing, sowing or reaping the **seventh year**. It must **rest**, that is, the land needs a **rest**. Dutch farmers in the 17th century used a technique which had similar results. They rotated crops so that the land would not be exhausted.ⁱ But the Israelites were to let it **lie fallow**. The main purpose in this context was **so that the needy of your people may eat**. In other words, whatever the land produced of itself that year was not owned by anyone. The product was for the poor who did not have a field or vineyard or olive grove. After the needy

had taken all they needed then the **beast of the field may eat** for they too are God's creatures and deserve a share of His bounty. **You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove**, in the seventh year they are not to be tended to and whatever fruit they bear is without owner, both poor and the beasts may have as much as they like.

This ordinance, like many others, is repeated in the Book of Leviticus (25:1-7). Apparently they violated this ordinance 70 times. Just imagine, for 490 years, every seventh year the needy people and the beasts of the field did not get to eat what God had allotted for them in these fields and vineyards and groves. God took this very seriously. We have to remember that the land was God's land (Lev 25:23). Israel only had tenant possession. Israel was responsible to manage God's land the way God wanted it managed. When they continually violated this God disciplined the nation, sending them into exile in Babylon (605BC). During this time the land was fallow and received its due rest. When Daniel thought the prophecy was coming near an end (536BC) Gabriel revealed to him that it would not be seventy years but seventy weeks of years or 490 years.



For 490 years Israel would be subservient to other empires. This is the famous prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, often called Daniel's 70 Weeks. The 490 years began with the decree of Artaxerxes the Persian in 444BC recorded in Neh 2:1-8. After the 483rd year Messiah was crucified in 33AD (Dan 9:26). Since Israel did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus the 490 year calendar stopped, during which time God is now building the Church, an entity distinct from the Israel. After the Church is raptured the final 7 years of Israel's calendar can begin when the Antichrist makes a firm covenant with

many Israelites (Dan 9:27) promising them peace for seven years. These 7 years are known as the “day of the Lord” or the “Tribulation” after which Messiah will have purged His people Israel and He will return in great glory and establish His millennial kingdom. It is significant that Israel’s refusal to let the land lie fallow 70 times was the key factor in God’s determination of Israel’s future 490 year calendar. Now, you can see that the people did not manage God’s land (Lev 25:23) as He instructed them to and they did not care much for the needy or the beasts of the field and yet God took their disobedience very seriously.

Verse 12 repeats the basics of the third commandment, the Sabbath rest. For six days they were to **do your work**, whatever your work was, **but on the seventh day you shall cease**, that is, from whatever your normal work is. Most people were farmers of some sort and so they must stop farming on the seventh day which began at 6pm Friday and ended at 6 pm Saturday. Here the concern is the **ox and donkey**, they need a rest too. Also the **son of a female handmaid as well as your stranger...**All men and animals need to have one day out of seven as a day to be refreshed. This is built into the created order and commanded by God. If you try to work more than six days in a row you will be inefficient. Efficiency goes down after six days. Try it and you’ll see.

ⁱ <http://history.wisc.edu/sommerville/351/351-08.htm>

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