

# Exodus 23 Commentary

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Irving Jensen ([Online](#)) - Used by Permission

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[View Chuck Swindoll's chart of Exodus.](#)

Summary Chart of The Book of Exodus	
DELIVERANCE FROM OPPRESSION	PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP
Redemption from Egypt Ex 1:1-18:27	Revelation from God Ex 19:1-40:38
Getting Israel Out of Egypt	Getting Egypt Out of Israel!
Narration	Legislation

Birth of Moses Ex 1-2	Call of Moses Ex 3-6	Conflict with Pharaoh Ex 7-10	Exodus from Egypt Ex 11-12	Red Sea Crossed Ex 13-15	Journey To Sinai Ex 16-18	Law Given Ex 19-24	Tent Plan Ex 25-31	Idol Worship Ex 32-34	Tent Built Ex 35-40
Subjection				Redemption		Instruction			
Suffering and Liberation of People of God				Guidance of God		Worship of God			
Moses and Burdens of Israel		Pharaoh and Plagues Upon Egypt		Red Sea Deliverance	Wilderness Provision	Sinai Instructions			
Bondage and Oppression				Deliverance and Provision		Law Pattern and Construction			
Israel in Egypt Ex 1:1-13:16				Israel to Sinai Ex 13:17-18:27		Israel at Sinai Ex 19:1-40:38			
God's People Enduring Bondage				God's Grace Revealed in Redemption		God's Glory Manifested in Worship			
Egypt 430 Years (15% of Exodus)				Wilderness 2 Months (30% of Exodus)		Mt Sinai 10 Months (55% of Exodus)			
From Groaning									To Glory!

[Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament](#) - online

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[Click for Excellent Map of Route of the Exodus](#)

[Click another Exodus from Egypt](#)

[Click for Events during the Sojourn at Kadesh-Barnea](#)

GENESIS	EXODUS
human effort and failure	divine power and triumph
word of promise	work of fulfillment
a people chosen	a people called
God's electing mercy	God's electing manner
revelation of nationality	realization of nationality

SUMMARY OF THE PENTATEUCH  
(from Believer's Study Bible)

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

NET Exodus 23:1 "You must not give a false report. Do not make common cause with the wicked to be a malicious witness.

NLT Exodus 23:1 "You must not pass along false rumors. You must not cooperate with evil people by lying on the witness stand.

ESV Exodus 23:1 "You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

LXE Exodus 23:1 Thou shalt not receive a vain report: thou shalt not agree with the unjust man to become an

unjust witness.

KJV Exodus 23:1 Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

NIV Exodus 23:1 "Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.

ASV Exodus 23:1 Thou shalt not take up a false report: put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

CSB Exodus 23:1 "You must not spread a false report. Do not join the wicked to be a malicious witness.

NKJ Exodus 23:1 "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

NRS Exodus 23:1 You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness.

YLT Exodus 23:1 'Thou dost not lift up a vain report; thou dost not put thy hand with a wicked man to be a violent witness.

- **You shall not bear a false report:** Ex 23:7 Ex 20:16 Lev 19:16 2Sa 16:3 19:27 Ps 15:3 101:5 120:3 Pr 10:18 17:4 25:23 Jer 20:10 Mt 28:14,15 Ro 3:8
- **a malicious witness:** De 5:20 19:16-21 1Ki 21:10-13 Ps 27:12 35:11 Pr 6:19 12:17 Pr 19:5,9,28 21:28 24:28 25:18 Mt 19:18 26:59-61 Lu 3:14 19:8 Ac 6:11-13 Eph 4:25 2Ti 3:3 1Pe 3:16 Rev 12:10
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SLANDER PROHIBITED

### Related Passages:

Exodus 20:16 (**NINTH COMMANDMENT**) "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Deut 5:20 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Leviticus 19:16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.

Deuteronomy 5:20 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Psalms 101:5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure.

Proverbs 10:18 He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.

Deuteronomy 19:16-17 If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days.

**COMMENT** - In this context the truthfulness of the witness is not established except upon further investigation (Dt. 19:18). Once he was established as a false witness, the penalty for the crime concerning which he bore false witness was to be executed against the liar (cf. Deut. 19:19). (Vine)

**RECOMMENDATION:** As you study these detailed **ordinances** in Exodus 21-23, keep the overall picture in mind so that you do not become bogged down in what appears to be tedious [minutiae](#). And to help you get a good perspective let me suggest taking 8 minutes to watch the summary by **Dr Gene Getz** in his [Video entitled "The Greatest Commandments"](#). Dr Getz reminds us that the first 4 of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 relate to our relationship with God ("vertical") while the last 6 commandments relate to our relationship with each other ("horizontal"). Then in Exodus 21-23 he notes that God focuses primarily on the last 6 commandments spelling out specific details on how the sons of Israel were to interact with one another.

- **Laws about Slaves**
- **Laws about Personal Injury**
- **Laws about Theft**
- **Laws about Crop Protection**
- **Laws about Seduction**

- **Law about Capital Offenses**
- **Laws about Protecting the Vulnerable**
- **Laws about Honesty and Justice**

**NET Note** - People who claim to worship and serve the righteous judge of the universe must preserve equity and justice in their dealings with others. These verses teach that God's people must be honest witnesses (1–3); God's people must be righteous even with enemies (4–5); and God's people must be fair in dispensing justice (6–9).

**J Ligon Duncan** - With this message, we come to a section that in the main applies the ninth commandment-- the commandment not to bear false witness. In the main, this set of laws or exhortations, calls on the people of God and especially on those who are in positions of influence—judges for instance, to be truthful in their dealings in the settings of the courts, but also it exhorts us to kindness to our enemies....First, verses 1 through 3, where we see these dictates for personal and practical obedience to the ninth commandment. What we learn in this passage is that our personal commitment to holiness is to show itself in our public fairness and truthfulness in the context of disputes. The language of this whole section, really verses 1 through 9, but especially verses 1 through 3, sounds a lot like the Ten Commandments. Did you catch the five “you shall nots” in the first three verses? Verse 1: “You shall not.” Verse 2: “You shall not.” Verse 3: “Nor shall you.” Over and over “you shall not.” General exhortation, general prohibition, no penalty. These are not like those case laws we were studying just a few verses ago. These sound like those grand exhortations of the Ten Commandments. “Thou shall not kill.” The language sounds like the Ten Words. We have here, then, categorical laws; these aren't like the case laws. If this happens, then you do this; if this happens, then you do this. These are categorical laws—no penalties—they are exhortations. They come with some threatenings. Five prohibitions are found in verses 1 through 3 which outlaw behavior in courts of law that would jeopardize the integrity and the impartiality of the judicial process. These laws in verse 1 through 3 are applications of the ninth command. You shall not bear false witness, and the exhortations of verses 1 through 3 are especially directed at the people of Israel. When we get to verses 6 through 9, they will be directed primarily to the judges of Israel. But first Moses speaks to the people of Israel specifically about their behavior in legal settings and legal proceedings. And these commands indicate how seriously God takes impartial justice and the well being of our neighbor even if we are in dispute with our neighbor.

**ESV Study Bible** introduces this chapter - The truthfulness of God, coming to its climax in Christ, is to be reflected in truthfulness displayed to fellow human beings, and the compassion and justice of God is to be reflected in treatment of fellow humans.

**Walter Kaiser** - Whereas most of the previous sections of the covenant code have stressed love and compassion toward the weak, the poor, and the alien, this section exhorts Israel to practice another virtue: justice. (EBC-Ex)

**Currid** - And, as with the Ninth Commandment, this directive has a judicial application. No one is to act in collusion with an evil person who is attempting to skirt the rules of justice. No one is to lie on the evil person's behalf. To do so would be to defeat justice. Rabbinical exegesis says this law has a general application to all life, not just the court-room.

**You shall not bear a false** (groundless, unfounded) **report** - To **bear** ([nasa](#)) means to take up or carry and was used twice in Ex 20:7+ “You shall not **take** ([nasa](#)) the name of the LORD your God in vain (Dt 5:11), for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who **takes** ([nasa](#)) His name in vain.” The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) gives a slightly different sense using the verb [paradechomai](#) which renders the sentence as “You shall not **receive** (accept, acknowledge as correct) a worthless report!” So one rendering says don't give it out and the other says don't receive it (the latter would for example apply to an arbiter or judge).

**THOUGHT** - Are you guilty of passing on unfounded hearsay and even overt gossip regarding others, regardless of whether they are believers or not? If so, then STOP IT! This is sin and needs to be confessed and repented.

**J Vernon McGee** - Be careful what you say; this is God's rule of conduct. A gossip is as bad as a murderer, a thief, or an adulterer in your midst, yet in our society a gossip gets by easily.

**Guzik** adds “The only way to obey this command is to put *astop* to a false report. Doing nothing or remaining neutral is to allow the **false report** to **circulate**. “The *inventor* and *receiver* of false and slanderous reports, are almost equally criminal. The word seems to refer to *either*, and our translators have very properly retained both senses.” (Clarke) Since the issue was a **false report**, it was proper to ask and require *proof* from the person bringing the report, and proof as required in the Bible – from two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15).”

The wicked Queen Jezebel did exactly what this law prohibits so that King Abab might get Naboth's vineyard...

Now she wrote in the letters, saying, “Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; and **seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, ‘You cursed God and the king.’** Then take him out and stone him to death.” 11 So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them.

12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. 13 Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. (1 Kings 21:10-13)

**False** (deceitful, empty, false) (07723)(**shav**) primarily means is deceit, lie, or falsehood. It designates a report that is unsubstantial. It is interesting that it is even used as descriptive word for idols (Jer 18:15). The **Septuagint** translates **shav** in this passage with **mataios** which means vain, empty, devoid of force, lacking in content, nonproductive, useless, dead, fruitless, aimless, of no real or lasting value.

**Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness**- NLT = "You must not cooperate with evil people by lying on the witness stand." NIV = "Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness."

**NET Note** on **wicked man** - The word "wicked" (רָשָׁע, rasha') (ED: Lxx = **adikos** - unjust, characterized by doing contrary to what is right) refers to the guilty criminal, the person who is doing something wrong. In the religious setting it describes the person who is not a member of the covenant and may be involved in all kinds of sin, even though there is the appearance of moral and spiritual stability.

**J Ligon Duncan** notes that this "is a command against collusion with people who are perpetrating a fraudulent charge or claim."

**David Thompson** - When we spread something false, we damage the individual and the community. False allegations, unproved speculations can do great harm to someone innocent. Wise counsel is do not start a false report, do not give a false report and do not spread a false report. ([Sermon](#))

**NET Note** on **malicious** - The word חָמָס (khamas) often means "violence" in the sense of social injustices done to other people, usually the poor and needy. A "malicious" witness would do great harm to others.

**Malicious** (Lxx again is **adikos**)(02555)(**chamas/hamas** from the verb **chamas** = to treat violently or wrong) "connotes the disruption of the divinely established order of things. It has a wide range of nuances within this legal sphere." (Vine) Chamas signifies extreme wickedness and the first two uses are very instructive (especially God's reaction)...

(Ge 6:11) Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with **violence**. (Lxx translates with **adikia** = an act that violates the standards of right conduct)

(Ge 6:13) Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with **violence** (Lxx translates with **adikia**) because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

#### Related Resource:

- [Why is "You shall not give false testimony" in the Ten Commandments? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Exodus 23:2 "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;**

NET Exodus 23:2 "You must not follow a crowd in doing evil things; in a lawsuit you must not offer testimony that agrees with a crowd so as to pervert justice,

NLT Exodus 23:2 "You must not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you are called to testify in a dispute, do not be swayed by the crowd to twist justice.

ESV Exodus 23:2 You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice,

LXE Exodus 23:2 Thou shalt not associate with the multitude for evil; thou shalt not join thyself with a multitude to turn aside with the majority so as to shut out judgment.

KJV Exodus 23:2 Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment:

NIV Exodus 23:2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not

pervert justice by siding with the crowd,

ASV Exodus 23:2 Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to wrest justice:

CSB Exodus 23:2 "You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert justice.

NKJ Exodus 23:2 "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.

NRS Exodus 23:2 You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice;

YLT Exodus 23:2 'Thou art not after many to evil, nor dost thou testify concerning a strife, to turn aside after many to cause others to turn aside;

- **follow:** Ex 32:1-5 Ge 6:12 7:1 19:4,7-9 Nu 14:1-10 Jos 24:15 1Sa 15:9 1Ki 19:10 Job 31:34 Pr 1:10,11,15 4:14 Mt 27:24-26 Mk 15:15 Lu 23:23,24,51 Joh 7:50,51 Ac 24:27 25:9 Ro 1:32 Ga 2:11-13
- **to turn aside after a multitude** Ex 23:6,7 Lev 19:15 De 1:17 Ps 72:2 Jer 37:15,21 38:5,6,9 Eze 9:9 Hag 1:4
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



Roman Statue of "Justice"

## JUSTICE DEMANDS NOT SIDING WITH EVIL MAJORITY

**J Vernon McGee** - Judgment should not be swayed toward the rich or toward the poor. Judgment and justice should be exercised fairly. The Romans depicted justice as a woman, tender but also blindfolded. She was no respecter of persons and held a sword in one hand and scales in the other. The sword meant that when the judgment was handed down, there would be the execution of the penalty. The scales meant that justice would be fair. Judgment should be exercised without respect of persons.

We could also subtitle it **"No mob rule in Israel."** As Duncan goes on to say "It doesn't matter if the multitude is doing it if the multitude is wrong. We are not to follow along with a perverted majority."

**You shall not follow the masses** (literally "many men," crowds) **in doing evil** - This law calls God's people to ["go against the flow"](#) (when the flow is flowing the wrong direction!) The masses are bent on acting wickedly and are not to be joined! The temptation for our fallen human nature is to go with the majority opinion but in this context it will result in perversion of justice! If we go with the evil flow, we sin. As Paul warned "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."" (1 Cor 15:33) **NET** - "You must not follow a crowd in doing evil things." Majority opinion does not justify doing evil. The prevalent opinion is not always the truth opinion! If you know something is true, you are not to be swayed for the majority opinion. Boy, does America need this law in Summer, 2020 with Coronavirus and race riots!

**NET Note** - The word רַבִּים (rabbim), here rendered "crowd," is also used infrequently to refer to the "mighty," people of importance in society (Job 35:9; cf. Lev 19:15).

**G Campbell Morgan** has an interesting observation that "The history of all right movements has been in the first place the history of lonely souls, who, having heard the authentic voice of God, have stood alone or in small minorities."

**John Currid** - Part of the teaching of this section of the law is that believers are not to follow the crowd when they are bent on doing evil or injustice. Christians are to stand against mob rule and against the will of the majority when it is wrong. But someone may say, 'I am in the minority.' Yes, praying people are in the minority. People who love God's Word are in the minority. Honouring God's day and his house is an exercise of the minority. But do not be discouraged! For we serve the conquering King who leads the minority!

**J Vernon McGee** - If we were to follow God's precept, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," it would put us out of the marching, protesting and rioting business. Also it would rid our society of the growing menace of gangs. I talked with a very attractive young fellow in this category. He said he dressed as he did because he wanted liberty and freedom. I noticed there were several thousand dressed just like him. So I asked him, "Would you dare dress differently? Would they accept you?" He said, "No." Then I said, "When they protest, you have to get in line and protest, don't you?" He said, "Yes, I do." "Well," I replied, "then you really do not have much freedom, do you? You have to do certain things. When they protest, you have to protest. When they dress a certain way, you have to dress a certain way. This is not freedom." My friend, freedom is not following a multitude to do evil!

**David Thompson** - God's people are never to join in with a majority mob that is moving away from God and His Word and is out to do evil. Justice is never to be perverted even if the multitude of people is behind it. This is exactly what happened to Jesus Christ. There are many people today who are in clear violation of this principle in their church. The church is moving away from a careful devotion to God's written Word and the majority is okay with it. No one should ever just tolerate that because the majority wants it. They need to oppose it and get away from it.

**Nor shall you testify (answer) in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice-** This statement takes the preceding directive from the general populace into a legal setting. **NIV** = "When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd." **NLT** = "When you are called to testify in a dispute, do not be swayed by the crowd to twist justice."

**Duncan** observes the "Same issue (AS IN THE PRECEDING PROHIBITION) but there is active involvement. In the one previous you went along with the multitude, here you are actually fostering the wrong thing that the multitude is doing. So you are neither passively nor actively to acquiesce or be involved with a multitude in perverting justice.

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#### Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible say about injustice? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Torrey Topical Textbook [Justice](#) [Courts of Justice](#)
- American Tract Society [Justice](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Justice](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Justice](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Justice](#) [Justice of God](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Justice](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Justice](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Justice](#) [Justice \(2\)](#)
- King James Dictionary [Justice](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Justice](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Justice](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Justice of God](#) [Justice](#)
- The Nuttall Encyclopedia [Justice](#)

**Exodus 23:3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.**

NET Exodus 23:3 and you must not show partiality to a poor man in his lawsuit.

NLT Exodus 23:3 And do not slant your testimony in favor of a person just because that person is poor.

ESV Exodus 23:3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

LXE Exodus 23:3 And thou shalt not spare a poor man in judgment.

KJV Exodus 23:3 Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.

NIV Exodus 23:3 and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.

ASV Exodus 23:3 neither shalt thou favor a poor man in his cause.

CSB Exodus 23:3 Do not show favoritism to a poor person in his lawsuit.

NKJ Exodus 23:3 "You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.



NRS Exodus 23:3 nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

YLT Exodus 23:3 and a poor man thou dost not honour in his strife.

- Ps 82:2,3 Jas 3:17
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DO NOT SHOW PARTIALITY TO THE POOR

### Related Passage:

Leviticus 19:15+ 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor **defer** (same verb [hadar](#) as Ex 23:3) to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

**Partiality** means favorable prejudice or bias, an inclination to favor one group or view or opinion over alternatives. Just as God is not on the side of the rich, He is not on the side of the poor. In short, He is always perfectly just.

**Nor shall you be partial ([hadar](#)) to a poor man in his dispute ([riv/rib/riyb](#))** - NLT - "do not slant your testimony in favor of a person just because that person is poor."

**Enns** - The rights of the poor are emphasized, but here the Israelites are warned not to take this to the extreme...Verse 3 must, however, be read in conjunction with verse 6. Although the poor are not to be shown favoritism, they are not to be denied justice either. Their case cannot be kept from court simply because they are poor and of little account in society. All of Israel is God's, and all are to be treated equally. (NIVAC-Ex)

**Currid** - The Torah enjoins people to have compassion on the poor, but this should not lead to the perversion or distortion of justice. If it did, it would be a case of reverse prejudice.

**J Ligon Duncan** points out that this prohibition "is revolutionary for near eastern law because even if you take time to sit down and for instance read the Code of Hammurabi or the Laws of Hammurabi, there are all sorts of distinctions made on the basis of the social standing of the individuals involved. But God's law is to be impartially administered. What is the significance of this for us? Our love for God is to be made manifest in our personal commitment to justice, fairness, and truth-telling in relationship to our neighbor. Personal piety is to reflect itself in a personal commitment to justice, to the truthfulness of our speech, our fairness in judicial dealings, and our personal commitment to holiness is to show itself in public fairness and truthfulness in disputes.

**Rayburn** - God is truth and justice Himself and God's people must be like Him. They should not favor the rich and powerful, nor follow the crowd, nor bend the truth to benefit the poor. Together with vv. 6 and 7, these commandments require a dispassionate justice: "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" with neither fear nor favor.

### Related Resource:

- [What does the Bible say about favoritism? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Exodus 23:4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.**

NET Exodus 23:4 "If you encounter your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, you must by all means return it to him.

NLT Exodus 23:4 "If you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey that has strayed away, take it back to its owner.

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

- De 22:1-4 Job 31:29,30 Pr 24:17,18 25:21 Mt 5:44 Lu 6:27,28 Ro 12:17-21 1Th 5:15
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DON'T JUST "LOOK THE OTHER WAY!"

### Related Passage:



Deuteronomy 22:1-3 "You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and **pay no attention to them**; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. 2 "If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 "Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect them.

**If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him-** It would be one thing if this was your friend's animal. God up's the ante so to speak. Watch out even for your enemy's animal! In so doing you are in effect treating your enemy as your friend!

**Currid** points out that "The Hebrew term for '**enemy**' can refer to either a personal foe or to a public national antagonist....This act of the Hebrew is not voluntary. The construction of 'You shall certainly return it' is a Hiphil infinitive absolute followed by a Hiphil imperfect of the same verb. It is emphatic and has the force of a command."

**Kaiser** - This act of compassion was owed to one another regardless whether the man was an enemy (v.4) or one who hated him (v.5). Kindness to one's enemy is commanded in Job 31:29 and Proverbs 25:21-22. (EBC-Ex)

**Guzik** - The principle was clear: How you feel about someone does not determine right and wrong behavior towards them. There are principles of justice that must be observed above our feelings.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took this directive a step further. As an aside the OT never commands Israel **Hate your enemy.**"

Mt. 5:43-45+ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

**Exodus 23:5 "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.**

NET Exodus 23:5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen under its load, you must not ignore him, but be sure to help him with it.

NLT Exodus 23:5 If you see that the donkey of someone who hates you has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help.

ESV Exodus 23:5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

NIV Exodus 23:5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.

KJV Exodus 23:5 If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.

- **If you see:** De 22:4
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **DON'T HATE THE ANIMAL OF ONE WHO HATES YOU!**

### **Related Passages:**

Dt 22:4 "You shall not see your countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.

2 Kings 6:18-23 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19 Then Elisha said to

them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria. 20 When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. 21 Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" 22 He answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.

Proverbs 25:21-22 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.

Romans 12:20-21<sup>±</sup> "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." 21 **Do not be overcome** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) by evil, but **overcome** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) evil with good.

Jeremiah 29:7 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'

**If you see the donkey of one who hates ([sane](#)) you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him** - The Israelite was to refuse to take advantage of the misfortune of an enemy. The Septuagint translates **hates** ([sane](#)) with the adjective [echthros](#) which means to be hateful, hostile toward, at enmity with or adversary of someone. **Echthros** is one who has the extreme negative attitude that is the opposite of love and friendship. An enemy is one that is antagonistic to another; especially seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound the opponent. So you can see this is quite an "ask" (actually a mandatory "ask") for the Israelites. One can only imagine the murmuring that this directive generated! I have to be honest, this one makes me wonder how they would have even possibly obeyed this mandate, for even those who were genuine believers did not have the indwelling

**NET Note** - The line reads "you will cease to forsake him"—refrain from leaving your enemy without help.

**Enns** - These verses (verses 4-5) are aimed not at the welfare of animals but that of the enemy. "Love your enemies" is not a sentiment found only in the New Testament....what is right, not how one feels, determines behavior. Finally, it is worth pointing out that verses 4–5 do not express enforceable law. This is what makes these two case laws different from most of the others in the Book of the Covenant. No penalty is mentioned, since the behavior described can hardly be monitored. These laws aim further than mere legal dealings. They get closer to the heart of the matter: treating all Israelites with love, whether one loves them or not. (NIVAC- Ex)

**Rayburn** - The Lord Jesus would say the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount when he commanded his disciples to love their enemies. And Paul would put it in terms even more like those here: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...do not repay anyone evil for evil." God has treated his people far better than they deserve and this then becomes their calling: to be like the Lord in their treatment of their enemies.

#### Related Resource:

- [What does the Bible say about revenge?](#)
- [What did Jesus mean when He instructed us to turn the other cheek?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about retaliation?](#)
- [What is the significance of burning coals in the Bible?](#)

**Exodus 23:6 "You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute."**

NET Exodus 23:6 "You must not turn away justice for your poor people in their lawsuits."

NLT Exodus 23:6 "In a lawsuit, you must not deny justice to the poor."

ESV Exodus 23:6 "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit."

NET Exodus 23:6 "You must not turn away justice for your poor people in their lawsuits."

NLT Exodus 23:6 "In a lawsuit, you must not deny justice to the poor.

- Ex 23:2,3 De 16:19 27:19 2Ch 19:7 Job 31:13,21,22 Ps 82:3,4 Ec 5:8 Isa 10:1,2 Jer 5:28 6:28 7:6 Am 5:11,12 Mic 3:1-4 Zep 3:1-4 Mal 3:5 Jas 2:5,6
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DO NOT DENY JUSTICE TO POOR

**You shall not pervert the justice** ([mishpat/mispat](#)) **due to your needy brother in his dispute** ([riv/rib/riyb](#)) - The idea of **pervert** is "bending" the case in such a way that it prevents justice from being achieved in a dispute or lawsuit. This passage deals especially with the **needy** ([ebyon](#)) or poor, the Septuagint translating **ebyon** with the noun **pentes** which describes one who is obliged to work for a living, but not being reduced to begging (like a "day laborer"). As Duncan says "They are themselves dependent upon the court for justice. They are dependent upon those who are influential in society for justice and are not to be denied justice."

**Alan Cole** - '[ebyon](#) is the common biblical word for 'poor', frequent in the Psalter with the sense of 'pious poor' (e.g. Ps. 9:18). It later gave the name of the Jewish-Christian sect of the Ebionites ('God's poor'), and had perhaps been used before as a title of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:10).

**Guzik** - Being poor did not make one right in a legal dispute, but it should never keep them from getting a fair hearing and justice.

**Duncan** - In verses 6 through 9...we're back to those court laws again. Here we see some demands for Israel's judges to show impartial justice to all alike. There's a special burden on those who are in positions of influence to show justice to the vulnerable. In the legal system, sometimes the only people who can help the vulnerable are those who have been officially charged to do so and placed in positions of leadership and responsibility.

**Currid** - This statute is the reverse of the coin in relation to 23:3. Whereas that earlier verse forbids partiality towards the poor, this verse prohibits any form of bias against them.

**Pervert** ([05186](#))([natah](#)) means to stretch out, to extend and has 3 primary nuanes, in this passage meaning to turn aside from justice. The Septuagint translates natah with the verb [diastrepho](#) which literally means to twist throughout or to distort.

### Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible say about injustice? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Exodus 23:7 "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.**

NET Exodus 23:7 Keep your distance from a false charge— do not kill the innocent and the righteous, for I will not justify the wicked.

NLT Exodus 23:7 "Be sure never to charge anyone falsely with evil. Never sentence an innocent or blameless person to death, for I never declare a guilty person to be innocent.

ESV Exodus 23:7 Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.

- **far from:** Ex 23:1 Lev 19:11 De 19:16-21 Job 22:23 Pr 4:14,15 Isa 33:15 Lu 3:14 Eph 4:25 1Th 5:22
- **the innocent:** De 27:25
- **for I will not:** Ex 34:7 Pr 17:15 Na 1:3 Ro 1:18 2:5,6
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CAREFUL NOT TO CONVICT OR HARM THE INNOCENT

**Keep far from a false charge** - The idea is stay away from it and have nothing to do with a **false charge**. (Literally in Hebrew "a false matter"). To whom does this directive refer? Some commentators think this is primarily directed to the judges in Israel and that is certainly possible.

**and do not kill the innocent or the righteous-** We saw an example of this miscarriage of justice in the result of false charges against Naboth described above ([see note](#)).

**For I will not acquit the guilty-** NLT - "I never declare a guilty person to be innocent." God's verdict is always perfect because He is omniscient and sees the heart. God refuses to pervert justice and will not call the one who is guilty "not guilty." The point would seem to be that if in taking care to not falsely charge or convict the innocent some who are guilty are set "[scot free](#)" like we say, ultimately they will stand before the righteous Judge and will not be set scott free, but will surely be found guilty. **NET Note** adds "God will not declare right the one who is in the wrong. Society should also be consistent, but it cannot see the intents and motives, as God can."

**J Ligon Duncan** has an interesting interpretation on **not acquit the guilty** reasoning that "The judge becomes guilty in a wrongful conviction of the innocent and God is saying, "I won't forget that. I will bring about justice." The judge is to have nothing to do with fraudulent claims. In this case a miscarriage of justice that would result in the death penalty being applied to an innocent person. We are to be careful not to convict or harm the innocent because God is the judge.

**Currid** takes a different approach writing "It also teaches that the judge ought to be careful in deciding criminal cases, lest the innocent or righteous person be erroneously condemned. And if this means there is a risk that a criminal might go unpunished, there is no need to despair, for ultimately the wicked will be brought to account before Yahweh"

**Exodus 23:8 "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.**

NET Exodus 23:8 "You must not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and subverts the words of the righteous.

NLT Exodus 23:8 "Take no bribes, for a bribe makes you ignore something that you clearly see. A bribe makes even a righteous person twist the truth.

ESV Exodus 23:8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

NIV Exodus 23:8 "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.

KJV Exodus 23:8 And thou shalt take no **gift**: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.

- **take:** De 16:19 1Sa 8:3 12:3 Ps 26:10 Pr 15:27 17:8,23 19:4 Ec 7:7 Isa 1:13 5:23 Eze 22:12 Ho 4:18 Am 5:12 Mic 7:3
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BRIBERY BLINDS AND SUBVERTS JUSTICE**

### **Related Passage:**

Deuteronomy 27:25 'Cursed is he who accepts a **bribe** to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

Deuteronomy 16:19 "You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a **bribe**, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.

Proverbs 17:23 A wicked man receives a **bribe** from the bosom To pervert the ways of justice.

**You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just-** Bribe ([shochad](#)) is first in the sentence for emphasis and is translated in the Septuagint with the word [doron](#) which means a gift, in this case a gift given for the purpose of influencing one's decision. The problem with a "gift" is that it clouds one's clear thinking ("the gift blindeth the wise" KJV; Literal Hebrew = "blinds the open-eyed") and therefore distorts justice. Note the two effects of a bribe - (1) blinds one to something that they would otherwise clearly be able to see and (2) it perverts or distorts justice. **Subverts the cause** can be rendered "distorts the words." **NLT** - "Take no bribes, for a bribe makes you ignore something that you clearly see. A bribe makes even a righteous person twist the truth."

**Alan Cole** - always a danger in a marginal society. It was important for any Israelite judge to be able to establish his position on this

(1 Sam. 12:3). Samuel's own sons failed at this point (1 Sam. 8:3).

**Rayburn** - In context, perhaps the text concerns especially judges. We are talking about ways in which justice is perverted. The prevalence of bribery in the Near East is notorious, but, then, we are accustomed to it in the West as well. Our forms of it are often more sophisticated, but congressional "pork" is, at least very often, bribery in fact and it is a full time job in Washington and in state capitals to try to discover who is making secret payments in order to affect political and bureaucratic outcomes.

**Bribe** (07810)(**shochad**) is "a masculine noun referring to a **bribe**, a reward, a gift. It refers to what is given in a situation to influence persons to act or think in a certain way they would not normally. It was often given to pervert justice and to blind the judgment of even good persons (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19). God does not take bribes (Deut. 10:17). The person who took a bribe was cursed by God (Deut. 27:25). The perversion of justice through bribes was a major downfall of Israel (1 Sam. 8:3). A bribe could consist of a major political gift or present to another king or nation, a glorified bribe (1 Kgs. 15:19)." (Baker) **Bribe** - "money or favor given or promised in order to influence the judgment or conduct of a person in a position of trust." (Webster) **Patterson** - "The OT condemns bribery because it perverts justice in the judicial sphere and equity in the social sphere of the Hebrew covenant community (cf. Ex 23:8; Dt 16:19; Pr 17:23)."

**Subverts** (05557)(**salaph**) means to twist, pervert, distort, overturn, overthrow. It means basically to distort, subvert, or mislead from what is normal. It is used of the effect of bribes on justice, hindering it (Ex. 23:8); and its process (Deut. 16:19); it is used of removing governmental powers as well (Job 12:19). It describes hindering or subverting the wicked and foolish in their ways (Prov. 13:6; 19:3; 21:12; 22:12).

**Salaph** - 7v - overthrows(2), perverts(1), ruins(1), subverts(2), turning(1). Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Job 12:19; Prov. 13:6; Prov. 19:3; Prov. 21:12; Prov. 22:12

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**Question:** [What does the Bible say about bribery / giving or receiving a bribe? |](#)

**Answer:** A bribe is money, favor, or other consideration given in exchange for one's influence against what is true, right, or just. The Bible is clear that giving or receiving a bribe is evil.

God's Law, given to Moses for the people of Israel, forbade the taking of a bribe, "for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous" (Exodus 23:8). The same rule is repeated in Deuteronomy 16:19: "You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous." The negative effects of taking a bribe are clearly outlined in these two passages. Bribery perverts justice. It is a blinding influence upon wisdom and discernment. It clouds the truth and perverts or twists the words of those who would be righteous in the sight of God.

The Law went even further in the case of a bribe involving the killing of an innocent person. A judge who takes a bribe to condemn to death an innocent person was as guilty as a paid assassin—he was to be "cursed" (Deuteronomy 27:25). There were incidents where this law against bribery was broken, to disastrous effect. The two men who testified against Naboth (1 Kings 21:4–16) and those who testified against Stephen (Acts 6:8–14) were probably bribed; in both instances, an innocent man was killed. When high officials give and receive bribes, it causes evil in a society. "The king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it" (Proverbs 29:4). Bribery is one characteristic of a corrupt society.

Isaiah prophesied against the evil of Israel when they had turned from the one true God and His laws. Isaiah likened the city of Jerusalem to an unfaithful harlot; the city was once full of justice, but it had become a place of rebellion, murder, and thievery. Her leaders were those who loved bribes and chased after the money bribery brought them (Isaiah 1:2–23). The people of Israel were not to follow the ways of evil but were to emulate God in their dealings with one another: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

The most heinous example of a bribe in the Bible is the thirty pieces of silver that Judas received to betray the Lord Jesus. A direct result of Judas's treachery was that Jesus was arrested and crucified. Eventually, even Judas realized that his acceptance of a bribe was evil. But when he tried to return the money to the chief priests and elders, they refused it, calling it what it was—"blood money" (Matthew 27:3–9).

Delilah was bribed to entrap Samson (Judges 16:5). Samuel's sons disrespected their office by taking bribes (1 Samuel 8:3). The wicked Haman bribed King Ahasuerus in an attempt to destroy the Jews in Persia (Esther 3:9). Felix left Paul in prison, hoping to receive a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:26). And the soldiers charged with guarding Jesus' tomb were bribed by the chief priests and elders to spread a lie about the disappearance of Jesus' body (Matthew 28:12–15). In each case, those receiving the bribes cared nothing for truth or justice.(Source: [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org))

**Related Resources:**

- Holman Bible Dictionary [Bribery](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Bribery](#)
- King James Dictionary [Bribery](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Bribery](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Bribery](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Bribery](#)

**Exodus 23:9 "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.**

NET Exodus 23:9 "You must not oppress a foreigner, since you know the life of a foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

NLT Exodus 23:9 "You must not oppress foreigners. You know what it's like to be a foreigner, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.

ESV Exodus 23:9 "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

- **shall not:** Ex 21:21 Dt 10:19 Dt 24:14-18 Dt 27:19 Ps 94:6 Eze 22:7
- **know:** Mt 18:33 Heb 2:17,18
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## KINDNESS TO STRANGERS

### Related Passage:

Exodus 22:21+ "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:14-18 "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. 15 "You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you. 16 "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. 17 "You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. 18 "But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Note that this verse repeats Exodus 22:21, but here the context is legal, not social.

**You shall not oppress** (crush) **a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger** - A stranger feels "strange," knowing he is not related by blood or ethnicity to the people he is associated with. S. R. Driver notes that the oppression or "crushing" in this context would probably mean with an unfair judgment in the courts. Deuteronomy 10:19 gives us the "flip side" of this command = **"So show your love for the alien**, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Instead of oppressing them, demonstrate love to them, which is a picture of God's pattern to strangers (all of us are strangers because of sin).

**Alan Cole on feelings** - The Hebrew is not the usual word for 'heart' but *nepes*, which can be translated 'life' or 'self'. Here it seems to have more the meaning of 'desires and longings'. However it be translated, the verse is indicative of deep and true sympathy, alike the Jewish and Christian duty (Rom. 12:15). Perhaps we might translate: 'you know from experience what a stranger yearns for.'" (TOTC-Ex)

**Guzik** notes that "Jesus simply summarized these laws promoting kindness and fair conduct in the community of Israel: You shall love ... your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27)."

**Oppress** (03905) (**lachats**) means to physically push against someone or something, to squeeze, to crush and has the sense of pressing, crowding or tormenting. Used literally twice of Balaam's donkey in Nu 22:25 "When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she **pressed** herself to the wall and **pressed** Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again." "Hold the door shut" in 1 Ki 6:32. **Lachats** is used repeatedly in the dark days of Judges (lasted some 1200 years!) when Israel would be oppressed by some pagan enemy and would cry



out to God for deliverance. The only problem was they kept falling back into sin after a period of rest! Sounds too familiar to my life sometimes! The **Septuagint** translates **lachats** with **thlibo** which literally means to press, squeeze, crush, squash, hem in and then to be narrow.

**Stranger...a stranger** (alien, sojourner) ([01616](#))(**ger** from **gur** = to live among people not one's blood relatives) is a masculine noun meaning sojourner, alien, stranger. It describes someone who did not enjoy rights usually possessed by residents. It describes a person who does not belong to the nation of Israel by ancestry. It is interesting that the Septuagint translates both uses of ger with the noun **proselutos** meaning "one who has come over" and in the NT is the technical term for a Gentile who came over to Judaism.

**For you also were strangers in the land of Egypt - For ([term of explanation](#)) you were strangers in the land of Egypt** - Memory of the misery and pain of suffering some sin is (or at least should be) a good antidote for practice of the same sin! Israelites knew mistreatment and oppression and were to be different in their treatment of foreigners.

**Rayburn** - This is not mere humanitarianism, but a deep fellow-feeling rooted in our own experience of God's grace. We are to treat others as the Lord has treated us.

**Exodus 23:10 "You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield,**

NET Exodus 23:10 "For six years you are to sow your land and gather in its produce.

NLT Exodus 23:10 "Plant and harvest your crops for six years,

ESV Exodus 23:10 "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield,

- **six years:** Lev 25:3,4 Ne 10:31
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **SIX YEARS SOWING AND REAPING**

**NET Note** - This section concerns religious duties of the people of God as they worship by giving thanks to God for their blessings. The principles here are: God requires his people to allow the poor to share in their bounty (10–11); God requires his people to provide times of rest and refreshment for those who labor for them (12); God requires allegiance to himself (13); God requires his people to come before him in gratitude and share their bounty (14–17); God requires that his people safeguard proper worship forms (18–19).

Exodus 23:10-11 is in a sense an exposition of the Fourth Commandment (Ex 20:8-11)

**Thomas** observes that "'The law of the Sabbatical Year. This was unique in the world, and associated only with Israel."

**Bush** - We have here one of the most remarkable ordinances of the Jewish code. As every seventh day was to be a Sabbath, so every seventh year was to be a Sabbatical Year, and hence in the repetition of this law, Lev. 25:4, it is called 'a Sabbath of Sabbatism to the land, a Sabbath to Jehovah.

**You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield**- God is telling the Israelites how many years they can work their land. **Gather** in the Septuagint is [sunago](#) meaning gather together.

**Sow** (sow seed; Septuagint = [speiro](#)) ([02232](#))(**zara**) refers to the action of sowing seed in the fields (Gen 26:12; Isa 37:30). Zara is used figuratively of sowing the wind in Hosea 8:7. Zara occurs first in Ge 1:29 in the summary of the blessings of creation which God has given to mankind. In an agricultural society such as ancient Israel, zara' would be most important and very commonly used, especially to describe the annual sowing of crops (Jdg. 6:3).

**Gather** ([0622](#))(**asaph**) means to gather (Ge. 29:22; 42:17; Ex. 3:16; 4:29), take away, harvest, assemble. Nation collecting armies for fighting (Nu. 21:23; Jdg. 11:20; 1 Sa 17:1; 2 Sa 10:17). Lord taking away Rachel's disgrace of childlessness (Ge 30:23). Harvesting food or other objects, such as animals (Jer. 12:9); quail (Nu 11:32); eggs (Isa. 10:14); money (2 Ki. 22:4; 2 Chr. 24:11). In context of death meaning to be gathered to one's people (Ge 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, 33); to be gathered to one's fathers (Jdg. 2:10); or to be gathered to one's grave (2 Ki. 22:20; 2 Chr. 34:28).



**W E Vine** says "refers to "bringing objects to a common point." This may mean to "gather" food to himself (Gen. 6:21). Eventually, the food was to go into the ark. This verb can also refer to "gathering" food at harvest time, or "harvesting": "And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof" (Exod. 23:10). 2 Kings 22:4 refers not to a process of going out and getting something together, but to standing still as someone brings money to one. Also notice Gen. 29:22: "And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast"; this verse similarly focuses on the end product of gathering. But here the "gatherer" does not physically handle what is "gathered." He is simply the impetus or active cause for a congregating of all those men. God may "gather" a man to his fathers, i.e., cause him to die (2 Kings 22:20). Here the emphasis is on the end product, and God as the agent who "gathers."

**'Āsāp may represent not only the process of bringing things to a common location; the word may also represent "bringing" things to oneself.** After the harvest is brought ("gathered") in from the threshing floor and wine vat, the Feast of Booths is to be celebrated (Deut. 16:13). In Deut. 22:2, a man is to "gather" into his home (bring home and care for) a lost animal whose owner cannot be found. In this manner, God "gathers" to Himself those abandoned by their family (Psa. 27:10). A special application of this nuance is to "receive hospitality": "...When he went in he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging" (Judg. 19:15). "To gather in" also may mean "to be consumed by", God promises that His people "shall be no more consumed with hunger" (Ezek. 34:29). Finally, used in this way the verb can mean "to bring into," as when Jacob "gathered up his feet into the bed" (Gen. 49:33).

**The third emphasis is the "withdrawal" or "removal" of something;** the action is viewed from the perspective of one who loses something because someone has taken it ("gathered it in"). In Psa. 85:3, the "gathering" represents this sort of "withdrawal away from" the speaker. Thus, anger "disappears": "Thou hast taken away all thy wrath." Compare also Rachel's statement at the birth of Joseph: "God hath taken away my reproach" (Gen. 30:23). In this case, Sarah speaks of the "destruction" of her reproach. "To gather one's soul" is "to lose" one's life (Judg. 18:25). God can also be the agent who "gathers" or "takes away" a soul: "Gather not my soul with sinners..." (Psa. 26:9). In this sense, 'āsāp can mean "being cured" of a disease; "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.](#))

**Asap** - 185v - again(1), all together(1), amassed(1), assemble(9), assembled(12), assembling(1), attached(1), bring(1), brought(2), brought together(1), collect(1), collected(2), collects(1), cure(4), destroy(1), disappear(1), drew(1), garner(1), gather(33), gathered(81), gathering(1), gathers(3), lose(3), pick(1), put(1), put them all together(1), reaper(1), rear guard(5), received(2), returned(1), surely assemble(1), surely gathered(1), take(3), take my away(1), take away(2), taken away(5), took(1), victims(1), wane(1), withdraw(3), withdrawn(1), withdraws(1), withdrew(1). Gen. 6:21; Gen. 25:8; Gen. 25:17; Gen. 29:3; Gen. 29:7; Gen. 29:8; Gen. 29:22; Gen. 30:23; Gen. 34:30; Gen. 35:29; Gen. 42:17; Gen. 49:1; Gen. 49:29; Gen. 49:33; Exod. 3:16; Exod. 4:29; Exod. 9:19; Exod. 23:10; Exod. 23:16; Exod. 32:26; Lev. 23:39; Lev. 25:3; Lev. 25:20; Lev. 26:25; Num. 10:25; Num. 11:16; Num. 11:22; Num. 11:24; Num. 11:30; Num. 11:32; Num. 12:14; Num. 12:15; Num. 19:9; Num. 19:10; Num. 20:24; Num. 20:26; Num. 21:16; Num. 21:23; Num. 27:13; Num. 31:2; Deut. 11:14; Deut. 16:13; Deut. 22:2; Deut. 28:38; Deut. 32:50; Deut. 33:5; Jos. 2:18; Jos. 6:9; Jos. 6:13; Jos. 10:5; Jos. 20:4; Jos. 24:1; Jdg. 2:10; Jdg. 3:13; Jdg. 6:33; Jdg. 9:6; Jdg. 10:17; Jdg. 11:20; Jdg. 16:23; Jdg. 18:25; Jdg. 19:15; Jdg. 19:18; Jdg. 20:11; Jdg. 20:14; Ruth 2:7; 1 Sam. 5:8; 1 Sam. 5:11; 1 Sam. 13:5; 1 Sam. 13:11; 1 Sam. 14:19; 1 Sam. 14:52; 1 Sam. 15:6; 1 Sam. 17:1; 1 Sam. 17:2; 2 Sam. 6:1; 2 Sam. 10:15; 2 Sam. 10:17; 2 Sam. 11:27; 2 Sam. 12:28; 2 Sam. 12:29; 2 Sam. 14:14; 2 Sam. 17:11; 2 Sam. 17:13; 2 Sam. 21:13; 2 Sam. 23:9; 2 Sam. 23:11; 1 Ki. 10:26; 2 Ki. 5:3; 2 Ki. 5:6; 2 Ki. 5:7; 2 Ki. 5:11; 2 Ki. 22:4; 2 Ki. 22:20; 2 Ki. 23:1; 1 Chr. 11:13; 1 Chr. 15:4; 1 Chr. 19:7; 1 Chr. 19:17; 1 Chr. 23:2; 2 Chr. 1:14; 2 Chr. 12:5; 2 Chr. 24:11; 2 Chr. 28:24; 2 Chr. 29:4; 2 Chr. 29:15; 2 Chr. 29:20; 2 Chr. 30:3; 2 Chr. 30:13; 2 Chr. 34:9; 2 Chr. 34:28; 2 Chr. 34:29; Ezr. 3:1; Ezr. 9:4; Neh. 8:1; Neh. 8:13; Neh. 9:1; Neh. 12:28; Job 27:19; Job 34:14; Job 39:12; Ps. 26:9; Ps. 27:10; Ps. 35:15; Ps. 39:6; Ps. 47:9; Ps. 50:5; Ps. 85:3; Ps. 104:22; Ps. 104:29; Prov. 27:25; Prov. 30:4; Eccl. 2:26; Isa. 4:1; Isa. 10:14; Isa. 11:12; Isa. 13:4; Isa. 16:10; Isa. 17:5; Isa. 24:22; Isa. 33:4; Isa. 43:9; Isa. 49:5; Isa. 52:12; Isa. 57:1; Isa. 58:8; Isa. 60:20; Isa. 62:9; Jer. 4:5; Jer. 8:2; Jer. 8:14; Jer. 9:22; Jer. 10:17; Jer. 12:9; Jer. 16:5; Jer. 21:4; Jer. 25:33; Jer. 40:10; Jer. 40:12; Jer. 47:6; Jer. 48:33; Ezek. 11:17; Ezek. 24:4; Ezek. 29:5; Ezek. 34:29; Ezek. 38:12; Ezek. 39:17; Dan. 11:10; Hos. 4:3; Hos. 10:10; Joel 1:14; Joel 2:10; Joel 2:16; Joel 3:15; Amos 3:9; Mic. 2:12; Mic. 4:6; Mic. 4:11; Hab. 1:9; Hab. 1:15; Hab. 2:5; Zeph. 3:8; Zeph. 3:18; Zech. 12:3; Zech. 14:2; Zech. 14:14

**Yield** (08393) (tebuaḥ from **bo** = to come) means produce, crop, harvest, increase, revenue, especially yield from the ground

(Ex. 23:10; Lev. 19:25; Josh. 5:12); and the fields (2 Ki. 8:6; Ezek. 48:18). Tebuah is any increase or prosperity in general (Job 31:12; Pr 10:16; 14:4) as well as the benefits from wisdom (Pr 3:14; 8:19). Figuratively describes nation of Israel = ""They have sown wheat and have **reaped** thorns," (Jer 12:13). Note that our words bear "**fruit**" (Pr 18:20) (**Woe!!!**). **Tebuah** is an economic term denoting "produce," "gain," "profits," "yield," "fruit" or "results."

**Tebuah** - 43x in 40v - crop(4), crops(6), gain(1), harvest(4), income(4), increase(3), produce(10), product(3), revenue(2), yield(5), yield may increase(1). Gen. 47:24; Exod. 23:10; Lev. 19:25; Lev. 23:39; Lev. 25:3; Lev. 25:7; Lev. 25:12; Lev. 25:15; Lev. 25:16; Lev. 25:20; Lev. 25:21; Lev. 25:22; Num. 18:30; Deut. 14:22; Deut. 14:28; Deut. 16:15; Deut. 22:9; Deut. 26:12; Deut. 33:14; Jos. 5:12; 2 Ki. 8:6; 2 Chr. 31:5; 2 Chr. 32:28; Neh. 9:37; Job 31:12; Ps. 107:37; Prov. 3:9; Prov. 3:14; Prov. 8:19; Prov. 10:16; Prov. 14:4; Prov. 15:6; Prov. 16:8; Prov. 18:20; Eccl. 5:10; Isa. 23:3; Isa. 30:23; Jer. 2:3; Jer. 12:13; Ezek. 48:18

**Exodus 23:11 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.**

NET Exodus 23:11 But in the seventh year you must let it lie fallow and leave it alone so that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave any animal in the field may eat; you must do likewise with your vineyard and your olive grove.

NLT Exodus 23:11 but let the land be renewed and lie uncultivated during the seventh year. Then let the poor among you harvest whatever grows on its own. Leave the rest for wild animals to eat. The same applies to your vineyards and olive groves.

ESV Exodus 23:11 but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

- **the seventh:** Lev 25:2-7,11,12,20,22 26:34,35
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A YEAR OF SABBATH PROVISION FOR POOR**

### **Related Passages:**

Leviticus 25:1-7 The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, 2"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. 3'Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. 5 'Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. 6' All of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 7'Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.

Leviticus 25:18-22 'You shall thus observe My statutes and keep My judgments, so as to carry them out, that you may live securely on the land. 19'Then the land will yield its produce, so that you can eat your fill and live securely on it. 20 'But if you say, "What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?" 21 then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. 22'When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in.

**Spurgeon comments** - They were to have enough for the year of rest, and for the next year in which the harvest was growing, and still to have something over for the ninth year. They scarcely could want as much as that; but God would give them more than they actually needed, exceeding abundantly above what they asked or even thought. That Sabbatical year had other blessings connected with it. Let us read about them in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter fifteen

Deuteronomy 31:10-13 Then Moses commanded them, saying, "**At the end of every seven years**, at the

time of the **year of remission of debts**, at the **Feast of Booths**, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. 12 "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may **hear** and learn and **fear** the LORD your God, and **be careful to observe** all the words of this law. 13 "Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

**THOUGHT** - Note the additional feature that every seventh year debts were to be forgiven. We have already learned that a slave was to be released on the seventh year. Here God says read these laws at the Feast of Booths and note the effect - hear > fear > obey. That order is still valid. Too few today even "hear" (read it themselves) and thus they do not learn to "fear" the LORD and they have far less motivation to obey the LORD. You might say it is not good to fear the LORD, for perfect love casts out all fear. Yes, that is true, but if we love Him, we fear Him reverentially and we will obey for Jesus said "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15).

**But** - Term of contrast, in this case 6 years versus 1 year and work versus rest for field and people.

**On the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow** - **Fallow** means marked by inactivity; plowed unseeded land. This truth is repeated in Leviticus "'Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard.'" (Lev 25:3,4)

**Rest** (08058) (**shamat**) means to let drop and so to drop something (or someone) or to throw down and then to cancel or to release. It also can mean to stumble; to let fall. In context the land is to lie free and untilled. It is used in its absolute participial form as a command, shall release, will release (a debt) (Dt 15:2). It means to knock something over, e.g., the ark (2 Sa 6:6; 1 Chr 13:9). It is used of tossing something down (2 Ki 9:33); in a figurative sense, it means removed from power (Ps 141:6). It indicates letting go of something, losing it. In context Israel loses her inheritance from the Lord, gives it up under force (Jer 17:4).

**Gilbrant** - The verb *shāmat* means "to release," "to let rest," "to drop." Cognates are attested in Middle Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, Akkadian and Arabic. As the Israelites brought back the Ark of God from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, they placed it upon a cart drawn by oxen. This procedure was not appropriate according to the Law, since it was supposed to be carried on poles by Levites (Num. 4). As the entire entourage processed in celebration, Uzzah, one of Abinadab's sons, put his hand on the Ark because the oxen stumbled (2 Sam. 6:6). The proper translation for "stumbled" is the oxen "kicked," which means they "were restive." Hence, the oxen became agitated or restive and moved recklessly or irregularly. *Shāmat* also means "to cast," "to throw down," such as in the case of Jezebel, wicked wife of Ahab, who was thrown down from an upper story of her palace by command of Jehu (2 Ki. 9:33). The inhabitants of Judah, just before they were exiled to Babylon, clung tightly to their wealth for security and identity, rather than clinging to the Lord. Jeremiah's prophecy informed them that God, in punishment for their sins, was going to make all their wealth a spoil for their enemies: "You shall loosen your hand from your heritage which I gave you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land which you do not know" (Jer. 17:4). The loosening of the hands pictures an object falling from a tight grip which has been released. Using a similar figure of speech, the Lord commanded Moses and the Israelites to work their land for six years and then "drop" or "let rest" the land on the seventh year (Ex 23:11). The Israelites were to leave it unattended, untilled, fallow. Likewise, the figures "open your hand to" and "shut your hand against" use the verb *shāmat*. Closing the hand indicates keeping the debt of someone. Opening the hand is remission of debt or alms for someone in need or giving a loan to someone. In Deuteronomy, the Lord commands that people must "open the hand" to help the poorer segment of the population, though the year of debt release (every seven years) is soon to occur. The person making the loan would not receive much from the person who received the loan since there would be only a few months left until release, but God commanded the people to extend loans anyway and He would bless them (cf. Dt. 15:1-11). The Niphal form means "to be cast down," "to be precipitated," "to be thrown down," as a rock cast down and shattered on the ground, which is the fate of the wicked (Ps 141:6). The Hiphil form means "to release," "to remit," used again to describe the actions required of Israelites at the time of the seven years' rest, when debts were to be remitted of fellow Israelites: "Of a foreigner you may exact [the loan] again: but that which is yours with your brother your hand shall release" (Deut. 15:3). (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

**Shamat** - let it rest(1), let go(1), release(2), threw her down(1), throw her down(1), thrown down(1),

**Fallow** (left)(05203)([natash/natas](#)) means to abandon, to forsake, to leave alone. In the present context it means to abandon and not use for a period of time.

**So that** - Term of purpose. The purpose of the Sabbath Year.

**Bush** - During that year the corn-fields were neither sown nor reaped. The vines were unpruned, and there were no grapes gathered. Whatever grew spontaneously belonged alike to all, instead of being the property of any individual; and the poor, the bondman, the day-laborer, the stranger, the cattle that ranged the fields, and the very game, then left undisturbed, could assert an equal right to it. In short, during this year, the whole of Palestine continued a perfect common (Lev. 25:1–8), and in order to render this law the more sacred, it was not only termed 'the year of the Sabbath,' its sabbatism or resting being declared holy to the Lord, but even the vines, as if under a vow, were called 'Nazarites' to which a knife must not be applied. Comp. Lev. 25:5, with Num. 6:5.

**The needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat**- The poor could eat what grew from the unplanted fallow ground. God even cared for "wild animals" that they may eat what was left. This edict came from the Creator God who cares for the sparrows (Matt 10:29) and feeds the ravens (Luke 12:24).

**NET Note** on **beast** - Heb "*living thing/creature/beast of the field*" A general term for animals, usually wild animals, including predators (cf. v. 29; Gen 2:19–20; Lev 26:22; Deut 7:22; 1 Sam 17:46; Job 5:22–23; Ezek 29:5; 34:5).

**Currid** points out that "It is unlikely that all Israel celebrated the land Sabbath in the same year. It probably rotated so that some land was left fallow each year, but much was also cultivated. Thus, the poor would be able to gather food each year, not only one in seven."

**Guzik** - One reason God commanded the Sabbath year was to give the poor something to eat, in that they were allowed to harvest and process that which grew unplanted from the fallow ground. This was a way to help the poor that demanded both that the landowners hold themselves back from maximum profit, and that the poor work to help themselves.

**Bush** - As the Sabbath of the seventh year had the same reference as that of the seventh day to the creation of the world, it went to cherish all those pious and adoring sentiments which were awakened by the stated recurrence of the weekly day of rest. This septennial sabbatism reminded the Israelites not only of what they in common with the whole world, owed to the great and glorious Creator of the universe, but of their more especial obligations to him as their covenant God, who had made them the peculiar object of his care; and who was pleased miraculously to overrule the laws of nature in their behalf. It is scarcely possible to conceive of any more effectual mode of teaching them the duty of a continual simple-hearted reliance upon a kind and bountiful providence, than by the command to let the whole land lie fallow for one entire year, and to trust for subsistence to the provisions of that power which made the earth, and which could easily make the produce of the sixth year sufficient for the wants of the seventh or even the eighth. Were they ever tempted to cherish the slightest doubt or misgiving on this score, it was at once confuted by the express assurance of augmented plenty when it became requisite. Lev. 25:20, 21, 'And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.' This was a plain intimation that a miracle should attend the strict observation of the law in question. Had such an extraordinary increase immediately succeeded the fallow year, it might have been accounted for according to the course of nature. The land had had a respite, and would naturally bring forth with more vigor. But when after being exhausted by constant tillage for five years, it produced more instead of less on the sixth, what was this but the manifest proof of a direct intervention of Omnipotence, showing as with the light of the sun that a particular providence incessantly watched over them? And not only so; the ordinance taught them impressively upon what tenure they held their possessions. They would be forced to acknowledge God as the lord of the soil, and themselves as liege-subjects of the great Proprietor, upon whose bounty their well-being continually hung. Intimately connected with this was the lesson of humanity which they were hereby taught to the poor, the enslaved, the stranger, and the cattle. The appointment of the Sabbatical Year was a striking demonstration that all classes and conditions of men, and even the beasts of the field, were mercifully cared for by the Universal Father; and what violence must they do to every kindly sentiment, if they could evince a contrary spirit? Once in every seven years they might freely suspend all the labors of agriculture, and yet rest in perfect security of an ample supply for their wants; and what could more directly tend to work the conviction upon their minds that heaven had appointed them a higher destiny than to be always drudging in earthly toils; that nothing would be lost by the prescribed intermission; and that if God could, as we may say, afford to be thus munificent to them, they were bound to act on the like noble, liberal, and generous principles to their fellow-creatures?

**You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove**- Grain and grapes for all.

Sadly Israel did not obey this law and in fact her failure to keep the **Sabbath Year** was one of the reasons for Judah's exile, which was to be for 70 years to make up for the missed sabbath years. This means that for 490 years Israel failed to keep the Sabbath every seventh year.

Leviticus 26:32-35; 'I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. 33 'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. 34 **'Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation**, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 'All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.

2 Chronicles 36:21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its **sabbaths**. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until **seventy years** were complete.

**Bush** comments - Such was the institution of the Sabbatical Year, and such its effects in creating a sense of dependence in God, charity to man, and humanity to brutes. It was admirably adapted to be a test of the faith and obedience of the chosen people, and yet we are unhappily obliged to record the fact, that they did not stand the test. Not only is there no express mention of the actual observance of the law in the historical books of the Old Testament, but in 2 Chron. 36:21, that neglect of it is spoken of as one of the procuring causes of the seventy years captivity to which they were subjected, during which the land was to enjoy the number of Sabbaths of which it had been defrauded by the rebellion and unbelief of its inhabitants. In other words, the years of their captivity were to correspond with the number of the **neglected Sabbatical years**; and as those were seventy, it would carry us back about 500 years to the close of Samuel's administration, when the observance began to go into disuse. Thus blindly and madly does depraved man war against his own interest in neglecting the salutary appointments of Heaven!

**Holman Bible Dictionary on Sabbatical Year** - Every seventh year when farmers rested their land from bearing crops to renew the land and people of Israel. Mosaic law directed that every seventh year the land would not be planted in crops; food would come from what grew wild (Exodus 23:10-11 ; Leviticus 25:1-7 ). Just as the Law reserved the seventh day as holy unto God, so too, was the seventh year set aside as a time of rest and renewal. This not only assured the continued fertility of the land by allowing it to lay fallow, but also protected the rights of the poor. Peasants were allowed to eat from the natural abundance of the untended fields. It may be that only a portion of the land was allowed to rest each Sabbath year, the remainder farmed as usual. Hebrews sold into slavery were to be released in that year (Exodus 21:2 ). Loans and debts to Israelites were also to be forgiven (Deuteronomy 15:1-3 ). It is doubtful that the Sabbath year was celebrated in early Israel. Jeremiah reminded the people that their fathers had ignored the observance of the law (Jeremiah 34:13-14 ; compare Leviticus 26:35 ). Although Israel renewed her dedication to practice the Sabbath year during Nehemiah's time, it is unclear whether it was carried out (Nehemiah 10:31 ). During the intertestamental period an attempt was made by Israel to observe the Sabbath year despite the political turmoil of the times (1 Maccabees 6:49 ). The Sabbath year laws consistently pointed to helping the poor.

#### Related Resources:

- [What is a sabbatical year? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- American Tract Society [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Sabbatical year](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Smith Bible Dictionary [Sabbatical Year](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Sabbatical Year](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Sabbatic year](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Sabbatical Year and Jubilee](#)

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#### A Time For Readjustment

In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land. —Leviticus 25:4

The earth's solar orbit takes 365 and a quarter days. Because of this, every 4 years an extra day is added to the calendar so we don't fall behind in the natural cycle of things. Each leap year we add that day onto the end of February. In this way, the calendar is readjusted to the astronomical timetable.

In the calendar of ancient Israel, God set up a remarkable means of readjusting things. Just as mankind was commanded to rest every seventh day (Ex. 20:8-10), so the land was to be allowed to rest during the seventh year (Lev. 25:4). This sabbatical year allowed the farmland to replenish for greater fertility. In addition, debts were canceled (Deut. 15:1-11) and Hebrew slaves were set free (Dt 15:12-18).

With our busy schedules and our hectic pace of life, we too need readjustment. Demands of work, family, and church can require reevaluation. One way we do that is by observing the sabbath principle—making sure to set aside time to rest and prayerfully refocus our priorities. Jesus, for example, went “to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).

When can you pull aside from your activities and prayerfully ask God to reset your spiritual calendar to His Word and His will? Is it time for a readjustment?

To face life's many challenges  
And overcome each test,  
The Lord tells us to take the time  
To stop, to pray, to rest.  
—Sper

To make the most of your time, take time to pray.

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TODAY IN THE WORD - “Sleep scientists” are warning that people are not getting enough rest, and our health and safety are suffering as a result. William Dement, founder and director of the Stanford University Sleep Research Center, estimates that people sleep about one-and-a-half hours less per night than the average from a century ago.

The consequences? One report found that driver fatigue was involved in over half of all American vehicle accidents. Larger accidents, such as the Exxon Valdez disaster, have also been linked to sleep deprivation. In laboratory experiments, prolonged stress without rest apparently caused the immune systems of the rats to fail. Also, recent theories propose that the REM stage of sleep is necessary to learning and memory, meaning that less sleep affects our cognitive functions as well as our physical well-being.

The need for rest should come as no surprise to Christians, for we know that our Creator made us that way! That's why in the Law God made every seventh day a Sabbath, and every seventh year a Sabbath year.

During a Sabbath year, fields were not to be worked, though whatever grew there could be taken for food, especially by poor people (Leviticus 25:5, 6, 7; Ex. 23:10, 11, 12). Physically, leaving the fields fallow for a year was, as we now know, **sound agricultural practice**, as well as **a unique custom compared to the surrounding nations**. Spiritually, to rest from farming—on which the people depended for their daily food and livelihood—**required faith in God's promise that He would provide bumper crops the year before** (Leviticus 25:20, 21). Other features of the Sabbath year included the cancellation of debts and a special reading from the Law during the Feast of Tabernacles (Dt. 31:10-13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Do you honor the spiritual principle of rest in your life? Though we no longer keep a Saturday Sabbath, God has built rest into the rhythms of life, even setting us an example Himself by resting on the seventh day of His work of creation. Given these facts, it is vital that work not occupy an inordinate amount of our time and energy.

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### The Global Reset Button

When I was a kid, I loved playing Super Nintendo—especially Donkey Kong. Despite my love for it, it would just make me angry at times. When I couldn't handle the way the game was panning out, I would slam down the controller and hit the reset button. I would start fresh. It's more than a little sad that my entertainment made me act like a caveman. Yet those moments of resetting the entire system felt like another chance at life (albeit a virtual one).

With the state of the global economy, it often feels like the world needs a reset. It's tempting to say something as radical as, “Let's forgive all debts and start again.” Though this couldn't happen—and it would be highly problematic since the statement depends on good will, free economy, and general care for one another—it doesn't stop us from hoping.

God actually created a system for this audacious idea: in the Year of Jubilee, or the Sabbatical Year, slaves were freed and debts were forgiven (Deut 15), people were celebrated as equals (Deut 16), and the land was given a rest to prevent famine. (Famine was often caused by overworking the land.) It was a reset button.

The global economy is complex. I'm not suggesting that it's time for a Year of Jubilee, but maybe it is time for an economic evaluation of our lives. Who is God calling you to forgive? Whose life could be better if you lifted their debts? Who needs your generosity right now? Who could you make an equal by changing something about your work or friendship? How can you celebrate with those who feel like lesser people in this world?

The economy proves the point that we are all interdependent. It also makes the case that doing something for those at the bottom of the economic ladder can have a massive impact—not just on them, but on others. Those that are forgiven are likely to forgive. (John



**Exodus 23:12 "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.**

NET Exodus 23:12 For six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you must cease, in order that your ox and your donkey may rest and that your female servant's son and any hired help may refresh themselves.

NLT Exodus 23:12 "You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but on the seventh day you must stop working. This gives your ox and your donkey a chance to rest. It also allows your slaves and the foreigners living among you to be refreshed.

ESV Exodus 23:12 "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.

- **Six days:** Ex 20:8-11 31:15,16 Lu 13:14
- **and the son:** De 5:13-15 Isa 58:3
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- See more commentary notes on the Sabbath - Exodus 16:23-29, Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 31:14-16, Exodus 35:2-3

## A DAY OF SABBATH REST

**Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor-** The basic meaning of the Hebrew word for **cease** ([shabath](#)) is to stop, so the instruction is clear - **STOP...cease and desist** all work on the seventh day.

**Bush** makes a good point about why the Fourth Commandment is repeated in this context - As the sabbatical year was a year of cessation from the ordinary labors of other years, so they might possibly take up the impression, that the ordinary observances of the Sabbath day were also to be suspended during that year; that it was, as it were, laid open in common with the other days of the week. But this would be a groundless and pernicious inference, and therefore the law of the Sabbath is expressly repeated, and the people reminded that the observance of that day was of perpetual and paramount obligation, and not in the slightest degree annulled by the occurrence of the Sabbatical Year.

**Alan Cole** - On the seventh day you shall rest: as in the ten commandments, but with a difference. The weekly sabbath here is not merely a reminder of God's creative work (Exod. 20:11) or of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). It is to be a cessation from labour for Israel, physical rest for the animals, and refreshment for the workers in slave or semi-slave status, for whom there was presumably no religious obligation. (TOTC-Ex)

**Cease** (put an end, stop) [07673](#)([shabath](#)) means to cease to repose, to rest, to rid of, to still, to put away, to put an end to, to cause to cease, to leave. Most uses refer to rest or abstain from labor (Ex 5:5), especially on the seventh day (Ex 20:8-11). It is the root verb of Sabbath the time to be set aside for rest. Of God resting after the completion of creation (Ge 2:2, 2:3 = "He **rested**", Ex 31:17, describing the Sabbath - Ex 34:21) The basic meaning of **shabath** is well illustrated in the declaration that day and night "shall not **cease**." (Ge 8:22). Israel will not "**cease** from being a nation." (Jer 31:30), a prophetic sign of God's faithfulness! The "three men **ceased** answering Job." (Job 32:1) In Joshua, the verb expresses a cessation of the provision of manna by God to the Israelites (Josh. 5:12). The land was also depicted as enjoying a rest (Lev 25:2, Lev 26:34, 35). The people of God are to rest (Ex. 16:30). "An **end** to strife." (Pr 18:18). "**Put an end** to the arrogance of the proud." (Isa 13:11)

**So that** - Term of purpose

**Your ox and your donkey may rest** - Rest for the land every seventh year and for animals (and men) every seventh day.

**Rest** (set/settle)([05117](#))([nuach/nuah](#)) means to rest or pause and essentially conveys a basic sense of absence of movement and of being settled in a particular place. In the present context nuach means to repose, to pause for rest after laboring. The Bible says that insects rest (Ex 10:14), as do cattle, slaves and even the Lord after a time of labor (Ex 23:12; Deut. 5:14; and Ex. 20:11 respectively). The Septuagint translates nuach in Ex 23:12 with the noun [anapausis](#) (from [anapauo](#) ~ refresh, give rest, permit one to cease



from labor in order to recover and collect his strength <> **aná** = again + **paúo** = cease, give rest) which means a ceasing from activity, a "cessation from wearisome activity for the sake of rest." (BDAG). In Matthew 11:29+ Jesus said "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND **REST** ([anapauo](#)) FOR YOUR SOULS."

**And the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves**- Slaves and **strangers** (Heb - [ger](#); Lxx = [proselutos](#)) would get a much needed rest. The Hebrew word **refreshed** (naphash from [nephesh](#) = soul, life) is used only 3x in the OT, here, next in Ex 31:17 where after Creating the Universe "on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was **refreshed** (naphash; Lxx = [katapauo](#))." The third use describes King David in 2 Sa 16:14 "The king and all the people who were with him arrived weary and he **refreshed** (naphash) himself there." The Septuagint translates **naphash** here (and 2 Sa 16:14) with the verb [anapsucho](#) (**ana** = again ~repetition + **psucho** = breathe, cool) literally means to cool again, to make cool or refresh, or to experience cooling so as to recover from the effects of overheating and so to revive by fresh air.

**Currid** comments "In Exodus 31:17 God is said to have been *refreshed* on the seventh day of creation because of his resting. Thus, God's work and rest in creation serve as a paradigm for man's work and rest each week."

I like Bush's comment on **refresh** - May be refreshed. Heb. ינפֿש yinnaphesh, may be **re-spirited**, or **new-souled**, from נפֿש [nephesh](#), soul; i. e. **may have a complete renewal both of bodily and spiritual health**. Gr. ἀναψνξ, the same expression with that occurring Acts 3:19+, '**Repent** ye, therefore, and **be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of **refreshing** ([anapsuxis](#), re-souling from verb [anapsucho](#)) shall come from the presence of the Lord.' **The very frequent repetition of the law respecting the Sabbath shows conclusively that the sanctification of that day was of great consequence in the sight of God, and that he had a special eye therein to its benign bearing physically both upon the welfare of man and beast.** With this institution before us, we can no more ask the question, '*Doth God care for oxen?*' So far from disregarding their well being, we find repeated provisions in His law breathing a most tender and beneficent concern for the brute creation subjected to the uses of man. How different from the light in which they are practically regarded by multitudes of civilized and nominally Christian men! How many thousands of patient drudging cattle and noble horses, have no Sabbath! They cannot remonstrate when called from their quiet stalls on the Sabbath, and put to their exhausting week-day toils, but the barbarous privation of their authorized rest speaks loudly in the ears of their merciful Creator, and their meek endurance reaches one heart in the universe that is not insensible to the appeal. That heart has a hand to execute judgment adequate to the wrong done to a portion of his creatures which have a capacity to suffer, but none to complain.

**NET Note** on **stranger** (*alien*) - Such an individual would have traveled out of need and depended on the goodwill of the people around him. The rendering "hired help" assumes that the foreigner is mentioned in this context because he is working for an Israelite and will benefit from the Sabbath rest, along with his employer.

**Ryken** says "Although the Sabbath rest was good for the land, this was not its stated purpose. The Sabbath was mainly for the people and the animals who depended on the land for food. In the seventh year the orchards, fields, and vineyards were left to grow on their own - "unpruned, unguarded, and unharvested." There is some question as to whether the whole land of Israel rested in the same year, or whether the rest was staggered field by field (the latter would seem most beneficial to the poor). However it was timed, the Sabbath year was one of the ways God provided for the hungry, and also for the animals that he created. Plenty of food was left for wild animals and the poor, who were free to gather whatever they needed."

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Of the Ten Commandments, the law of the Sabbath is mentioned more often in Scripture than any of the others. It is a serious and weighty issue. When Eric Liddell found out that his race in the Paris Olympics was to be run on Sunday, he refused to compete. Of course, he was vilified by the press of the day. Liddell did not waver in his resolution, but he ran the 400 metre race later in the week and won it. He later commented that 'When I was about to run in the finals the trainer handed me a little note. I opened it and read the words, "Them that honour me will I honour." ' Liddell's stand for the Sabbath had a great impact upon people of his day. His story was made into the film Chariots of Fire in 1981, and it also had a good effect for the gospel. What a witness for Christ are those who stand for him and his ways! (John Currid)

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**Robert Rayburn** - Interestingly the sabbatical year has been retained only in the academic world. In the law of God it was the agricultural worker who profited most from it and, even now, it is the peasant and the factory worker who need it most and are least likely to receive it. "...be refreshed" in v. 12 is literally "catch one's breath." Imagine how agricultural workers would have looked forward to every seventh year. Forget two weeks vacation; an entire year off! The production of the previous six years is entirely adequate to provide for everyone – owners and workers alike – in the seventh year. If the industrial revolution were produced in large part from the Protestant work ethic, its managers failed to humanize it by applying such biblical insights as these. The factory owner is likely to say that he could not compete were he to do so; Holy Scripture and history combine to prove that one who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness finds that the other things are added to him in abundance. And the proof of that is

that it was during the time that the Sabbath was kept in Western culture that the foundation for its great wealth was laid. It is God's will that man work six days and rest a seventh and, as in so much of this legislation, the implied threat is that if God's will is flaunted, he will see to it that the sinner will face the consequences. God is not a taskmaster and his people are not to be either. There are other things more important than maximizing profit, and one of them is a just and humane treatment of one's workers. Part of that is a holiday every week, the Sabbath day. Here the accent falls especially on the design of this legislation – both the sabbatical year and the weekly Sabbath day, to help to give relief to various classes of people – the poor and the workers – as well as the animals who are both given time for refreshment every week and are free in the sabbatical year to take what the fields, vineyards, and orchards produce naturally, without planting or cultivation. [Ellison, 132] The produce of that seventh year did not belong to the owner of the field but to the poor and the animals. We are taught here that there are many reasons to keep God's laws. Here the rationale for Sabbath-keeping is not God's having created the world in six days and rested the seventh, nor as a memorial of Israel's redemption, but for humanitarian purposes.

The provision for the animals, both wild and domestic, is an expression of the fact that God is their creator too and that he provides for them. The Lord Jesus reminded us that the Lord cares for little sparrows and feeds the ravens. We may wonder about wild animals – where they go at night, what they do all day (we look for deer and elk, for bear and even for lions at our cabin in Colorado, but hardly ever see them when we are looking for them; then, suddenly, when we are not expecting to see them, there they are! We are always wondering where they are the rest of the time!) – well God watches them. He loves them and enjoys them. We love to watch them, even at a zoo, and God must too! And if he loves to watch them, he also provides for them.

In any case, as religious observances, both the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatical year were expressions of faith in the Lord who promised to provide for their needs. You will remember that the later prophets saw the 70 years of exile in Babylon as the land's rest – the sabbatical rest it had not been given as it should have been. The Sabbath was so fundamental that it was part of the Ten Words, but it is mentioned here also because the law here is dealing with days dedicated to rest, refreshment, and the service of the Lord.

By the way, we know nowadays that it is responsible agriculture to allow fields to lie fallow at intervals. The farmers in that day no doubt knew this as well. But this was not the principle reason for the law, though the law also conveyed that benefit. The laws concerning clean and unclean foods can be seen to have had some beneficial results for Israel's health. That is not the reason for the laws per se, but God's laws often bring unannounced and unanticipated blessings just as disobedience often brings all manner of unanticipated trouble. It is no accident, for example, that promiscuous sex has all manner of grisly consequences for a person's health.

#### **Related Resources:**

- See more commentary notes on the Sabbath - Exodus 16:23-29, Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 31:14-16, Exodus 35:2-3
- [What is the Sabbath day?](#)
- [How can we enter into God's rest?](#)
- [What does it mean that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath?](#)
- [What does it mean to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?](#)
- [Why does Exodus 35:2 require the death penalty for working on the Sabbath?](#)
- [Does God require Sabbath-keeping of Christians?](#)

**Exodus 23:13 "Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth."**

NET Exodus 23:13 "Pay attention to do everything I have told you, and do not even mention the names of other gods— do not let them be heard on your lips.

NLT Exodus 23:13 "Pay close attention to all my instructions. You must not call on the name of any other gods. Do not even speak their names.

ESV Exodus 23:13 "Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.

NIV Exodus 23:13 "Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.

KJV Exodus 23:13 And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

- **be on your guard:** De 4:9,15 Jos 22:5 23:11 1Ch 28:7-9 Ps 39:1 Eph 5:15 1Ti 4:16 Heb 12:15
- **not mention:** Nu 32:38 De 12:3 Jos 23:7 Ps 16:4 Jer 10:11 Ho 2:17 Zec 13:2 Eph 5:12
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A CHARGE TO UNIVERSAL HEEDFULNESS

### Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 4:9+ "Only **give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently**, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.

Deuteronomy 4:23+ "So **watch yourselves**, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you.

**John Currid** comments that "This verse is the climax of the Book of the Covenant. It enjoins Israel to do three things: to guard the laws that God has given them, to forget false gods and to refrain from mentioning their names (all three verbs are [reflexive](#) Niphal forms = ED: THEY INITIATE THE ACT AND PARTICIPATE IN THE EFFECT OR BENEFIT OF THE ACT). The verse also serves as an inclusio for the Book of the Covenant, returning as it does to the theme of the opening verses. The section began with the pronouncement of the primary commandment of [monotheism](#) (Ex 20:22–26+). Now it ends with a return to that commandment. In addition, in Ex 20:24+ God proclaimed that **1 will cause my name to be remembered**; in the present verse, the name of the false gods is not to be remembered. Monotheism was the first commandment of the Decalogue. Now we see it marks both the beginning and ending of the Book of the Covenant, binding the whole together, as it were. It is the principal doctrine of Israelite theology in the Torah. (EPSC-Ex-volume 2)

**Now concerning everything which I have said to you** - This is a fairly all inclusive declaration, but in context refers primarily to the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant.

**Be on your guard** - NET says "The verb for paying attention is a Niphal imperfect with an **imperative force**." The Hebrew verb **be on guard** is [shamar](#) which means to keep watch, to preserve, to guard, to be careful, to watch over carefully, and to be on one's guard. It is translated in the **Septuagint** with the verb [phulasso](#) which means to watch, to carry out the function as a military guard or sentinel (cp Acts 28:16), to keep watch, to have one's eye upon lest one escape, to guard a person that he might remain safe (from violence, from another person or thing, from being snatched away, from being lost). The NT uses **phulasso** of guarding truth (eg, 1Ti 5:21, 1 Ti 6:20+, 2Ti 1:14+). And in a use that closely parallels God's warning in Ex 23:13 the apostle John writes "Little children, **guard** ([phulasso](#) - [aorist imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves from idols. (1 Jn 5:21+).

**George Bush** (he is a distant relative of both President [George H. W. Bush](#) and President [George W. Bush](#)) comments on **be on your guard** - It is a strict injunction of universal heedfulness in respect to every one of the divine precepts, but with more especial reference to those prohibiting idolatry in any of its forms; for to this sin Omniscience foresaw that they would be preeminently disposed and tempted.

**And do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth** - The Hebrew verb mention is [zakar](#) which conveys the basic meaning ot to recall, call to mind or remember and is translated in the Septuagint with the verb [anamimnesko](#) which carries the idea of carefully thinking back and reconstructing something in one's mind. It is preceded by **NOT** and in Greek the "not" (ouk) which signifies absolute negation so the thought is one is absolutely not to begin to reconstruct an image of these idols in one's mind! (cf Paul's warning in Ro 13:14+). God knows that a tempting thought (as of an idolatrous image or practice) will "percolate" in one's mind and unless "killed" will lead to an action! James said it this way "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (IN THIS CASE AN IDOL). Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:13-15+) And as we see repeatedly in the Bible the "act" associated with **idolatry** is **immorality**! So God is saying in effect "kill sin lest it be killing your," to paraphrase John Owen.

God is charging Israel to develop "**idol amnesia**!" Jehovah repeatedly gives Israel a clear warning against the danger and deception of idolatry. He knows their (and **our**) hearts naturally gravitate away from the true God and towards the false gods associated with idols.

Consider these related passages:

Joshua 23:6-7 (SOME OF JOSHUA'S LAST WORDS! LAST WORDS FROM GODLY MEN SHOULD BE

LASTING WORDS!) "Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or **mention the name of their gods**, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them.

Isaiah 26:13 O LORD our God, other masters besides You have ruled us; **But through You alone we confess Your name.**

Psalms 16:4 The sorrows of those who have bartered for another god will be multiplied; I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood, **Nor will I take their names upon my lips.**

**Bush on do not mention** - Make no mention, &c. Heb. לֹא תִזְכְּרוּ lo tazkiru, ye shall not cause to be remembered. They were to endeavor to blot out the remembrance of the gods of the heathen, and for this end their names were not to be heard from their mouths; or if mentioned at all, it must be only in a way of detestation. The Chal. terms these other gods 'idols of the peoples;' and God, by the prophet Zech. 13:2+, says, '*In that day ([Millennium](#)) I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered.*' And again, Hos. 2:17, '*I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.*' It was in accordance with the spirit of this precept that the Israelites seem to have made a practice of 'changing the names' of idolatrous places, Nu 32:38. And under a similar prompting David says, Ps 16:4, '*Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.*' In the intercourse of society, there is no more emphatical mode of indicating hatred towards a person than not mentioning his name, shrinking from even the remotest allusion to him, and striving, as far as possible, to forget even his existence. Thus would God have his people do in regard to the gods of the heathen. He says to them in effect of idolatry, as elsewhere, '*Thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing*' (Dt 7:26).

**Rayburn** - A reminder that there is but one living God with whom they have to do; it is his will and the will of no other that must be our duty and his promise of blessing that must be our hope. A general statement like this serves as a kind of transition to the next body of laws.

**Mackay** states: It may come out of the associations of the Sabbath with worship. Though that would fit this general context, it is the humanitarian aspect of the Sabbath that is mentioned here. Another possibility is that it comes from the mention made of 'the alien'. While consideration was to be given to their welfare, there was to be abhorrence for, and avoidance of, their false worship. 'Invoke' is 'cause to be remembered' and would cover use in ordinary speech as well as in worship and in taking oaths in law courts. It was indeed an act of treason even to utter the names of these false gods lest it should seem that they were being given a status comparable to that of the Great King (Psa. 16:4).

#### Exodus 23:14 "Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me.

NET Exodus 23:14 "Three times in the year you must make a pilgrim feast to me.

NLT Exodus 23:14 "Each year you must celebrate three festivals in my honor.

ESV Exodus 23:14 "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me.

- Ex 34:22 Lev 23:5,16,34 De 16:16
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### CELEBRATION OF THREE ANNUAL FEASTS REQUIRED

In Exodus 23:13 God has just told Israel to "minimize" devotion to the false gods and now instructs them to "maximize" devotion to the one True God, in Ex 23:14-19 describing the 3 annual feasts where He is to be honored and worshiped.

**Rayburn** - These feasts were also a regular interruption of the daily round of life. They are just mentioned briefly here because Israel was still in the wilderness. Their regulation will be given in detail later.

**Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me** - Moses repeats this instruction to the generation entering the promised land - "Three times in a year **all your males** shall appear before the LORD your God **in the place which He chooses**, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and **they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.**" (Dt 16:16) Notice that Deuteronomy gives additional details - (1) All males (2) Place Jehovah chooses (3) Bring an

offering.

One might reason that all the males leaving cities across Israel unprotected three times a year would be prime targets for the pagan nations who were surely aware of these three annual pilgrimages. And yet we do not read of attacks during these times. The explanation is found later in Exodus...

Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. "For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and **no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.** (Ex 34:23-24)

**Bush** comments - Can any thing afford us a more striking instance of a particular providence? He is a wall of fire about his people as well as the glory in the midst of them. The hearts of all men are in his hands. He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath, which will not praise him, he restraineth. During the whole period between Moses and Christ, we never read of an enemy invading the land at the time of the three festivals; the first that occurs was thirty-three years after they had withdrawn from themselves the divine protection, by embruing their hands in the Savior's blood, when Cestius the Roman general slew fifty of the people of Lydda, while all the rest were gone up to the Feast of Tabernacles, A.D. 60. We have only farther to add, that the three great Festivals were honored with three remarkable events in the Scripture history. The feast of Tabernacles was the time when the Savior was born, and also the time when, in his thirtieth year, he was baptized. The Passover was the time when he was crucified; and the Pentecost the time when the Holy Ghost descended in a visible manner upon the apostles.

**NET Note** - The expression rendered "three times" is really "three feet," or "three foot-beats."

**Bush** adds "Three times thou shalt keep a feast, &c. Heb. שלש רגלים shalosh regalim, three feet; i. e. three foot-journeys. Greek *treis kairous* three times."

**Celebrate a feast** (02287) (**chagag**) means to hold or keep a feast, a pilgrim feast, to celebrate a holy day. **Chagag** usually refers to the three annual pilgrimage festivals. It is used in Lev. 23:39, 41; Num. 29:12; and Deut. 16:15, in relation to the **Feast of Tabernacles**. In Ex. 12:14, it is used in reference to the **Passover**, while here in Ex 23:14, it refers to the celebration of all three festivals: Unleavened Bread and Passover, Harvest or the Feast of Weeks and Ingathering or the Feast of Tabernacles. The remaining occurrence of the verb in the Pentateuch is Ex 5:1, where Moses cites a festival celebration as the reason why the Israelites must leave Egypt.

**Currid** makes an excellent observation that "These three feasts form the core of Israel's religious calendar (see Lev. 23). Yet it is important to observe that this section is closely tied to the Sabbath commands of verses 10–12. The foundation of each of the three festivals is the seven-day week which climaxes on the Sabbath (see Deut. 16:3–4, 9, 13–15). The Sabbath is at the very heart of Israel's religious celebrations." (Ibid)

**Adam Clarke** has an interesting comment - Old men, sick men, male idiots, and male children under thirteen years of age, excepted; for so the Jewish doctors understand this command."

**Alan Cole** - All adult males must go, presumably because such occasions are a gathering of YHWH's war-host, though we know from 1 Samuel 1 that women could and did go up with their husbands. It is, however, plain that even the greatest of the three (passover) was observed only sporadically or on a limited scale during the time of the kingdom (2 Kgs 23:22), though no doubt kept regularly after the exile, when Ezra and Nehemiah were able to enforce the law in a small close-knit community. This of course does not prove that the regulation did not exist earlier. (Ibid)

**Bush** proposes three reasons for these three feasts - thrice-yearly concourse of all the males of Israel at the place of the sanctuary, was well calculated, (1) To counteract all the unsocial tendencies arising from their separation into distinct tribes, and to unite them among themselves as a nation of brethren. Were it not for some provision of this kind, local interest and jealousies would have been very apt to be engendered, which in process of time would probably have ripened into actual hostilities and collisions that would have broken their commonwealth to pieces. But by being frequently brought together, the acquaintances of tribes and families would be renewed, all feelings of clannish exclusiveness repressed, and the social union more effectually consolidated. (2) It was an ordinance well calculated to perpetuate the memory of the great events on which they were severally founded. As the weekly sabbath brought to remembrance the creation of the world, so did the Passover the departure from Egypt; the Pentecost, the delivery of the Law; and the Feast of Tabernacles, the sojourning in the wilderness. Whatever of salutary religious influence was exerted by the celebration of these memorable events, it would obviously bear with most weight when it became the joint act of the whole assembled nation. Moreover, as the Law was read and instruction imparted on these occasions, the effect would naturally be,



to render them faithful to their religion, and better disposed to carry out its principles in their lives and conversation. (3) Another important end which we may suppose to have been designed by these assemblages, was to afford to the people seasons of relaxation and recreation from their necessary toils. Although the weekly sabbath brought with it a welcome respite from labor, yet the Maker of our frame saw that something more than this was requisite for the highest well-being, corporeal and mental, of his creatures, and therefore ordained certain seasons of innocent hilarity in connexion with those religious observances which would tend to keep them within proper limits. It is observable, therefore, that the expression, 'rejoicing before the Lord,' is of frequent occurrence in speaking of those festive conventions which brought the Hebrews together from time to time during the year; and it is no doubt desirable that the precepts of Christianity should be so construed as to lay no chilling interdict upon those harmless amusements which the constitution of our nature seems to render occasionally requisite.

THE SEVEN GREAT FEASTS OF ISRAEL							
1st Month = Nisan Festival of Passover (Pesach)			3rd Month = Sivan Feast of Pentecost	I N T E R L U D E	7th Month = Tishri Festival of Booths (Tabernacles) (Sukkot)		
Passover Pesach	Unleavened Bread	First Fruits	Feast of Weeks		Feast of Trumpets	Day of Atonement	Feast of Booths
Lamb's blood on Door Ex 12:6-7, 43-49 Lev 23:5, Nu 28:16, Dt 16:1-8	Purging Leaven (Sin)	Wave Offering (Promise of Harvest to come)	Wave Offering of two loaves of leavened bread (promise of harvest to come)		Trumpet Blown - A Holy Convocation	Atonement shall be made to cleanse you Lev 16:30	Celebrates harvest, memorial of God's care in wilderness
Evening of the 1st Month, 14th Day of Nisan (Abib) Lev 23:5	1st Month, 15th Day Lev 23:6-8 (1st & 8th are Sabbath)	Day after Sabbath Lev 23:9-14	50 Days after first fruits Lev 23:14-21		7th Month, 1st Day Lev 23:23-25 (A Sabbath)	7th Month, 10th Day Lev 23:26-32 (A Sabbath)	7th Mo, 15th Day 7 Days; Convocation on 8th Day Lev 23:33-44 (1st & 8th are Sabbath)
Christ our Passover has been sacrificed	Clean out the old leaven... just as you are in fact unleavened	Christ has been raised... the first fruits	Promise of the Spirit, Mystery of Church - Jews and Gentiles in one body		Regathering of Israel before final day of atonement Jer 32:37-41	Points to Cross of Christ Israel repents and looks to Christ in one day Zech 3:9-10, 12:10, 13:1, 14:9	All families come to Jerusalem for Feast of Booths Zech 14:16-19
1Cor 5:7	1Cor 5:7-8	1Cor 15:20-23	Acts 2:1-47 1Cor 2:13 Eph 2:11-12			Ezekiel 36:24	Ezekiel 36:25-27 Heb 9-10 Ro 11:25-29

Exodus 23:15 "You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me

NET Exodus 23:15 You are to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; seven days you must eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you, at the appointed time of the month of Abib, for at that time you came out of Egypt. No one may appear before me empty-handed.

NLT Exodus 23:15 First, celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast, just as I commanded you. Celebrate this festival annually at the appointed time in early spring, in the month of Abib, for that is the anniversary of your departure from Egypt. No one may appear before me without an offering.

ESV Exodus 23:15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed.

LXE Exodus 23:15 Take heed to keep the feast of unleavened bread: seven days ye shall eat unleavened bread, as I charged thee at the season of the month of new corn, for in it thou camest out of Egypt: thou shalt not appear before me empty.

KJV Exodus 23:15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)

NIV Exodus 23:15 "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

ASV Exodus 23:15 The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep: seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month Abib (for in it thou camest out from Egypt); and none shall appear before me empty:

CSB Exodus 23:15 Observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you are to eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, because you came out of Egypt in that month. No one is to appear before Me empty-handed.

NKJ Exodus 23:15 "You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

NRS Exodus 23:15 You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

YLT Exodus 23:15 the Feast of Unleavened things thou dost keep; seven days thou dost eat unleavened things, as I have commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in it thou hast come forth out of Egypt, and ye do not appear in My presence empty;

- **the feast:** Ex 12:14-28,43-49 13:6,7 34:18 Lev 23:5-8 Nu 9:2-14 28:16-25 De 16:1-8 Jos 5:10,11 2Ki 23:21-23 Mk 14:12 Lu 22:7 1Co 5:7,8
- **none shall appear before Me empty-handed:** Ex 34:20 Lev 23:10 De 16:16 Pr 3:9,10
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

**You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you-**

This alludes to the prior directive in Exodus 12:14-20+, the purpose being to serve as a memorial of Israel's exodus orchestrated by Yahweh (Ex 12:24-28+). The fact that it was to be observed for **seven days** ties it to the Sabbath day. Recall that the Passover was so intimately linked to the following days of "unleavened bread" that Luke records "Now the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, which is called the **Passover**, was approaching.." (Lk 22:1+) In Leviticus 23:5-6+ we read "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD'S **Passover**. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."



**At the appointed time in the month Abib** - See [the structure of the Jewish calendar](#). **Abib** or Nisan (the Chaldee name), is our March-April, you are to celebrate your deliverance and freedom. **Bush** calls Abib "the month of green corn."

**Abib** (024) (**abib**) means "young ear of grain," ripe, but soft. Thus, it became a designation of a specific time of the year, the time of the first harvest. Others say it means barley especially when it is just ripe and still soft and allows the grains to be eaten rubbed or roasted. In Lev 2:14 it was used as an offering to the LORD. Abib is the month of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and first-fruits which are still observed yearly to remind the Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt.

**A b i b** - 9x in 6v - Abib(6), ear(1), fresh heads(1), fresh heads of grain(1). Ex 9:31; Ex 13:4; Ex 23:15; Ex 34:18; Lev. 2:14; Dt. 16:1

Deuteronomy 16:1 "Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

**For in it you came out of Egypt** - This summarizes why they are to celebrate the Passover/Unleavened bread, for it would serve as an annual reminder to the nation of the greatness of their deliverance by Jehovah.

**THOUGHT** - How often to you go back to that glorious day or time when the Spirit of the living God swept into your heart and gave you new life in Christ Jesus by grace through faith (when you "came out of Egypt")? I wonder what it would do to our daily walk if we periodically the greatness of the time when "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:13-14+) Would it not make us more zealous and motivated to walk blamelessly, being diligent to keep God's precepts enabled by His Holy Spirit? Just thinking! Read the opening lines of the great psalm....

Psalm 119:1+ Aleph. How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD.  
2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart. 3 They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways. 4 You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep them diligently. 5 Oh that my ways may be established To keep Your statutes!

**And none shall appear before Me empty-handed** - NLT = "No one may appear before me without an offering." **Before Me** is literally "My face." This is repeated in Ex 34:20+ after the covenant is renewed - "None shall appear before Me empty-handed." Why? Because it all belonged to God and this was a symbolic way (from the heart) of acknowledging His gracious and abundant provision. It is notable that this same phrase empty-handed was used in Exodus 3:21+ when God explained to Moses at the burning bush what He would do for Israel when He delivered them from Egypt - "I will grant (DIVINE PROMISE) this people favor (Lxx - **charis** = grace) in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go **empty-handed**." So from the very beginning Yahweh had in effect "filled their hands" and so it was only fitting to return a portion to Him what He had given them.

**Alan Cole** adds "Since each feast corresponded to some harvest activity, this command was easy to fulfil, by the general rule of offering of first-fruits (verse 19). Unleavened bread, for instance, fell at the beginning of barley harvest. Harvest, or 'weeks', was seven weeks later, squarely in wheat harvest. Ingathering (or 'booths', or 'tabernacles') was the 'harvest home' in autumn, when grapes and olives were all gathered in. The agricultural calendar ended then, with the cessation of all agrarian activity for the winter. (Ibid)

**Rayburn** - The feasts of Israel's liturgical calendar were related to the cycles of nature and then further related to events in salvation history. It was this latter feature that lifted them above the seasonal harvest feasts of other ancient Near Eastern peoples. It is sometimes argued that we shouldn't celebrate Christmas or Easter because they originated from pagan feasts, or, at least, were observed at the same time, or as substitutions for pagan feasts. But that was true of the feasts of the OT law. Here is the Lord redeeming the culture and putting the natural practices of human beings to better use. Passover and Unleavened Bread came at the beginning of the barley harvest – the first grain harvest of the year (April) – and provided a break before the heavy work of the summer began. [Ellison, 133] But it also was a dramatic recreation of the history of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

#### **Related Resources:**

- [The Feast of Unleavened Bread](#)
- [What are the different Jewish festivals in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [How do the elements of the Passover Seder point to Christ?](#)

**Exodus 23:16 "Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field."**

NET Exodus 23:16 "You are also to observe the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors that you have sown in the field, and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you have gathered in your harvest out of the field.

NLT Exodus 23:16 "Second, celebrate the Festival of Harvest, when you bring me the first crops of your harvest."Finally, celebrate the Festival of the Final Harvest at the end of the harvest season, when you have harvested all the crops from your fields.

ESV Exodus 23:16 You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

- **feast of harvest:** Ex 22:29 34:22 Lev 23:9-21 Nu 28:26-31 De 16:9-12 Ac 2:1
- **ingathering:** Ex 34:22 Lev 23:34-44 Nu 29:12-39 De 16:13-15 Ne 8:14-18 Zec 14:16-19 Joh 7:2,37
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FEASTS OF HARVEST AND INGATHERING

**Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field-** (See [description below](#)) **The Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits** is also known as the **Feast of Weeks** (shābu'ot in Hebrew - Ex 34:22) and **Pentecost** (Acts 2:1+) because the festival is celebrated fifty days ("pente-" = 50) after 'the Sabbath of Passover' (Lev. 23:15- 16).

**Currid** - It is also held seven weeks to the day after the sickle has first been put to the grain (Dt. 16:9). The purpose of the celebration is to recognize Yahweh as the provider of crops, and that he is deserving of the firstfruits of produce. The rituals of the feast are described in Leviticus 23:15–22 and Deuteronomy 26:1–11.

**Bush on The Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits** - When they offered two loaves of first-fruits, Lev. 23:17, called in Ex. 34:22, 'the feast of weeks (or sevens)', because it was seven weeks or forty-nine days from the feast of unleavened bread, and occurring on the fiftieth day, was thence called the Pentecost, a Greek word signifying fifty. This was properly the harvest festival, in which they were to offer thanksgiving to God for the bounties of the harvest, and to present unto him the first fruits thereof in bread baked of the new corn (wheat), Lev. 23:14–21, Num. 28:26–31. As the period of this festival coincided with that of the giving of the Law from Mount Sinai, which was fifty days after the Passover, it is usually spoken of as commemorative of that event, Just as the feast of the Tabernacles is of their dwelling in tents for forty years during their sojourn in the wilderness.

**Also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field-** (See [description below](#)) **The Feast of the Ingathering** IS also referred to as the **Feast of Booths** (Lev 23:34, Dt 16:13, 16), the **Feast of Tabernacles**, (Lev 23:34KJV), the **Festival of Temporary Shelters** (Lev 23:34NET), or the **Feast of Sukkot** (Succoth means "booths"). The time phrase end of the year is not the end of the normal Jewish calendar but refers to the end of the agricultural year as this festival marked the time of the final ingathering of the grape harvest. Feast of Tabernacles

**NET Note** - The rendering **booths** (cf. NAB, NASB, NRSV) is probably better than the traditional **tabernacles** in light of the meaning of the term sukkah, "hut, booth", but "booths" are frequently associated with trade shows and craft fairs in contemporary American English. The nature of the celebration during this feast as a commemoration of the wanderings of the Israelites after they left Egypt suggests that a translation like "temporary shelters" is more appropriate.

**Bush - The feast of ingathering.** Called also the 'Feast of Tabernacles,' Lev. 23:34. Deut. 16:13. This was the festival of gratitude for the fruitage and vintage, commencing on the evening of the fourteenth day of the seventh month, or October, called here **'the end of the year.'** It continued seven whole days until the twenty-first, and then received the addition of the eighth day, which had probably in ancient times been the wine-press feast of the Israelites. During these eight days the Israelites dwelt in booths, formed of green branches interwoven together, which in the warm region of Palestine answered extremely well, as in October the weather is usually dry.—It may be remarked in regard to all these festivals, that the original term by which the appointment is expressed is תָּחַג tahag, from חָג hagag, which signifies to go round in a circle, and thence in its religious application to move round in circular

dances. As this was no doubt in early ages one of the leading features of their religious festivals, the term came in process of time to signify in a general way the celebration of a religious feast or solemnity. The idea, however, is prominent that these were to be seasons of joy and rejoicing; that a sanctified hilarity was to be regarded as a part of the duty connected with these festive seasons. The fact affords us an abundant indication of the Mosaic system from the charge of sullen gloom and cheerless austerity in its rites and services.

#### **Related Resource:**

- [What are the different Jewish festivals in the Bible?](#)

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#### **Question: "[What is the Feast of Weeks?](#)"**

**Answer:** Described in Leviticus 23, The Feast of Weeks is the second of the three "solemn feasts" that all Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem to attend (Exodus 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deuteronomy 16:16). This important feast gets its name from the fact that it starts seven full weeks, or exactly 50 days, after the Feast of Firstfruits. Since it takes place exactly 50 days after the previous feast, this feast is also known as "Pentecost" (Acts 2:1), which means "fifty."

Each of three "solemn feasts"—Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—required that all able-bodied Jewish males travel to Jerusalem to attend the feast and offer sacrifices. All three of these feasts required that "firstfruit" offerings be made at the temple as a way of expressing thanksgiving for God's provision. The Feast of Firstfruits celebrated at the time of the Passover included the first fruits of the barley harvest. The Feast of Weeks was in celebration of the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles involved offerings of the first fruits of the olive and grape harvests.

Since the Feast of Weeks was one of the "harvest feasts," the Jews were commanded to "present an offering of new grain to the Lord" (Leviticus 23:16). This offering was to be "two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah" which were made "of fine flour . . . baked with leaven." The offerings were to be made of the first fruits of that harvest (Leviticus 23:17). Along with the "wave offerings" they were also to offer seven first-year lambs that were without blemish along with one young bull and two rams. Additional offerings are also prescribed in Leviticus and the other passages that outline how this feast was to be observed. Another important requirement of this feast is that, when the Jews harvested their fields, they were required to leave the corners of the field untouched and not gather "any gleanings" from the harvest as a way of providing for the poor and strangers (Leviticus 23:22).

To the Jews, this time of celebration is known as Shavuot, which is the Hebrew word meaning "weeks." This is one of three separate names that are used in Scripture to refer to this important Jewish feast. Each name emphasizes an important aspect of the feast as well as its religious and cultural significance to both Jews and Christians. Besides being called the Feast of Weeks in Leviticus 23, this special feast celebration is called the "Day of the Firstfruits" in Numbers 28:26 and the "Feast of Harvest" in Exodus 23:16.

The Feast of Weeks takes place exactly 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits. It normally occurs in late spring, either the last part of May or the beginning of June. Unlike other feasts that began on a specific day of the Hebrew calendar, this one is calculated as being "fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:15–16; Deuteronomy 16:9–10).

Like other Jewish feasts, the Feast of Weeks is important in that it foreshadows the coming Messiah and His ministry. Each and every one of the seven Jewish Feasts signifies an important aspect of God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Jesus was crucified as the "Passover Lamb" and rose from the grave at the Feast of Firstfruits. Following His resurrection, Jesus spent the next 40 days teaching His disciples before ascending to heaven (Acts 1). Fifty days after His resurrection and after ascending to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as promised (John 14:16–17) to indwell the disciples and empower them for ministry. The promised Holy Spirit arrived on the Day of Pentecost, which is another name for the Feast of Weeks.

The spiritual significances of the Feast of Weeks are many. Some see the two loaves of leavened bread that were to be a wave offering as foreshadowing the time when the Messiah would make both Jew and Gentile to be one in Him (Ephesians 2:14–15). This is also the only feast where leavened bread is used. Leaven in Scripture is often used symbolically of sin, and the leavened bread used in the Feast of Weeks is thought to be representative of the fact that there is still sin within the church (body of Christ) and will be until Christ returns again.

On the Day of Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, the "firstfruits" of the church were gathered by Christ as some 3,000 people heard Peter present the gospel after the Holy Spirit had empowered and indwelt the disciples as promised. With the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the first fruits of God's spiritual harvest under the New Covenant began. Today that harvest continues as people continue to be saved, but there is also another coming harvest whereby God will again turn His attention back to Israel so that "all of Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). (Source: [Gotquestions](#))

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**Question: "[What is the Feast of Tabernacles / Booths / Sukkot?](#)"**

**Answer:** The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths and Sukkot, is the seventh and last feast that the Lord commanded Israel to observe and one of the three feasts that Jews were to observe each year by going to “appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose” (Deuteronomy 16:16). The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles can be seen in how many places it is mentioned in Scripture. In the Bible we see many important events that took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. For one thing, it was at this time that Solomon’s Temple was dedicated to the Lord (1 Kings 8:2).

It was also at the Feast of Tabernacles that the Israelites, who had returned to rebuild the temple, gathered together to hear Ezra proclaim the Word of God to them (Nehemiah 8). Ezra’s preaching resulted in a great revival as the Israelites confessed their sins and repented of them. It was also during this Feast that Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–39).

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place on the 15th of the Hebrew month Tishri. This was the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar and usually occurs in late September to mid-October. The feast begins five days after the Day of Atonement and at the time the fall harvest had just been completed. It was a time of joyous celebration as the Israelites celebrated God’s continued provision for them in the current harvest and remembered His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness.

As one of the three feasts that all “native born” male Jews were commanded to participate in, the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned multiple times in Scripture, sometimes called the Feast of the Ingathering, the Feast to the Lord, or the Feast of Booths (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:13). As one of the pilgrim feasts (when Jewish males were commanded to go to Jerusalem), it was also the time when they brought their tithes and offerings to the Temple (Deuteronomy 16:16). With the influx of people coming to Jerusalem at that time, we can only imagine what the scene must have been like. Thousands upon thousands of people coming together to remember and celebrate God’s deliverance and His provision, all living in temporary shelters or booths as part of the requirements of the feast. During the eight-day period, so many sacrifices were made that it required all twenty-four divisions of priests to be present to assist in the sacrificial duties.

We find God’s instructions for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23, given at a point in history right after God had delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt. The feast was to be celebrated each year on “the fifteenth day of this seventh month” and was to run for seven days (Leviticus 23:34). Like all feasts, it begins with a “holy convocation” or Sabbath day when the Israelites were to stop working to set aside the day for worshiping God. On each day of the feast they were to offer an “offering made by fire to the Lord” and then after seven days of feasting, again the eighth day was to be “a holy convocation” when they were to cease from work and offer another sacrifice to God (Leviticus 23). Lasting eight days, the Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a Sabbath day of rest. During the eight days of the feast, the Israelites would dwell in booths or tabernacles that were made from the branches of trees (Leviticus 23:40–42).

The Feast of Tabernacles, like all the feasts, was instituted by God as a way of reminding Israelites in every generation of their deliverance by God from Egypt. Of course, the feasts are also significant in that they foreshadow the work and actions of the coming Messiah. Much of Jesus’ public ministry took place in conjunction with the Holy Feasts set forth by God.

The three pilgrim feasts where all Jewish males were commanded to “appear before the Lord in the place he chooses” are each very important in regards to the life of Christ and His work of redemption. We know with certainty that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are symbolic of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. Likewise, we know that Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the Feast of Weeks, was the time of Jesus’ bodily ascension. And most scholars would agree that the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of Christ’s Second Coming when He will establish His earthly kingdom.

There are also some who believe that it was likely during the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus was born. While we celebrate Christ’s birth on December 25, most scholars acknowledge that this tradition was begun in the fourth century AD by the Roman Catholic Church and that the exact day of Jesus’ birth is unknown. Some of the evidence that Jesus might have been born earlier in the year during the Feast of the Tabernacles includes the fact that it would be unlikely for shepherds to still be in the field with their sheep in December, which is in the middle of the winter, but it would have been likely they were in the fields tending sheep at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The strong possibility that Jesus was born at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles is also seen in the words John wrote in John 1:14. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The word John chose to speak of Jesus “dwelling” among us is the word tabernacle, which simply means to “dwell in a tent.”

Some believe it is very likely that John intentionally used this word to associate the first coming of Christ with the Feast of Tabernacles. Christ came in the flesh to dwell among us for a temporary time when He was born in the manger, and He is coming again to dwell among us as Lord of Lords. While it cannot be established with certainty that Jesus was born during the Feast of

Tabernacles, some believe there is a strong possibility the Feast of Tabernacles not only looks forward to His second coming but also reflects back on His first coming.

The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a special Sabbath day of rest. During the days of the feast all native Israelites were “to dwell in booths” to remind them that God delivered them out of the “land of Egypt” and to look forward to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would deliver His people from the bondage of sin. This feast, like all of the feasts of Israel, consistently reminded the Jews and should remind Christians as well that God has promised to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and deliver them from their enemies. Part of God’s deliverance for the Israelites was His provision and protection of them for the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness, cut off from the Promised Land. The same holds true for Christians today. God protects us and provides for us as we go through life in the wilderness of this world. While our hearts long for the Promised Land (heaven) and to be in the presence of God, He preserves us in this world as we await the world to come and the redemption that will come when Jesus Christ returns again to “tabernacle” or dwell among us in bodily form. (Source: [Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org))

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## **Stephen Eyre - God’s Time**

God built time spent with him into the Ten Commandments. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Ex 20:8). The purpose of this gift of time was to celebrate his creation of the world as well as his redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Deut 5:15).

In the course of a year five feasts were celebrated, two of which lasted a week. These feasts were Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in March/April, Pentecost and the Feast of Weeks in May, the Feast of Tabernacles in September/October, the Feast of Trumpets in late September and the Day of Atonement in early October.

Not only were days and weeks set aside, but years were holy as well. One year in seven, the sabbatical year, was devoted to rest and worship. Two consecutive years, a sabbath year every forty-ninth year followed by the Jubilee year in the fiftieth year, were holy times when all debts were forgiven and all slaves were set free.

What was the message of these feasts? God creates time, meets us in time and orders time. Therefore the use of time is to revolve around him. By observing those designated days, weeks and years, Israel was to experience the centrality of God over and over again. And their celebrations would teach them something essential about God. More than a burden, the days of rest were reminders of God’s saving care. They were true holidays (holy days). People were set free from toil and debts to rest, worship and celebrate.

Sadly, Israel missed the significance of this gift of holy time. Because the holy days were ignored, the nation was condemned by the prophets. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God commanded the wayward nation, “Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers” (Jer 17:22).

Daniel understood the essential issue. Living in pagan Babylon, he prayed three times a day—morning, noon and evening. He maintained his pattern, even when it got him thrown into the lions’ den. By Jesus’ day, the gift of holy time had been turned into a legalistic burden. People couldn’t cook or walk over a mile on the sabbath. The sabbath was no longer understood as protected time in which God could be worshiped and enjoyed.

Christians of the Middle Ages ordered time around worship. The day was ordered around the prayer times of Prime, Sext and Vespers. The week was organized around Sunday. The seasons were organized around the Christian festivals of Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. And the years were organized around the birth of Christ, B.C. and A.D. Churches kept the time because they had the only mechanical clocks.

Today we have lost the sense that time is ordered by God. Holidays are merely vacation times, and Sundays are days for sports and leisure. Christmas and Easter are times to exchange gifts. Our culture has lost any sense of making time to be with God. (Drawing Close to God)

**Exodus 23:17 "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.**

NET Exodus 23:17 At three times in the year all your males will appear before the Lord GOD.

NLT Exodus 23:17 At these three times each year, every man in Israel must appear before the Sovereign, the LORD.

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



- Ex 34:23 De 12:5 16:16 31:11 Ps 84:7 Lu 2:42
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Exodus 34:23; 24+ "Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel.  
24 "For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and **no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.**

### ATTENDANCE AT THREE ANNUAL FEASTS IS MANDATORY

**Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD-** Ex 23:14 does not specifically state the males must attend but now that is specified (also in Ex 34:23+). While the attendance by men was mandatory it is clear that women also attended (Dt 16:11-14). Note the parallel passage above in which God promises supernatural protection for their homesteads while the men are gone to Jerusalem to attend the feasts (before they entered the promised land this of course would not be necessary). What does it mean to appear before? Where did Jehovah dwell? In the midst of the camp during the wilderness wanderings, in the tabernacle once they entered the promised land and then finally in Solomon's (Yahweh's) Temple in Jerusalem. So they would bring their sacrifices (**And none shall appear before Me empty-handed - v15**) **before the Lord God** by presenting themselves in whichever venue was in existence at that time in history.

**MacArthur** - Requiring all males to be present for 3 specified feasts at a central sanctuary would have had a socially and religiously uniting effect on the nation. The men must trust the Lord to protect their landholdings while on pilgrimage to the tabernacle (cf. Ex 34:23, 24). All 3 feasts were joyful occasions, being a commemoration of the Exodus (the Feast of Unleavened Bread), an expression of gratitude to God for all the grain He had provided (the Feast of the Harvest), and a thanksgiving for the final harvest (the Feast of Ingathering). (MSB)

**Bush** on Lord God - Heb. יהוה אל פני האדון el penē ha-Adon Yehovah, (**BEFORE** LITERALLY = ) to the face of the Lord Jehovah.

**NET Note** - Here the divine Name reads in Hebrew הַאֲדֹנִי יְהוָה (ha'adon yéhvah), which if rendered according to the traditional scheme of "LORD" for "Yahweh" would result in "Lord LORD." A number of English versions therefore render this phrase "Lord GOD," and that convention has been followed here.

**Rayburn** - Since each feast was celebrated at a harvest, the commandment not to come empty-handed was easy to fulfill.

**Exodus 23:18 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning.**

NET Exodus 23:18 "You must not offer the blood of my sacrifice with bread containing yeast; the fat of my festal sacrifice must not remain until morning.

NLT Exodus 23:18 "You must not offer the blood of my sacrificial offerings together with any baked goods containing yeast. And do not leave the fat from the festival offerings until the next morning.

ESV Exodus 23:18 "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning.

- **blood:** Ex 12:8,15 34:25 Lev 2:11 7:12 De 16:4
- **remain:** Ex 12:10 Lev 7:15
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread**- Some suggest these regulations apply only to the Passover, but others think they refer to all three.

**Cole** writes that this regulation regarding blood "may be either a general sacrificial regulation, or a specific reference to passover. Leaven seems to have been a stock symbol of evil (Matt. 16:6) since, like fermentation of grapes, it symbolized corruption."

**Currid** - "The blood of a sacrifice is not to be mixed with leavened bread—although that practice is strictly forbidden in connection with Passover (Exod. 34:25; Deut. 16:4), here the prohibition applies to all the major festivals. The law probably means that all



leavened bread must be removed from the house during the festival periods."

**Guzik** - Since leaven was a symbol of sin and corruption, atoning blood could never be offered with leavened bread.

**Kaiser** - "It means that individual Israelites were not to kill the Passover lamb while leaven was still in their houses."

See the very interesting explanation by **Douglas Stuart** of why blood was not to be offered with leavened bread.

**Nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning**- NLT "And do not leave the fat from the festival offerings until the next morning."

**Currid** writes that "the fat of a sacrifice is to be consumed before the break of the next day. That law is also specifically related to Passover, but now it becomes foundational to the sacred calendar of Israel."

**Guzik** - If atonement was to be regarded as a complete work, it must be wholly offered unto the LORD—everything must be given to God, not a portion reserved for later. This especially included the fat of My sacrifice, the best portion of the sacrificed animal.

**Cole** - The fat of my feast: that is, the special portion of the victim that belonged to God. Were it left till morning, it might be rancid, and so unfit for sacrifice. Any unused portion of the passover victim must be burnt in the same night (Exod. 12:10). Compare the parallel verse in Exodus 34:25, and the general rule of Leviticus 19:6.

**Rayburn** - Here leaven may be symbolic of corruption and so of impurity as it is sometimes, but by no means always, is in the New Testament. Interestingly, there were offerings that were to be offered with leavened bread (e.g. the fellowship offering, Lev. 7:13). The fat, the richest part of the meat was the portion that belonged to God. If left over night it might become rancid and so unfit as an offering to God. Care must be taken to give God the best. That commitment lies at the bottom of all true holiness of life.

**Exodus 23:19 "You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother."**

NET Exodus 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of your soil you must bring to the house of the LORD your God. "You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

NLT Exodus 23:19 "As you harvest your crops, bring the very best of the first harvest to the house of the LORD your God."You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

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

LXE Exodus 23:19 Thou shalt bring the first-offerings of the first-fruits of thy land into the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a lamb in its mother's milk.

KJV Exodus 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

NIV Exodus 23:19 "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

ASV Exodus 23:19 The first of the first-fruits of thy ground thou shalt bring into the house of Jehovah thy God. Thou shalt not boil a kid in it mother's milk.

CSB Exodus 23:19 "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the house of the LORD your God. "You must not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

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

NRS Exodus 23:19 The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

YLT Exodus 23:19 the beginning of the first-fruits of thy ground thou dost bring into the house of Jehovah thy God; thou dost not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

- **the choice first fruits:** Ex 22:29 34:26 Lev 23:10-17 Nu 18:12,13 De 12:5-7 26:10 Ne 10:35 1Co 15:20 Rev 14:4
- **You are not to boil a young goat:** Ex 34:26 De 14:21 Pr 12:10 Jer 10:3

- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God** NLT = "As you harvest your crops, bring the very best of the first harvest to the house of the LORD your God."

**Guzik** - When Israel came into Canaan, they had a special responsibility to make a firstfruit offering to God, in addition to their regular firstfruit offering (Exodus 23:16). Giving God the first and the best honored Him as the Good Provider of all things.

**You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.**- The interpretation of this verse is uncertain. Some possibilities are mentioned below.

**John MacArthur** - Canaanite ritual, according to excavations at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), called for sacrificial kids to be boiled in milk, but the damaged Ugaritic text does not clearly specify mother's milk. If it were so, then it is understandable that Israel was being prevented from copying pagan idolatrous ritualism. Another option suggests that the dead kid was being boiled in the very substance which had sustained its life; hence the prohibition. Until more archeological information comes to light, the specific religious or cultural reason remains as supposition.

**Guzik** - This strange-sounding command was actually a command to not imitate a common pagan fertility ritual. "It was a custom of the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid and boil it in the milk of its dam; and then, in a magical way, to go about and besprinkle with it all their trees and fields, gardens and orchards; thinking by these means to make them fruitful, that they might bring forth more abundantly in the following year." (Cudworth cited in Clarke) But because of strange rabbinical interpretations, today this command is the reason why an observant Jew cannot eat a kosher cheeseburger. Observant Jews today will not eat milk and meat at the same meal (or even on the same plates with the same utensils cooked in the same pots), because the rabbis insisted that the meat in the hamburger may have come from the calf of the cow that gave the milk for the cheese, and the cheese and the meat would "boil" together in one's stomach, and be a violation of this command.. This law also speaks of keeping distance between a mother and the death of her offspring. Meyer says this law was meant "to inculcate a tender appreciation of the natural order, and of the relation subsisting between the mother and her offspring. It was against nature to make the mother an accomplice in the death of her child."

**John Currid** - The second statute of the verse is repeated in the Torah in Exodus 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21. Its basis is as a polemic against a Canaanite ceremony connected with a fertility cult. In the Ugaritic Texts, we read about an idolatrous custom of boiling a kid in its mother's milk as part of a festival. One text, called The Birth of the Gods Fair and Beautiful, says, 'Cook a kid in milk, a lamb(?) in butter.' The Hebrews were not to celebrate fertility in the same way as the pagans. So end the laws of the Book of the Covenant.

**Rayburn** - The prohibition against cooking a young goat in its mother's milk illustrates the importance of reading the Bible in its historical context. The rabbis never agreed on the reason for this law but nevertheless spun out regulations forbidding the eating of meat and dairy products in the same meal. Among the ultra orthodox Jews different crockery and cutlery must be used for meat and milk, and, where practicable, separate kitchens and refrigerators. [Ellison, 134] But this prohibition, archaeological evidence now almost certainly has shown, was, in effect, a command not to worship as the pagans did. It was a commandment requiring God's people to be separate in their worship. Like the commandment in Deut. 14:1 against cutting oneself or shaving the front of one's head for the dead, or the commandment against getting a tattoo, the objection is not to the act itself – which separated from its historical context in Canaanite usage is entirely unobjectionable – but to the act as part of pagan worship. An Ugaritic poem, describing a Canaanite rite, reads: "Cook a kid in the milk, a lamb in the cream." This was apparently part of a fertility rite thought to have some magical power, the kind of magic forbidden already in 22:18.

**Exodus 23:20 "Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.**

NET Exodus 23:20 "I am going to send an angel before you to protect you as you journey and to bring you into the place that I have prepared.

NLT Exodus 23:20 "See, I am sending an angel before you to protect you on your journey and lead you safely to the place I have prepared for you.

ESV Exodus 23:20 "Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

LXE Exodus 23:20 And, behold, I send my angel before thy face, that he may keep thee in the way, that he

may bring thee into the land which I have prepared for thee.

KJV Exodus 23:20 Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

NIV Exodus 23:20 "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.

ASV Exodus 23:20 Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

CSB Exodus 23:20 "I am going to send an angel before you to protect you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared.

NKJ Exodus 23:20 "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

NRS Exodus 23:20 I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

YLT Exodus 23:20 'Lo, I am sending a messenger before thee to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee in unto the place which I have prepared;

- **Angel:** Ex 3:2-6 Ex 14:19 32:34 33:2,14 Ge 48:16 Nu 20:16 Jos 5:13 6:2 Ps 91:11 Isa 63:9 Mal 3:1 1Co 10:9,10
- **prepared:** Ge 15:18 Mt 25:34 Joh 14:3
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Enns** summarizes Exodus 23:20-33 - Verses 20–26 fall into two parts, each with a command followed by consequences of either obeying or disobeying the command. (1) Listening to the angel will result in the nations being driven out of Canaan (vv. 20–23). (2) By worshiping Yahweh alone, Israel is promised well-being, long life, and offspring (vv. 24–26). The object of obedience in the first part is the angel, in the second it is God. Both are to be obeyed if Israel hopes to realize God's plan for them, which is possession and enjoyment of the land. (NIVAC-Ex)

**Alan Cole** introduces Exodus 23:20-22 which he entitles **"The 'Deuteronomic promise'.** This title may well be given to the present passage because its hortatory style and theological approach are so close to that seen best in Deuteronomy. Traces of this outlook can be found in Leviticus (19:9–17). We should therefore see it as a 'strain', a way of understanding God and his dealings with Israel. It runs right through the Old Testament, because it corresponds to one aspect of God himself. (TOTC-Ex)

**NET Note** on Exodus 23:20-22 - This passage has some of the most interesting and perplexing expressions and constructions in the book. It is largely promise, but it is part of the Law and so demands compliance by faith. Its points are: God promises to send his angel to prepare the way before his obedient servants (20–23); God promises blessing for his loyal servants (24–33). So in the section one learns that God promises his protection (victory) and blessing (through his angel) for his obedient and loyal worshippers.

**Behold** ([02009](#)) ([hinneh](#)) is an interjection meaning behold, look and generally directs one's mind to the following text, imploring the reader to give it special attention. In short, the Spirit is trying to arrest Israel's (and our) attention! As **Spurgeon** said **"Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

**I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way** - **Angel** is [malak](#) which means messenger, the Greek word [aggelos/angelos](#), in this context almost surely the "Divine Angel." Note that the an angel will guide and guard (protector). The question arises is this a created angel or the Creator of the angels, the [Angel of the LORD](#)? I personally believe this is a Theophany/Christophany.

Recall the earlier description of the [Angel of the LORD](#) -

The **LORD was going before** them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. Ex 13:21-22

Now compare Exodus 14:19

The **angel of God**, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar

of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.

Finally notice in Ex 23:21 God says "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him." In other words this "angel" has the authority to "pardon your transgression." I am not aware of any Scripture that assigns the authority to forgive sins to anyone other than God. Also the fact that God's Name is in Him, implying that it is intimately associated with Him also supports this as a Theophany, because while angels are messengers of God, I know of no Scripture where the Name of God is stated to be in a created angel.

**John MacArthur** agrees noting that "Neither Moses nor some other messenger or guide qualify for such descriptions. The key to victory in the upcoming takeover of the Land would not be Israel's military skill but the presence of this Angel, who is the pre-incarnate Christ." (MSB)

**McNeile** "The 'angel' is Jehovah Himself 'in a temporary descent to visibility for a special purpose.' " (ED: HOW WAS HE MANIFEST? TEXT DOES NOT SAY BUT CERTAINLY REASONABLE TO ASSUME THE [SHEKINAH GLORY CLOUD](#) THAT HAD BEEN LEADING THEM SINCE THEIR DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT.)

**Walter Kaiser** -The **angel** mentioned here cannot be Moses, God's messenger, or an ordinary angel; for the expressions are too high for any of these: "he will not forgive your rebellion" (who can forgive sin but God alone?) and "my Name is in him" (v.22). This must be the Angel of the Covenant (cf. Isa 63:9; Mal 3:1), the Second Person of the Trinity (EBC-Ex)

**Currid** comments - Some commentators believe the figure of an angel is merely symbolic for God's care of Israel. Cassuto comments that 'The angel stands only for the guidance and help of the Lord.' Yet an actual angelic being had been with Israel since the people left Egypt (see 3:2; 14:19). There is no reason to think that God would not continue to supply such protection until Israel entered the land of Canaan.

**David Thompson** - So God is promising that His angel, who is specifically Jesus Christ, is going to protect them and lead them. Just think of this. It is possible to actually have Jesus Christ as your Personal guide through life. In fact, it is interesting that when Jesus was here, He specifically said that he had protected and guarded His own and not one of His own perished (John 17:12). This is a great motivation for obeying the Word of God. When we choose to obey the Word of God, we have the personal protection and the guidance of God. ([Sermon](#))

**and to bring you into the place which I have prepared-** The **place** refers to Canaan. This is in a sense a prophetic promise that God would bring the sons of Israel into the promised land.

**Rayburn** - As you know, the Hebrew word for "**angel**" is simply the word "messenger." So the question is: is this a reference to the [Angel of the LORD](#)...or does it apply to an angel; or to Moses? Context alone can decide. However, we know elsewhere that "angel of the Lord" refers to the presence of Yahweh himself. The difficulty with taking it to refer to **an angel**, a supernatural being but not Yahweh himself, is that in all the rest of the history of Israel in the wilderness we are not given any report of this angel, of his speaking to Moses, or of his directing Israel on her journey. What is more, the presence of the Lord with his people was a primary theme in the first 20 chapters of Exodus. "[Angel of the LORD](#)" then is a way of the invisible God mediating his presence to his people.

**Exodus 23:21 "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.**

NET Exodus 23:21 Take heed because of him, and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him.

NLT Exodus 23:21 Pay close attention to him, and obey his instructions. Do not rebel against him, for he is my representative, and he will not forgive your rebellion.

ESV Exodus 23:21 Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.

LXE Exodus 23:21 Take heed to thyself and hearken to him, and disobey him not; for he will not give way to thee, for my name is on him.

KJV Exodus 23:21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.

NIV Exodus 23:21 Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive

your rebellion, since my Name is in him.

ASV Exodus 23:21 Take ye heed before him, and hearken unto his voice; provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgression: for my name is in him.

CSB Exodus 23:21 Be attentive to him and listen to his voice. Do not defy him, because he will not forgive your acts of rebellion, for My name is in him.

NKJ Exodus 23:21 "Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.

NRS Exodus 23:21 Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him.

YLT Exodus 23:21 be watchful because of his presence, and hearken to his voice, rebel not against him, for he beareth not with your transgression, for My name is in his heart;

- **Be on your guard:** Ps 2:12 Mt 17:5 Heb 12:25
- **do not be rebellious:** Nu 14:11 Ps 78:40,56 Eph 4:30 Heb 3:10,16
- **he will not pardon your transgression:** Ex 32:34 Nu 14:35 De 18:19 Jos 24:19 Jer 5:7 Heb 3:11 10:26-29 Heb 12:25 1Jn 5:16
- **my name:** Ex 3:14 34:5-7 Ps 72:19 83:18 Isa 7:14 9:6 42:8 45:6 57:15 Jer 23:6 Mt 1:23 Joh 5:23 10:30,38 14:9,10 Col 2:9 Rev 1:8 Rev 2:8,23 3:7
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Be on your guard before him** - **Be on guard** is [shamar](#), a command calling on Israel to keep watch, to guard, to be careful, to watch over carefully and is translated in the **Septuagint** with the verb [prosecho](#) (**pros** = toward + **echo** = hold) a command in the [present imperative](#) which means to continually hold one's mind toward something so as to take heed, pay attention, stay alert and remain on guard. In the NT **prosecho** often warns of some type of danger (usually spiritual danger but occasionally physical)! **Prosecho** is not a call simply to notice or sense something, but to be on guard against it because it is so harmful. **Prosecho** meant to moor a ship, to tie it up. **Prosecho** was also used to mean "to remain on course".

**THOUGHT on Angel of the LORD going before** - The same principle is true of our life with Jesus today. Not only is it true that Jesus goes before us to prepare a place for us in heaven (John 14:2-3), but the place we walk in today was prepared by God, and where we will walk tomorrow is prepared by Him also. (Guzik) Paul would add " we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which **God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**" (Eph 2:10+)

#### Related Resources:

- [The Will Of God](#)
- [Believers are God's Masterpiece, His Poietema](#)

**And obey his voice** - So in some way not stated the [Angel of the LORD](#) would communicate to Israel, probably through Moses. The Hebrew for **obey** is [shama](#) which means to hear, but clearly conveys more than "in one ear and out the other," but hear and heed, hear and obey what you have heard. The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates **shama** with [eisakouo](#) which is a command (like "be on guard" in the [present imperative](#)) which is a command to continually listen to attentively. **BDAG** adds the idea is "**to obey on the basis of having listened carefully** ([eisakouo](#) is used in similar contexts in the [Lxx](#) in Dt 1:43 = "So I spoke to you, but you would not **listen**. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD." and in Dt 9:23 = "you neither believed Him nor **listened** [[Lxx](#) = [eisakouo](#)] to His voice". In the end times at the end of the [Great Tribulation](#) Moses gives a prophetic promise - "When you are in distress [Time of Jacob's Distress] and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and **listen** [[Lxx](#) = [eisakouo](#)] to His voice. Dt 4:30+).

**Currid** - The verse opens with two imperatives: Israel is required to guard itself as the angel comes to guard Israel. Israel is to keep the word spoken by the heavenly being.

**Guzik** makes a good point that "It was characteristic of the Mosaic covenant that blessing was based almost purely on Israel's performance. If they obeyed, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they would be cursed.. Under the New Covenant we operate on a different principle. Though there are inevitable consequences of sin and God's loving correction for disobedience, we are blessed in Jesus, and not because we have been obedient (Ephesians 1:3+)."

**Do not be rebellious toward him** - CSB "Do not defy him." KJV "Do not provoke". Israel is commanded not to show resistance to

or defiance of the authority of the Angel! Sadly, Israel too often failed this "test" and in Nu 20:10 Moses was fed up and said "Listen now, you **rebels** (same word - [marah](#))." Moses described their rebellious attitude again declaring "Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled (same word - [marah](#)) against the command of the LORD your God...So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled (same word - [marah](#)) against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. (Dt 1:26, 43). And the "beat goes on!" The point is that in this passage they had clearly been warned told not to be rebellious toward the [Angel of the LORD](#). The Septuagint translates [marah](#) with the verb [apeitheo](#) ([present imperative with a negative](#)) calling for them to stop their perverse, willful disbelieving. In other words stop an action already in progress!

**Be rebellious** (04784)([marah](#)) means to be contentious, rebellious, and openly defiant to an authority by not obeying commands. Most of the uses of **marah** refer to rebellion by Israel or Judah against Jehovah (exceptions = Dt 21:18, 20, Job 17:2, Job 23:2, Pr 17:11). There is repeated focus on Israel's rebellion in the wilderness after being set free from slavery in Egypt (Nu 20:10, 24; 27:14; Dt 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23), summed up by the statement "You have been **rebellious** against the LORD from the day I knew you." (Dt 9:24) **Marah** is used with similar descriptive words - stubborn (Dt 21:18, 20, Jer 5:23, Ps 78:8), to grieve (Isa 63:10, Ps 78:40), to refuse (Isa 1:20, Neh 9:17), to transgress (Lam 3:42), to sin (Ps 78:17), to test (Ps 78:56), to rebel ([marad](#) in Neh 9:26), to reject or profane (Ezek 20:13).

**For he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him-** Their open rebellion would not be forgiven (cf Dt 1:26, 43). As **Cole** says "God's 'name' is the equivalent of his revealed nature" which supports the supernatural nature of the angel.

**NET Note** on **My name is in Him** - This means "the manifestation of my being" is in him (S. R. Driver, Exodus, 247). Driver quotes McNeile as saying, "The 'angel' is Jehovah Himself 'in a temporary descent to visibility for a special purpose.'"

**Cole** agrees that "'My name is in him seems to translate the 'messenger' into the supernatural realm, for God's 'name' is the equivalent of His revealed nature." (TOTC-Ex)

**Kaiser** - "Just as Yahweh's name resided in his temple (Deut 12:5, 11; 1 Kings 8:29), so this Angel with the authority and prestige of the name of God was evidence enough that God himself was present in his Son."

**Guzik** has an interesting note - We only know a few angels by name, and in a sense, Micha-el and Gabri-el each have the name of God in their name. But neither Michael nor Gabriel commanded this kind of obedience from Israel or presumed to sit in judgment over them. This is the specific Angel of the LORD, Jesus appearing in the Old Testament, before His incarnation in Bethlehem, who often speaks directly as the LORD.

**Rayburn** - As often in the Bible, rebellion against God's messenger is the same thing as rebellion against him. Because the messenger brings the Word of the Lord and it is that word that is being disobeyed, God himself is being defied. This statement, to be honest, makes it somewhat more difficult to identify the "messenger" or "angel of the Lord" with Yahweh himself because it seems to distinguish "him" from the "I" of v. 1. Are we left then with Moses? But verses 20-21 don't sound like they refer to a mere man and "angel of the Lord" elsewhere in the Bible and on a number of occasions does unmistakably refer to the Lord's presence made known to men. As one scholar puts it, Yahweh and his angel are "obviously one and the same." [Von Rad in Durham, 335] Another says, "in the final analysis, the angel of God is simply God's action." [Cassuto, 305] It is also a way, as we saw in Genesis, of referring to a theophany, a visible appearance of God. So, however unusual a way of speaking, the total context seems to require us to understand "angel of the Lord" as the Lord's presence itself.

**Exodus 23:22 "But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries."**

ET Exodus 23:22 But if you diligently obey him and do all that I command, then I will be an enemy to your enemies, and I will be an adversary to your adversaries.

NLT Exodus 23:22 But if you are careful to obey him, following all my instructions, then I will be an enemy to your enemies, and I will oppose those who oppose you.

ESV Exodus 23:22 "But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

NIV Exodus 23:22 If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.

ASV Exodus 23:22 But if thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an



enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

CSB Exodus 23:22 But if you will carefully obey him and do everything I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

NKJ Exodus 23:22 "But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

NRS Exodus 23:22 But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

- **an enemy:** Ge 12:3 Nu 24:9 De 30:7 Jer 30:20 Zec 2:8 Ac 9:4,5
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A CRITICAL CONDITIONAL CLAUSE

**But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say** - The negative was do not rebel which contrasts with the positive, obey. The condition is hear and obey what Jehovah says to do. This section shows that God's blessings to Israel were conditioned on faith and obedience.

**THOUGHT** - As the old hymn says "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, then to trust and obey." Play [Trust and Obey](#).

**Kaiser** - Obedience to the Angel would result in all of the blessings listed in the text. Israel was commanded: "Do not rebel against him" (v.21); yet they did just that (ED: IN THE FOLLOWING NOTE THAT REBELLION AGAINST GOD EQUATES WITH UNBELIEF!)

Numbers 14:11 The LORD said to Moses, '**How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me**, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?

Psalms 78:17 **Yet they still continued to sin against Him, To rebel against the Most High in the desert.**

Psalms 78:40 **How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness** And grieved Him in the desert!

Psalms 78:56 **Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God And did not keep His testimonies,**

**ESV Study Bible** on how they might have heard **his voice** - When Joshua finally leads the people into the land, he meets a figure outside Jericho referred to as "the commander of the army of the LORD" who speaks nearly identical words as those spoken to Moses at the burning bush (see 3:2; Josh. 5:13–15); both his title and drawn sword seem to identify him with the angel who has protected Israel (see Ex. 14:19) and who is promised here to go before them into Canaan (see also Ex 33:2).

**Currid** - The 'if ... then' clause is emphatic. In Hebrew when a conditional sentence is followed by an infinitive absolute / imperfect construction it lays great weight on the action—hence the translation 'diligently'. The repetition of synonymous words in parallel, i.e. 'enemy' / 'enemies' and 'adversary' / 'adversaries', also adds considerable force to the sentence.

**then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries** - This is a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham "I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse." (Ge 12:3+). The promise is Israel will experience victory over their enemies as a result of her obedience to Jehovah.

**David Thompson** - If God's people obey God, His people's enemies will be His enemies. 23:22 Think about this for a moment. If God's people obey Him, then their enemies become God's enemies. If you are obeying God, leave your enemies to God because He will take care of every one of them. Now at this point, Israel had no way of knowing who all her enemies would be anymore than we can know who all our enemies will be. But it doesn't matter who or what the enemy, as long as we are obeying God's Word, He fights for us. ([Sermon](#))

This makes me think of Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

**Exodus 23:23 "For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.**

NET Exodus 23:23 For my angel will go before you and bring you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will destroy them completely.

NLT Exodus 23:23 For my angel will go before you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, so you may live there. And I will destroy them completely.

ESV Exodus 23:23 "When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out,

LXE Exodus 23:23 For my angel shall go as thy leader, and shall bring thee to the Amorite, and Chettite, and Pherezite, and Chananite, and Gergesite, and Evite, and Jebusite, and I will destroy them.

KJV Exodus 23:23 For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

NIV Exodus 23:23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

ASV Exodus 23:23 For mine angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: and I will cut them off.

CSB Exodus 23:23 For My angel will go before you and bring you to the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

NKJ Exodus 23:23 "For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

NRS Exodus 23:23 When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out,

YLT Exodus 23:23 'For My messenger goeth before thee, and hath brought thee in unto the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, and I have cut them off.

- **Angel:** Ex 23:20 32:2 Isa 5:13
- **thee in:** Ex 3:17 Ge 15:19-21 34:2 Jos 24:8-11
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites** - This land is the "place which I have prepared." (Ex 23:20).

**And I will completely destroy them** - Note God says He will utterly destroy them, but He would use the Israelites to bring about this objective, just as He did with the Amalekites in Exodus 17:8-16+. This was to be the fate of the pagan people and their false gods - utter destruction. Complete obliteration and eradication.

**Thompson** makes a good point - Now the promise of God is that if Israel would obey the Word, He would "completely destroy" these people and rout them out of the land. Obviously something has gone wrong, because Israel has never lived in the land out from under the threat of various land intruders, who still are in it. ([Sermon](#))

**Kaiser** comments that completely destroy them means God would "remove from their national, not necessarily personal, existence; for surely David had Hittites in his army (2 Sa 23:39) and was friendly with a Jebusite (2 Sa 24:18-24). It was the worship and practices of the gods of these nations that were strictly forbidden. (EBC-Ex)

**Guzik** - God did not bring Israel out of Egypt to leave them in the wilderness. His plan was to bring them into His land of promise and abundance. Though there were mighty nations in Canaan, His Angel would bring an obedient Israel into the Promised Land.

**Exodus 23:24 "You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces.**

NET Exodus 23:24 "You must not bow down to their gods; you must not serve them or do according to their practices. Instead you must completely overthrow them and smash their standing stones to pieces.

NLT Exodus 23:24 You must not worship the gods of these nations or serve them in any way or imitate their evil practices. Instead, you must utterly destroy them and smash their sacred pillars.

ESV Exodus 23:24 you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces.

LXE Exodus 23:24 Thou shalt not worship their gods, nor serve them: thou shalt not do according to their works, but shalt utterly destroy them, and break to pieces their pillars.

KJV Exodus 23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.

NIV Exodus 23:24 Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

ASV Exodus 23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works; but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and break in pieces their pillars.

CSB Exodus 23:24 You must not bow down to their gods or worship them. Do not imitate their practices. Instead, demolish them and smash their sacred pillars to pieces.

NKJ Exodus 23:24 "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.

NRS Exodus 23:24 you shall not bow down to their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices, but you shall utterly demolish them and break their pillars in pieces.

YLT Exodus 23:24 'Thou dost not bow thyself to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their doings, but dost utterly devote them, and thoroughly break their standing pillars.

- **shall not:** Ex 20:5
- **nor do according to their deeds:** Lev 18:3,26-30 De 12:30,31 2Ch 33:2,9 Ps 101:3 106:35-38 Eze 16:47
- **overthrow:** Ex 32:20 34:13,14 Nu 33:52 De 7:5,25,26 12:3 2Ch 34:3-7
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **DON'T BOW DOWN BUT BREAK DOWN!**

**You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds-** Keep in mind that these instructions were given to the first generation that had come out of Egypt, and because of unbelief would not be allowed into the Promised Land but would be forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Notice the pattern - what you bow down to (your idol) you end up serving and even imitating their godless practices! The Canaanites were deeply depraved because their so-called gods were deeply depraved. As we have repeatedly stressed their gross idolatry was associated with an even more abominable immorality! And thus the clear negative command. **Worship** is [shachah](#) which means bow down as does the Greek verb [proskuneo](#). **Serve** is [abad](#) which can mean to become a slave of and the Greek is [latreuo](#) meaning to serve by carrying out religious duties and so to venerate these idols.

**THOUGHT** - Be very careful what you "bow down to," because it will soon be your master! All unsaved souls sadly are forced to "bow down" to [Master Sin](#) (personified in Romans 6-7), regarding which Paul commanded believers "**do not let sin reign** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts (SIN WILL CONTINUALLY TEMPT WITH STRONG DESIRES TO GRATIFY YOUR FALLEN FLESH, IN EFFECT BOWING DOWN TO THE IDOL OF "SELF")," (Ro 6:12+).

**Currid** - Most worship, especially in Canaan, occurred at 'high places', sacred sites where the pagans erected altars for sacrifice, 'sacred standing stones' (massēbōt in Hebrew) and idols (see 1 Ki 14:23). God strictly forbids Israel to worship or serve these gods, or to participate in any way with the rituals of those people.

**David Thompson** - God's people are not to worship false gods but destroy them. 23:24 This is a key demand of God. God keeps repeating do not worship some false deity. This was the first of the Ten Commandments and God has brought this up multiple times. Why? This was a big threat to Israel and God knew it. ([Sermon](#))

**But** - Term of contrast. Don't bow to them but break them!

**You shall utterly overthrow them and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces - Utterly overthrow** (see below on [haras](#); Lxx = [suntribo](#)) God follows the negative command with two positive commands to positively eradicate the pagan gods and their

abominable places of worship. To leave traces would make the Israelites vulnerable to temptation to indulge in the sensual practices of the pagans. And so the call was for complete destruction not just of the pagan gods but the pagan people who followed those gods. In the next chapter Moses will set up 12 **pillars** Ex 24:4 as a memorial. Mark it down -- what God means for good, Satan will always attempt to counterfeit!

**G Campbell Morgan** makes a pithy statement - "Concerning the people to be driven out, it is worthy of note that this paragraph shows that 'their gods' were their undoing. Everything in the life of a man or a nation depends on the character of its worship."

**George Bush** -The divine Speaker is here commanding the total excision of all the memorials of that vile idolatry, which would be likely to seduce his people from their allegiance to him. It was enjoining upon them the same spirit with that which afterwards prompted the convicted conjurors to 'burn their books,' Acts, 19:19.

**Alan Cole** on **sacred pillars** - literally 'standing (stones)' or 'orthostats'. These upright stones are often found in groups of ten at the Canaanite sanctuaries (Gezer and Taanach, for instance). In Exodus 24:4 Moses set up twelve, to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. In patriarchal days their use had been innocent enough (Gen. 28:18), but not now, in the context of Canaanite Baal-worship. As in Hinduism, the stone probably represented the male principle in the fertility cult, while the tree represented the female-principle.

**NET Note** - these long stones were erected to represent the abode of the numen (a spiritual force or influence often identified with a natural object, phenomenon, or place) or deity. They were usually set up near the altar or the high place. To destroy these would be to destroy the centers of Canaanite worship in the land.

**Kaiser** on **sacred pillars** - These *maššēbôt* apparently were free-standing stones that were associated with the veneration of deities, particularly the male deity. Examples of these stones have been found at Gezer, Byblos, Ras Shamra, and especially Hazor, where one was found with an offering at its base by the entrance to an important building in the Canaanite citadel

**John MacArthur** on **break their sacred pillars** - Stone markers of pagan shrines were absolutely intolerable once the Land had been taken from the tribes just mentioned in the previous verse.

**Utterly overthrow** (break down, destroy, tear down) (02040)(**haras**) basically means to destroy by tearing down (e.g., cities = 2Sa 11:25, 2Ki 3:25, 1Chr 20:1, Isa 14:17; Lam 2:2, altars - Jdg 6:25, etc). **Haras** means break down, break through, broken down, destroyed. In Ex 19:21, 24 the *haras* is used by God to warn the people not to **break though** into the area surrounding Mt Sinai and as a result perish. The first use of *haras* is in Ex 15:7+, referring to the destruction of the Egyptian armies in the Red Sea. Israel was to destroy the Canaanites (Ex 23:24 = "utterly overthrow"; Lxx = *suntribo* = strictly rub hard together, hence smash or crush) and break up their idols.

**Break** (07665)(**shabar**) means to break in pieces, to shatter, to smash. The first biblical occurrence of *shabar* is in Ge 19:9, where the men of Sodom "pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door." In another use, God says "I will also break down your pride of power" (Lev 26:19). In Ezekiel 6:9 God describes how He has "been hurt (broken) by their adulterous hearts which turned away from" Him "and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols" (describing faithless Judah now in captivity in Babylon). The Lxx translates **shabar** in Ex 23:25 with a second use of the verb *suntribo* which means to cause destruction of something by making it come apart (by shattering, smashing or crushing).

**Pillars** (04676)(**matstsebah** from **natsab** = to take a stand) means something set upright, most often "a standing, unhewn block of stone utilized for religious and memorial purposes. After a powerful experience of the Lord in a dream, Jacob set up as a pillar the stone on which he had laid his head, in commemoration of the event (Ge 28:18, 22; cf. Ge 31:45; 35:20). Moses set up an altar and also twelve pillars at the base of Mount Sinai to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 24:4). These pillars were erected as monuments to God (Hos. 3:4); or, more commonly, to pagan deities (1 Ki. 14:23, Mic. 5:13). Many times in 2 Kings, the term refers to a sacred pillar that aided people in their worship of pagan gods, especially the Canaanite god Baal. In most of these passages, the sacred columns were used by Israelites, contrary to the Lord's prohibition concerning the worship of any other god (2 Ki. 3:2; 10:26, 27; 18:4; 23:14; cf. Hos. 10:1, 2; Mic. 5:13[12])." (Baker)

**Septuagint** in Ex 23:24 = **stèle** = a commemorative stone block or pillar, monument, pillar from the time of Hom. inscribed and used as a grave marker, or for commemoration of events, proclamation of decrees, recognition of personal achievements. Stèle is a block or slab, bearing an inscription; and so, 1. a gravestone, Hom., Att. 2. a block or slab, inscribed with record of victories, dedications, treaties, decrees, etc., Hdt., Att.; whether for honour, or for infamy, Hdt., Dem.:also the record itself, a contract, agreement, kata. th.n sth,lhn according to agreement, 3. a boundary post, Xen.:the turning-post at the end of the

racecourse,

**Matstsebah** refers to the obelisks which stood at the entrance to the temple of the Sun in the Egyptian city of Heliopolis (Jer. 43:13). According to Heroclitus (II.3), two of these pillars were a hundred cubits high and eight cubits across, and each was a single stone. The word is also used of the statues of Baal (2 Ki. 3:2) which were erected in the innermost recess of the Temple.

**Matstsebah** - 38x in 33v - obelisks(1), pillar(19), pillars(16), stump(2). Gen. 28:18; Gen. 28:22; Gen. 31:13; Gen. 31:45; Gen. 31:51; Gen. 31:52; Gen. 35:14; Gen. 35:20; Exod. 23:24; Exod. 24:4; Exod. 34:13; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 7:5; Deut. 12:3; Deut. 16:22; 2 Sam. 18:18; 1 Ki. 14:23; 2 Ki. 3:2; 2 Ki. 10:26; 2 Ki. 10:27; 2 Ki. 17:10; 2 Ki. 18:4; 2 Ki. 23:14; 2 Chr. 14:3; 2 Chr. 31:1; Isa. 6:13; Isa. 19:19; Jer. 43:13; Ezek. 26:11; Hos. 3:4; Hos. 10:1; Hos. 10:2; Mic. 5:13

**Holman Bible Dictionary - Pillar** - Stone monuments (Hebrew matstsebah) or standing architectural structures (Hebrew amudim ). 1. Stones set up as memorials to persons. Jacob set up a pillar on Rachel's grave as a memorial to her (Genesis 35:20 ). Because Absalom had no son to carry on his name, he set up a pillar and carved his name in it (2 Samuel 18:18 ). **Shrines both to the Lord and to false gods.** Graven images often were pillars set up as gods. God commanded Israel to break down such "images" (Hebrew matstseboth; Ex 23:24). The Canaanites erected pillars at their places of worship, and probably influenced Israelite practice. Archaeologists found pillars, at Gezer. Jacob set up a pillar following his dream (Genesis 28:18 ) and again when God spoke to him at Bethel (Genesis 35:9-15 ) as memorials of God's revelation. **Moses set up twelve pillars to commemorate the giving of the law to the tribes of Israel** (Exodus 24:4).

- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Pillar](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Pillars](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Pillar](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Pillar](#)
- King James Dictionary [Pillar](#)

**Exodus 23:25 "But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.**

NET Exodus 23:25 You must serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove sickness from your midst.

NLT Exodus 23:25 "You must serve only the LORD your God. If you do, I will bless you with food and water, and I will protect you from illness.

ESV Exodus 23:25 You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you.

LXE Exodus 23:25 And thou shalt serve the Lord thy God, and I will bless thy bread and thy wine and thy water, and I will turn away sickness from you.

KJV Exodus 23:25 And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

NIV Exodus 23:25 Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you,

ASV Exodus 23:25 And ye shall serve Jehovah your God, and he will bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

CSB Exodus 23:25 Worship the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. I will remove illnesses from you.

NKJ Exodus 23:25 "So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.

NRS Exodus 23:25 You shall worship the LORD your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from among you.

YLT Exodus 23:25 'And ye have served Jehovah your God, and He hath blessed thy bread and thy water, and I have turned aside sickness from thine heart;

- **But you shall serve:** De 6:13 10:12,20 11:13,14 13:4 28:1-6 Jos 22:5 24:14,15,21,24 1Sa 7:3 12:20,24 Jer 8:2 Mt 4:10
- **He will bless your bread:** De 7:13 28:5-8 Isa 33:16 Mal 3:10
- **I will remove sickness:** Ex 15:26 De 7:15 Ps 103:3 Isa 33:24
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE BLESSED CONTRAST

**But** - Term of contrast. This presents a striking contrast. You gotta serve somebody. And if they refused to serve the false gods, God gives them the only other option which is to serve the true and living God!

**ESV Study note** - Among the gods worshiped in both Egypt and Canaan were those believed to have control over crops, health, or fertility. The Lord made it clear through the signs in Egypt that he has power over all of life and he calls Israel to serve him alone,

**You shall serve the LORD your God** - It is implicit that Israel would worship and bow down before Jehovah (cf Ex 23:18-19). And as we saw above, the one you bow down to is the one you will serve. Worship always precedes service. **Serve** is [abad](#) which can mean to become a slave of Jehovah and the Greek is [latreuo](#) meaning to serve by carrying out religious duties and so to venerate Jehovah.

**THOUGHT** - You will serve someone, either God over the world or gods of this world! Jesus alluded to this when He declared "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.." (Mt 6:24+) Bob Dylan put this basic truth into song, [You Gotta Serve Somebody](#)! Dear reader, who is your master? Who are you serving? Believe in and serve Jesus now and you will be privileged to serve Him forever and ever. Amen!

**Bush** - Nothing can be more reasonable than the conditions which Jehovah imposes upon his people—that they should serve their own God, who was indeed the only true God, and have nothing to do with the gods of the devoted nations, which were no gods, and which they had no reason to respect. In doing this they would not only be acting the part of sound reason, but would assure themselves also of the special tokens of the divine blessing. They would be secure of the enjoyment of all desirable temporal prosperity. The blessing of God would crown their bread and their water, and make that simple fare more refreshing and nutritive than the richest dainties without it, while wasting sickness with its fearful train of evils, should be effectually banished from their borders.

**Thompson** - When God's people would finally get to the Promised Land, if they would obey Him and serve Him and worship Him according to His Word, He promised that He would bless Israel in eight specific ways. These would be real incentives for obeying God ([Sermon](#))

**And He will bless your bread and your water** - This is as basic as one's needs get - bread and water. God will provide, but in reality obedience would allow Israel to truly partake of the Milk and Honey of the Promised Land. Obedience would bring blessing (cf Dt 30:19). God would provide for their needs. **Bless** is [barak](#) meaning to honor one with divine favor and in Greek is [eulogeo](#) (in first person "I will bless") which speaks of God conferring favor or benefit (Acts 3:26+, Eph 1:3+).

**NET Note** - On this unusual clause B. Jacob says that it is the reversal of the curse in Genesis, because the "bread and water" represent the field work and ground suitability for abundant blessing of provisions (Exodus, 734).

**Kaiser** - The worship of God would affect the Israelites' water and food (v.25). No wonder the prophets connected a series of agricultural reverses with the judgment of God on a particular culture (e.g., Hag 1:5–11).

**Remember that whereas**  
**in the OT, God promised Israel a LAND,**  
**in the NT, He promises us a LIFE (in Christ)!**

**That life can be abundant,**  
**but it is still based on obedience.**

**And I will remove sickness from your midst** - And if they obeyed and served Jehovah, He would heal their sickness. **Remove** (sur) means to turn aside your sickness and Greek is [apostrepho](#) meaning to turn away, almost personifying "Sickness" as "knocking at the door" of your body and being turned away by divine power!



Recall God's promise in Ex 15:26+ where He uses the same word for **sickness** ([machalah](#)) "He said, **"If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases ([machalah](#)) on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer ([Jehovah Rapha](#))."** O, that Israel had ears to hear the LORD's words!

**Enns** - This is more than merely possessing the land; it is enjoying it and living life to its fullest. (Ibid)

**Cole** - God's blessing is here couched in material terms, easily understandable by ordinary men. The Creator promises food, health, fertility, and long life, to those who obey his laws. As a rough 'rule of thumb', this can be tested and found true at any level of civilization....it becomes clear to God's saints that the deepest of God's blessings are spiritual, not physical (Hab. 3:17, 18+): this brings us to the dawn of the New Testament.

**Exodus 23:26 "There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.**

NET Exodus 23:26 No woman will miscarry her young or be barren in your land. I will fulfill the number of your days.

NLT Exodus 23:26 There will be no miscarriages or infertility in your land, and I will give you long, full lives.

ESV Exodus 23:26 None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

LXE Exodus 23:26 There shall not be on thy land one that is impotent or barren. I will surely fulfil the number of thy days.

KJV Exodus 23:26 There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.

NIV Exodus 23:26 and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.

ASV Exodus 23:26 There shall none cast her young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.

CSB Exodus 23:26 No woman will miscarry or be childless in your land. I will give you the full number of your days.

NKJ Exodus 23:26 "No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

NRS Exodus 23:26 No one shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

YLT Exodus 23:26 there is not a miscarrying and barren one in thy land; the number of thy days I fulfil:

- **shall:** De 7:14 28:4 Job 21:10 Ps 107:38 144:13 Mal 3:10,11
- **the number:** Ge 25:8 35:29 1Ch 23:1 Job 5:26 42:17 Ps 55:23 90:10 Isa 65:20
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BLESSING FROM THE WOMB TO THE TOMB**

**There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land** - The blessing continues that Israel's obedience would guarantee fertility and birth of term children. Israel would be fruitful and multiply.

**Currid** has an excellent observation that "Much of the religious ritual of the ancient Near East is bent towards appeasing the gods so that they would ensure fertility for man and all that he owned. Acts such as temple prostitution and child sacrifice served to manipulate the deities so that productivity would result. Israel is not to participate in such activity—it is Yahweh, and Yahweh alone, who provides fertility for humans, animals and fields. This teaching is echoed in Deuteronomy 7:14." (Ibid)

**I will fulfill the number of your days** - A full lifespan! Here Jehovah promises the blessing of a long life. In short we see obedience by Israel would result in Jehovah's blessing from the womb to the tomb!

**Bush** - That is, thou shalt not be prematurely cut off before reaching that good old age, which in the ordinary course of things thou mayest expect to attain. This is the blessing of the righteous, as is said of Job 42:17, **And Job died, an old man and full of days,** where as 'the wicked live not half their day

Ps. 55:23 But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction; Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days. But I will trust in You.

[Spurgeon](#) - They were in heart murderers of others, and they became in reality self murderers. Doubt not that virtue lengthens life, and that vice tends to shorten it.

[NET Note](#) is interesting - No one will die prematurely; this applies to the individual **or the nation**. (ED: THEY DID "DIE" PREMATURELY! - NORTHERN 12 TRIBES INTO ASSYRIAN IN 722 BC AND JUDAH INTO BABYLON IN 586 BC) The plan of God to bless was extensive, if only the people would obey.

**Rayburn** - As often elsewhere in the Bible (the NT as well as the OT) food, health, fertility, and long life are promised as the blessings of a life of faithfulness to God's covenant. This, of course, needs to be set side by side with the Bible's honest acknowledgement of the sufferings of the righteous and the mysteries of life. Still, it was true then and is now that there is much present blessing in following the Lord and living according to his will.

**Exodus 23:27 "I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you."**

NET Exodus 23:27 "I will send my terror before you, and I will destroy all the people whom you encounter; I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

NLT Exodus 23:27 "I will send my terror ahead of you and create panic among all the people whose lands you invade. I will make all your enemies turn and run.

ESV Exodus 23:27 I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

LXE Exodus 23:27 And I will send terror before thee, and I will strike with amazement all the nations to which thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies to flee.

KJV Exodus 23:27 I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.

NIV Exodus 23:27 "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.

ASV Exodus 23:27 I will send my terror before thee, and will discomfit all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.

CSB Exodus 23:27 "I will cause the people ahead of you to feel terror and throw into confusion all the nations you come to. I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you in retreat.

NKJ Exodus 23:27 "I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

NRS Exodus 23:27 I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

YLT Exodus 23:27 My terror I send before thee, and I have put to death all the people among whom thou comest, and I have given the neck of all thine enemies unto thee.

- **my terror:** Ex 15:14-16 Ge 35:5 De 2:25 Dt 11:23,25 Jos 2:9-11 1Sa 14:15 2Ki 7:6 2Ch 14:14
- **throw into confusion:** De 7:23
- **backs:** Ps 18:40
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **OBEDIENCE TO GOD BRINGS DIVINE VICTORY**

These **I WILL** promises (notice "I will" 11x in 9v in Ex 23:22-31) are contingent upon Israel's obedience described in Ex 23:25. When Israel obeyed, God would be like a Warrior against her enemies.

**"The LORD is a warrior;  
The LORD is His name.**  
-- Exodus 15:3+

This promise is a foreshadowing which will be fulfilled in Jehovah's victory over Israel's enemies in the [Time of Jacob's Distress](#), the last days of the 3.5 year [Great Tribulation](#) when Zephaniah's great description will become a reality for the nation of Israel...

"The LORD your God is in your midst (SPEAKING OF THEIR MESSIAH), A **Victorious Warrior**. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (Zephaniah 3:17+, read Zeph 3:18-20)

**I will send My terror ahead of you** - God would lead the charge. The omnipotent God would be in charge of the terror! This harkens back to and is associated with Ex 23:22 "I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." [NET Note](#) says terror "has the thought of "panic" or "dread." God would make the nations panic as they heard of the exploits and knew the Israelites were drawing near." The best commentary on this is the description in Exodus 15:14-16+

"The peoples (pagan nations, Gentile nations) have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. 15 "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. 16 "**Terror** and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; Until Your people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.

**Alan Cole - My terror** explains the method that God will use to subdue the Canaanites before Israel: a divine panic will grip them.

**George Bush** - Will strike a panic terror into the inhabitants of Canaan before thine arrival, which shall facilitate the subsequent conquests. The words of the historian Josh. 2:9, 11, show how precisely this threatening was fulfilled.

**Positive example of terror** on the enemies of Israel when she obeyed

Deuteronomy 2:25 This day I will begin to put the **dread and fear of you** upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will tremble and be in anguish because of you.'

Deuteronomy 11:25 "No man will be able to stand before you; the LORD your God will lay the **dread of you and the fear of you** on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you.

Joshua 2:9 (Rahab the Harlot) said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the **terror of you** has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

**Negative example of terror** on Israel when she disobeyed

Deuteronomy 32:25 (WHEN ISRAEL SPURNED GOD FOR OTHER SO-CALLED GODS) 'Outside the sword will bereave, And inside **terror**— Both young man and virgin, The nursing with the man of gray hair.

**Terror** ([0367](#)) (eman from **ayom** = dreadful, terrible) means "fear, terror, dread, or horror. The basic meaning is that of fear. It is used to signify the dread of the darkness that fell on Abraham (Gen. 15:12); a fear of hostile opponents (Josh. 2:9; Ezra 3:3); the terror of the Lord's judgment (Ex. 15:16; 23:27; Job 9:34); dread of the wrath of an earthly king (Prov. 20:2); something fierce or fearsome (Job 39:20). In a metaphorical sense, it refers once to pagan idols (Jer. 50:38)." (Baker)

**Eman** - 17x in 17v - dread(2), fear(1), fearsome(1), terrible(1), terrified(1), terror(8), terrors(3). Gen. 15:12; Exod. 15:16; Exod. 23:27; Deut. 32:25; Jos. 2:9; Ezer. 3:3; Job 9:34; Job 13:21; Job 20:25; Job 33:7; Job 39:20; Job 41:14; Ps. 55:4; Ps. 88:15; Prov. 20:2; Isa. 33:18; Jer. 50:38

**And throw into confusion all the people among whom you come** - This promise ("I will" is implicit) is repeated in Deuteronomy - "But the LORD your God will deliver them before you, and **will throw them into great confusion** until they are destroyed." (De 7:23) The purpose of the **confusion** of the enemy was that they would be destroyed. **Confusion** is [hamam](#) (meaning first to make noise and then throw into confusion as used in Ex 14:24+ = The LORD "brought the army of the Egyptians into **confusion**." ) and in Greek is [existemi](#) which means literally the people's will stand out of themselves indicating they will be utterly amazed, astounded and confused by the nation of Israel!

**And I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you** - NLT "I will make all your enemies turn and run." Another **I will** promise. God will do this for Israel. Her enemies will turn and retreat in terror and dread of Israel. Compare the effect of the terror of Israel on Jericho and the surrounding lands = "all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you." (Josh 2:9).

**Currid** - The last clause literally reads, '**And I will give all your enemies to you, backward.**' This is 'a very pregnant expression' that highlights the flight of those people. The Torah translation issued by the Jewish Publication Society (1962) puts it this way: 'I will make all your enemies turn tail.'

**Rayburn** - "**My terror**" is an expression corresponding to the "angel of the Lord" (INDEED Ex 14:24<sup>+</sup>. At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud [THE MANIFESTATION OF THE ANGEL OF THE LORD] and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion."). It is as if "**terror**" were a vanguard marching in front of the hosts of Israel, as the angel of the Lord will go ahead of them in Ex 23:20.

**Exodus 23:28** "I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.

NET Exodus 23:28 I will send hornets before you that will drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite before you.

NLT Exodus 23:28 I will send terror ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites.

ESV Exodus 23:28 And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you.

LXE Exodus 23:28 And I will send hornets before thee, and thou shalt cast out the Amorites and the Evites, and the Chananites and the Chettites from thee.

KJV Exodus 23:28 And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

NIV Exodus 23:28 I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way.

ASV Exodus 23:28 And I will send the hornet before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

CSB Exodus 23:28 I will send the hornet in front of you, and it will drive the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites away from you.

NKJ Exodus 23:28 "And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.

NRS Exodus 23:28 And I will send the pestilence in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you.

YLT Exodus 23:28 'And I have sent the hornet before thee, and it hath cast out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee;

- **hornets:** De 7:20 Jos 24:11
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Hornet - Can Be up to 5.5 cm (2.16 inches)

**I will send hornets ahead of you** - This is almost an exact parallel of Ex 23:27 "'I will send My terror ahead of you." While this could be literal hornets, it could be a figurative description of the terror Jehovah sends. If you have ever been stung by even one hornet or wasp, you know that a swarm of hornets coming at you would be a terrifying sight! So either literally or figuratively, the result is terror in the enemies of Israel! Recall from Ex 23:23 God said " My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land." This would support that the terror was not literal hornets, but was the supernatural work of the Angel of the LORD. Clearly, the point is that Israel would be granted entrance to the promised land because of the grace and power of God going before her.

The Hebrew word for **hornet** is used only 2 other times in the OT...

Deuteronomy 7:20 "Moreover, the LORD **your God will send the hornet against them**, until those who are left and hide themselves from you perish.

Joshua 24:12 'Then **I sent the hornet before you** and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before

you, but not by your sword or your bow.

**Comment** - In this historical description (the other two uses are prophetic promises) there is no obvious Scriptural description of literal hornet attacks on the Canaanites, but that does not exclude literal hornets.

**Believer's Study Bible** note - The "hornet" may refer to (1) literal hornets, (2) a symbol of Pharaoh, (3) a sense of panic or despair caused by God, (4) a plague, or (5) an angel of the Lord (cf. Ex. 23:27, 28; Deut. 7:20). The point is that God did it.

**Adam Clarke** thinks the passage in Joshua supports literal hornets writing "'From Joshua 24:12, we find that two kings of the Amorites were actually driven out of the land by these hornets, so that the Israelites were not obliged to use either sword or bow in the conquest."

**John MacArthur on hornets** - Fear and panic did play a strategic role in the victories in Transjordan and Canaan (Nu 22:3; Jos 2:9, 11; 5:1; 9:24). An alternative non-figurative view is based upon the bee or wasp being a heraldic symbol of Egyptian pharaohs whose steady succession of military strikes into Canaan year after year God providentially used to weaken Canaan prior to the invasion by Israel. (MSB)

**Hornet** (06880) (tsirah from tsara/tsaraath - to scourge, to be stricken with leprosy) **Gilbrant** says "The noun **tsirāh** is perhaps derived from a verb that means "to scourge," "to strike," referring to the idea of piercing (stinging), which does not differ much from the idea of striking. The word is found only three times in the OT (Ex. 23:28; Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). Hornets and wasps in warm countries moved from place to place in large swarms and would often attack travelers."

**NIOTTE** - The word is found only 3x in the OT. All three vv. refer to God's driving out the peoples in Canaan before Israel. The reference may be taken literally, hornet's nest, wasp's nest; hornet, wasp (so LXX, σφήκια, wasp's nest; cf. σφήκν, a wasp), or figuratively. Yahweh's sting may well have been the dread/fear of him upon the inhabitants when they heard of what he did to Egypt. The report psychologically incapacitated them much as a wasp's/hornet's sting does (Josh 2:10–11). Exodus 23:27 (הַיָּמָה, terror) may support this view if considered to be parallel in thought with v. 28. But v. 28 could be a further (synthetic) development of v. 27, adding the means for the dread, terror. The hornet may be the messenger of the Lord, who leads Israel (Exod 23:20). P-B The LXX translates צִרְעָה each time with σφήκια. (**sphekia** = wasps' nest) In Late Hebrew the term is taken literally. There were supposedly two attacks/plagues of hornets, one in Moses' day, one in Joshua's day (Sot. 36[a]). Hornets were considered dangerous to life and **could be killed on the Sabbath** (cf. Jastrow 2:1303).

#### Related Resources:

- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Hornet wasp](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Hornet or Wasp](#) (lengthy article)
- [Wikipedia article on hornets](#) -

**So that** - Term of purpose. Literal or figurative supernaturally enabled "hornets" would cause anyone to run and thus would be used by God to drive out these pagan nations.

**They will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you** - They refers to the "hornets"

**Rayburn** - In all likelihood the "hornet" here is being used as a metaphor: something that causes fright or panic. Many scholars, however, think that, because the bee or hornet is found on Egyptian heraldry as a symbol of Pharaoh, the reference here is to the Egyptian army which, at this time, made periodic raids into Canaan and so weakened the Canaanites before Israel took them on during the conquest.

**Exodus 23:29 "I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.**

NET Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild animals multiply against you.

NLT Exodus 23:29 But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply and threaten you.

ESV Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you.

LXE Exodus 23:29 I will not cast them out in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beasts of the field multiply against thee.

KJV Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee.

NIV Exodus 23:29 But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you.

ASV Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before thee in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beasts of the field multiply against thee.

CSB Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out ahead of you in a single year; otherwise, the land would become desolate, and wild animals would multiply against you.

NKJ Exodus 23:29 "I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you.

NRS Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you.

YLT Exodus 23:29 I cast them not out from before thee in one year, lest the land be a desolation, and the beast of the field hath multiplied against thee;

- **year:** De 7:22 Jos 15:63 Josh 16:10 Josh 17:12,13 Jdg 3:1-4
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

"The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you **little by little**; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, for the wild beasts would grow too numerous for you." (Deut 7:22)

**I will not drive them out before you in a single year** - Note the emphasis on God's sovereign power in regard to driving out the pagan peoples. Obviously the book of Joshua tells us that Joshua led northern and southern campaigns to root out the pagan peoples, but it was God Who gave them the power to be victorious.

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, the principles in this passage are true in every believer's life. Israel was promised a **land**, but we are promised a **life**, even one that can be abundant in Christ (cf Jn 10:10. And just as the LORD drove out their enemies, and Israel had to do their part and carry out warfare, so too believers are called to carry out the battle for holiness but they can be victorious only as they learn to rely on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Word. Are you experiencing repeated spiritual defeats? While there could be several reasons (unconfessed sin, unforgiving spirit, etc), one of the major impediments to driving out the "pagans" in our life and occupying the promised life, is that we fail to understand and avail ourselves of the power God provides to us through His Spirit (Eph 3:16+, 2 Cor 12:9+, Lk 4:14+), the sufficiency of His Word (2 Pe 1:3+, Col 3:16+) and the provision of His precious and magnificent promises in Christ Jesus (2 Pe 1:4+), by which we "may become partakers of the divine nature (THE PROMISED LIFE IN CHRIST), having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." See [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#) and the ["Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible"](#) (100/100).

So God did not drive out the pagan peoples in single year. **How long did it take to conquer the promised land?** Charles Swindoll in his introduction to the book of Joshua writes

"The events of the book of Joshua span about twenty-five years, starting soon after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:1) around 1406 BC, before the conquest commenced. The conquest of Canaan took about seven years, and Joshua's final address and subsequent death came almost twenty years later. The book begins with the nation of Israel poised at the banks of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. It records the details of numerous military campaigns that defeated the inhabitants of the land. The book ends with Joshua's regathering of the nation for his final exhortation. ([Introduction](#))

And if we compare the book of Judges, we read a very sad description of what transpired in the Promised Land after Joshua died and God had to raise up judges...



But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. 20 So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, 21 **I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died**, 22 in order to (HERE IS WHY HE LEFT SOME OF THE PAGAN PEOPLES) test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." 23 So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua. (Judges 2:19-23+).

**That the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you**- It the land became desolate or sparsely populated, the wild animals were increase. Ancient Israel is not like modern Israel, but it was a forested land which had large, aggressive carnivorous animals such as lions and bears (read David's testimony to King Saul - 1 Sa 17:34-37). If the population declined too quickly, the beasts would proliferate. (See [mammals in modern Israel](#))

**John MacArthur** - The occupation would be a gradual but effective process taking longer than a year to accomplish, but ensuring full control of a land in good condition and not left desolate by a sweeping and destructive warfare. The reference to the multiplication of wild beasts if the land was desolated underscores the fertility of the land and its ability to support life.

Alan Cole on **the beasts of the field become too numerous** - For the real possibility of multiplication of wild beasts, see 2 Kings 17:25, where the lions represent a major danger to the 'Samaritan' colonists of Israel, the so-called 'proselytes of the lion'. In Malaysia, during the communist 'emergency' in the years following World War II, tigers increased alarmingly in some areas, since no hunter had leisure or opportunity to deal with them. Additional reasons for the gradual nature of the conquest are given in Judges 2:20-3:4 (to teach succeeding generations to fight: to test their faith: and so on).

**Exodus 23:30 "I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land."**

NET Exodus 23:30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you become fruitful and inherit the land.

NLT Exodus 23:30 I will drive them out a little at a time until your population has increased enough to take possession of the land.

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

LXE Exodus 23:30 By little and little I will cast them out from before thee, until thou shalt be increased and inherit the earth.

KJV Exodus 23:30 By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

NIV Exodus 23:30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

ASV Exodus 23:30 By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

CSB Exodus 23:30 I will drive them out little by little ahead of you until you have become numerous and take possession of the land.

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

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

YLT Exodus 23:30 little by little I cast them out from before thee, till thou art fruitful, and hast inherited the land.

- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land**- In Deuteronomy we read why this will be more of a process (little by little) than a one time event.

**Rayburn** - There are several reasons given for the fact that Israel did not conquer Canaan all at once and once for all. Some others are given in Judges 2:20-3:4.

**David Thompson** - God's principle of development is "little by little." God develops us little by little, not all at once. He wants us always growing and depending on Him all the way through life. God would not drive them out all at once so that the land would not become desolate. God would drive out the enemies little by little until they are completely eliminated. ([Sermon](#))

**Alan Cole** - In Malaysia, during the communist insurgency in the years following World War II, tigers increased alarmingly because no hunter had the leisure or opportunity to deal with them.

**George Bush** - This was an immense territory, and it is obvious that its sudden depopulation would be attended by the consequences here stated. It was, therefore, wisely ordered that the extirpation of the Canaanites should be gradual, especially when we consider that the continued presence of enemies would keep them on their guard, and prevent them from settling down into that sluggish supineness to which they would otherwise be prone. **Thus too in our spiritual warfare, it is no doubt ordained for our highest good that our corruptions should be subdued, not all at once, but by little and little;** that our old man should be crucified gradually. We are hereby necessarily kept in an **attitude of perpetual vigilance**, and reminded of our **constant dependence upon God, who alone giveth us the victory.** (AMEN!)

**Exodus 23:31 "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.**

NET Exodus 23:31 I will set your boundaries from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River, for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.

NLT Exodus 23:31 And I will fix your boundaries from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the eastern wilderness to the Euphrates River. I will hand over to you the people now living in the land, and you will drive them out ahead of you.

ESV Exodus 23:31 And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

LXE Exodus 23:31 And I will set thy borders from the Red Sea, to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the great river Euphrates; and I will give into your hand those that dwell in the land, and will cast them out from thee.

KJV Exodus 23:31 And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee.

NIV Exodus 23:31 "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you.

ASV Exodus 23:31 And I will set thy border from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness unto the River: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand: and thou shalt drive them out before thee.

CSB Exodus 23:31 I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates River. For I will place the inhabitants of the land under your control, and you will drive them out ahead of you.

NKJ Exodus 23:31 "And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

NRS Exodus 23:31 I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will hand over to you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall drive them out before you.

YLT Exodus 23:31 'And I have set thy border from the Red Sea, even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from

the wilderness unto the River: for I give into your hand the inhabitants of the land, and thou hast cast them out from before thee;

- **I will fix:** Ge 15:18 Nu 34:3-15 De 11:24 Jos 1:4 1Ki 4:21,24 Ps 72:8
- **deliver:** Nu 21:34 De 3:2 Jos 8:7,18 10:8,19 21:44 23:14 24:8 Jud 1:4 Jud 11:21 1Sa 23:4 1Ki 20:13
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## GOD'S PATTERN FOR SUCCESSFUL OCCUPATION DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY PRECEDES HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

**I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River***Euphrates* - From the Red Sea would be the [Gulf of Aqabah](#) (see [map](#)), to the sea of the Philistines, the Mediterranean Sea, from the wilderness, which would be the [Negev](#) ([map](#)), to the river, which is almost certainly the [Euphrates](#) ([map](#)) on the north. A few writers make the statement that the boundaries were attained briefly under David and Solomon, but I think that is probably not the case.

**David Thompson** - This completely coincides with the land boundaries God promised to Abraham (Ge 15:18+). Israel has never had the totality of this land. When will she have it? The day is still in the future ([Millennium](#)). She did not obey God and she rejected His Word and she rejected His Son. ([Sermon](#))

**Currid** has a slightly different interpretation - The extent of the land that God gives to Israel is not described in purely idealistic terms, because it was attained during the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21).

**For** - Term of explanation. Explains how Israel would be able to take over an area inhabited by pagan peoples.

**I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand**- Note first God's sovereignty. God must move first and in context He did it by sending terror ("hornets") and the Angel of the LORD. To deliver someone into another's hand is a picture of giving them over to the power of the recipient (Israel).

**And you will drive them out before you** - Here we see man's (Israel's) responsibility to eradicate the pagan peoples from the land.

**Exodus 23:32 "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods."**

NET Exodus 23:32 "You must make no covenant with them or with their gods.

NLT Exodus 23:32 "Make no treaties with them or their gods.

ESV Exodus 23:32 You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.

LXE Exodus 23:32 Thou shalt make no covenant with them and their gods.

KJV Exodus 23:32 Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

NIV Exodus 23:32 Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods.

ASV Exodus 23:32 Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

CSB Exodus 23:32 You must not make a covenant with them or their gods.

NKJ Exodus 23:32 "You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

NRS Exodus 23:32 You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.

YLT Exodus 23:32 thou dost not make a covenant with them, and with their gods;

- **shalt make:** Ex 34:12,15 De 7:2 Jos 9:14-23 2Sa 21:1,2 Ps 106:35 2Co 6:15
- **or with:** Nu 25:1,2 De 7:16
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NO INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY WITH THE PAGAN NATIONS

**You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods**- The Hebrew phrase for **make a covenant** is the idiom

"[Karath beriyth](#)" which more literally is translated "**cut a covenant**". The noun [Berit/berith/beriyth](#) is a contract or agreement, one made by passing between pieces of cut flesh. The verb [Karath](#) means to divide or cut in two or to make a covenant. **Make a covenant** signified the most solemn, binding, intimate contract known in the ancient world and in the Bible.

See an example of what happened when Israel disobeyed this command in [note below](#) on Numbers 25.

**Alan Cole** comments on **make no covenant** - "This is the end of the 'book of the covenant', giving the terms upon which God's covenant was to be made with Israel. The next chapter moves on to the actual establishment of YHWH's covenant. In view of the exclusive nature of this relationship, it is right that this chapter should end with the forbidding of any other covenant, human or divine, for Israel. Such a provision was common in the treaties of the day. (TOTC-Ex)

#### Related Resources:

- [Covenant: Why Study It?](#)
- [Covenant: Introduction](#)
- [Covenant: Summary Table](#)

**Exodus 23:33 "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."**

NET Exodus 23:33 They must not live in your land, lest they make you sin against me, for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

NLT Exodus 23:33 They must not live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me. If you serve their gods, you will be caught in the trap of idolatry."

ESV Exodus 23:33 They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

LXE Exodus 23:33 And they shall not dwell in thy land, lest they cause thee to sin against me; for if thou shouldest serve their gods, these will be an offence to thee.

KJV Exodus 23:33 They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

NIV Exodus 23:33 Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

ASV Exodus 23:33 They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me; for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

CSB Exodus 23:33 They must not remain in your land, or else they will make you sin against Me. If you worship their gods, it will be a snare for you."

NKJ Exodus 23:33 "They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

NRS Exodus 23:33 They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

YLT Exodus 23:33 they do not dwell in thy land, lest they cause thee to sin against Me when thou servest their gods, when it becometh a snare to thee.'

- **make:** 1Ki 14:16 2Ch 33:9
- **it will surely:** Ex 34:12 De 7:16 12:30 Jos 23:13 Jdg 2:3 1Sa 18:21 Ps 106:36 2Ti 2:26
- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me**- Obviously the idol worshipers could not force Israel to sin against Jehovah, but as explained below, they could be enticed or seduced and then ultimately ensnared. However the implication of this command is clear -- if Israel associates with the idolatrous peoples, they are virtually assured of committing sin against Jehovah, and would especially likely to break the first commandment "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Ex 20:3+). Why? Because they would have intimate exposure to the sensual, seductive "worship" by the pagans of their false gods.

**George Bush** - Evil communications corrupt good manners, and by familiar converse with the votaries of idols, their dread and detestation of the sin would imperceptibly wear off, and they would find themselves, before they were aware, transferring their worship and allegiance from the true God to the vanities of the heathen. The language implies that the serving of false gods is nothing else than making a covenant with them, and that this is a very natural consequence of making a covenant with those who worship them.

**For** - Term of explanation. Explains how Israel would be made to sin against Jehovah.

**if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you**- Idolatry would be an ever present problem for Israel as they interacted with the pagan nations. Here it says they serve them which is the same Hebrew verb abad used above, but now the Septuagint uses a different verb douleo which means to serve as one's master, to relinquish one's will to the will of the master (in this case the false gods). And in serving these false gods, they would become entangled or ensnared by them.

We read about Israel's ensnarement by idols in the book of Judges 2...

Now the **Angel of the LORD** came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, 2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? 3 "Therefore I also said, '**I will not drive them out before you**; but they will become as **thorns in your sides** and **their gods will be a snare to you**.'" (Jdg 2:1-3+)

All that generation also were gathered to their fathers (THE GENERATION OF JOSHUA); and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel (NOTE: THEY DID NOT KNOW THE PERSON OR THE POWER OF THE TRUE GOD AND SO WERE A SETUP FOR FALSE GODS!) 11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and **served the Baals**, 12 and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. (Jdg 2:10-12+)



Click to Enlarge

**COMMENT** - How significant was the warning in Exodus 23:13? The warning became reality and cycles of apostasy and idolatry were repeated in the book of Judges. And how long did Israel's cycles of apostasy and idolatry last? The book of Judges chronicles about a 350 year period (or almost 25% of the entire Old Testament history of the nation of Israel - see [map of various judges](#) by location).

One is reminded of Balaam's advice to King Balak (of Moab) on how to ensnare Israel in Numbers 25 where we see that what Balak and Balaam had failed to accomplish through sorcery, they accomplished through the seduction of Canaanite fertility worship! The association of idolatry with immorality is a clearly taught from Genesis to Revelation. The upshot is that **idolatry** will lead you into **immorality** unless you repent quickly! And so in context of a discussion of **idolatry** and **immorality** (1 Cor 10:7,8) Paul's command "Therefore, my beloved, **flee** ([present imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) from idolatry." (1 Cor 10:14). Similarly John commanded "Little children, **guard** ([aorist imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves from idols." (1 Jn 5:19+).

While Israel remained at Shittim (LAST STOP BEFORE ISRAEL CROSSED JORDAN RIVER - Josh 2:1), the people began to play the harlot (IMMORALITY) with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods (cf Ex 23:33 "IF YOU SERVE THEIR GODS..."). 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor (IDOLATRY), and the LORD was angry against Israel. (Nu 25:1-3)

**NET Note** - The idea of the "snare" is to lure them to judgment; God is apparently warning about contact with the Canaanites, either in worship or in business. They were very syncretistic, and so it would be dangerous to settle among them.

Life is a journey and obedience to God is the key to a great journey.

--- [David Thompson](#)

**Rayburn** - The final two verses, as a summary, form a fitting conclusion to the covenant document. The sparing of Rahab and her family and their settling among the Israelites shows that this extermination of the Canaanites was for religious and moral purposes, not for ethnic purposes. Israel was the instrument of God's judgment. Remember, God had waited many centuries to punish the Canaanites because "their iniquity was not yet full."

The deceptive danger of idolatry to ensnare one's heart was a repeated warning to Israel (and no less of a warning to us today!)

Judges 2:3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a **snare** ([moqesh](#)) to you.'"

Deuteronomy 7:16 "And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a **snare** ([moqesh](#)) to you."

Joshua 23:13 know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they shall be a **snare** ([moqesh](#)) and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

**Snare** ([4170](#))([moqesh](#) from [yaqosh](#)) is a masculine noun meaning a snare, a trap, bait. The picture is of the lure or bait being placed in the hunter's trap, which gives rise to moqesh referring to the snare itself. Traps were used to capture birds or beasts (Amos 3:5). As used in Judges 8:27 moqesh refers to a moral pitfall (Pr. 18:7; 20:25). **M o q e s h** can be anything that lures one to ruin and disaster (Jdg. 2:3; Pr 29:6). [Septuagint](#) translates **moqesh** with [proskomma](#) (Ex 23:33, 34:12) which refers to that which causes one to stumble (figuratively) as in Ro 14:13, 20, 1 Pe 2:8, etc.

**Moqesh** - 27x - Ex 10:7; Ex 23:33; Ex 34:12; Deut. 7:16; Jos. 23:13; Jdg. 2:3; Jdg. 8:27; 1 Sam. 18:21; 2 Sam. 22:6; Job 34:30; Job 40:24; Ps. 18:5; Ps. 64:5; Ps. 69:22; Ps. 106:36; Ps. 140:5; Ps. 141:9; Prov. 12:13; Prov. 13:14; Prov. 14:27; Prov. 18:7; Prov. 20:25; Prov. 22:25; Prov. 29:6; Prov. 29:25; Isa. 8:14; Amos 3:5

**Holman Bible Dictionary** on **snare** - Trap to catch birds and animals. There were basically two kinds of snares. One used rope or cord. Either the animal stepped in the trap and was snared by the feet, or the rope fell from above and caught the animal by the neck. The most common was a trap with a net. The animal would be attracted by the bait. When the baited trigger was released, the net covered the animal and captured it. Also the opening of a pit would be camouflaged with cover. The animal would fall into the pit and be captured. Figuratively, snares spoke of peril or death and the destruction of persons (Job 22:10 ; Psalm 18:5 ; compare 1 Samuel 28:9).

#### **Related Resources:**

- [Are You Entangled?](#) (or ensnared)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Snare](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Snare](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Snares](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Snare](#)
- King James Dictionary [Snare](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Snare](#)
- Wilson's Bible Types [Snare](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Snare](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Snare](#)

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#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY - Resources Quoted in Commentary**

- [Exodus 23 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries - these are free
- [James Bruckner - Exodus \(Understanding the Bible Commentary\)](#)
- [Umberto Cassuto - A Commentary on the Book of Exodus](#)
- [Alan Cole - Exodus - TOTC](#)
- [John Currid - Episc Exodus Volume 1 \(1-18\)](#)
- [John Currid - Episc Exodus Volume 2 \(19-40\)](#)
- [Victor Hamilton - Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary](#)
- [John Hannah - The Bible Knowledge Commentary \(Old Testament:\)](#)



- [Walter Kaiser - Exodus -The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#)
- [John Mackay - Exodus: A Mentor Commentary](#)
- [Rod Mattoon - Treasures from Exodus](#)
- [Douglas Stuart - Exodus - An Exegetical and Theological Commentary \(NAC Series\)](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe - Exodus - Be Delivered](#)