

Scripture Lesson Text

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

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

3 Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.

4 If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

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.

6 Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.

7 Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

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

9 Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

NOTES

Obedience in Justice

Lesson Text: Exodus 23:1-9

Related Scriptures: *Deuteronomy 19:15-21; Proverbs 6:16-19; Isaiah 10:1-4; Jeremiah 5:25-29; Mark 14:55-59*

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—“Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked” (Exodus 23:7).

Lesson Exposition

The call for God's people to exercise justice in their daily lives and to live righteously did not begin at Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. Though this week's Scripture text is part of the wider context of the giving of the law, the call to be just and holy goes back to Genesis and the call of Abram (Gen. 12:1-2). One could say that from Creation onward, God wanted these virtues to be demonstrated in humanity.

BE A PERSON OF INTEGRITY— Exod. 23:1-3

Do not spread rumors (Exod. 23:1). Following the giving of the Ten Commandments in chapter 20, chapter 21 begins by saying, “Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.” Then, after covering a series of topics, Scripture declares, “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments” (24:3).

The word “judgments” means ordinances, or rules, and is based on the Ten Commandments.

The first rule has to do with watching the tongue and not being a party

to spreading any false rumor. God's people need to listen with care and be even more careful when speaking. God wants people of integrity who will make discerning judgments and not bring harm into the lives of others.

Do not follow the wrong crowd (Exod. 23:2). A person of integrity not only will watch what he says about others but also will watch with whom he associates. The point here is that a person at one time or another will face peer pressure to do the wrong thing. Someone who lacks a strong moral compass may give in to the temptation to do wrong in order to be liked or to be part of a group.

Do not be partial (Exod. 23:3). The Lord is on the side of the poor (cf. Lev. 19:9-10; Prov. 22:2, 22-23), and He blesses those who care for them. But justice is perverted if one acts with partiality in any direction.

BE A PERSON OF COMPASSION— Exod. 23:4-5

In the Creation account, God gave man the right to have dominion over the lesser creatures (Gen. 1:26), but

that does not mean that man is not to have compassion when undue suffering is observed. The specific topic in these verses has to do not only with alleviating the suffering of animals but also with doing so even when they belong to your enemy. Instead of having the attitude of "serves him right that his animal is wandering away" or "look how he treats his beast of burden by piling on too heavy a load," our command is to take pity and have mercy on the animal.

In so doing, a person displays a heart of compassion and forgiveness toward his enemy. To do less would indicate the holding of a grudge and the presence of an unforgiving spirit and a heart so hard that it cannot be touched by the sufferings of animals.

BE A PERSON OF DISCERNMENT—Exod. 23:6-9

Refrain from injustice (Exod. 23:6). In verse 6, the idea is that the rights of the poor are to be preserved. The poor man may be right in his dispute, or he may be wrong; but the truth needs to be sought regardless of the consequences.

Refrain from wrongdoing (Exod. 23:7). Remembering that God will judge the judge (as well as all mankind) should motivate those in authority to be as sure as they can be that truth and justice are being served by their decisions.

Refrain from being bought (Exod. 23:8). There have always been judges who have made decisions out of self-interest (cf. Zeph. 3:3). Every so often in our own day we hear in the news reports of a judge being wrongly influenced by pressure, by money, or by some motivating factor other than justice.

To be fair, it is not only a judge who can succumb to a bribe; name the profession, and you will likely find

a bad apple or two. Are not most of us inclined to favor those who give us gifts? Do we not sometimes think more highly of them than of others? The challenge is not to allow the gift to blind us to reality or to unduly influence us in future dealings with people.

Refrain from forgetting your past (Exod. 23:9). God told Israel to remember their past and, considering the lessons learned when they were aliens, treat strangers in their midst with understanding. Sometimes God has to put people in certain situations so that they will learn humility and thus have compassion on others in similar circumstances. Otherwise, the person may not develop the humility God desires.

—Darrell W. McKay.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Christians are to remain outside the loop when it comes to rumors (Exod. 23:1).
2. We are called to seek the strength and fortitude needed to withstand peer pressure to do evil (vs. 2).
3. Concern for the needy needs to be based on more than sentiment (vs. 3).
4. The fact that we have enemies should not rob us of the ability to do good unto them (vss. 4-5).
5. Truth and justice should be hallmarks of believers and their actions (vss. 6-7).
6. Justice, not personal gain, should guide the decisions of God's people (vs. 8).
7. Hospitality is always in order when there are those in need of a helping hand (vs. 9).

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