

Exodus 23

This chapter continues the “book of the covenant” (24:7) and focuses on impartiality in the courtroom as well as religious services offered to God exclusively (monotheism).

TRANSLATION - 23:1-9:

1 You must not raise a report of falsehood. Do not set your hand with evil to be a witness of violence. **2** Do not be after a multitude to do evil; and do not answer for to plead to turn after a multitude to turn. **3** The poor man do not honor in his dispute.

4 When you meet the bull of your enemy or his donkey wandering, to bring him back, you will bring him back. **5** When you see the donkey of one hating you lying under his burden, then you stop from leaving it to him, but to leave you will leave with him.

6 Do not turn judgment of your poor in his dispute. **7** A word of falsehood you will keep distant and pure and righteous you will not kill because I will not justify the wicked. **8** A bribe you will not take because the bribe will blind the perceptive and he will distort the words of righteousness. **9** A sojourner you will not oppress because you yourself know the soul of the sojourner because sojourners you all were in the land of Egypt.

HEBREW WORDS:

The word “report” (ver. 1) here is related to the verb translated “to hear” or “to obey.” It is used 27 times in the OT; only here in Exodus. “Falsehood” was used earlier at 20:7. This is the word’s last usage in Exodus. “Evil” was used earlier at 2:13; 9:27. “Witness” was used earlier at 20:16; 22:12. “Violence” is used only here in Exodus; it is used 60 times in the OT. “Evil” (ver. 2) was used earlier at 5:19; 10:10. “To answer” was used earlier at 4:1; 15:21. “To plead” was used earlier at 17:2; 21:18. “To turn” or “to return” was used earlier at 7:5, 19. “Poor man” (ver. 3) is used 48 times in the OT; only here and 30:15 in Exodus. “To honor” in this context suggests the idea to be “partial.” The verb is only used 6 times in the OT: Exo. 23:3; Lev. 19:15, 32; Isa. 63:1; Prov. 25:6; Lam. 5:12. “Dispute” is actually an infinitive in the Hebrew language. It was used in 17:2, 7. “Enemy” (ver. 4) was used earlier at 15:6, 9. This is the only use of “burden” (ver. 5) in Exodus; the word is used 44 times. “To stop” or “to refrain” was used earlier at 9:29, 33-34. “To leave” was used earlier at 2:20; 9:21.

“Judgement” (ver. 6) was used earlier at 15:25; 21:1, 9, 31. This word for “poor” is only used here and 23:11. It is used 61 times in the OT. It will later be used to refer to a sect of Jewish-Christians known as the *Ebionites*. “Falsehood” (ver. 7) was used earlier at 5:9; 20:16. “Pure” was used earlier at 21:28. The adjective “righteous” is related to the word “justify” in this same verse. The adjective was used earlier at 9:27. The verb is only used here in Exodus; it is used 41 times in the OT. “To kill” was used earlier at 2:14-15. This is not the verb used in the Ten Commandments. “Wicked” was used earlier at 2:13; 9:27. “Bribe” (ver. 8) is used 23 times, only here in Exodus. “To blind” is only used in 5 passages in the OT: Exo. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; 2 Kings 25:7; Jer. 39:7; 52:11. The verb “to distort” is used only 7 times in the OT: Exo. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Job 12:19; Prov. 13:6; 19:3; 21:12; 22:12. The word “perceptive” is only used here and in Exodus 4:11 in the OT. “To oppress” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 3:9.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To bring back he will bring back” (ver. 4) and “to leave, he will leave” (ver. 5) reflect the emphasis of the Hebrew grammatical construction, involving the infinitive absolute and the same verb in an imperfect form.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Courts in ancient Israel were held at the city gates with the various leaders (elders) of Israel presiding over the cases (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4). The beginning of an “appellate court” system was seen in Exodus 18.

COMMENTARY:

The Ten Commandments had forbidden false testimony in court (20:16). Here, Jehovah elaborates on the justice He expects Israel to implement in His name. Israel should avoid a “false report” and should avoid siding with the wicked to implement justice (ver. 1). Israel should avoid legal decisions that are influenced by the majority rather than justice (ver. 2). Justice should not be perverted because it goes against the majority’s will. In the same way, Israel is not to pervert justice simply to side with the poor man (ver. 3). The poor are not always right; the rich are not always wrong.

The impartiality God requires of Israel extends to events outside the courtroom as well. An “enemy’s” livestock should be returned to him if it has wandered away (ver. 4). If the animal of an “enemy” has a load which is too heavy for the animal to carry, its burden should be eased (ver. 5). Justice should not be perverted relative to the needy (ver. 6), which has been easy to do in most societies. False charges should be avoided in the court, at all costs (ver. 7). An innocent person who is righteous should not be put to death; God will hold judges accountable. The fact that God will not acquit the wicked suggests a future reckoning - if not in this life, then in the life to come. God is the judge and He will do right (Gen. 18:25). He will balance the scales of justice.

Bribes - monetary gifts or similar - given to influence the judge one way or another are to be avoided in God’s court of justice (ver. 8). Bribes can have a negative influence in many ways. It can “blind the perceptive” and they will distort the “words of righteousness.” There is no justification for failing to execute God’s laws in a fair and equal way.

In verse 9, God commands Israel to respect the “stranger” who lived among them. This would be the non-Israelite who lived within their borders. The reason they should respect the strangers is because they could empathize with strangers, having been strangers themselves in Egypt. God wanted Israel to always remember they were slaves in Egypt.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - In Deuteronomy 10:17, Moses will describe God in terms which are reflected here. God is not partial and He does not take bribes. Verse 3 is also found taught in Leviticus 19:15 and Deuteronomy 1:17. Lost property was to be returned, according to Deuteronomy 22:1-3. Bribery was forbidden also in Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19; 27:25.

Later Jewish writers - Israel will allow bribes later in their history (1 Sam. 8:3; 12:3; 2 Chron. 19:7), which will be condemned by the prophets: Isa. 1:23; 5:23; 33:15; Ezek. 22:12; Amos 5:12; Micah 3:11; 7:3; Psalm 15:5; 26:10. The wiseman will frequently call on Israel to help the poor: 3:27-28; 25:21. The wiseman will also caution to not be happy when calamity happens to one’s enemy (24:17).

NT writers - God is not partial (Matt. 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25) and He expects Christians to be impartial (1 Tim. 5:21; James 2:9). To further illustrate the illegality of Jesus’ trial, we note that the Sanhedrin was *looking* for false witnesses (Matt. 27:59-64). Jesus will raise the level of expectation among His followers when He tells Christians to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44-45). The theology of the NT teaches that Christ died for us even while we were God’s enemies (Rom. 5:10). God expects us to *serve* our enemies with the same love.

John (1 John 3:16-18) will call on Christians to serve the poor “in deed and truth” and James (2:15-17) will state that benevolence shows that faith is active. Every man and woman will answer to God for how they responded to the Gospel and its expectations: Romans 14:11-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10. Jesus will also warn that the majority is often (usually?) wrong: Matthew 7:13-14.

TRANSLATION - 23:10-12:

10 Six years you will sow your land and you will harvest your crops. **11** And the seventh [year] you will allow rest and allow it to lie fallow and the poor of your people will eat and what remains the beasts of the field will eat. Thus you will do for your vineyards and your olives. **12**

Six days you will do your work and in the seventh day you will rest for the sake he will rest your bull and your donkey and he will be refreshed the son of your slave and the sojourner.

HEBREW WORDS:

“To sow” (ver. 10) is used 56 times in the OT; it is used in Exodus only in this context: 23:10, 16. “Crops” or “yield” is only used here in Exodus, out of 43 times. “To allow to rest” (ver. 11) is used 9 times in the OT; only here in Exodus. “To lie fallow” is only used here in Exodus, out of 40 uses. “Vineyards” was used earlier at 22:4. “Olive” orchards or trees is used in Exodus here, 27:20 and 30:24. The word is found 38 times.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Just as the Sabbath day reflects God’s rest on the seventh day of the week of creation (Gen. 2:1-3), so the Sabbath year reflects God’s intention for Israel to rest.

COMMENTARY:

The Ten Commandments had already required Israel to sanctify the Sabbath day (20:8-11). Here, God expands the idea of “rest” to the land itself. For six years, God would allow the land to produce sufficient produce to feed Israel. But the seventh year, Israel was to allow the land to rest. The land should rest from producing crops as well as vineyards and olive trees. What would grow spontaneously was to be left for the poor of the land and what the poor could not consume, the wild animals could eat (ver. 10-11). Some scholars believe that certain tracts of land would be allowed to rest every seventh year while other tracts of land would be in a different seven-year rotation. Perhaps, but the rest of biblical history does not provide much information on the law.

The Sabbath day is reiterated again here, now for the third time (ver. 12). It was introduced to Israel in Exodus 16, and then incorporated into the Ten Commandments in 20:8-11. Here, God states that the animals (ox and donkey) were to rest along with the slaves (male and female) and strangers could also observe the Sabbath law.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - See the parallel laws in Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22; Deut. 15:1-10.

Later Jewish writers - God will express interest in the wild animals in Psalms 36:6; 104:21.

NT writers - Jesus will also note that God cares for the animals: Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:24.

TRANSLATION - 23:13-17:

13 And in all which I said to you all, you must keep. And the name of other gods you will not mention nor will it be heard on your lips.

14 Three times you will celebrate a feast to me in a year:

15 [First] the feast of Unleavened Bread you must keep. Seven days, you will eat unleavened bread just as I commanded you for a holy month of Abib because in it you went out from Egypt and they will not appear before Me in vain.

16 [Second] And the feast of the harvest of the first fruits of your work which you will sow in the field and [third] the feast of the ingathering at the end of the year when you harvest your work from the field. **17** Three times in a year, there will appear every one of your males before the face of the Lord, Jehovah.

HEBREW WORDS:

“To mention” (ver. 13) is the verb often translated “to remember,” although here it carries the nuance of “causing to remember” or “to mention.” The verb was used earlier at 2:24; 6:5. “To celebrate a feast” (ver. 14) is all one word in Hebrew; the word was used earlier at 5:1; 12:14. The noun “feast” (ver. 15) is related to the prior verb; the noun was used earlier at 10:9.

“Unleavened bread” was used earlier and often in chapter 12. “Harvest” (ver. 16) is used 36 times; it is found in Exodus here and 34:21-22. “First fruits” is used here (23:16, 19) and 34:22, 26 in Exodus, out of 17 uses. There is a second word for “harvest” - translated here as “ingathering” to distinguish it from the prior feast - is used only here (23:16) and 34:22 in the Bible. “Lord” (ver. 17) is the word for “master,” not the word often written “LORD,” which is actually the second name “Jehovah.” The words “lord” was used earlier at 4:10, 13.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The feast of unleavened bread would occur around March or April as it coincided with the harvest of barley. It was started by God at the moment He killed Egyptians’ first born in Exodus 12. The feast of harvest occurred seven weeks later; it celebrated the end of the wheat harvest. This feast is also called the feast of “first fruits” (see 23:19; Lev. 23:9-11). The third feast, at the end of the season, was in the fall and signified the beginning of a new agricultural year. Fruit were harvested at this point. It is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. For more on these feasts, see Exodus 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:1-17; Leviticus 23:1-44.

The month “Abib” (ver. 15) was renamed “Nisan” after the Babylonian exile; see 13:4.

COMMENTARY:

God had told Pharaoh to release Israel so they could celebrate a feast for Jehovah in the wilderness (5:1; 10:9). Having a relationship with Jehovah God is what this is all about. When God initially assembled Israel at Mount Sinai, He required Israel to obey (19:5). That obedience is to be offered to God alone and not to any other gods. God’s insistence on monotheism, commitment, loyalty, and submission to Him alone is also emphasized throughout the Law: 20:3-6; 20:22-23; 22:18, 20. That same emphasis continues in this section of the law (ver. 13). Israel is to “guard” what God says; in this context, the verb means to obey or to submit. They are not to “mention the name of other gods,” whether in oaths or prayers or worship. These names should not be heard from their mouths, in any way which shows respect, trust, or honor.

In verses 14-17, God highlights three major festivals which Israel was to celebrate each year. Notice in verse 14 and in verse 17, the phrase “three times a year” is mentioned. These feasts are to be celebrated (ver. 14) and the male Israelite (if not also his family; see 1 Sam. 1) is to present himself before Jehovah at these festivals (ver. 17). Perhaps it has always been easy for men to shirk their religious responsibilities. Here, God holds all Israelite men accountable for leading their families in worship to Jehovah God.

The first festival on the calendar is the Feast of Unleavened Bread (ver. 15). This feast was originally established in chapter 12 at the death of the firstborn from Egypt. It would commemorate their departure out of Egypt. No one was to appear before God empty-handed; they were to offer sacrifices to Him at that time. See notes above under “Archaeology” for further information about these feasts and the calendar.

The second and third festivals are mentioned in verse 16. The Feast of Harvest happened fifty days later, specifically on the first day of the week (Lev. 23:15-16). This “fifty days” gave this feast its Greek name: Pentecost. The final feast was that of “Ingathering.” Actually this word is synonymous with “Harvest” of the prior feast; but it was a separate feast. See above under “Archaeology.”

Israel is to appear before the “Lord, Jehovah” (ver. 17) at these feasts. The Canaanites called their god *Baal*, which meant “Lord” or “Master.” Verse 17 uses a different word (*adonai* in Hebrew) which Jehovah God calls Himself; He does not embrace the other term.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - The feast of harvest is also known as the “Feast of Weeks” (Deut. 16:10) and “Pentecost” by NT times. Jews also celebrated during the feast, the gift of the Law of Moses. The third feast of ingathering, the last harvest of the season, brought in the fruit from their orchards, vines, and gardens. It is also known as the “Feast of Booths” (or

“Tabernacles”): Lev. 23:42-43; Num. 29:12-39. It also celebrated God’s provisions during the 40 years of Israel wandering in the wilderness. See also Exodus 34:18-24; Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16:1-17.

Israel was to bring its best to God: Lev. 23:16-20; Deut. 26:1-11. Women and children could accompany the husband / father to the festival if they were able: Deut. 16:11, 14.

Later Jewish writers - Zechariah will mention the Feast of Booths (14:16-21). Elijah will criticize King Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1 for calling on the name of Baal, as if there was no God in Israel to whom he could pray. King Solomon dedicated the temple during the Feast of Booths (1 Kings 8:65). Israel did not seem to keep its religious calendar as faithfully as God commanded: 2 Kings 23:22. God will mention again in Joshua 23:7 that He doesn’t want Israel to swear an oath or pray to false gods.

NT writers - Jesus, of course, turned the Passover with its attendant Feast of Unleavened Bread into the Lord’s Supper, which is to be celebrated every Lord’s Day. But the idea of the Feast of Harvest is reflected in 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 where Jesus is identified as the “first fruits” of our own resurrections which will take place one day. Also, remembering that the Feast of Harvest was known as Pentecost, when the church of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, we see God reaching down and gathering (“harvesting”) faithful Jews into His new body, the church which belongs to Christ. That harvest would eventually include non-Jews beginning in Acts 10. The Feast of Ingathering is the context of John 7.

It is interesting that God does not require *any* festival for Christians to celebrate nor does He require *any* pilgrimage any where at any time. This reflects the idea that Christianity, in contrast to the Law of Moses, is intended for *all people, of all time, every where*. When Paul states that certain immoral behaviors should not be “mentioned” among Christians (Eph. 5:3), he may have verse 13 in mind.

TRANSLATION - 23:18-19:

18 You must not sacrifice with leavened bread the blood of My sacrifice nor must remain the fat of My feast until morning.

19 The beginning of the first fruits of your land, you will bring to the house of Jehovah your God; you must not cook a kid in the milk of its mother.

HEBREW WORDS:

“To sacrifice” (ver. 18) or “to slaughter” was used earlier at 3:18; 5:3, 8, 17. “Leavened bread” was used earlier at 12:15; 13:3, 7. The verb “to remain” also means “to lodge.” It is used in Exodus here and 34:25, out of 71 times. This is the first use of the designation “house of Jehovah” for the tabernacle or temple which will be built. The expression is used here and 34:26 in Exodus, out of 237 uses in the OT.

COMMENTARY:

These two verses are related to the festivals mentioned in the prior paragraph as they make commands relative to what is acceptable in worship and what is not acceptable. Blood could not be sacrificed with leavened bread (ver. 18). Perhaps this was based on the idea that leaven could denote corruption. Israel could not eat blood since life was in the blood (Lev. 17:11). By the same token, the fat of the feast offerings was to be burned. It could not “remain until morning.” Fat is the juiciest, best, often tastiest part of the animal. But it could not be left to be eaten the next day; it was offered to God.

Verse 19 denotes that God expected Israel to offer to Him the best of their crops. Offering to God the best shows one has trust in God that further crops will be provided by God. If one really trusts God, then He gives God His best and God will provide. The “house of Jehovah your God” will immediately refer to the tabernacle / tent of meeting; eventually, it will denote the temple built by King Solomon.

The other law related in verse 19 is somewhat obscure. It has led modern Jews to separate their meats and dairy. This is not likely God’s intention. It appears from archaeology

that Canaanites engaged in this practice as a part of their pagan worship rituals. God forbid His own people from engaging in such a practice which would integrate pagan rituals into Israel's life and thoughts.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Israel's gifts were to be in proportion to God's gifts to them (Deut. 16:17). See also Deut. 26:2-11; Num. 18:12-13.

NT writers - Paul speaks most densely about the Christians' gifts to God in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, when Paul tells Christians to give on the first day of every week, he notes that this giving is to be proportionate to one's income.

TRANSLATION - 23:20-25:

20 Behold, I Myself, am sending My Angel before you, to protect you in the way and to bring you to the place where I have chosen. **21** Guard yourself before Him and obey His voice; do not be embittered against Him because He will not take away your transgression because My name is in Him. **22** Because if to obey you obey His voice and do all which I speak, then I will hate your enemies and I will be hostile against your adversaries. **23** Because My angel will go out before you and He will bring you to the Amorites and Hittites and Perizzites and Canaanites and Hivites and Jebusites and I will destroy them. **24** You must not worship their gods and you must not serve them and you must not do according to their works because to demolish you must demolish and to smash you must smash their pillars. **25** But serve Jehovah your God and He will bless your bread and your waters and I will remove sickness from your place.

HEBREW WORDS:

"To choose" (ver. 20) or "to appoint" was used earlier at 15:17; 16:5; 19:11, 15. It will be used again in Exodus at 34:2. "To be embittered" (ver. 21) was used earlier 1:14. "Transgression" was used earlier at 22:8. The verb "to hate" (ver. 22) is related to the noun "enemies" (used earlier at 15:6, 9). It is used only here in Exodus, out of 6 uses in the OT. "To be hostile" is used only here in Exodus, out of 26 uses. It is related to the word "adversaries." This word is a synonym for "enemy." It is used 72 times. "To destroy" (ver. 23) was used earlier at 9:15. "To worship" (ver. 24) is used exclusively for the concept of offering worship to God. It was used earlier at 4:31. "To serve" was used earlier at 1:13-14. "To demolish" was used earlier at 15:7. "To smash" (ver. 24) was used earlier at 9:25; 12:46. "Pillars" refers to columns erected for worship rituals, often translated as "sacred stones." They are mentioned in Exodus at 23:24; 24:4; 34:13. They were found in Genesis 11 times. It is used 33 times in the OT. "To bless" (ver. 25) was used earlier at 12:32. "Sickness" was used earlier in Exodus at 15:26.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

"To obey, you will obey" (ver. 22) and "To demolish, you must demolish" and "to smash you must smash" (ver. 24) reflect the Hebrew grammatical form which suggests emphasis. It is the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the imperfect form.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Israel's enemies will be God's enemies: Gen. 12:3; 27:28-29.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Amorites," "Hittites," "Perizzites," "Canaanites," "Hivites," and "Jebusites" were all mentioned earlier at 3:8, 17. See comments on that text. These "pillars" were sacred stones used, in some way, in pagan ritual practices: Exo. 34:13; Deut. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Kings 17:10; 18:4; 21:3; 23:14-15.

COMMENTARY:

The angel (ver. 20) had appeared to Moses in 3:2 and to Israel in the pillar of cloud (13:21; 14:19). We believe this is a reference to that presence continuing indefinitely with Israel. The angel was sent by God to represent Him and His authority (carrying His name, ver. 21 - thus "angel of Jehovah" or "angel of God") will be with this angel.

Because this angel has been appointed by Jehovah God ("His name is on him"; ver. 21), then Israel must guard itself and be careful to obey his voice. They should not be "embittered" or "rebellious" against him and his requirements because he does not have to forgive any of their transgressions. On the other hand (ver. 22), if they are careful to submit to his voice and do what God commands through him, then God will be an enemy to Israel's enemy and an adversary to their adversaries.

This angel will go ahead of Israel and lead them into the Promised Land (ver. 23); the land of these groups. At the end of that verse, God promises that He will "destroy" them. Once again, God reiterates the need for Israel to be monotheistic (ver. 24). They should not worship the gods of the Canaanites nor serve them, nor follow their example. Rather, once they have occupied the Promised Land, they should get rid of every vestige of paganism left in the country. They should "demolish" their gods and they should "smash" the pillars which were used in the pagan worship.

Rather, they should serve Jehovah God (ver. 25), the One who just brought them out of Egypt. The One who worked His miracles on their behalf. The One who led them through the Red Sea on dry land. The One who brought water to them from a rock. The One who fed them with bread from heaven and quail. The One who made His appearance known at Mount Sinai with thunder, lighting, smoke, and trembling.

If Israel does stay faithful to God and worships Him and serves Him alone, then He will bless them with bread and with water. He will also bless their health; He will remove sickness from their midst. Remember it was at 15:26 that God said He was Israel's "healer." The last paragraph in the chapter will list many blessings which God will provide for Israel.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Israel will, in fact, rebel against Jehovah's Angel: 32:23. God warns them not to sacrifice their children to gods (Deut. 12:31; 18:9-12) and pagan sexual practices (Lev. 18:3-30). The idea that enemies of Israel will also be enemies of Jehovah God is reiterated in Deuteronomy 28:1-7. Compare verse 20 with Deuteronomy 6:10-11. God will again present blessings for covenant loyalty in Deuteronomy 7:13-15.

Later Jewish writers - Gideon will tear down pagan monuments (pillars) in Judges 6:25-32. Israel will, in fact, build "sacred pillars" in defiance of Jehovah God: 1 Kings 14:23. On the idea of Israel's enemies being God's enemies, see Joshua 1:1-9. The psalmist warns that God's people should be enemies of who / what God hates: Psalm 139:21-22. It will eventually become clear in the NT that spiritual blessings are far superior to physical blessings: see Habakkuk 3:1-18.

NT writers - There is a principle in the NT as well that enemies of Christians are enemies of Jesus Christ: Acts 9:4-5; 22:7-8; 26:14-15.

TRANSLATION - 23:26-33:

26 There will not be one misbearing [children] or barren in your land; the number of your days I will fulfill. **27** My terror I will send before you and I will confuse all the people to whom you are coming to them and I will give all your enemies to [turn] to you their backs. **28** And I will send the hornet before you and she will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. **29** I will not drive them out before you in one year lest the land will be devastated and there multiply against you beasts of the field. **30** Little by little I will drive them out from before you until when you will be fruitful and will possess the land. **31** And I will put your boundaries from the Red Sea until the Sea of the Philistines and from the wilderness until the river because I will give into your hand the inhabitants of the land and you will drive them out from before you. **32** You must not cut with them and with their gods a covenant. **33** They

must not dwell in your land lest they cause you to sin against Me because you will serve their gods because they will be to you for a trap.

HEBREW WORDS:

“Bearing” (ver. 26) here denotes one having a miscarriage. This is its only use in Exodus, out of 5 uses. “Barren” is used only here in Exodus, out of 12 uses. “Terror” (ver. 27) was used earlier at 15:16. “To confuse” was used earlier at 14:24. “Hornet” (ver. 28) is used only here; Deut. 7:20; Joshua 24:12. “To drive out” was used earlier at 2:17; 6:1; 10:11. “Devastation” (ver. 29) is used 56 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “To be fruitful” (ver. 30) was used earlier at 1:7. “To possess” will be used here and 32:13; 34:9 in Exodus, out of 59 times. “To cut” (ver. 32) was used earlier at 4:25. It is the verb often used with making a covenant, since the covenant ceremony included cutting up animals (see Gen. 15). “Covenant” was used earlier at 2:24; 6:4-5. “To sin” (ver. 33) was used earlier at 9:27, 34. A “trap” was seen earlier at 10:7.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

“Great terror” fell on the cities around Jacob and his family as they moved through Canaan in Genesis 35:5. The original, detailed list of nations which would be driven out of the land in order for Israel to have a place to prepare for the coming Messiah is found in God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The “Red Sea” (ver. 31) is a branch of the modern Gulf of Aqaba; it might not even be visible today. “The river” refers to the Euphrates river. Other rivers in the OT will have a more specific designation. The Sea of the “Philistines” (used earlier at 13:17) will be the Mediterranean Sea, along which coast the Philistines settled.

COMMENTARY:

If Israel remains faithful to God - specifically defined as avoiding idolatry (23:24), then God will bless them. God will bless their mothers with pregnancies that go full-term (ver. 26). God will bless them by causing other peoples to be afraid of them and to be in confusion, even to turn their backs on Israel as they fled in fear (ver. 27).

God will bless Israel by sending “hornets” - probably a metaphor for His disciplinary actions through Israel’s armies - to drive the Canaanites out of the land of Egypt (ver. 28). God will bless Israel so that the land will not become desolate through neglect. Rather, He will lead the invasion slowly, incrementally so the wild beasts will not become too great in Canaan (ver. 29). He will lead them into Canaan gradually so they will become fruitful and take possession of the whole land of Canaan. The story of this invasion is recounted in the books of Joshua and Judges. The fact that Israel’s occupation happened slowly often causes issues with archaeologists because they can’t find evidence of such an invasion, which they imagine happened quickly.

God will bless Israel by preparing the boundaries of her habitation (ver. 31) from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, to the Euphrates (ver. 31). The inhabitants of Canaan will be driven out of the land; the land will be given into the hand of Israel. They should drive the Canaanites out of the land.

Once again, God reinforces His prohibition against idolatry and even making treaties (“covenants”) with the peoples of Canaan (ver. 32). God did not want Canaanites to live in the land among Israel because they would motivate Israel to sin against God (ver. 33) and then serve the gods. They would be “traps” for Israel. We see that this, in fact, happened against God’s warning and in fulfillment of His prediction.

If God allowed Israel to fall into idolatry, there would be *no one* who believed in only One True God. Then, when the Son came to earth, no one would believe that He was the “only, unique Son of the Living God” (John 3:16; Matt. 16:16). In that case, Jesus would be accepted

as a god among many gods. At which point, salvation would not be possible. This is the reason God strictly required monotheism from Israel and why He punished Israel severely (two exiles) for its idolatry and paganism.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - God's gift of the land to Israel is contingent on their spiritual commitment to Him. He also promises that He will take the land from them (Lev. 24:26).

Later Jewish writers - God will cause confusion during the days of Joshua (2:11; 10:10-11). See also 1 Sam. 7:10; 14:15; Isa. 24:17-20; Jer. 48:44. The nations in Palestine became "traps" for Israel's spiritual relationship with God: Josh. 23:13; Judges 2:3. The near-term fulfillment of God's warning in 23:32-33 is the time of the judges (2:11-13). Israel will control the land, even if it did not completely occupy it, by the time of Kings David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chron. 18:3; 2 Chron. 9:26). This shows that the affirmation of those who believe in premillennialism is wrong, that Israel never controlled that amount of territory in biblical times; therefore the promise must still be fulfilled. God no longer has any spiritual interest in the land of Palestine.