*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 10 - 15

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three*

**Monday, August 10 Exodus 22:18-20**

*“Sorceresses, bestiality, and false sacrifices”*

 The first command is against sorceresses. While the female form is used here, Scripture makes it clear that sorcerers are also to be put to death. Sorcery involved calling on spiritual forces other than the God of Israel. The second command is against bestiality which is outlawed as an offense against God, not to mention being a sick, demented, gross act. It was also a religious practice of Israel’s neighbors, and thus was to be avoided along with many other things that blurred the line between the true worship of the true God and the false worship of false gods.

 The third command regards the making of sacrifices to other gods. Those who do so must be destroyed. The Hebrew word for ‘destroyed’ is different than the word meaning ‘put to death’ which is more generally used to indicate the death penalty. While the end result of both ‘destroyed’ and ‘put to death’ will be the same, the use of ‘destroyed’ indicates the severity of the offense. For example, it is the word used with respect to the destruction of Canaanite cities whose chief sin against God is their worship of other gods, including making sacrifices to them.

*The practices of false religions, Lord, are not for those who worship you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 11 Exodus 22:21-28**

*“Oppression and loans”*

 These laws are aimed at the proper treatment of others, whether Israelites or foreigners living within their borders. The first law concerns mistreatment and oppression of aliens, which is precisely what Israel was in Egypt. Another group which, like aliens, represents a disadvantaged portion of the population is widows and orphans. Having no husband or parent makes a person particularly susceptible to those who prey on the weak, an unfortunate human trait no less true then than it is today. Oppression of these people will not go unnoticed by God.

 The proper treatment of the needy, those significantly disadvantaged economically, is the next concern. If a poor man is loaned money, he is to be charged no interest. Presumably, the proper motive for lending money to the poor is to help one’s neighbor and not to make a profit. It was customary to take a pledge in a loan transaction, a form of collateral. The fact that someone would give a cloak as a pledge rather than something more valuable indicates his destitute state. But that cloak must be returned by sunset so that he may sleep warmly.

*You love your people, Lord, and are protective of them against abuse. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 12 Exodus 22:29-31**

*“Offerings, firstborn, and holiness”*

 The Israelites are reminded that their best belongs to God. The grain and wine offerings of verse 29 are the firstfruits of the field and the vine, which are often the best of the harvest. The principle is to not hold the best for yourself, but give it to God. The same holds for the firstborn of Israel’s sons. We have already seen in chapter 13 that all firstborn males, including human firstborn sons, belong to God and are therefore to be sacrificed to him. In the case of human firstborn, they are to be redeemed (i.e., substituted) by a lamb.

 Verse 31 contains another reminder – that Israel is to be God’s holy people (an echo of 19:6). But what are we to make of the specific law mentioned in verse 31b? Why should the meat of torn animals be such an issue? As will be make explicit in Leviticus, eating meat torn by wild animals (carrion) makes one unclean. Why eating torn meat results in uncleanness is not explained in the Bible, unless we understand such eating to be in violation of the law against eating meat with blood in it.

*We give you our best, Lord, for in your Son you have given us your best. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 10 - 15

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three*

**Thursday, August 13 Exodus 23:1-9**

*“Social responsibility”*

Verses 1-3 and 6-9 are direct commands (“do not . . .”), as opposed to the case law of verses 4-5 (“if . . . then . . .”), that pertain to giving testimony in court. When called upon to give testimony one must not side with either the wicked man (that is, the perpetrator of the crime), the crowd or, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, even a poor man, simply for the sake of doing so or by giving into some pressure. The godly Israelite is to make no attempt at perverting justice by making the guilty look innocent. These laws are explications of the ninth commandment: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

 Verses 4-5 envision situations in which one Israelite should go out of his way to help another. In fact, you are even to help your enemy. “Love your enemies” is not a sentiment found only in the New Testament. The unity that God’s covenant people are to express toward each other extends even to those who do not like each other. Again, what is right, not how one feels, determines behavior.

*We fail to reflect your glory, Lord, when we deal falsely with others. Amen.*

**Friday, August 14 Exodus 23:10-13**

*“The Sabbath”*

 The stated purpose for leaving the land unplowed during the seventh year is so that the poor can eat their fill. This Sabbath year is an extension of the fourth commandment: “Remember to observe the Sabbath by keeping it holy.” The way that the Israelites keep the seventh year holy is not by offering the firstfruits of the produce of that year to God, but by leaving it for the poor. The emphasis we have seen on protection of the disadvantaged throughout these chapters on the law is evident here.

 Verse 12 refers to the Sabbath day and essentially repeats what was stated in 20:8-11. Such repetition underscores the importance the Sabbath plays in God’s will for his people. There is, however, one interesting difference. In 20:11, the motivation for ceasing work on the seventh day is that God himself ceased work on that day. In 23:12 the motive is to refresh beasts of burden, slaves, and aliens. The humanitarian concerns of 23:12 complement the more God-centered motive of 20:11.

*Your laws, Lord, benefit the needs of all your creation. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 15 Exodus 23:14-19**

 *“Festivals”*

 Three annual festivals are to be observed. The first is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This ceremony is to be understood in conjunction with the Passover night described in Exodus 12, and is the yearly commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt. The Feast of Harvest is also referred to as the Feast of Weeks. It was held seven weeks after the first festival and entails offering to God the firstfruits of one’s produce, with the celebration of the completed harvest coming in the fall during the third feast, the Feast of Ingathering. Thus, the second feast symbolizes the harvest that is to come. It is tangible, concrete evidence of what is ahead.

 The Feast of Ingathering, also referred to as the Feast of Booths, to symbolize Israel’s living in temporary shelters while traveling through the wilderness, is intimately tied to the settling of the land. The land’s ability to produce is a gift from God. It is not to be taken for granted, but Israel it truly to thank God for its “daily bread.” The four final laws in verses 18-19 are somewhat odd, but they all have to do with particular practices related to the three festivals.

*We celebrate your Son, Lord, with the festivals of Christmas and Easter. Amen.*