

Exodus 22-24

The Israelites have arrived at the mountain of God. This is the same mountain we encountered a week ago, where Moses met with God and was given the command to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The sign God would give to Moses about all of this was that that Israelites would worship him on the mountain. Well, here we are. The Israelites are worshiping God on the mountain. Amazing what a difference a week makes!

In our reading today, God will continue to give the law to the Israelites. There is also a unique scene near the end of our reading that we'll want to pay careful attention to because it undoes a good amount of Christian Superstition ☺ Let's get to it!

22:1-15

The laws governing the economic affairs of God's people often get overlooked when we talk about "God's Laws." But they, possibly more than any of the other laws, would have had the greatest impact on daily life. Just a few points in passing:

- Private property rights are assumed.
- Laws concerning the accidental destruction of property are restorative, not punitive; laws concerning the intentional destruction of property are punitive (see especially 21:35-36, 22:7-9).
- Laws concerning the accidental or intentional death of work animals (or the destruction of property by animals) take up more space than the 10 Commandments (21:28-22:15 vs. 20:1-17).

22:16-31

The focus shifts now away from economic affairs to social justice. The commands come fast and furious. As above, I'd like to offer my comments on several of them.

- Idolatry is mentioned in between bestiality and treatment of foreigners. Without squeezing too much out of this, I think it can be said that the faith (or worship life) of your neighbor impacts you as much (if not more) than his or her social behavior. There is a "horizontal relationship" component to a person's faith.
- When it comes to the treatment of the fatherless and widow, the Lord himself says he will bring retribution against those who mistreat these

- two categories of people. When it comes to punishing or bringing justice, the Lord has trusted his people to carry it out. But for these defenseless classes of people, the Lord himself will act.
- The Israelites were not to speak evil of their rulers. It is tempting to make a direct application to our leaders, saying that we should always speak well of those in positions of leadership, but we need to be careful in making a direct comparison between our leaders and the leaders of Old Testament Israel. Yes, we are to respect our leaders and give them the obedience due their office (Romans 13 comes to mind), but the rulers of Israel, which would have included the priests and Levites, were more than political figures (as ours are today) and we need to be careful to distinguish between them and our leaders today (without totally denying our leaders today obedience and proper support).
 - Consecration. There's a lot here, but in the interest of time, let's skip it for now.

23:1

One of the most persistent evils of our day, IMHO, is gossip. Entire industries exist today to spread malicious gossip and false reports about people. If you have not read Luther's comments from the Large Catechism on the 8th Commandment, I strongly encourage you to do so. When it comes to gossip, we would rather hear something bad about someone than something good. But heaven forbid someone would ever say something unflattering about us! Notice that in this verse it is not just forbidden to tell lies about someone to damage them; it is also forbidden to say anything MALICIOUS... even if it is true. It is our calling, as it was the calling of the Israelites, to speak well of people as much as we can, in every way we can.

23:2-3

It is forbidden for people to gang up against someone and tear them down for personal gain. Honesty combined with speaking well of people, is to define how we bear witness about our neighbor.

23:4-5

In other words: when you see some good that you should do, do it! The moral character of the child of God does not simply say "NO" to what is wrong; it says "YES" to what is right.

23:6-9

Integrity in legal proceedings is very important. As God's people, we should not side with someone in a dispute because they are rich, nor should we gang

up on someone because they are poor (and vulnerable). We should treat with respect and dignity those who are not like us. (This does not mean that we cannot support policies at a governmental level that establish standards for entry and residence in our country; it does mean that we should not treat anyone harshly based on their country of origin.)

23:10-11

It is worth noting that Paul wrote that the Sabbath laws (etc) were a shadow of the things that are coming, but that the reality is in Christ. We are not bound by Sabbath laws, but they can be helpful with informing us how to carry out our business and our lives.

23:12

We are to extend rest even to people who do not share our beliefs.

23:13

Notice how many times, and in how many different contexts, idolatry is forbidden! (Also, as we continue our Bible-in-a-year, and come to the books of the history of Old Testament Israel, notice how idolatry is by far the sin of the people that results in their downfall.)

23:14-19

A more detailed explanation of the various festivals will be given in Leviticus. We'll hold off on studying them until then...

23:20-33

The promise of the land given to Abraham (and to his descendants) is reiterated. God details how the driving out of the peoples in the promised land will take place. It would not happen all at once, but slowly over time. And while this would be a whole lot less dramatic than if God drove them out of the land in the same overpowering way he scattered the people at Babel, brought plagues on Egypt, or destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, we can learn a whole lot more from God working this way.

God rarely, if ever, works the way we think he should. Because if this, it's easy to miss God's work. Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Word are all... well... plain. And yet this is how God comes to us. A man on a cross 2,000 years ago, while grotesque, was not uncommon. And yet the death of the man Jesus on a cross 2,000 years ago means salvation for all. Be skeptical of "God-as-Rockstar." Embrace the hidden God who comes through means and became a human being and walked as one of us.

23:1-2

We will meet Nadab and Abihu again. Don't get too attached to them.

Notice already how God is establishing a distance between himself and different groups of people. Moses may get closest, then the elders, and then the rest of the people. This will carry over in the tabernacle/ sacrificial system God will give to his people in the coming chapters.

23:3-8

Notice two things here:

1. Moses is taking time getting up the mountain with the elders because what is going to happen up there is a big deal.
2. The people repeat the promise: "All the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do." Keep this in mind as the story moves on.

23:9-11

Well-intentioned Christians like to say that no one can see God and live. If this is the case, then the 70 elders of Israel, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu have some explaining to do!

Maybe a better way to say it is: "those whom the Lord chooses WILL see God and live forever." And not only will they see his face, but they will enjoy themselves when they see it. This scene foreshadows the eschatological marriage feast of the Lamb.

23:12-18

Again, Moses draws this story out so that when we actually get the substance of what God says to Moses, we are more than ready to hear it. Notice that Moses is able to enter the presence of God; he has been chosen for such an honor. As a murderer, Moses was not worthy on his own to be doing what he was doing; only by God's grace is he able to be called to do what he is doing.