

Justice and Fairness

Exodus 23:1-12

SS Lesson for 01/16/2022

Devotional Scripture: Proverbs 1:10-16

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Exodus 23:2-3

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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False witnessing comes from an evil mind (Matt 15:19-20)

False witnesses must be punished (Prov 19:9)

False witnesses are among those who try to destroy Christianity (Matt 26:59-61)

False witnesses speak things that can never be proven (Acts 25:6-8)

False witnesses cause dissensions (Prov 6:19)

Associations in witness (2)

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Wicked associations are enemies of God (James 4:4)

Wicked associations entice to sin (Prov 1:10-11)

Wicked associations seek to plan evil (Prov 4:14-16)

Wicked associations can cause others to stray from God (Gal 2:11-13)

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Mercy because it is a prerequisite of getting mercy (Matt 18:32-35)

Mercy because God is merciful (Luke 6:36)

Mercy because it is a characteristic of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

Mercy because mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13)

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

To understand the laws under consideration in today's text, we must pay attention to their contexts (plural). On a larger scale, Exodus 21–23 is often called the Covenant Code because it gives foundational rules for ancient Israel's corporate life. In other words, the laws reflect how people were to conduct themselves in typical, everyday situations. This collection of laws is the basis of longer discussions in Leviticus 17–27 and Deuteronomy 12–26. Within Exodus, the Covenant Code comes immediately after the Ten Commandments. While that shorter list includes 10 distinct laws, expressed for easy memorization, the longer list of the Covenant Code repeats itself and arranges topics more by association ("speaking of X, consider also Y"). That sort of organization appears in today's lesson. The sequence of the laws influences meaning. Readers should not think of them as sound bites but as a web of required behaviors that collectively reflected the character of those practicing them. On a smaller scale, today's text of Exodus 23:1–12 concentrates on issues of justice. Verses 1–9 fit closely with the end of chapter 22, while verses 10–12 open up a discussion of the proper use of time for worship and rest. The two major sections of the text at hand use the same sort of lock-and-key organizational technique common in Israelite legal texts and in the book of Proverbs. That is, several statements on obviously

related themes follow each other. Then the topic seems to change, and then it returns to the original subject. This pattern challenges the reader to see previously unconsidered dimensions of both the main idea on the ends of the list and a seemingly different idea wedged into the middle. In this case, Exodus 23:4–5 seems to change the subject covered in verses 1–3 and 6–8, all of which feature a courtroom setting. Verses 4–5 envision encounters out in the field or on the road. The apparent change of topics reminds the reader that lying in court does not occur in the abstract but at the expense of real people and relationships. Conversely, the text’s connection between judicial proceedings and ordinary helpfulness toward enemies reminds the reader that even the most mundane incidents of life have wider societal implications. These laws apply concretely the more general command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Since people tend to extend greatest love to friends and family members while treating others less favorably, the Law of Moses identifies classes of people who deserved respect in the Israelites’ interactions with them. The law does not allow for rationalizing, self-indulgence, or sanctimonious self-justification. Rather, it demanded that the Israelites take seriously their status as peers with all other human beings and as fellow subjects of their Creator. This fact is reflected in the apostle Paul’s statement that “whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). These laws also assumed that the Israelites wanted to be people of integrity. The Israelites should have wanted to act justly, even when pushed to do otherwise or when conflict made them want to take personal revenge. They were to have recognized their own faults and temptations to misbehavior and take steps to correct them.

Key Verse: Exodus 23:2-3

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. 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

23:1-9. These admonitions, which expand the ninth commandment (20:16), deal with the need for impartial justice in lawsuits. The Israelites were to bear a true witness in legal cases. Israelites were **not to pervert justice by** being influenced by **the crowd** or even by **favoritism to the poor**. The words **enemy’s** (23:4) and **someone who hates you** (v. 5) probably mean “a legal adversary”; an Israelite was to be kind even to the animals of someone with whom he had a legal disagreement. Denying **justice to the poor** because of their social status (v. 6; cf. V. 3), giving **false** testimony in court that results in an **innocent** person’s **death** (v. 7), accepting **a bribe** (payment for favoritism in court, v. 8; cf. Deut. 16:19—this was a common problem in the ancient Near East), and oppressing **an alien** (cf. Ex. 22:21; perhaps 23:9 refers to court cases) were all forbidden

23:10-13. The Lord then instructed Israel concerning the sabbatical year (vv. 10-11) and the Sabbath Day (vv. 12-13), instructions that expanded the fourth commandment (20:8-11). The sabbatical year reminded Israel that God owns the land and that it was theirs merely as a trust (Lev. 25:23). Also the sabbatical year provided for **the poor**, who could glean from the **fields**. By resting **on the seventh day** man and animals could **be refreshed** for another six days of work. This section (Ex. 23:13) ends with a general admonition to obey God’s commands and a warning not to recognize the existence of any **other gods** by mentioning their **names**.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Fairness in Witness (Exodus 23:1-2)

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

False witness (1)

False witnessing is to be purged from among the saints (Deut 19:16-19)

16 If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, 17 the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. 18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, 19 then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you.

False witnessing comes from an evil mind (Matt 15:19-20)

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

False witnesses must be punished (Prov 19:9)

9 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish.

False witnesses are among those who try to destroy Christianity (Matt 26:59-61)

59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward 61 and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

False witnesses speak things that can never be proven (Acts 25:6-8)

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. 8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

False witnesses cause dissensions (Prov 6:19)

19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

Associations in witness (2)

Wicked associations can lead to assimilation (1 Cor 15:33)

33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Wicked associations are enemies of God (James 4:4)

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Wicked associations entice to sin (Prov 1:10-11)

10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. 11 If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul;

Wicked associations seek to plan evil (Prov 4:14-16)

14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. 16 For they cannot sleep till they do evil; they are robbed of slumber till they make someone fall.

Wicked associations can cause others to stray from God (Gal 2:11-13)

11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Injustice in witness (2)

Injustice is one of the things God detests (Prov 17:15)

15 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent — the Lord detests them both.

Injustice God says is not good (Prov 18:5)

5 It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice.

Injustice should be rebuked (Prov 24:23-25)

23 These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good: 24 Whoever says to the guilty, "You are innocent" — peoples will curse him and nations denounce him. 25 But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them.

Injustice causes wickedness to be present (Eccl 3:16-17)

16 And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment — wickedness was there, in the place of justice — wickedness was there. 17 I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed."

Injustice corrupts (Eccl 7:7)

7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Fairness in Judgment (Exodus 23:3-9)

3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.

5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

6 "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.

7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.

8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

9 "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Partiality in judgment (3)

Partiality bring God's rebuke (Job 13:10)

10 He would surely rebuke you if you secretly showed partiality.

Partiality is thinking more highly of oneself than others (Luke 18:11-14)

11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Partiality is wrong because Christians are one in Jesus (Gal 3:27-28)

27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Partiality is wrong because Christians are members of one body (1 Cor 12:12)

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

Partiality is wrong because God shows no distinction (Rom 10:12)

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Partiality is wrong because there is none with God (Rom 2:11)

11 For God does not show favoritism.

Honesty in judgment (4-6)

Honesty comes from God (Prov 16:11)

11 Honest scales and balances are from the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making.

Honesty is pleasing to God (1 Chron 29:17)

17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

Honesty is rewarded by God (Luke 16:10-11)

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"

Honesty is summed up by the golden rule (Matt 7:12)

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Honesty should be a goal (Acts 24:16)

16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Righteousness in judgment (7-8)

Righteousness through faith in Jesus (Rom 3:22)

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Righteousness through Jesus' obedience (Rom 5:19)

19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Righteousness that comes from God (Phil 3:7-9)

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Righteousness through Jesus becoming our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30)

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Righteousness through Jesus bearing our sins (2 Cor 5:21)

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Mercy in judgment (9)

Mercy because it is a blessing (Matt 5:7)

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy because it is a prerequisite of getting mercy (Matt 18:32-35)

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Mercy because God is merciful (Luke 6:36)

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Mercy because it is a characteristic of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Mercy because mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13)

13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Fairness in Work (Exodus 23:10-12)

10 "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce,
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. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove.
12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

Productive in work (10)

Productive so that life flourishes (Ps 92:12-14)

12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; 13 planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,

Productive through remaining in Jesus (John 15:5)

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Productive through obedience to God (Josh 1:6-8)

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Productive through fear of the Lord (Ps 128:1-2)

1 Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Sabbath observance (11)

Sabbath should be a rest for land (Lev 25:4)

4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.

Sabbath should not be for buying and selling (Neh 10:31)

31 "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

Sabbath is a rest for man (Heb 4:9)

9 There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God;

Sabbath is not to be a judgment for others (Col 2:16-17)

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Sabbath has Jesus as Lord of it (Matt 12:8)

8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27)

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Rest in work (11)

A rest made possible through receiving God's mercy (1 Peter 2:10)

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

A rest that is an inheritance from God (Ps 94:13-14)

13 you grant him relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked. 14 For the Lord will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.

A rest that is peaceful and secure (Isa 32:18)

18 My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.

A rest that provides relief from troubles (2 Thess 1:7)

7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

A rest that is a blessing for those who die in the Lord (Rev 14:13)

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

Refreshment in work (12)

Refreshment through repentance (Acts 3:19)

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Refreshment through generosity (Prov 11:25)

25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Refreshment of the spirit (1 Cor 16:18)

18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

Refreshment of the heart (Philem 1:20)

20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Refreshment from God (Jer 31:25)

25 I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint."

Refreshment through fellowship (Rom 15:32)

32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from John Gill

Introduction

This chapter contains several laws, chiefly judicial, relating to the civil polity of Israel, as concerning witness borne and judgment made of cases in courts of judicature, without any respect to poor or rich, and without the influence of a bribe, Exodus 23:1, concerning doing good to an enemy in case any of his cattle go astray, or fall under their burden, Exodus 23:4, and of the oppression of a stranger,

Exodus 23:9, and then follow others concerning the sabbath of the seventh year, and of the seventh day, with a caution against the use of the names of idols, Exodus 23:10, next are laws concerning the appearance of all their males at the three feasts, Exodus 23:14, and concerning the slaying of the sacrifice of the passover, and bringing the first of the firstfruits of the land, Exodus 23:18 and then a promise is made of sending an angel to them to bring them into the land of Canaan, where they should carefully avoid all idolatry, and show a just indignation against it, and serve the Lord, and then it would be well with them, Exodus 23:20, and particularly it is promised, that the Lord would send his fear, and his hornets, before them, to destroy the inhabitants of the land, and drive out the rest by little and little, until they should possess the utmost borders of it, which are fixed, Exodus 23:27, and the chapter is concluded with a direction not to make a covenant with these people, or their gods, nor suffer them to dwell among them, lest they should be a snare unto them,

Verse 1

Thou shalt not raise a false report,.... Of a neighbour, or of any man whatever, either secretly by private slanders, whispers, backbiting and tale bearing, by innuendos, detracting from his good name and credit, suggesting things false and wicked concerning him; or publicly in a court of judicature, bringing a false accusation, laying a false charge, and bearing a false testimony against him: or "thou shalt not receive a false report" p; if there were not so many, that say, Report, and we will report it, that are ready to receive every ill

thing of their neighbours, there would not be so many that would raise such ill things of them; everything of this kind should be discountenanced, and especially by judges in courts of judicature, who are chiefly spoken to and of in the context; these should not easily admit every charge and accusation brought; nor bear, or endure a false report, as the word also signifies, but discourage, and even punish it:

put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness; which is not a gesture used in swearing, such as with us, of putting the hand upon a book, which did not obtain so early; nor is there any instance of this kind in Scripture; the gesture used in swearing was either putting the hand under the thigh, which yet is questionable, or lifting of it up to heaven; but here it is expressive of confederacy, of joining hand in hand to carry on a prosecution in an unrighteous way, by bearing false testimony against another; and such were to be guarded against, and not admitted to give evidence in a cause, even a man that is known to be a wicked man, or to have been an unrighteous witness before; on the one hand, a man should be careful of joining with him in a testimony that is unrighteous; and, on the other hand, judges should take care not to suffer such to be witnesses. The Jews say q, that everyone that is condemned to be scourged, or has been scourged for some crime committed, is reckoned a wicked man, and he is not to be admitted a witness, nor his testimony taken.

Verse 2

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil,.... The Targums of Jerusalem and Jonathan add, but to do good. As in private life, the examples of the many, who are generally the most wicked, are not to be followed, though they too often are; examples, and especially of the multitude, having great influence, and therefore to be guarded against; so in public courts of judicature, where there are many judges upon the bench, if one of them is sensible that the greater part go wrong in their judgment of a case, he ought not to follow them, or be influenced by them, but go according to the dictates of his own conscience, and the evidence of things as they appear to him, and neither agree to justify the wicked, nor condemn the righteous:

neither shall thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment; or "thou shalt not answer" r; either in pleading in a cause, and taking the side of it the majority is on, and for that reason, though it is a manifest perversion of justice; or by giving a vote on that side, and on that account, whereby a wrong judgment passes; and this vote given either according to the number of witnesses, which ought not always to be the rule of judgment; for it is not the number of witnesses, but the nature, evidence, and circumstances of their testimony, that are to be regarded: Jarchi says, in judgments of life and death, they go after the mouth of one witness to absolve, and after the mouth of two to condemn: or according to the number of judges on the bench, and their superiority in years and knowledge; and so some render the word, "after the great ones" s; for a judge is not to be influenced by names or numbers in giving his vote, but to judge according to the truth of things, as they appear to him: hence the Jews say, that the younger or puisne judges used to be asked their judgment first, that they might not be influenced by others superior to them; and a like method is taken with us in the trial of a peer, the younger lords always giving their opinion first: as to the number of votes by which a cause was carried in court, it is said t, not as the decline to good, is the decline to evil; the decline to good, i.e. to absolution, is by the sentence of one (a majority of one); the decline to evil, i.e. to condemnation, is by the mouth or sentence of two, a majority of two.

Verse 3

Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause. Because he is a poor man, and for that reason endeavour to carry his cause for him, right or wrong, from a foolish pity to him as a poor man, and from an affectation of gaining the applause of people on that account; or "thou shalt not honour" or "adorn" a poor man u, by a set speech in favour of his cause, though wrong, dressed up in the best manner, and set off with all the colourings of art, to make it appear in the most plausible manner; the law is against respect of persons, as not the person of the rich, so neither is the person of the poor to be accepted, but the justice of their cause is to be regarded; so the Targum of Jonathan,

"the poor that is guilty in his judgment or cause, his face (or person) thou shalt not accept to have pity on him, for no person is to be accepted in judgment."

Verse 4

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray,.... Or any other beast, as the Samaritan version adds; for these are only mentioned for instances, as being more common, and creatures subject to go astray; now when such as these are met going astray, so as to be in danger of being lost to the owner, though he is an enemy; or as the Targum of Jonathan,

"whom thou hatest because of a sin, which thou alone knowest in him;"

yet this was not so far to prejudice the finder of his beasts against him, as to be careless about them, to suffer them to go on without acquainting him with them, or returning them to him, as follows:

thou shalt surely bring it back to him again; whether it be an ox, or an ass, or any other beast, the law is very strong and binding upon the finder to return it to his neighbour, though an enemy, and bring it either to his field or to his farm.

Verse 5

If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden,.... Fallen down, and such a burden upon him that he cannot rise up again, but lies under it, and the owner of it is not able of himself to raise it up again:

and wouldst forbear to help him; show an inclination to pass on without giving him any assistance to get up his beast again; or "wouldst thou forbear to help him?" was Jarchi, and others, read with an interrogation, could it be in thine heart to forbear helping him? couldst thou go on, and take no notice of him and his case, and not join him in endeavouring to get up his beast again, that he may proceed its his journey? canst thou be so cruel and hardhearted, though he is thine enemy? but if thou art, know this,

thou shalt surely help with him; to get up his ass again: hence the Jewish canon runs thus x,

"if an ass is unloaded and loaded four or five times, a man is bound, i.e. to help, as it is said, "in helping thou shalt help"; if he (the owner) goes away, and sets himself down, seeing the command is upon thee, if it is thy will and pleasure to unload, unload, he is free; for it is said, with him; if he is an old man, or sick, he is bound, the command of the law is to unload, but not to load."

The words may be rendered, "in leaving thou shalt leave with him" y; either leave or forsake thine enmity to help him, as Onkelos; or leave thy business, thou art about, to lend him an hand to raise up his beast again.

Verse 6

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. As the poor man was not to be favoured when his cause was bad through an affected pity for him as a poor man, so his judgment was not to be wrested or perverted, when his cause was good, because of his poverty; which is too often the case, through the power of rich men, and the prevalence of their gifts and bribes, and to curry favour with them: the phrase, "thy poor", is very emphatic, and intended to engage judges to regard them, as being of the same flesh and blood with them, of the same nation and religion; and who were particularly committed to their care and protection under God, who is the Judge and protector of the poor, of the widow and the fatherless.

Verse 7

Keep thee far from a false matter,.... Or "word" z; from receiving a false testimony, or taking the false or wrong side of a cause, or engaging in a bad one; keep aloof off from it, as much at a distance from it as possible:

and the innocent and the righteous slay thou not; that is, do not condemn them to death, nor join with the majority in their condemnation, if they appear to be innocent and righteous; nor give orders, or join in giving orders to the executioner to put such to death. The Targum of Jonathan is,

"he that goes righteous out of the house of thy judgment (out of the sanhedrim, to which he belonged), and they find out his sin (afterwards), and he that goes out guilty, and they (afterwards) find out his righteousness, do not slay:"

for I will not justify the wicked: the wicked judge in pronouncing an unjust sentence on innocent and righteous men, or if they absolve wicked men, at the same time they put to death the innocent and righteous, God will not justify those wicked men cleared by them, but will, in his own time and way, sooner or later, inflict the deserved punishment on them: this is not contrary to Romans 4:5 for though God justifies the ungodly, he does not justify ungodliness in them, or them in ungodliness, but from it, and that by the imputation of the righteousness of his Son.

Verse 8

And thou shalt take no gift,.... Of the persons whose cause is to be tried in a court of judicature before judges; neither of those on the one side nor on the other, neither before the trial nor after, neither by words, by a promise, nor by facts, by actually receiving money; and not even to judge truly, as Jarchi observes, neither to clear the innocent nor to condemn the guilty: a gift was not to be taken on any consideration whatever:

for the gift blindeth the wise; or the "seeing" a; the open ones, who used to have both their eyes and their ears open, and attentive to the cause before them; and yet a gift so blinds them, by casting such a mist before them, that they are inattentive to the true merits of the cause, and their affections and judgments are to be carried away in favour of those that have bribed them, as to pass a wrong sentence:

and perverteth the words of the righteous; either the sentences of righteous judges, as they ought to be, but a gift perverts their judgment, and they give a wrong decree; or the causes of the righteous that are brought before those are perverted by giving the cause to their adversaries, who are wicked men.

Verse 9

Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger,.... As these were not to be vexed and oppressed in a private manner and by private men, see

Exodus 22:21 so neither in a public manner, and in a public court of judicature, or by judges on the bench when their cause was before them, by not doing them justice, showing a partiality to those of their own nation against a stranger; whereas a stranger ought to have equal justice done him as a native, and the utmost care should be taken that he has no injury done him, and the rather because he is a stranger:

for ye know the heart of a stranger; the fears he is possessed of, the inward distress of his soul, the anxiety of his mind, the tenderness of his heart, the workings of his passions, his grief and sorrow, and dejection of spirit: the Targum of Jonathan is,

"the groaning of the soul of a stranger": this the Israelitish judges knew, having had a very late experience of it:"

seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; where they had been vexed and oppressed, brought into hard bondage, and groaned under it; and therefore it might be reasonably thought and expected that they would have a heart sympathizing with strangers, and use them well, and especially see that justice was done them, and no injury or oppression of any kind.

Verse 10

And six years thou shalt sow thy land, The land of Canaan, given to their ancestors and to them, and which they were now going to inherit; and when they came into it they were to plant it with vines and olives; or rather, these being ready planted, they were to prune and dress them; and they were to till their land, and plough it, and sow it with various sorts of grain, for six years running, from the time of their possession of it:

and shall gather in the fruits thereof; corn and wine, and oil, into their own garners, treasuries, and cellars, as their own property, to dispose of as they pleased for their own use and profit.

Verse 11

But the seventh year thou shall let it rest, and lie still,.... From tillage, and make its fruits common, as the Targum of Jonathan; the note of Jarchi is, "let it rest", from perfect tillage, as ploughing and sowing; "and lie still", from dunging and harrowing, or weeding; this law was intended to show that God was the original proprietor and owner of this land, and that the Israelites held it under him; and to teach them to depend upon and trust in his providence; as well as that there might be both rest for the land, and so it became more fruitful afterwards, having by this rest renewed its vigour, and also for servants and cattle; and that the poor might have an equal share in the fruits of the earth, and appear to be joint lords of it with others under God, as it follows:

that the poor of thy people may eat: that which grows up of itself, of which there were great quantities; for the sixth year bringing forth for three years, a great deal of seed fell, which grew up again; and especially, as through plenty they were not so careful to gather it all up; and besides this, there were the fruits of trees, of vines, olives, c. which brought forth their fruit in course as usual, and which were all this year common to poor and rich so that the former had an equal propriety and share with the latter:

and what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat; signifying that there should be such plenty that there would be enough for all, and to spare; that there would be much left, and which should be the portion of the beasts of the field, and who would also be sufficiently provided for by the produce the earth brought forth of itself, as herbage, c. and the fruits the poor left:

in like manner thou shall deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard that is, these were not to be pruned, nor the grapes and olives gathered, but were to be in common with all: a larger account is given of this law in Leviticus 25:2.

Verse 12

Six days thou shalt do thy work,.... That is, they might do what work they would on the six days of the week: **and on the seventh day thou shall rest**; from all the work and labour done on other days, and give up themselves to religious exercises:

that thine ox and thine ass may rest; and so every other beast, as horses, camels, c.

and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed the former, the Targum of Jonathan, and so Jarchi, interprets, of one uncircumcised, and the latter, of a proselyte of the gate: this law is here repeated, partly to show that it is of the same kind with the former, namely, ceremonial and temporary; and partly, as Jarchi observes, lest it should be said, since all, the year is called the sabbath, there was no need to observe the weekly sabbath.

(Adapted from [URL:https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/geb/exodus-23.html](https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/geb/exodus-23.html))

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

One of the most powerful treatments of the nature of God appears in Exodus. It contains a richly layered set of stories exploring the question “What sort of God do we have in our midst?” This story lies behind all of Israel’s laws. Rather than creating a long philosophical discussion on God, the scroll of Exodus weaves together stories about divine actions and conversations around them. As it reveals a God who practices a radical commitment to mercy, Exodus does not avoid the challenges that belief in a redeemer God poses. The 600-plus laws in the Old Testament do not address every imaginable circumstance. Even so, they lay out enough specific examples to allow thinking people to figure out how to act in situations not explicitly named. The Law of Moses invites reflection. Those following it ask questions that will shape commitments and attitudes for a lifetime. A remarkable feature of today’s church in much of the Western world is its distance from the poorest among us. American Christians, in particular, often seem to live in a bubble. Wealth is taken as proof of God’s blessing, which can lead us to blame others for their alleged failures if they do not obtain it. We are slow to acknowledge how decisions of past generations still affect people’s lives. And those most vulnerable pay the price for that self-deception. The Law of Moses, while aimed at the people of Israel, offers guiding principles for the church as well. Life together requires practical actions that show love for difficult people. In this way, we can fulfill the law: to love our God, and to love both neighbors and enemies, wherever they are found.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Justice - Am I a person who is swayed when justice is discussed? Or do I seek what the Bible has to say and govern my thinking, attitudes, and actions? Once a false report is in circulation and everyone believes the report, it’s easy to jump on the bandwagon. The majority aren’t always right. Take a hard, honest look at your associates. Do not be led in the wrong direction: “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor. 15:33). Remember that those who follow God often stand by themselves with God alone on their side.

No Favoritism - Throughout Scripture, God encourages no favoritism toward the rich or the poor. When dispensing justice, the facts of the case should determine the outcome, not a person’s finances or social status. Do not show favoritism to someone in a dispute just because they are poor.

God’s Laws Are Not Partial - It is easy to show favor to individuals who favor you. But if your hateful neighbor’s ox wanders off and you find him, take him back. If that same hateful neighbor’s donkey falls under too heavy a load, don’t hold back. Help the poor animal and his ungrateful owner.

God’s Justice Prevails - Truth is the goal in any and every court case. Never have anything to do with an innocent person’s death. Refuse a bribe; it will come back to bite you. Taking bribes deprives a reasonable person of moral sense and perception and causes their speech to be twisted. Moses continued to expound on the law of the Sabbath. Every seventh year the land should rest. No planting or harvesting, the servants and animals should stop working for a year. The congregation should spend their time in spiritual activities on the Sabbath. For example, when the Hebrews were on the way to the Promised Land, God said He would supply no manna on the seventh day and the people were to prepare for Sabbath on the day before by collecting extra. It is always better to follow God’s instructions in His Word than the voices of the day.