

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Exodus 23:1-9

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, June 3, 2012

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 3, 2012**, is from **Exodus 23:1-9**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **The Oklahoman** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Exodus 23:1-9

(Exodus 23:1) You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness.

Through Moses, God taught former slaves how to govern themselves by just laws. God helped them establish a human and a humane government designed to bless all people, all living creatures, and the fields and land where they would live in the Promised Land. Formerly, they had to obey unjust taskmasters, who made arbitrary rules for the selfish benefit of government leaders (Pharaoh and his advisors). If they did not obey their taskmasters' unjust commands, they suffered punishment. To live in a just society, God gave them laws that forbid telling lies against others and spreading falsehoods. God also forbid them from joining with the wicked in bearing false witness, especially in a court of law, for then the judge would make an unjust judgment based on knowing only false testimony.

(Exodus 23:2) You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice;

The majority may rule, but the majority may rule wrongly. If the majority want to do wrong, we are not to do what they do: we must be just and do right. In a jury, the majority may want to do wrong. If we serve on a jury and the majority want to do wrong, we must not side with the majority. A majority of the judges in a court may want to do wrong, we must not pervert justice along with them, and may need to work justly to change their rulings or replace the judges. Majority

rule is not to overrule the law of God, and we must respond rightly and wisely.

(Exodus 23:3) nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

When we see the poor suffering, we often want to help them. But in a court of law, we cannot show partiality to someone who is poor, because that would be unjust to others. The poor can be helped in ways that will not be unjust to anyone.

(Exodus 23:4) When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

Both the Old and New Testaments command us to love our neighbor. Whether someone is our enemy or not, they are our neighbor. If our enemy's ox or donkey has gone astray, if we take it back to our enemy (with an explanation and possibly witnesses going with us), we may save others and ourselves from possibly being harmed by the stray animal or the animal being harmed or lost. Our enemy may be turned into a friend. We can apply this principle anytime we see someone having a problem that we can help solve, whether they are our enemy or not.

(Exodus 23:5) When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and

you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free.

In addition to loving our neighbor, God commands us to care for domestic animals and not abuse them. For the sake of the donkey and the sake of our neighbor, we are to help even our enemy if they or their animals are in trouble. Our enemy may hate us, but through love we can show them a better way. Love can overcome hate and may win us a friend.

(Exodus 23:6) You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits.

The Egyptian taskmasters perverted the justice due their Hebrew slaves; and they kept their slaves poor. Justice is based on God's objective laws and not the arbitrary decisions of human rulers or majority opinions. Under God's law, the rich should not take unjust advantage of anyone who may be mentally or physically poor or uninformed. The poor may not be able to afford legal advice, and they should not be sued in order to take unjust advantage of them.

(Exodus 23:7) Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty.

Some people or parties make false charges to win an election; this is unjust, for it robs the electorate of the truths they need to cast wise votes. Innocent people

have been framed and accused of stealing or killing. Unborn or newborn babies are murdered, sometimes at the command of government or with a government's permission or encouragement. Those in the right have been murdered for all the wrong reasons. Even though a government may declare something is right, that does not make it right; just as Pharaoh's unjust treatment of the Hebrews in Egypt was not right. God will judge and punish those who do these evil things.

(Exodus 23:8) You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

To live in a just society, and to have confidence in the judges and political leaders in that society, bribes must be forbidden and those accepting and receiving bribes must be punished—they subvert not only just judgments in the courts, but also just decisions in government offices and assemblies, in businesses, in classrooms, and even in some churches.

(Exodus 23:9) You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

God gave His laws to help people live in a just society; a society where partiality is not shown to citizens or noncitizens; a society with a just system of laws and where just enforcement prevails. Resident aliens are

those in the country legally, but who are not citizens. An alien is “passing through,” and is usually in the country only temporarily, and he or she must abide by all the laws of that country while they are within its borders. The aliens who came to live in the Promised Land were not to be oppressed or taken unjust advantage of just because they were not citizens. The Hebrews were told to remember their unjust treatment in Egypt so they would not treat others unjustly.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How do we know what is just and unjust?
2. How can God’s people live justly in an unjust society or where majority rules?
3. How does the lesson teach us to be concerned for all people and all domestic animals?
4. In what ways does God’s law show concern for the poor?
5. What is the difference between a resident alien and an illegal alien?

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