

Exodus 23:20-33 • Israel's Work Assignment

Introduction

In Exodus 18:20, Jethro gave Moses some excellent advice that summarized the work of discipleship, the things that must be imparted from the teacher to the student

“...make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.”

Since arriving at God's mountain in Exodus 19, the ensuing chapters have provided the first part of this responsibility in that God first gave to them the Law in order to “make known to them the way in which they are to walk”. Now God is providing the instructions for “the work they are to do” establishing themselves in the Promised Land He has prepared for them.

²⁰“Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

[Read v.20]

Q: What might be the New Testament equivalent that we have a God-sent guide much like Israel?

A: The Holy Spirit.

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

John 14:16-17

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

John 15:13-15

Application: Do you see that you are not left alone in either your walk with Christ nor the pursuit of His work? Discuss how you've learned that God was in control of the path of your life to this point. Discuss how He is preparing the way forward. Are His preparations just for this life, just the next, or both?

[Read v.21]

Q: What is our primary responsibility in responding to the calling of God's work?

A: Obedience.

Q: Chapter 23 is the end of five continuous chapters in which God has been speaking at length. How does this command fit within the context of what He's been teaching?

A: Beginning with the 10 commandments and then greatly expanding on them, God first provided the exact things to be obedient to.

Point: God does not ask for blind obedience, but declares specifically what He expects.

Application: Do we have any doubt as to what God expects of us? If someone does have doubts, what is the most likely cause? [They aren't listening to His Word.]

²¹Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.

²⁴“You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces. ²⁵But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.

[Read v.24-25]

Q: The first demand on our part is to be obedient to God’s Word. What is the second demand according to v.24?

A: That we not merely avoid the worship of other and false gods, but utterly remove them.

Application: Why can’t we simply allow other gods to co-exist with our own? How is actively destroying false gods and religions a benefit both to us personally and those around us?

Q: What is the third demand provided in v.25? How does it relate to the first two?

A: “But you shall serve the LORD your God”. To “serve” or “worship” God is defined both by obedience to His Word and the complete removal of all other gods. Bear in mind Jesus’ words, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other...” (Matthew 6:24)

Application: How do you define your service to God? Is it by the time you devote to Him or the time you spend at church or in ministry? Does your definition conform to being obedient to His Word, removing all other gods, and serving Him alone? If you don’t see this as a 24-hour-a-day activity, do you realize that you’re actually devoting time to things other than Him that may be contrary to your spiritual health and devotion?

³²“You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. ³³They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

[Read v.32-33]

Q: It’s not just false gods that we must shun. Who else is stipulated and why?

A: Those devoted to following other gods are to be equally eliminated from our life because they are a spiritual snare, a constant bad influence tugging us in the wrong direction.

Application: What are the things that you have allowed to live in parallel with your spiritual walk in Christ? Why do you suppose you allowed them in? How should you deal with them going forward?

Summary

List the 4 things required on our part:

1. Obedience (v.23)
2. Utterly remove all false gods and their influences (v.24)
3. Serve God only (v.25)
4. Utterly remove all association with those devoted to false gods (v.32-33)

²²But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.

²⁴“You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces. ²⁵But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. ²⁶There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

²⁷“I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

²⁸I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.

²⁹I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. ³⁰I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.

³¹“I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.

[Read v.22-31]

Q: There are 12 “I will” statements in this passage. Based on the overall context, what is the basis on which God will work on our behalf?

A: It's the “if-then” conditional statement in v.22, “*But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say...*” Basically that the 4 conditions laid down for us are adhered to on our part.

Q: List each of the 12 items.

1. “I will be an enemy to your enemy and an adversary to your adversaries” (v.22)
2. “I will completely destroy them” (v.23)
3. “...will bless your bread and your water...” (v.25)
4. “I will remove sickness from your midst” (v.25)
5. “I will fulfill the number of your days” (v.26)
6. “I will send My terror ahead of you” (v.27)
7. “I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you” (v.27)
8. “I will send hornets ahead of you” (v.28)
9. “I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate...” (v.29)
10. “I will drive them out before you little by little until you become fruitful...” (v.30)
11. “I will fix your boundary...” (v.31)
12. “I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand...” (v.31)

Q: How might we categorize these promises?

1. Blessings for personal well-being
2. Blessings for protection
3. Blessings for spiritual victory

Application: How are these blessings effected for us today? How do they take form under New Testament teaching? How strong is our faith concerning the fact that God is the agent bringing all things about on our behalf?

Overall Application

- What are the parallels between Israel's possession of the Promised Land and our own spiritual journey?
- Why is it probably not the wisest decision to simply allow false religions to exist in parallel without a fight? Why should we engage in making a distinction between God and all other gods, even in a “freedom of religion” society?
- What things have we allowed to co-exist in our life alongside God? What must we do and why?
- How seriously do we consider spiritual struggles to be the end result of spiritual compromise?